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GRADUATE THEOLOGICAL UNION

Distinguished Faculty Lecture



Barbara Green

Professor of Biblical Studies
Dominican School of Philosophy
and Theology
Wednesday, November 10, 2004
Pacific School of Religion
Chapel of the Great Commission
Berkeley, California

**2004 DISTINGUISHED FACULTY
LECTURE**

November 10, 2004

7:00 p.m.

Chapel of the Great Commission

Pacific School of Religion

INTRODUCTION

Arthur G. Holder

Dean and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Professor of Christian Spirituality

Graduate Theological Union

LECTURE

*Fruitful Flailings: Reading the Anger of the
Prophet Jonah*

Barbara Green

Professor of Biblical Studies

Dominican School of Philosophy & Theology

RESPONSE

Gina Hens-Piazza

Associate Professor of Biblical Studies

Jesuit School of Philosophy and Theology

&

Sandra Schneiders

Professor of New Testament Studies and Christian

Spirituality

Jesuit School of Philosophy and Theology

*Please join us after the lecture for a reception in
the Dinner Board Room at the GTU Library.
Refreshments will be served.*

Fruitful Flailings: Reading the Anger of the Prophet Jonah

Barbara Green, O.P.

Distinguished Faculty Lecture

Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, CA

November 10, 2004

Our opportunity and challenge tonight is to talk about biblical *studies* and biblical *spirituality* and their relationship. They share “biblical,” of course. And though *spirituality* claims to study and *studies* surely aspires, currently, to be spiritual, there are colleagues and students in this room who can testify that the *studies/spirituality* overlap is not so easy. Biblical studies and biblical spirituality also intersect at interpretation *theory* and in reading *practice*. Both studies and spirituality want to theorize about how interpretation works, and each is happy to engage biblical texts. But biblical *studies* might say its most urgent challenge is to braid from the nearly infinite field of data the best blend of historical-social, literary, and readerly-pragmatic information to assist reading; and biblical *spirituality* owns that need but aims also to do readings that are transformative toward what counts most: ever-deeper relatedness with God and creatures, if I may name it in shorthand tonight for us. Biblical *studies* and *spirituality*: uneasy bedfellows, at least occasionally, perhaps often. But not inevitably.

The format for tonight is as follows: I will pose an apt *question*, suggest some *thesis points* while we do our verbals and visuals. As I proceed, I will expose bits of supporting *scholarly process*. My two colleagues have been charged to start their response: “Yes, Barbara, but. . .” They will cross-hatch, refine and contest my question, theses, and reading in some way helpful for all of us. They have read my paper but I do not know their plans. And you will participate as well, with cavils, proddings, even agreement if you like. But after not too long a time Arthur Holder will invite us to adjourn across the way for light refreshment and informal conversation! The point is to learn something useful and enjoy ourselves while doing so. You have its most relevant portion of the narrative on a handout; there as well is the Cliffs Notes for this talk: the *entry questions*, *five theses*, and *outline* so you can anticipate refreshments without undue disappointment. If God wills it, we will have a bit of Jonah art, thanks to GTU doctoral candidate Carrie Rehak who found, produced, and will project it.

The specific topic for the evening is Jonah’s anger: how it is handled *within the text* as characters

chat, in the *ancient world* where the story *was produced*, and by us as we *participate in the scene*. Let me quickly review what you perhaps recall: A prophet is commissioned to preach repentance to wicked Ninevites; but he flees, boarding a ship which, on his account, is whipped by a fierce storm; the crew, learning from him that he is avoiding God, reluctantly jettisons him (ch. 1). [slide] But God has appointed a large fish to rescue him, and from within its innards Jonah cries to God (ch. 2). [slide] Delivered, Jonah goes to Nineveh and preaches a single sentence which produces conversion from all who hear; and God, responsive, calls off what had been threatened (ch. 3) [slide]. The last chapter (4) is taken up by discussion between prophet and deity about what has transpired. [slide]

Tonight's sharpened question: *Why* is Jonah angry, *how* does God deal with it, and *how*—of the very many options available *will I set it up* for us—and *will you receive and make use* of it? How will biblical studies and spirituality collaborate: theory and practice? apt research, a reading that provides insight, promotes change?

My reading sketch will probe "*Jonah's*" *fear of failure* and of criticism, which themselves rise from as well as generate anger and resentment, jealousy and pettiness. His feelings culminate at the end of the story but did not begin there; the outcome bothers him dreadfully, but not in isolation from his other reactions. This nexus of "Jonah issues" brings us into contact with the realm of *violence*, in the sense of disrespectful, coercive construction of another. This sense rests on the insight and writings of Gandhi, who sees violence most fundamentally as the refusal to will good for another. And I will also present in a particular way the *character God*, whom I construe basically as a *respectful mentor, a loving friend who wills the good*, most deeply, for Jonah and the various others in the story. Jonah needs to learn from God how to love and be loved creatively, as God does. These particular interpretation choices are mine, granted in dialogue with a vast Jonah scholarship; you, also minutely attentive to the narrative, might see things differently. The story ends, apparently, as God poses a question and Jonah refuses to answer; this odd genre detail—crucial conversation truncated at the climax—makes particularly visible that *we must enter and participate*; this is about us!

Entry point one: *What did God say that was so fresh and galvanizing?* In asking the book's final

question, God makes available to Jonah and to us something of God's inner workings. We become privileged to be admitted to that intimacy, which happens only once in the story. God's self-disclosure, or its narrative representation here, is stunning, silencing—not in the sense of wiping Jonah out ignominiously and triumphantly—but in providing perspective that is existentially fresh. God begins with an observation which Jonah can accept, since it correlates with the prophet's experience: "You are concerned about the plant, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came up in a night and perished in a night. . . ." Jonah has felt concern for a plant which owed him nothing; i.e., he had done nothing for it that it might have a claim on his feelings or will, that he would "spare" it. In fact, *we* know that God is the one who appointed the plant; God's labor, such as it was, is pertinent. The plant works for God, not for Jonah; it owes the creator, not another creature. God's point, I suggest, is that there is no obligation on either side between Jonah and the plant: *Owing is not the basis for what is happening.*

But this is an analogy: Think about me, God says. What concern, what "sparing" should I feel—and do I feel—when in fact there is some effort expended on both sides? Nineveh is a big place, God says; and there are a lot of people who struggle to tell their right hand from their left, animals as well: east paw, west paw, north paw, south paw. God here stresses the moral and spiritual ignorance, or lack of direction, of the human and animal citizenry, though we and Jonah know they just did quite well (ch. 3). God's point, I suggest, is that God has invested in Ninevites and they in God, at least latterly. The analogy turns both on quantity (one small and brief plant compared to a large and populous city) and on quality (nothing owed between Jonah and the plant compared with what God and the Ninevites have built into their bond to date). God seems to say: There is something here, at least recently. I sent a prophet to assist them and they responded, even with no specific promise made by God. God seems to ask: If you can recognize how *you* felt, can you understand how *I* might and actually do feel?

The Hebrew verb in question (hus) is not the usual word for "to have mercy, feel compassion." Other occurrences of this verb—"to spare a thought for"—help us see something usefully nuanced. Implied is an unevenness of position, where a superior might or might not "spare" an inferior; there is not adequate grounds for either to think primarily in terms of anything deserved or owed. So "spare," with a non-

pejorative sense of condescension, is a better English word than “have pity,” which operates differently. God does not critique Jonah for his feeling but moves to say that it pertains all the more when more is involved, quantitatively and qualitatively. Nor does God deflate Jonah by saying that it is thanks to God that the plant was known to the prophet at all; that insight is for us. So, to sum up, *God says to Jonah, think about how you feel on the basis of tiny relationship and I, here, on the basis of somewhat more.*

Inferred by me, now, is a crucial third-level point: *God’s hint to Jonah that with all the deity and prophet have expended with each other, the “sparing” is all the more germane.* Jonah has survived—been spared—from a great deal: a disobedient journey, a storm, a fish, a risky ministry, a big disappointment of some kind, the sun and wind, a worm, anger. God says to Jonah: Note how it works: for you and a bit of shrubbery, for these near-strangers and me, and now for you and me! Thesis one: *everything turns on relationship but not on entitlement and deservingness.* [slide]

Entry point two: *Why is Jonah angry?* This is not an easy question, but let’s inquire carefully. Granting for the moment that Jonah is already in distress (4:1), he leaves Nineveh after a verbal exchange with God (4:2-4). He goes east of the city, builds a shelter, and sits under it while awaiting something. God appoints a plant to grow up over Jonah to save him from something bad; and Jonah is very happy with the plant. But God next appoints a worm which attacks the plant and devastates it, and then a fierce east wind. With the rising of the hot sun, the unshaded and wind-whipped prophet has some sort of reaction, “swooned” or “was faint.” First the narrator tells us that Jonah wished for death, and then we hear him say it directly: “Better to die than to live.” He may be speaking to himself. But God overhears him and asks: “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?” (4:9). God diagnoses the reaction as rising specifically from the plant’s destruction, not simply a result of hot wind and sun. And God asks if Jonah’s anger over the plant is a good thing, to which Jonah retorts that it is—enough to die for, sufficient for death. It seems a strong reaction. Let’s deal with both question and answer.

The question: We need to recall that we know more clearly than does Jonah the source of the plant. And we have just seen that the topic God broaches is entitlement and expectations of those in relationship. Though it is important to see how the story roots the anger—in the destruction of the plant—the anger itself

is also crucial. That is, there are two related but distinct things: the anger itself and its ostensible cause. First, is the plant's loss a sufficient context for Jonah's feeling? We can say no, since it was a gratuity—the point God makes as the conversation moves ahead a lap. Does Jonah understand that the plant was appointed by God? I think not. Plants come and go in the experience of all of us; why would Jonah assume a special creation? Why would we, unless we had been told so by the narrator? So we have information that Jonah lacks and must allow him his “shorter” angle of vision while tracking our longer one.

If we allow our story to participate here in the ancient Near Eastern topos of the search for the plant that brings life, the question of the suitability of Jonah's anger takes an unexpected path. You may know the story of Gilgamesh, the oldest extant narrative in the West, perhaps in all culture. In it the hero, Gilgamesh, who is a blend of divine and human, brushes against mortality in several ways, most notably when his friend Enkidu dies. In his rage against death, Gilgamesh roams the world, eventually to seek the flood hero Utanapishtim. Gilgamesh is assisted to find and also forces his way into the presence of the flood hero to hear his story: how when the gods decreed a flood to eliminate noisy humans, one deity spilled the beans, so that a human couple survived the waters in their boat. The gods conceded that the pair should become immortal as a result. But hearing even this great story does not help Gilgamesh with his mortality issue, and so he starts dejectedly homeward. The flood couple, pitying him, suggest that if he can simply stay awake for seven days, he may avoid death; thereupon, Gilgamesh immediately falls into a deep slumber--though refuses to admit it when he awakens seven days later.

Mrs. Flood Hero next advises her husband that the visitor has come a long way and endured a great deal to go home with nothing; so Utanapishtim tells him of a rejuvenating plant that he might acquire on his way home. Gilgamesh seems to know how to proceed, tying stones to his feet and diving into the sweet-water Apsu in search of the prickly plant. He finds it, takes it, surfaces and talks about it excitedly, naming it, planning for its use. But shortly thereafter he sets it down to enjoy a refreshing dip into another pool of water; a snake comes by, smells the plant and carries it off, shedding its own skin as it goes, thus testifying to the extraordinary qualities of what Gilgamesh has once again not managed to secure. The story breaks off as Gilgamesh returns to his city to serve his people, write up his experience, hone his insight, become wiser.

Jonah is not Noah, and our story at the surface resembles neither a flood nor a tree of life tale. But in the narrative stew that is ancient Near Eastern storytelling, motifs pass readily from pot to pot. This shared motif suddenly opens between two otherwise different narratives an unanticipated resemblance: Each hero is given unexpected access to a plant with fertile qualities, but just as he is rejoicing in it—perhaps too proprietorially—he loses it to a reptile. The heroes react with frustration but seem more reconciled to death than previously. There is no hint in the Jonah story itself that the plant is more than a common shrub, except that it sprang up quickly and without human labor. But as we read Jonah over against the Gilgamesh quest, then losing the plant can seem to cap his quest as well. Each hero's decisive if enigmatic learning comes from failure to hold on to the specially vital plant. To find and then inexplicably lose this object is cautionary. The fuller Gilgamesh story suggests that whatever that hero's life-related quest is, it will not be quite accomplished: not the restoration of Enkidu, not a reward from the gods like Utanapishtim's. But if the quest is actually to produce wisdom, Gilgamesh does better, learning limits from his failure to grasp what is not his to secure. Jonah's elliptical story gains depth here. Is Jonah's anger justified? Suddenly he looks less petulant, if what he has lost has much more significance than we may have supposed. Thesis two: *This plant is a serious thing to have briefly and then lose. To fail to hold the plant is to face death's inevitability. Anger is justified.* [slide]

Entry point three: But if understandable, even justifiable, *is Jonah's anger productive? Can he do well with it?* Anger has its positive place as an energy. Anger can be an authentic response which we do best to recognize, acknowledge, channel and transform. But anger can also be destructive, out of control, misbegotten and wasted. Which is Jonah's to be? "Getting perspective" is a phrase I picked up from Sister Wendy Beckett, whom you may know. She says that when we view great art, as we are doing as we work this biblical scene, the deep wisdom and skill of the art can offer us vistas—perspective—that we would not otherwise have glimpsed; with such experience, we become more, grow, change. This is the moment for Jonah and his friends who are here this evening to negotiate such a choice.

So let's consider Jonah's response to God's question—right to be angry? Jonah claims yes, in spades. But given what has happened, Jonah has to say he is justified; to reply in the negative—"I guess

not, LORD”—would reroute the story significantly. I suspect the dynamic here is familiar to all of us from having been in similar situations. Jonah’s anger is such that he is loath to concede a point or take a way out that he is offered, even if it is aimed to be friendly and helpful. Recall that the issue of concern is not primarily about being owed or entitled but about mutual investment in relationship. And we have seen that Jonah’s anger is not petty and trivial but has greater depth. Here is the moment for “Jonah” to take a fresh look at God, which will involve “his” asking how “he” is at the center of the universe. Thesis # 3: *The moment calls on Jonah to re-calibrate if he can, to get a fresh perspective if he is able to do so. What is to die for and what to live for? What causes anger and what brings joy?* It is sometimes easier to stay mad, and it is surely easier to refuse to diagnose our anger, to factor its roots. But to attempt it is crucial, especially when we have help as Jonah does at this moment.

Entry point four: *What does Jonah want, most fundamentally?* Recall that, though the narrator has told us in 3:10 that God has had a change of heart about the Ninevites after their repentance, we do not hear that communicated to Jonah. So it is most accurate to say that so far as Jonah is concerned, God has not destroyed the city yet. It may happen, since some days remain within the window of forty Jonah had announced. That the Ninevites responded at once does not mean they can be expected to stay the course; early repentance does not preclude later lapses. So Jonah may be read as waiting out the period God specified to see what happens within it. If we assume that Jonah does not know that God has relented from the original threat against the city, then what angers Jonah has to be what he saw: the Ninevite repentance described at comparative length in 3:5-9. Jonah is angry at the effectiveness of his own words in the lives of his opponents. *Does Jonah will the city to be destroyed for its evil or saved for its conversion?* Many writers think he wants it destroyed, and for good reasons. Jonah may have something against the Ninevites themselves, though careful scholarship exposes that we cannot automatically presume to know what it would have been; it will depend on the supposed date of setting and production of the book. And commentators often make Jonah participate in some sort of equation where if Gentiles were to benefit, Jews cannot fail to lose in some way—a conviction all too clearly shared by many, as we know from history and experience. Finally, we can review the many queries about Jonah’s sense of his own professional position as a prophet:

how he will seem and be if one thing happens to the city or if another does, after he has spoken his prophecy.

The best contemporary historical scholarship posits that this small prophetic book was produced by and for the leadership of post-exilic Judah, whose parents had lived through the devastation of the sixth-century exile to Babylon. Such people will not soon have put behind them the experience of Jerusalem's defeat and destruction, like sons and daughters of our contemporaries whose forebears have experienced something deeply shocking. These late-sixth or fifth-century Judeans will have known that ancient Nineveh was reprieved by God in Jonah's day but also that it now stands in ruins. Historians thus reconstruct that Jerusalem's leaders, writing and reading this book, will have reflected existentially on prophetic pronouncements about overturnings—like Jonah's prophecy to Nineveh—and on repentance, on reprieve—and end-to-reprieve. He bemoans God's propensities: what God abounds in—graciousness, mercy, steadfast love; what God is short on—anger; where it all leads—readiness to relent from punishing (4:2). This is not secret information about God. That Jonah claims he already knew it does not distinguish him so very much. Surprising is the tone. Ordinarily these are characteristics to give thanks for, but here they have made Jonah angry. But though well known as divine qualities, these features are not entitlements. God is prone to these behaviors but known for some others as well.

But since these are live options for God, there may be danger of God's selecting them. *Again, what does Jonah deeply want for the city of Nineveh?* One of the most wonderful Jonah-commentators is St. Jerome, distinguished for his tendency to think all the story's characters are basically good and do well. With Jerome's help, the Jonah I am reading is *not able to will* destruction for the Ninevites. He may wish he could. But to be angry at something is not the same as wishing it destroyed. All of Jonah's reasons for feeling thwarted remain valid: Perhaps the Ninevites have been or will be cruel to Israel; relations between Jews and Gentiles in regard to God's favor will have many bad days for Jewish people; and which of us likes to feel that others disrespect us or that we may not look quite as we would desire in their eyes? But not even all those explanations require Jonah to want the city destroyed. But to see the shortcomings (and longcomings!) of this city and still not be able to wish it vaporized: that is angering!

And insofar as the wicked, warned, repenting and reprieved Ninevites resemble the Jerusalem community who tells this story, Jonah has to be conflicted. Does God forgive transgressions and cancel threatened punishment? For our enemies? For us? If Nineveh is once reprieved but in time destroyed, what lies in store for Jerusalem, with *its* new lease on life? Such questions keep the producers and readers of the book of Jonah walking the floor at night. Thesis #4: *The receivers of the Jonah tradition—represented by the character Jonah—have the opportunity to see how closely they resemble their opponents and to ponder their options, decide on what in fact, they want: to be destroyed, to be spared, to destroy, to spare.* [slide]

Entry point five: *But at this urgent moment of decision, does Jonah have a fulcrum-relationship with God to move him well?* Commentators tend to doubt it: Fled west when ordered east; chose sea journey instead of land travel; made terse, resentful announcement; quibbled querulously at God's lovely qualities; evinced additional anger when thwarted. For many, Jonah is a disgrace! But I don't see it that way. Again, let's tally what we know: Jonah's outburst is a prayer—not a picket sign, nor a petition, not even a journal entry. Jonah prays to God about what he has just experienced and his reaction to it—granted, one of the “I told you so” genre, again perhaps familiar to us from relationships with people we care about, God included. His prayerful outburst involves God, the Ninevites, Jonah's own sense of himself—in fact, the interrelationship among all of those. When Jonah concludes his prayer by asking to die (4:3), we take it seriously. Out of proportion it may seem. But we have just seen him repeat the same request twice more (4:8, 9) and we know he has had earlier brushes with death: in ch. 3, where he threatens destruction of a city he stands within; in ch. 2 when he begs for release from the fish; and in ch. 1 when he and others are at risk from a storm. In rabbinic tradition Jonah was the young, unnamed boy who died untimely and was brought back to life by Elijah, who was staying with the family; the rabbis claim Jonah was exempted from death on the basis of his deeds. We just saw him resemble one character who survived the flood and another who struggled plantlessly for immortality. So we have to listen when he begs for death. But that Jonah calls for death does not mean he actually *wills* it but that he may *feel* like it—two separable elements which may or may not overlap. Death is one of the stages on which our dramatic Jonah treads when his feelings are profound. To call for it is serious, but safe. When Jonah asks the God who has rescued him so far to allow

him to die, Jonah can count on the very qualities he has just named; he cannot assume them as his right, but he can trust that they will be there for him. *Jonah trusts God to deal graciously with him at the very moment of railing at the deity for doing the same for others; he has to rely for his own life on the very qualities he has just complained about when they assisted others. Frustrating—and provocative of perspective!*

Their earlier relationship? Perhaps it was disappointing for God when Jonah went off silent at the start of the story. Some think Jonah expects he can evade God, but that seems unlikely. To huff off makes a dramatic statement. God runs after Jonah, then as later, in wind and weather. Some see divine anger here, resent the deity's heedless endangering of many in the pursuit of one; but it need not be so. The God I am reading is deeply concerned, eager to teach. The storm hurts no one (midrashic insight says only the *one* boat is *briefly* imperiled). Jonah sleeps for grief, or for depression rising from an inadequate facing and factoring of his own reactions. Flight from God, even if not meant seriously, takes energy; anger projected onto God invites denial, another enervating activity. The sailors are left to face their fears and to utter their prayers, absent their passenger's doing the same. What we learn of God's graciousness and readiness to relent of plans is that, though the sailors do end up throwing some of their livelihood overboard before the prophet follows it, they end up praying to Jonah's God themselves, having their prayer heard; and in fact as we see the last of them, these Gentiles are worshiping the one true God. Though I want to avoid saying that suffering is inevitably good for us—or that it is good for others when it happens to them—my reading here is that the crew gain, not lose, from the storm. To find God is worth disposing of some stuff—in fact, may be just the upper-body exercise needed. God here is concerned primarily for Jonah but incidentally for others; it is not so much a matter of preferences but of focus. Jonah is the most needy one in this scene. God is neither passive nor permissive, not capricious, not cruel. God is involved, engaged, intent.

Jonah's fish experience is one of the most important parts of the narrative, not simply his going in and coming out, but his transformation while within. Though Jonah was not digested, he was transformed. Visual art often suggests that Jonah turned around while inside the fish, came out differently than he went in. His words may not be quite what all wish him to have said, but we may get more than we anticipate.

Jonah's prayer from within the fish is richly biblical. He knows his psalter well and so is no novice at prayer. Here is where we can see that he and God are, in fact, old friends. Some suspect him of just mouthing the prayers, but I don't think so. The words of the psalms are active and intrusive, making their way in from the lips of those who say them. Don't say the psalms unless you want to mean them; they may well take over your prayer life. That Jonah thanks God for the rescue while he is still within the fish is a testimony to the relationship shared between deity and prophet. Virtually all biblical prayer says thank you as part of the request, as though that were good manners, or more deeply a matter of conviction. God and Jonah are like an old married couple or a pair of long-ranging friends who are so familiar and intimate with each other's mind and heart that they can anticipate shared conversation and take either part. Somewhat in the manner of fifth-century Theodore of Mopsuestia, I myself will enhance Jonah 2 a bit here, so we can hear both voices as they harmonize.

To Jonah's 'I cried, you heard,' God rejoins 'Finally you spoke and I was glad; I had missed you' (2:2). As Jonah accuses, 'You cast me. . . your waves and billows. . . ;' God smiles: 'You bought a boat ticket, chose a water experience!' (2:3). As Jonah wails, 'You'll miss me in the temple, though I'll miss you as well,' God replies 'not so fast! We'll meet there again' (4:4). Jonah relates the terrors of his struggle with the primeval waters, at the very gate of death (2:5-6): 'As my life was ebbing, it was you I reached out to,' and God says 'I was sitting by my phone in the temple, so relieved when you finally called' (2:7). God deals respectfully with Jonah, throughout, not forcing a way in without some sort of invitational cue. This story is all about relatedness, and that is what we see in this fish transaction. It is also about the others, whom Jonah mentions as he nears his conclusion: 'Some are not very loyal—idols and such—but you can count on me!' to which God smiles and nods: 'I do count on you, Jonah; and you can rely on me. Deliverance is my gift' (2:8-9). Thesis # 5: Some fish! Some relationship! [slide]

Some find Jonah guilty of foxhole piety. That does not worry me overly, since such piety is better than impiety. Better foxhole piety than foxhole despair. I am far from prescribing such a fish for myself or for you, but it may happen. If it does, the challenge is to get what you can, to reach for what you need. Anticipate help in terms of the relationship with God that you have, and try to have a relationship in terms of

which to anticipate. If you do not have such a friendship with God, acquire one. A foxhole may be a step, a phase, a prompt. But actually I don't think that is what Jonah is to be suspected of. Others wonder if his change of heart is sincere, since it seems to have worn off by the end of the story. But I don't see it that way. We do not acquire wisdom in so simple and straight-forward a way. Human experience and our capacities to gain perspective from it are not like capital in some bank, accruing interest steadily. The journey is more like the stock market: dramatically changeable, dizzily circuitous, irrationally tumultuous—much more interesting!

God has designed for Jonah a ministry the prophet needed to undertake. God's initial survey turned up the evil in Nineveh; but not simply that. The prophet and the pagans share a need for God's gentle instruction, each distinctively. Jonah, assigned, acts out his resistant reaction, not once but a number of times. But God persists, pursues, not in angry determination but in anxious love. While God woos Jonah, others benefit as well. There are plenty of God's gifts to go around. Care for one creature can splash over onto others. Lavish love. Jonah is a prophet for the sailors and the Ninevites, but they offer him insight into God's ways as well, if he can accept it. And Jonah is no stranger to God, as we learn when he is nestled in what Jerome calls God's paunch. Jonah cries to God who responds. Jonah emerges changed from his experience. But conversion is never really complete; there are always more possibilities to explore. So Jonah, re-commissioned, preaches effectively, successfully; but he is not satisfied. From a certain integrity, he speaks up his feelings about God's qualities which seem troublesome instead of comforting. And God, attentive and patient, helps him push for additional insight—us too, I hope.

But let me break off, returning us briefly to consider the challenge with which we began:

The interface of biblical studies and its goals with biblical spirituality and its projects: Useful historical, literary, readerly information directed in the service of human transformation; some theory but plenty of reading. A sense that our tradition can serve well the urgent needs we face, can offer us insight about not simply our personal selves but our social and political selves as well. God with us, God for us, God with and for all of us.