



# Feathered Quill Book Reviews

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## The Fire Trail

By: Christine Sunderland  
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Reviewed by: Anita Lock  
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Christine Sunderland offers a thought-provoking viewpoint on the collapse of Western civilization in her latest murder mystery.

Twenty-two-year-old Cal student Jessica Thierry witnesses the rape and murder of a young woman while walking on the scenic Fire Trail. It is difficult for Jessica to get the horrific images out of her thoughts. Jessica is particularly unnerved by the fact that she and the murderer made eye contact. Between his dysfunctional family issues and the murder, Jessica has to find a way to keep her attention on her history dissertation research, instead of allowing herself to be engulfed by fear and worry. Fortunately, her advisor points her in the direction of the Comerford House, the perfect place to gather information for her thesis. Another Cal grad, twenty-six-year-old Zachary Aguilar hasn't been able to get Jessica off of his mind since he encountered her in one of his classes. While helping his docent mom Anna out at the Comerford House, Zachary is caught off guard when Jessica not only attends a house tour, but also applies for the open assistant docent position. A strong bond begins to build between Zachary and Jessica. Plus, Zachary's Catholic beliefs start to rub off on Jessica, providing her with a deep sense of peace and encouragement during this troubled season in her life. Yet Jessica is unaware that her newfound faith will soon undergo testing.

Sunderland chooses her own stomping ground for the backdrop in her sixth religious novel. Featuring the popular Fire Trail frequented by "joggers, walkers, and hikers of all ages," Sunderland has created a story that draws from the Catholic faith as well as raises issues of free speech and relaxed sexuality (as a result of the sexual revolution of the 1960s) and its effects on society. Sunderland's fictional cast is surrounded by the histories of Berkley and the beneficial work of the Presentation Sisters, while punctuating factual news articles from September 2014.

Forthright about her deep concerns with "America's cultural collapse, the decline in civil order, and threats to freedom of speech and religion," Sunderland unflinchingly weaves in conservative perspectives that give readers plenty of food for thought. Examples include

speeches from speakers at the Fidelity Society highlighting sexual purity and encouraging traditional marriage. Although fictionalized, the Fidelity Society "is loosely based on the Anscombe Society (which began at Princeton), and the Love and Fidelity network, which links such university groups." Incorporating a flurry of expected and unanticipated scenes, Sunderland's plot is a nice mix of fact and mystery from beginning to end.

Quill says: *The Fire Trail* is a perfect read for religious enthusiasts.