

A JOURNEY
with JONAH

“Can you write a lucid guide to bewilderment? Fr. Paul Murray has done so, explaining Jonah with a wide range of references, psychological and spiritual insight, and clarity.”

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“We are so familiar with Jonah’s story that we forget how much truth is there to learn. Paul Murray reacquaints us with this wayward prophet by drawing on literature, art, and commentators from across the Church and from the Jewish tradition. Reading this ‘parable of mercy’ with these myriad lenses, Murray highlights the reader’s participation in this story—that we might become both more merciful toward others and more aware of our vast need of mercy ourselves.”

—**Jessica Hooten Wilson**, Louise Cowan Scholar in Residence, University of Dallas

“Like the book of Jonah itself, Fr. Paul Murray’s *A Journey with Jonah* is both terse and profound. In three short chapters Murray masterfully shows his reader—with colorful commentary from Augustine, Buber, Mankowitz, Melville, Merton, and Teresa of Avila—that the conversion of Jonah precedes the conversion of the Gentiles of Nineveh to whom he was preaching, an absolutely essential reminder to anyone working on the frontlines of evangelization that you can’t give what you haven’t first received. *A Journey with Jonah* is the perfect book for a post-COVID Church, as Fr. Murray inspires us to get out and get moving again in the work of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

—**Fr. Damian J. Ference**, Vicar for Evangelization in the Diocese of Cleveland, Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Borromeo Seminary

A JOURNEY *with* JONAH

The Spirituality of Bewilderment

PAUL MURRAY, OP

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To Sally Read

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INTRODUCTION

One clear indication of the importance of the book of Jonah is the fact that Jonah is the only ancient prophet with whom Jesus identifies himself in a dramatic way in the New Testament, and to whom he refers explicitly by name.¹ As soon, however, as we turn to read the book itself, with the thought of the book's importance in our minds, we find ourselves at once somewhat bewildered. For the so-called "book" turns out to be only two pages long; and Jonah, the prophet, a prophet of only one short sentence.

Even more surprising, Jonah is—sad to say—no hero. In fact, if anything, he's a sort of anti-hero.

1. There are, in fact, three references made to Jonah in the New Testament: Matt. 12:38–42; Matt. 16:1–4; and Luke 11:29–32. On each occasion, Jesus speaks about what he calls "the sign of Jonah." Jesus also refers to Elijah on a number of occasions but only when asked a question by his disciples, and he identifies Elijah with John the Baptist, not with himself.

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Normally we think of prophets as men of character. But in this case, all that we can say of Jonah is that, in the Irish sense of the word, he's a *character*! I sometimes think the term "Gubu factor" might almost have been coined to describe the extraordinary happenings in the story of this minor prophet. You remember what "Gubu" stands for—G U B U: grotesque, unbelievable, bizarre, and unprecedented.² And, let's face it, the text of the book itself, with a cast of characters that includes thousands of animals in sackcloth and one great prophet-swallowing whale, might almost have been written, in another age, by the Irish comic genius Myles na gCopaleen!

All that being said, however, I am convinced that the book of Jonah is the most profoundly Christian of all the books in the Hebrew Bible, and the book from

2. These four words were used in a remarkable press conference given by the Irish politician Charles J. Haughey on August 16, 1982. According to one of Haughey's biographers, "The press took up these dramatic words in reports and headlines, and out of the initial letters Conor Cruise O'Brien . . . constructed the acronym and mnemonic GUBU." See Bruce Arnold, *Haughey: His Life and Unlucky Deeds* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), 201.

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which we have the most to learn at the beginning of this new millennium. What is more, given the book's great subtlety and, at times, quite pungent satire, I am myself persuaded that it is probably the most "Irish" of all the books in the Bible!

But let's begin first with a brief outline of the story. The book opens with Jonah rejecting God's explicit command to preach to the Gentiles of Nineveh. In fact, Jonah runs away as far as possible in the opposite direction, boarding a ship bound for Tarshish. Soon, however, when a huge storm rises, the terrified men on the ship feel compelled to cast Jonah into the ocean. But, at that moment, a great fish—often pictured as a whale—swallows the astonished prophet.

Jonah remains inside the belly of the whale for three days, praying in his anguish, until he finds himself regurgitated onto land. Deciding, then, to obey God's command after all, he prophesies to the people of Nineveh the destruction of their city within forty days. The people of Nineveh repent, and God forgoes his threat of punishment against them. But this decision

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deeply irritates Jonah. He is all of a sudden filled with self-pity and wants to die. His anger is further roused when a plant, which had afforded him temporary shelter against the scorching heat, is withered. But the end of the story, Jonah is brought to realize that God can show kindness to whom he will, no matter which race or nation the people belong to, and even if they are living within the evil city of Nineveh.

In outline, the story seems simple enough. In fact, the entire work consists of no more than forty-eight verses. And yet, around this small book, as if it were around Jonah's own troubled ship, high waves and storms of controversy have swirled for centuries. Vastly different currents of thought, represented by ancient rabbis and scholars, medieval and modern exegetes, contemporary believers and postmodern skeptics, have surrounded the work with questions concerning its date of composition, its authorship and literary genre, its basic theme and purpose. But so far, and perhaps not surprisingly, little or no consensus has been reached. In fact, at times, in terms of understanding, all we seem to have before us is what has

been called by one exegete “a tempest in a text.”³

In some ways, the situation today is much as it was in the fourth century. At that time, St. Jerome, in his own commentary on the book, noted that although many Latin and Greek authors had already given their attention to the book of Jonah, “by their many questions they have not so much clarified as obscured the meaning, so much so in fact that their own interpretation needs itself to be interpreted, and the reader leaves more uncertain than he was before he began his reading.”⁴ Twelve centuries later, Martin Luther leveled a no less bitter complaint against St. Jerome himself.

3. Phyllis Trible, “A Tempest in a Text: Ecological Soundings in the Book of Jonah,” *Theology Digest* 43, no. 4 (1996): 303–312. On one key question, however, there is by now almost unanimous agreement among scholars—namely, that the author of the book of Jonah is not concerned with presenting a literal, historical account: “Recognition of the book’s literary qualities has turned the attention of interpreters to the work’s character and function as story” (see A.R. Ceresko, “Jonah,” in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy [Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990], 580).

4. Jerome, prologue to *In Jonam prophetam*, in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne, vol. 25 (Paris, 1845), col. 1117–1118 (all translations of this text are my own).

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Along with certain other Fathers of the Church, Jerome had obscured the text of Jonah, Luther claimed, with “intricate, innumerable, and silly questions,” although the text itself is “clear, easy to understand, and full of comfort.”⁵

In my own opinion, some of the best commentaries on the book of Jonah have not come from the scientific minds of exegetes, but from poems and paintings, sculpture, stained glass, and children’s stories and plays. These kinds of “readings,” when one work of art or one “construct of the imagination” responds to another—and responds from *within* the creative act or the creative process itself—are often, in George Steiner’s opinion, “of a penetrative authority rarely equaled by those offered from outside, by those propounded by the non-creator, that is to say the reviewer, the critic, the academic.”⁶

5. “Lecture on Jonah: The Latin Text, 1525,” in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 19, ed. H.C. Oswald, trans. Charles D. Froehlich (St. Louis: Concordia, 1974), 4–5.

6. George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 12. For a reflection on some of the many different images of Jonah in art and literature, see James Limburg, “Jonah and

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Undoubtedly, one of the most brilliant responses ever made to the book of Jonah is Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* and, in particular, the famous sermon delivered, in chapter nine, by the sailors' chaplain, Father Mapple. "Shipmates," the priest explains, "this book [the book of Jonah] . . . is one of the smallest strands in the mighty cable of the Scriptures. Yet what depths of the soul does Jonah's deep sea-line sound! what a pregnant lesson to us is this prophet!"⁷

My intention here, in these pages, is to try to uncover something of "the pregnant lesson" of the prophet Jonah. But as well as focusing attention on the text itself, I hope to take some soundings within the depths of the Jewish and Christian soul, to explore, that is, something of the impact Jonah has made over the centuries on the Judeo-Christian tradition. But also, however briefly, I would like to note examples

the Whale through the eyes of Artists," *Bible Review* 6, no. 4 (August 1990): 18–25. See also Yvonne Sherwood, *A Biblical Text and its Afterlives: The Survival of Jonah in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

7. Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002), 49.

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of the response that the Jonah story has awakened in a number of creative writers, poets, and artists, both inside and outside the Judeo-Christian tradition.

The message of the book of Jonah, its “pregnant lesson,” can be divided into three parts. Accordingly, the present study will be structured in a simple three-fold manner under the following headings:

1. Obedience to the Word: The Lesson of the Wild Storm
2. In the Belly of Paradox: The Lesson of the Great Whale
3. Compassion without Limit: The Lesson of the Wondrous Plant

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Obedience to the Word: The Lesson of the Wild Storm

“**A**rise, go to Nineveh” (1:2 RSV-CE). These are words addressed uniquely to Jonah, requiring obedience. But over the centuries, Jewish and Christian commentators, preachers, and poets have, on occasion, extended the meaning of the text to include all of us in some sense, for all of us—if not now, sooner or later—are called to go and face some “Nineveh” of our own. There is a claim on us—on our time, on our love, on our courage—that we would rather avoid. In one of his *Divine Poems*, the seventeenth-century poet Francis Quarles describes the challenge to go to “Nineveh” as a command, among other things, to do what justice demands. He writes:

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Jonah must go, nor is the charge confin'd
To Jonah, but to all the World enjoyn'd:
You magistrates, arise, and take delight
In dealing Justice, and maintaining right:
There lies your Nineveh; Merchants arise
And mingle conscience with your Merchandise;
Lawyers arise, make not your righteous Laws
A trick for gain.¹

For Quarles, all the different vocations and professions are under the Word, under the call of God, even if here, in his poem, only three are mentioned explicitly: magistrates, merchants, and lawyers.

There is an interesting twentieth-century short play by Wolf Mankowitz in which Jonah appears as a sort of traveling salesman “who has his eye out for a sharp bargain,” but who finds himself all of a sudden called to be a prophet.² The call does not please this

1. Francis Quarles, “A Feast for Wormes: A Poeme of the History of Jonah,” in *Complete Works in Prose and Verse*, vol. 2, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (Edinburgh: T. & A. Constable, 1880), 10.

2. Wolf Mankowitz, *It Should Happen to a Dog: A Play in One*

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twentieth-century Jonah one little bit. He cries out at one point in the play: “You can’t do this to me. I am on very important business.”³ And, in another place, he exclaims: “Please, please, what do you want from my life? . . . All these years I’ve been running—a traveller—Jonah, the traveller, representing Top Hat; Braces For The Trousers; Fair Lady Fancy Buttons; Hold Tight Hair Grips—only good brands in the suitcase. Ask them in Tarshish . . . I shouldn’t have to run with a suitcase any more. And still he nags me. All right. I heard. I’m going.”⁴ To Jonah’s profound irritation, the voice of God always comes to him in the form of birds chirping inside his head. “I hate birds,” Jonah complains. And then: “You know what it says? ‘Arise, Jonah, arise. Go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it.’ I ask you. Why pick on me?”⁵

The humor in Mankowitz’s play echoes the humor in the book of Jonah itself. But the message about obedience

Act, in *Religious Drama 3*, ed. Marvin Halverson (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1972), 123.

3. Mankowitz, 129.

4. Mankowitz, 125.

5. Mankowitz, 126.

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remains a serious one all the same. And it occurs to me that, perhaps in all of the literature about Jonah, no one keeps the seriousness of this message more to the forefront of his mind than Father Mapple in *Moby-Dick*: “As with all sinners among men,” the priest declares, “the sin of this son of Amittai was in his willful disobedience of the command of God—never mind now what that command was, or how conveyed—which he found a hard command. But all the things that God would have us do are hard for us to do—remember that—and hence, he oftener commands us than endeavors to persuade. And if we obey God, we must disobey ourselves; and it is in this disobeying ourselves, wherein the hardness of obeying God consists.”⁶

Father Mapple paints a vivid picture of Jonah skulking about the wharves of Joppa, hiding from God, and seeking “a ship that’s bound for Tarshish”:

Miserable man! Oh! most contemptible and worthy of all scorn; with slouched hat and guilty eye,

6. Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002), 49.

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skulking from his God; prowling among the ship-ping like a vile burglar hastening to cross the seas. So disordered, self-condemning is his look, that had there been policemen in those days, Jonah, on the mere suspicion of something wrong, had been arrested ere he touched a deck. . . . In vain he tries to look all ease and confidence; in vain essays his wretched smile.⁷

Of course, in the end, Jonah does manage to get on board a ship. He goes down into the hold of the ship and is soon fast asleep. But then, all of a sudden, as if in imitation of the prophet's disobedience, "the sea rebels."⁸ In Father Mapple's words: "A dreadful storm comes on, the ship is like to break. But now when the boatswain calls on all hands to lighten her; when boxes, bales, and jars are clattering overboard; when the wind is shrieking, and the men are yelling, and every plank thunders with trampling feet right over Jonah's head; in all this raging tumult, Jonah sleeps his hideous sleep."⁹

7. Melville, 49–50.

8. Melville, 51.

9. Melville, 51.

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The text of the book of Jonah itself reads: “Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried to his god. They threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten it for them. Jonah, meanwhile, had gone down into the hold of the ship and had lain down, and was fast asleep. The captain came and said to him, ‘What are you doing sound asleep? Get up, call on your god! Perhaps the god will spare us a thought so that we do not perish’” (Jon. 1:6). The anguish of the captain brings to mind at once the anguished cries of the disciples of Jesus, in St. Mark’s Gospel, during a comparable storm. In chapter four, we read: “A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, ‘Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?’” (Mark 4:37–38). Almost like a new Jonah, Jesus would seem to have found himself here in the same situation as the bewildered son of Amittai. But, in spite of the marked similarities between these two incidents, there exists of course an enormous gap between the state of mind of Jesus and that of our unhappy prophet.

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St. Jerome, commenting on this particular passage—and wanting Jonah to be a hero, not a coward—attributes Jonah’s sleep to what he calls “the serenity of the soul of the prophet.”¹⁰ Jerome asserts that Jonah is calm even in the face of imminent shipwreck, since “neither tempest nor dangers disturb him.”¹¹ The suggestion, though greatly complimentary to the prophet, is clearly untenable. And even St. Jerome appears to change his mind within the space of a paragraph, openly acknowledging the fact that Jonah knows very well that the tempest is actually “raging against him.” *That*, Jerome says, is the real reason why Jonah goes down into the hold of the ship and seeks oblivion in sleep. So intense are his feelings of sadness and guilt, he simply cannot bear, it seems, the pain of staying awake.

Reflecting on this particular stage in the story, Father Mapple draws a sharp comparison between Jonah’s condition and that of an unhappy drunkard: “Like one who after a night of drunken revelry hies to his bed, still reeling, but with conscience yet pricking

10. Jerome, *In Jonam prophetam*, col. 1125.

11. Jerome, col. 1125.

him. . . . At last, amid the whirl of woe [which he is feeling], a deep stupor steals over him, as over the man who bleeds to death, for conscience is the wound, and there's naught to staunch it; so, after sore wrestling in his berth, Jonah's prodigy of ponderous misery drags him drowning down to sleep."¹²

The understandable but desperate strategy of sinking down, as far as possible, into the stupor of sleep is, of course, simply a way of refusing to hear the voice of God, refusing to obey. I think it is no accident of grammar that our English word "disobedience" comes from the Latin *obaudire* (to listen), and so *dis*-obedience means, literally, "not to listen." Jonah's impulse to avoid responsibility and evade the command of God by hiding himself away in the womb of sleep has inevitably attracted the attention of many modern psychologists. For them the story of Jonah is "not only a religious manifesto; it is also a psychological tableau of the human condition."¹³ The "Jonah" in *us*, we are

12. Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 51.

13. See André Lacoque and Pierre-Emmanuel Lacoque, *Jonah: A Psycho-Religious Approach to the Prophet* (Columbia: University of

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told, desires somehow to regress into the warm, protective womb of the mother. In his book *The Forgotten Language*, Erich Fromm suggests that the images of “going into the ship, going into the ship’s belly, falling asleep, being in the ocean and being in the fish’s belly” are all “symbols” that stand for “a condition of being protected and isolated, of safe withdrawal from communication with other human beings.”¹⁴

This solipsistic tendency on the part of Jonah—what psychologists refer to as “the Jonah-and-the-Whale complex” or “the Jonah syndrome”—is, we are asked to believe, a tendency that forms part of the “Jonah” make-up within all of us. I have no doubt that there is wisdom in this theory.¹⁵ But what interests me here is not so much the psychological manifestations of this tendency but rather the complex form that it has assumed today in contemporary spirituality. As all

South Carolina Press, 1990), 217.

14. Erich Fromm, *The Forgotten Language* (New York: Rinehart, 1951), 22.

15. Carl Gustav Jung was the first to use the term “Jonah-and-the-Whale complex.” See Jung, *Symbols of Transformation*, trans., R.F.C. Hull (New York: Pantheon, 1956), 419.

of us are well aware by now, there is a new fascination among our contemporaries with the things of the spirit. Unfortunately, however, that interest doesn't always translate into a capacity to attend to the living voice of God or to surrender with faith and hope and love to the transcendent beauty and pressure of divine revelation. Instead, there is a tendency to live one's spirituality within the bubble of the self, and practice what Martin Buber has called, in a memorable phrase, "the religion of pure psychic immanence."¹⁶

Modern consciousness, Buber writes, looks to the soul as the *only* sphere in which we can expect to harbor or discover the "divine."¹⁷ And this marks, of course, a complete shift away from transcendence to immanence. In Buber's opinion, "[Modern consciousness] will have nothing more to do with the God believed in by the religions, who is to be sure present to the soul, who reveals Himself to it, communicates with it, but

16. Martin Buber, *Eclipse of God: Studies in the Relation between Religion and Philosophy*, trans Maurice S. Friedman et al. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 84.

17. Buber, 83.

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remains transcendent to it in His being.”¹⁸ A spirituality of this kind—an exclusively *immanent* spirituality—at least in its extreme manifestations, represents a regress back to a safe, controlled environment, a “return to the womb.” In terms of religion, it is nothing less than a spiritual manifestation of “the Jonah syndrome.”

But let us turn our attention back once more to the text itself: “Jonah, meanwhile, had gone down into the hold of the ship and had lain down, and was fast asleep. The captain came and said to him, ‘What are you doing sound asleep? Get up, call on your god! Perhaps the god will spare us a thought so that we do not perish’” (Jon. 1:5–6). A moment ago, I attempted, in a not-too-complimentary fashion, to relate Jonah’s sleep to certain forms of contemporary spirituality. But thinking further about Jonah’s sleep, I cannot escape the thought that the thrust and challenge of this text relate, whether we like it or not, to those among us who consider ourselves members of Christ’s Church, and in particular to those of us who feel called to be preachers of the Word. For, like Jonah, we have been given a task

18. Buber, 83.

to complete and a message to preach to the world—but are we preaching it? Are we not, perhaps, living in a kind of bubble ourselves?

“The church today is in retreat.” This bald, simple statement was included in a sermon about Jonah, which was preached at Westminster Chapel, London, some years ago. But it is a sermon that could, I think, be preached again today. The Church, though entrusted with the Word of truth is, we are told, like Jonah, because it “has looked to Tarshish and not Nineveh. The church is like Jonah who paid the fare to sail on the ship going in the opposite direction from what God demanded. The church has spent its energy, its time and its money on the wrong things. The church at the present time is like Jonah, asleep in the sides of the ship while the world is tossed in unprecedented bewilderment. The world is afraid—the church is asleep. The world asks questions—the church has no answers.”¹⁹

19. R.T. Kendall, *Jonah: Sermons Preached at Westminster Chapel* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1978), 11.

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When, finally, Jonah emerges on deck, he finds himself forced to admit that he is the cause of all the trouble and that he should, therefore, be thrown overboard at once. “I know it is because of me,” he says to the sailors, “that this great storm has come upon you” (Jon. 1:12). In a lengthy Latin poem, “Carmen de Iona Propheta,” which for centuries has been attributed to Tertullian, Jonah is heard to exclaim—and the phrase I think is remarkable—“In me is the storm. I am all the madness of the world” (*Ego tempestas, ego tota insania mundi*).²⁰ In the next verse of the poem, Jonah is heard to cry out: “’Tis in me . . . / That the sea rises, and the upper air / Down rushes; land in me is far, death near, / And hope in God is none!”²¹

20. Tertullian, “Carmen de Iona propheta,” in *Quae Supersunt Omnia*, vol. 2, ed. Francis Oehler (Leipzig: T.O. Weigel, 1854), 770 (my translation).

21. “A Strain of Jonah the Prophet” [“Carmen de Iona propheta”], trans. Sydney Thelwall, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4, *The Fathers of the Third Century*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 128. Martin Luther, in his commentary on *Jonah*, notes that “a much greater storm was raging in Jonah’s heart and conscience than raged on the sea outside” (“Lecture on Jonah: The Latin Text,” 10).

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In spite of Jonah's despair, the sailors, according to the book of Jonah, try their best to control the storm. They make a last, desperate effort to get Jonah and themselves safely back to land. But the sea becomes ever more turbulent. The reality of Jonah's disobedience has to be faced, and the consequences accepted. The sailors take up Jonah in their arms and throw him into the deep.

One early Christian author, who identified himself, in a particular way, with this moment in the life of Jonah, was an Irish saint. His name, in its original form, meant "dove." And that, as it happens, is also the meaning in Hebrew of the name "Jonah." The saint in question is none other than the remarkable Abbot of Luxeuil and Bobbio, St. Columban. In 610, Columban found himself expelled from Burgandy after he had spoken out against the wild sexual mores and pagan lifestyle of Theodoric II. In 613, writing in a letter to Pope Boniface IV, Columban dares to compare himself with Jonah since, just a few years earlier, with the threat of expulsion hanging over his head, he had come very near to experiencing the "shipwreck" of all his

hopes.²² On another occasion, finding himself in the midst of an ecclesial storm that had been brewing for many years, Columban wrote to one particular group of bishops who were involved in the controversy, and who were decidedly opposed to his way of thinking and acting: “If on my account this storm is upon you, take me and cast me into the sea, that this tempest may recede from you in calm; yet let it first be your part, like those mariners [in the book of Jonah], to seek to save the shipwrecked by the bowels of godliness, and to draw the ship to land.”²³

In Letter IV—undoubtedly the most moving of all the letters of Columban—the famous abbot writes to his own religious brethren and asks his “frugal brothers” to pray for his safety.²⁴ Referring to himself as a “sinful dove” (*colomba peccator*), he draws their attention to the great drama and vulnerability of his present situation by suggesting an identification with

22. “Letter V,” no. 16, in *Sancti Columbani Opera*, ed. and trans. G.S.M. Walker (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1997), 55.

23. “Letter II,” no. 7, 19.

24. “Letter IV,” no. 1, 27.

the prophet Jonah at the moment of his expulsion into the deep.²⁵ He writes: "If I am cast into the sea like Jonah, who himself is also called Columba in Hebrew, pray that someone, a safe concealor, may take the place of the blessed whale, and by rowing, restore me, your Jonah, to the land he longs for."²⁶ The passage, though brief, is so distinctive in its expression and so poignant in its meaning that it impresses me as nothing less than a sharp, bright jewel in St. Columban's writing. Nevertheless, the episode of the whale as the saint remembers it here is, to say the least, somewhat glamorized, and the whale itself practically canonized! For what actually awaits the prophet Jonah after he finds himself cast out

25. "Letter IV," no. 1, 27.

26. "Letter IV," no. 8. The image of the whale appears again in a story concerning another famous Irish saint, also called Columba, or sometimes Columcille. In an early biography of the saint, in one section, we read of "how the saint spoke with foreknowledge concerning a great whale." Apparently, a brother in the community, named Berach, when he was about to set out on a journey by boat, was told by St. Columba that he would confront on the open sea "a prodigious monster." And, in fact, Berach and his sailors did see "a whale, of marvellous and enormous size, swimming on the surface," and "it rose up like a mountain, and opened gaping jaws, with many teeth." See *Adomnan's Life of Columba*, ed. and trans. A.O. Anderson and M.O. Anderson (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1961), 245–247.

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of the boat by the sailors is—as we will discover in a moment—by no means an easeful trip home!