

The Michael Ramsey Prize
for theological writing



The Michael Ramsey Prize
for theological writing
2011

PRESS PACK

The Michael Ramsey Prize
for theological writing

The Prize

The author of the winning book will receive £10,000. This is a substantial award, particularly for a specialist competition. Each runner-up will receive £1000.

The shortlist

David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions* (Yale University Press)

Christopher Cocksworth, *Holding Together* (Canterbury)

Richard Harries, *The Re-enchantment of Morality* (SPCK)

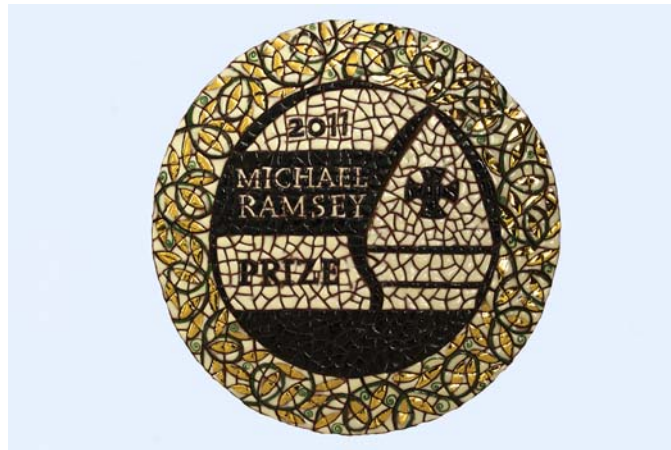
Robert Hughes, *Beloved Dust* (Continuum)

Angel Montoya, *The theology of Food* (Wiley-Blackwell)

Thomas Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion* (Brazos Press)

Prize-giving

The winner will be announced at the end of The Michael Ramsey Prize Lunch at the Telegraph Hay Festival on 27 May 2011 by Archbishop Rowan Williams. More details on the Hay Festival can be found at www.hayfestival.com



The winning author will receive £10,000 and this mosaic plaque handmade by Dee Hardwicke

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About the Michael Ramsey Prize

The Prize, which is sponsored by the Lambeth Fund and administered by SPCK, was inaugurated by Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams to encourage the most promising contemporary theological writing and to identify it for a wider Christian readership.

The biennial prize commemorates Dr Ramsey, who was Archbishop of Canterbury 1961-1974, and his commitment to increasing the breadth of theological understanding of people in general.

The Prize was inaugurated in 2003, and the first award was made in 2005 for *The Resurrection of the Son of God* by Tom Wright. In 2007 the Prize was awarded to Fr Timothy Radcliffe for *What is the Point of Being a Christian?* Richard Bauckham, one of this year's judges, won the 2009 Prize with *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*.

Nominations are made by invited Anglican Primates, by leaders of Christian church bodies in the UK, Anglican Bishops, principals of theological colleges and other invited individuals. Books may not be nominated by publishers or members of the public.

Regulations

- 1 The Michael Ramsey Prize for 2011 will be awarded to the author of a theological work that is judged to contribute most towards advancing theology and making a serious contribution to the faith and life of the Church.
- 2 The book must be by a living author, and must have been first published between January 2008 and December 2009.
- 3 The book must be written in or translated into English, and available in the UK.
- 4 The Prize is £10,000, and is awarded to the author(s) of the winning work. The author(s) of each other shortlisted title will be awarded £1000.
- 5 The judging panel is appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury. The judges' decision is final.
- 6 Books must be nominated by a member of the nominating body.
- 7 Each publisher of a shortlisted title must agree to:
 - Supply 8 copies of the book, to be used for judging and for promoting the book and the Prize;
 - Secure the attendance of the author at the prize-giving ceremony in May 2011. This is especially important for overseas authors;
 - Make shortlisted/winning authors available wherever possible for other public appearances and events to promote the book and the Michael Ramsey Prize e.g. literary festivals, signings, online discussions and academic/educational events;
 - Acknowledge the Michael Ramsey Prize in subsequent reprints, paperback editions and any point-of-sale material for the winning book. The Michael Ramsey Prize will provide stickers and flyers for winning books.

Archbishop Rowan Williams on the Prize



Archbishop Rowan Williams presents the Michael Ramsey Prize to winner Richard Bauckham at the Hay Festival in 2009

Archbishop Rowan Williams spoke about the purpose and nature of the Michael Ramsey Prize at the prizegiving ceremony at the Christian Resources Exhibition at Sandown Park in May 2007.

An edited version of his speech appears below.

When I was first nominated as Archbishop of Canterbury I was, of course, asked what my priorities were. The two that I named were doing something about the mission of the Church generally in terms of church planting and new kinds of congregation, and that bore fruit eventually in the Fresh Expressions initiative which was launched a couple of years ago, but also something about theological education. As you've gathered it's something that quite a bit of my own life has been devoted to and I've got a very strong conviction that a healthy church is a Church where people know their way around their Tradition; know where to look for resource, challenge, growth etc.; where people aren't afraid to think and aren't afraid to argue.

I spoke in another context of how we needed a more argumentative democracy than we've got at the moment: people who are more open in the public sphere about fundamental questions of meaning and direction and where people were able to have informed dialogue that didn't issue in stand-offs, violence or rejection. So what we're talking about is a theologically educated Church and that's not about everybody being able to get down volumes of the great classics and being able to read them straight off: it's something to do with the biblical phrase about being able *to give a reason for the faith that is in you* and something to do with an assumption that the Church is a community where people grow; grow not only in a depth of feeling, or a depth of commitment, but grow in integration with all that is to do with the work of the mind.

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And so one idea that formulated itself, with the help of friends, was that we ought to have a theological book prize. There have been such in the past. The Collins Religious Book award in years gone by was a very significant presence on the scene but there didn't seem to be anything quite like that now and I thought perhaps there ought to be. Enough other people thought there ought to be to make it very worthwhile and the Lambeth partners who are generously supportive of the work of the Archbishop of Canterbury by their voluntary giving agreed promptly and enthusiastically to fund this award.

The criteria that we've applied have been twofold. We're looking for a work that does in some sense advance theology. It's the kind of phrase you get in research submissions and in universities and it's pretty vague, but I take it that what it means is that we're looking for something which is more than a text book, not necessarily something that argues some great devastating new thesis – though that is welcome – but something that extends the range of people's understanding, casting fresh perspectives on familiar territory and perhaps even giving us a bit more territory to explore. So, something that advances theology but also that advances it for the sake of the Church, in other words not *primarily* an academic monograph – though again, we're looking for rigour and intellectual quality – but something that will, directly or indirectly, nourish the Church, make people in the Church feel it's worth belonging, it's worth exploring, it's worth communicating.

So that's what we're after and, as you'll hear in a moment, we've been extraordinarily well served this year. This second round has convinced us judges that it's a good idea. There are books out there that are worthy of consideration and that this is something which can be and will be an appropriate encouragement to people.

And finally, why Michael Ramsey? Well, I couldn't resist it really! He's my favourite among the Archbishops of Canterbury of the last 1000 years or so and somebody who certainly did manage to advance theology and advanced it very much by producing things that continue to nourish people in the most surprising ways and places.

I had a letter from a literary friend just before Easter who rather surprisingly confided that he was reading Michael Ramsey's *Be Still and Know* as his Lenten reading and I suspect those who are familiar with his published work would be rather surprised to find him reading that. But it's an index of just how profound an impact he had and how he exemplifies what this award is all about: a thinking church, a growing church in the spiritual and intellectual sense, a praying church, an adventurous church, a rooted church, all those things that the Church tries with extremely variable levels of success to be. I think he's the perfect patron for this award and I hope that in addition to all the other things this award will do it will keep alive a very precious and a very important memory.

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The Judges



RICHARD BAUCKHAM is a biblical scholar and theologian. He is Emeritus Professor of New Testament Studies at the University of St Andrews, Scotland, and Senior Scholar at Ridley Hall, Cambridge. He has published widely: one of his books, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, was awarded the Michael Ramsey Prize for 2009.



JOHN INGE became the 113th Bishop of Worcester in 2008. Prior to that he had a varied ministry as Chaplain at Harrow School, vicar of an inner city parish on Tyneside, Canon Missioner at Ely Cathedral and then Bishop of Huntingdon. His academic theological interest is in the theology of place. His 2003 book *A Christian Theology of Place* was shortlisted for the 2005 Michael Ramsey Prize.



SIMON RUSSELL BEALE was a chorister at St Paul's Cathedral. He read English at Cambridge before becoming an actor. Simon has starred in, and won many awards for, productions at the RSC, National Theatre, the West End and in New York. He has presented two series of documentaries on Sacred Music for BBC 4. He was awarded a CBE in 2003.



JANET SOSKICE is Professor of Philosophical Theology at the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of Jesus College. She is past-President of the Catholic Theological Association of Great Britain and President of the Society for the Study of Theology. Janet is the author of *Metaphor and Religious Language* (OUP, 1984) and *The Kindness of God* (OUP, 2008).



JANE WILLIAMS read Theology at Cambridge, then worked in theological publishing and education. She currently works for Redemptorist Publications and as a Visiting Lecturer at King's College, London and as a Lecturer at the St Paul's Theological Centre. Since 1981 she has been married to Archbishop Rowan Williams.



ROWAN WILLIAMS, Archbishop of Canterbury, read Theology at Christ's College, Cambridge. After research, lecturing and parochial work, Dr Williams became Professor of Theology at Oxford. He was enthroned as Bishop of Monmouth in 1992 and Archbishop of Wales in 2000. Dr Williams has written a number of books on the history of theology and spirituality and published collections of articles and sermons.



LUCY WINKETT, Rector of St James's Piccadilly, read History at Selwyn College, Cambridge and Theology at Birmingham University. After working in East London, she spent 12 years at St Paul's Cathedral, seven of which were as Canon Precentor. She is the author of the 2010 Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent Book *Our Sound is our Wound* and a regular broadcaster and writer on gender, culture and religion. She is a founder advisor for the public theology think tank Theos.

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Events at the Hay Festival

10am "The Big Read" a conversation on the King James Bible

Jane Williams Exodus
Thomas Reynolds Lamentations
Robert Hughes Jonah

Presentation to participants by Bible Society

11.30am Shortlisted authors in conversation with Jane Williams

12.30pm Gala lunch and prizegiving

2.30pm "The Big Read" a conversation on the King James Bible

"The Trinity of Bishops"

John Inge Philemon
Richard Harries 1 Corinthians
Christopher Cocksworth Ruth

Presentation to participants by Bible Society

3.30-4pm book signings in Permbertons Festival Bookshop

4pm Simon Russell Beale in Conversation with Archbishop Rowan Williams about Shakespeare

5pm tea in St Mary's Parish church

6pm Evensong in St Mary's Parish church

More information on the Hay Festival can be found at www.hayfestival.com

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The shortlist

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Thomas E. Reynolds
Vulnerable Communion
Brazos Press (Baker)

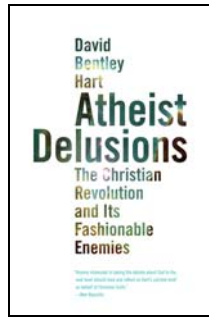
Christopher Cocksworth
Holding Together
Canterbury

Richard Harries
The Re-enchantment of Morality
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Angel Montoya
The theology of Food
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Robert Hughes
Beloved Dust
Continuum

David Bentley Hart
Atheist Delusions
Yale University Press



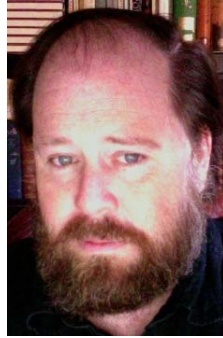
Atheist Delusions, David Bentley Hart

Paperback, £14.99, 978-0300164299, Yale University Press

Currently it is fashionable to be devoutly undevout. Religion's most passionate antagonists – Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and others – have publishers competing eagerly to market their various denunciations of religion, monotheism, Christianity, and Roman Catholicism. But contemporary antireligious polemics are based not only upon profound conceptual confusions but upon facile simplifications of history or even outright historical ignorance: so contends David Bentley Hart in this bold correction of the distortions. One of the most brilliant scholars of religion of our time, Hart provides a powerful antidote to the New Atheists' misrepresentations of the Christian past, bringing into focus the truth about the most radical revolution in Western history.

Hart outlines how Christianity transformed the ancient world in ways we may have forgotten: bringing liberation from fatalism, conferring great dignity on human beings, subverting the cruellest aspects of pagan society, and elevating charity above all virtues. He then argues that what we term the 'Age of Reason' was in fact the beginning of the eclipse of reason's authority as a cultural value. Hart closes the book in the present, delineating the ominous consequences of the decline of Christendom in a culture that is built upon its moral and spiritual values.

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David Bentley Hart

Why did you write this book?

To correct a number of historical misimpressions regarding the history of Christianity.

What is the central idea of your book?

That the rise of Christianity constituted the most radical conceptual revolution in Western history, one whose scope and nature even most Christians fail to grasp.

Why is this topic of particular relevance to the Church in the twenty-first century?

Christians and non-Christians alike inhabit a culture that is increasingly unaware of the wellsprings of its own deepest and most prevalent values, and of the social history that has brought us to the present. It is also relevant, perhaps, in that it might help to expose certain of the more nihilistic premises that often lie just below the surface of modernity.

Describe your ideal reader.

A literate person with an open mind, curious about the history of the West, and about Christianity's history in particular.

Do you need a degree in theology to read and understand your book?

No, not at all.

Why is theology more important than ever today?

I do not believe that it is, really. What is more important today than ever is the clarification of theological ideas and their history, simply because the storm of adverse polemic has become so relentless and so wantonly ignorant.

I'm delighted to be nominated for the MRP because...

I am a great admirer of the man whose name the prize bears, as well as of the current Archbishop of Canterbury, and because it is pleasant to think that the book has found favour with so distinguished a panel of judges.

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Holding Together, Christopher Cocksworth

Paperback, £16.99, 978-1853118395, Canterbury Press

Holding Together by Christopher Cocksworth explores Christian identity in all its fullness – being and living in a way that holds together the gospel with the life of the church and the life of the Spirit. With the tendency for evangelical Christians to focus primarily on the gospel and catholic Christians to emphasise the importance of church, these traditions have sometimes been unnecessarily forced apart. This bridge-building book explores the notion that biblical gospel, catholic church and powerful Spirit are the fundamental realities of Christian existence that all need to experience *together*. In different ways, each chapter of *Holding Together* attempts to hold the gospel together with the church, and to hold the gospel and the church together with the Spirit as it explores different approaches to key areas of doctrine and practice:

- Scripture and tradition
- Justification
- Church
- Mary
- Worship
- Baptism and Eucharist
- Mission

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Christopher Cocksworth

Why did you write this book?

I came to Christian Faith through the influence of evangelical Christians. They introduced me to the Gospel – the good news – of Jesus Christ. As time went on, partly as a result of more catholic-minded Christians, I began to see that life in the Church is intrinsic to Christian existence and that Jesus is very active in the Church. At some point, thanks to charismatic Christians, I discovered the dynamic energy of the Holy Spirit active in the Church and in the world in ways that I first found rather surprising but then welcomed as a gift. I learnt that Gospel, Church and Spirit belong to the essence of Christian Faith and I wanted to see them *held together* in my own life and in the lives of others. I became especially keen to influence evangelicals and to encourage them to develop a *catholic form of evangelicalism in the Spirit*. That's why I wrote *Holding Together*.

What is the central idea of your book?

I suppose the central idea of *Holding Together* is that 'there is no Gospel without the Church' (just as 'there is no Church without the Gospel') and that 'there is no Gospel without the Spirit' (and 'no Church without the Spirit'). So, for evangelicals to be *Gospel* people, they must be also *Church* people and *Spirit* people. I hope that the book will also help Christians formed in other traditions to find ways of holding Gospel, Church and Spirit together in life-giving configurations. *Holding Together* seeks to be a distinctively Anglican contribution to ecumenical theology and Christian identity, drawing on the particular experience of living out Christian life in the Anglican tradition, with its accumulated wisdom and its patterns of living with, listening to and learning from the other.

Why is this topic of particular relevance to the Church in the twenty-first century?

Evangelicalism – in its various forms – is one of the fastest growing forms of global Christianity. It is vital for the health of world-wide Christianity – and for the world evangelicals' influence – that evangelicalism is as authentic and as true to the deepest character of Christian life as possible. The book contends that an ecclesial (or Church) form of evangelicalism, which is alive to the present activity of the Holy Spirit, will be closest to its calling.

Nearer to home (my home at least) is *Anglican evangelicalism* both here in the Church of England and throughout the world-wide Anglican communion. Anglican evangelicals are at a pivotal point of global Christianity. They are in an historic Church community with a claim to and consciousness of catholic identity. They live out Christian life with other Christians who most definitely call themselves 'catholic Christians' and they have access through their Communion's status and systems to Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians. At the same time, Anglicanism has proved to be very open to renewing movements of the Holy Spirit in Christianity, and evangelical Anglicans are well connected with both charismatic Anglicans and with charismatic Christians in other arenas of the Church across the continents. Hence, Anglican evangelicals have a particular opportunity and responsibility to model an authentically full form of Christian life – one that I call an ecclesial (or catholic) form of being evangelical which is continually open to the dynamic movement of the Spirit.

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Describe your ideal reader.

My ideal reader is anyone who wants to read the book. In particular, when writing it I had in mind evangelical Christians who know instinctively that a hermetically sealed form of evangelicalism is insufficient (and fails to recognise the 'boundless riches of Christ' – Ephesians 3.8) but I gather that Christians of all sorts of persuasions have found its integrated vision of Christian life helpful.

Do you need a degree in theology to read and understand your book?

No, the book doesn't expect you to have a degree in theology and it is written for any serious Christian who wants to think theologically about their faith.

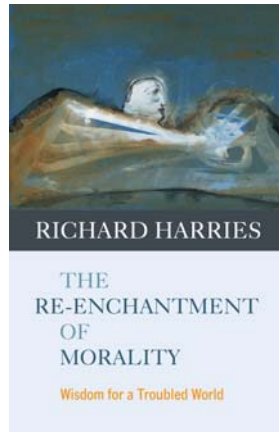
Why is theology more important than ever today?

In a world where many people have forgotten how to speak of God and where many others speak of God without listening to others who also speak of God, theology – the task of speaking about God truly – is essential and urgent.

I am delighted to be nominated for the Michael Ramsey Prize because...

Michael Ramsey held Gospel, Church and Spirit together in his faith, life and teaching. My book – *Holding Together* – is inspired by his vision of Christian Faith and by his confidence in the capacity of Anglicanism to embody that vision and to hold it, with joyful humility, before the Universal Church of Christ.

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The Re-enchantment of Morality, Richard Harries

Paperback, £10.99, 978-0281059478, SPCK

Today's society is in a state of confusion about the basis of morality. The traditional Christian approach is widely rejected, whilst secular philosophies offer little real help. Richard Harries sets out an understanding of the relationship between Christianity and the decisions we make, which re-enchants morality with a profound appeal. He considers this in relation to the four great drivers of human conduct – sex, money, power and fame – drawing on the biblical theme of Divine Wisdom and the radical teaching of Jesus. He is aware that all our decisions have a moral basis, including political and economic choices.

Willing to recognize and rejoice in goodness wherever it is to be found, he argues that it is only in the surpassing goodness of God that morality finds its true basis and inspiration.

This is a book for all who are concerned that our society is living off its moral capital with nothing to replace it.

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Richard Harries

Why did you write this book?

I wrote this book because I had something to say that no one else is saying.

What is the central idea of your book?

The central idea is that the current conflict between a secular morality and a religiously based one is misconceived. Good values are to be recognised and celebrated wherever they come from, but a Christian understanding of what it is to be a human being illuminates the world, and gives a special enchantment to morality. This approach is applied to the great drivers of human behaviour, money, power, sex and fame.

Why is this topic of particular relevance to the Church in the twenty-first century?

The topic continues to be intensely relevant to the church in the twenty-first century, as it tries to dispel caricatures of Church teaching and set forth both the challenge and appeal of a faith based ethics.

Describe your ideal reader.

The ideal reader is someone who puzzles about what difference the Christian faith makes to morality in general and the drivers of human behaviour in particular.

Do you need a degree in theology to read and understand your book?

The reader does not need a degree in theology.

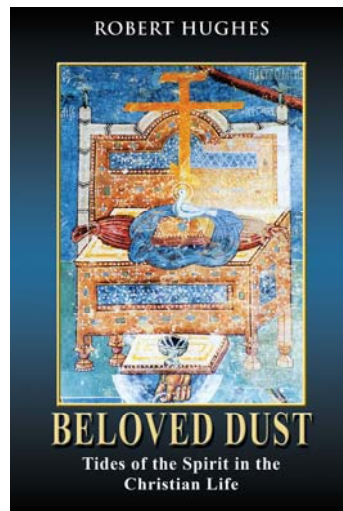
Why is theology more important than ever today?

Theology, that is, trying to think seriously and consistently about the world in the light of the Christian faith, is of growing importance now that religion is such a major player on the public stage.

I am delighted to be nominated for the Michael Ramsey Prize because

it will enable a wider audience to find some help and stimulus to their own thoughts on an issue which is both important and contentious.

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Beloved Dust, Robert Hughes

Paperback, £19.99, 978-0-8264-2843-1, Continuum

There has been an explosion of interest in classical Christian spirituality over the past 50 years. Nevertheless, while a great deal of work has been done on the history of Christian spirituality, there has been no full-scale, systematic theological and pastoral treatment of Christian spiritual life since before the Second Vatican Council.

Beloved Dust takes a realistic and contemporary view of human being as entirely physical (dust) and then shows it immersed in three great tides of the Holy Spirit, the traditional threefold rhythm of conversion, transfiguration, and glory. What is unique about Robert Hughes's approach is the effort to root spiritual theology in the doctrine of the Spirit, an outgrowth of the renewed interest in the Trinity among both Catholics (Karl Rahner) and Protestants (Robert Jenson). Also striking is Hughes's emphasis on 'ordinary life'—marriage, parenting, etc. Here a married Episcopal priest and theologian brings a distinctly 'Protestant' perspective to a traditionally 'Catholic' enterprise. What he achieves is an entirely new presentation of the traditional teaching in the light of contemporary knowledge and practice.

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Robert Hughes

Why did you write this book?

Spiritual theology has been a passion of mine since seminary days over forty years ago. I believed we needed a new, systematic theology of the spiritual life and wanted to be among those to provide one. It took some fifteen years to write this one.

What is the central idea of your book?

Theology of the spiritual life is more about movements of the Holy Spirit and her mission than about inherent human spiritual capacities. Human beings are material creatures, dust, who have a spiritual life because of the Holy Spirit who gives life and then sanctifies it. The Spirit blows where she wills, but often flows in regular channels that allow us to discern a common shape to the spiritual life that helps guide us on our journey. In our time we need an approach that overcomes the body/soul dualism and gives equal emphasis to contemplative and liberating prophetic practices.

Why is this topic of particular relevance to the Church in the twenty-first century?

There is a wonderful renewal of Christian spirituality underway but there had been no comprehensive theology of the spiritual life since before Vatican II. This is like building a ship without radar or rudder. But the 'old school' spiritual theologies were now coming across as authoritarian and unhelpful, despite containing a good deal of wisdom. I believed we needed a spiritual theology with contemporary concerns and a more democratic rhetoric, available to all Christians and not just a cloistered elite.

Describe your ideal reader.

I hope the book will appeal to any Christians who are theologically literate and have a serious interest in spirituality, in leading a life that is both contemplative and outwardly fruitful. I also hope non-Christian seekers may find the book helpful in understanding the depths Christian spiritual life has to offer.

Do you need a degree in theology to read and understand your book?

Absolutely not. My wife was first editor of the book and had the particular assignment of making sure ordinary folks would be able to understand it. I also hope it is a topic of broad interest. I am grateful to the staff at Continuum for encouraging me to write a serious scholarly book in a manner I hope will appeal to a general audience as well.

Why is theology more important than ever today?

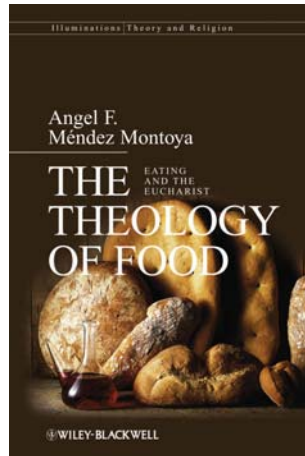
Theology needs to address but also challenge the "I am spiritual but not religious" trend, which tends to be privatized and emotional only. Today's seekers need to be made aware of the riches of intellectual life and inquiry in the great world religions, including, and for me especially, Christianity.

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I'm delighted to be nominated for the MRP because....

It is a tremendous honour to be in the company of past winners and past and present nominees, for a prize created and awarded by a distinguished theologian who is Archbishop of Canterbury and in honour of a predecessor who was also a distinguished theologian and Archbishop. I also hope the increased visibility the nomination brings to my book will help spur the renewal of spiritual theology in service to a renewed life in the Spirit for God's people.

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The Theology of Food, Angel Montoya

Hardback, £62.50, 978-1405189675, Wiley-Blackwell

The links between religion and food have been known for centuries, and yet we rarely examine or understand the nature of the relationship between food and spirituality, or food and sin. Drawing on literature, politics, and philosophy as well as theology, this book unlocks the role food has played, and shows religion in a new and illuminating light.

A fascinating book tracing the centuries-old links between theology and food, showing religion in a new and intriguing light

Draws on examples from different religions: the significance of the apple in the Christian Bible and the eating of bread as the body of Christ; the eating and fasting around Ramadan for Muslims; and how the dietary laws of Judaism are designed to create an awareness of living in the time and space of the Torah

Explores ideas from the fields of literature, politics, and philosophy, as well as theology

Takes seriously the idea that food matters, and that the many aspects of eating - table fellowship, culinary traditions, the aesthetic, ethical and political dimensions of food - are important and complex, and throw light on both religion and our relationship to food

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Angel Montoya

Why did you write this book?

While studying for my M.A., and Ph.D. degrees in theology, I experienced a growing disenchantment with theologies that felt quite 'insipid' to me, mere disembodied, abstract mental arguments without much substance, unrelated to everyday life. Naturally, not all theological proposals suffered from this limitation, but I realized that I was truly hungry and thirsty for a way of thinking and making theology that would not only nourish and satiate people's desire for God, but also lay the foundations for alternatives where people can share and care for one another. This true heartfelt longing became a prayer that day by day started to become actualized into envisioning theology as food, a discipline similar to the practice of preparing and cooking a lavish and nourishing communal feast. This reflection evolved into thinking about the meaning of food and eating in the midst of our daily concrete life, which furthermore opened questions about both physical and spiritual hunger in the world. What does this hunger actually mean? How does it appear in the world, in history, cultures, and traditions? I realized that matters related to food and the lack thereof, as well as those related to our willingness or unwillingness to share are indeed imperative theological matters. In fact, most religious traditions contain symbolic images and ritual practices related to food: feasting and fasting, sharing meals, and caring for the hungry. This is true within Christian narratives and practices, where we discover that God cares and feeds all people, but paradoxically also becomes food, thus intimately participating of our lives and stories, while simultaneously making us participants of a divine nourishing gift, meant not to be possessed but to be shared selflessly.

What is the central idea of your book?

My book explores the question of what it means to believe in God who is superabundance, infinite nourishing and sharing in a world where there is so much hunger, hatred, and violence. For Christians, God shares divinity in order to be near us, in order to reach intimacy with us, to invite us to become Eucharistic people, that is, to practice divine *caritas*, to nourish and care for one another, particularly those who physically and spiritually most hunger in our midst. Christian theology should respond to this appetite for God, becoming nourishment, i.e. alimentary theology.

Why is this topic of particular relevance to the Church in the twenty-first century?

The Church in the twenty-first century is facing swift shifts and deep transformations in the world. Recent technological advances and scientific discoveries are opening our minds to the deeper realms of micro and macro realities, and how they can be interconnected. This sense of connectivity is increasing thanks to the Internet and other network systems that help to reduce space and time barriers and geo-political borders. Yet the world is also facing terrible economic and political crises, unleashed expressions of violence, along with ecological disasters, which are mostly produced by selfish and careless human behaviour toward the planet and toward one another. While we experience a sense of living in a global village, we also realize that societies can be polarized, and vulnerable communities are often ghettoized by stronger power mechanisms related to economic power, political power, ideological power, power of all sorts. More than ever, the Church is required, first from within itself, to exercise *metanoia*, a conversion of the heart that moves our desire to

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open communal spaces where diversity is celebrated, revealing to the world that it is possible to create concrete everyday practices of love, justice, and peace. As a Catholic, I realize that the Eucharist can often be fetishized to such an extent that it antagonizes the spiritual against the material, the liturgical space vis-à-vis the space of everyday reality. I share a reflection on the Eucharist that I hope can help overcome these dichotomies, understanding the Eucharist as a paradigm of an occasion of encounter and mutual constitution of the spiritual and the material, the liturgical and everyday space; an encounter of desires, both human and divine. This means that the Eucharist is not a private practice, but a public performance of the reign of God, where everyone is welcome and no one goes away hungry. I propose that the *ecclesia* is the locus of the mutual complementing of eros and agape, for it responds to a primal appetite for God (Saint Augustine), as well as for one another. This *appetitus* is both a longing for that which we lack, but at the same time it is – from a Eucharistic perspective – a foretaste of God's plenitude. All creation is embraced by a loving and caring God that satiates our hunger, attends to our deepest desire. I pray that my work can be relevant to a Church that is willing to be dialogical and inclusive, in order to create not only a space of inner and ecumenical dialogue, but also a dialogue and collaboration with non-Christian religious traditions, including people who do not hold a particular religious belief. I envision the Church as a shared inclusive table where everyone is welcome, particularly those who are outcast.

Describe your ideal reader.

My ideal reader is a person who wishes to find a theological reflection relevant to everyday life and is willing to find ways of providing a communal table. A reader who is open to interdisciplinary dialogue, who is willing to learn from a wide variety of disciplines and discourses, such as literature, film theory, aesthetics, ethics and politics, among others. A reader who is sensitive to intellectual reasoning, but also to matters related to the body and the senses, to the heart, and to the delightful 'savouring' –*sapere*– of faith.

Do you need a degree in theology to read and understand your book?

Although my book was first written as a doctoral dissertation, I wrote it with the intention of addressing a wide and diverse readership, beyond academic theology. Since food is such a basic symbol and down-to-earth reality, I hope that anyone interested in a broad spectrum of food-related matters can find food for thought in my work.

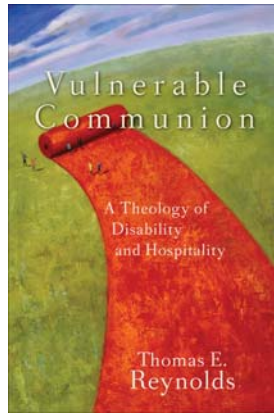
Why is theology more important than ever today?

We are currently experiencing a 'return of the religious'. In this post-secular world, I observe, particularly among the younger generations, hunger and thirst for the spiritual and the sacred, i.e. for everlasting happiness. I believe that theology has the vocation and mission to respond to this hunger, and become a form of nourishment. Christian theology can be particularly helpful to prevent antagonizing transcendence and immanence. This dichotomous tendency usually ends by raising huge walls between the spiritual and the material, nature and culture, humanity and the planet, as well as putting a wall between the individual and society. The narratives of creation, incarnation, resurrection and the Eucharist tell a story where matter and spirit, the human and the divine are interwoven without nullifying differences, yet embodying love and affinity.

I am delighted to be nominated for the Michael Ramsey Prize because...

I feel part of a very inspiring tradition of theologians from past and present nominations, who are seated at the same table, celebrating God's presence amidst creation and humanity, caring for creation and for people's lives. As a Latin American theologian, I am delighted to know that there is a desire to unite theological agendas from the reality of both the Northern and Southern hemispheres, working together in a world that is suffering from spiritual and physical hunger.

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Vulnerable Communion, Thomas Reynolds

Paperback, £14.99, 978-1587431777, Brazos Press

As parents of a son with disabilities, Thomas E. Reynolds and his wife know what it's like to be misunderstood by a church community. In *Vulnerable Communion*, Reynolds draws upon that personal experience and a diverse body of literature to empower churches and individuals to foster deeper hospitality toward persons with disabilities.

Reynolds argues that the Christian story is one of strength coming from weakness, of wholeness emerging from brokenness, and of power in vulnerability. He offers valuable biblical, theological, and pastoral tools to understand and welcome those with disabilities. *Vulnerable Communion* will be a useful resource for any student, theologian, church leader, or lay person seeking to discover the power of God revealed through weakness.

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Thomas Reynolds

Why did you write this book?

I wrote this book because I realized there was great need for faith communities to think differently about and act differently toward people with disabilities. The matter is profoundly personal; in fact, the book really 'wrote me', an instinct I couldn't deny. Caring and advocating for my son – Chris, diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, Tourette's Syndrome, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, and so on – made it impossible for me to avoid reconsidering many Christian theological themes from the ground up. People with disabilities – and their families – are often misunderstood as somehow other than 'us' normals, diminished as a deficiency in need of cure, an inconvenience relegated to a charitable cause, or a problem to be pushed aside. The book is an effort to help change this. Christians are called to a wider hospitality on the issue of disability (and far beyond it).

What is the central idea of your book?

Recognizing that all human beings, both people with and without disabilities, are vulnerable before God and each other is a pathway into welcoming people with disabilities more robustly into faith communities. Indeed, the biblical witness speaks of the redemptive nearness of God to human vulnerability and brokenness, a nearness of solidarity that does not undo or fix such a condition but, paradoxically, embraces it in love through Christ. The experience of 'inability' and dependence can be a harbinger of divine abundance in genuine relationships with others. Rather than strength and ability – for example, the capacity to think rationally, act autonomously, look healthy, etc. – it is vulnerability that is a starting point for discovering what we *share* in our differences, a source bearing the precious and fragile grace of communion with one another. God's power is made complete in weakness.

Why is this topic of particular relevance to the Church in the twenty-first century?

The Church today is filled with people with disabilities and their families. Furthermore, thanks to the disability rights movement, attention is now being paid to the many kinds of disabilities represented in church communities. It is impossible to ignore these facts, which challenge people of faith to proclaim and practice the Gospel in a way that avoids treating disability as an abnormality affecting only 'them'. Disability affects all human beings. And because this is so, the Church also has a prophetic role to play in resisting social and political mechanisms that diminish people with disabilities. For example, my son has been designated 'medically inadmissible' by Canadian immigration because of his disabilities (my family moved from the USA). Rejected as an immigrant, Chris cannot access government health care services that would greatly benefit him. Injustices like this occur widely, and they call for Christian response. The Church that offers wide hospitality is also a place where prophetic resistance is cultivated.

Describe your ideal reader.

A person who is involved with disability – as someone with disabilities, a caregiver, a family member, a parishioner – and who is also interested in understanding more deeply how their theological thinking relates to their experiences. Of course, everyone is involved with disability in some way (if nothing other than that we all grow old and die).

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Do you need a degree in theology to read and understand your book?

No, you do not. The book is tilted toward seminarians and church leaders, but educated lay readers with some background in theology will hopefully find a home in it.

Why is theology more important than ever today?

Theology is more important than ever today because Christians must think through the way the Gospel is transformative, credible, and relevant in a globalizing predicament. In a time when tradition is being eroded by social and cultural forces, theology carries the collective wisdom of Christian tradition and bears witness to its transformative potential here and now. It does so in a vigorous engagement with contemporary viewpoints and practices to understand faith's witness as intellectually viable and coherent as well as ethically and spiritually relevant. This is so crucial today because of several factors related to our context: secularism, poverty, oppression, violence, etc. The practice of Christian faith requires theological reflection to have direction and focus (bad theology can make for bad practice); and the reflection that is called 'theology' requires transformative practice to have meaningful substance (bad practice can make for bad theology). Theology makes a difference.

I'm delighted to be nominated for the MRP because....

...the book is very personal, a testimony to my own struggles and desires to be a better parent to my son with disabilities and also make the world a better place for him. So it is particularly gratifying to see that the issues discussed in it are connecting with people's lives and recognized as important for faith communities to grapple with.

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