

Finally, a last word about repetition. Many readers who have browsed through *The Book of Job* have remarked on the long-winded and repetitious character of what we are offered there. The same sorrows appear to be rehearsed, and the same (wrong-headed) replies seem to be re-iterated, without apparent regard for editorial pruning. But this is a misunderstanding. Job as Everyman speaks for us all in his cries of despair, in his articulation of doubts, in his issuing of challenges, and in his expressions of sorrow, both for his children and for himself.

It is here that we get our first impression of the genius of this book. All those who have suffered a loss as Job has suffered, all those who mourn for parents, or spouses, or children, will tell you that “you can’t hurry the pace of grief”. The work of grieving, the work of sorrow, is not something that can just be “hurried along”, so that you can get “back to your life” or so that “things can return to normal”. Grief has its own rhythms, its own pace, and its own timings, and the immense privilege we have in *The Book of Job* is in accompanying Job on his journey, thus preparing each of us for a journey we shall each individually be faced with in due course.



The Reverend Dr. Tom Curran is a Senior Fellow at King’s College, Halifax, and an Adjunct Professor of German at Dalhousie University. Since serving as President of the provincial branch of the Prayer Book Society, he has also been on the executive committee for the annual Atlantic Theological Conference.

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**THANK YOU!**



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## MICHAELMAS 2006



*This preface to the reading of The Book of Job is offered as an introduction to the Prayer Book Institute which will be held on Saturday, November 18th at 12 Noon. Please come along if you would like to hear more, and please bring your translation of the Bible as well.*

Any approach to *The Book of Job* can only begin with a recognition of the fact that this sacred book is a work of poetry. It cannot therefore be treated as a compendium of dogmatic theology, although it does, of course, contain both arguments and teachings. It is offensive to the whole notion of literature to treat the poetic form of this Biblical book as if it were simply the chaff which by careful winnowing can be isolated from the wheat.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (famous for his “The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner”, 1798) defined poetry as “the best possible words in the best possible order”. And that is surely the first and most important reason that individuals from all walks of life continue to read *The Book of Job* - because what they are able to find there is an

account of the tragic character of human life expressed precisely in “the best possible words in the best possible order”.

If this were not so, then we should, all of us, content ourselves with ten-point handout summaries prepared by our rector or pastor. Sadly, in this minimalist, denuded format, *The Book of Job* would lose all its persuasive power. The attempt to carve out the remnants of doctrine from the poetic form in which we have received them would be like substituting the traditional, family Sunday dinner by a healthy selection of vitamins and nutritional supplements in capsule form. The nourishment may survive, but the salt has lost its “avour” (Matthew 5:13).

For instance, the poetry of *The Book of Job* is well aware of the principles of parallelism, which are the essential literary style of our Biblical Psalms. Parallelism points us towards the fact that Psalms are constructed according to a convention of repetition, by which device each verse of Biblical Psalms can be tested for statement and re-statement of the same general assertion *within each verse*. Repetition here has nothing to do with literary “padding”, but is, in fact, an incredibly powerful tool by which the original statement is reinforced by further emphasis, amplification, clarification, explanation, modification, elaboration, effective multiplication, and even, on occasion, retraction and negation.

For me, the most striking illustration of the subtlety of this poetic technique is provided in *1st Samuel* where the women of Israel greet the heroic warriors by their song: “Saul hath slain his thousands”, and another group of women pick up the refrain with a slight alteration: “and David his ten thousands”. Chapter 18 informs us that “the women sang to one another” (Verse 7), so that we understand that there was an original statement, followed by a spirited response. This exchange of tidings in victory is not just an echo of what has gone before, but involves a definite shift of emphasis, which Saul does not fail to note: Saul does not overlook the diminution of his own accomplishment when these are set beside David’s in parallel formation. Parallelism, therefore, is not some crude repetitive echo of the original assertion, but always the transposition of the original idea or assertion into a new and more complex key. The Psalms themselves seem to confirm the divine necessity of their own reiterating poetic style. Psalm 62, verse 11, begins: “God spake once, and twice I have also heard the same...” It is as if we can only begin to approach the awesome divine majesty when we give ourselves over to the enduring repetition of the single statement: “The Lord our God is one Lord”.

While to this point I have been emphasizing the poetic character of *The Book of Job*, it will not have escaped any attentive reader that in our English translations of the Bible, the poetic design I have been championing only begins with Chapter 3, and ends at Verse 7 of Chapter 42 (the conclusion). So around the timeless poetry which constitutes the essence of this Biblical book, there has been placed a far more straightforward (even though rather fabulous and

magical) narrative which acts as a frame to the poetic discourse that occurs between Job and his comforters. The poetical text, if I may speak this way, is actually embedded in its own historical context by the Biblical authors themselves. The date for this supreme achievement of Hebrew poetry is much disputed, but most scholars seem to think that its final form reflects one of the great crises in the history of Israel: the destruction of Solomon’s Temple by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC, the subsequent Babylonian Captivity of the children of Israel, and the return of the Exiles in 538 BC. The Persian Cyrus the Great, who had conquered the Babylonians, demonstrated his generosity not only by allowing the captives to return to Jerusalem, but also by issuing an edict which permitted them to rebuild their Temple (a work which was only completed in 515 BC).

Seen in this context and with this background, *The Book of Job* cannot be dismissed as a “one-off”; it is not really the peculiar history of a man of property, the father of ten children and the rancher of 7,000 sheep. Job, the narrative claims, comes into the spotlight at a meeting of the heavenly court, where Satan (not yet a proper name, more a title indicating “the adversary”) and God don’t appear to be of one mind with respect to Job’s “sterling” character: the suggestion that Job is both “blameless and upright”, more so than any other human being, is going to be put to the test. This scene-setting, this theatrical staging of Job’s trials, we might almost say, puts us in mind of the narrative of the Garden of Eden. In Genesis, we are introduced to a creature named Adam, which by the way is not really a proper name either, but a generic Hebrew word for human being, and one that is not even gender specific, I have been told. The real interest in the story is not the encounter with a talking serpent, and the peculiarities of the vegetation in this earthly paradise, the real interest is, in fact, how the story of Adam and Eve is *repeated* in every son of Adam and every daughter of Eve. Job, then, should be seen less as a historical figure, a man of vast wealth, apparently measured by his 3,000 camels, than as a universal type of humanity. Job is Everyman: his history is the history of every man and woman who has faced the injustices and tragedies of human existence, and in the challenges and questions he puts to God, Job is speaking for every one of us; equally, in the answers Job receives, God is also answering each of us individually. Job’s character as Everyman is emphasized in the very first verse of the first chapter of *The Book of Job*.

The opening sentence of the book informs us that “there was a man in the land of Uz”, not exactly “once upon a time”, but not exactly very far off either. Apart from the fact that nobody really knows where “Uz” was supposed to have been, the consensus seems to be that “the land of Uz” lay east of ancient Israel, possibly in Arabia. This seems to be another indication that the story of Job is not particularly to be identified with the inhabitants of Israel, but again suggests a universality, in which the sorrows of Job are a paradigm for all mankind, Jew and Gentile alike.

## The Series on Popular Aesthetics (formerly known as the Pop Culture Series) at King's College

is set to return this year on the heels of last year's successful lectures on The Da Vinci Code and Harry Potter.

**Dr. Simon Kow, the director of the Early Modern Studies Programme, will present "The Sacred, the Secular & the North in Philip Pullman's trilogy His Dark Materials" at 7:00 pm on Thursday, October 5 in the KTS Lecture Hall.** The lecture will also feature a response from Natasha Harwood, a Teaching Fellow in the Foundation Year Programme.

"Dr. Kow has read Philip Pullman's trilogy, called His Dark Materials," says series coordinator Dr. Tom Curran, a Senior Fellow in the Foundation Year Programme. "The whole thing is based on Milton's Paradise Lost, which he's also read, so he's going to be able to show the derivative character of what Pullman is doing which is both an embrace and a repulsion of Milton."

"I'll focus particularly on Pullman's first book, The Golden Compass, or, by its British title, Northern Lights., says Dr. Kow, " I'm quite fascinated by the symbol of the North in that novel, and the way he is trying to overturn Milton in many ways – retelling the tale of the fall of man from a new age view."

**Dr. Curran himself will give the second lecture: "The Afterlife of Dracula," aptly scheduled for 7:00 pm in Alumni Hall on Tuesday, October 31 – Hallowe'en.**

"I am interested in why vampires, and Dracula in particular, have this kind of staying power," he says. "In the 1970s, 150 films were made about vampires, and in 1996, 425 books were published on them. It never dies! Every film

now adds something new to the mix, in order to justify itself. I will begin with the discussion of Bram Stoker's novel and why it continues to be read, and then move on to various film versions. The really interesting thing, if I get there, is what Anne Rice adds to the soup with Interview With The Vampire.

I won't give my hand away, but I have to end with her because she does something really remarkable by bringing out something that has been implied for more than 100 years."

### Prayer Book Society Institutes

#### Saint George's Round Church

Saturday, October 21<sup>st</sup>  
The Rev'd Doug Chard  
Ecclesiastes

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Saturday, November 18<sup>th</sup>  
The Rev'd Dr. Tom Curran  
The Book of Job

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Typical schedule  
coffee available - 11:30  
first address - noon to 12:45  
lunch (brown bag) - 12:45-1:15  
  
second address - 1:15 to 2:00 pm  
followed by Evensong

## St. Michael's Youth Conference 2006



[www.smyc.ca](http://www.smyc.ca)

with clergy? Going to Church several times a day? This?

Because they want to. Because it matters. It is the St. Michael's Youth Conference. This was its 19<sup>th</sup> year of operation in the Maritimes. It happened in Buctouche at Camp Wildwood, a Baptist operated facility which has allowed a committed group of Anglicans to run a remarkable week of study and worship, fun and fellowship. (Committed is perhaps the right word in every sense!) There are classes on the Bible, on Theology, on Spirituality, all taught by a dedicated, humble and learned mix of clergy and laity and held in the mornings after Morning Prayer or Communion. The classes are structured in such a way as to accommodate first year and returning Michaelites. In the afternoons, there were outings to the beach and to other venues of fun. And the evenings were dedicated to skits and competitions involving cabin challenges, a quiz night and the performance of an unbelievable pageant – a stunning tableau of creedal salvation performed by the senior students.

This was my first appearance at St Michael's – my oldest daughter is a former conferee. I was there as a novelty. (The Da Vinci Code, again!) In this case, how a bad book can teach you good things! How to think orthodox Christianity as distinct from Gnostic nonsense. But far beyond novelty, there were courses on the Book of Job, on the history of Church Music, on the Sacraments, on the theology of Creation, and so on. There were masterful applications of the Story of David by the Conference speaker, Fr. John Pearce.

And did I mention the Book of Common Prayer? It grounds the thinking and the praying, the fun and the fellowship at the St. Michael's Conference. Next year will be the twentieth year of its Maritime operation. The best, the most fun and the most serious Christian camp for teenagers going.

Fr. David Curry

(*The Rev'd David Curry is Rector of the Parish of Windsor Nova Scotia. He also teaches Philosophy in the International Baccalaureate programme at King's Edgehill School. His students and fellow staff from the St Michael's Conference do not consider him a novelty item.*)

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Each summer the NS/PEI Branch of the Prayer Book Society makes every effort to enable teenagers (for whom the Conference fee might be prohibitive) to attend St Michael's in New Brunswick. This year we are able substantially to assist more than five campers. Please help us to continue this invaluable work by supporting the NS/PEI Branch generously.