



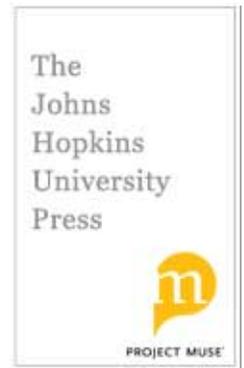
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Editor's Preface

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Editor's Preface

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On the evening of Friday, July 15, 2011, Archbishop Rowan Williams was awarded the Conference on Christianity and Literature Lifetime Achievement Award. The award was presented at the "Hospitable Text" Conference held at the Notre Dame House in London, England, a conference co-sponsored by CCL and the journals Religion and Literature and Literature and Theology. We are pleased to commence the Fall 2011 issue of Christianity and Literature with a revised version of the memorable lecture on Marilynne Robinson that Archbishop Rowan presented upon receiving the CCL award. That essay is followed by a thoughtful reflection on Archbishop Williams' work by Kent Eilers.

Below is the commendation of Archbishop Rowan Williams that I read upon the presentation of the CCL Lifetime Achievement Award by CCL President Harold K. Bush:

With great joy, I represent the Conference on Christianity and Literature in offering this commendation of Archbishop Rowan Williams as he receives our 2011 Lifetime Achievement Award. All of us gathered here are deeply pleased and honored, Archbishop, that you can be with us this evening, together with your wife, Mrs. Jane Williams, your children Rhiannon and Pip, and your friend Reverend Canon Anthony Ball. We eagerly anticipate your address.

Dr. Williams has deeply enriched our sense of the religious dimensions of modern literature. His recent study of *Dostoevsky* (2008) illuminates the way that novelist "is repeatedly directing us toward a pattern of divine action that is outside our heads or hearts" (274). This theme receives an initial development in *Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love* (2005) which emphasizes the artist's responsibility to attend to the real. Drawing upon the aesthetic thought of Jacques Maritain, Williams discerns

its affinity with the artistic practice of David Jones and Flannery O'Connor. For Williams, all three writers exemplify the "contemplative absorption in what is truly there" (16), grounded in their faith that the real—loved as it is by God—is good.

Over the years, Dr. Williams' work has encompassed the Christian intellectual and artistic tradition as a whole. His first book, *The Wound of Knowledge* (1979), is a compendium of spiritual wisdom. It analyzes the varied ways in which an array of saints—including Paul, Irenaeus, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and John of the Cross—articulate the Christian calling. In *Where God Happens* (2005), he offers the prosaic wisdom of the fifth-century Desert fathers and mothers. He has written beautifully on scripture, including books on the trial of Christ (2003), and his resurrection (1982). He is an artful homilist whose collected sermons can stand beside Newman's in their perennial capacity to nourish. His small, meditative books on Eastern Orthodox icons have taught many to see how those images, grounded in Christ's incarnation, can help a receptive viewer become "open to God's action" (2002, 2003). A fine poet, his lyric evocations of Rublev, Bach, Tolstoy, Weil, and Merton have illuminated their human struggles and creative task, even as other poems celebrate God's continuing creation in nature and redemptive work in Christ. Dr. Williams is one of our finest living theologians, and the essays gathered in *On Christian Theology* (2000) and *Wrestling with Angels* (2007) will bear fruit for anyone who tills the field of religion and literature.

The Conference on Christianity and Literature is an ecumenical organization of scholars from varied traditions: Evangelical, Reformed, Anglican, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and others. Our scholarship sometimes reflects our differences, but we unite in Christ's prayer that we all may be one (John 17:21). Archbishop Rowan Williams stands with us as one of the wisest ecumenical leaders of our time.

And he is a leader in interreligious relations, too. This coming September 11 will mark ten years since he, along with thousands of others in downtown Manhattan, fled the falling towers of the World Trade Center. Soon after that event, he eloquently reminded us of the folly of vengeance. In the wake of great suffering and strife, he has remained committed to interreligious dialogue, about which he has memorably written: "Significant interfaith encounter arises from our being able to see each other doing whatever it is we do as well as possible—teaching, worshipping, reflecting, serving." In our conversations, "[w]e have to see how very other our universes are; and

only then do we find dialogue a surprise and a joy as we also discover where and how we can still talk about what matters most—holiness, being at peace with what most truly is” (“Christian Theology and Other Faiths” 2003).

A month and a day ago Dr. Williams celebrated his 60th birthday. He has already achieved so much, but we pray that, with God's help, he will continue to do so for many years to come. This Lifetime Achievement Award is given with gratitude for a work in progress. With all of the members of CCL, and all those gathered here, thank you, Archbishop, for the gift not only of your words, but the image of your example.