**Clarion Review**

Religion

**Nonetheless, God Retrieves Us: What a Yellow Lab Taught Me about Retrieval Spirituality**
Jonathan Bryan
Jonathan Bryan, illustrator
iUniverse
978-0-595-39583-5
Three Stars (out of Five)

"It felt good to have my doggy companion and good to enjoy the liberty of mutual trust and our unspoken covenant to stay together. All went well, this soul warming moment, until an aroma struck Jocko's nostrils…activating urges, luring Jocko away from me…into the neighbor's yard." Jocko, a yellow Labrador Retriever, provides occasion for insights into relationships between God and man, such as this incident, which causes Jonathan Bryan to muse "on how readily I break my own covenants for my own self gratification."

Jonathan Bryan, a community college English teacher, and Rector of an Episcopal parish, has two previous books: *A Life of Love, a Love of Life*, and *CrossRoads: Musings on a Father-Son Pilgrimage*. In his third book, *Nonetheless God Retrieves Us,* Bryan deals with what he calls a "nonetheless" response from God regarding our alienation. As he delineates the process, Bryan makes every effort to avoid religious clichés, describing the original state of perfect harmony with God as equilibrium. In spite of what we would expect as a response to our alienation from God (sinfulness), nonetheless (graciously) God continues to love us and strives to retrieve (reconcile, save, redeem) us for relationship with himself.

Bryan's ideas of God are complex, yet well explained. He approaches God through the concept of first cause, and expands his ideas "beyond comprehension, beyond definition, beyond time, space and matter…creating the potential" for all observable things and process.

He also leads us into an understanding of the content and meaning of the Bible. He analyzes fourteen episodes in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation and then relates them to the five stages of a good story: Equilibrium, Alienation, Suspense, Climax and Resolution.

Stories of Jocko abound, introducing most concepts contained in the book. When Jocko brought home "sticks and tennis balls in his jaws," "slobbery stuff…I did not treat him as the

father treated his prodigal son." Or regarding transcendence, "It's like Jocko. As far as he's concerned, we transcend his dogness. We provide; he knows not how. We correct him according to policies he cannot fathom. We live a life incomprehensible to his consciousness."

Bryan's doggedly innovative approach to a complex subject makes the difficult concepts understandable. None of his ideas are really new, but his presentation is fresh and entertaining. This could be a good introduction to the subject of theology, and for those who are too bound to traditional terminology the story of God's relationship to man, illustrated by man's relationship to a dog, will provide a real jolt. This is not just another doggone theology book.