

This Gladdening Light

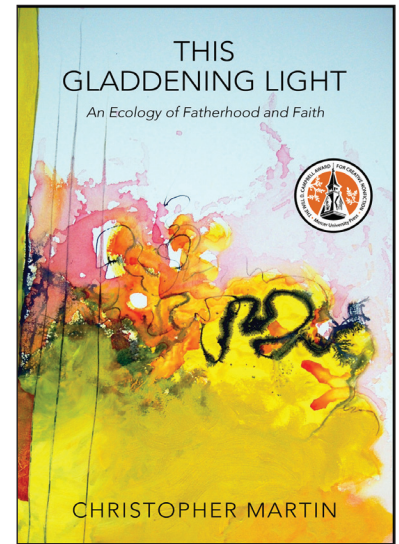
An Ecology of Fatherhood and Faith

by *Christopher Martin*

June 2017 - Memoir/Essays

9780881466157 • \$18.00 • Paperback • MUP/P544 • 172 pages • 5.5 x 8.5

Winner of *The Will D. Campbell Award for Creative Nonfiction*



Meditations along the
interconnected path to belonging

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Macon, Georgia—"With the eye of a poet and the heart of a saint, Christopher Martin explores a theology of love in this honest, gritty, and transcendent book," says Janisse Ray, author of *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood*. "Martin's quest, essentially, is for wisdom, and on this journey he brings his wise and beloved teachers—Thoreau, Merton, Jesus, nature—to inform the search. Oh god, if only we all were such seekers."

Part memoir, part essay collection, part spiritual journal, *This Gladdening Light* offers a unique perspective on the interconnectedness of universal themes—doubt and devotion, childhood and parenthood, disconnection and ecological mindfulness, anguish and empathy—all told at the level of the ground. This much-anticipated nonfiction debut from Christopher Martin is, ultimately, a work of belonging. Through narrative prose that moves between a rain-soaked Appalachian cove, Thoreau's hut site at Walden Pond, hospital rooms in Atlanta and Cherokee County, Civil War battlefields crossed by highways, and the suburbanized, ore-red hills of Northwest Georgia, Martin paints a spirituality of the ordinary, of the creaturely world. Lyrical meditations abound with wasps enduring in derelict farm machinery, wildflowers dwelling on the rocks of Arabia Mountain, and two children—whether singing old R.E.M. songs, seeking insignificant butterflies in a roadside ditch, or simply abiding within the timbre of their mother's heartbeat—all embody an "anonymous and unknown Christ who comes in merciful hiddenness to the distraught pilgrim," as Thomas Merton wrote.

This spirituality of the ordinary cannot ignore violence and injustice—the turmoil so often dismissed by manifestations of faith that lean toward prosperity, individualistic salvation, and the otherworldly—and Martin speaks to these themes, as well. The Gospel of Mary asks its readers to follow the "child of true humanity" that exists within. *This Gladdening Light* is no map to that inner child, as no map exists. But it is certainly one path along the pilgrimage.

"Over the past few years, I have continued to learn and listen, and in so doing have become much more aware of the pervasive violence and injustice at the core of a white, patriarchal structure that too often passes as Christian but is in reality far from it," says Martin. "I wish this book to be a testament against that structure, part of the 'single garment of destiny' and 'inescapable network of mutuality' that Dr. King talked about. This, of course, is a life's work, and I am grateful for those whose work has enriched and continues to enrich my own."

Christopher Martin is author of three poetry chapbooks, and his essays and poems have appeared in publications across the country. He is the founding editor of *Flycatcher*, an ecological journal, and a contributing editor at *New Southerner*, an online magazine promoting self-sufficiency, environmental stewardship, and support for local economies. *This Gladdening Light* is Martin's nonfiction book debut, and his full-length debut of any genre. Learn more about him at christopher-martin.net.

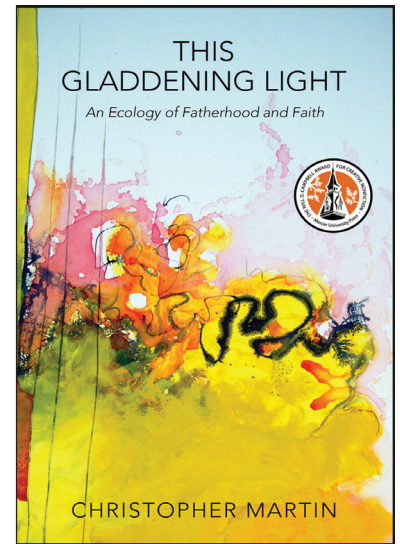
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Advance Praise

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—**Janisse Ray**, author of *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood*

Christian, father, husband, environmentalist, Southerner: those are all hard things to be in the twenty-first century. In these essays, we follow a young writer as he wrestles mightily with the implications and the complications of that identity. Our reward is Christopher Martin's honesty, bravery, and winning prose.

—**Erik Reece**, author of *Lost Mountain* and *An American Gospel*

In a world that chooses to define religious doctrine and faith-based practices in black and white terms, Christopher Martin sheds light on the gray area of spirituality. This gray area is a place of mindful questioning, honest struggle, and joyful observation that is no less earnest and devout than any other means of seeking the divine. Martin speaks with an unfettered heart about family, nature, life, and death in a beautiful collection of essays that are both relatable and poignant. He is bold in articulating what so many of us think, but maybe are too afraid to say. In *This Gladdening Light*, Martin explores what it is to be human alongside the great unknown that religion presents us. His words offer comfort to the restless, acceptance to the misunderstood, and a majestic view of the natural world—that ever expansive wilderness of small wonders that is God's creation.

—**Cristina M. Martin**, founding editor of *Loose Change Magazine*

Christopher Martin's poetry and essays connect with both the big and small concerns of life. With wry humor and lyricism, he travels in the tradition of H. D. Thoreau, Thomas Merton, Wendell Berry, and Mary Oliver, where a contemplation of nature is also a recognition of the Holy in all things. Nowhere is this recognition stronger than in children. *This Gladdening Light* is an exploration of what it means to be a father in the context of faith, contemporary events, and nature. It is extraordinary that this insightful work comes from a young writer, whose reflections on religion, nature, literature, and family create a synthesis of ideas and imagery that is as pleasurable to read as it is effecting.

—**Anthony Grooms**, author of *The Vain Conversation*, *Bombingham*, and *Trouble No More*