

Wrestling with God: The Lived Theodicy of Marilyn McCord Adams

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William Ockham. 2 vols. By Marilyn McCord Adams. Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1987. 1402 pp. \$90.00 (paper).

“Love of Learning, Reality of God.” By Marilyn McCord Adams. In Thomas V. Morris, ed., *God and the Philosophers: the Reconciliation of Faith and Reason*. 137–161. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994. 304 pp. \$19.95 (paper).

Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God. By Marilyn McCord Adams. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999. 240 pp. \$21.00 (paper).

Wrestling for Blessing. By Marilyn McCord Adams. London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2005. 144 pp. \$12.60 (Kindle).

Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology. By Marilyn McCord Adams. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 240 pp. \$21.00 (paper).

Opening to God: Childlike Prayers for Adults. By Marilyn McCord Adams. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2008. 120 pp. \$17.00 (paper).

“Truth and Reconciliation.” By Marilyn McCord Adams. In Derek R. Nelson, Joshua M. Moritz, and Ted Peters, eds. *Theologians in Their Own Words*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2013. 288 pp. \$29.00 (paper).

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The Rev. Dr. Marilyn McCord Adams (1944–2017) was a priest in the Episcopal Church, the first female Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford University, a theologian who made enormous contributions in the areas of theodicy and Christology, and a philosopher who wrote the definitive work on William of Ockham. She was a wife, mentor, colleague, and godmother. I count it as one of the great blessings of my life that she was also my friend. In and through all of these roles and relationships, Marilyn McCord Adams was a God-wrestler. This appellation is taken from one of her favorite Bible passages, Genesis 32:24–28, in which Jacob wrestles with a divine figure, refusing to let go until he receives blessing. Jacob is both blessed and injured in the process. He becomes Israel, and he walks with a limp. In similar fashion, McCord Adams wrestled with God and refused to let go. She wrote, “Between birth and the grave, the human assignment is to strive into God with all of our powers” (2013, p. 21).

McCord Adams grew up in rural Illinois. Three facts from her childhood set the stage for her academic work. First, she was raised in a church that taught her to know, love, and turn to the Bible. A veritable human concordance, she never ceased to study scripture. Second, McCord Adams experienced the goodness of God and was convinced of the centrality of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Third, she suffered horrendous abuses at the hands of her parents, a truth upon which she reflected publicly only after they had died.

As an adolescent, McCord Adams was unable to reconcile the goodness of the God she knew from scripture and experience with the horrors of relentless abuse. She writes, “My problem was how to house God and evil in the same world, and how to contain the experiences of God and horrors in the same self” (2013, p. 17). She felt God hated her; she hated God back. Yet it was not a clean break. McCord Adams wanted “to get back in touch with the reality of God” (2013, p. 18) and God, she would later say, kept trying to get back in touch with her.

Her study of philosophy at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign provided physical distance from the horrors of her childhood home and intellectual companions—in book form—with whom to wrestle about nature, both human and Divine. Notably, philosophy alone did not make way for McCord Adams and God to reconcile. Protestants encouraged faith and appropriate feelings of love for God and neighbor. To someone in McCord Adams’s situation, this was

useless. Faith and love for God were precisely what she was looking for—to say she needed them to find God did not help! However, the Anglo-Catholics offered a step forward: even if she did not believe, she could go through the motions. The material rituals of Anglo-Catholic worship and the repetitive affirmation of the creeds were the door through which McCord Adams could reclaim her faith and re-enter the church, becoming an Episcopalian in 1964 (2013, p. 20). The importance of bodies in meaning making, both negatively in horrendous evils and positively in liturgical formation, was central to McCord Adams's later work.

After earning an undergraduate degree in two and a half years, McCord Adams went on to doctoral work at Cornell University. One result of McCord Adams's training at Cornell was a writing style of extreme clarity. While her prose—particularly in her theological and ecclesial works—was filled with illuminating metaphors, literary and biblical allusions, and poetic turns of phrase, there is not one iota of evocative hand waving or rhetorical suggestions she was not prepared to cash out in detail. Students appreciated her repertoire of clarifying metaphors, including Beulah the cow and Brownie the donkey. McCord Adams's typical sentence structure matched her intellectual power and her personality—active, declaratory sentences with nary an introductory clause in sight.

Another significant result of McCord Adams's time at Cornell was her marriage to fellow philosopher Robert Merrihew Adams. After a stint in Michigan, the Adams moved to Los Angeles to take up appointments in the philosophy department at UCLA in 1972. While teaching there, McCord Adams discerned a call to the priesthood and eventually took two brief turns at Princeton Seminary to complete two master's degrees. McCord Adams also began assisting in the adult education programs at Trinity Episcopal Church in Hollywood. Participants in her Sunday School classes included gay men living and dying with AIDS. Never one to shirk a question, McCord Adams started a study group on the Bible and sexuality. Through such study, but much more so through her witnessing of incredible faithfulness and sacrificial love among gay couples and friends, McCord Adams became utterly convinced that erroneous Christian taboos have “blinded us to the image of Christ in gay and lesbian Christians” and that same-sex love can be a reflection of Divine Trinitarian giving and receiving (1994, p. 157).

McCord Adams preached at Trinity, developing a distinctive and compelling homiletic style that was deeply biblical, radically honest, and unrelenting in declaring God's fierce love. She reflected, "Preaching the Gospel to people whose gray-green skin tells you that they won't be there in six months creates a pressure to tell as much Truth as one can" (1994, p. 157). Her sermons display a lack of inhibition that was surely forged in those days at Trinity. Tell the truth; ask the questions; demand that God be present; assure that God loves us! McCord Adams wrote out precisely worded sermons, which she then delivered from memory without a manuscript, looking the congregation directly in the eye.

In 1987, McCord Adams became a deacon in the Episcopal Church, and thereby especially commissioned to minister to the poor and the sick. She sat by bedsides of those suffering from the plague of AIDS, keeping vigil with those facing death, bearing witness to unbearable destruction and to unaccountable creativity and love. She saw, up close, God present with people in the midst of horrors. It was clear to her that even though her friends and parishioners were enduring horrific suffering, they were beloved by God, who never left their sides. She then looked back on her own life differently. Instead of believing that the suffering she endured meant God had abandoned her, she realized she could not have survived such horrors if God had not been present with her. Through preaching and liturgy, prayer and Bible study, academic inquiry and a lifetime of deep friendships, McCord Adams became convinced that God is not just good, but good to each one of us, herself included. She was ordained a priest later that year.

McCord Adams's first major work was published in 1987, as well. She spent the early years of her career researching and carefully writing an unparalleled scholarly work on medieval theologian and philosopher William of Ockham, which was published in two volumes. This work displays the full force of her intellect, as she carefully teases out the implications of Ockham's statements and untangles the scholarly conversations in which he was engaged. It is a magnificent work of historical philosophy, granting sustained attention to understand precisely what Ockham was up to in his nonpolitical works, the influences upon which he drew, and the debates into which he spoke. McCord Adams's love for and reliance on medieval metaphysics never waned, and she continued to find them valuable resources for grappling with theological anthropology.

McCord Adams's most creative writing is her theological works. When her husband, beaming with delight, brought her the first copies of *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* that had arrived in the mail, McCord Adams said to me, "This one is from the gut."

McCord Adams had been wrestling with the problem of evil since childhood, had written shorter pieces on it, had taught courses on suffering and salvation, and had coedited a book on evil with her husband, Robert Adams. In *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, McCord Adams lays out her own constructive and creative proposal:

The logical problem of evil can be distilled into four statements that appear incompatible.

1. God is omniscient (all-knowing).
2. God is omnipotent (all-powerful).
3. God is omnibenevolent (all-good).
4. Evil exists.

If God wills the good, knows the good, and has the power to enact the good, it makes no sense that evil exists. Some find this quandary to be sufficient evidence to reject the existence of God altogether. Many provide explanations that fudge a bit on 1 or 2, nuancing either the knowledge God has in a world that is still unfolding, or the kind of power God has or chooses to use. While few theologians would claim God's goodness is limited, their views include particular angles on how goodness is maximized.

McCord Adams shifts the terms of the debate in ways that shatter these alternatives. From the outset, she focuses on what she calls "horrendous evils." These are "evils the participation in which (that is, the doing or suffering of which) constitutes prima facie reason to doubt whether the participant's life could (given their inclusion in it) be a great good to him/her on the whole" (1999, p. 26). In other words, evils that make it seem that it would be better for the people involved if they had never been born. McCord Adams tackles the hardest task, focusing on precisely those evils that call Divine goodness most into question. She rejects definitions of evil that focus on morality, injustice, or mass suffering in order to hone in on the least explicable events. It is precisely their inexplicability—their destruction of the meaning-making potential, capacities, and frameworks of those involved—that identify them as horrendous evils. "What makes horrendous evils so pernicious is their life-ruining potential, their

power *prima facie* to degrade the individual by devouring the possibility of positive personal meaning in one swift gulp” (1999, p. 28). Those who suffer horrendous evils would then include “the Bible’s Job, the father who nonnegligently runs over his beloved child, and those who suffer from schizophrenia or deep clinical depression” (1999, p. 28). McCord Adams’s focus on horrendous evils effectively raises the bar on theodicies. Instead of being the outlier examples that stretch explanations of more mundane moral failings or misfortunes, horrendous evils become the central and primary category. Extreme cases are taken as normative in order to rise to the challenge of theodicy in a world where horrendous evils are commonplace.

She raises the bar on theodicies in another way, as well. Her coinage of “horrendous evils” focuses on the individual, with an assertion that Divine goodness cannot be affirmed in relation to evil in a remote, abstract, or cosmic fashion. It is not enough that God understands and affirms the meaning of human life. Rather, McCord Adams insists that evil is only fully defeated when we humans can understand the meaning of our individual lives as positive—as a great good not only in some universal scheme but to each of us! McCord Adams aims not only to identify how God is good, but how God is “good-to” every human. Such a high standard is not usually required by the traditions of philosophical theodicy or the logical requirements of generic theism. It is, however, required by the biblical and confessional affirmations of the goodness of the God of Jesus Christ as McCord Adams understands them. She writes, “I desire to flatter Divine resourcefulness by interpreting good (as Augustine does only sometimes) to mean that Divine government can and will accomplish the utopian integration of cosmic excellence with the good of individual persons in such a way as to insure the defeat of evil or, at least evils of horrendous proportions within the context of each individual’s life” (1999, p. 43).

Finally, McCord Adams changes the structure of the question. Instead of asking why a good God would allow evil, she asks how God is going to defeat evil. She inquires, “What would it take for Divine power and agency to be able to guarantee created persons lives that are great goods to them on the whole, and to defeat their participation in horrors not just globally, but within the context of their individual lives?” (1999, p. 80) It is characteristic of McCord Adams’s work in all genres—philosophy, theology, teaching, preaching, pastoral care, and activism—that she does not protect or defend God. This stems from deep conviction that there is enough to God to withstand any

question, accusation, or lament, and, indeed, God counts such interactions as attempts at relationship.

Many theodicies fall into one of two categories: Free Will Defense (FWD) and Best of All Possible Worlds (BPW). Free Will Defenses argue that evil results from the misuse of human free will. Put simply, God makes a good world and we mess it up. The value of creatures with free will is so great that it is worth the risk, or even the actuality, of evil. Best of All Possible Worlds theories argue that evils are an integral aspect of the best world that God could possibly make.

Focusing on horrendous evils, McCord Adams finds Free Will Defenses preposterous. At best, these defenses insert one level of buffer between God and evil. While God does not directly cause evil, God surely creates a world in which humans are free to cause evil, and indeed are able to cause far more evil than we can predict or grasp. McCord Adams argues that having humans take the blame for evil in a world created by God misses the metaphysical size gap between God and humanity. Created human free will is too measly to take the fall when God set us up! McCord Adams decimates standard free will defenses with the immensely teachable “Stove Analogy.”

Suppose a parent introduces a three-year-old into a room which contains gas that is not harmful to breathe but will explode if ignited and also contains a stove with brightly colored knobs which if turned will light the burners and ignite the gas. Suppose further that the parent warns the child not to turn the knobs and then leaves the room. If the child turns the knobs and ignites the gas, blowing up the room, surely the child is at most marginally to blame, even though it knew enough to obey the parent, while the parent is both primarily responsible and highly culpable. (1999, p. 39)

Best of All Possible Worlds defenses fare no better. While low- to mid-level evils might be analogous to ugly shades of green in a painting, such analogies crumble at genocide, systematic rape as a tactic of war, and starvation. Furthermore, McCord Adams argues, even if a painting so heavy with ugliness could somehow be seen as good from God’s perspective, it certainly wouldn’t look that way to those surrounded by sick green.

While Christian theology demands a more robust account of God’s relationship to evil than generic theism does, it also provides

additional resources. Central is the value of relationship with God. Divine goodness is great enough that intimate relationship with God overwhelms, swamps, and defeats all horrors. Relationship with God, the ultimate meaningmaker, gives human lives meaning that is not only good, but good-to the individuals involved. This view includes two contested points: first, there is an afterlife, and second, salvation is universal. In this life, millions die in suffering. Horrendous evils are not defeated in their lifetimes. Postmortem, even horrendous evils can be integrated into a meaningful whole in intimacy with God. Having created a world in which human beings are vulnerable to horrendous evils, Divine goodness will follow through and make life good-to all.

Divine-human intimacy is ensured through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. God identifies with humanity and leads a human life of vulnerability to horrendous evils. This cancels the dishonor of the human condition and wipes out the stains of defilement. Because Jesus participated in horrendous evils, even horrors can become meaningful parts of an individual's relationship with Jesus. Shared suffering becomes a point of contact. Evil and suffering are not needed for salvation, but can be integrated into the larger story of a human life such that, "from the vantage point of heavenly beatitude, human victims of horrors will recognize those experiences as points of identification with the crucified God, and not wish them away from their life histories" (1999, p. 167).

Permit me a personal example to clarify. In the weeks after McCord Adams died, I found myself telling stories about her often, as part of my own grief. I told tales of positive and enjoyable times—of ordinations and demonstrations and celebrations. I also told stories of some of the most difficult times of my own life when Marilyn stood by my side, cared for me, and shared my struggles. These times of suffering were meaningless (or destructive of meaning!) on their own, but were taken up into, and became part of, a deeply meaningful friendship. Of course, horrendous evils cannot be defeated so easily, by being taken up into merely human friendship. But, McCord Adams argues, they can be defeated by being taken up into friendship with Jesus. Not only has Jesus stood by our sides, cared for us, and shared every struggle, Jesus has also endured his own. Jesus walks with a limp, just like Jacob, just like the rest of us.

The christological center of McCord Adams's thought is expanded upon in the sequel to *Horrendous Evils, Christ and Horrors*:

The Coherence of Christology. The conclusions of *Horrendous Evils* reappear in the opening pages of *Christ and Horrors*

Divinity is a good incommensurate with both created goods and created evils. Likewise, personal intimacy with God that is on the whole and in the end beatific is incommensurately good *for* created persons. By catching up our horror-participation into a relationship that is incommensurately good for us, Divine participation in horrors defeats their *prima facie* life-ruining powers. (2006, p. 40)

The terminology shift from “horrendous evils” to “horrors” does not mark a change of definition but rather a change of conversational setting. This work is not primarily situated within philosophical discourse about evil, but rather within a much broader philosophical and theological frame. *Christ and Horrors* is a compact christo-centric systematic theology.

God, both personal and triune, chooses to create out of love for material creation. God’s long-term project includes assimilation (“God wants matter to be as Godlike as possible while still being itself”) and union (God desires to unite with creation) (2006, p. 40). The incarnation, then, is not an emergency response to sin, but vital to God’s unitive aim in creation.

The aim of making matter as Godlike as possible results in humanity—personal animals who have significant agency. McCord Adams defies both traditional theologies and the Disney empire by identifying the conjunction of animality and personality as inherently difficult, indeed, as the root of “human non-optimality” (2006, p. 49). Our “psycho-spiritual powers” are tied to a developmental life cycle that includes immaturity, slowly moves toward higher functioning, and declines toward death. Our meaning-making capacities are not strong enough from the beginning to handle challenges including inadequate caretakers, pain, chemical imbalances, hostility from others, and disease (2006, p. 49). In McCord Adams’s analysis, the basic problem with humanity is not that we are sinful, but that we are metaphysical straddlers. God evolves material creation into humanity for God’s own aims, but the process makes us misfits in a dangerous world. “My diagnosis of human radical vulnerability to horrors traces our non-optimality to our being personal *animals*, *enmattered* spirits, *embodied* persons, in a material world of real and apparent scarcity.

My cosmological hypothesis about God's creative purposes sees the evolution of human being as a contribution towards satisfying God's assimilative aims by personifying matter" (2006, p. 142).

While such a view might be turned toward dualism, McCord Adams's focus on horrors prevents this. Horrors expose dualist views of the meaning-making mind as separable from the sense-perceiving body as "entirely bogus" (2006, p. 286). "Tying personality to an animal life cycle means that the task of organizing our subjective worlds in relation to the outside world is repeatedly thrust upon immature powers, which are unequal to the task" (2006, p. 149). Sin is a secondary, derivative problem that stems from the "metaphysical mismatches God has set up in creation" (2006, p. 79).

One correlate of McCord Adams's view of nonoptimality is that, while humans can and should bear responsibility within human communities for the ways in which we unjustly treat one another, ultimately the buck stops with God. The Divine creative project sets us up for horrors! However, following Anselm, McCord Adams says that God would not start something that God could not finish (2006, p. 142). The intimate relationship with God into which each human person is drawn defeats the horrors to which she or he has been subject. God's long-term project of loving material creation makes us vulnerable to horrors. Precisely because God loves material creation, this requires the defeat of horrors.

This defeat takes place in three stages:

Stage I: establishing a relation of organic unity between the person's horror-participation and his or her intimate, personal, and overall beatific relationship with God;

Stage II: healing and otherwise enabling the horror-participant's meaning-making capacities so that she or he can recognize and appropriate some of the positive significance laid down in Stage I;

Stage III: recreating our relation to the material world so that we are no longer radically vulnerable to horrors (2006, p. 66).

Stage I horror defeat happens in the incarnation, life, and passion of Jesus Christ, who becomes not only vulnerable to, but a participant in, horrors. Horrors cannot be a mark of separation from God if God

shares in them with us. They are objectively defeated by being integrated into relationship with divine goodness. Stage III horror defeat will be fully established in heaven; we see its promise in the resurrection of the crucified Christ. Stage II horror defeat is the difficult work of integration within our own understanding, subjectively appropriating the meaning-making power of relationship to God. This requires the aid of the Christ, the Inner Teacher. Left to our own devices, humanity cannot pull off harmonization between our animality and our personality. Yet, says McCord Adams, this was never the intent. Human beings were created to operate in collaboration with “Divine agency, which has not only the wisdom, power, and resourcefulness to harmonize matter and spirit, but also the pedagogical imagination to rear us up into conscious and willing participation” (2006, p. 161).

Much of Stage II horror defeat happens in the afterlife. But to the degree that it happens in this life, church can be a part of it. Consistently universalist in regard to salvation, McCord Adams states that “the Church universal” includes the whole human race. Human beings who have some sense that Jesus might have made a difference in the world, who talk with God enough at least to argue, are members of “the wrestling Church.” When wrestlers gather to help one another along, we have “the congregating Church.” “The missionary Church” emerges when those who wrestle and congregate tell others the good news (2006, p. 202). In all of this, the church’s primary tasks are “testimony and solidarity” (2006, p. 202).

The wrestling Church and the congregating Church are communities of healing, where acknowledged horror-participants come alongside other horror-participants to bear witness to the reality of their problem and help them learn how to make the fact of Divine solidarity (of Stage-I horror-defeat) a centerpiece in making new sense of their lives. Likewise, the missionary Church steps outside in solidarity, publicly to protest horror-perpetrating individuals and institutional structures, to demand and work for changes in personnel and institutions that will bring horrors to a stop. (2006, p. 202)

The work of the church, and the church itself, is always bodily. As personal animals, essentially embodied, “our knowledge and appreciation of the world, of one another, and of God are carnal” (2006,

p. 222). The rituals of the church are a vital way for Christians to come to know the love of God. The eucharist is particularly central. McCord Adams understands the bread and wine to truly become the body and blood of Christ (albeit by *impanation* rather than *transubstantiation*). The communion table is portrayed as a family dinner table, in which Christ performs the functions assigned to the church above: testimony and solidarity.

Christ fixes the appointment to meet us embodied person to embodied persons, appearing under forms of bread and wine. Because we are horror-participants, Christ sets a specific agenda: all conflicts out on the table, immediately! We come, first and foremost, to show forth the Lord's death: "This is My Body!" "This is My Blood!" "Do this in remembrance of Me!" Christ crucified is "in our face," Christ crucified is "in *God's* face," re-presenting, reminding God how in establishing material creation God "set us up," how in creating human being God has put us in the position of being radically vulnerable to horrors. (2006, p. 294.)

The eucharist invites—demands—that we take our complaints straight to the top: to God. In anger, confusion, exhaustion, confession, we engage with God about the worst of it all, even to the point of biting and tearing at the flesh of Jesus Christ. Instead of returning our anger, God appreciates our honesty and honors our engagement. Better to take our bitterness to God than to spew it at each other or turn it on ourselves! Jesus says, in McCord Adams's words, "For heaven's sake, don't hold back! I can take it all in, and still rise on the third day!" As McCord Adams explains,

Not always but in some cases, not right away but eventually, not all at once but from time to time and fleetingly, catching our breaths between bouts of thrashing and sobbing, the Easter recognition begins to dawn. This family will not break. This quarrel is between lovers. Love bade us welcome. (2006, p. 295)

By the time *Christ and Horrors* was published in 2006, McCord Adams had been installed as Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford.

She was the first woman, and the first American, in that position. During a time of great debate regarding same-sex love, McCord Adams took every opportunity her role provided to publicly advocate on behalf of LGBTQ rights.

It was during her time at Oxford that McCord Adams published a collection of her sermons, titled *Wrestling for Blessing* (2005). Here she specifically commends Jacob as a model for faith, and wrestling with God as a pattern to emulate (2005, p. 22). One of the three sections of the book addresses themes related specifically to same-sex love. With characteristic style, McCord Adams points out that traditionally masculine language for the Holy Trinity portrays a same-gender *ménage à trois* (2005, p. 39) and concludes a sermon for Pride Day declaring, “Gay Pride Sunday is a day of gospel reversals: a day for old Mother Church to come out of the closet and confess her failures, to receive absolution from her priestly children, to parade with them behind Christ our Drum Major, onward to Zion; that beautiful City of God!” (2005, p. 140)

These sermons provide wonderfully accessible versions of McCord Adams’s theology. The theological content and vision are the same as in her academic books, but the tone and genre differ. For example, in a sermon entitled, “Risen Dead, Borrowed Life!,” based on the resurrection narrative of Luke 24:1–10, McCord Adams affirms that God is not absent in our worst moments, but present and actively engaged in helping us to endure them. She states clearly what every person in the congregation knows, but is rarely spoken from the pulpit: that each one of us has had terrifying experiences. She writes,

Think back to the most terrifying experience of your life . . . when with or without the miracles of modern medicine your body literally didn’t have strength to make a fist, when blood clotted the wrong way, infection raged out of control, when the damning diagnosis came—cancer, MS, multiple bypass, HIV . . . the mind-blowing panic of the swerving truck, the rage at your partner’s divorce announcement, the paralyzing fear at walking out of locked closets, or back into places haunted by failure and abuse, the leaden depression that descends, flattens when you lose and can’t find another job or relationship. Re-member, re-enter those times when you were really convinced it was all over, when you were

absolutely certain there was no power in you—body, mind, or spirit—strong enough to pull you together, enable you to stand.

But here you are, risen from the bed! You've got yourself to church on Easter Sunday, more or less clothed and in your right mind! There are at least two interpretations of this fact. Our head reasons, the feeling must have been misleading; we were a lot stronger than we thought! Sometimes, maybe. Easter turns this calculation upside down, urges us to face how often feelings told the truth. Left to itself, nature would *not* have recovered health, kept a grip on sanity, renewed us for human connection and productive lives. To whatever extent we are here, hale and sound, it is the work of some "higher" miraculous power. (2005, pp. 70–71)

This is classic McCord Adams theology. It tells the truth of human experience—this mess is hard. But taking the difficulty seriously does not lead to the conclusion that God has abandoned us. Instead, it leads to the conclusion that God has been helping us through all along! Given that God has already walked with us through the valley of the shadow of death, we look forward with confidence. Death is a familiar and defeated foe, and God is a friend upon whom we can rely to see us through.

During her time at Oxford, McCord Adams also served as canon of Christ Church Cathedral. In 2008, she published a collection of brief prayers, most of which were written for liturgical use at Christ Church, in a volume titled, *Opening to God: Childlike Prayers for Adults*. This book is a treasure for any worship leader, layperson, or seeker. The prayers are direct and truthful, topically arranged and indexed in correlation with biblical passages. As McCord Adams intuited that "doing philosophical theology itself is a form of prayer," it ought not be surprising that her intellectually sophisticated work can be conveyed in prayer (1994, p. 153). The theology expressed in each of these prayers reflects the deep, coherent, and profound faith that resulted from McCord Adams's own wrestling with God.

It is an immense loss to the theological, philosophical, and ecclesial communities that McCord Adams died on March 22, 2017. When she received a diagnosis of aggressive cancer, McCord Adams said

she wanted more time with her husband and friends, and that she had more theology she wanted to write. And yet, having wrestled with God for so long, she was confident that Jesus was with her and that death was not the end. In the final weeks of her life, friends from near and far gathered at the Adams's home, and McCord Adams took great comfort in the prayers she knew to the marrow of her bones, the words of the Daily Office.

