



FOREWORD BY
ROWAN WILLIAMS

BOUNDLESS GRANDEUR

The Christian Vision of
A.M. 'Donald' Allchin

EDITED BY
DAVID G.R. KELLER

INTRODUCTION BY
KALLISTOS WARE

Boundless Grandeur

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Boundless Grandeur
*The Christian Vision of
A.M. 'Donald' Allchin*

Edited by
David G.R. Keller

Foreword by
Rowan Williams

Introduction by
Metropolitan Kallistos Ware



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For Donald
Friend, mentor, colleague.

I Donald
cyfaill, cynghorwr, cydweithiwr

“For the things which belong to the story of Jesus
are not yet completed.”

DONALD ALLCHIN

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Editor's Note

“ . . . in every generation, she [wisdom] passes into holy souls, and makes of them friends of God, and prophets.”¹

Donald Allchin (1930–2010) was an ordained priest in the Church of England, an historian, and theologian. After a four-year curacy in a parish in Kensington from 1956 to 1960, Donald became Librarian at Pusey House, Oxford. During the 1960s he developed a substantive interest in Eastern Orthodox Churches and became friends with the Orthodox theologians Vladimir Lossky and Dumitru Staniloae and the Russian historian Nicolas Zernov. Donald was an active member of the Society of St. Alban and St. Sergius promoting Anglican-Orthodox dialogue and later became the editor of its journal *Sobornost* until 1977. From 1968 to 1973 he was warden to the Sisters of the Love of God, an Anglican contemplative order in Fairacres, near Oxford. During this period he became a friend of Thomas Merton, visiting Gethsemane Abbey in Kentucky and conducting a lively correspondence. From 1973 to 1987 Donald was residentiary canon at Canterbury Cathedral where he developed an interest in the Welsh spiritual tradition. Donald returned to Oxford in 1987 to become director of the St. Theosevia Center with a focus on learning and dialogue between Eastern and Western Christian spirituality. In 1994 he moved to Bangor, North Wales and immersed himself in the poetry, saints, and holy places of the Welsh spiritual tradition. He remained there as professor in theology and Welsh until 2010 when he returned to Oxford and died later that year.

1. Wisdom of Solomon 7:27.

Editor's Note

Donald Allchin was also a friend of God. He found God's presence and boundless grandeur everywhere and in every person he encountered. Without trying, Donald could be fully present in places, conversations, and relationships and at the same time make connections with other diverse yet complementary topics and persons. His endless curiosity and delight in life gave birth to an eclectic range of interests and academic investigations. Donald's gift of friendship was contagious. He could draw people from a variety of backgrounds and interests into a collegial network of collaboration and mutual support. All of this flowed from Donald's prayerful experience of God. The life of the Trinity was the template for Donald's awareness and celebration of the unity of all creation and human life. At the same time he knew that the resurrection of Christ brings both the opportunity for transformed human life and the responsibility to mend and transform broken human lives and institutions.

The chapters, poems, and memoirs in this book represent what Donald's friendship and mentoring have brought forth in the lives of the contributors. The book is an example of his ability to bring people together, even after his death, and it testifies to Donald's influence and contributions to the life of the world. Here you will meet poets, historians, bishops, archbishops, monks, priests and lay persons, scholars, professors, and writers. You will taste the rich ecumenical dialogue between Donald's Anglican heritage, the Eastern Orthodox Churches, the Roman Catholic Church, and churches of the Reformed Traditions, including Donald's friendships and correspondence with Thomas Merton and the Romanian Orthodox theologian Dumitru Stăniloae. Readers will gain insights into Donald's interpretation of the Anglican Tradition and his emphasis on the value of monastic solitude and community for the lives of modern Christians. And last, but certainly not least, you will enter Donald's journey into the lives, poetry, saints, and holy places of the Welsh spiritual tradition. And this is only a taste of his legacy. In Donald's words, "*For the things which belong to the story of Jesus are not yet completed.*"²

2. Allchin, *Participation in God*, 1.

Foreword

When I first learned that my doctoral supervisor at Oxford was to be Donald Allchin, I was pleased but slightly surprised; I had associated him up to that point with his work on the Anglican monastic revival, and I was planning to study contemporary Eastern Orthodox theology. The surprise didn't last, of course. Not only did I discover the unique breadth of Donald's acquaintance with the Orthodox world, I learned never to be surprised at the depth and range of Donald's interests. At the end of our first hour of (nominal) supervision, during which we had discussed Orthodoxy, Merton, Wales, David Jones, John Wesley, and much else besides (even, briefly, my proposed research), he said with that characteristic beaming smile, "Well! This is all turning out even better than we could have hoped." What I think he meant was that he was always delighted by the chance of conversation that roamed anarchically around the wide world of Western and Eastern Christian civilization and glad to find someone who was equally happy to let it do so—even if they could not begin to match his energy, appetite, and capacity to make connections.

As many have said, that capacity was one of his greatest gifts: allowing you to link up some insight from a modern Episcopalian literary critic with an aphorism from sixth-century Syria, a Welsh elegy, and the notebooks of some out-of-the-way Tractarian; and linking up people with the same imaginative gusto ("You know x, of course? No? Really? Oh, you *must* meet . . ."). Thinking about all sorts of things and persons that have been intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally precious to me over the years, I am quite taken aback to recall how many of them I owe to Donald: from an introduction to some of Merton's lesser-known work through to the manuscripts of Vladimir Lossky that formed the main matter for my doctoral research, from the philosophy of Christos Yannaras to the poetry of Denise Levertov, and the later Geoffrey Hill (whose *Tenebrae* I first picked up in Donald's

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house in Canterbury). It is Donald's eye and ear that I realize picked out for me so much that gave lasting nourishment and joy.

In 1973 I went with him on a visit to Paris to meet an assortment of mostly Orthodox friends, and was delighted and amused to see that the reaction to him of these Franco-Russians was so like the way in which he was received and welcomed in the UK—the affectionate exasperation at his utter impracticality, the awe at the breadth of his interests, the intense warmth of appreciation and gratitude for his spiritual luminosity. His unselfconscious enthusiasm and sheer enjoyment of his friends and his faith never seemed to vary from one cultural context to another, and the response was always the same. And, it must be said, his willingness (untypical of the English) to converse in fluently rickety and English-accented French (or indeed Welsh) never failed to consolidate the affection he won.

One of those Orthodox friends remarked on that visit as he greeted him, “Pas encore évêque?” “Not a bishop yet?” And that reminds us of another feature of Donald's ministry: he managed to be close to many powerful and influential figures in the church, near the heart of the Anglican Establishment in Oxford and Canterbury, yet supremely uninterested in church politics, let alone a “career” in the church. He once quoted to me a remark made to him by (I think) David Edwards when both were young clergy: “You'll be fine when you're Dear Old Father Allchin—but what are you going to do until then?” In the event, he found innumerable things to do, and none of them required any particular hierarchical meal ticket. It was part of the “monastic” quality of his contribution to the church. He came close a couple of times to committing himself to the monastic calling in the traditional sense; but (surely rightly) recognized his charism as being more to do with living on the edge of the institution in a rather different way—even more insecure in many respects, but simply a visible presence on the edge of the church's “business” world, reminding people of other and more fruitful explorations to be had, if only they would turn to the larger horizon. Unfussily compliant (mostly) with the rules around intercommunion and the like, he nevertheless behaved in so many respects as if the divisions between churches had already been healed. He was never an ecumenical negotiator; always an ecumenical witness. To be with him in that context was to recognize that in some profound sense he was right and the divisions *had* been healed—not by our ingenuity and good will but by the abiding, inexhaustible presence of grace. Like a few others of his generation, he embodied a style of Anglican identity that succeeded in being

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utterly and humbly hospitable just because it was fundamentally confident and unworried. It does no harm to be reminded that this was once possible; and perhaps still is, by the grace of God.

The essays in this book present a wonderfully rounded picture of Donald in so many settings, so many conversations. For those who knew him, they will rekindle not only memories, but shared enthusiasms; for those who didn't, they should open up a world of new and startling possibilities for joining up the dots in theology and creativity and spiritual understanding. It is a welcome tribute to a loving and much beloved friend, and I hope it will make new friends for him and his vision of the church and the kingdom.

Rowan Williams
former Archbishop of Canterbury; currently Master,
Magdalene College, Cambridge University.

Editor's Acknowledgements

One of Donald Allchin's great gifts was creating communities of colleagues and friends who shared and contributed to his Christian vision of life. This book is an example of Donald's handiwork, even after his death. I am grateful for the encouragement and work of the fourteen other contributors, each of whom brings a unique perspective to Donald's life and vision. I am especially grateful for Esther de Waal who, as a close friend of Donald, helped me identify contributors and offered personal support along the way. My wife, Emily Wilmer, who was present when I shared the idea for this book with Donald, has been a patient companion and guide throughout this project.

Gladstone's Library in Hawarden, North Wales, is a place Donald Allchin loved. Thanks to the vision of the Warden, Peter Francis, the Allchin Archive is housed there and the staff of the Library, especially Peter, has given professional support to the development of this book. I was awarded a month-long residential scholarship in July 2014 to organize the editing process. Louisa Yates and Gary Butler digitalized part of the archive for contributors' access through the internet. The Library accepted an offer to host an initial book launch and seminar on Donald's life and work in November 2015. I'm grateful as well to Patricia Williams, a former Gladstone's Library librarian, and Mae Balchin and Alexandra Ross, two former interns at the Library, for their work in the early stages of organizing Donald's archive. Their assistance helped me in planning the scope of this book.

St. Theosevia Center for Christian Spirituality in Oxford, England, is a place that was dear to Donald Allchin's heart. He was Director from 1987 to 1994, offering courses and dialogue between Eastern and Western Christian spirituality. I appreciate the support of the current Director, The Rev. Dr. Liz Carmichael, who offered to host a Study Day at the Center to

Editor's Acknowledgements

launch the book and give Oxford students, faculty, and the general public an opportunity to be more familiar with Donald's life and work.

Larry Todd Wilson, Founder and Director of Knowledge Harvesting, Inc. helped me design a format for the three hour-long interviews I conducted in 2007 with Donald Allchin at Gladstone's Library. It was part of an ecumenical effort to archive the spiritual wisdom of elders. Edited transcripts of these interviews are in the Appendix; they give the only known overview of Donald's life, thought, and work in his own words. I'm grateful to Suzanne Cahoon who transcribed the interviews from a digital recorder to computer documents which I have edited. Father Stephen Platt, Editor of the ecumenical journal *Sobornost* has given generous support to the project through access to issues and permissions to use copyrighted material. Dr. Paul M. Pearson, Director and Archivist of the Thomas Merton Center in Louisville, KY, provided links to resources on the Center's website that document the friendship and correspondence between Donald Allchin and Thomas Merton. Dr. Pearson gave permission to use material from the Center's *The Merton Annual*, including two addresses by Donald and one by Dr. Pearson. Peter Francis Barrett, retired Anglican Bishop of Cashel and Ossory in the Church of Ireland helped with communications between the editor and contributors and offered faithful support for the project. I am grateful to the staff of Pickwick Publications for recognizing the unique value of this book and to Dr. Robin Parry, my editor, who has provided timely, professional, and friendly support.

In March of 2010 Ann Shukman of Elshieshields Tower, Lockerbie, Scotland, a long-time friend and colleague of Donald's, invited me and my wife, Emily, to visit Donald who was staying with his caregiver, Ciaran, in her guest cottage. We stayed with Ann and it was during this visit that Donald endorsed the idea that has become *Boundless Grandeur*. I am grateful to Ann for her hospitality and encouragement. It was the last time Emily and I would see Donald and is a memory we cherish.

David Keller
The Feast of All Saints 2014

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"Merton at Ninety" *The Merton Journal* 12/1 (2005).

Remembering Merton. A roundtable discussion between a few of Merton's friends—Tommy O'Callaghan, Donald Allchin, Jim Forest, and John Wu, Jr., chaired by David Scott at the Thomas Merton Society conference "Your Heart is my Hermitage," held in Southampton, 1996. <http://www.thomasmertonsociety.org/panel.htm>

"Donald Allchin and the Thomas Merton Society." *The Merton Journal* (2011).

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Contributors

Ruth Bidgood was born and brought up in South Wales. She studied English at Oxford, then served in the WRNS in Egypt. She married and had three children. Her writing life in poetry and local history started in middle age, on her return from Surrey to live in Wales.

Ciprian Burca is a priest of the Romanian Orthodox Church. His current theological research is focused on the challenges and the perspective of modern Christian theology, spirituality, and ethics within the recent ecumenical context of the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century.

James Coutts is a retired parish priest of the Church in Wales who served in urban, rural, and small town parishes.

Fiona Gardner is a psychoanalytic psychotherapist and a spiritual director. She is the UK International Advisor for The International Thomas Merton Society, has been very involved in The Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland, and has presented papers regularly at both TMSGBI and ITMS conferences. She is an author and her latest book is *Precious Thoughts, Daily Readings from the Correspondence of Thomas Merton*. She is currently working on a book about Thomas Merton and the child-mind.

Kallistos Ware was born in 1934 and joined the Orthodox Church in 1958, becoming priest in 1966, and bishop in 1982. He is a member of the monastic brotherhood of St. John the Theologian on the island of Patmos, Greece and for thirty-five years (1966–2001) he taught Orthodox theology in the University of Oxford. He is Orthodox Co-Chairman of the International Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue, and he is also a member of the

Contributors

International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. His best-known publications are *The Orthodox Church* and *The Orthodox Way*. He is a co-translator of three volumes of material from the Orthodox service books, and of four volumes of *The Philokalia*.

David Keller, an Episcopal priest, has led retreats, seminars, and pilgrimages with Donald Allchin in the United States and the UK. From 1994–2002 he was the Steward of the Episcopal House of Prayer at St. John's Benedictine Abbey in Colledgeville, MN and serves as Adjunct Professor of Ascetical Theology at the General Theological Seminary in New York City. He is co-steward, with his wife, Emily Wilmer, of Oasis of Wisdom: An Institute for Contemplative Study, Practice, and Living, based in Asheville, NC. He is the author of *Oasis of Wisdom: The Worlds of the Desert Mothers and Fathers*, *Desert Banquet: A Year of Wisdom from The Desert Mothers and Fathers*, and *Come and See: The Transformation of Personal Prayer*.

Charles Miller met Donald Allchin as a teenager and remained a lifelong friend. He is Team Rector of Abingdon-on-Thames in the Diocese of Oxford and has served parishes in the United States and England. He has taught historical and ascetical theology and church history at Nashota House, The General Theological Seminary, and Yale Divinity School in the United States. His areas of special interest are seventeenth-century English and twentieth-century Orthodox theology and spirituality, and Anglican-Orthodox relations. He is the author of four books, *Praying the Eucharist, Toward a Fuller Vision: Orthodoxy and the Anglican Experience*, *The Gift of the World: An Introduction to the Theology of Dumitru Staniloae*, and *Richard Hooker and the Vision of God: Exploring the Origins of Anglicanism*.

D. Densil Morgan is Professor of Theology at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David and was previously Professor of Theology, Bangor University, Wales. He was educated at the University of Wales and the University of Oxford. Among his publications are *The Span of the Cross: Christian Religion and Society in Wales, 1914–2000*, *Barth Reception in Britain*, *The SPCK Introduction to Karl Barth*, *Wales and the Word: Historical Perspectives on Religion and Welsh Identity*, as well as books in Welsh on different aspects of theology and modern church history. He co-authored with A. M. Allchin *Sensuous Glory: The Poetry of D. Gwenallt Jones*.

Contributors

Barry A. Orford was born in Manchester and ordained in the Church in Wales. He worked in North and South Wales and in Yorkshire. From 2001 until his recent retirement he was Priest Librarian and Archivist at Pusey House in Oxford. He now lives near London.

Geoffrey Rowell is an Emeritus Fellow of Keble College, Oxford, where he served as Chaplain and Tutor in Theology from 1972 to 1993, teaching theology, church history, and Christian spirituality in the University. He was Bishop of Basingstoke from 1994 to 2001 and Bishop of Gibraltar in Europe from 2001 to 2013. He is the author of several books, including *The Vision Glorious: Themes and Personalities of the Catholic Revival in Anglicanism*, published to mark the 150th anniversary of the Oxford Movement in 1993, and was co-editor, with Rowan Williams and Kenneth Stevenson, of *Love's Redeeming Work: The Anglican Quest for Holiness*.

David Scott is an Anglican priest, spiritual writer, and poet. A friend of Donald's for almost fifty years, he was much influenced by his guidance. They had a shared affection for poetry, religious communities, and Thomas Merton. The latter led to the creation of the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland. David's most recent collection of poems is entitled *Beyond the Drift: New & Selected Poems*. He has published five collections of his poetry and won the National Poetry Competition in the UK in 1978. In 2008 the Archbishop of Canterbury conferred on Scott a Lambeth Doctorate of Letters.

Martin L. Smith is a priest of the Episcopal Church and the writer of a number of widely read books exploring contemporary spirituality. After reading theology at Oxford, he was ordained in 1970, served for three years in parish ministry, and then entered the Society of St. John the Evangelist. He became a member of the American Congregation of SSJE in 1979 and took American citizenship. After serving as Superior of the American Congregation, he left the Society in 2002 and moved to Washington DC, where he has been on the staff of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and St. Columba's Episcopal Church. In retirement he travels widely to lecture, preach and lead retreats.

Contributors

Patrick Thomas is Vicar of Christ Church, Carmarthen, and Canon Chancellor of St Davids Cathedral, Pembrokeshire. He is a former member of the Welsh Language Board and an honorary member of the Gorsedd of Bards. He has published books on a variety of subjects, including Welsh Celtic Spirituality, and worked with Donald Allchin and Densil Morgan on the volume *Sensuous Glory: The Poetic Vision of D. Gwenallt Jones*.

Esther de Waal is an Anglican lay woman who grew up in a Shropshire country vicarage and there had her first experience of history under the guidance of her father, who showed her the importance of recognizing the role of landscape and buildings, as well as the written word. This shaped her life, since it was the monastic remains at Canterbury that drew her to the Rule of St. Benedict, and the Irish High Crosses that first awakened her awareness of the Celtic tradition. Later her interest in the Cistercians, in Welsh religious poetry, and Thomas Traherne ensured that she and Donald continued to share those enthusiasms that had nourished their friendship since the 1950s. Esther and Donald edited *Daily Readings from Prayers & Praises in the Celtic Tradition*. She is the author of *Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict*.

Rowan Williams studied theology in Cambridge and then worked on modern Russian Orthodox thought at Oxford under Donald Allchin's supervision. He has been a teacher of theology in Oxford and Cambridge, served as Bishop of Monmouth for ten years, three of those also as Archbishop of Wales, then as Archbishop of Canterbury from 2002 to 2012. He is now Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge.

Introduction

Kallistos Ware, Metropolitan of Diokleia

Donald Allchin's friend Thomas Merton has written some striking words that apply exactly to Donald himself.

If I can unite *in myself* the thought and the devotion of Eastern and Western Christendom, the Greek and the Latin Fathers, the Russians with the Spanish mystics, I can prepare in myself the reunion of divided Christians. From that secret and unspoken unity in myself can eventually come a visible and manifest unity of all Christians. . . . We must contain all divided worlds in ourselves and transcend them in Christ.¹

Donald did indeed come close to realizing within himself “the secret and unspoken unity” of which Merton was speaking. Christian reconciliation was the central theme that inspired his life. To a remarkable degree he united in himself Eastern and Western Christendom, Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and the Anglican and Protestant worlds. He wrote scholarly works on monasticism in the Church of England and on the great Danish theologian N. F. S. Grundtvig. He was co-editor of a book on the hymns of John and Charles Wesley. He loved the land and the poetry of Wales. He numbered among his friends several of the leading theologians of the Orthodox Church, such as the Greeks Demetrios Koutroubis and Christos Yannaras, the Russian Vladimir Lossky and the Romanian Dumitru Staniloae. He was truly a bridge-builder.

1. Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 21. In this introduction I draw upon the obituary that I wrote on Donald Allchin in the journal of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St Sergius. Ware. “Obituary,” 37–46. Used with permission.