

NO CONVICTION

Commentary by Peter Rollins

“This reflection was written after I happened to see a car speed past with a bumper sticker that read, “If Christianity were illegal would there be enough evidence to convict you?” At the time, I didn’t pay this little saying much thought, but over the course of the day it began to take root in my consciousness and play on my mind. So that evening I took some time to imagine such a world and what would happen to me if I lived in it. I was not interested in imagining a world where Christianity as a mere tradition or belief system was illegal but rather in a place where a life that reflected the acts and teachings of Jesus was prohibited.

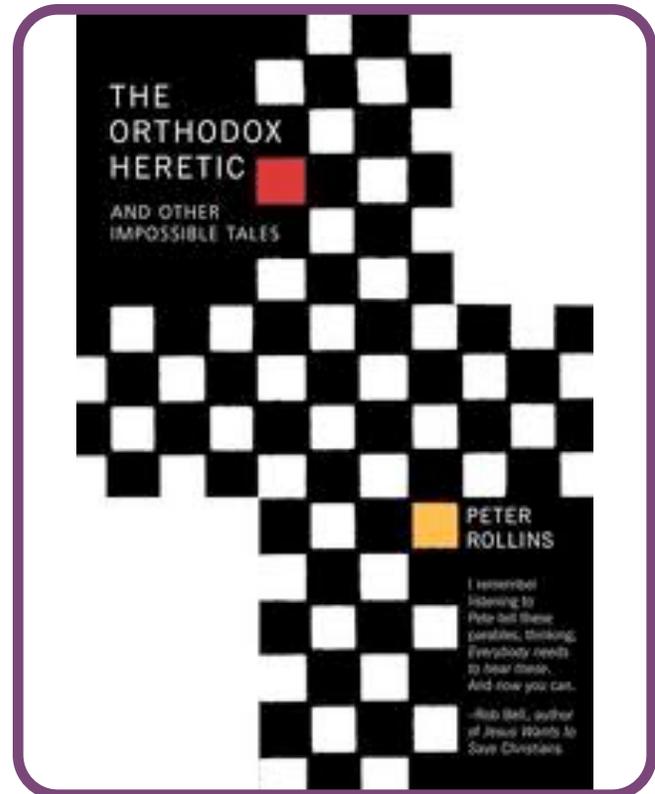
Yet, in the process of reflecting I began to wonder whether we actually already lived in such a world. Rather than reading, “If Christianity were illegal would there be enough evidence to convict you?”--I wondered whether the bumper sticker I had seen that day should actually have read, *Christianity is illegal: is there enough evidence to convict you?* For if I were really to take the teachings of Jesus seriously, would I not, sooner or later, find myself being dragged before the authorities? If I were really to live a life that reflected the subversive and radical message of love that gives a voice to the voiceless and a place to those who are displaced, if I were really to stand up against the systemic oppression perpetrated by those in power, then would I not find myself on the wrong side of the lawmakers?

This” parable “simply exposes the reality of Christ’s subversive teaching by imagining that those who exist in the place of power today are both aware of the fact that they oppose the way of Christ and willing to openly admit it. The story thus has two primary points. First, I used it to express the idea that authentic faith is expressed, not in the mere acceptance of a belief system, but in sacrificial, loving action. Here I reject the inner/outer distinction in which one can fool oneself into thinking that private beliefs are somehow more important or reflective of one’s essence than public actions. Second, I wished to draw the reader into the reflection that perhaps this larger-than-life scenario, in its imaginary description of an alternative universe, is actually merely a reflection of the universe that we already inhabit. By creating a fictional world, we thus come face-to-face with our own world.” (“The Orthodox Heretic” pages 7-9)

Lenten Evening Prayer

Ancient & Modern

PARABLES



“Religious writing is usually designed to make the truth of faith clear, concise, and palatable. Parables subvert this approach. In the parable, truth is not expressed via some dusty theological discourse that seeks to educate us, but rather it arises as a lyrical dis-course that would inspire and transform us...parables do not seek to change our minds but rather to change our hearts.” **PETER ROLLINS**

Lenten Evening Prayer

Parables

“**Parables** subvert the desire to make faith simple and understandable. they do not offer the reader clarity, for they refuse to be captured in the net of a single interpretation and instead demand our eternal return to their words, our wrestling with them, and our puzzling over them.

This does not mean that the words contain no message, or that they mock us as some insoluble puzzle (and thus not rally as a puzzle at all). Parables do not substitute sense for nonsense, or order for disorder. Rather, they point beyond these distinctions, inviting us to engage in a mode of reflection that has less to do with fixing meaning than rendering meaning fluid and affective.

A parable does not primarily provide information about our world. Rather, if we allow it to do its work within us, it will change, our world--breaking it open to ever-new possibilities by refusing to be held by the categories that currently exist within that world. In this way the parable transforms the way we hold reality, and thus changes reality itself.” (Peter Rollins)

Please begin your worship in quiet contemplation.

Invocation:

P: It is part of our human nature to desire God, and it is part of God’s nature to desire us.

C: **We can never stop yearning for God until we are possessed by God in the fullness of love.**

(Julian of Norwich: Revelations of Love)

Benediction:

P: Let our God of Goodness be enough for you.

Ask for nothing less,
for if you ask for less than God
you will always be left wanting.

In God:

All shall be well
and all shall be well
and all manner of things shall be well.

(Julian of Norwich: Revelations of Love)

Peace:

*receive the peace of Christ
and share Christ’s peace as you depart.*



*God is all that is good,
and God made all that is made,
and God loves every part of it.
If you love all people
because of God’s love,
then you love
each created thing,
because you love the creator.
For God is in every person,
and every person is in God.
If you love in this way, you love all.*

Julian of Norwich (1342-1416)

Hymn: **#581 You Are Mine**

Prayers of the Body

We will begin and end our prayers by singing the canon

May be sung in canon. Kristopher E. Lindquist



My spir - it rests in You a - lone, All my whole-ness comes from You.

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Abba Prayer

P: As Jesus taught us, we pray:

**Heavenly Mother, Heavenly Father
Holy and blessed is your true name.
We pray for your reign of peace to come.
We pray that your good will be done.
Let heaven and earth become one.
Give us this day the bread we need.
Give it to those who have none.
Let forgiveness flow like a river between us
From each one to each one to each one.
Lead us to holy innocence
Beyond the evil of our days:
Come swiftly Mother, Father, come.
For yours is the power
And the mercy, and the glory.
Forever your name is all one. Amen.**

Hymn: **#569 The Day You Gave Us, Lord Has Ended**

Evening Hymn: **#561 Joyous Light of Heavenly Glory**

Prayer of Thanksgiving:

P: God is all that is good, and God made all that is made, and God loves every part of it.

If you love all people because of God's love, then you love each created thing, because you love the creator.

For God is in every person, and every person is in God. If you love in this way, you love all. **C: Amen.**

(Julian of Norwich Revelations of Love)

Psalmody: **#232 Let My Prayer Rise Up**
the piano side is Group 1 and the north side Group 2

Silence for reflection

Prayer:

P: "All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well."

C: "Let nothing disturb you. Let nothing frighten you. Everything passes away except God."

P: "If there is anywhere on earth a lover of God who is always kept safe, I know nothing of it, for it was not shown to me. But this was shown: that in falling and rising again we are always kept in that same precious love."

C: "Let nothing disturb you. Let nothing frighten you. Everything passes away except God."

P: It is God's purpose that we be delighted--that we enjoy the gift of wholeness--that we be comforted and strengthened through grace.

**C: We are God's happiness and delight.
And God is our happiness and delight.**

(Julian of Norwich: Revelations of Love)

Silence for reflection

Hymn: **#565 All Praise to Thee, My God, This Night**

Scripture Reading: Mark 4:1-23

A Reading from *The Orthodox Heretic*:

No Conviction

In a world where following Christ is decreed to be a subversive and illegal activity you have been accused of being a believer, arrested, and dragged before a court.

You have been under clandestine surveillance for some time now, and so the prosecution has been able to build up quite a case against you. They begin the trial by offering the judge dozens of photographs that show you attending church meetings, speaking at religious events, and participating in various prayer and worship services. After this, they present a selection of items that have been confiscated from your home: religious books that you own, worship CDs, and other Christian artifacts. Then they step up the pace by displaying many of the poems, pieces of prose, and journal entries that you had lovingly written concerning your faith. Finally, in closing, the prosecution offers your bible to the judge. This is a well-worn book with scribbles, notes, drawings, and underlinings throughout, evidence, if it were needed, that you had read and reread this sacred text many times. Throughout the case you have been sitting silently in fear and trembling. You know deep in your heart that with the large body of evidence that has been amassed by the prosecution you face the possibility of a long imprisonment or even execution. At various times throughout the proceedings you have lost all confidence and have been on the verge of standing up and denying Christ. But while this thought has plagued our mind throughout the trial, you resist temptation and remain focused.

Once the prosecution has finished presenting their case the judge proceeds to ask if you have anything to add, but you remain silent and resolute, terrified that if you open your mouth, even for a moment, you might deny the charges made against you. Like Christ, you remain silent before your accusers. In response you are led outside to wait as the judge ponders your case.

The hours pass slowly as you sit under guard in the foyer waiting to be summoned back. Eventually a young man in uniform appears leads you into the courtroom so that you may hear the verdict and

receive word of your punishment. Once you have been seated in the dock the judge, a harsh and unyielding man, enters the room, stands before you, looks deep into your eyes and begins to speak.

“Of the charges that have been brought forward I find the accused not guilty.”

“Not guilty?” your heart freezes. Then, in a split second, the fear and terror that had moments before threatened to strip your resolve are swallowed up by confusion and rage.

Despite the surroundings, you stand defiantly before the judge and demand that he give an account concerning why you are innocent of the charges in light of the evidence.

“What evidence? he replies in shock.

“What about the poems and prose that I wrote?” you reply.

“They simply show that you think of yourself as a poet, nothing more.”

“But what about the services I spoke at, the times I wept in church and the long, sleepless nights of prayer?”

“Evidence that you are a good speaker and actor, nothing more,” replied the judge. “It is obvious that you deluded those around you, and perhaps at times you even deluded yourself, but this foolishness is not enough to convict you in a court of law.”

“But This is madness!” you shout. “It would seem that no evidence would convince you!”

“Not so,” replies the judge as if informing you of a great, long-forgotten secret.

“The court is indifferent toward your Bible reading and church attendance; it has no concern for worship with words and a pen. Continue to develop your theology, and use it to paint pictures of love. We have no interest in such armchair artists who spend their time creating images of a better world. We exist only for those who would lay down that brush, and their life, in a Christlike endeavor to create a better world. So, until you live as Christ and his followers did, until you challenge this system and become a thorn in our side, until you die to yourself and offer your body to the flames, until then, my friend, you are no enemy of ours.”