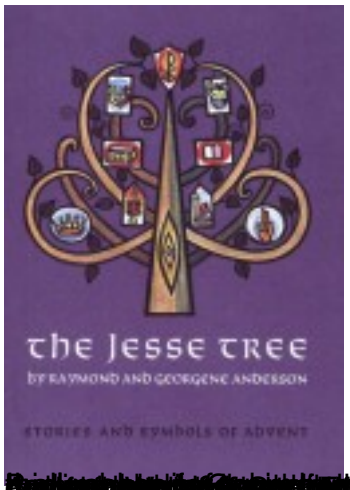


PROGRESS OR ADVENT?

Here in the early 21st century we're still a good deal more inclined to think in terms of "Progress" rather than in terms of "Advent." Despite the terrible experiences of the 20th century that ought to have sobered us up a bit, we still want to see ourselves as engaged in the great civilizational project of making the world "better"… by which we mean making ourselves more secure and comfortable as we build, restlessly, the vast social and technological systems we rely on now for just about everything. John Locke, the English political thinker said it a long time ago: our goal would be "comfortable self-preservation." It's a low goal but one about which most people can agree and make "progress" toward it more or less, on into the future…so long as we don't pause to think too much about it.

But the fact is, when we do think about it, deep down we know better. Progress makes life easier but gives no clue as to life's meaning, and when we have no sense of meaning, even an easy life doesn't seem worth the living.

It's a story older than John Locke. All the nations of the world are and always have been first and foremost about the business of preserving themselves: fighting off foreign enemies, restraining evil-doers, dealing with the constraints and exigencies of nature… We build our world to fend off death—that's how what Scripture calls "the nations" spend their lives. They use up their lives desperately delaying death.


the Jesse tree
BY RAYMOND AND GEORGENE ANDERSON
STORIES AND SYMBOLS OF ADVENT

