

# Growing in Grace: Formation Perspectives

*Wem* WAIOLAIHUI'IA CENTER for MINISTRY *For all God's people*

## Pray, Reflect, Act: Tools for Living the Gospel in Troubled Times

By The Rev. Cn. Andrew J. Arakawa, Canon for Ministry Formation

One of the tools I use for my prayer life is an app called *Pray as You Go* –[click here for the website](#). Some of you may be familiar with the app/website and even use it. *Pray as You Go*, created and operated by Jesuit Media Initiatives in the United Kingdom, offers daily prayer rooted in Ignatian spirituality. Each day, *Pray as You Go* presents a short (10–15 minutes) guided prayer session featuring music, a Scripture reading, and reflective questions. The music is always beautiful, and the questions are thoughtful and a great way to deepen engagement with Scripture.

This morning, Wednesday, September 24, the app offered a reading from the Book of Ezra (Ez. 9:5-9). The passage captures a deeply penitential prayer offered by Ezra as the Jewish community returns from Babylonian exile and seeks to restore life and worship in Jerusalem. Ezra, profoundly aware of his people's historical failings, physically expresses mourning by tearing his garments and fasting, then confesses the community's guilt and gratitude for God's brief favor amidst hardship.

The reflective questions that follow the reading challenge us to consider our contemporary situations in our communities, our nation, and our world.

- How many of the world's nations claiming to be Christian treat the poor, the stranger, the earth as kindly as God would have us do?
- How many of these nations are truly just?
- How many are compassionate?
- Is 'my nation first' really a Christian attitude?

Christian nationalism is raging through our communities, our country, our institutions, and our halls of government. A quick definition of Christian nationalism comes from the introduction to *The Crisis of Christian Nationalism: Report from the House of Bishops Theology Committee*, "Christian nationalism is an idolatry of white supremacist national ideology that uses the Christian religion as justification. Thus, it is fundamentally an apostasy that violates the first and second of the Ten Commandments."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> House of Bishops Theology Committee, *The Crisis of Christian Nationalism: Report from the House of Bishops Theology Committee* (New York, NY: Church Publishing, 2024), 12.

The final reflective question from this morning's time with *Pray as You Go* asks, "How is God inviting you to repair, rebuild, and create something good in the world?" In order to repair and rebuild, we need:

"tools with which to navigate the tensions we experience when our primary identity and loyalty to the Kingdom of God are in tension with our identity as members of our own families, culture, and nations. . . Being equipped to live faithfully in the world requires intentional formation, engaged in regularly. It means identifying leaders capable of learning and walking with others as they learn new ways of being together in the intimate, life-transforming practices of discipleship."<sup>2</sup>

To the above, I would like to add that we need resilience. I invite us to consider the 3Rs of Resilience:

- **Relationship** – Our connections matter. They offer guidance, empathy, and safe spaces for vulnerability, helping us navigate and recover from adversity. How are our relationships with our communities, the created world, ourselves, and God?
- **Rigor** – We need to actively embrace challenges rather than avoiding them. Productive struggle, which strikes a balance between rigor and appropriate support, prevents burnout and maintains progress. How are we allowing ourselves to step out with courage?
- **Roots** – Hold fast to our grounding as followers of Jesus. How are we continually strengthening ourselves, knowing that we are worthy and belong?

In a recent session with my Spiritual Director, he gave me a wonderful visualization to use when facing a challenging situation or something that requires deep discernment, and I offer it to you. The visualization asks you to imagine Jesus standing behind you with his hands on your shoulders. With Jesus, you look at the challenge at hand and hear him asking you, "What shall we make of this together?"

Dear friends, what shall we make of this together?

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*Growing in Grace – Formation Perspectives* seeks to cultivate a community of lifelong learners as disciples of Christ within our diocese. The articles offer resources, share formation stories, and give updates on the Waiolaihui'ia Center for Ministry. Please reach out to the Rev. Canon Andrew Arakawa if you have story ideas or resources that can add to this ongoing conversation: [arakawa@episcopalhawaii.org](mailto:arakawa@episcopalhawaii.org).

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 25.