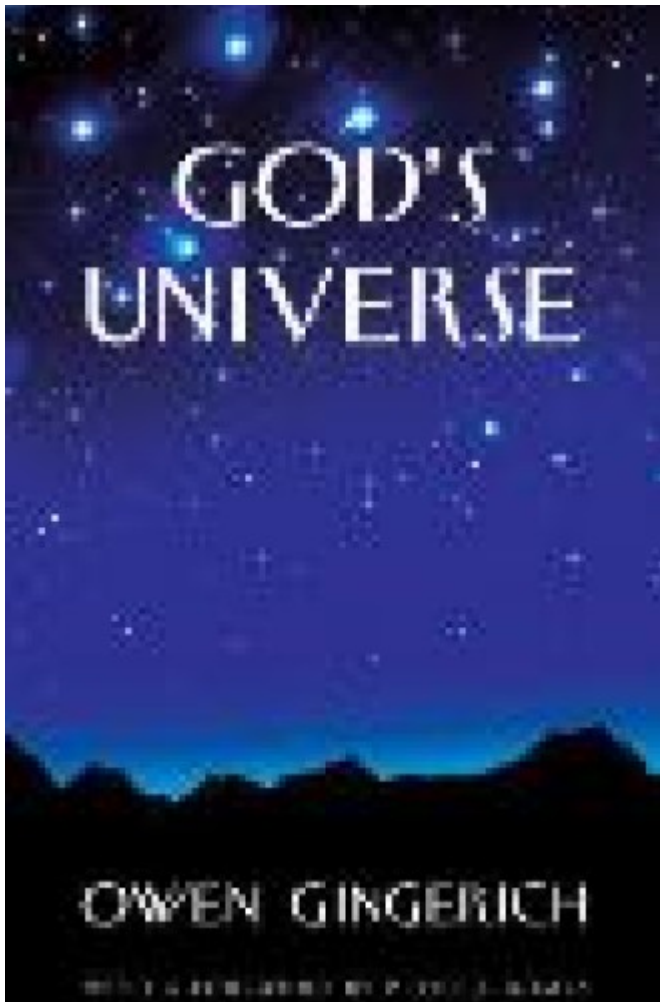


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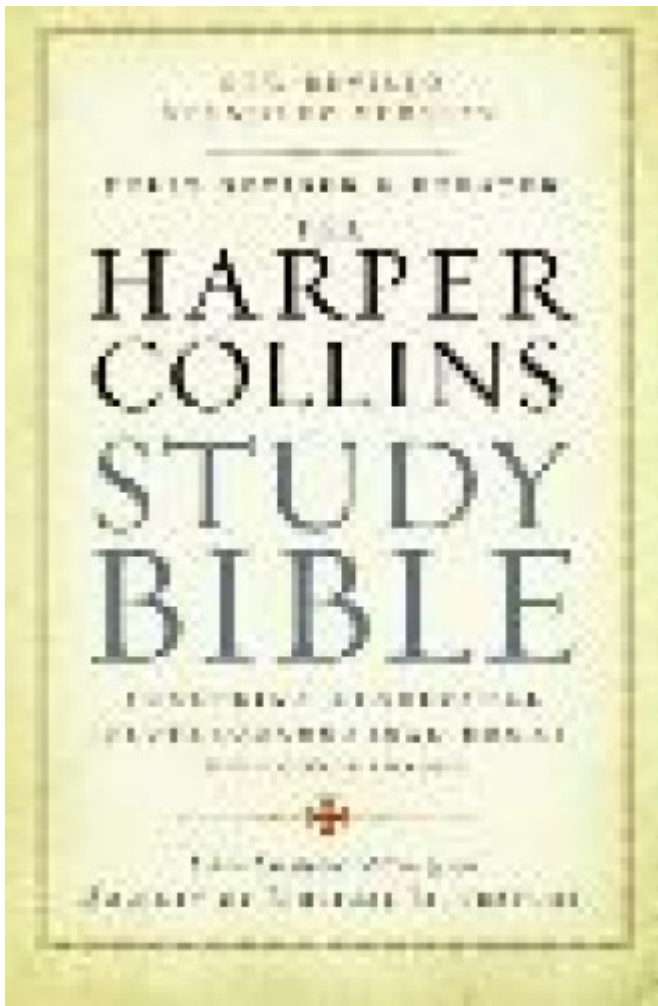
Books in the [December 12, 2006](#) issue

In Review



God's Universe

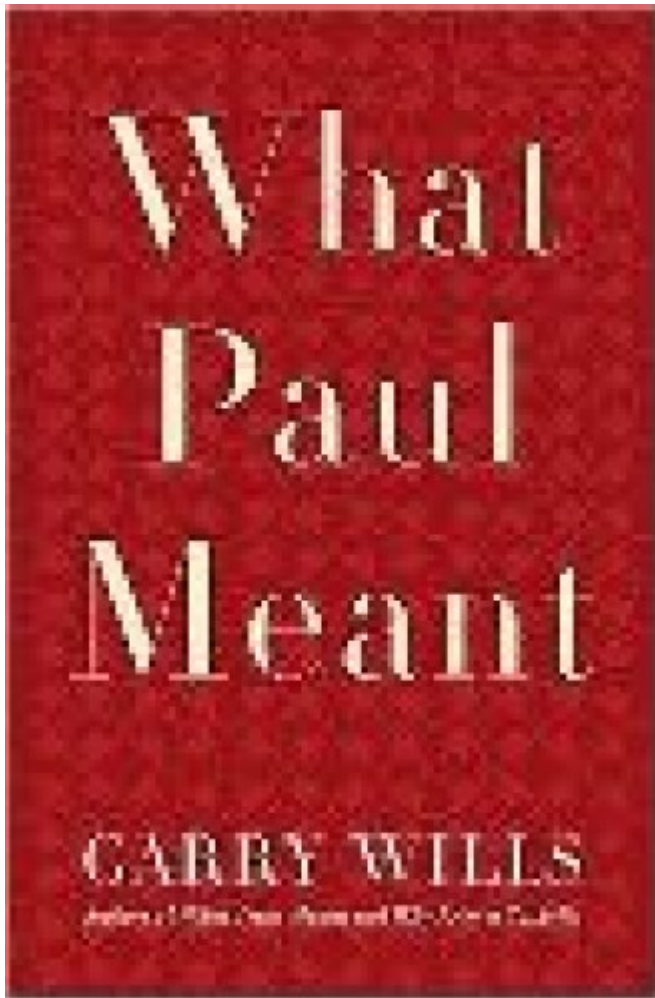
Owen Gingerich
Belknap



The HarperCollins Study Bible: Fully Revised and Updated

Harold W. Attridge, ed.

HarperSanFrancisco



What Paul Meant

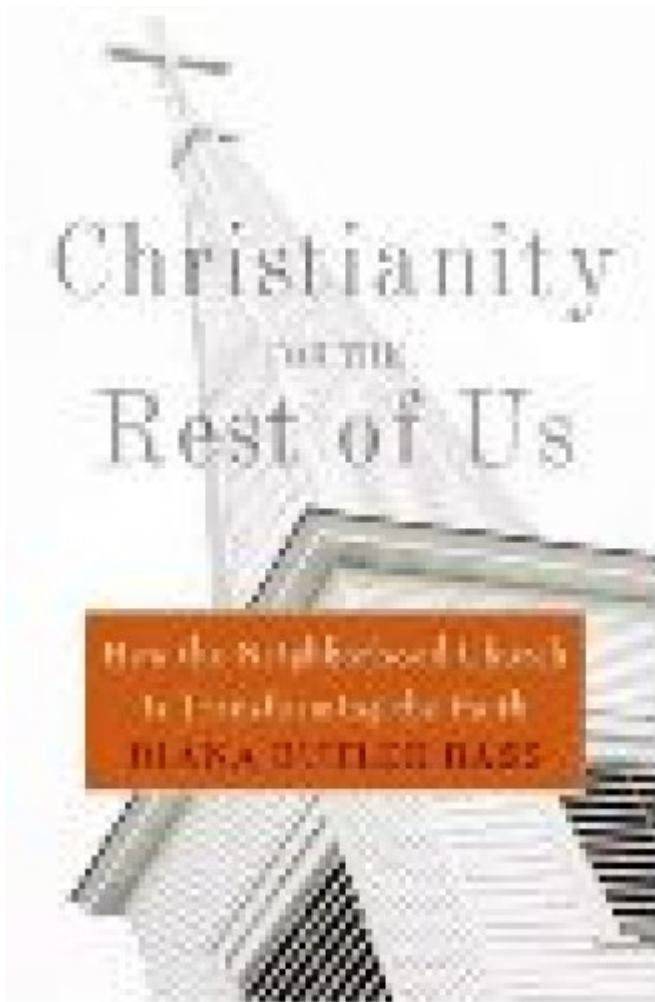
Garry Wills

Viking



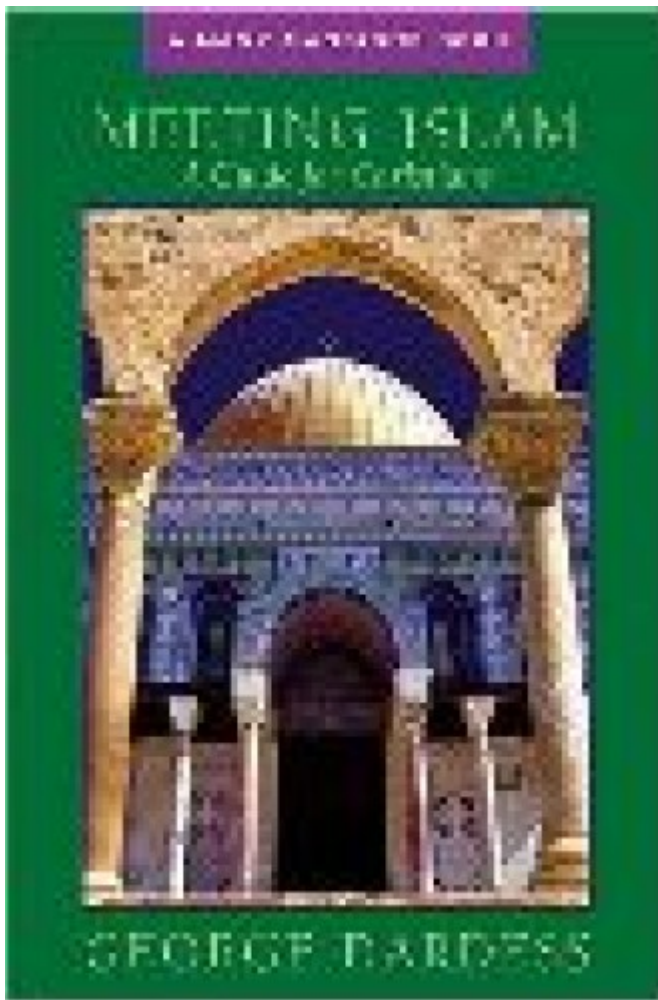
Undergoing God: Dispatches from the Scene of a Break-in

James Alison
Continuum



Christianity for the Rest of Us: How the Neighborhood Church Is Transforming the Faith

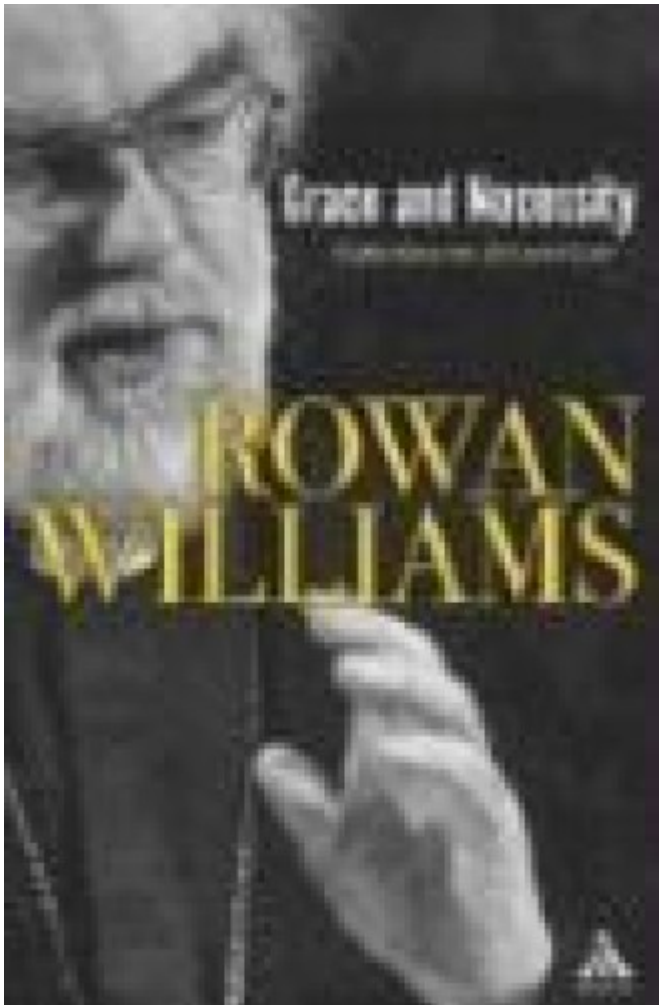
Diana Butler Bass
HarperSanFrancisco



Meeting Islam: A Guide for Christians

George Dardess

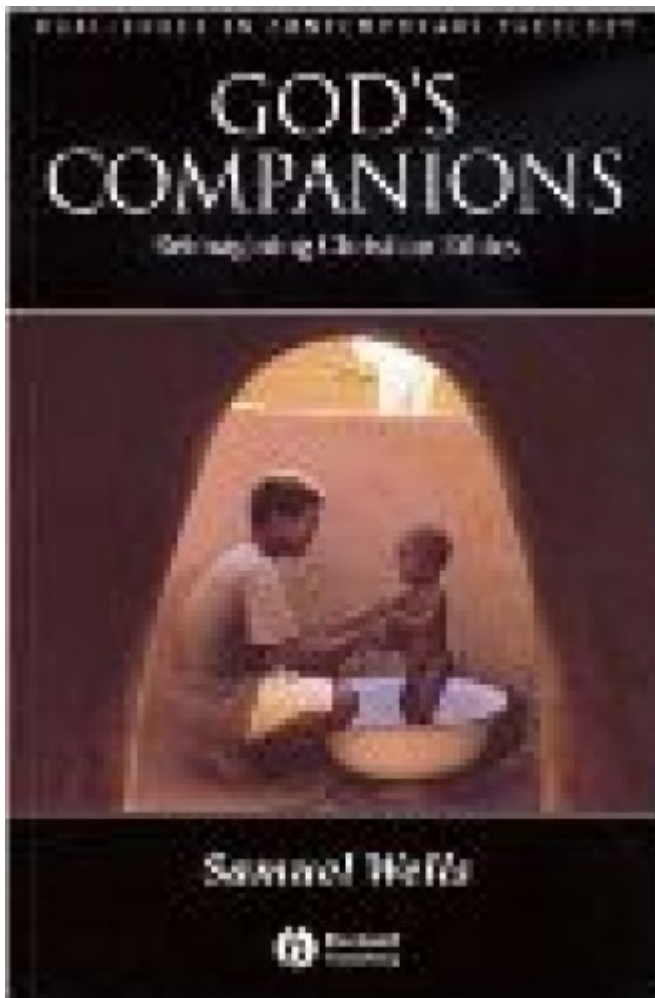
Paraclete



Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love

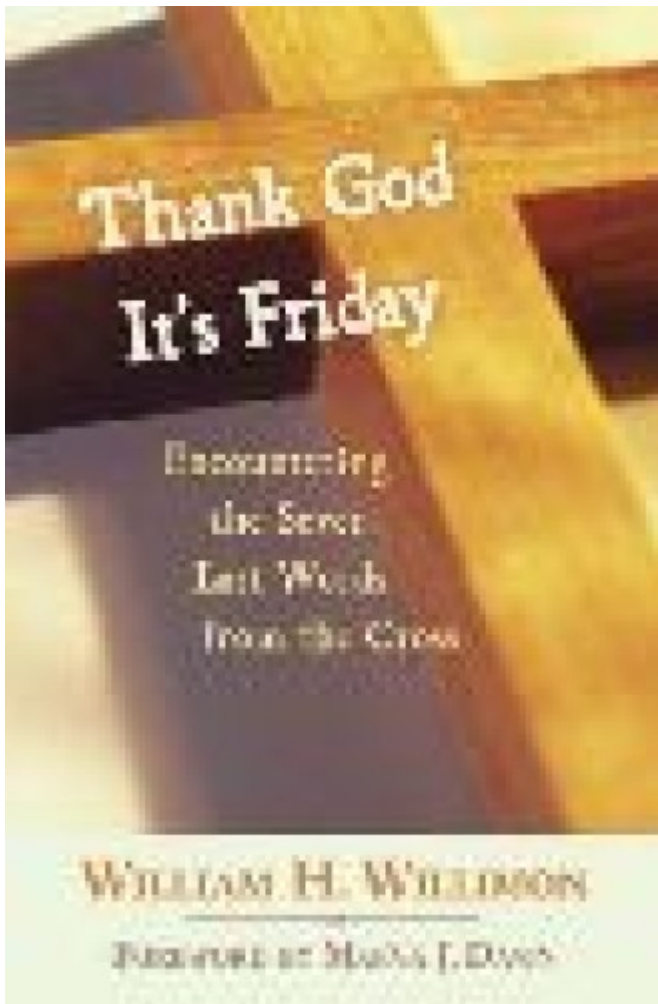
Rowan Williams

Continuum



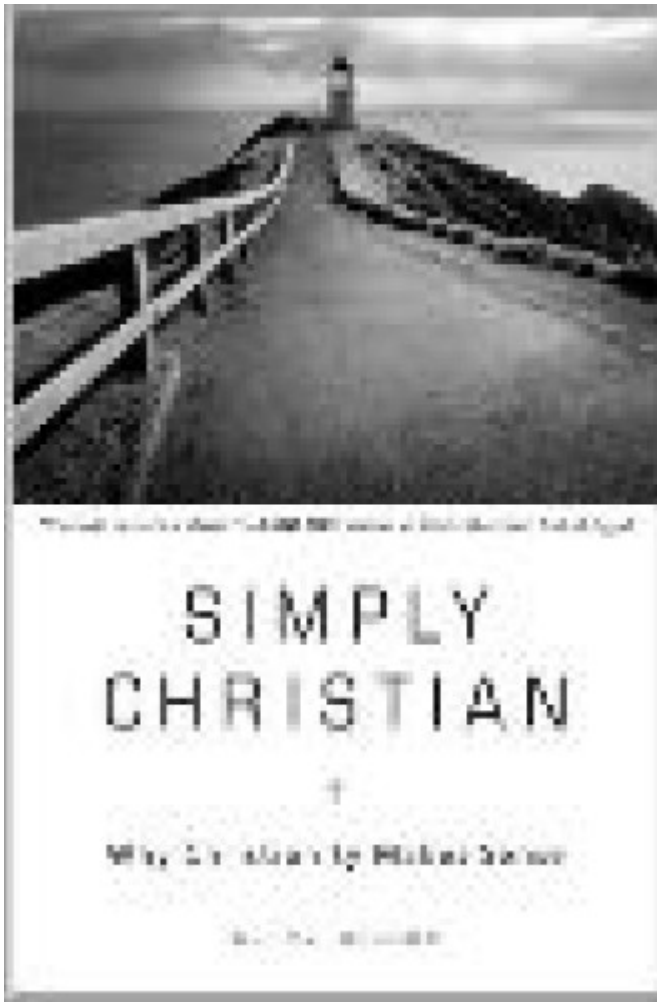
God's Companions: Reimagining Christian Ethics

Samuel Wells
Blackwell



Thank God It's Friday: Encountering the Seven Last Words from the Cross

William H. Willimon
Abingdon



Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense

N. T. Wright

HarperSanFrancisco

This lucid little book began as the William Belden Noble Lectures, which deal with Christian faith and contemporary issues. Gerson, a retired astronomer and historian of science, is also a Christian who taught for many years at Harvard. He dares to venture far beyond his own specialty, taking on the contentious debate about creationism, intelligent design and evolution. He concludes that a scientist might plausibly believe in intelligent design—in a small “i” and small “d” sense—but not in Intelligent Design as a school of thought that is touted as an alternative to evolution.

This new edition of the *HarperCollins Study Bible*, again published with the Society of Biblical Literature, contains new introductory articles and revised essays that deal

diplomatically with issues arising from critical biblical studies. For instance, one article notes that archaeologists and other scholars now debate the historical veracity of events described in early Israel and Jerusalem.

Wills, a classicist and a Catholic, takes on the apostle Paul, a writer who had an ambivalent relation to the world of classical Greek and Rome. Wills reminds us that all of Paul's letters were written, sent and read before Christians started putting together the stories in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Wills makes orthodoxy about the risen Jesus sound more exciting than the claim that Jesus' pure message was corrupted by Paul. An afterword on misreading Paul is designed to start arguments or conversations—and will do so.

Alison continues his extraordinary contribution to Christian theologies of atonement, worship and biblical exegesis with a book that is at once learned and engaging, theoretically profound and homiletically fecund.

Bass refutes a thesis that has been wielded like a club for three decades—namely, that liberal churches are dying because they are liberal. Her eye-opening first chapter discusses the ways that mainline churches have struggled to adapt to changing neighborhoods. The remaining chapters show how individual congregations *have* adapted and served their neighborhoods in ways that are more “liberal” precisely because they are more faithful.

Dardess, a Roman Catholic deacon, responded to what he took to be the unintelligent coverage of Islam in the Western media in the 1990s by learning Arabic and how to recite the Qur'an. The result is a spirited engagement with Islam. He is unafraid to highlight similarities (he compares Muhammad to Mary as one who bears the Word of God) or to make pointed critiques (for Christians, Islam can be a warning against sloppy trinitarianism).

Archbishop of Canterbury Williams continues and adds to the renaissance in Christian reflection on theological aesthetics with rigorous essays on Flannery O'Connor, the French theologian Jacques Maritain and the English artist David Jones. For Williams, art is like God's making of the world in creation: it reflects and embodies the artist without collapsing the maker into what is made.

Wells moves seamlessly from exposition of scripture to stories of ordinary lives. That seamlessness is essentially his point: there is no ultimate divide between the church and the fields of scripture, theology and ethics. Wells avoids the bombast of others

who rail against these divisions of labor. The clarity of his writing is enhanced by his organization around his central thesis: "God gives his people everything they need to worship him, to be his friends, and to eat with him."

Willimon continues his prodigious output, here offering some of his best work. More a collection of essays than of sermons, the book is full of material for both those called to preach and those called to listen during Holy Week. The prayers that accompany each of the seven "words" include Jacob-like wrestling with God: "Your lessons are hard as nails."

C. S. Lewis's classic *Mere Christianity* is fondly echoed, slightly updated and even improved upon by means of Bishop Wright's biblical scholarship. Wright is among the blessed few who can both master several fields of arcane scholarship and communicate well with those who are virtual outsiders to Christian faith and practice.