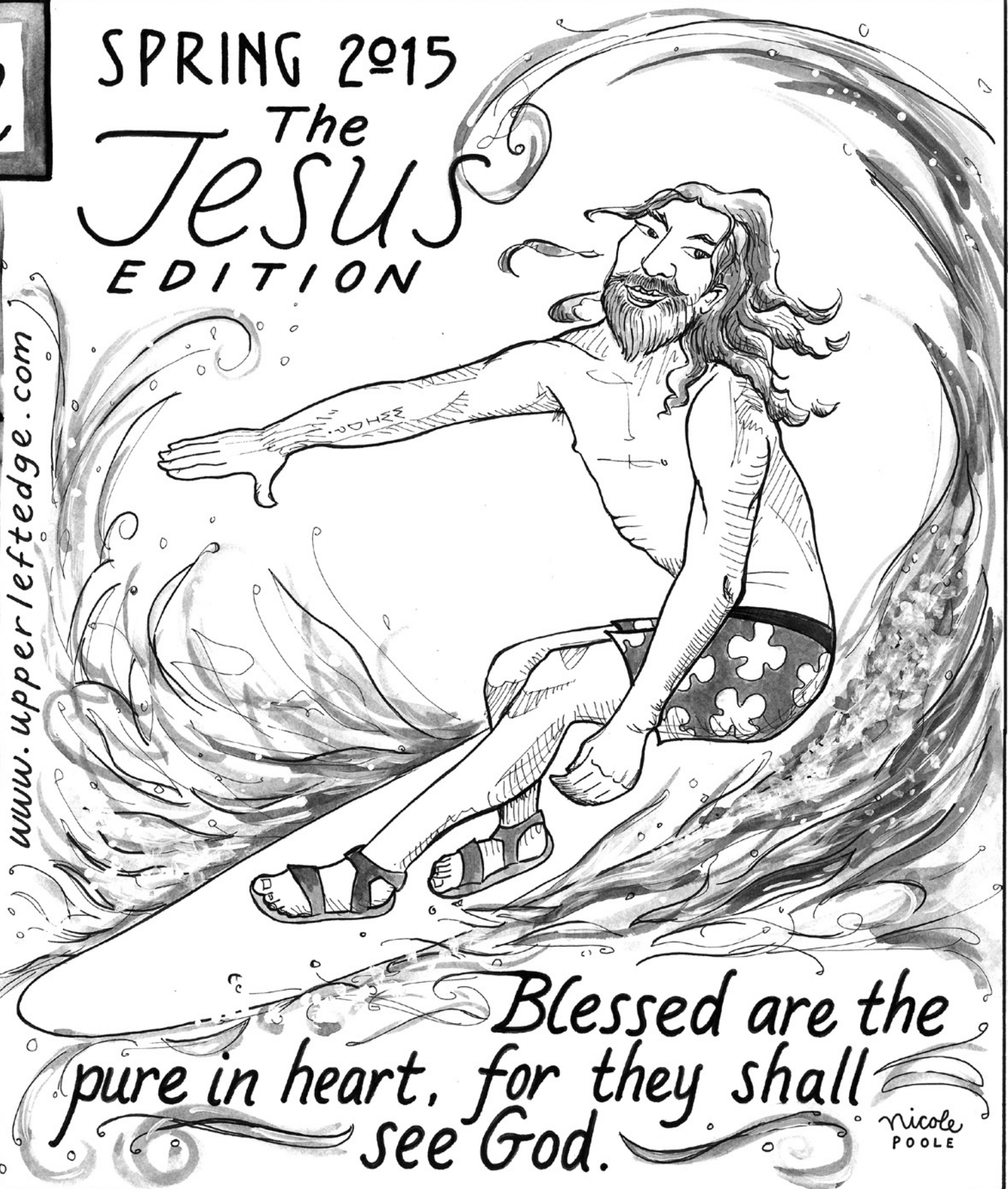


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The
JESUS
EDITION

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Blessed are the
pure in heart, for they shall
see God.

nicole
POOLE

UPPERLEFTEDGE

Epistle to the people

Seasoned readers of this little bohemian paper may be scratching their heads at our featured topic for this edition. If so, that makes me smile. Head-scratching is a dandy human habit, especially when it signals a willingness to wonder over something unexpected or new.

Hopefully folks who liked our last print edition, which celebrated Ken Kesey, will enjoy this one as well. It shouldn't be hard to see some continuity. Kesey was a storyteller who generated quite a social buzz. The same can be said for Jesus, at a much higher order of magnitude. Both men challenged the status quo ~ by mingling with outsiders, bucking orthodoxy, and wielding revolutionary words.

That's part of the reason why many hippie elders consider the Son of Man to be a brother of sorts. I'm a tad young to have run with the real hippies, back in the day; so I've relied on others to enlighten me thus. Like the founding publisher of this paper, a washboard player who readers knew as the Reverend Billy Lloyd Hults (the title came from his ordination as a Universal Life minister). Billy was a fount of knowledge on hippiedom, and he often gave a loving nod to Jesus while preaching against religion at the pub. It was clear he held the Prince of Peace in high regard, even if he seldom set foot in any church.

In fact Billy published a piece about Jesus on the front page of this paper. I wrote it during my first extended visit to the Oregon coast. Villages here on this beautiful edge inspired me to picture how people can work together to care for the life around us. I envisioned an economy built on stewardship rather than the depletion and hoarding of resources.

That dream was so big, I knew I needed big help if it were ever to come true. So I penned a letter to Jesus, informed in part by my Christian upbringing, and in part by lessons I learned from a small-town Jewish merchant who was one of my first employers. My heart soared when the piece was published by Reverend Billy, the hippie mensch, peace be upon his soul.

Decades later, we carry the gift forward. Author Tricia Gates Brown graciously agreed to serve as guest editor for this edition. A mutual friend of Billy's, Tricia organized a reunion of Upper Left Edge writers



“Whatever is hidden away will be brought out into the open, and whatever is covered up will be found and brought to light.” Jesus Luke 8:17

while serving as director of the Cannon Beach History Center. She has written several books that speak sumptuously to her art and faith. Reading her memoir *Jesus Loves Women* made me wonder: what if Jesus really is the alpha model for manhood, as many people believe? Doesn't that prescribe a major shift in our relationships?

Here are some other ideas worthy of smiling speculation. What if many of the wonderful things about Jesus (his baffling compassion, his mystical rapport with life, his resistance to oppressive regimes) were an outpouring of his being raised a Jew? What if people of other faiths have as much to show the world about Jesus as Christians do? What if Muslims love Jesus too, and are equally poised to spread goodwill by putting his teachings into action?

In some quarters of the quantum universe, scratching heads over such questions may be a precursor to Christ consciousness (a critical mass of which could trigger a messianic age, sort of a pandemic of benevolence). At a minimum, the willingness to wonder might offer us some rest from the hard-line religious extremism that plagues our planet.

So keep scratching, and read on. These words and images are gathered with respect, playfulness, and reverence for life. Our hope is to open conversations among people of many persuasions who have more in common than we often realize.

Watt Childress

Editor & Publisher:

Watt Childress

Guest Editor

Tricia Gates Brown

Cover Art & Illustrations:

Nicole Poole

Sally Lackaff

Design & Layout:

Rebecca Stewart-Johnson

Webmaster:

Bob Goldberg

Contributing Writers:

Rick Bonn

Tricia Gates Brown

Watt Childress

Vincent Ferrau

Margaret Hammitt-McDonald

Erin Hofseth

Aamir Malik

Lorraine Ortiz

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Encounters with the Jewish Jesus

by Margaret Hammitt-McDonald

Back in 1986, I was browsing my university bookstore when someone yelled, “How dare you wear that!?” Before I turned around, I glanced down to make sure my pants matched my shirt. What could I be wearing that was so offensive? Was this hostility even directed at me?

The scowling woman was dressed in a black skirt that skimmed her ankles, a long-sleeved blouse buttoned up to her chin, and a Star of David pendant. She must’ve been the Jesuit university’s only Orthodox Jewish student, and here I was, a woman in a kippah (better known by its Yiddish name, a yarmulke) – in her tradition, religious headgear reserved for men.

“I plan to go to rabbinical school after I graduate,” I stammered. “Um, in my denomination, it’s acceptable for women to wear kippot. I’m sorry if it offends you.”

“Okay. I didn’t realize you were Jewish.” She explained while I was puzzling over who else would wear a yarmulke, “I thought you were a Catholic kid setting a new trend.”

I forced myself not to laugh at the idea of me of all people starting a fad, wary of losing this belligerent stranger’s precarious goodwill. Then I noticed something strange about her pendant. The area where the two triangles of David’s shield met, usually empty, cradled a cross. Before I could control myself, I asked, “Why does your Star of David have a cross in the middle?”

Oops. The combative glare returned full strength. I put a sweatshirt rack between us and tried to appease her with the sacrifice of polyester fleece to substitute for my sheepish self. “I’m sorry. I’ve just never seen one like that before.”

She must’ve recognized my harmlessness, as she relented and revealed how she’d been brought up Pentecostal and recently learned that her ancestors had been *conversos*, Spanish Jews baptized into the Catholic Church to avoid being evicted in 1492 with their co-religionists. More than a bit defensively, she declared that while she hoped to incorporate Jewish traditions into her religious practices, she wouldn’t go so far as

to spurn Christ and his Gospels. “After all,” she proclaimed with zeal as militant as it was messianic, “Jesus was Jewish.”

That conversation lingers in my memory, but not just because of the dramatic confrontation between Our Pacifist Hero and the Rabid Evangelical Titan. It also embodied the potentially unifying – but often divisive – role in interfaith dialogue played by the figure of Jesus. “Jesus was Jewish after all,” that representative of the Yarmulke Police had said. But what did that mean to her, to me, and to believers (and non-believers) who have appropriated his image, from medieval Norse converts who turned him into a tow-headed warrior to young people who sport his image on T-shirts as if he’s the lead singer of a boy band?

I’m not the first to notice how people devote more energy to fashioning gods in their own image than in seeking out the divine likeness in their fellow human beings – sweaty, neurotic, and lovably flawed as we are. Still, Jesus as the human face of God seems particularly prone to this treatment. This tendency probably stemmed from the universalist approach Christians have taken ever since the Apostle Paul started spreading Jesus’ message to his non-Jewish neighbors. For a faith committed to the siblinghood of humanity, and sharing the faith with as many brothers and sisters as possible, it made sense to detach the figure of Jesus from the particulars of his time, place, and culture. Missionaries to the Irish represented Jesus as a plaid-clad Celt plying the North Sea in a coracle; missionaries to China depicted him sharing rice, not bread, with his disciples at the Last Supper. Removing the culturally specific trappings from Jesus made it possible for the faith to appeal to everyone. It underscored the notion of Christ as Everyman at the same time as he was Son of God.

One negative result of this distancing of Jesus from his Jewish milieu was that over the centuries since the Gospels were written, anti-Semitism was born and flourished in Christian communities. In some of the Christian Scriptures, while Jesus is never labeled outright as Jewish, his enemies are both the hereditary priesthood that continued in power until the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. and the rising rabbinic group, interpreters of religious law. The narrative of events leading up to his crucifixion includes a scene where a mob jeers at him, calling for his death, and they’re labeled not a rabble, but “Jews.”

Jesus’ original followers may have presented matters in this way to eschew narrow sectarianism (those who proposed limiting the growth of the Jesus Movement – not yet a new religious tradition – to their fellow Jews versus those who advocated sharing Jesus’ message with all people). The presentation also stems from sectarian disputes that were a consequence of the brutal Roman war against Jews in the years around 70 CE and the destruction of the Jerusalem temple – when Jews were

Encounters with the Jewish Jesus cont. »

grappling with different ways to replace the temple (while most Jews took the route of synagogue-based rabbinic Judaism, Jewish followers of Jesus conceived him as the replacement). Hundreds of years later, though, that presentation of Jesus versus “the Jews” became the inspiration for oppression, from discriminatory laws prohibiting Jews from farming or being guild members (limiting them to despised jobs such as money-lending) to sprees of genocide that erupted every Easter season, when the destructive myth of Jews murdering Christian children inflamed anew the superstitious rage of the ignorant and sparked genocidal violence from pogroms to the Holocaust.

The degree to which Jesus’ Jewishness is celebrated or denied, and the unintended consequences of the canonical Gospels’ account of Jesus’ ministry, took another personal turn when I played one of his disciples in a local production of *Godspell* alongside my husband, Seth Goldstein (who played Jesus) and our friend Bob Goldberg (who played John the Baptist and Judas). A product of the hippie era, *Godspell* offers audiences a progressive, activist Jesus who collides with the Establishment of his time. His antagonists thrive on admiration for their public displays of piety, but they do not represent Judaism as a whole. Conversely, Jesus’ Jewishness is presented explicitly: the Last Supper is a Passover Seder, and he recites the Hebrew blessings over bread and wine.

On the other hand, the musical does not question the common misperception of the Pharisees as stuffy representatives of entrenched religiosity. (Ironically, the Pharisees actually represented a liberal strand of rabbinic tradition that shared much with Jesus’ philosophy.) Friends who came to see the show reported afterward that the distinction between these Pharisees and Judaism as a whole was too subtle for audiences reared on the long-unquestioned assumption that Judaism represents at best a tradition of spiritless observance rendered obsolete by the Christian dispensation, and at worst as the force chiefly responsible for Jesus’ death.

Jewish-Christian dialogue has come a long way, but it’s also challenging to get around the fundamental difference between the two faiths: for many Christians, Jesus was the one we all were waiting for, while some Jews are still waiting for someone else, and others believe in a messianic age rather than an individual messiah or, in the words of the civil rights movement, “We are the ones we have been waiting for.” On this question – the cause of so much misunderstanding and violence – we must peacefully agree to disagree.

So what does the figure of Jesus, Jewish teacher and Christian savior,

mean to me? I can’t speak for my co-religionists and wouldn’t try (it’s not for nothing that the old saying goes, “Two Jews, three opinions”), but here’s my approach, which some others of my temperament and progressive inclinations share. I imagine Jesus as a feistier brother of Buddha: fiercely committed to serving the most disrespected members of his society, rhapsodically in love with life, quick to become angry at injustice and intolerance and just as quick to laugh at a friend’s joke. While I don’t share the beliefs of some Christian friends in the divine aspect of Jesus, I believe in a Jesus who was a model human being, not because he distanced himself from the human condition but because he immersed himself fully in it and showed other human beings how to realize our fullest capacities, or in Buddhist terms, enlightenment.

Whenever a movement, religious or otherwise, centers on a single charismatic figure, it’s inevitable that someone’s going to turn him or her into a hybrid of a superhero and a rock star. I’ve seen this Jesus. My imagined Jesus is a humbler figure, like my copy of a woodcut I love, showing him surrounded by the tools of the carpentry trade, wearing a protective apron and working at his bench. I imagine him stepping around curls of wood shavings, hoisting a pint at the local pub with his disciples (fishers in cable-knit sweaters), playing a first-century form of soccer with the neighborhood children and, because he’s a Jewish Jesus after all, engaging in that wonderful custom of celebrating and sanctifying every aspect of life with a prayer.

Braver than I am when confronted by the guardians of propriety who have shouted others into line in every era, my Jesus would also wear a kippah in a Catholic university bookstore.

- Margaret Hammitt-McDonald is a naturopathic physician, licensed acupuncturist, writer, parent, and instructor at Clatsop Community College and National College of Natural Medicine. She enjoys hiking, backpacking, puttering around in her Chaos Theory garden, dragonboating, performing at the Cannon Beach Coaster Theatre, and randomly speaking in a Cockney accent.

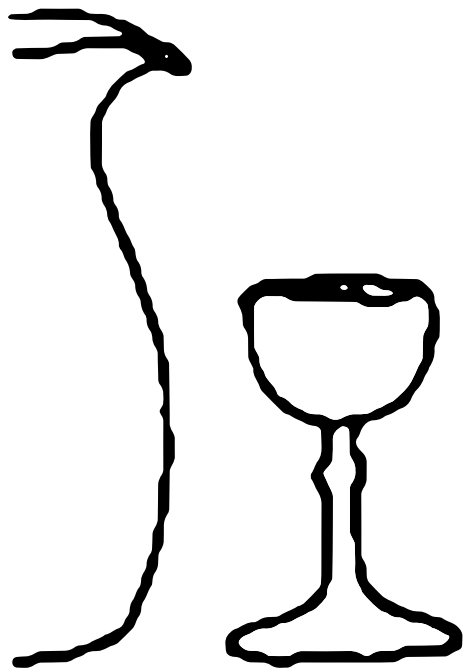
“Blessed are the gentle, for
they shall inherit the earth.”

Jesus
Beatitudes
Luke 6:20-22



What Jesus smells like

by Vincent Ferrau



- Vincent Ferrau moved to Oregon from New Jersey in 2010. A healing arts practitioner, Vinny has studied with indigenous people in Siberia and South America. He began writing poetry twenty-some years ago when he was a student at Evergreen College. He lives in Cannon Beach with his wife Bjorg and daughter Kaya.

Everything
he ever laid a blue-veined compassionate hand
on
even the one with the
spear
that touched Him
through a shaft of wood
and a head of
metal

many of us
are built like that
dense and piercing
killing that
we've only just begun
to love

Jesus smelled like that
like unrequited love
and passion
sorrow
and
awe

fear turned upside down
becomes a chalice
capable of filling
but we all know
to feel satisfied
You must
Drink

Jesus smelled like that
like wine and fish
and transformation
like the unconditional love of
the lowliest quotient of
Creation
elevated
recognized
seen through fearless eyes
washed in
perfumed reverence

Jesus smelled like that
like song and prayers
and temptation
like temple currency
Overturned
glistening in the mid day sun
till some wondrous and famished
Child
picks it up

Jesus smelled like that
like Animals
and Anger and
Angels
like longing
for one good reason
to quit
to give up
find another avenue of
Salvation
but in the end
there's no good reason
to quit anything
Love keeps you
punched in
working overtime
in this life
or the
next
on the things we
can't
forgive
or forget

Jesus smells like
that
oh yeah
and You
Jesus smells
like
You

Jesus As A Young Muslim's Spiritual Example

by Amir Malik

Growing up Muslim in semi-rural Northern California in the '70s and '80s meant having almost zero exposure to Muslims or the Islamic faith. Even my Pakistani father didn't teach me much more than the name of Islam's prophet. So the primary example of Godliness for most of my formative years was Jesus. I wasn't taught to worship Jesus, or even to revere him. But from earliest memory, I inherently accepted him as a conveyor and proof of God's truth.

Since then, Jesus has been consistently present in my life. His perfection of love and kind-heartedness is something I aspired to — even in kindergarten when I was known as a peacemaker, solving problems between other kids. I don't know when I was first exposed to the example of Jesus, but he seemed to impact me from a young age. His teachings of tolerance and patience with those who offend served me well in my school years when I experienced many a thug picking on me for my weird name or my origins from a race of dark skinned foreigners.

In high school it was Jesus the social misfit and 'rebel with a cause' that I related to. The broader society he was born into needed a firm slap in the face, and he delivered it handily! As a teen, I had my own strong urge to metaphorically slap people upside the head, as I felt displaced in ways Jesus did in his time — or so I imagine. And I longed to speak truths that went against societal conventions, even if they disturbed people (or especially if they disturbed people!), without fear of consequences, as did Jesus. Jesus said some hardcore stuff to rattle people awake: "If your eye offends you, pluck it out. If your hand offends you, cut it off." As a typical teenage boy with an appreciation for darker metaphors, I thought these sayings were off-the-charts cool.

By coincidence of nature, or perhaps a beautiful plan, I began to be called Jesus at some point in my teen years. With my unkempt long dark hair and scruffy facial growth, I attracted the comparison. Though I didn't encourage it, there was something strangely satisfying about

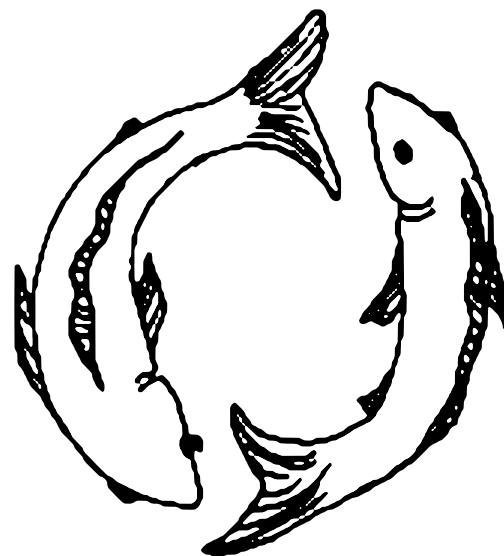
having Japanese foreign exchange students follow me around, pointing at me and giggling, whispering to each other "It's Jesus!"

In college I began serious study of Islam, and it solidified as my religion of choice. Yet my love for Jesus continued, and has never been in conflict with my Muslim faith. On the contrary, I credit it with assisting my interest in spirituality. When my soon-to-be wife converted to Islam and was given one of the Muslim names of the Virgin Mary, I was hardly surprised. It was yet another event in a long line that cemented my inner sense of connection with him.

As my youth fades away and I begin to face my latter days, I am inclined to apologize to Jesus. Though he's always been there for me, teaching me good and warning against evil, I have never found a solid footing from which to demonstrate I am his follower, or at least the type of follower I yearn to be. I am comforted, however, by continuing to remember what a shining example of good he is, and the infinite value of appreciating him.

Islam teaches that Jesus was God's messenger, similar to Muhammad, and that he will have a second coming, returning to Earth one day. If I'm still alive, I'd very much like to meet him. Thanks in advance to anyone who can set that up for me!

- Amir Malik is a musician, writer, and starving artist currently residing in Chico, CA. His short film "A Muslim Christmas," where he boldly proclaims "Muslims love Jesus too!" can be found on Youtube.com.



Jesus

by Erin Hofseth

Barefoot,
transient,
swaddled in rags,
born in a manger.

Friend to the marginalized,
the lepers,
the homeless.
The sick,
the sad,
and the forgotten.

Radical Revolutionary.
Peaceful leader.
Turn the other cheek,
Give the coat off your back.

Wash the dirty feet of neighbor,
stranger,
and friend.

Deliverer of hope.
Lover of souls.
Healer.
Without possessions,
money,
or worldly power.

We are taught in our CHRISTian nation to follow the masses; to buy, to sell, and to own. The rich are beyond reproach, and the poor regarded as reproachable. Yet Christ said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get into heaven." (Matthew 19:24)

We are taught to earn as much as we can and keep what we have; that only a foolish person gives away what they've worked for. Yet Christ said, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor." (Matthew 19:21)

We are taught to fear what we don't understand, and to judge what scares us. Yet Christ, in compassion, turned his eyes from no one.

We are taught to hate, to fight, and to own. Yet Christ said "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and loves God." (1 John 4:7) "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." (John 14:27)



- Erin Hofseth lives in Seaside Oregon with her two little boys, husband, and faithful black dog. She was raised in Cannon Beach, venturing away from the Oregon coast only briefly in her life to attend college at George Fox University, explore Homer, Alaska, and travel through Central and South America. Writing has been a creative outlet for as long as she can remember. Having been published in a variety of magazines and websites, Erin writes mostly for a North Coast local alternative newspaper, Hipfish Monthly. Aside from writing, she enjoys dancing, surfing, hiking, reading, creating, and most of all, observing the world through the eyes of her two children.

Hollywood Jesus

by Rick Bonn

I saw Jesus in Hollywood many times over the course of my decade working there. And most of them were surprises. And mysteries.

For me, Jesus is like a puzzle I've been assembling since youth. I know I don't have the whole picture yet, but the few pieces that have come together thrill me.

Did you ever put puzzles together as a kid? My dad taught me to look for the corner pieces first; they anchor the image. Then the sides. Then similar pieces until it's all filled in.

Funny thing was, when I became a parent and tried to do the same, my kid had a different way of doing it. He'd work from the inside out, matching color splotches and patterns only he could see. I didn't understand his method, but I liked how he worked. And the picture that he made.

So here are some pieces of my Jesus puzzle. They may not be yours, nor match the way you would assemble it, but maybe we'll both still like the picture.

"I was so mad at him!" she said to me as we crossed the street. She was recounting the time in New York City when a homeless man had asked everyone for money except her. It was exasperating not to be asked.

She was Maia Wojciechowska. A petite, salty, white-haired author of some fame who I was trying to talk into selling the film rights to her Newberry award winning book *Shadow of a Bull*.

What a fantastic, unexpected woman she was. Having escaped Poland as a child, she later fought bulls in Spain while befriending Ernest Hemingway and then turned all of that into a career writing literature for children.

She was also a devout Catholic, which is where the Jesus part comes in. Often she would call me after attending Mass and extol the virtues of Jesus. And this is what I thought at the time: 'She loves Jesus more than I do. How is that possible? She's Catholic!' Raised Protestant, I had picked up the erroneous notion that Catholics weren't Christians. That we had a monopoly on Jesus.

Well, in Maia Wojciechowska, I saw Jesus. I saw him in how fervently she wanted to help a homeless stranger who shunned her and in how her words shimmered and glowed in recounting daily encounters with Jesus at Mass. She made me want to be Catholic, too.

“

For me, Jesus is like a puzzle I've been assembling since youth. I know I don't have the whole picture yet, but the few pieces that have come together thrill me.

”

Then there was this writer guy. On the cusp of being famous or at the very least accomplished, he was an alumnus of my college, a few years older than me, and he had just been featured in Vanity Fair.

And here he is, braving the LA streets in his convertible. Confident beyond measure. Top of the world. We park near Cantor's Deli on Fairfax. I stride towards the restaurant when he stops to talk to the lot attendant. Now, there is a social hierarchy in Hollywood, and attendants aren't at the top. But this guy smiles at the attendant. Trades jokes. Connects. Engages in such a personal way that it reminds me of...? You guessed it. Jesus never cared what station or status you held in life; he loved all. For him, everyone had a deep significance that he acknowledged and celebrated.

This guy wrote books and screenplays, produced a movie called *Elf*, and still stops to love on whomever he meets. And while I don't remember what was said during our lunch, I remember Todd Komarnicki showing me Jesus.

Hollywood Jesus cont. »

One night I saw Jesus himself. And forgive me if this tosses me into the 'weirdo' bin, but it's true. Only I didn't know it was Jesus at first.

I was lying flat on my back in our Pasadena cabin. Awake around 3am. And this face appears floating just above me. A three-dimensional bust of a bald man's head, gray and smooth like a marble statue. I was scared. Then a voice says, "It's Jesus, don't be afraid." And I think, "Well, okay then," and relax.

As I study every line and angle of that face, a mental picture flashes into my mind of a man stripped to his waist, kneeling face first against a wall to which his arms are chained. His back is bare with bloody cuts, and his long hair nearly touches his waist cloth. I spend the next however many minutes marveling, crying, praying, rejoicing, and thinking 'I'd better treasure this; I may never see his face again.'

Here's where it gets weirder. I go to seminary the next day and I can see auras. At least I think that's what they are having no experience with such things. The air looks different, like a negative exposure only colored. Something like a thermal reading. Or a filter placed over my normal vision. I take to the sidewalks of Pasadena at lunchtime and people are glowing with different colors and intensities. (Some are, some don't register at all.)

One man in particular has an atomic glow. He's in a wheelchair, about to board a bus. And I have this feeling, "Tell that man I love him." And this urge, this surge of what I'll call faith, fills me and I think - I actually think - if I touch this man in the name of Jesus and tell him what I just heard, he will be healed.

But I don't. I'm too scared. Too weirded out.

I try to explain to a fellow seminarian at lunch what I have experienced and he does his very best not to look at me like I'm crazy.

~

Talk about seeing things that aren't there. I once watched James Earl Jones film a scene in a tiny, on-location set. His character returns to an attic apartment after a long prison stint. As he enters the room from a lower stairwell, he's supposed to react to the furniture and

the memories it stirs. Only because of the camera, lights, crew, producers, and visitors, there is no furniture. There is nothing for him to see or react to. And yet upon entering, he stares so intently and specifically into the corner that I 'see' a fridge. Like he imagines one into existence. "That's a real actor," I remember thinking. "One who can see what's not really there and make us believe it is."

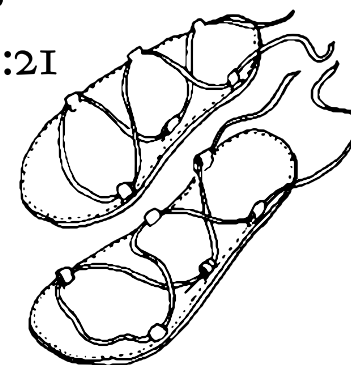
Maybe that's a good way to describe the puzzle of Jesus in my life: there, but not always there in the way I expect. Yet I do see him. In others. In films. In creation. In our daily struggle to be fully human and discern meaning for our lives. In our failures to connect lovingly with each other. In the brief days of sun here on the coast that interrupt gray months of storm. And, even in Hollywood.

"That is why I speak to them in parables," Jesus said to his disciples. "Because having the power of seeing, they do not see." (Matthew 13:13, Amplified Bible)

- Rick Bonn owned the last video store in Cannon Beach, still does development work in Hollywood, and writes comics and movies. His reviews and essays have been published in Don't Stop Believin': Pop Culture And Religion From Ben-Hur To Zombies by Westminster John Knox Press, in magazines such as Prism and Christianity & Theatre, and on websites like aintitcool.com and hollywoodjesus.com. His first graphic novel, Meow Meow Jones, should be published later this year.

"The Kingdom of God is
within you."

Jesus
Luke 17:21



Forgiveness and Light

by Lorraine Ortiz

It is the first time I've driven up the long driveway leading to the monastery. For years I've imagined visiting, but life's busyness never allowed the time. Now I am desperate for quiet. The desire to escape is strong—much like my childhood desire for invisibility to avoid my father's bullying. With a lull in life's activity, the beautiful abbey promises solace.

As the volunteer at the registration desk prepares to show me around, she offhandedly says, "of course growing up Catholic you are familiar with the mass." I nod in agreement but am taken aback. I haven't told her I was baptized Catholic nor that I haven't practiced the religion in over 40 years.

Actually, for decades I've connected with Eastern wisdom practices and find extraordinary comfort in Kwan Yin — the goddess of mercy and compassion. In my daily surroundings, I am surprised to realize that I've amassed quite a collection of Kwan Yin statues. A tiny one lives next to my bedside. It is the first thing I see in the morning, the last thing I see at night. A slightly larger version sits at the center of the small altar in our home. A beautiful rendition in translucent purple presides on the windowsill. To the right of my computer screen, again there is Kwan Yin, standing in front of a large portrait of my deceased mother. Until recently, I've never considered the close association of Kwan Yin with my mother, who lived her life mitigating my father's emotional toll on me and my siblings.

Remembering this inventory, I am surprised by the obvious role Kwan Yin, the comforting mother figure, plays in my home life. At the abbey, I'm even more surprised to realize that I have arrived, as a grateful short-term resident, at a place that venerates another mother figure — the Hispanic version of the mother of Jesus — Our Lady of Guadalupe (the Virgin of Guadalupe).

I've long been attracted to this particular religious icon. In my eyes,

she is more earthy and energetically compassionate than the light-blue robed virgin depicted on holy cards I grew up with. In fact, as I study Guadalupe more closely, she seems like a relative of Kwan Yin. The Virgin of Guadalupe is venerated throughout the world and especially throughout the Americas. Beginning as an appearance to a humble peasant, the Virgin of Guadalupe was eventually crowned patroness of Nueva España at the time my Spanish ancestors came to the continent, pillaging and laying claim to land they named New Spain. And now here, as the patroness of this beautiful monastery, she plays a role in leading me to sit with the grief of my relationship with my deceased father, and with conflicted feelings associated with my Spanish ancestry.

The Virgin's mysterious eyes evoke the mysteries of my heritage. Some say that on close inspection, her eyes reflect a figure. Others contend that it's not a single figure, but a host of 14 figures — those present at her first miraculous appearance. Her enigmatic eyes beckon me to be quiet, courageous and contemplative, while encouraging me to dive deep into my questions.

Indeed it is no mystery why I am here. I have carried the burden of the circumstances of my father's death for five years, and for years have grappled with the aggression of my Spanish ancestors — often feeling I carry a curse. Away from the distraction of daily routines, my heavy heart seeks solace and forgiveness.

A stay at the monastery includes an open invitation to attend the monk's worship services called "divine office." Multiple times per day the monks gather in the church to chant. Having experienced the heart-opening quality of chant, I make a point to attend several sessions of the divine office while on retreat. As I attend evening "compline" for the first time (the final office of the day), I am overwhelmed by the beauty of the enormous tapestry of the Virgin lit by candles and saturated by decades of devotion. As the procession of monks line up to chant and pray to her as their last reverent act of the day, I welcome the Virgin's mercy and compassion. Without warning, my heart gently opens for the first time in years.

During the day, as I hike trails, sit by ponds and waterfalls, and take meals in silence — all surrounded by the potency of the Virgin and the chanting of the monks, I hold visceral hope that forgiveness might be possible. Still, I sense the harsh presence of my father, extending to me a hand of forgiveness, only to quickly pull it away. Or maybe it's my own critical inner voice. Can we forgive each other? Am I willing to forgive myself?

The morning comes when I must leave the monastery and return to life's demands. I pack up, clean my room and head to the guest desk to check out. I am surprised to see a monk on duty. During my retreat, I hadn't had interactions with the cloistered monks and had only seen them in the church. This monk is laughing and talking to other retreatants, and beckons me to the desk.

I hand him the slip of paper with my name and room number. He looks at the name on the slip and then back at me. He does this several times, finally saying, "Where did you get a name like Ortiz?"

"It was my father's name," I tell him.

He grows silent a moment. Then, speaking in Spanish, he asks if my father was a teacher.

I answer in English, "No, he wasn't a teacher. He was a baseball player."

The monk pauses for a moment and then says, "I grew up in San Diego with a guy who played baseball named Lou Ortiz."

"That was my father," I answer, beyond stunned.

It is impossible. Inspired by this miraculous coincidence, the monk proceeds to share information about the father I thought I knew. Can this be happening? I ask myself. In full-blown amazement, I allow the possibility of forgiveness to wash over me again. As I find myself starring in my own drama, Kwan Yin remains steady in her compassionate witness for all who seek forgiveness. And next to me, in the lobby of the monastery, the Virgin of Guadalupe gazes on the scene and holds within her eyes the mystery of it all.

Meeting this 90-year-old monk who knew my father as a boy becomes an entry point on the path of understanding and forgiveness. As he and I begin a friendship, his willingness to have meaningful conversations offers me the honest experience I am starving for. Brother Martin advises me "to give my father a break," and I wonder if this might imply permission to give myself a break as well. So I begin a cautious silent communication with my father. In the process, I discover we are alike in many ways and could have been good friends. This truth saddens me

all over again, regarding what had to have been an equally disappointing relationship for us both.

Kwan Yin has provided a reliable presence in my daily life. Now enter Guadalupe, appearing at every turn. Knowing the big forgiveness job I have ahead of me, I can only assume she arrives to help.

Over the course of the next few days, I find Guadalupe in the office of my massage therapist, in a shop filled with vintage treasures, and in an article in the New York Times. Attending an African grief ritual where I learn that we inherit the mortgage of our ancestor's undealt-with grief, Guadalupe holds her place next to a photo of my father on the rich "ancestors altar," while Kwan Yin is patient and steadfast next to my mother's photo on the "forgiveness altar."

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Guadalupe's newly magnetic presence guides me to attend, at a local church, a special event in her honor where we sing to her in Spanish, hearing her story and chanting a litany. An excursion to Mexico becomes an adventure to find a sterling silver medal with Guadalupe's likeness for Brother Martin, and on the search I encounter her image everywhere I turn. From the golden-crowned cathedral in the plaza where she graces the interior in paintings and sculptures to her facsimile on trailside altars, doorways, murals, portraits, t-shirts, baseball caps, shopping bags, and all manner of religious tchotchkes, I bask in the warm and generous companionship of Guadalupe and her understanding eyes.

The path of forgiveness is yet before me. But as I cautiously proceed, I sense my mother listening to my silent communications with my father and standing in ready witness, having lived her life surrounded by this familiar grief. Still, somehow, my mother's light found places to shine, allowing her children to feel her love. I miss my mother. I can feel that the forgiveness I seek is like a mother's love. A mother's love is light. Guadalupe is light. Kwan Yin is light. Grateful for this luminous support guiding me on my path, I willingly walk toward forgiveness and all that awaits.

- Lorraine Ortiz has made her home at the Art Ranch, in Nehalem on the rural Tillamook Coast for the last 25 years. Her passion for the arts and the environment continue to shape her work and her life choices.

Myths & Misunderstandings

by Tricia Gates Brown

A writer friend told me I was passed over for a recent book-signing because the organizer finds my book title “scary.” This wasn’t the first time I learned of such a reaction to *Jesus Loves Women: A Memoir of Body and Spirit*, and from readers who’d likely enjoy the book if they’d get over the word “Jesus” and venture a read. This conclusion is based on the type of reader who did relish the book – well-read, of spiritual inclination, appreciative of grey areas in matters of ethics and values, and experienced enough to understand moral failure. If only she could get over the title.

Call me naïve, but the reaction to my title surprised me. I didn’t expect the word “Jesus” to be the conversation killer it turns out to be. While I understand some individuals shut down at the word “Jesus” because of stereotypical images of Christians (picture the enthusiastic faithful asking if you’ve “accepted Jesus as your personal lord and savior” or telling you “Jesus died for your sins”), I assumed “Jesus” wouldn’t conjure this reaction in generally thoughtful people. I expected the critically minded to realize that Jesus – the name-sake of a major world religion as varied as it is widely held – holds myriad meanings for different souls. I expected them to approach the name with an appreciation for nuance, perhaps even curiosity. Yet, after conversing with my friend, I was faced with a dilemma: Should I ask my small-press publisher to consider changing the title?

Amid the wide array of people on the spectrum of Christian tradition are those who never utter the words “Jesus died for your sins,” or “Jesus is my personal lord and savior.” In fact, I don’t believe Jesus was killed as a sacrifice for people’s sins. I also don’t consider Jesus a ‘personal lord and savior,’ as much as I respect the prerogative of others to hold such views. Yet I claim my place on the spectrum of Christianity. (Same goes for Buddhism. Both traditions contribute significantly to my spirituality.)

As I considered the prospect of changing my book title, I decided against it. I wondered if altering the title because of reactions to “Jesus” would

be catering to prejudice. Besides, as I narrate in the book’s introduction, the phrase “Jesus loves women” came first. An elderly Trappist monk named Brother Martin, one of my closest friends, repeatedly asked me: When will you write that book about how Jesus loved women? The memoir I ended up writing was likely not the book he had in mind. Yet his question precipitated my thinking about divine love, and how – for reasons of childhood misconceptions – I felt alienated from it. The phrase “Jesus loves women” precipitated the narrative. Because of my background in Christianity, Jesus is a symbol to me of embodied divine love, and wrestling with the question of divine love for women, and divine love for me, is central to the story. Even today as I struggle with male/female relationships and with my own marriage, I am inspired by Jesus to honor the fullness of God in me while also practicing selfless love.

Still, another motivation lies behind my inclusion of “Jesus” in my title. I actually like the specificity evoked by the name. I like how it grounds the story in a particular mythology, because myths are monumentally important and increasingly undervalued.

I often hear religion, Christianity included, maligned by the non-religious. Granted, glimpses of Christianity in the popular sphere – Christian bookstores, Christian TV, Christian radio, are so distorting and limited that disparagement of Christianity could be understandable. To many Christians including myself, the displays in mainstream media – the nationalism, the wedding of religion and political conservatism, the anti-intellectualism, the easy belief and simplistic formulations for salvation – are foreign to our experience of the faith. For many inside the vast and varied world of Christianity, it’s easy to see how these images distort. They characterize a small facet of the faith and fail to characterize the rest. But as with all things maligned by prejudice, misunderstanding and prejudice commingle, and the stereotype is assumed to be an accurate representation of the whole.

It is therefore tempting at times to distance myself from the stereotype by distancing myself from the tradition. But as fate would have it, I cannot. I believe too strongly in the value of myth and religious literacy to let the temptation seduce me. Prejudices against Christianity, like those against Islam, Judaism, Modern Paganism, and other faiths, stem from a general proliferation of religious illiteracy: a lack of understanding of major faith traditions, their diversity, and their histories. The most religiously illiterate hear the word “Jesus” and think of young earth creationism and virulent homophobia, or hear the word “Allah” and think of terrorists and burkas. But the mildly religiously illiterate sense discomfort with the unfamiliar and simply turn away.

I am by nature impatient with religious illiteracy. I have a PhD in a field of religious study and if I could, would assign Karen Armstrong as required reading for American adults. I am reading Martin Buber’s *I and Thou ...* for fun. Admittedly, my level of interest in religion is atypical. On the other hand, I can name topics of great interest to others of which I am illiterate. Sports, for example. We’re all specialists in our own ways. We don’t need to be specialists in religion one and all. That said, I am leery of impulses to blend away distinction in religious and spiritual traditions to make people comfortable with the unfamiliar.

I don’t equate distinctiveness with dogmatism. It’s possible to appreciate special elements of a religious tradition without requiring assent to cognitive beliefs that define orthodoxy in particular expressions of that tradition. I stand my ground on the spectrum of Christianity, though much of the Nicene creed stokes doubt in me (I take solace in the “we believe” language of the creed – which expresses the heart of the whole tradition rather than individual beliefs, and in the meaning of the verb “credo,” which does not mean “to believe” in a cognitive sense, but to “embrace with one’s heart” as part of a collective with a long historical lineage). On the other hand, for some people of faith, distinctiveness includes strongly held beliefs, or dogmas. My unfamiliarity with the beliefs of other people, or my disagreement with them, might make me uncomfortable. Yet I want to make space for their distinctiveness.

Though dogmatism doesn’t appeal to me personally, it’s part of the diversity of human experience, and honoring diversity does appeal to me.

Most people – myself included – need distinctive sacred stories, which I call “mythologies,” intending the term in the most honoring way. I like Karen Armstrong’s definition of a myth as: “essentially, a guide,” and like Armstrong, do not imply by the word “myth” that a story is a fabrication (as is sometimes implied in modern usage of the word “myth”). On the other hand, facticity in a scientific or historical sense

is not the point of a myth. The point is to tell us how to live and who to be. As Armstrong wrote in *The Spiral Staircase*: “The myths of the hero, for example, are not meant to give us historical information about Prometheus or Achilles – or for that matter, about Jesus or the Buddha. Their purpose is to compel us to act in such a way that we bring out our own heroic potential.”

Many secular people are starved for mythological meaning and sacred stories. For me, the Jesus myth (including Jesus’ teachings and actions) is indispensable. It guides me in how I view power-dynamics, how I view injustice and strive to relate to those less privileged than I, how I stand up to authority. To be less abstract, it compels me to recycle and use less resources, to give money to those helping Central American refugee kids at the US border, to pay my employees well, to tell my daughter “I’m sorry” when my words are harsh and hurtful, to support the farmer down the road, and so on. And the Jesus story shapes and guides how I think about divine presence, compelling me to see divinity as essentially compassionate, generous,

and immanent. It challenges me to envision nonviolent responses to trials I’ll face in my lifetime. Time and again, it has compelled me to keep my heart open despite betrayals and disappointments, particularly by men.

Myths provide stable vantage points from which to see and understand the world, and the Jesus story (along with the Buddha story) is my mythological terra firma. Myths demonstrate what it means, within a particular tradition, to be human and to live a purposeful life. Having

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Myths & Misunderstandings cont. »

sacred stories is so important that people without faith traditions often develop their own to fill the vacuum. Dominant non-religious myths in America center on science and technology, popular culture, sports, 12-step programs, or national, state, and family histories and dramas. I'd bet every healthy individual I know has a life-ordering meaning story or myth. In fact, social-scientists acknowledge the importance of personal myths for healthy development. For example, an Emory University study found that children who see themselves in a family story of decline and assent are better poised to overcome life's adversities because they see how those around them have overcome¹.

People can develop dangerous, even lethal, myths, and these myths are, needless to say, distressing. But despite the fact religion is often blamed, dangerous mythologies can as easily pivot on non-religious axes. I see examples in the lives of young men perpetrating school-yard massacres, or historically, in Maoist China or Stalinist Russia. The best antidote to a dangerous myth is a healthy myth.

A healthy mythology involves specificity and distinctiveness. It involves special stories we come to know and understand, and is life-affirming. It helps us open our hearts. There was a time, after completely laying down the belief system of my childhood, when I felt uncomfortable with religious specificity. I wanted to float among the unformed and religiously non-distinct, where I wouldn't be troubled by belief. But I now see this as the other side of the fundamentalist coin. Both the view that clings to belief, and the one that shuns all belief out of discomfort, put far too much emphasis on belief. They miss the point of religion and spirituality, which is practice, and being shaped by practice. What I desire now is the wide-mindedness to experience sacredness in all manner of specific religious contexts – whether synagogue, Zendo, mosque, forest-circle, or church, while simultaneously cherishing a specific mythology of my own.

The thing about honoring myths is that we can't exclusively honor our own. We need to allow others their own myths. To state the obvious: if our mythologies were all the same, they would no longer be meaningful. Yet twenty-first century people have difficulty with intellectual diversity, and with our 40-character attention spans, with nuance of thought. We define diversity narrowly by race and gender, and falter when a person we've included along these lines suddenly challenges our unwritten intellectual orthodoxies (I think of the discomfort white progressives

have with the opposition to gay marriage in conservative black churches). But our intolerance of intellectual diversity comes from insecurity, fed in part by the tenuousness of our mythological bearings. Perhaps if we were each consciously grounded in healthy myths we'd more willingly let others have myths that differ from ours, to let go of stereotypes, and to peacefully dialogue about difference. The beautiful thing about a myth is how it's both stable and reinterpreted again and again. To allow mythology its interpretive potential, we must let our edges touch those with whom we disagree. In titling my book *Jesus Loves Women*, I hoped those who don't resonate with "Jesus" would be open to a distinctive story that teases their edges. And I still hold out hope.

¹ See http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/17/fashion/the-family-stories-that-bind-us-this-life.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

- Tricia Gates Brown is a writer and garden designer residing in Nehalem. She holds a PhD from University of St. Andrews and is currently at work on a novel. She loves to explore theology in works of fiction, and story in ancient sacred texts.

“You cannot serve both
God and money.”

Jesus
Luke 16:13

More Online » Visit upplerleftedge.com for a review by Margaret Hammitt-McDonald of Tricia Gates Brown book, *Jesus Loves Women: A Memoir of Body and Spirit*.

Return to the scene of our baptism

by Watt Childress

A little oasis lives in the city of man,
a place insiders drink to divinity.
Their libations skim the surface bare ~
lauding scapegoats, mocking strangers.
Signs say trespassers will be hazed
or drowned if it suits the economy.

But heya heya heya ho, pilgrims
sneak through the bushes so
no frat dragons know we're here.

This spring first pooled under primal skies
when people came to imitate beavers.
Ancestors stopped while tending rocks
to swim in the living currents. Fish
stories gurgled without need of translation
and knowledge deepened with play.
Animal folk, pointing at what was built,
said dam, not bad for savages.

Later came lords with sinks and spigots
and serfs pumping spirits for scrip.
Contractors were ordained to slay human lambs
and provide clean room service for members.
When enough drains were installed
there were slip-n-slides for warriors in
the rut of July and hot tubs for
money-lenders in winter.

All that plumbing didn't purge any blood
so much as flush it from the city's conscience.
For a while the empire's lavish pipes
diverted runoff from our crucifixions.
Killing was sanctified by the master
plan of obedient sacrifice. Jesus,
Auschwitz, Hiroshima...whole biomes
we now slaughter for our altars.

Yet creation calls us in to look for
lost kin who've hidden among
predators since the beginning.
On muddy knees beside this pool
we reflect on Caesar's image.
Will we own remorse, work to heal
the world we have broken?

Listen for that splash of grace
beyond man's will to power.
Wade toward the source. Pray.
Toes buried in muck we recall
clear dawns when the spring spills
calm, birds sing psalms, and trees
dress life with leafing arms
for Sabbath morning.

All is risen in the echoing flow,
this pulse that ushers memory.

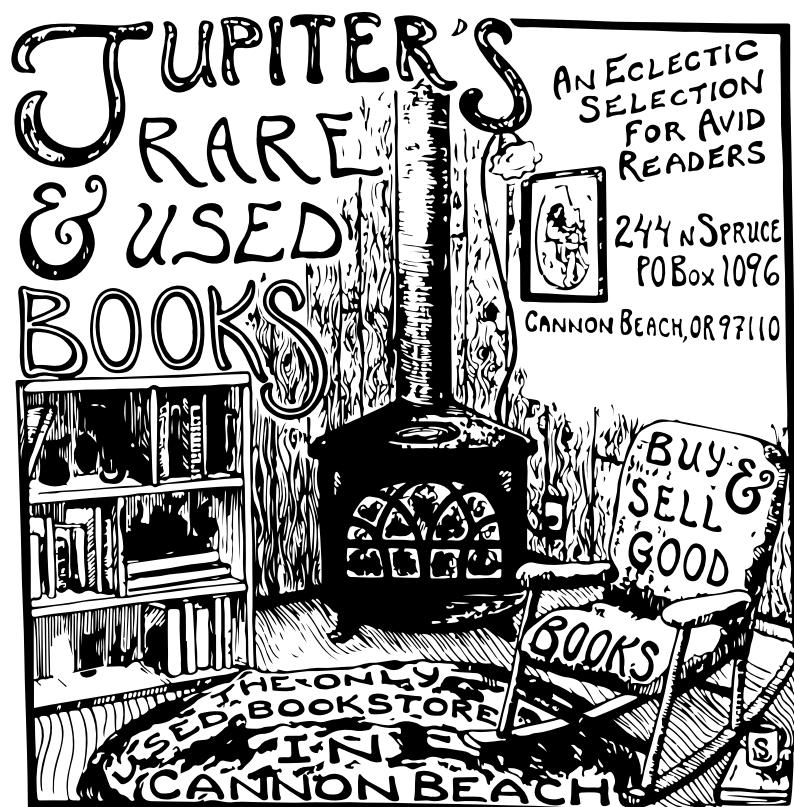
- Watt Childress owns Jupiter's Books in downtown Cannon Beach and he publishes the Upper Left Edge. His writing has appeared in Hipfish, the Daily Astorian, the North Coast Citizen, the Seaside Signal, The Oregonian, and the Vancouver Observer. He lives on a farm in the Nehalem Valley with his wife Jennifer and their two daughters.



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