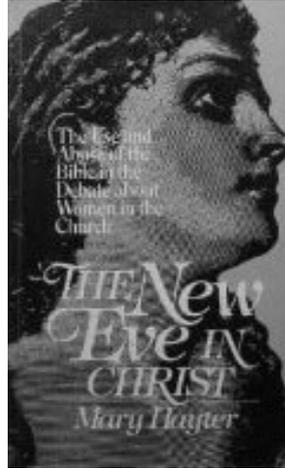


MORE Theologians who have changed our lives

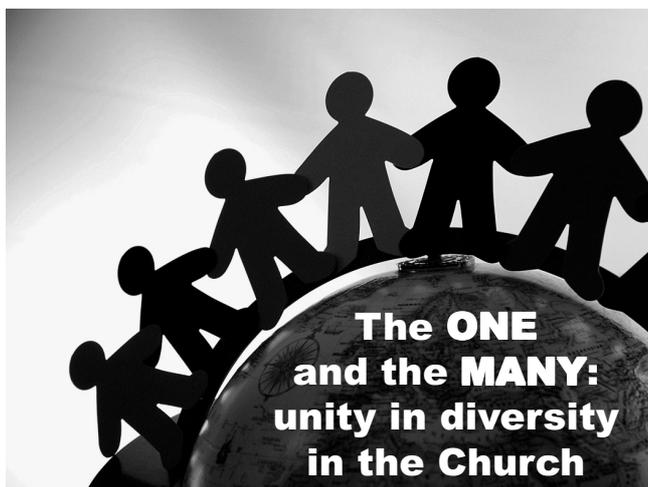


From the Director and Canon Theologian

After our last Newsletter, WIT Council had a sense of unfinished business. There were more theologians we wanted to write about (there are *always* more theologians!), and in particular we wanted to acknowledge some of the many female writers who have made a difference to us. This latest bunch are as diverse as those featured in the last issue, and range from a mediaeval mystic and surely one of the most level-headed spiritual directors, Julian of Norwich, to a dedicated missionary and, here at least, fiction writer, Elisabeth Elliot, scholar Mary Hayter, and novelist Penelope Wilcock. As chance would have it, I am reading 'The Hawk and the Dove' trilogy at the moment (having only recently discovered it), and am finding it every bit as absorbing as Jenny Wilkens did.

I think if there is a common thread amongst the books and writers discussed in this issue it is the experience of vulnerability. Wilcock's Father Peregrine was a respected leader when he arrived at the abbey, but it is only when he is disfigured and disabled by violence, unable to write or even to cut his food at dinner, that he becomes loved. His vulnerability makes him human; his pain makes him a better abbot. There are lessons there (uncomfortable ones) for leaders everywhere. Dame Julian experienced her life-changing visions of Jesus when she was gravely ill: God met her in her pain, and God's love stayed with her through the uncertainties of life in an England still suffering from the Black Death. Elisabeth Elliot's life was tested by her love for her husband, their love for the Auca tribespeople, and the vulnerability of opening

(continued overleaf)



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Penelope Wilcock



Penelope Wilcock

If a theologian is one who talks about God, then Penelope Wilcock is a theologian, though probably better known as the British author of historical fiction, specifically the 'Hawk and the Dove' trilogy (*The Hawk & the Dove*, *The Wounds of God*, *The Long Fall*), followed by *The Hardest Thing to Do*, *The Hour Before Dawn*, and *Remember Me*.

Wilcock's books are set in a 14th century Benedictine monastery, and if you think life in a monastery is predictable and boring, then think again, as she explores the intricacies of human relationships, uncovered in the raw reality of daily life, and through this medium the big themes of love, forgiveness, justice, mercy, faith, suffering and grace.

I first came across the 'Hawk and the Dove' trilogy some twenty years ago. The first two books alternate

between contemporary life and medieval stories, almost like morality tales. The third, *The Long Fall*, is a beautiful bittersweet novel of the journey alongside one who is dying. These to me are 'comfort books' that I return to again and again, and only lend them out when I know they'll be returned!

Then, some twenty years later, Wilcock resumed the series, the last of which, *Remember Me*, was published earlier this month. I think what I find most interesting is the exploration of personality, and the interactions and learning of those who rub up against each other in the life of a community – which is not so unlike church life really!

Wilcock writes, "My aim in writing is to make goodness attractive. I love simple human kindness and gentleness, and I am moved by human vulnerability. I am fascinated by the power that is within our grasp to lift one another up, to heal and strengthen and encourage each other - our power to bless. In the novels I write, I think of the reader sitting down to enjoy a book, the door of their imagination open wide to allow the story in to influence and shape their spirit... and it is my intention that when you put down any book of mine, at the end of reading it, you will feel hopeful, peaceful and comforted, more ready to look on your fellow human beings with compassion and see their point of view."

<http://www.amazon.com/Penelope-Wilcock/e/B001JRWJWA>

Oh yes, it might be nice if there were room for a few more women in the stories (a bit like *The Hobbit!*), perhaps a feisty abbess à la Hilda or Brigid, and yes there is a love interest, but I won't give any spoiler alerts....I'll let you discover it for yourself!

Jenny Wilkens

From the Director and Canon Theologian (continued)

her life to a God who calls us and sends us places where we cannot define for ourselves what will happen – a God who is not our accomplice. And Mary Hayter? I'm left wondering if the scholarly endeavour makes us vulnerable – to the temptation to 'fudge' a result, to escape an uncomfortable conclusion, and to the anger or disdain of those who do not like where we have ended up.

Who would I add, to the list of those who feature in this issue? I'm not sure if 'theologian' is the right label, but I'm tempted to include the woman who prayed 'This God of my life and life of my soul, the King of all comfort is my only refuge'. This was a leader who said towards the end of her life that 'I have ever used to set the Last Judgement Day before mine eyes and

so to rule as I shall be judged to answer before a higher judge' – no bad standard to follow. She took her faith seriously, and yet had 'no desire to make windows into men's souls', allowing others the liberty to choose their own religious path: Elizabeth I, the first Anglican monarch.

Canon Deborah Broome

WIT roadshow on Job

Saturday 13 October	St. Mark's Church, Carterton
Saturday 27 October	St. Jonn's Church, Feilding
Saturday 3 November	Anglican Centre, Wellington

Lady Julian of Norwich



Lady Julian of Norwich

At the age of 30 Julian, seriously ill, experienced a series of intense visions of Jesus Christ. Around 1393, after twenty years of meditation, she wrote an expanded account of these visions ('shewings'): *Revelations of Divine Love*.

When reading *Revelations*, we come across ideas that still challenge modern minds, e.g. the motherhood of God revealed in Jesus Christ, which is combined with the courtesy and gentleness one would expect of an ideal Lord in a feudal society. Julian made a special point of describing motherhood within the Trinity. "I saw that there were these three attributes: fatherhood, motherhood, and lordship – all in one God".

Julian's message is filled with optimism and hope. "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well." In all things we will not be overcome.

Her consistently sunny outlook is founded on an absolute certainty that God is love towards all his creatures. On one occasion she saw, "a little thing, the size of a hazel-nut, on the palm of my hand, round like a ball".

"What is this?"

"It is all that is made."

"It exists, both now and for ever, because God loves it."

It is Julian's gift to express the most profound truths in simple and homely terms. We might argue that her thinking is mistaken or short-sighted, because she gives little attention to the problem of evil, but I think that she is so confident of the love of God that she is prepared to trust and hope that in God there is a solution to all we cannot answer.

Julian herself lived through very challenging times of economic distress, and depopulation. For the latter part of her life, at least, she lived under a form of voluntary internal exile, as an anchoress, confined to fixed (but comfortable) quarters attached to a church. There she developed a high reputation as a spiritual director – a reputation that continues to this day through her little book, reputed to be the first book in English written by a woman.

Lyll Perris

The New Eve in Christ

The use and abuse of the Bible in the debate about women in the church, by Mary Hayter

This book, published in 1987, is an amazing very thorough examination of the position of women in religion throughout the Bible. It is a book that wants to take the Bible seriously, and therefore it does not take on ideas from feminism that do not fit Biblical attitudes. A difficult path to tread, but an idea I endorse.

Hayter is a thorough scholar, and she develops arguments carefully, examining all sides. She begins with looking at God as revealed in the Old Testament. She shows that God is a person, but we don't know what gender He is. In the Hebrew language, as in English, we need to use a personal pronoun for God, and we use masculine pronouns. But God is not necessarily masculine. Some feminine metaphors are used for God. It is easy to think that because God appears to be masculine, women are not as important as men, and certainly cannot take leading roles in religious ceremonies. It is good to get this false idea out of the way early in the book.

The religion of the Hebrews was different to that of her neighbours. Monotheism means that there are no god and goddess who bring fertility to the earth by having sex. Sex with cult prostitutes is not part of worship. But this means we don't know the gender of

God. We cannot argue that God is masculine, so His priests must be masculine. It might be fine to associate the monotheistic God with masculinity for a while, to eliminate the idea of sex between the god and goddess. But it might not be valid now.

Were there female priests in Old Testament times? The Old Testament doesn't forbid women priests in any of the law sections, but there are no examples of women priests appearing in the text. There may have been women priests, but they just don't appear.

The New Testament chapter primarily discusses Paul's apparently negative attitude to women. It discusses the difficult issue of why Paul's interpretation of Genesis Chapters 2 and 3 seems to be different to that developed in the previous chapters of Hayter's book. I like Hayter's honesty, and her desire to be true to the Biblical text. She wants to understand what Paul is saying.

I enjoyed this book. It made me think. It used good scholarship. It honestly examined the Bible, even when the conclusions were uncomfortable.

Barb Lash

Elisabeth Elliot



Elisabeth Elliot

One of the most profound and challenging theological statements I have read actually appears in a novel, written by the Christian missionary Elisabeth Elliot, who was born to missionary parents in 1926. After studying classical Greek with the intention of working in the area of unwritten languages, she went to Ecuador to work with the Quichua Indians, and in 1953 married fellow missionary Jim Elliot. They worked together until he and four other missionaries were killed in January 1956 by a group of Auca tribesmen, with whom they were attempting to make contact.

Determined to continue his work and despite the fact that he had been killed by men for whom he had prayed for six years, Elisabeth remained in Ecuador with their 10 month old daughter, and after meeting and getting to know two Auca women, she went to live with the tribe for two years. She then continued with the Quichua work until 1963, when she returned to the United States, where she became a popular writer and speaker.

Although she has written in the genre of biography, autobiography and contributed numerous articles and essays, J. I. Packer, in his foreword to her novel *No*

Graven Image, suggests she turned to an imagined story, “because it was most apt for what she has to say”, and that “imaginative involvement in the story is more than nonfictional analysis can ever convey”. This extraordinary book is not, however, the usual ‘two-pronged plot formula’ often found in popular Christian novels, in which someone turns away from God to encounter difficulties, or turns to God and finds blessing. Growing out of her personal experiences, it tells of a young and idealistic female missionary who starts, in the words of Packer, as the victim of a well-meant, God-shrinking, success-oriented notion of the “work” she has been called to. Her subsequent experiences, however, are of tragedy, frustration and waste as, “Nothing...worked out for me as I had thought it would work”.

The searing honesty of the story, in which the trials and often harsh realities of life are faced head-on, poses some challenging questions for the reader but it is the character’s concluding reflection that has stayed with me for the nearly twenty years since I first read this book.

It seemed... as though *Finis* was written below all I had done...God, if He was merely my accomplice, had betrayed me. If, on the other hand, He was God, he had freed me. I find that I can no longer arrange my life in an orderly succession of projects with realizable goals and demonstrable effects. I cannot designate this activity as “useful” and that one as “useless” for often the categories are reversed and even more often I am at a loss to apply either label, for the work, in the end, as well as the labelling, is God’s.

While this statement continues to be a humbling reminder to me of the tendency to ‘allow’ God to be part of *my* plans it is also an often timely reminder of the renewed hope and freedom that can be found, despite any circumstance, within a vision of God that cannot be confined to the limitations of human goals and perspectives. Elisabeth Elliot has experienced this vision within, and perhaps because of, the challenges of her own life, and it is a vision that, in biblical tradition, she offers to others in the form of a thought-provoking and at times haunting story.

Sarah Beattie

Contact details

The Wellington Library is located based on the first floor of the Anglican Centre, 18 Eccleston Hill (off Hill Street), Thorndon, Wellington. Contact Director Deborah Broome at 04 4759085 or debroom@paradise.net.nz. And contact Librarian John McCaul at 04 4718599 or WITLibrary@wn.ang.org.nz. The Palmerston North Library is located at St. Peter’s Church, 229 Ruahine St, Palmerston North. Correspondence should be addressed to the WIT Council, c/o the Anglican Centre.

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