

Editorial

Of the poems in my middle school reader, one that I remember well is Joyce Kilmer's "Trees" (1886–1918). Here it is—

I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.
A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;
A tree that looks at God all day,
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;
A tree that may in Summer wear
A nest of robins in her hair;
Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
Who intimately lives with rain.
Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.¹

This issue features women in the role of trees. Nurturing women. **Kay Bonikowsky** sets the tone with Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) who, if she was cut, might well "bleed green." Hildegard lays out the intricate and inseparable interconnection between "soul and soil," articulating a powerful creation theology. She invites us to feast, like she did all her life, from "the earth's sweet flowing breast."

Ian Randall records the largely untold story of an Irish missionary in Kenya: Eva Stuart Watt (1891–1959). The peoples who populated the slopes of Kilimanjaro who received her attention and care gave her the name *Bibi Simba*, the Lioness. **Beulah Wood** introduces us to three Baptist Kiwi women, each a nurturer. Braving jungle treks and precarious river crossings, Nola Ivory (1904–1988) served as a medical doctor among the tribal people groups of east India. Her modest hospital constructed out of forest bamboo welcomed never-ending streams of refugees from the turbulent period in 1947 when the Indian sub-continent was divided into three countries. Tony Wansbrough

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(1941–present) found her mission with asylum-seekers in Auckland. Advocating on their behalf, finding them accommodation, attending to their medical needs, her work changed the lives of hundreds of asylum-seekers and their families. Marilyn Withers (1951–present) became a legend as a youth pastor, and for her remarkable work was awarded the King's Service Medal in the King's Birthday Honours List (2025).

All these were women who "intimately live[d] with rain." The sadness and sacrifice that drove their cause were daily companions. Yet, each, in their respective "summers," hosted many a happy "nest of robins."

In contrast to these is Herodias, hardly a tree. Using the parable of the soils, **David Malick** shows her to be seed that the birds immediately gobble up. Her husband Herod is equivalent to the plants that grow among thorns, quickly choked.

Carly Pruch helps us appreciate Paul's upending of cultural desirables in his Christ hymn of Philippians 2. Rather than jostle for social standing and strain after public honour as any self-respecting Roman would, the church at Philippi was to desire and practice humility. As a tree "looks at God all day," the Christ-follower is to turn their eyes towards the self-emptying Jesus. Pointedly, Pruch corrects the complementarian misconception that humility is particularly for women to adopt in their relationship with men.

I pray that this issue of *Priscilla Papers* inspires us, both men and women, to nurture. To be as "lovely as a tree."

Together, side by side, in God's world.

Havilah Dharamraj
Editor

Notes

1. Joyce Kilmer, "Trees" from *Poetry* 2/5 (August 1915): 153.

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On the Cover: Cover design: Cate Hong. Cover photo: Alessia Paggi, unsplash.com/@alepag.



Priscilla Papers (issn 0898-753x) is published quarterly by CBE International, 122 W Franklin Avenue, Suite 610, Minneapolis, MN 55404-2426 | cbeinternational.org | 612-872-6898
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