Valparaiso University
ValpoScholar

The Cresset (archived issues)

11-2002

The Cresset (Vol. LXVI, No. 2, Christmas)

Valparaiso University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.valpo.edu/cresset_archive

Part of the Arts and Humanities Commons, and the Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons

This Full Issue is brought to you for free and open access by ValpoScholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Cresset (archived issues) by an authorized administrator of ValpoScholar. For more information, please contact a ValpoScholar staff member at scholar@valpo.edu.

6612

THE CRESSET

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE, THE ARTS, AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

1967 SADAO WATANABE

Christmas | 2002

THE CRESSET

Alan F. Harre, *Publisher*
Thomas D. Kennedy, *Editor*
November 2002, Christmas
Vol. LXVI, No.2 ISSN 0011-1198

Valparaiso University
Valparaiso, Indiana 46383

***Cresset* Staff & Departmental Editors**

Melissa Peronto
Assistant Editor
Jessica Pleuss
Web Page Manager
Julie Davidson
Office Manager

Gregg Hertzlieb
Art Editor
John Ruff
Poetry Editor
Ralph Klapis
Copy Editor

General Advisory Board

Marcia Bunge
John Feaster
Michelle Janssen
Fred Niedner
Mark Schwehn
Al Trost

Editorial Advisory Board

Michael Barrett
Scott Huelin
Kathleen Kostel
Thelma Megill-Cobbler
Gilbert Meilaender
David Morgan
David M. Owens
Richard Stith
Mary Treanor
Robin Visser
Stan Zygmunt

Cover:

Sadao Watanabe
(1913-1996)
Untitled (Nativity),
1967
Katazome dyed stencil print
Gift of Jack A. Hiller
Brauer Museuem of Art, 87.18
Valparaiso University

THE CRESSET is published five times during the academic year by the Valparaiso University Press as a forum for informed opinion about literature, the arts, and public affairs. The views presented are not thereby endorsed by Valparaiso University nor are they intended to represent the views of the faculty and staff of the university. Manuscripts should be addressed to the Editor and accompanied by return postage. Letters to the Editor for publication are subject to editing for brevity. *The Book Review Index* and the *American Humanities Index* list Cresset reviews. Periodicals postage is paid at Valparaiso, Indiana. Regular Subscription rates: $20.00 per year, Student/Senior subscription rates: $10.00 per year; single copy: $5.00. International subscriptions add $8.00. Entire contents copyrighted 2002 by the Valparaiso University Press, Valparaiso, Indiana 46383, without whose written permission reproduction in whole or in part for any purpose whatsoever is expressly forbidden. *Postmaster* send address changes to The Cresset, Huegli Hall, Valparaiso University, 1409 Chapel Dr, Valparaiso, IN 46383.

Readers are encouraged to address the Editor and staff at cresset@valpo.edu or http://www.valpo.edu/cresset/

In Luce Tua

still I sent up my prayer wonderin' who was there to hear

You might not be able to tell it by my practice, but I happen to think talking to God is, more or less, a good thing. Of course there are places and times when you shouldn't talk to God. I have in mind four-way stops, although I'd much rather that folks talk to God at four-way stops than to anyone who can be reached by cell phone. Generally, I'm opposed to talking to God during musical performances, unless it is the performer talking to God, in which case it may be a good thing. I do say "may." It may also be the case that one can't do a good job of either singing or praying if one is trying to do both excellently. I don't think talking to God in a musical performance is wrong so much as it is missing the point of both prayer and performance. No matter how good you are at multi-tasking, when it comes to prayer you can't serve two masters.

Talking to God has been much in the news after 9/11, much of that news originating in some of the religious communities where this journal is read. There the issue has to do with Christian prayer in interfaith religious services. *Cresset* readers can get that news—or try to get the news—elsewhere. But if we are embarrassed by much of that news, as we ought to be, we also ought to admit that the troublemakers are not entirely misguided.

To many folks, interfaith prayer looks like a "no-brainer." People coming together, uniting for some purpose other than financial gain—that's a good thing. People who have historically not come together, indeed, who have often been at one another's throats, finally talking together, learning about one another, about their similarities as well as their differences—it couldn't hurt to try. Wouldn't the world be a better place if more people attempted more often to transcend their differences in order to accomplish some good? It is this moral drive, a praiseworthy moral drive, that is behind much interfaith activity, and that establishes the goodness of interfaith conversation and service.

But interfaith service and conversation is not interfaith worship or interfaith prayer, and that's the rub for many Christian folk and, no doubt, for Jewish and Muslim folk as well. There is a difference between loving one's neighbors and loving one's spouse and it is good for neither one's marriage nor the neighborhood to ignore that difference.

Christians have good theological and even moral reasons for worrying about interfaith prayer. On the theological front, Christians believe that God is known best and seen most clearly as he has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. Thus, Christian prayer is essentially Trinitarian, and Christians should be no more willing to act in a manner that denies that essence than others who deny the Trinity would be willing to embrace it. It is nonsense, of course, to say that Jews and Muslims have only false beliefs about God. (I am a Christian who has learned a lot and who still has a lot to learn from the Jewish tradition.) Just as we share a common story, so we believe many of the same things about God. That commonality means a lot on many philosophical projects where a theistic understanding of things is noticeably different from a non-theistic understanding; we ought to be better co-workers on such projects. Despite this commonality (and I don't think this commonality entails a perfect parity between Christian theism's two fellow-travelers), there are major differences between the three religions in their understandings of how God engages the world, of what God has done and is doing in the world, and of who God is. It may well be that many of the perceptions of God of each of the three faiths are mistaken; it doesn't follow that no perceptions are more accurate than others, or that one should believe that, say, a Trinitarian understanding of God is not more accurate, only different, than non-Trinitarian understandings. Nor does it follow that anyone gains by gliding over this and other major differences between the faiths. (The tendency to ignore real differences in order to achieve "unity" was well-represented by a local cleric who announced that he was inviting

his atheist friends to join him in a recent interfaith prayer service. I do not know to which god in whom he did not believe the atheist was expected to send his "prayers.")

Many Christians, Jews, and Muslims would grant this, would grant the real differences between the faiths, but argue that in interfaith prayer we are not praying with, but praying alongside those of other faiths. We're each doing our own thing, but we're doing our own things together. This strikes me as rather similar to inviting members of a football team, a soccer team, and a rugby team to the local stadium to play a game alongside one another; after all they are each field sports. Perhaps it could be done, perhaps the three could play alongside each other on the same field, but why would anyone want to do it? What would be the advantage? Wouldn't it make more sense to have the football, soccer, and rugby games one after the other, each sport encouraging players of the other sports to watch them at work? Wouldn't people who watched the three games sequentially better understand the similarities and differences between the three sports? Wouldn't a soccer player be less likely to try to catch the ball with his hands if there were no football or rugby players nearby? Who really benefits from such an intersport game?

I have assumed, rather than established, that there are real and significant differences between even the three major theistic faiths, never mind the differences between theistic religions and polytheistic or atheistic religions. If so, it looks like interfaith prayer, with its implication that everyone is doing the same thing, is too much—too much apparent unity when the reality is great difference. But perhaps I am wrong. Perhaps there really is that much unity in the world's religions, especially the three monotheistic faiths. If so, then we might better fault the religious leaders for doing too little. Why only pray together? Why not tell us, and lead us, to the unity that these prophets see in the religions? Let us, too, be enlightened. So, take your choice, interfaith prayer looks either like too much or too little. Ordinarily, we ought to resist the well-intentioned desire to join in public prayer with others not of our faith.

Ordinarily. But I can imagine times when interfaith prayer might be appropriate. Followers of Jesus ought to look upon Dwight D. Eisenhower's famous "All Americans ought to believe in God and I don't care which God it is," with more than a little suspicion. What Eisenhower was right about is that religious belief, especially vague, generic religious belief, is helpful in uniting a people, in enlisting individuals in the service and love of their country. What Eisenhower failed to recognize is that the God Christians believe in, the Trinitarian God who calls Christians to faithfulness, is a jealous God, and rarely does this God see eye to eye with the god of civil religion.

Rarely, but it is not impossible. When some policy grants greater protection for the voiceless and preyed upon, that is something Christians know the true God, too, wants. A state that recognizes the dignity of all persons created in God's image is a state that, at least to that extent, receives God's favor. In these contexts it is not inappropriate for Christians to regard publicly calling upon God's name in much the same way that Paul regarded worship of "the unknown god" of the Athenians. Paul and Christians recognize the idolatry of the worship of the unknown God of civil religion as well as that the true God is seen, albeit most dimly, in this pagan worship. Paul did not advocate that Christians join in the worship of the unknown god; nor should Christians yield uncritically to the god of civil religion; there is a danger in bowing before such a god, even in reciting the pledge of allegiance. But that is a danger that we citizens of two communities—one temporal and one eternal—may be called to risk. (It may be a risk that is easiest, that is to say, least risky, for those of us who live in places that still trade on the borrowed capital of a now abandoned Christendom.)

One can imagine circumstances in which the unity and goodness of an earthly city is so imperiled, when so many are in such great need of solace, that Christians might be called to suspend, for a time, our warranted reluctance to pray publicly with others whose understanding of God differs from ours. In times of national emergency for a good state, it may be right to join together with others in a non-Trinitarian prayer, in a prayer to the unknown god of civil religion, aware, nevertheless, that this unknown god is but a shadow of the true God who has shown his face in Christ Jesus. Perhaps there is some way for Christians to "pray through" an unknown God?

Such prayer might not be apostasy, though that is a danger. Wise Christians, while willing for a moment—and only for a moment— not to name the Trinity who has surnamed them, will nevertheless take precautions and erect safeguards to prevent the conflation of the true God and the unknown god of civil religion. Prayer in times of national emergency, prayer to the unknown god, thus, must be genuinely public prayer, in public places rather than in houses of worship, free of the language of the particular God of faith. Such prayer may bring solace, if only a temporal solace. Such prayer may inspire goodness, if only a temporal goodness. But that temporal goodness may protect our liberty to return to our particular places of faith to pray to the God we know, to the God who has shown his face, whose Incarnation we celebrate this season.

TDK

CHRISTMAS, 1999

Mary, she blows on her knuckle
The wind so cold
The night and the snow:
Mary, she blows on her knuckle
And Joseph, he blows on the coal.

The donkey that bore the young mother
Sing lullabies
On perilous ice:
The donkey that bore the young mother
Bore the bearer of Jesus, our Christ

Mary, she hasn't the ticking
Cold, earthen floor
The wind at the door:
Mary, she hasn't a mattress
For catching her Christ and our Lord.

Joseph, he doffs his warm clothing
Bind hay in the stable
To make a small cradle:
Joseph, he gives up his clothing
And serves her as well as he can.

We are the watchers who watch them
Two cries in the night,
One pain and one fright:
We are the watchers while Mary
Gives breath to the baby and life.

We are the beasts and the singers
Ba! Ba!
Gloria!
We are the hosts and the shepherds
Who see and who run with the sight—

While Mary, she blows on her baby
The wind so cold,
The night and the snow:
While Mary, she kisses her infant
And Joseph, he brightens that coal.

Walter Wangerin, Jr.

The Bible and the BBC:
Dorothy L. Sayers's Working-Class Voices

Martha Greene Eads

Marti Greene Eads is a Lilly Fellow at Valparaiso University.

In *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain*, historian David Cannadine acknowledges his nation's reputation for social self-consciousness. "It is widely believed," he writes, "both in Britain and abroad, that the British are obsessed with class in the way that other nations are obsessed with food or race or sex or drugs or alcohol." His fellow-countryman, editor and biographer Frank Harris, made a similar observation decades earlier. "Snobbery is the religion of England," asserted Harris in 1925.

Although she is herself sometimes accused of snobbery, Dorothy L. Sayers, one of Harris's contemporaries, thoughtfully explored issues of class in her radio biblical dramas for the BBC. Better known for her work in other genres, Sayers wrote a Nativity and then an entire play cycle about the life of Christ. As the daughter of a High-Church Anglican priest and one of the first women to receive an Oxford degree, Sayers enjoyed a relatively privileged background. That background and her mystery novels about the aristocratic sleuth Lord Peter Wimsey have prompted many to label her elitist. In moving from detective fiction to radio drama, however, Sayers became an unlikely ally of the working class. In her radio plays *He That Should Come* (1938) and *The Man Born To Be King* (1941-2), she spoke for popular audiences in voices like their own.

Sayers had two primary goals in using vernacular speech in these plays. First, and on the most practical level, she wanted to enable listeners to distinguish among her characters, and giving them accents was one way of doing that. Second, Sayers believed that a correct theology of the Incarnation yields a realistic depiction of the life of Jesus. In taking on flesh, Christ also took on an ethnic identity, an economic status, and an accent. Sayers's emphasis on Christ's particularity, and the particularity of those around him, prompted her to use modern vernacular speech in a manner that ultimately challenged English views of class.

Although she made her living first by creating advertising campaigns and later by writing detective fiction, Sayers also worked as a poet, playwright, essayist, and translator of medieval French and Italian texts. She cut her dramatic teeth on a romantic comedy, *Busman's Honeymoon* (1936), featuring Lord Peter Wimsey and his beloved Harriet Vane. Having established her reputation and a measure of financial security with her detectives, Sayers then turned to writing about the theological matters that fascinated her. Her first religious drama, *He That Should Come*, was performed on BBC Radio on Christmas Day, 1938, and was soon published with directions for stage production. The practicality of Sayers's production notes, the play's focus on characterization, and its use of natural-sounding speech yielded a wildly popular and down-to-earth treatment of the loftiest of subjects.

She explains her approach in her "Note to Producers" for *He That Should Come*:

> I feel sure that it is in the interests of a true reverence towards the Incarnate Godhead to show that His Manhood was a real manhood, subject to the common realities of daily life; that the men and women surrounding Him were living human beings, not just characters in a story; that, in short, He was born, not into "the Bible," but into the world.

In her drama, even Mary and Joseph sound like typical working-class people, asking only for a "shake-down" somewhere on the crowded property. Sayers carefully worked out appropriate speech for the innkeeper and his staff, the shepherds, and various guests at the inn. While Clementine Churchill wrote to the BBC that she, her husband Winston, and their children had "never enjoyed anything more" than *He That Should Come*, a rural listener also observed from her considerably lower rung on the English social ladder that "it's nice to think that people in the Bible were folks like us."

Ken Worpole's work on class and speech suggests that this latter response to a British radio broadcast must have been unusual. In his discussion of BBC English, Worpole cites *The Spoken Word*, a 1981 BBC staff pamphlet that describes appropriate radio diction as "that of a person born and brought up in one of the Home Counties, educated at one of the established southern universities, and not yet so set in his ways that all linguistic change is regarded as unacceptable." In other words, the more one sounds like an upper-class Londoner who attended Cambridge or Oxford, the better. Guidelines in Sayers's own day, fifty years earlier, were even less flexible. John Reith, the BBC's General Director from 1922 to 1938, was so committed to elevating the tastes of his listeners that he required radio announcers to wear dinner jackets while broadcasting. Worpole asserts that the BBC's cultural authority had a stifling effect on the working class:

> Given such a powerful and monopolistic apparatus, together with compulsory state education and its insistence on Standard speech forms and the omnipresent rule of classroom silence well into the 1950s, then it is not surprising that in the first half of this century, the majority of the population had very few cultural institutions in which they could recognise themselves and create their own new forms of cultural practice.

With *He That Should Come*, however, even working-class listeners finally had radio program characters with whom they could identify. Pleased with the Nativity play's reception, James W. Welch, the BBC's newly appointed Director of Religious Broadcasting, approached Sayers in February 1940, asking her to write a series of 30-minute plays for broadcast during the Sunday evening *Children's Hour*. The series would be called *The Man Born To Be King*.

In the first of the series' twelve plays, *Kings in Judea*, Sayers establishes not only her characters and their political situation but also their class. Her notes to the producer are most helpful in this regard, describing the personal qualities and backgrounds of the characters—from the magi down to the "pretty, pert, and thoroughly spoilt" slave boy at Herod's court. Sayers gives attention to accents here, establishing the shepherd's wife as "a nice, kind, bustling, motherly person. Country accent." She describes Joseph as "an artisan of a good class; a little sententious and given to quoting the Scriptures—he is the kind of man who reads his Bible regularly. He has a slight provincial accent, but less pronounced than that of the SHEPHERD'S WIFE." Mary "must be played with dignity and sincerity, and with perfect simplicity. Her voice is sweet, but not sugary; and there must be no trace of any kind of affectation. A very slight touch of accent—perhaps a faint shadow of Irish quality—would be of assistance in keeping her in her 'station of life'. . . ."

Sayers's concern for class emerges again in the first play's production notes as she directs the Roman characters to exhibit social differences through speech. She acknowledges that the most realistic portrayal of the characters would have Jesus and his fellow-Galiliean characters all speaking with one local dialect while characters from Jerusalem use another, but such pronounced differences would be likely to overwhelm listeners. Her solution is to give the disciples speech slightly

more elevated than that of the crowds, with variations among them: "John and Judas, for example, speaking Standard English, Peter being kept rougher (in preparation for his recognition as a Galilean peasant by the High Priest's people), and Matthew being given a Cockney twang to distinguish the 'townee' petty official from the country fishermen." Sayers's attention to dialect and inflection thus helps radio listeners distinguish among the characters, but it also illustrates real differences in culture and class.

Sayers's use of vernacular speech had contributed significantly to the success of *He That Should Come*, but it created challenges for her as she worked on *The Man Born to Be King*. The most colorful crisis developed when the public learned that Matthew was to be a Cockney. Sayers played up the Matthew-controversy at a press conference for *The Man Born To Be King* on 10 December 1941. After speaking about the project, she read several passages, including one from the fourth play in which Matthew tells a gullible fellow-disciple that he has "been had for a sucker." The press took Sayers's bait and publicized the production with such headlines as "BBC 'Life of Christ' in Slang" and "Gangsterisms in the Bible Play." The BBC received a letter from one concerned citizen who wrote, "Two shocks broke on us this past week: Pearl Harbor and *The Man Born To Be King*." Donald Low points out that "it was not for nothing that the author of *Murder Must Advertise* had served as an advertising copywriter. The ensuing furor resulted in *The Man Born To Be King* attracting more attention than any other BBC radio plays before or since."

In spite of floods of complaint letters to the Prime Minister, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the BBC, Welch aired the first of the series' twelve plays, *Kings in Judaea*, on 21 December 1941. The press quickly changed its tune, and many who had been suspicious of the production wrote to thank the BBC for an engaging and reverent program. Consulting with a thirteen-member Central Religious Advisory Committee, Welch gained approval for the rest of the series one play at a time. When Welch informed Sayers in February 1942 that committee chairman Cyril Garbett, the Bishop of Winchester, had questioned the language in the fourth play, Sayers anticipated that he would be even more upset about the scourging and crucifixion scenes to come. In a confidential letter to Welch, she outlines her position:

> I will not allow the Roman soldiers to use barrack-room oaths, but they must behave like common soldiers hanging a common criminal, or what is the point of the story? The impenitent thief cannot curse and yell as you or I would if we were skewered up with nails to a post in the broiling sun, but he must not talk like a Sunday School child. Nobody cares a dump nowadays that Christ was "scourged, railed upon, buffeted, mocked, and crucified", because all those words have grown hypnotic with ecclesiastical use. But it does give people a slight shock to be shown that God was flogged, spat upon, called dirty names, slugged in the jaw, insulted with vulgar jokes, and spiked up on the gallows like an owl on a barn-door.
>
> That's the thing the priests and people did—has the Bishop forgotten it? It is an ugly, tear-stained, sweat-stained, blood-stained story, and the thing was done by callous, conceited and cruel people. Shocked? We damn well ought to be shocked. If nobody is going to be shocked we might as well not tell them about it.

Sayers visited Garbett, by then the new Archbishop-elect of York, on 30 March, and he offered fewer criticisms as the series progressed. Continuing to expect him to object to the Crucifixion play, *King of Sorrows*, she wrote to Val Gielgud, the show's director, on 18 August: "It is pretty brutal and full of bad language, but you can't expect crucified robbers to talk like a Sunday-school class. The Archbishop will probably fall dead and all the parents will complain. The children won't mind—they like blood and tortures. . . ." Only a day after *King of Sorrows* aired on 20 September 1942, however, Garbett wrote to thank Sayers for writing the play and to apologize for having asked for changes to earlier scripts.

The last play in the series, *The King Comes to His Own*, aired on 18 October 1942. After its

early vilification by the press and the public, the entire production proved a remarkable success. Welch chronicles its meteoric rise in the minds of listeners in his foreword to the 1944 edition of the plays, writing, "[Opponents of the production] said that Singapore fell because these plays were broadcast, and appealed for them to be taken off before a like fate came to Australia! They were answered by the supporter who thanked us for the plays which (ending in October) 'made possible the November victories in Libya and Russia'!" Slightly over twelve percent of adult BBC listeners tuned in to the second installment of the children's series, and Welch estimated that more than two million adults listened over the next year. BBC historian Kenneth M. Wolfe writes that the children and young people reached were "innumerable." He asserted in 1984 that "[t]he Sayers cycle rooted the lectionary of the Church of England in storytelling and theatre. . . .It was colloquial and perhaps convincing: above all it was popular, and the common people heard it gladly. That it was the most astonishing and far-reaching innovation in all religious broadcasting so far is beyond dispute."

Pronouncing Sayers "a prophet to this generation," Welch urged William Temple, the Archbishop of Canterbury, to award her the Lambeth Degree of Doctor of Divinity. Temple agreed that *The Man Born To Be King* and Sayers's book *The Mind of the Maker* were valuable enough to make her the first female recipient of the Lambeth D.D., but Sayers declined his offer for personal reasons. Even so, she was becoming an unofficial spokesperson for the Christian faith. As early as August 1940, she had confessed in a letter to Cambridge University theologian Donald Mackinnon about *He That Should Come*, "I've got wound up accidentally into this theological business, and I feel more and more ridiculous as it goes rollicking along. I only started by writing a play and trying to make its theology orthodox, and look what's happened to me!"

Although Sayers had good dramatic reasons for emphasizing realism and particularity, her commitment to orthodox Anglican theology, with its high regard for the material world as the site of divine activity, had necessitated an emphasis on Christ's incarnation. She explains in her introduction to *The Man Born To Be King*:

> For Jesus Christ is unique—unique among gods and men. There have been incarnate gods aplenty, and slain-and-resurrected gods not a few; but He is the only God who has a date in history. And plenty of founders of religions have had dates, and some of them have been prophets or avatars of the Divine; but only this one of them was personally God. . . In the light of that remarkable piece of chronology we can see an additional reason why the writer of realistic Gospel plays has. . .to display the words and actions of actual people engaged in living through a piece of recorded history. He cannot, like the writer of purely liturgical or symbolic religious drama, confine himself to the abstract and universal aspect of the life of Christ. He is brought up face to face with the "scandal of particularity."

That scandal becomes the source of Sayers's treatment of class in her biblical radio plays. Their very particularity demands the presence of characters of diverse social backgrounds, and the pains she takes to delineate them ensures that she will reveal their origins and alignments. From the Cockney Matthew to Claudia, the patrician wife of Pontius Pilate, Sayers creates characters who illustrate social stratification. Her controversial use of modern vernacular speech served to demonstrate to her radio audiences their own social contexts. Sayers hoped that "[tearing] off the disguise of the Jacobean idiom, [going] back into the homely Greek of Mark or John," and "[translating] it into its current English counterpart" would enable every audience member to see his own relationship to the gospel story. Her mirror reflects more than just an individual's spiritual condition, however; it reveals his economic and social context, as well.

The popular response to *The Man Born To Be King* suggests that Sayers's sensitivity to the relationship of speech and class enabled her to write convincingly about and to twentieth-century English men and women whose lives were nothing like that of her detective Lord Peter Wimsey. J.W. Welch reports that among the hundreds of listeners who wrote to thank the BBC for the series was one who related:

> I am a very ordinary and humble person—a factory forewoman by trade, and it's because of that, that I know many working folk will listen and learn from these plays who would never desire to listen to a set church service on the wireless—for instance, my folk are not what one calls "religious," and "organized" religion they think has lost its usefulness. . ., but the first broadcast of your play was listened to attentively by seven of us, and we learned something we didn't realise before, and I for one was very grateful.

That listener's sense of the radio biblical drama's being for *her* is in keeping with the presentation Sayers had tried to offer: that of a gospel offered equally to tax collectors, fishermen, blind beggars, politicians' wives, and magi-kings. Although her concerns were artistic and theological, Sayers's attention to the gospel's claims about human equality produced for the conservative BBC a surprisingly progressive play. Her sense of the dramatic and her commitment to incarnational theology yielded radio biblical drama that, like the Gospel itself, invites us to examine the hierarchies our cultural institutions and even our religious traditions so often affirm. ✠

LAST DAYS

I am not surprised that God worries about cattle in Nineveh.
Cattle never answer divine impetuosity
by beating plowshares into swords.
They would no more break the earth than
break into a song about suffering they have known.
But they have known suffering.
See the sorrow in their eyes and know
they know death as sure as you or I.
God does not have to shout them down,
even in last days when they cry
because brooks run dry and fire
has devoured pastures. They cry silently,
wait patiently for God to remember.
They have never ploughed, never
ploughed iniquity, never
reaped injustice, never
eaten the fruits of lies, never
trusted chariots or warriors.
But they know war with an intimacy
that passes human understanding, and
they know waiting.

Even the land mourns,
and people are destroyed for what they do not
know, not for what they do.
My father is an old man now, and I am not
young.
I was with him last night when
he woke from a dream and sat in darkness
contemplating death.
But I do not know what vision young men see
when child soldiers inspire less fear than the daily mail.

Steven Schroeder

On Not Speaking of Man in a Loud Voice:
Flannery O'Connor's Grotesque Preachers of the Gospel

Ralph C. Wood

The Tennessee literary critic Robert Drake once declared that Jesus is the real hero of Flannery O'Connor's fiction, and O'Connor herself admitted that the voices that speak in her stories are closer to the Old Testament than to any other book. Her characters have the direct personal communication with God, she confessed, that characterizes Scripture itself. (Sally Fitzgerald, ed. *Flannery O'Connor: Collected Works* [New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1988], 963. All further references to O'Connor's work will be cited with parenthetical page numbers.) While O'-Connor's pistol-shot sentences do not declare, "Thus saith the Lord," their directness has a decidedly biblical quality. Evelyn Waugh infamously and incredulously said of *Wise Blood* that, "If this is really the unaided work of a young lady, it is a remarkable product" (897). He probably referred to the novel's shocking violence, but he may also have alluded to the prophetic directness of its narrative technique. The wintry plainness of O'Connor's prose, its dry and tart matter-of-factness, its spare straightforwardness—none of these allows the lazy luxuriation of mere eloquence. Even repeated re-readings of O'Connor's fiction prompt fear and trembling, not only in the foreknowledge that someone will get gored or blinded or shot, but also in the dread that we ourselves will be eviscerated. A former student, the late John Millis, put the matter sharply when he said that, while no one's salvation depends on getting Faulkner right, we read O'Connor knowing that the stakes are ultimate.

Ralph C. Wood is University Professor of Theology and Literature at Baylor University.

For O'Connor, a faith worthy of belief must also be worth proclaiming to others. Christians who do not make drastic witness to Jesus Christ, whether by singular words or lifetime deeds, are deniers of their Lord. The Gospel is a message of such radical divine deliverance that it allows no neutral response. It must be either embraced or rejected, and in both cases it excites a necessary vehemence. O'Connor found Southern fundamentalist preaching, because it is often a shouted and sweated affair, quite congenial to her imagination. The aim of this essay is to listen carefully to two of O'Connor's backwoods preachers, and thus to discover the grotesque truth that they proclaim.

Hazel Motes as a scandalized preacher of nihilism

Wise Blood, Flannery O'Connor's first novel, was published in 1952 when she was only twenty-seven. Her protagonist-antagonist is a preacher, Hazel Motes. He has heard the radical summons of the Gospel from his grandfather, an itinerant evangelist. We learn quickly that O'Connor does not regard preachers as church functionaries who regard the *evangelium* as a form of either therapeutic or civil religion. Motes's ancestor was "a waspish old man who had ridden over three counties with Jesus hidden in his head like a stinger" (20). This uncouth proclaimer of the Word stung his audiences with the awful Truth:

> They were like stones, he would shout! But Jesus had died to redeem them! Jesus was so soul-hungry that He had died, one death for all, but He would have died every soul's death for one! Did they understand that? Did they understand that for each stone soul, He would have died ten million deaths, had His arms and legs stretched on the cross

> and nailed ten million times for one of them? (The old man would point to his grandson, Haze. [...]). Did they know that even for that boy there, for that mean sinful unthinking boy standing there with his dirty hands clenching and unclenching at his sides, Jesus would die ten million deaths before He would let him lose his soul? He would chase him over the waters of sin! Did they doubt Jesus could walk on the waters of sin? The boy had been redeemed and Jesus wasn't going to leave him alone ever. [....] Jesus would have him in the end. (10-11)

Hazel Motes is properly scandalized. He spends the rest of his life wrestling with his grandfather's claims, trying desperately to deny them. Motes knows that the Word he has heard from the old man cries out for total embrace or total rejection. Why, he must ask, would Jesus die ten million deaths to save one boy's soul? What are the waters of sin, and why can Jesus walk on them? Why won't this Jesus just let Hazel alone—leaving him free from responsibility to anyone or anything but himself, letting him remain content to live entirely for his present pleasure and to avoid all considerations of sin, death, and the devil? The youthful Motes had tried to elude his grandfather's summons by living in utter self-control: "the way to avoid Jesus was to avoid sin" (22). The doctrine of humanity's original sinfulness is a profound affront to Hazel. It makes him answerable to evils that he cannot even name, including the transgressions of his primal parents: "If I was in sin I was in it before I ever committed any. There's no change come in me. [...] I don't believe in sin" (29). Hence his determination to avoid Christ's grasp by remaining morally uncorrupted.

Young Motes learned that it is no easy task to avoid sin. At a carnival sideshow, he had seen a naked woman squirming in a casket. The mature Motes recalls his father's candid response: "Had one of themther built into ever' casket [...] be a heap ready to go sooner" (75). No easy hedonist like this father, the boy was overwhelmed by a nameless and placeless guilt. Knowing nothing of the Freudian link between *eros* and *thanatos* that the casket-scene suggests, Motes's mother nonetheless saw the shame written on Hazel's face, and she caned him for it. Yet she had also offered the boy a word of hope: "Jesus died to redeem you." Wanting no such reliance on Another, Motes had muttered in reply, "I never ast him." Instead, he walked with stones in his shoes in order to make his own self-sufficient penance: "He thought, that ought to satisfy Him." Much to Hazel's consternation, his self-saving act produced no divine response: "Nothing happened" (36).

Motes's self-punishment fails to satisfy because it is self-referential. If there is no God, there is only the human self, living for little else than its own satisfactions. Still trying to prove that sin is a meaningless word, Motes visits a whorehouse. Yet he finds no pleasure in his prostitute. Indeed, she must remind him to take off his hat! Since carnal indulgence cannot satisfy Motes's Augustinian restlessness, he resorts to blasphemy against all Christian hope of transcendent transformation: "I'm member and preacher to that church where the blind don't see and the lame don't walk and what's dead stays that way" (59).

We must be clear that O'Connor honors the rigor and seriousness of Motes's unbelief. When she confessed that she was a Catholic not as someone else would be a Methodist or a Baptist, but as someone else would be an atheist, she was paying tribute to atheists. It requires enormous energy and care to deny the real God. Precisely because he takes God so seriously does Motes scandalize the ordinary Christians he encounters. He is obsessed with the God whom they thoughtlessly take for granted. In one of the novel's most hilarious scenes, he confronts a church-going lady with a startling declaration: "I reckon you think you've been redeemed." Blushing at this blunt suggestion, the poor woman stammers, "Yes, life is an inspiration" (6). Though he doesn't know about Nietzsche's complaint that the redeemed ought to look more like it, Motes makes similar judgments. He accosts one unsuspecting woman with the charge that, "If you've been redeemed [...] I wouldn't want to be." He startles yet another person by asking, "Do you think I believe in Jesus? [...] Well I wouldn't even if He existed. Even if He was on this train" (7).

Gradually Hazel Motes comes to see that all his denials are parasitic, that his bitter negations

register only in relation to positive truth. Thus does he come at last to espouse the nihilistic gospel of his own self-invented "Church Without Christ."

> "I preach there are all kinds of truth, your truth and somebody else's, but behind all of them, there's only one truth and that is that there's no truth," he called. "No truth behind all truths is what I and this church preach! Where you come from is gone, where you thought you were going to never was there, and where you are is no good unless you can get away from it. Where is there a place for you to be? No place."
>
> "Nothing outside you can give you any place," he said. "You needn't to look at the sky because it's not going to open up and show no place behind it. You needn't search for any hole in the ground to look through into somewhere else. You can't go neither forwards nor backwards into your daddy's time nor your children's if you have them. In yourself right now is all the place you got. If there was any Fall, look there, if there was any Redemption, look there, and if you expect any Judgment, look there, because they all three will have to be in your time and your body and where in your time and your body and can they be?" (93)

Though Motes seeks converts to his cornpone Sartrean existentialism, he is unsuccessful. His church has only a single member—himself. It is fitting that Motes the solipsist also has only one true love—his Essex. His beat-up and broken-down car serves as the single sacrament of his nihilistic religion, the true *viaticum* for escaping all who would lay claims on him. O'Connor agrees with Walker Percy that the automobile, even more than the movies and television, is the great American dream-machine. It fulfills our fantasies of individualist autonomy, enabling us to strike out for the proverbial territories whenever the limits of social existence press in upon us. As Motes's only sacred space, the car serves as both pulpit and residence, enabling him to incarnate his message in a life of perpetual isolation and vagabondage. It's a machine, he boasts, that "moved fast, in privacy, to the place you wanted to be" (105). "Since I've had it," he declares, "I've had a place to be that I can always get away in" (65). Motes makes no idle boast, therefore, but offers a fine creedal summary of modern faith when he declares that "Nobody with a good car needs to be justified" (64). As a countrified Karamazov, Hazel also acts out Ivan's belief that, since God is dead, all things are permitted. He heartlessly runs down a poor derelict who had been paid to impersonate Motes, thus making his car also his weapon of death.

Hazel Motes's life of murderous self-justification ends, appropriately, when a patrolman destroys his automotive idol. Because he has preached an insistent nihilism—deafening himself to the true Word—Motes comes to the truth by means of silence and vision. With his Essex gone, he can at last see that there is another Place than the suffocating confines of his sinful ego. Looking away from himself for the first time, he beholds the infinite space—"depth after depth" (118)—of the sky. The firmament is not cold and frightening, as Pascal found it at night, but alive with a burning mercy, a purging peace.

Having preached the counter-gospel that nothing is true but one's own body and place, Motes must work out his salvation precisely there—by mutilating the flesh that he had deified. He puts broken bits of glass in his shoes and wraps barbed wire around his chest. And because he had also sought to cast out the beam of belief in other people's eyes, Haze must cleanse the motes from his own offending orbs. Like Oedipus, he learns to see everything by seeing nothing—by blinding himself with quicklime. These are not self-justifying sacrifices meant to earn Motes' salvation; they are acts of radical penance offered in gratitude for the salvation that has already been won for him at the Place of the Skull. When Motes declares that his macabre self-lacerations are his attempt "to pay" (125), he is not making atonement for his sins so much as he is paying his debt of gratitude for the Redemption already wrought for him. Following the example of the Apostle Paul in Rom. 8:13 and Col. 3:5, he is mortifying his flesh, albeit by extreme means, in order to conform his life to the Savior who conformed his own life to the Cross. As Motes approaches death, therefore, he gives his

final testimony to his own small cloud of witnesses—two brutal policemen and his self-seeking landlady. He confesses to them that he is no longer fleeing his guilt but embarking for his true Country—the place where no car could carry him. "There's no other house," he confesses, "nor no other city" (129).

Bevel Summers as a river-preacher of the Gospel

O'Connor's positive preachers proclaim a Word that is no less discomfiting than Motes's nihilism. Bevel Summers serves as an evangel of the radical Gospel in "The River." A youth still in his late teens, he has found his cachet in river-preaching. Summers has no pulpit of his own but proclaims the Word while standing in the midst of streams, ready to baptize all who hear and heed his preaching. Baptism is for him no mere symbol of the human promise to follow Jesus. It is the outward and visible initiation of believers into death and burial with Christ, so that those who are thus called and who thus respond may rise up out of the watery grave of sin into utter newness of life. Hence Summers's clear and discerning Word from the water:

> "If you ain't come for Jesus, you ain't come for me. If you just come to see can you leave your pain in the river, you ain't come for Jesus. You can't leave your pain in the river. I never told nobody that" [....]
>
> Then he lifted his head and arms and shouted, "Listen to what I got to say, you people! There ain't but one river and that's the River of Life, made out of Jesus's blood. That's the river you have to lay your pain in, in the River of Faith, in the River of Life, in the River of Love, in the rich red river of Jesus' blood, you people!"
>
> His voice grew soft and musical. "All the rivers come from that one River and go back to it like it was the ocean sea and if you believe, you can lay your pain in that River and get rid of it because that's the River that was made to carry sin. It's a River full of pain itself, pain itself, moving toward the Kingdom of Christ, to be washed away, slow, you people, slow as this here old red water river around my feet.
>
> "Listen," he sang, "I read in Mark about an unclean man, I read in Luke about a blind man, I read in John about a dead man! Oh you people hear! The same blood that makes this River red, made that leper clean, made that blind man stare, made that dead man leap!
>
> "You people with trouble," he cried, "lay it in that River of Blood, lay it in that River of Pain, and watch it move away toward the Kingdom of Christ." (162)

Bevel Summers's fame as a faith-healer has won him an eager hearing. Crowds gather at the river in the hope that he will perform miracles on the sick and the lame, the blind, and the deaf. They are more eager to have their bodily ills cured than to have their spiritual sins redeemed. Yet on this occasion, if not always on others, Summers frustrates their desire. He has come to teach them that there is not one kind of pain but two, even as there are two rivers. There is indeed the terrible physical pain that clamors for cure. As a woman who would die at age thirty-nine of acute lupus erythmatosus, Flannery O'Connor knew the terror of such pain. She even took the baths at Lourdes—confessing, however, that she prayed more for her crippled novel than for her crippled legs. "I am one of those people," she wryly commented, "who could die for his religion easier than take a bath for it" (1056).

Yet human suffering is amenable to human succor. There is a second kind of pain that does not submit to such therapy. This other disease has origins and agonies that are not merely human. Luther identified this second sort of pain as the bruised human conscience. It is the ache of sin and guilt and alienation from God. Its cure lies in another river than the clay-draining stream that the preacher stands in. When Bevel Summers announces this radical Cure, he does not speak for himself, therefore, but for the God of the Gospel. Hence the remarkable conflation of his own voice

with another Voice: "If you ain't come for Jesus, you ain't come for me." As with the apostles and the prophets, so with Bevel Summers: he preaches with utmost authority. He does not speak in the subjunctive mood about what ought to be or might be, but with sheer declarative force concerning what is: "Listen to what I got to say, you people."

Bevel Summers has a rich analogical imagination because his preaching is animated by the Incarnation: by the startling union of the human and the Holy in the rabbi of Nazareth. Summers offers no direct openness to God, therefore, and his speech is stretched almost to the point of snapping. Summers likens Jesus' atoning blood to the red river which is his liquid pulpit. Nothing would seem to be healed or cleansed by waters so muddy or else so bloody. Yet in the world of radical Christian paradox, things are never as they seem. Summers surely knows William Cowper's great hymn, since the River whose healing powers he proclaims is indeed "a fountain fill'd with blood/Drawn from Emmanuel's veins;/And sinners plunged beneath that flood,/Lose all their guilty stains." The sanguinary atonement wrought at Golgotha provides no instant holiness. Sanctification, as he declares, is as slow a process as the movement of a languid Georgia river. Salvation requires the gradual and often painful conformity of sinful human wills to the sacred will, a series of lifelong conversions that issue in holy living and holy dying.

The preaching of Bevel Summers is at once so richly suggestive and so starkly simple that even a child such as Harry Ashfield can comprehend it. He is the four-year old son of secular parents who are also cold sophisticates. The only person who has ever cared for young Ashfield is Mrs. Connin, his fundamentalist babysitter. She tells him that he is not merely the product of natural causes—having been brought into the world by a doctor named Sladewall—but the supernatural creation of a carpenter named Jesus Christ. It is her love and teaching that enable little Harry to receive, in his own child-like way, the preaching of Bevel Summers. Summers's proclamation is as succinct as Motes's nihilism is verbose. "If I Baptize you," the preacher [Summers] said, "you'll be able to go to the Kingdom of Christ. You'll be washed in the river of suffering, son, and you'll go by the deep river of life. Do you want that?" (165). Finally Summers reduces the call of Gospel to a single question: "Does the boy want to count?" The child instinctively discerns what the preacher means. He knows that he has never really mattered to his mother and father, that everything is a joke at his house, that, if there is a God, his last name surely must be "damn." The boy has been given everything he wants, having learned to break old toys in order to get new ones. Yet in the deepest sense the boy has been given nothing. He has no life.

Though at first he scoffs at the preacher, just as his parents have taught him, little Harry desperately wants to count: to be somebody, to love and be loved by God, especially in the absence of parental love. And so he says "Yes" to the river-preacher, and is baptized. Yet it is not a baptism into happiness and contentment. It is an initiation into the suffering and death that the preacher had promised. O'Connor does not narrate the inner reasoning that prompts the boy's final decision once he returns home. But little Harry uses a child's naïve logic to fathom what has happened to him and what he must do in response: If he were made to count so much for staying under the water so little, he could count totally if he stayed under the water totally. Far from committing a despairing act of suicide, therefore, young Ashfield chooses new Life by plunging beneath the river's surface, rather than old Death by remaining at home with his loveless parents.

Harry Ashfield succeeds in this act of permanent immersion only in flight from Mr. Paradise, a man who scorns Summers's river-preaching. Because he has not himself been healed of a cancerous growth on his forehead, Paradise is a bitter unbeliever. He rejects all potential occasions for gratitude. Thus does he fish with an unbaited hook, daring not to catch anything, lest he himself be caught up into the Life that both risks and receives everything. Like Motes, Mr. Paradise is a solitary and anti-communal skeptic who has sealed himself off in mockery. Only in flight from this demonic figure offering his phallic stick of candied temptation does the boy at last succeed in keeping himself under the rich red river. He finds the final Kingdom not by repeating his once-and-for-all sacramental baptism, but by seeking an aqueous burial with Christ. Child Ashfield enters into the community of perpetual praise by way of a supremely happy ending to a supremely happy story.

preaching as the Protestant sacrament

O'Connor's preachers are grotesque because the Gospel, when properly embodied and proclaimed, is scandalous. It excites vigorous affirmation or equally vigorous negation. Because it displaces the world as the supposed heart of life by restoring Christ as its true core, the Gospel produces literal eccentrics—people who are off-center because their lives now circle about the real Center. O'Connor is reputed to have altered John 8:32 to read as follows: "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you odd." Even when rejecting the Gospel, one remains irremediably de-centered by it. Hence her celebrated reply when asked why Southern fiction contains such a surfeit of freaks: "I say it is because we are still able to recognize one" (817). In the Bible Belt, as H. L. Mencken derisively named it, there is a transcendent norm for measuring human anomalies. The biblical plumb-line reveals the real deviant to be the thoroughly well-adjusted man, the completely autonomous woman, the utterly successful American. In our blithe neutrality and complacent indifference toward the Gospel, we become living corpses. O'Connor's preachers, by contrast, have been bent out of their sinful shape for having received an Address from beyond themselves.

They are grotesque because they are hearers no less than preachers of the Word. Barry Harvey observes that ancient Israel was unlike its ancient Near Eastern neighbors in one important regard: the Israelites did not worship the primal forces of nature and history as they were often personalized in feminine deities. "Israel's primal relationship to the world," Harvey declares, "took the form of response to personal address. Persons, things, and events were interpreted as visible signs of God's activity, created and ordered by the divine utterance." Israel's very identity has an interlocutory character, Harvey adds, for Yahweh always dwells in counterpoint with his answer-avoiding yet answer-attempting people:

> Over and over again the word of the LORD comes to claim this people in the entirety of their existence, and their world is turned upside down. God addresses Abraham, calling upon him to give up everything that was safe and familiar and go with his family to a land he had never seen. God addresses Moses, telling him to leave the safety of those with whom he had taken refuge and return to Egypt where his people were oppressed. God addresses David, reminding him that he was but the servant of the LORD. God addresses Elijah, assuring him that there were others who had not bowed down to idols. God addresses the author of the book of Daniel, allowing him to see in dim figures the ultimate fate that awaited the holy ones of the Most High. [...] The story of Israel is that of a people becoming a question to themselves time and again, constantly struggling with the mystery of having been chosen to be God's people. Even Israel's name testifies to the centrality of this interlocutory setting. [...] The eponym Israel, 'he who strives with God,' thus foreshadows the destiny that awaits this community on their pilgrimage through history. (*Another City: An Ecclesiological Primer for a Post-Christian World*, 41, 38, 40.)

The biblical exaltation of hearing over seeing is no happenstance. We can shutter ourselves to what is seen, for we have eyelids to seal off images and scenes that we do not want to behold. The ear, by contrast, has no flap for silencing unwanted voices. Ear lobes are meant to increase hearing, not to prevent it. The eye often comprehends surfaces while the ear can penetrate depths. It is an organ for receiving announcements, and thus for either accepting or rejecting commands. Over and again Scripture declares that no one has seen God, while at the same time insisting that many have heard the Word. So does Jesus make an auditory rather than a visual call: "Let anyone with ears hear"(Matt. 11:15)—not "Let anyone with eyes see." He also warns Thomas the Doubter against the naïve notion that seeing is believing: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe" (John 20:29). "The eyes are hard of hearing," said Luther, with his usual sharpness of metaphor, "so stick them in your ears when the Word of God is proclaimed." Preaching is a summons to a new way of seeing—through the hearing of the Word. We learn to look rightly at the world when we learn to hear truly from the pulpit. It follows, said Luther, that "the church is a mouth-house, not a pen-house."

The divine address is heard in preaching as it is heard nowhere else. Karl Barth called it the distinctively Protestant sacrament. *Fides ex auditu* became the motto of the magisterial Reformers because of St. Paul's celebrated declaration that "faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17). The Gospel is not only a message to be preached, Paul makes clear, but also preaching itself. Authentic proclamation is not, therefore, a word about God; it is the Word of God. "With its preaching," P. T. Forsyth boldly declares, "Christianity stands or falls." He maintains that preaching is to Protestantism what the church is to Catholicism—an extension of the original Word: "it is the Gospel prolonging and declaring itself" (*Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, 5). Barth contends that all of Scripture has a proclamatory character. In the Bible, he argues, there is an "unusual preponderance of what is said [...] over the word as such." The how of scriptural manner subserves the what of the scriptural Message—form being intrinsic yet subordinate to content. In the jargon of contemporary lit-crit, the *haec dixit Dominus* of Scripture makes the Signified trump the signifiers. Yet to be a proclaimer of the Gospel is never an elective affinity: God must summon preachers to so terrible a privilege and so wondrous a task. Though the church usually ordains its proclaimers of the Gospel, their authority derives neither from themselves nor from those who ordain them but only, as Barth insists, from "the Author in whom this authority finds its ultimate source" (*Church Dogmatics, I*, 2: 468, 13). Hence the Apostle Paul's excellently burdened confession: "If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no grounds for boasting; for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!" (1 Cor. 9: 16).

Because each age is blinded by the darkness that cannot overcome the Light, the positive reception of the Gospel always has a miraculous quality. It is no ordinary human event. As Barth explains, the Word "completes its work in the world in spite of the world, reaches its goal, finds faith, and gives birth to children of God" (*Witness to the Word: A Commentary on John* 1, 66). When the Gospel is heard and transformation results, there is no confident mastery of human words over the holy Word. Only by sheer miracle does the fallible and finite discourse of preaching become the means of God's own speech, and God alone can judge its truthfulness and enable its effectiveness. So unlikely is the possibility of the preacher's success that Barth describes the task of preaching as the riskiest of all ventures. Faithful preachers must approach their calling in the terror that they will announce something other than the Gospel—that they will proclaim a god who is one object among others, a deity who is not the Maker and Redeemer of heaven and earth, but a supreme being who is our own projection and who thus remains at our own disposal (*Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*, I: 49). Perhaps for this reason Luther confessed that he preached best when he seemed least in control of his proclamation.

If miraculous acceptance is the right response to the Word whose true preaching God alone can enable, then bland indifference is the dreadfully wrong one. As we have seen, O'Connor regards complacency, whether Christian or secular, as the real mark of freakishness and abnormality. The massive self-satisfaction of the modern age made Søren Kierkegaard declare that God may take Christianity away from us as the final proof of its truth. Eight centuries before Christ, the prophet Amos warned darkly of a famine in the land that God himself will send—"not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord" (Amos 8:11). Walker Percy offered a similar caveat in his apocalyptic novel of 1972, *Love in the Ruins*. A Catholic priest named Rinaldo Smith enters his New Orleans pulpit, prepared to deliver his weekly homily, only to discover that he cannot utter a word. "Excuse me," he declares after a long and embarrassing silence, "but the channels are jammed and the word is not getting through." The congregation nervously assumes that there must be a problem with the speaker system. But as Father Smith later collapses in the sacristy, he mutters "something about 'the news being jammed.'" In the hospital, as he speaks to his attending psychiatrist, Dr. Max Gottlieb, the priest clarifies the nature of his aphasia. The principalities and powers, he explains, have silenced the Good News. "Their tactic has prevailed," he elaborates. "Death is winning, life is losing." Father Smith refers not only to the massive outward carnage of our culture of death, but also to the terrible inward collapse of those who remain animate. "Do you mean the living are dead?" asks Gottlieb. "Yes," answers Smith. "How can that be, Father?

How can the living be dead?" "I mean their souls," replies the priest. "I am surrounded by the corpses of souls. We live in a city of the dead" (*Love in the Ruins: The Adventures of a Bad Catholic at a Time Near the End of the World*, 184-6).

As this episode reveals, it is far better for the Word to elicit scandal and offense than for it to be ignored or dismissed and thus silenced. "[C]omplete impartiality" toward the Word of God," said Barth, is "completely comical" (*Church Dogmatics, I*, 2: 469). Preaching that prompts neither a negative nor a positive response, it follows, is not a true but a false proclamation. Flannery O'-Connor salutes her scandalized deniers of the Gospel for the integrity of their grotesque repudiations. Vehemently to reject Jesus Christ is oddly to honor him. Yet her chief interest lies with preachers who unabashedly proclaim the Word, and with hearers who receive it, often reluctantly and only in the last moment. Together they discover the one thing worth knowing—that they may freely die in order that they may freely live. Such glad tidings will always seem grotesque in a world bent on believing that the purpose of life is not to die for the crucified Christ, but to stay alive for one's own benefit—or else to terrorize others with the threat of death. Bevel Summers is one of her most admirably offensive proclaimers of the Word. He is indeed a fine fictional embodiment of Karl Barth's celebrated claim that "one can not speak of God by speaking of man in a loud voice" (*The Word of God and the Word of Man*, 196).

A SMALL THEOLOGY

With God all things are possible—
that's the beginning and the end
of theology. If all things are possible,
nothing is impossible. Nothing.
Why do the godly then
keep slinging out their nooses?

Wendell Berry

Film

driving lessons

Crystal Downing

I still remember the endorphin rush as my thirteen-year-old fist pounded my little brother who had just told me, with bratty officiousness, that I should not be eating Mom's fruitcake. (Fruitcake!!) Even at the time, I was horrified at my exhilaration, desisting only because I feared that the pleasure of each punch might push me to the point of seriously injuring the eight-year-old howling at my feet. I have no recollection whether my mother found out about the fight—or the fruitcake. The memory, instead, inscribes my potential for violence: a potential that perhaps more of us need to consider as we remember the incidents of September 11 and regard in dismay the escalating violence in the Middle East.

Unfortunately, when many of us think of vengeance, we attribute it primarily to people of countries "less civilized" than our own. Even when we consider homegrown vendettas, we usually distance ourselves by associating them with identifiable ethnic subcultures, or as a problem of the rural and urban poor. For this very reason, more people need to see *Changing Lanes*, one of the most interesting and critically acclaimed (though little seen) films of this past summer. Recently released on video and DVD, *Changing Lanes* is a parable about the overpowering attraction of vengeance, even to well-educated upper-class American professionals—a parable that gets more relevant with each newspaper dropped into the recycling bin.

The opening shots of the movie create disequilibrium as the camera delivers a headlight-level view of the pavement, speeding up the film as the car behind the camera barely misses objects in the road when it turns, passes, and, of course, changes lanes. In the midst of this montage, the director gives us an establishing shot that unwittingly increases our disequilibrium: the New York City skyline, with the World Trade Center intact. Filmed before 9-11-01, *Changing Lanes* becomes prophetic, without even meaning to.

After this opening sequence, the film introduces us to the contrasting protagonists, cutting back and forth between Doyle (Samuel L. Jackson), a recovering-alcoholic insurance salesman with coke-bottle glasses, and Gavin (Ben Affleck), who, as a partner in a successful law firm, seems to have attained the American dream with a tony office, luxurious car, beautiful wife, and youthful good looks.

The film's first words are from Doyle, who stands in a squalid row house, telling a realtor "I think I'll make this the boys' room." We cut to the image of boys and girls playing orchestral music in a contrastingly elegant space, where Gavin talks into a microphone about a foundation that funds inner-city youth programs. These differing approaches to the support of children intersect as Doyle and Gavin drive to the same courthouse, Doyle in an attempt to keep his estranged wife and sons in New York, Gavin to defend his law firm's control of the foundation. We are given shots inside each car, where both are talking out loud, Gavin speaking to a colleague on his handless car phone about his court appointment, and Doyle practicing to himself what he will say in court: "Boys need their fathers." Their goals crash into each other—literally--as both attempt to change lanes in the rain, an incident which will change the lanes of their lives.

While Doyle's old, beat-up Toyota is completely disabled, Gavin's Mercedes is still operable. Not wanting to take the time to exchange insurance info, Gavin resorts to the expediency of wealth—offering to write a blank check—ig-

noring not only Doyle's exhortation that "It's important we do this right," but also his plea for a ride. Gavin zooms off, yelling "Better luck next time," not noticing that he has dropped a red file folder crucial to his case. Doyle picks up the folder and walks toward the city in the rain, losing the chance to gain custody of his sons when he fails to appear in court on time. Meanwhile, Gavin risks jail time if he cannot produce an important legal document that is in the file folder Doyle now possesses.

When Doyle discovers the value of the red folder to its owner, he faxes Gavin's own words back to him, scrawling over one of the file's typed pages "better luck next time"—as though in parody of "eye-for-eye" justice. Old Testament scholars assert that the biblical injunction "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" called for equitable retribution rather than the intensification of violence, but *Changing Lanes* illustrates the difficulty of keeping revenge from escalating. Reminding us of the endless brutalities in Israel and Palestine, the retributions enacted by Doyle and Gavin get more and more vicious, until the hatred so overwhelms them that they both forget what caused their feud in the first place. Destroying the other's well-being eventually becomes an end in itself.

Changing Lanes, then, asks us to consider how to change out of the lane of revenge, showing that wealth and privilege can offer no comforts that might temper the impulse for retribution. The movie makes explicit the difference between Gavin's upper-class world and Doyle's lower middle-class existence. Gavin works in a light-filled art-studded office that towers above the streets below, where Doyle makes his way amidst the bleak greys and browns of the grimy pavement, often in the rain. Unlike the refined Gavin, Doyle often resorts to physical violence, throwing objects and punches to express his frustration. However, the most outrageous moral lapses occur in Gavin's law firm, whose senior partners cynically forge documents to disguise the fact that they have skimmed money from the foundation they supervise. As though to illustrate that the rain falls on the poor and the rich alike—on both Doyle in the dirty streets and the lawyers in their elegant offices—the film includes a scene in which Gavin sets off the fire-sprinkler system, raining water down on the pricey office decor.

Demonstrating the failure of education and professional status to guarantee ethical behavior, the film suggests—and retracts—"family values" as a way to change the lanes of revenge. In perhaps the most chilling scene of the movie, Gavin joins his wholesome-looking wife at an up-scale restaurant, where she tells him with tender, wide-eyed sincerity that they're "partners" and that she wants "to stand beside" him. We soon discover, however, that her supportive words, "let me help you with this," are meant to motivate his forgery of a legal document so that they can maintain their comfortable lifestyle: "I could've lived with a moral man, but I married a Wall Street lawyer," she says. "Can you live there with me?"

The disturbing juxtaposition of familial love and self-serving behavior occurs in another scene: when Gavin visits a computer hacker who, for a hefty fee, agrees to eliminate Doyle's credit, essentially bankrupting him. As the camera enters his bare-bones office, we witness the hacker saying on the phone, presumably to the child who has colored the cute pictures tacked on his wall, "One cookie before lunch is OK." Though affectionately prescribing correct behavior for his child, the hacker has no qualms destroying another man's life.

As the hacker gets ready to disrupt Doyle's finances, the distressed Gavin asks, "Is there any other way?" The man at the computer replies, without a hint of sarcasm, "Sure! Call him up and be nice to him." This hopeful solution is suggested, as well, in the very next scene. While addressing an envelope containing the red file, Doyle tells a co-worker that he is "doing the right thing" by returning the legal document to its rightful owner. Before he can get the envelope delivered, however, Doyle gets Gavin's vicious voice-mail about his bankruptcy, leading him to reject what he believes is "right."

Choosing what is "right," of course, is the only way to defuse increasingly violent acts of retribution. *Changing Lanes*, however, shows us that competing definitions of the "right" turn this simple choice into a moral morass. When Gavin tells his colleague (and former mistress) about Doyle's appropriation of the red file, she offers him a solution, using what seems to be the language of morality: "Do you want what's

right? What's right is your job, your wife, your life." This self-serving definition of "right," then, is what justifies Gavin's visit to the computer hacker.

The Janus face of "ethics" appears once again as Gavin converses with his wife over lunch. She talks about her mother's seemingly noble decision to stay with her husband despite knowledge of his mistress, but then she explains her mother's motivation: "She thought it would be unethical to leave a man for cheating on his marriage after she has enjoyed an expensive lifestyle that depends on a man who makes his money by cheating at work." When a person (and perhaps a nation) aligns the "right" with protecting a way of life, ethics can easily become skewed.

Changing Lanes exposes the ruthlessness of self-protectionism through its temporal setting. We are told early in the film that the day is Good Friday, preparing us for later when Gavin wanders into a church in the midst of its Good Friday service. Having nearly died when Doyle successfully sabotaged his car, Gavin enters the church in dismay. Drenched by the rain, he has abandoned his totalled Mercedes on the same road where he had abandoned Doyle earlier in the day. When we see him walk past Doyle's wrecked Toyota, it seems as though he has changed lanes, or at least places, with his nemesis, who had walked down the same rainy road that morning. As the camera follows Gavin into the church, we see a crucifix with the suffering Christ and hear a hymn about "the Savior of the World," reminding us of the one who changed lanes, or at least places, with us. Gavin enters a confessional, telling the priest "I came here for meaning," because "the world is a sewer, a garbage dump": appropriate words for Good Friday, the day which memorializes the brutal crucifixion of the only truly innocent man. Significantly, in the midst of Gavin's visit to the church, the film cuts to Doyle and his estranged wife talking in the squalid house he wants to buy. Between them, pasted on the back wall of an open closet, is a familiar picture of Christ, opening his chest cavity to show a breaking heart.

We see neither Gavin nor Doyle looking at these images, but the presence of Christ has nevertheless entered a film about the need to change the vengeful lanes of our lives. Interestingly, of eight reviews I surveyed, each of which praises the intelligent script and superb acting elicited by British director Roger Michell (*Persuasion*, *Notting Hill*), not one mentions the scenes containing depictions of Jesus. To my mind, the reviewers miss the crucial point: that in order to disrupt the escalating violence of revenge we must follow the example of Christ, who did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but who emptied himself, taking the form of a servant.

In *Changing Lanes*, the vendetta changes lanes only when both Gavin and Doyle independently decide to take the form of servants, meeting the needs of the other rather than serving their own self-interests. After Doyle returns the red folder and asks forgiveness, Gavin tells his wife that he wants to start doing pro bono work and "live on the edge." Then, in an echo of the scene in which Doyle had faxed his words back to him—"Better luck next time"—Gavin speaks his wife's words back to her: "Can you live there with me?"

By the end of the movie we realize we have been given an exemplum of the Serenity Prayer that we heard chanted at Doyle's Alcoholics Anonymous meeting: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." *Changing Lanes* suggests that knowing the difference between competing definitions of the "right" derives from knowing the Christ, who might well say to us "Can you live there with me?"

Music

hip-hop

Preston Jones

As my wife and I listened to the radio on the evening of 9/11, one year ago, I thought to myself that the events of that day must signal the end of mass stupidity in America. It was stupid of me, a true American, to think that. Yet, for a few days the country seemed to take a sober turn. My great concern was whether I could get to the local K-Mart before its American flags were sold out. (I couldn't.) And there were a lot of editorials and op-ed pieces about a new, morally serious nation. But, like the radio advertisements that reappeared first in trickles then in waves, slowly but certainly pushing "round the clock news" aside, the country's stupidity came back. By late summer of the following year, it seemed even to a dolt like me that nothing had changed.

This came home to me during my wife's and my annual sojourn with her family in Alaska last June. The sun was out till near midnight and it never got really dark after that, so I often found myself wide awake in the wee hours, lurking in the TV room, getting caught up on what my wife and I miss in the tube-free existence we lead in Texas. I soon discovered that the rap star Eminem was back, chanting that he hopes his mother will "burn in hell" and crying about "catching flack" from activists as if, he complains, he were the "the first rapper to 'smack' a woman and 'say faggot.'" Eminem has a point; he isn't the first rapper to do either of these things.

At the beginning of the 1980s, when Ronald Reagan was sunny and saving us from malaise, hip-hop seemed nice. The Sugar Hill Gang took the genre public with a snappy tune called "Rapper's Delight." The pop group Blondie also recorded a giddy rap-like number. But when Chuck D, Flavor Flav, and Terminator X's record, "It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back," appeared, rap was changed, fundamentally. Not long before, Niggaz with Attitude had said "F*** tha Police," and not long after 2 Live Crew would openly denigrate women, and another boring round of "public discussion" over the meaning of the First Amendment ensued.

I never liked rap before "Nation of Millions" was released, and I never bought another Public Enemy tape. But I listened to "Nation of Millions" often. The album's lyrics and drive reminded me of the black neighborhood I grew up in, the token white boy. There was Chuck D's genuine intelligence expressed in dubious English, which reminded me of Carl a.k.a. Shane. There was Public Enemy's anger combined with hope and the group's religiosity and impiety honed into a single outlook. There were the throbbing beats that could make the flimsiest white kid feel as if he possessed all the muscle of a South Bronx hooligan. For an intellectually ambitious and self-taught kid who grew up in an environment hostile to learning and who still hasn't quite shaken the fury that he had picked up on tough streets—who is committed to the Christian faith and yet struggles against a seemingly congenital Sophoclean paganism—who as a kid regularly got his pale butt kicked on account of his skin color—for a kid like that, Chuck D was something of an existential companion. Or at least, as one Public Enemy tune puts it, a "prophet of rage."

Of course, rage—stupid, misdirected rage—is the trouble with contemporary rap. On "Nation of Millions" whites are kicked to the curb nearly as much as praise is offered to Allah, or to the Nation of Islam's version of Allah. But Chuck D, and even Niggaz with Attitude, seem

mild these days. Eminem says (among other unpleasant things), that he would like to kick "the door down to murder this divorced slut." In another tune, he muses on ripping women's breasts off. Rap's come a long way, baby.

At the Brooklyn Museum of Art's exhibition "Hip-Hop Nation: Roots, Rhymes, and Rage," which ran through the last months of the waning millennium, a t-shirt on display encouraged urban kids to "Kill white people." Perhaps the sentiment had its roots in Sista Souljah's famous *fin-de-siecle* suggestion that black men should take a break from killing each other and knock off some crackers instead. As it happened, Souljah's advice was lost on Tupac Shakur and the Notorious B.I.G. (aka Biggie Smallz)—thug rappers in search of meaning—who were both eventually gunned down, probably by rival "artists," though neither's killer has ever been identified. Upon these hip-hoppers' martyrdom, music companies decided to back off gangsta rap and thus begat much talk about toning down the violence—the chatter bore some resemblance to the chatter last September.

But it didn't last long, for Americans love violence: at the end of 2000, the average teenage kid watched 500 human killings a year on TV. Each weekend millions of Americans, religious and non-religious, make pilgrimages to the local cinema, where rape, mayhem, and Reese's Pieces are digested with equal gusto. So it's funny that so many suburbanite Americans screech about hip-hop. The stuff's as American as professional wrestling.

And rap has its brainy supporters. The first edition of *Doula: The Journal of Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture* provided a "semiotic analysis" of the lyrics in a rap number called "Big Poppa." In a book on "popular music, postmodernism and the poetics of place," George Lipsitz of the University of California at San Diego locates rap's meaning within a global African "diasporic struggle."

Some Christian writers have said that hiphop reflects a deep longing for, and an avenue toward, "community." In *Re:generation Quarterly* an article on rap claims that "Aristotle's musings on the importance of friendship above mere success are echoed in the lyrical philosophies of one Snoop Doggy Dogg: 'It ain't no fun if the homies can't have none.'" In the pages of *Christianity Today*, meanwhile, Regent University professors of communication William J. Brown and Benson P. Fraser noted that hip-hop shuns "Sugarcoated or superficial answers to complex problems," promotes "brutal honesty," and burns with a "passion for honesty."

Honesty? Seventy percent of rap CDs are purchased by middle-class white kids who wouldn't be caught dead on the black side of town—which is to say that, basically, popular rappers are something like modern-day minstrels reduced to acting the fool to the delight of the affluent on the safe side of the tracks. On the occasional day when uniforms aren't required at the Christian preparatory school where I teach, some of my brightest students—National Merit Scholar types—don baggy shirts and jeans, not knowing that the fad got its start among prisoners whose pants sag because they're not allowed to wear belts.

In an essay in *Doula*, April Silver makes a good, if incompetently expressed, point. "Hip Hop sought light, but is now being burned by the flame" of corporate influence, Silver writes. "With the failures of [the Civil Rights and Black Power] movements as its backdrop and it [sic] own shortsightedness, Hip Hop has become quintessential [sic] American. For the most part, it expresses the most fundamental and sacred American values: individualism, material greed, conspicuous consumption, and misogyny." One can disagree with Silver's summary of America's most "sacred" values (I don't), but her general point—i.e., hip-hop isn't what it pretends to be—seems right.

Consider hip-hop religiosity. Famous rappers wear crosses big enough to make archbishops blush, but, for all the grave inter-gangster nonsense about "keeping it real," the heart of hip-hop is a long way from the Sermon on the Mount or Luther's catechism. It's true that the accomplished felon Snoop Dogg waxes theological in his memoir, *The Doggfather*—as in:

> Spreading the music. Elevating and
> educating. That's my mission.
> Because no matter who you think I
> am, or who you want me to be,
> when it all comes down, I only answer
> to one description: I am a child of God.
> Doing God's work.

As you maybe can tell—,

> I'm not really down with that celebrity s***. God gave me talent and ability and ambition and then put me to the test to prove I was worthy. It's the standard game he runs on everyone.

The appeal to "education" and the heaving of one's unacknowledged faults onto God—these are two more of hip-hop's wonderfully American features.

In a few places in his book on wannabe rappers, *Westside: Young Men and Hip Hop in L.A.*, William Shaw describes drug dealers and thieves who pray regularly before meals. What they pray for we're not told. Perhaps they pray for the women they've impregnated and left in the lurch. Maybe they pray to muster up the courage to join the military and get money for college in exchange for a few years of service. Maybe they pray that they'll remember to sign up for the free remedial writing class about to begin at the local junior college.

Maybe, but one doubts it. Why would young city kids give up the dream of wealth and slots on MTV so long as the middle class kids on the other side of town are prospective patrons? As I pondered this at 1:00 a.m., I went out my parents'-in-law front door to look at the glassy purple in the summer Alaskan sky. And coming from somewhere in Eagle River, a small town about ten miles northwest of Anchorage, I could hear bass beats and an unmistakable hip-hop rhythm. "Wow," I said to myself. "It's here, too."

AFTER THE FUNERAL

Only an hour after the funeral, he finds himself
caught by another midwinter storm. Under

cloudbanks—as ominous as those shadowy
forms of clots he'd first seen only weeks ago

on that gray x-ray image—and then momentarily
lost somewhere among a slow procession of late

morning traffic, it seems this time he's unable
to leave as quickly as he'd like. Cutting crosstown

along avenues crowded with brownstones once
known for their glamour, but nowadays marred

with gang graffiti—perhaps, he thinks, the wit
and wisdom of a new age—everything appears

blurred like those old photographs, all his father
had left him. Finally, pulled alongside the edge

of that first turnpike on-ramp just beyond the web
of city streets, he pauses, watches as a last few cars

crawl past—the vague cityscape still showing through
that powdery swirl of snowfall over his shoulder—

and peers blindly out the smudged windshield
of his pickup truck toward this highway winding

like a dark scar through the gust-whipped
whiteness. For a moment, he holds his hand tightly

on the gear shift, halting as though to assess the life
that now lies ahead, then slides it forward into drive.

Edward Byrne

Books

Oscar Hijuelos. *A Simple Habana Melody*. New York: Harper-Collins, 2002.

When I was ten, my Cuban cousins came for their first visit. It was the late 1950's, and Arturito was a freshman at M.I.T. I was entranced by his fiancé Vivian's long, slender fingers, perfectly manicured, by her blue-black hair swept back by a tortoise-shell comb and by Arturito's silk socks. His parents, Arturo and Nieves, sat in our living room outside of Boston and spoke about Cuba—and I remember hearing the name "Batista" for the first time, and "Castro." This was just a few weeks before Castro marched into Havana, the Revolution accomplished. Within a year scores of my relatives had fled Cuba, leaving behind their homes, their wealth, and all of their possessions, but carrying with them to pass on to their children and their children's children, the stories of paradise lost. This novel, by Oscar Hijuelos, a Cuban-American author of five previous novels, including *Mr. Ives' Christmas* and the Pulitzer Prize winning *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*, explores the richness, variety and energy of life in Havana before the events that forced so many to leave Eden. The subtitle of the novel reveals the focus: *A Simple Habana Melody (from when the world was good)*.

This is the story of Israel Levis, a celebrated Cuban composer returning to his homeland in the late 1940's after several years abroad—first in Paris where he was feted until the arrival of the Germans—but later in Buchenwald concentration camp to which he was transported because of his apparent Jewish name, given to him by his ardently Catholic parents.

Israel, a vastly corpulent man, is a writer of popular tunes, of *zarzuela* (a form of Spanish opera), of ballets, and symphonies, but he is known worldwide for his timeless song, "Rosas Puras," which is the recurring motif in the book and in his life. Written for Rita Valladores, a vocalist to whom Israel has never been able to declare his love, "Rosas Puras" is a tune and a text of great simplicity and beauty, associated forever with the time when the world was good, when Israel, living alone with his mother, found it very easy to believe in God. "As a creature of habit," Hijuelos writes, "he remained by his mother's side, their weekly rituals of attending Mass together on Sundays somehow reassuring to the composer, for while contemplating the timelessness in which the symbols of Christianity dwelled, he found it impossible to believe that good would not prevail over the world. In the midst of prayers, or while hearing an Ave Maria and while gazing with pure devotion at an image of Christ on the cross, His eyes compassionate and ever loving, he believed that the greater power of God would preside and solve the little disagreements of man. (He imagined a great and lordly figure seated before a keyboard with a feather quill in hand, changing certain notes within the *pentagrama* of his score, fixing this and that and patiently awaiting a favorable melody to emerge." Israel's world, an island paradise of good food, high culture, superb music, and plenty of brothels, satisfies his every need, and his physical needs are prodigious. But there are flaws. He notices the poor and the destitute, he learns that several of his friends are dangerously involved in political turmoil in attempting to overthrow the dictator Machado, he experiences the death of his father and remembers his two siblings who died in childhood. Still, Israel lives in a world apart. "My dear friend," he says, "haven't I done enough? And what can I do but compose my music?"

That the experience of Buchenwald would sour an optimistic man and fill him with despair is no surprise. When he returns to Cuba, his faith is gone, but his nostalgia for the past is strong. Romanticizing the faith of his youth, he longs for the time when he was a part of a fairy tale. He wants Jesus to remove

his past—"and with a single whispered command remove from his mind the latter history of his life when he had witnessed so much useless suffering around him, breathe new life into his flesh, peeling away those sea green numbers of a diminutive size that had been tattooed onto his arm and that seemed the indirect emanation of a song." Of course, Jesus does nothing of the kind. Nor does it ever occur to Israel to connect his experiences in the camps with the cross, any more than earlier in his life he ever wondered why Jesus was necessary in a world that seemed so perfect. Israel has also forgotten that despite the outward signs, the faith of his boyhood had fled long before he set foot outside of Cuba.

How different this novel is from Hijuelos' masterpiece, *Mr. Ives' Christmas*, a novel that grapples much more successfully with the question of human suffering. One would think that the Holocaust would present this issue in the most dramatic way possible, but for Israel Levis, the experience of Buchenwald, though terrible, is peculiarly abstract. Hijuelos does not let the reader dwell on it for any length of time. In *Mr. Ives' Christmas*, Ives is a decent, charitable man, whose faith is as alive for him and for others as the scriptural stories with which he identifies. The crisis of faith that Ives faces comes because of the murder of his son, which is the central event of his life, and which occurs a few days before Christmas. Forever after, Ives' experience of Christmas becomes inseparable from his experience of loss—and that forces him to confront the paradox of the Incarnation and the difficulty of forgiveness at a depth that Israel Levis never does, in spite of his exposure to the greatest evil of the twentieth century. For Israel Levis, Christ is no more than a sweet thought and a sentimental link to his childhood. In fact, music takes the place of faith, becomes the defining part of his identity, and assures his survival because as a highly sought musician for the parties of his German captors, he is able to rise above the rest of the Buchenwald masses. Finally, at the end of his life, even though he is confronted by the ambiguity of his salvation through music, and even though his years in the camp have sapped his desire to compose or to play the music he now associates with his Buchenwald experience, he still has come to believe that the act of composing music and performing it is "a mystical experience" in which "musicians were left to face the deity alone."

This is a character of occasional contradiction but of no great complexity. One supposes that Hijuelos set out to write the study of a musical genius. Whether his intention was to glorify him or to expose him is unclear, but what he has ended up with is a rather tedious chronicle of a man with limited vision.

Jill Peláez Baumgaertner

Marcia J. Bunge, ed., *The Child in Christian Thought*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001, xiv + 513 pp.

This is a very fine volume of essays. Edited by Marcia Bunge of Valparaiso University, the book is a major contribution to a small, but growing literature on children and family life in the Christian tradition. Contributors include biblical scholars, historians, systematic theologians and practical theologians. It is an interdisciplinary work of quality and class.

The sheer diversity of entries in this book's chapters ranging from Augustine and Chrysostom to Schleiermacher and Bushnell, with Calvin, Luther, Wesley, Edwards, and others in between, might be disorienting at first glance. But the excellent introduction by Marcia Bunge gives coherence and focus to the book. She summarizes the purpose of the book as contributing to a complete "account of past theological perspectives on children and our obligations to them" (pg. 7). The book, then, has two foci: historical/documentary as well as ethical/practical. The historical work on the nature and place of children in society and in communities of believers is only beginning. Bunge identifies some recent contributions to the emerging literature, but clearly, much work is yet required. The place of the child in home, society, and church in the New Testament, in Puritan New England, in John Wesley's rural England, in twentieth century Catholic thinking and in contemporary feminist thought are worth examination. All these areas of research, and many more, are beginning to catch the attention of scholars committed not only to the flourishing of children, but to the goal of a wider, deeper understanding of the Christian tradition.

Most of the chapters in this book are exploratory excavations into some relatively unmined, but remarkably rich, veins of Christian thinking. The wisdom of ancient writers is surprisingly cognizant of the developmental range of children's sensibilities. For example, Vigen Guroian's article on John Chrysostom reports Chrysostom's specific advice on when to introduce to children the stories of the Bible. Parents should not impose on

small children the terrors of the fiercest biblical tales, said Chrysostom, and he advises that children should not hear of hell until they are at least fifteen years old (p. 76).

Even exhaustively researched early thinkers like Augustine are approached with fresh questions in this volume. Martha Stortz' chapter on Augustine investigates the bishop's attitudes toward children, including his own much-loved son, Adeodatus. In a letter to Jerome, Augustine struggles with the problem of the sufferings of infants. He recites a long list of childhood diseases and deprivations. When such things happen to adults, he remarks, "we are accustomed to say that they are being put to the test like Job, or that they are being punished for their sins like Herod" (p. 97). But, for defenseless infants, he laments, "And so let the just reason why such terrible things happen to children be stated." Clearly, Augustine's theodicy of adult suffering did not apply to children. It left him restless and troubled.

Jane Strohl's discussion of Luther's theology of children includes examples both of Luther's high regard for the receptivity of childhood, a receptivity adults should imitate, and of Luther's recognition of the inheritance of sin each person, from earliest childhood, persistently displays. Consistent discipline and catechetical teaching were tools parents and church needed to shape and mold the child. Luther claims, "If this were done, God would richly bless us and give us grace so that men might be trained who would be a benefit to the nation and the people. We would also have soundly instructed citizens, virtuous and home-loving wives, who would faithfully bring up their children and servants to be godly" (pg. 148, from the *Large Catechism*, 388-89). Strohl wryly remarks, "Luther's often apocalyptic proclamation of the breaking of the gospel's dawn upon the darkened and suffering world produces here rather unremarkably domesticated fruit" (pg. 148). In any case, catechetical instruction does not deserve the opprobrium often heaped on it. In its past and present career, catechetical instruction can be an important and appropriate method of teaching the faith to children, seekers, and converts.

John Calvin is often thought to hold the darkest, gloomiest attitude toward the human condition in general. It is true that Calvin, like Augustine, assumes the presence of original sin in infants. Yet he does not emphasize this. In fact, Barbara Pitkin points out that Calvin supposes a "graduated guilt" that accrues as one grows and commits actual sin. Furthermore, adults should not only imitate the faith of children, they should also listen to the praise that children offer to God, for it is true praise. Nursing infants "even before they pronounce a single word, speak loudly and distinctly in commendation of God's liberality toward the human race" (p. 166, from the *Psalms Commentary*, 8:2).

In spite of this lovely theme in the *Psalms Commentary*, Calvin's overall view of children receives a mixed review from Pitkin. She notes, "Children are included, but marginally; they are subsumed under a notion of human nature that takes as its normative representative the adult male" (pg. 189). Several problems emerge if the adult male is taken as an adequate picture of human personhood. Most obviously, a theological anthropology is seriously limited and partial. In addition, the possibility exists that unhappy practical implications might follow from this reductionist understanding of the child in harsh treatment of children because of the "seed of sin" that exists in them, for example. Pitkin makes clear that she does not automatically rule out the concepts of original sin or depravity in theological language. But she does advise that "theologians ought to be explicit in ruling out possible misinterpretations of (these concepts) that would diminish the fundamental humanity of children" (p. 190).

Schleiermacher's interest in children was deep and his occasional reflections on them thoughtful. Dawn De Vries examines the great Berlin theologian's nine 1818 sermons on the Christian home. In these sermons, Schleiermacher consistently notes that the gifts children bring to the community are the gifts of freshness, spontaneity, optimism, forgiveness, and flexibility. He also displays a keen insight into the psychological health of children, what promotes it and what damages it. Children have some notion of their basic dependence that will help them understand and interpret their relationship to God (pg. 342). It is the task of parents, teachers, and pastors to develop and encourage this sense and help children flourish and develop in their faith. De Vries sums up Schleiermacher on this responsibility of the church to children, "Failures in child rearing can lead to pain and ultimately even to alienation from God. For this reason, the church neglects children at its own very significant peril" (p. 348).

Other fine chapters in this book examine Horace Bushnell's influential theory of childhood develop-

ment by Margaret Bendroth and the contribution of organized African-American women's societies in the late 19th century to issues of child education and nurture. This book in its delightful variety as well as its impressive focus is an important contribution to a widening inter-disciplinary conversation on the whole array of issues relating to family, child-bearing, child nurture, parenting, homemaking, and work. As Bonnie Miller-McLemore puts it in her closing essay, this is a conversation that has deep impulses for justice and care for children. She says, "The challenge now is to articulate even more boldly and directly a stronger and fuller theological vision of children and our obligations toward them" (pg. 473). This book is useful for both college and seminary classrooms, in a wide variety of disciplines, including theology, history, and sociology. It is also to be commended to the church, where theological reflection on children and family is needed in a society of increasing fragmentation and diversification. It has the added benefits of a fine subject and names index, a select bibliography, and an index of scripture references.

Leanne Van Dyk

Richard T. Hughes, *How Christian Faith Can Sustain the Life of the Mind*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001.

If you are familiar with the work of Richard T. Hughes, you know that Mitch Albom's *Tuesday's With Morrie* is an important work in his conception of the role of the scholar. In fact, one of the distinguishing aspects of Hughes's newest addition, *How Christian Faith Can Sustain the Life of the Mind*, is the final chapter, a poignant description of Hughes's own brush with mortality, with the famous, jaunty college professor, Morrie Schwartz as the epilogue's exigence and its immediacy. After reading Albom's affectionate memoir, I, too, along with thousands of others, reached out across the miles to connect to one of those special teachers in my life. Whether across the miles, or now just down the hall, these gifted teachers continue to inspire. It is ironic, then, after reading the descriptions of Hughes's open heart surgery and his own "Tuesday questions," I find Morrie's experience further away from the idea of the life of the mind Hughes has argued for. What are the "Tuesday questions" for Hughes, and why are they more developed and better suited for the Christian scholar?

First, in the chapter entitled, "The Power of Christian Traditions," Hughes seeks to help Christian scholars find out how religious uniqueness can sustain the life of the mind. "While the question of motivation may be the most fundamental issue at stake, it is not the last word, for scholars who are driven by Christian faith to engage in the life of the mind will find a variety of ways in which their Christian commitments will play themselves out. How that works may depend on one's discipline, the nature of one's educational institution, ones own presuppositions, and those of one's students, and a host of other factors" (11). Instead of searching for platitudes or aphorisms, Hughes shies away from such categorical statements. While Morrie sighs, "Love each other or die," Hughes tells us how our religious distinctives allow us to do so specifically. Hughes is the real deal, here. The section on institutional character and religious identity should provide any one of us at church-related institutions with a primer on who we are, where we are at and what that means. In one of the most succinct and yet appealing descriptions of Catholic, Reformed, Mennonite, and Lutheran character, Hughes provides a handbook of sorts on how each tradition is unique and the strengths and potential weaknesses of each. By identifying institutional uniqueness rather than consensus, Hughes resists trendy clichés on tolerance and instead provides the Christian scholar with a nuanced roadmap for negotiating religious higher education. Being able to apply all four together seems even more helpful for the Christian scholar teaching at an institution different from her own religious tradition. For example, a Catholic scholar teaching at a Mennonite institution could benefit from both Hughes's identification of the Catholic tradition, "Precisely because it takes 'seriously the unity of the human race,' the communitarian dimension suggests that faculties in Catholic colleges and universities should place scholarship and teaching in the service for justice and peace for all the peoples of the world" (66), with the strengths of the Mennonite tradition, "Menonnites routinely counsel one another to abandon self in the interests of others and to abandon narrow nationalism in the interest of world citizenship" (81). It is in this way that the Christian scholar understands how the differences in other perspectives complement each other.

Second, in the chapter entitled, "What it Might Mean to Teach from a Christian Perspective," Hughes' work moves Christian

scholars away from dependence on the self and toward the power of limitations. "These then are the ultimate questions: the question of fate and death, the question of guilt and condemnation, the question of emptiness and meaninglessness. These questions, if we pay them serious regard, always reveal to us the extent of our limitations and the depth of our finitude and alienation" (113). While Morrie distinctly turns to the self and away from a belief in a higher power, Hughes' work begins with a belief in God and in the redemptive power of the Son. While Schwartz's aphorisms describe his own suffering, they are meant to guide Mitch towards what is important, but also away from his own suffering. While Morrie may have accepted his body's finitude, he expresses, even to the very end, the virile ability of his mind to grasp and understand the meaning of life, which Albom eagerly transcribes.

How does an understanding of finitude shape our scholarship? Hughes writes, "If we are to hear the gospel, we must confess our finitude, our limitations, and our shortcomings. And if we are to be serious scholars we must confess that our understandings are inevitably flawed and incomplete" (107). Is Morrie skeptical of his own experience and analysis of mortality? No. Does he help Albom towards this skepticism? To some extent, yes. "Helping students come to terms with their finitude, however, is hardly a one time affair. As human beings we tend to forget our finitude to lose sight of our frailties and our limitations in a sea of pretensions that we are something we are not" (Hughes 108). Albom does come to some understanding of his own human situation, but it is in his belated persistence that his pretense erodes. It is an inconvenient and even painful process, requiring a sustained engagement over time. Hughes seems to understand this, as his definition of a Christian scholar reaches back into Enlightenment history, but it also deals with current issues surrounding distinctiveness and proclamation.

What impact does teaching from a "Christian perspective" have on today's students? Hughes writes that "by asking our students to take seriously their own finitude—and the finitude of others—we free them for a healthy skepticism, not only of their own self-sufficiency, but also of the presumed self-sufficiency of others. We free them to question the wisdom of all human authorities, including the wisdom they learn from us. And we free them to doubt the finality of all human solutions, especially those that masquerade under the label, 'final solutions'" (115). If "everyone is entitled to their [sic] own opinion," the difficulty of teaching the postmodern student is not to free them to be skeptical of the authority of other scholars, but to be skeptical of their own authority. Hughes describes the inherent difficulty of teaching such a position from the reaction of a UCLA student, "I don't like limits" (108). The same could be said, to some extent, of Morrie himself. But it is in this situation, understanding the inability of human solutions, that the Christian faith sustains intellectual inquiry. While *Tuesdays With Morrie* has helped us see what questions are important, in Hughes' new work we now have a better framework for working on the answers.

James Beasley

Spot: Light on Technology

learning from the Luddites

Chuck Huff

Ned Ludd was born just outside Leicester, England and has given his name to the modern movement questioning the worth of technology. It is an odd journey from the time Ned smashed the needles in a knitting frame to the current critiques of the information society, and while on sabbatical in Leicester I've investigated what Ned was originally so mad about.

I am not being Freudian when I say it was about his father. Ned Ludd was working as a weaver in Nottinghamshire, just north of Leicester, and was "ordered" by his father to "square his needles" on his stocking knitting frame. In a fit of rage he "took a hammer and beat them into a heap." Although it is easy to find sympathy for a son's anger at his father, this does not sound like the stuff of which social movements are made. Other than one anecdote from *Blackner's History of Nottingham* (1815), we know almost nothing else about Ludd. (Blackner says his name was actually Ludlam). There is speculation in ballads that he was "simple" and that he was frustrated because he could not master the skills he needed to emulate his successful father. All we get from Blackner is that Ludlam was "ignorant," a term that leaves much room for speculation.

The legend also claims that subsequent equipment damage in the area was often facetiously attributed to Ned Ludd. All that changed in December, 1811, when the name of Ludd was used to strike fear into the hearts of the machine owners in Nottingham. Workers had been breaking into houses and smashing stocking frames. Threatening letters from "Ned Ludd," "King Ludd," and "General Ludd" were sent to many employers and officials about 3 months after the breaking of frames began. Among the leaders of food riots of the time, we find women and even men disguised as women, calling themselves "General Ludd's Wives" and "Lady Ludd."

Chuck Huff is on leave from the Department of Psychology at St. Olaf College, thinking about computers and social relations while in Leicester, England.

So the name of Ludd had gotten around and had become symbolic of wider issues than knitting frames. What were all these Luddites upset about? As the food riots might suggest, it was not about the machines. This was a transitional time in the industrial revolution, and large-scale factories were not yet operating. Most of the work was done as "cottage industry." Weavers skilled at making stockings would rent a stocking-frame from an employer, who provided materials and paid the weavers based on their production. The stocking frame was kept in the weaver's home. Thus, frames were spread in small villages all across Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire and were difficult to guard from roving bands of frame breakers. Given this geographic distribution of the labor force and the laws against collectivization, unions or collectives were hard to organize. According to the historian Malcolm Thomas, destruction of the employer's property was part of an established pattern of "collective bargaining by riot" that had been practiced for decades before the Luddite uprisings. The rioters/Luddites complained that the prices they received for their work were too low and that the rents they had to pay for their frames were too high. In addition, machinery had been introduced that made an inferior product with less skilled labor. This inferior product was both ruining the weavers' reputation for quality and driving down the price for their skilled work.

If you read the published claims of the Luddites or the depositions from their trials, it was these economic and craft-pride claims that drove them to frame breaking. They did not blame the machines, but those who provided them, fixed the prices, and ran the economy. They placed the blame on employers and on Parliament. Since they could not formally organize or strike, they bargained by riot, and broke the machines. So, Ned Ludd was not mad at the machine, but

at his father. And the Luddites were not primarily angry at the machines, but directed their wrath at the employers by destroying their property.

In the short run, the Luddites lost. Government was unsympathetic, sent in the troops, shot many rioters and hung others. Prices did stabilize, but the clothing industry was in turmoil for many decades and eventually was exported to countries with cheaper labor. In the longer run, though, the concerns of the Luddites (now taken up by labor unions) were addressed by government intervention to assure living wages and to regulate work conditions.

Modern-day Luddites tend to make a mistake that the originals avoided. Although the originals broke the machines, they did it as a form of collective bargaining to influence the system. Today's Luddites tend to focus on the technology and fail to peer behind the curtain at the people and institutions that are designing the technology and imposing it on them.

If we are going to be neo-Luddites today, I suggest we take a lesson from the originals. We need to learn whom we ought to be mad at and then take action to influence those individuals to change. I am not advocating collective bargaining by riot, though when half of the 300 e-mails I receive in a day are spam I am tempted to drastic action. Instead of raging at the machine, we need to decide what our real goals are and take action to accomplish them. Some of these actions can be personal change, while others require change in broader systems.

On a small scale, think about how you use electronic mail. How often in the day do you check it? I used to have my e-mail program check mail every half hour. As a part of my sabbatical experience, I have turned off this option, and check my mail once or twice a day. I have set up a cascade of filters for my mail that groups much of the flood of "public" list mail and spam into folders for later consumption (or batch deletion) and only leaves mail addressed personally to me in my "in" box. This small change changes the pace of my life.

On a large scale, I am working to reform education in computer science so that those who design software (like e-mail systems) will think about the social and ethical issues associated with them before they make design decisions. The payoff for this change is going to take longer, perhaps on the order of the time it took for some of the Luddite concerns with fair pay to be addressed.

We should give more thought to what makes us mad about technology. I often hear it said that e-mail makes it easier for people to misunderstand each other and to escalate argument. In one sense this claim is undoubtedly true. There is a long line of research that shows how online interaction is more likely to encourage argument and maintain disagreement than face-to-face interaction. But to say that e-mail "does this to us" is to accept e-mail as an unanalyzed actor. There are a tremendous number of ways that e-mail systems could be designed, and an even larger number of social systems that e-mail use could be a part of. The combination of these two things (the design and the social context) with your personal goals is what makes your particular experience with e-mail more or less happy. E-mail systems can make it easier or harder to filter your e-mail, easier or harder to identity the real senders of e-mail, and easier or harder for your boss to track and archive your online activity. E-mail systems can be used in organizations where it is easier or harder for people to send you mail, where people get more or less training in the use of e-mail, where regulations about use are more or less strict, where expectations are for more or less frequent contact.

So, wake up to the real reasons why you like or do not like a technology. You might be able to change your experience by simply changing your personal habits (though change of this sort is often far from simple). It often is "the computer's fault," but if you look behind the curtain, you will find designers, engineers, and business people who made decisions about how to produce the computer as well as someone who made a decision about how to buy and configure the machine. You might find yourself moved to speak out in your organization about the way work (or computing) is organized. You might find yourself engaged in a longer-term project to change the way we do or teach business. Take advice from the original Luddites and direct your anger where it will do the most good. ♦

Pulpit and Pew

ghosts of Christmas present

Thomas C. Willadsen

On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.
[Matthew 2:11, NRSV]

The Rev. Mr. Tom Willadsen has written for The Cresset since 1996, sharing experiences from his home in Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

The Christmas I turned six my family went to a showing of "A Christmas Carol." At one point my mother turned to me and said, "Which ghost is next? We've seen the Ghost of Christmas Past, the Ghost of Christmas Present . . . ."

I whispered back in the darkened theatre, "The Ghost of Christmas Tree!" I didn't know what "Christmas Past""was, but I figured it was some food or tradition that they observed in England. I knew very well what Christmas presents are; that is what the Big Day is about, right?

The only other thing I could think of that uses "Christmas" as an adjective was "Christmas tree," that had to be it!

Mom was disappointed.

I don't remember what I got for Christmas that year. In fact, I don't remember what I got for Christmas last year. Except that I know I got a book from my mother, a game from my 6 year old and, in my stocking, an orange and baseball cards (but I get those every year). It's easier for me to remember what I gave to certain people, but not much easier.

Once in a while I find the perfect gift for someone and take great delight in giving it. Last year I gave such a present to one of my neighbors. Don helped clear my yard, and several neighbors' yards, after a horrific windstorm. We had a great time getting to know each other as we sawed limbs into pieces that were then light enough to drag to the curb. It took us about 4 hours. I took some pictures of the destruction and later had a coffee mug made for him with one of my photos on it. At the time, he'd been suffering severely from caffeine withdrawal because of the loss of power, so I also got him a pound of the strongest coffee they sell at Planet Perk. It was a way to thank him, but also a reminder for both of us of a surprisingly pleasant day.

Don was thrilled.

The book I gave my wife last year was "just too strange," and is still only partially read.

When I think of the three most memorable Christmas presents I have ever received, I am surprised that none of them is from my childhood. Those are the years of racecar sets, microscopes, drum sets—the big, traditional rite of passage presents. I got those presents, but they do not resonate through the years as do presents I received later.

On Christmas Eve, 1981, about 4:00 in the afternoon, I was hunched over my brother's new electric typewriter hunting and pecking my way to a 15-page paper on the plague. (My classmates had importuned our English teacher to let us turn in our term papers the day we returned from Christmas Break. We were also to take our *Ivanhoe* test that day. Mrs. Holmes was against it, but caved in. Had The Revolution occurred the first week of January, she would have been the first one lined up at the wall and shot for not protecting us from ourselves.) The doorbell rang. There on the stoop was a freshman from the debate team, one of "Tom's Protegés." He mumbled, "Merry Christmas, I thought you'd like this album." He handed it to me through the screen-door crack and shuffled through the snow back to his mother who was waiting in the car.

The album was "Heartland" by the Michael Stanley Band. To the extent that this fiercely average Mid-western rock band had a breakthrough, "Heartland" was it. Clarence Clemmons, from Bruce Springsteen's band, played solos on some of the tracks. The working-class vibe of the songs spoke to my years of working-class jobs as I worked through college and seminary.

More than the songs, what made this gift memorable was that it came as an absolute surprise. I fell in love with the songs, but I was always surprised that my protegés had the intuition that these songs would speak to me. The present wasn't wrapped, there was no pride of presentation, I haven't listened to it in years (I haven't even had an operable turntable since 1994!); still, I would never dream of parting with it.

My second memorable gift was *A Flag Full of Stars* by Don Robertson, who, like the Michael Stanley Band, hails from Cleveland, Ohio. Robertson is easily my favorite author, his *Morris Bird III* trilogy, which I read repeatedly through high school and college, helped me become a man, without having to be a he-man. These books were a great help and comfort to me in my teenage years, especially in the absence of my father, who had died when I was very young.

Robertson wrote two kinds of novels, historical tomes about the Civil War and domestic, homey volumes about a fictional community, Paradise Falls, Ohio. I do not care for the Civil War ones, but I devour the others. I had thought that *Flag Full of Stars* was one of his Civil War books, so I had never bothered to read it.

My mother found the book in a dollar bin in Galena, Illinois and tucked it away for months as my "Christmas book." I was quite surprised that it was about the election of 1948, told through a series of gripping vignettes. The surprise of there being another Don Robertson book was a great gift; to receive a copy of my very own was a delight that I still feel warmly; that my mother boasted of having found it in a dollar bin reveals a great deal about our family's character.

It felt like my mother had found a gift for me that I did not even know I wanted. What a feeling! To be known better than one knows oneself! Receiving this book is still the best example of Grace I have ever felt.

The UPS man rang my buzzer a few days before Christmas 1991, the first Christmas since my ordination, the first Christmas I would be away from my family. I was too busy to feel lonely or, more likely, I was too busy because I was lonely. I rushed down to sign for the package. Whatever it was, it was in a beaten up shoebox, with no return address and my last name misspelled. It had been sent from a community where I knew no one. I was busy, so I put it under the tree. I was busy, I forgot about it until Christmas morning.

Now in some families presents are opened on Christmas Eve. My family is emphatically not one of those families. If you think it's hard for spouses of different denominations to observe the holidays, try watching a husband from a "Christmas Eve opening" family on his first Christmas with a wife from a "Christmas morning" family. Nurtured as I was in a "Christmas morning" family I had no trouble waiting until the 25th. "It's a Christmas present, not a Christmas Eve present. End of debate," I have observed, pastorally, on numerous occasions.

When I opened the box I found a plastic baby-Jesus doll, wrapped in, I suppose, swaddling cloths, or at least a rough, muslin loincloth. The doll's hair was a plastic seascape of deep brown that recalled Jimmy Connors's hair at Wimbledon, or maybe Ringo Starr's. The fingers of the right hand were set in a sort of blessing attitude. The unclosing brown eyes stared straight ahead from its poseable head. In the bottom of the box was a card, signed by three seminary classmates, on which they had written, "What greater gift could we give?"

Indeed.

Baby Jesus is the last Christmas gift that has really taken me by surprise. He still sits on a high shelf in my office. Once in a while I take him down when a fussy child visits me. Most of the time he sits up there, alone with a Burger King crown, staring and blessing.

Like a good gift he makes me laugh and makes me wonder. Like the Ghost of Christmas Presents, he points me back to One who gives us the Greatest Possible Gift. Even to those who do not know they want it. ✠

refined by fire

Tricia O'Connor Elisara

Tricia O'Connor Elisara and her family share their lives between their home in California and their home in the South Pacific, where she and her husband work for Creation Care Study Program, an undergraduate semester abroad program.

I knew I had become skittish about water when I found myself grousing about my son's toilet training video. Yes, I know the point of the video is to demonstrate the proper way to roll up one's sleeves and wash hands after using the potty, but does the little boy have to keep the water running while he demonstrates the technique? The twelve separate forest fires that have alternately burned and spared the region I call home have set me on edge when it comes to water usage.

My town of Julian is nestled in a mixed woodland in the mountains of eastern San Diego county. Its historic downtown, national forest, and apple pie draw thousands to its streets, trails, and inns. Southern California dry, with sand-colored hills dotted with full oaks and stately pines, the town looks out towards the Pacific Ocean to the west, the Anza Borrego desert to the east. It's gorgeous, it's home, and it's in a severe drought.

Every third pine appears dead or dying due to bark beetle infestation, a disease exacerbated by stressed, water-thirsty conditions. Dry leaf litter covers the ground, and homeowners find it cost-prohibitive to remove trees or clear acres of land: there's tinder everywhere. We live in a place where everything crackles—the once-green grass underfoot, my nerves.

Fire conditions were bad in June, and neighbors held their breath (and took boxes of photo negatives to relatives in other cities) until the first blaze confirmed our fears. This was going to be a bad year. A year in which fire did not behave as it was supposed to in this ecosystem—a natural and healthy phenomena that burns low through the bush, clearing the dead leaf litter and bursting open seed pods through its heat while sparing the old trees. Those in the know forecasted a wholly different, and far more dangerous, situation: when a fire hasn't burned through a forest for a long time, it can burn even the oaks, render the soil sterile, and spread lightning quick as it burns higher than normal, igniting the canopy and catapulting embers.

The biggest of the fires began in late July with an accident that ignited a beast with multiple heads that ferociously consumed 63,000 acres and dozens of homes.

Our town's population doubled as the California Department of Forestry set up a shadow city on a neighbor's ranchland to direct the massive assault on the fire. The camp did indeed have a war-like feel to it with a mess hall, medical clinic, laundry, and a mail, mapping, and communication center. Fire was the only word on anyone's lips as the local high school was transformed into a place where people ate, slept, and watched smoke columns in a trance, faithfully attending the fire briefings, always hoping for good news. Phone lines lit up as neighbors spied plumes over the next ridge—"Tricia, this is Kristen! Pick up! I see smoke in your direction!" Fire-trucks from as far away as Arizona and Sacramento lined our streets. A makeshift helipad was erected down the road. As soot-smudged firefighters crowded the corner market in search of candy bars, residents offered humble, nearly reverential words of thanks. Hand-painted signs appeared in shop windows, and the town came out to thank the rescue crews in a celebration that blocked Main Street, sold a stack of hastily silk-screened souvenir t-shirts, and swept us up into a collective moment of civic pride.

After that fire was finally contained, we

sighed deeply. . .until an arsonist set a fire in our neighborhood two weeks later, forcing us to evacuate all over again. Thankfully, the boxes removed the first time were still stacked in the garage, so we fell effortlessly into formation in grabbing our valuables. But by then my nerves were shot.

How does one redeem a summer of fire? With local ponds dried up from drought and fire fighting, I've found myself worrying frequently about our aquifer. I can hardly send water down a drain without a physical grimace; my son has watched in wonderment as I've sloshed big stockpots of dishwater across the living room in an effort to give the water a second use on the withered plants outside. I've also had to swallow hard and push my fists deep into my pockets to keep from yelling at my parents' neighbor who I saw meticulously hosing a handful of leaves down his driveway. "Haven't you heard?" I wanted to yell. "California's in a drought, and they've invented the broom!"

In addition to my general skittishness, fire season has also provided a lesson in winnowing out the important stuff. I got to play out that age-old question of what you would save in a fire as I glanced at each room and in barely controlled self-talk thought "grab the photos, the chair can be replaced, the quilt needs to go, the books can burn. . . ." A life of simplicity looks mighty nice when you realize you can shove the truly irreplaceable treasures in the trunk of a car in twenty minutes or less. I was also reminded of the beauty of community and hospitality—the night of the fire we had seven adults sleeping in our house, and the group evacuation effort would have brought tears to my eyes if I hadn't already been choking on smoke. As I raced down the hallway with our files of important documents (pre-prepared, thankfully!), the spiritual analogy was not lost on me: if awakened in the middle of the night in your pajamas, would you be ready to account for your life?

Back to earth, the fires brought me into closer touch with another elemental fact of life: water itself. It's a strange thing to be on the receiving end of an environmental crisis when other people in your region are blithely going about their business, irrigating their sidewalks with wild abandon. Sadly, it takes a scare to bring us to our senses about the small stuff like the preciousness of water, its regional scarcity, and the ensuing vulnerability of the places we live. With fire season still on, I thirst for rain. May my renewed appreciation for water, and my desire to guard it, go unquenched. ✤

REQUERDO

The sound of the sea is a lonely sound
  when the long day is dying,
with the silver tide slipping away
  and the deep woods sighing.
For here in the shadow of alders and firs
  the heart is ever trying
to hear the voice from far away,
  at night, with the sea gulls crying.

J.T. Ledbetter

philosophy at work: environment and development in China

Xiangui Su

When I first began planning a new course in Environmental Ethics at my university, there were already in place numerous courses of a scientific nature dealing with the environment—Global Ecology, Environmental Science, even Ecological Economics. So in my course proposal, I took pains to show reasons why a philosophical and moral perspective is essential for an adequate understanding of environmental issues given the difficult context in which environmental issues are addressed in China.

Xiangui Su teaches philosophy at Peking University, Beijing, China.

China awakened to the environmental crisis very late, a result of both ignorance and political ideology. Soon after Communist China was founded in 1949, Chairman Mao Zedong expressed his vision of a new China: when he ascended the walls of the Forbidden City, he wished to see black smoke rising from the chimneys of factories! What we now see as pollution was hailed as a symbol of industrialization, promising a bright future to human beings. Moreover, not until its reform, and the opening of its doors to the world in 1979, did China admit that it had environmental problems. People had naively believed that environmental crisis was unique to capitalist countries, and was a manifestation of the crisis of capitalism, which was, in return, rooted in the private ownership system.

After gradually merging into the international community, China has come to realize that the tensions between the environment and economic development are universal; China needs to deal with them as well. This has resulted in the inclusion of environmental protection in the annual governmental report submitted to the sessions of the People's Congress. During the last two decades, China has passed many laws concerning the environment and has participated in most international environmental treaties.

Unfortunately, economic development has become the controlling guideline for the country at this stage. Economic growth is used not only to satisfy the basic material needs of people, but it is also established as a central political task for the Party, contrasting with the Class Struggle in Mao's era. This policy has significant consequences on environmental preservation, for government officials are tested and promoted by a standard of economic merit and achievement during their period in office. This has led to a booming economy (average annual GDP growth rate maintained at 8.3% during 1995-2000), but it has also resulted in many irrational and ill-planned economic projects, projects that are frequently the cause of serious environmental effects. Thus, environmental quality is sacrificed for local economic growth.

As the economy has become the center of all social life, the personal pursuit of wealth is now sanctioned by the ideology of the Chinese. The aspiration for wealth and material comforts of the contemporary Chinese is unprecedented in their history. Nothing is wrong with a materialistic desire in itself, but the desire of the Chinese is unbridled. The legal system is incomplete in China, and even worse, the laws often cannot be enforced. Morality and public opinion, which in earlier generations have played important roles in curbing inappropriate social behavior, have lost much of their normative power. At the same time, the communist party's doctrines and ethical codes are losing most of their strength as a basis for social morality in our increasingly commercialized society. This has been described by sociologists as a "faith crisis," especially since the traditions of China, once powerful and united, have now have lost credibility in the face of modern western science and political systems. All that seems left within Chinese people's belief system is a mixture of political pragmatism, consumerism, and optimism for unlimited economic growth and the progress of science and technology.

In direct contrast with the high hopes for development, China's natural resources are

very scarce, especially in view of the large population (1.26583 billion people in 2000). For example, China's per capita water reserve is about one-fourth of the world's level, about one-fifth of America's level. Its per capita arable soil is about one half of the world's average. This alarming condition has not yet been fully realized by many Chinese, who in their eagerness to follow the American lifestyle of owning spacious houses and luxury cars, overlook these threatening realities.

In recent years, the government has been promoting the auto industry as a prominent supporting sector of the economy. Unfortunately, the policy to make cars accessible to every household has created formidable traffic congestion problems in most of the major cities in China (not to speak of the air pollution and land reduction). In Beijing, road building has been a perennial job for the municipal services, for it has never been able to catch up with the rapid growth in the number of private cars. A reasonable prescription for this ill would be the priority of public transit, but this may frustrate many people (in particular those who have benefited from economic reform, and who can now afford one or more cars). Even more disappointing, some experts have concluded that, given the limited natural resources, it would be environmentally disastrous if the individual consumption of Chinese people reaches the standards of Americans. It is dismaying, but true. This leads to the question most people would ask: Are we destined to live a poor life?

At bottom, this is a philosophical question that requires philosophical insight. Philosophy may not be able to satisfy people's desires, but it can change and transform desires. A simple truth of social ecology is that human beings always interact with nature in the form of society and culture; we obtain resources from the natural world and then return waste. This is done to satisfy the material and spiritual needs of individuals, but the manner and the levels of this satisfaction have been heavily conditioned by cultural structures. These structures at one level include political and economical institutions, and at another level involve ideological devices such as religion, cosmology, philosophy, the arts, and literature, in short, the symbolic system we employ to make our lives meaningful.

By clarifying the assumptions of the development mentality, philosophy can help to show that, while our basic material needs are real and vital to human life, many of these "needs" are illusory and not well justified. They have been formed or imposed by social opinions or ideology. As for the broader question concerning the human relation to nature, environmental philosophers have argued that our attitudes towards nature are informed by our concept of nature. The substitution of a mechanical and "disenchanted" worldview for an organic one has made nature something "dead" and an object for manipulation, which has been realized with the help of western science. By questioning the fundamental goals that our mode of economy and technology serve, an alternative view insists that the crisis in the environment is primarily a crisis in the core of our civilization and spirituality.

Conceptual analyses, although useful, are not enough to find solutions for our environmental problems. An environment-oriented philosophy must contribute to building an ecologically sound human culture, in which each person's existence and development is harmonious not only with others, but with the flourishing natural world as well. To attain this, we should reclaim and reinterpret our traditions, making them relevant to our situation, so that the ecological ideal would not appear to be something exotic and unpractical. Instead of St. Francis of Assisi, Henry Thoreau, John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and Rachel Carson, we (the Chinese) have Confucianism, which teaches that spiritual happiness surpasses temporal and sensuous satisfactions, and emphasizes a self-perfection and cultivation through harmony with others in social life. We also have Taoism, which values the aesthetic aspect of nature, and seeks the unification of humans with the universe. Finally, we also have Buddhism, which sees every living thing as equal, and inhibits killing.

These are the kinds of spiritual resources available to us, and they are as essential as natural resources if we are to survive on this planet. I believe that, in an age of environmental crisis, a central wisdom that philosophy must teach is how to live a simple life that is meaningful and valuable. This is imperative not only for the Chinese people, but also the world.

Vocation

rookie cop

A. P.

A. P. patrols and writes in a midwestern city.

"Bring the pipe," my partner said.

"What?"

"Bring the pipe. It's a 'man with a gun' call. Take the pipe."

The pipe. He means the shotgun. We've just been sent to a house to check for a wanted subject known to be armed. The philosophy at work here is that if you think the bad guy has a gun, you bring a bigger gun. It's winter. I've been a cop for about seven weeks. I have a fresh haircut, my uniform is pressed, and my badge is shiny. I have absolutely no idea what's going on.

The police academy was a mini-boot camp, a rush of push-ups, criminal law, and being yelled at by instructors in a variety of creative ways. Our graduating class was then split up and assigned to districts throughout the city. We are now paired with an experienced cop, a Field Training Officer (FTO), who will show us the ropes. I have heard tales about some FTOs who have their recruits write parking tickets in rain storms and others who, in public, verbally eviscerate their recruits. There is often an inherent tension between the FTO and a recruit. After all, a recruit's slip-up could get them both killed. But I have drawn a good hand. My FTO is a placid man, a veteran of the most violent districts in the city. I try to absorb all he has to tell me. There's a lot to know. "It's hard at first," he says. "But just follow my lead. If I put my hands on someone, you put your hands on them too. If I fight, you fight. The number one thing out here is safety."

My FTO and I and another officer are sent to a domestic violence-related assault in a low-income neighborhood. A woman answers the door, her face bruised and bloodied. There is blood on the floor of the house and on the walls. She wordlessly points to the man who struck her. He's a rather large fellow. And he won't show us his hands, and suddenly we're in the room with him, a bedroom that seems about the size of a gym locker, and now he's got a knife, a curved blade a foot long and he doesn't want to go to jail. We struggle to subdue him, the room is filled with pepper spray, my FTO calls for backup, and soon it's over. 30 seconds of adrenaline, an hour or so of investigation, follow-up at the hospital where the victim is taken, and then the paperwork. Volumes of it. Reams. Incident reports, clearance reports, DA sheets, inventory forms, arrest documentation. It takes hours. You never see cops writing reports on television.

Some other veteran officers at the district offer me advice for working the street. Watch their hands. It's their hands, or what's in them, that can hurt you. Turn off your headlights at an accident scene so you don't blind oncoming traffic. Believe nothing that you hear and only half of what you see. Treat people the way you'd want a member of your family to be treated by a cop. To other veteran officers, recruits don't exist. I can't blame them. They have twenty years of experience. I have twenty hours. I have nothing new to tell them. I have nothing they need. No one likes a warrior who's never been to war.

My FTO and I are on patrol. "You new?" people ask me. They can sense it. My uniform is too spotless, my face too guileless, my uncertainty too telling. I meet a man with a half-shaved head who is convinced that burglars are after his Disney coloring books because they are worth "millions of dollars." I enter homes piled knee-high with garbage, the only clear space on the floor smeared with human and animal feces. There are cockroaches, lots of cockroaches, al-

ways cockroaches, and there are bodily fluids where they shouldn't be. You meet a lot of people who aren't doing particularly well and you want to step into their lives and fix them. But you can often offer only a Band-aid solution before it's off to the next call.

Some days are slow-paced. Time to patrol, do follow-up, make a traffic stop. Other days, the dispatcher sends you from assignment to assignment as if trying to test your endurance; a shooting, a stabbing, a family trouble where all anyone seems to know how to do is shriek at the top of his or her lungs. No time to catch your breath. No time to eat. On nights like these, when the shift finally ends, I go to an all night diner, peruse the menu, and make up for lost time.

My field training is over. I'm on my own, no longer shadowed by a veteran officer. What now? A placard in the district station offers some counsel: *In the absence of detailed instruction, please do the right thing.* I have a list of numbers to call for advice. The desk sergeant, the lieutenant, and my FTO, who expertly guided me through the early days, and for whom, if I had the clout and funding, I would like to name a monument.

I have a few months in on the job. There are things I know now. I know the comforting metallic whisper that my handgun makes when I take it out of the holster, the only thing more reassuring being when the problem has been resolved and it's safe to put the gun away. I know where on their bodies prostitutes hide their dope. I know the best places in the district to get a hot sandwich after midnight. But every time I reach a comfort level, something new comes along that makes me realize how little I have experienced, how I haven't really seen anything yet. They say it takes at least five years before police officers become cops, before they can function at a high level on the street. I have a long way to go.

I have highs on the job; a foot pursuit of a knife-wielding suspect with a sprinter's build that takes me over two fences before my partner and I snap him up, helping catch a home invasion armed robber just as he is exiting the house he just ransacked, assisting an elderly woman in feeling more secure after her house is burglarized. There are most definitely lows; a drunk woman spitting in my face, broadcasting the wrong direction of travel for a theft suspect, and times, in general, when my ignorance seems galactic.

Someone asked me not long ago what kind of goals I had set for myself my first year on the job. I thought about that, pondering some lofty rhetoric about serving the community, making order out of chaos, righting wrongs. And that's all well and good. But for now, I'm just going out there, trying to treat people with respect, picking up a trick or two, and remembering to bring the pipe when it's called for. ♦

OBEDIENCE STREET

I live with my mother and sisters
on Obedience Street, just off Deferential,
Mama sometimes says.
My father died when I was 4.
All my sisters are older, and ever since
Pop-o "passed" (as Mama says) they've called me
plain—plain, yes, "Patricia Plain."
Maura, my oldest sister, started it.
Then Dorothy, then Eileen, and even
Margaret, who's a whole
17 minutes older, except
she calls my "*Patty* Plain." If Patrick
were my name they wouldn't. He was Pop-o.

Saul Bennett

The Nation

the importance of words

Jean Bethke Elshtain

Jean Bethke Elshtain is the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Professor of Social and Political Ethics at the University of Chicago. This essay is based on Chapter I from her forthcoming book, Just War Against Terror: Ethics and American Power in a Violent World, *to be published in March by Basic Books.*

How does one speak of "terror" and the "terrorist"? The language of "martyr" and "martyrdom" is distorted when it is applied not only to those prepared to suffer and even to die as witnesses to their faith but, as well, to those who kill as many civilians as they can while committing suicide in the process. Likewise, "terrorist" is twisted beyond recognition if it is used to designate anyone anywhere fighting for a cause.

The word "terror" first entered the political vocabulary of the West during the French Revolution. Those who guillotined thousands in the Place de la Concorde in Paris and called it "justice" were pleased to speak of revolutionary terror as a form of justice. "Terrorist" and "terrorism" entered ordinary language as a specific way to designate a specific phenomenon: indiscriminate killing directed against ideological enemies outside the context of a war between opposing combatants.

A terrorist is a person who kills because someone is perceived as an "objective enemy," no matter what he or she may or may not have done. If you are a bourgeois, or a Jew, or a religious nonconformist—the list of victims of such violence is long—you are slated to die in revolutionary violence. And as long as you are an enemy, you can be killed, no matter what you are doing, no matter where you are, no matter whether you are two years old or ninety.

A complex, subtle, and generally accepted international language has emerged to make critical distinctions where violence and its use are concerned. *Combatants* are distinguished from *non-combatants*. A *massacre* is different from a *battle*. An *ambush* is different from a *firefight*. When Americans look back with sadness and even shame at the Viet Nam War, it is horrors like the My Lai massacre they have in mind. People who have called the slaughter of more than four hundred unarmed men, women, and children a "battle" are regarded as having taken leave of their senses; they seem so determined to justify everything that Americans did in the Viet Nam War that they have lost their moral moorings.

To be sure, it is only fair to point out that the Viet Nam War was a terrible war, in part because we faced an enemy who fought by blurring the line between combatants and non-combatants. It was often difficult to distinguish combatants from non-combatants (although one is always obliged to try) because non-combatants often harbored combatants who lay in wait to ambush American soldiers. The soldiers at My Lai were inflamed, having just lost comrades. But none of that exculpates or justifies what happened. *Massacre* it was. Anyone who claimed a glorious victory over these villagers and chortled at their suffering would rightly be regarded as a moral monster.

A terrorist is one who sows terror. Terror subjects its victims or would-be victims to paralyzing fear. As political theorist Michael Walzer puts it in his classic work, *Just and Unjust Wars*: "Its [terrorism's] purpose is to destroy the morale of a nation or a class, to undercut its solidarity; its method is the random murder of innocent people. Randomness is the crucial feature of terrorist activity. If one wishes fear to spread and intensify over time, it is not desirable to kill specific people identified in some particular way with a regime, a party, or a policy. Death must come by chance. . . ." Remember this: Terrorism is the random murder of innocent people. By innocent, one means "people in no position to defend themselves." The designation is not a reference to moral innocence, for

none among us is innocent in that way, but to the fact that civilians going to work, taking a trip, shopping, or riding a bus are not armed to the teeth and ready to defend themselves. In other words, they are not combatants.

Terrorists are not interested in the subtleties of diplomacy or in compromise solutions. They have taken leave of politics in favor of violence. Period. There are times when it becomes clear that elements of movements that resort to terrorism—say the I.R.A.—also move in the direction of developing a political arm and begin negotiating a political solution. But there is no political solution if the terrorism is aimed at destruction. This is especially true if what is being opposed is not specific policies but entire ways of life, when a people are targeted for destruction not because of what they have done but, simply, because of who they are.

The designation of *terrorism* becomes contested because terrorists and their apologists would prefer not to be depicted accurately. It is important to distinguish between two cases here. In some hotly contested political situations in which each side has a lot at stake and each side resorts to force, it may be in the interest of one side to try to label their opponents as "terrorists" rather than "combatants" or "soldiers" or "fighters." But one must ask who such men (and women) attack. Do they target soldiers at outposts or in the field? Do they try to disable military equipment, killing soldiers in the process? As they carry out such operations, are they open to negotiation and diplomacy at the same time? If so, it seems reasonable to resist any blanket label of "terrorist" or "terrorism" for what they are up to.

In a situation in which non-combatants are deliberately targeted and the maximum murder of non-combatants is the explicit aim, "fighter" or "soldier" or "noble warrior" is language that is not only beside the point, but pernicious. It collapses the distance between those who plant bombs in cafes or fly civilian aircraft into office buildings and, by contrast, those who fight other combatants, taking the risks attendant upon such forms of fighting. There is a nihilistic edge to terrorism: it aims to destroy, most often in the service of goals that are wild and utopian and that, therefore, make no sense at all in the usual political ways. That is why the terrorist and the soldier are worlds apart. To collapse the two into one erodes a vital moral distinction central to ethical reflection upon violence and the use of force. ✦

ON FAILING TO ANSWER

This morning I've accomplished
some things around the house:
I've mowed the grass, paid

the bills, and run a load of wash.
I've even written this poem.
All of it was easy, relatively

speaking, and what's left undone
I will never need to explain
to anyone. You'd be surprised

what industry and poetry allow me
to ignore: the cold in Mitrovica,
those German tanks you pass, your

neighbor's missing brother, the close
alleyways the missionaries walk,
and the features of Albanian

you notice as you talk
about God to the girl who has been
to Islamic seminary in Prishtina.

I miss you so.

With all that I've done already
today, I'll not be required to explain
why I do not reply to the email

that came from you yesterday—
the one that poses questions I wish
I could bring myself to answer:

How are you doing?
How do we get where we are in this life?
How did I get to Kosovo?

Mary M. Brown

The Attic

From The Cresset, *Vol. XVI, no. 1, published in November of 1952*

Why the CRESSET?
By John Strietelmeier

THE CRESSET is published by the Valparaiso University Press. Valparaiso University is mainained almost wholly by volunary gifts of Lutherans of the Synodical Conference. Therefore, although neither the University nor the CRESSET could properly be classified as an official agency of any Lutheran church body, both are Lutheran in their orientation, their constituency, and their functions.

The CRESSET, however, does not undertake to speak officially or even semi-officially for any church body. It is not our function to duplicate the work and writing of official church publications or to comment on matters of internal policy within any of the Lutheran bodies. For technical reasons, our audience is dominantly Lutheran. But it is our policy to speak to anyone who will listen, Lutheran or not, and it is our hope that in the years to come we may bring into our audience a completely representative cross-section of the American people.

Until we find entry into that larger audience, however, we shall of necessity be forced to address ourselves primarily to our fellow Lutherans. And certainly, for many years to come, that audience will present challenge enough to our best efforts. For it is apparent to anyone who knows Lutheranism that the various Lutheran bodies are in a period of dramatic and, at times, painful transition. We do not consider ourselves qualified to comment authoritatively on the stirrings which are taking place within the areas of theology and ecclesiastical institutions. What concerns us is the changes that are taking place within the so-called "secular" areas, for it is within these areas that Lutherans are encountering problems which it is our privilege and duty to explore and to try to find answers to. I have space to suggest only some of the very broadest areas within which these problems lie and within which the CRESSET is working to find answers which will be consistent both with the facts of life as we observe them and with the theological tradition which is the grandest part of our heritage.

Obviously for all of us, one of the major problems is that of the family. One writer has pointed out that if Martin Luther had left nothing else to western culture, he would have made a tremendous contribution by establishing the pattern of home life which, by way of the Lutheran parsonage, passed down into all levels of Protestant society as a model. This concept of the family is now running headlong into the restless, rootless, pagan world of the midtwentieth century-a world in which children are being more and more torn from their parents, husbands and wives live together under a kind of tentative arrangement, and an unbridled individualism challenges the old ideals of family loyalty and solidarity. Many of us believe that we are in danger of losing a wonderfully good heritage without gaining anything nearly as good by way of compensation. At the same time, we recognize that today is not 1890 and certainly not 1540. The family, also, must find its place in the social structure of 1952. We must try to find a way to save as much of the good of the past as we can while, at the same time, drawing out of modern culture whatever of good there may be in it.

Then there is the problem of government and the state. Many of our people are just beginning to become politically conscious. In an abstract way, Lutherans have approved of American democracy for 100 years. But until recently, they approved of a democracy of which they were the benficiaries, a democracy which permitted them freedom of worship, a democracy in which they were not called upon to participate in those objectionable features of the German states (military service,

for example) which had caused many of them to leave their homelands in the first place. Today, while still the beneficiaries of such a democracy, Lutherans are becoming more and more aware of the fact that they must necessarily become also participants in it. And faced with that necessity, they are troubled by some of the practical workings of our democracy. They are troubled, to cite just a couple of examples, by the kind of goings-on which they encounter on the precinct level and which, seemingly, are an essential part of the system. They are troubled by the tone of our system, a tone which seems radically different from all that their former idealistic picture of American democracy had led them to expect. Among the problems we must face, then, are first of all the problem of helping our people to pass from their former political quietness into the arena of active participation in government and, secondly, the problem of establishing whatever relevance there may be between the Faith which should be our motive force and the political activities to which this force should be applied.

There is, thirdly, the problem of science. Since the time of Darwin, science to most Synodical Conference Lutherans has been a bugaboo. The fear of science, one may suspect, is the sort of fear one normally feels of the unknown, for it has been generally true that our people have never come into any sort of sympathetic association with science at its best. To many of them, science has been only a matter of Darwinian evolution with some vague ideas of a world considerably older than the 6,006 years which they found in the margins of their English Bibles. This is not said in any spirit of uncharitable censure. It was a product of isolation from the intellectual currents of almost a century. But with the passing of the period of isolation, we are now cast into the middle of the scientific stream without any clear picture of its source or of the course it has followed during a long part of its route or of the direction in which it is tending. It must be our task to try, in a comparatively short time, to bring ourselves up to date so that we may know where we are and where we are drifting. As a minimum necessity, we must attempt to understand the basic assumptions of science, we must try to approach the honest scientist sympathetically as a fellow-searcher after the truth, and we must persuade our people that there can be no unbridgeable gap between faith and reason. We must, in other words, tear down the wall of suspicion and fear which, for so long, has kept the Lutheran out of the laboratory. And perhaps in the process of doing so we may even make a positive contribution to science. For surely the truth which has been given us by revelation must suggest at least a few insights to our reason.

The fourth problem that confronts us is the problem of finding for ourselves and for others the place of the Lutheran Christian in the world of letters. Until very recently, this problem was perhaps incapable of immediate soluttion. There was the formidable barrier of language. We had all about us the familiar example of the Lutheran whose German was the flawless literary German of Luther's Bible and the Lutheran hymns and, at least in some cases, of Goethe's and Kant's and Schiller's works, but whose English was the colloquial English of the community in which he lived. Language is more than grammar and syntax. The right use of a language requires a feeling for the delicate nuances of meaning, a feeling for cadences and rhythms, an understanding of connotations as well as denotations. Such feelings and understandings can not be lectured into a person in a classroom or in a whole series of classrooms. They come only with immersion into the literature of the language. And it is fair to say that, by and large, our people were hardly aware of the existence of English literature, let alone immersed in it. We are, however, standing today at the point of change. We are dealing now with a generation which has lost its roots in German literature and which has not yet found roots in English literature. I consider the book review section of the CRESSET a section of critical importance, primarily because it brings our readers, every month, a sampling of the almost riotous abundance of writing which is being done, in every conceivable area of interest, in our country and in the English language.

Closely allied to the problem of letters is the problem of the arts. Much has been made of the Lutheran heritage in the arts, particularly in music. But I must ask, what contribution has Lutheranism in the United States made to any of the arts, including music? I am not aware of a single contribution, unless it be that of introducing our heritage to other nationalities which have been blended in the American melting pot. But nothing original has been done. Why this sterility? Perhaps here again the elements of geographical and cultural isolation have played their roles. But perhaps there has crept into Lutheranism a fear and a suspicion of the artist which is foreign to its spirit. At any rate, this state of affairs, too, is changing and it must be

one of the purposes of a magazine such as ours to encourage and to bring to public notice those among us whose talents lie in the arts and who, if we will but let them, will make their arts the handmaiden of their faith.

And, sixthly, I could be expected, as a combination of editor and teacher, to point out the problems involved in education. It must be said to the undying credit of our Lutheran people that they recognized, from their earliest days in this country, that in the area of education you cannot have your cake and eat it too. You cannot leave God out of the schools without out taking Him out of men's lives. At much cost and in the face of much prejudice, Lutherans educated their own children in their own schools. Unfortunately, they did not keep pace with developments in American society. There was a time when the eight grades of a parochial school corresponded to the length of schooling of perhaps 95% of the American people. But as the length of schooling increased from generation to generation, the church's facilities remained essentially static. There came at last the day when our young people as a matter of course left the parochial school to enter completely secular high schools and later even universities. Today, then, with notable exceptions such as the Lutheran high schools in our larger cities and the university which publishes the CRESSET, the Church is content to give its young people the eight years of education which would have been satisfactory for 1850 or even 1875 but which falls far short of the average length of schooling in the United States of 1952. And this despite the fact that Lutheranism came out of the universities and was nurtured in the universities of Germany and Scandinavia and has traditionally included the teaching mission in the total mision of the church.

Finally, although scores of other problems could be suggested, there is an urgent need for theological discussion on the lay level. I am unalterably opposed to any suggestion that the clergy and the laity are two different and mutually suspicious species. This spirit of anti-clericalism, which crops up every now and then, runs counter to the whole spirit of Lutheranism. But it must be admitted that laity has, by default, surrendered its rights and duties in the area of theology to the clergy, with the result that the clergy has, seemingly, come to have a very low regard for the theological capabilities of the laity while the laity has come to suspect the clergy of using obscurantist theology as a means of maintaining control of the church. Both suspicions have some ground in fact. I believe that a major purpose of a magazine such as the CRESSET should be a broadening of interest in specifically theological problems with a view toward removing, ultimately, the present wholly artificial distinctions between the clergy and the laity in the field of theology. In a practical way, it is impossible for a Christian, even if he tries to claim lay immunity from theology, to operate without some reasonably systematic theolology. And, as a matter of fact, our laity has been operating with a theology. Unfortunately, the theology has been a rudimentary theology consisting essentially of a pat set of questions and answers prefabricated by President Schwan in his explanation of the Small Catechism. I do not mean to suggest that this is not a good theology. What I mean is that President Schwan considered it a thorough enough theology for fourteen-year-olds who were about to take their first communion-not the more highly-developed theology that a scientist, for instance, would need in order to relate his faith to his work or that a corporation president would need in meeting his problems of profits and labor relations and considerations of the morals of our economic system.

This brings us, finally, to the question of the demands that are made upon those of us who would write to this Lutheran audience which stands a notch above the general level of people in interest and education and awareness of the problems of the modern world. Those demands I should like to discuss in the space that still remains.

The first demand that is made of us is, obviously, that we be men of God. The evangelist who said that, in his preaching, he spoke as a dying man to dying men gave us also the basic rule for our writing. God not only has the answers to our problems. In our age He is our problem! For the kind of writing which alone justifies our existence as a magazine, we need men of prayer even more than we need journalists. God could use a stuttering Moses to direct His people. The excellency of the power in our writing also must be of God and even if we stutter and stammcr we will accomplish His purposes.

But in the divided church of the twentieth century, one can hardly be a man of God in the abstract. Like it or not, we all see God and our Saviour through the glasses of some denominational bias. Since we do, it is essential that we who would write against the background of a denominational bias be thoroughly grounded in the theological tradition of our denomination. This is necessary both in order that we may

speak with accuracy and assurance the great truths which have been preserved in that tradition and also that we may be aware of those areas within which our own tradition comes into conflict with other theological systems. It is not enough, in other words, to be merely religious, although certainly we must be that; we must acquire the best specifically theological background we can.

Beyond that, we must of course possess the specific skills of our profession. Church journalism carried on by willing but incompetent amateurs has not, we must admit, had much standing in the journalistic profession. Journalism is a profession, as difficult and as demanding as are most professions. Amateurs in the field run the risk that amateurs run in any profession of prejudicing what they have to say by mistakes in style, structure, composition, or professional ethics.

Finally, we must know the constituency to which we are writing. This is much easier said than done. In its very nature, most church journalism is a part-time job. It is carried on by men whose primary duties lie in some other area, commonly the ministry or teaching. There is a lack both of time and of opportunity to move about through the country, meet people, sit in on meetings, and get behind the scenes. For a magazine like the CRESSET, the problem is complicated by the fact that in order to deal adequately with the broad fields of the arts, letters, and current affairs, one should, ideally, have access to artistic, literary, and political circles. I must admit that we have not yet succeeded in gaining that access.

It is, after all, our constituency to which, under God, we owe our chief responsibility. As I conceive it, that responsibility is threefold.

First of all, as has already been indicated, we owe our constituency the duty of speaking on the happenings and the problems in which it already has an active concern. And we must speak in these areas as Christians and, more specifically, as Lutheran Christians. We must bring these areas under the searching light of Faith as we understand it in the Lutheran tradition. That is why people buy the CRESSET. If they want mere moralism or if they want to know what Rome thinks about something, there are magazines which can supply both those needs.

In the second place, we owe it to our constituency to attempt to draw their interests toward questions in which, at present, they are not particularly interested but in which we feel they ought to be interested. By what right, you may ask, can one person or even group of persons assume that he knows what a larger group should be interested in? The answer is simply that these are areas of whose importance we are ourselves convinced and which, in all honesty, we think our brethren should be interested in, too. Just to cite a few examples, our editors are convinced that thinking Lutherans can (and for their own sakes should) be interested in the basic disagreements between an individualistic view of man, as we have traditionally held it in the United States, and the collective view of man which is today being championed by the leaders of the U.S.S.R. We believe that our people should be interested in this basic disagreement because it is here that the real issue lies, not in the by-products of the disagreement such as capitalism versus communism, democracy versus totalitarianism, nationalism versus internationalism.

We think that our people should become more and more aware of the literary heritage of the English language and of the art forms which arise out of man's putting English words together. Why should our people be satisfied with literary chaff when there is so much good, pleasing nourishment to be had? Why should our people be satisfied with Edgar A. Guest when they can read T. S. Eliot? There is a rich English-language culture that might compensate for our loss of the rich German-language culture.

We think that our people should learn to examine critically but sympathetically the great fields of modern art and music. Great as our musical heritage is, we shall be doubly rich if we can add to it whatever of good is being produced by our contemporaries. Not all modern music is discordant and jangling. Indeed it may be presumed that the proportion of good music to bad that is being written in our time is not out of proportion to the amount of good to bad that was written in any other period of history. The same goes for the graphic arts. Much modern painting is, of course, junk. But much of it is excellent, too. Similarly with architecture. Historically the arts have been the handmaidens of the Faith. Our people should be interested in any device, any work of man, by which the work of the Kingdom may be advanced.

And this leads me to the third of the obligations which, it seems to me, we owe our brethren in the faith—the duty of searching out and encouraging with all of the resources at our command those among us whose talents and interests parallel our own. It is not

enough that a magazine such as ours accumulate the works of established writers and bring them to our people. We must encourage the young men and women who have something to say but are not yet, perhaps, quite ready to say it as they should. We have, on occasion, run material which did not, perhaps, meet the most rigid technical requirements simply to supply a little encouraging oxygen to a flame which was burning unsteadily but seemed to be fed by solid fuel. In a sense, we were not altogether altruistic in doing this. From the purely selfish standpoint, we have gone along on the hope that by encouraging young men to give us their first efforts we might hope, in years to come, to have first chance at their mature writing. Even if that should not happen, we would have had the satisfaction of having helped a promising writer realize his capacities and get started profesionally.

REMAINS (FOR BILL KOCH)

The year I didn't rake the leaves remains.
Scored in the grass under the maple, tracks
of my negligence persist. The rains,
the maple shade as thick as syrup, pack
the memory down. But was it an early snow
that year? one of those packed Octobers when
I barely breathed for busyness? some blow
to pride that sapped my autumn spirits then?

This year I'm raking early, though all the leaves
seem on the branches still. I promise grass
in spring—to clear, to shovel good black dirt
and sprinkle winter seed. The warm wind weaves
through linden, maple, oak. No trespass lasts
forever: heart's hard work can heal earth's hurt.

Kathleen Mullen

For Christmas give a subscription to

THE CRESSET

In 1937 you could have read this on the back page of the first issue of The Cresset:

Now that you have seen the first issue of this stimulating little magazine, tell others about it: better still, order subscriptions for them.

Among your friends there is, no doubt, a group for whom gifts are not lightly chosen. For them you will want a gift to express genuine thoughtfulness; for them you would forget the gifts of duty and convention. You want your gift to be a tribute to their mentality, a reflection of your own; a lasting link between mind and heart of the one who gives and the one who receives; a bond of friendship created by mutual enjoyment and appreciation.

THE CRESSET now solves your problem of selecting that "just right" gift, especially for those you particularly wish to please. There will be a real gratification in sharing with them, for twelve months to come, the stimulation, cultural knowledge, entertainment, that you yourself will be enjoying.

Exactly. Why give socks when you can give The Cresset?

Regular subscription rates: $20.00 for five issues; gift subscriptions $17.50.

Please mail all subscription orders to

The Cresset
Valparaiso University
Huegli Hall
1409 Chapel Dr.,
Valparaiso, IN 46383

Things We Said Today

"The fact is, poetry isn't as popular as it once was." That's from a recent columnist who writes for a national church periodical. The claim is pretty vacuous, to be sure, though I suppose there may be some truth to it. There may have been some particular day, or some particular moment on some particular day when poetry was, in fact, more popular than the moment at which our columnist recently wrote those words. (Maybe September—when she probably penned those words—in fact, was a "down" month for poetry, although that seems unlikely given the use of poetry for singing our sorrows.) But for those who have been losing sleep worrying about poetry's fall, bemoaning these bad days in which folks just don't appreciate poetry the way they used to, rest easy. Here are some statistics from a recent New Zealand survey: over one month, 205,000 New Zealand adults read poetry—an activity ranked 10th out of 35 arts activities. Over a year, reading poetry is among women's top 10 arts activities; it's in the top 10 for the 18 to 24 years group and for 60+ years; and in the top 10 for New Zealand's Pacific Islands people. Lest you think New Zealanders more poetic than Americans, consider the more than 18,000 responses to former poet laureate Robert Pinsky's Favorite Poem Project call for submissions. (See http:www.favoritepoem.org). Or, consider that a well-known poet can earn in an hour-long public reading what it takes a beginning professor almost a year to earn. Or consider that there is a national poetry month (April). There is no national philosophy month (and not just because a relevant group of philosophers could not agree on the appropriate month). From which it does not follow that "The fact is, philosophy isn't as popular as it once was," although for all I know, that may be true. Rest assured, poetry is every bit as popular as it once was, perhaps even more popular. That is due in no small part, I suspect, to journals like this one. Philosophy—I should say, "reasoned argument" —isn't as popular as it once was in public discourse if my experience is typical. We were a committee of professional folk (I the only academic on the committee) discussing abortion. We might have discussed and debated the issue a bit longer had not a fellow Lutheran on the committee pronounced "We've all got our minds made up on the matter and we're not going to change them because of what someone else says, so let's just vote." On the one hand, I can understand and even, to some degree, appreciate the Lutheran pessimism that some think would underwrite such a statement. Indeed, especially upon this particular issue, it is easy to be pessimistic. It is difficult to get beyond some pretty deeply entrenched (and not well thought out) feelings and beliefs. I'm not terribly optimistic about how much wisdom unaided human reason can come to on this particular issue. Still, my colleague's words were chilling. It is very bad news for democracy, bad news for Lutheran participation in democratic experiments, if we think reasoned argument never can change our minds, if, at the outset, we might as well vote. A more subtle and sophisticated Lutheran understanding of political action may dispose us to employ even fallen reason in public conversation in order to restrain sin and to further the common good. If reason fails to accomplish all that it might, then, at the end of the day, we can confess our sin and pray for God's mercy. But never, never, should we propose just voting and then leaving, because we can't be swayed by rational discourse, anyway.

Journals like this one, Margaret O'Brien Steinfels has recently reminded us, exist for the purpose of presenting reasoned argument, exist as compasses in giving readers their bearings, "and provide an orientation or reorientation to that outlook." It is the special vocation of periodicals attached to a church-related university to offer that guidance to an educated Christian laity (and

to offer that guidance explicitly, rather than as advocacy parading as news, as one may find in some religious periodicals). The journal in which Steinfels' words appear, *Books and Culture*, has recently joined the ranks of those periodicals affiliated with a university, as has not too long before it, *Image: A Journal of Arts and Religion*. We commend Baylor University and Seattle Pacific University, respectively, for their support of these journals and wish for them as long and happy a relationship with these journals as *The Cresset*, now in its fifty-first year of publication at Valparaiso University, has had with our own institution.

People may wonder where the funding for university-related periodicals comes from. Finally, it comes from the pockets of those who are committed to some particular understanding of the academic project and "lifelong learning." That is just to say that we depend upon you, our faithful readers, not only for subscriptions, but for gifts that enable us to do better what we do. Christmas is a good time for giving, though we gratefully accept gifts for *The Cresset* at any time of year.

Scores of people—probably at least one every other day—have been contacting me recently with astonishingly good opportunities for significant financial reward and mutual profit: Kevin Ezeh of South Africa, Kabiru Turak of Nigeria, Kunle Cole of Nigeria, Kiki Manga of Ivory Coast, Dr. Isah Gamba of Nigeria, Kofi Mbani of South Africa, Alberto Beto Martin of Santa Clara, Cuba, to name but a few of the most recent. As much as we value globalization--now, does this make us good folk or bad?--we have not yet taken advantage of these opportunities to raise funds for *The Cresset*. If you, however, are interested in any of their offers, do let me know. I would also be happy to inform you of opportunities of mutual benefit to you and *The Cresset*. Just send me your bank account number and we'll take it from there. Alternatively, send us a check, delivering us, at least for the moment, from the temptation of global partnerships ♱

on covers—

Sadao Watanabe was a Japanese Christian artist whose work can be found in many buildings on Valparaiso University's campus. The Brauer Museum's permanent collection houses 56 of Watanabe's katazome stencil prints. This beloved artist received an honorary doctorate from Valparaiso University in 1987.

Watanabe's images are a fascinating blend of East and West. The bold black outlining seen in his work reminds one simultaneously of traditional Japanese woodcuts, early medieval art, and stained glass designs. His works can be appreciated for their depiction of a particular biblical theme or story and can also be enjoyed for their patterned, compressed space that borders at times on complete abstraction. Through his high degree of stylization or simplification, Watanabe communicates both his reverence for his subject matter and his personal dialogue with art history.

Watanabe's technique of katazome stencil printing was originally used for the dyeing of textiles. He adapted this technique for use on the delicate surface of rice paper. His prints have an elegant fluidity to their surfaces and a rich saturation to their color, both qualities which make them richly satisfying to view. More examples of Watanabe's work can be seen in the Brauer Museum's permanent collection exhibition, which runs from October 25, 2002 to January 12, 2003.

on reviewers—

Crystal Downing
teaches film and literature at Messiah College.
Preston Jones
is a contributing editor of *Books and Culture*.

Jill Peláez Baumgaertner
is Dean of Humanities and Theological Studies at Wheaton College.

Leanne Van Dyk
is Professor of Reformed Theology at Western Theological Seminary, Holland, MI.

James Beasley
is the Assistant Director of the Valpo CORE program.

on poets—

Walter Wangerin, Jr.
teaches at Valparaiso University.

Steven Schroeder
teaches liberal arts at Shenzen University in China and Roosevelt University in Chicago.

Wendell Berry
farms and writes in Port Royal, Kentucky.

Edward Byrne
is the author of four books of poetry, most recently *East of Omaha*. His poetry has appeared in *American Literary Review*, *American Poetry Review,* and *American Scholar*. He teaches English at Valparaiso University

J. T. Ledbetter
is professor of English at California Lutheran University. He has published poetry, fiction, and essays.

Saul Bennett
has published poems in *The Christian Century*, *Pudding*, *First Things*, and *Peregrine*. His collection, *Harpo Marx at Prayer,* was submitted by its publisher Archer Books for Pulitzer Prize consideration.

Mary M. Brown
teaches literature and creative writing at Indiana Wesleyan University. Her work has appeared in *Christianity and Literature*, *Mars Hill Review*, *Christian Century*, and *Artful Dodge*.

Kathleen Mullen
teaches literature at Valparaiso University.

on *The Attic*—

John Strietelmeier
was editor of *The Cresset* from 1949-1969.

PERIODICALS
POSTAGE
PAID

In This Issue

3 The Editor / *in luce tua*: still I sent my prayer wonderin' who was there to hear

5 Walter Wangerin, Jr. / Christmas, 1999 (verse)

6 Martha Greene Eads / the Bible and the BBC: Dorothy Sayers's working class voices

10 Steven Schroeder / last days (verse)

11 Ralph C. Wood / on not speaking in a loud voice: Flannery O' O'Connor's grotesque preachers of the Gospel

18 Wendell Berry / a small theology (verse)

19 Crystal Downing / *film*: *Changing Lanes*

22 Preston Jones / *music*: hip-hop

24 Edward Byrne / after the funeral (verse)

25 book reviews / Baumgaertner on Hijuelos (*A Simple Habana Melody*);Van Dyk on Bunge (*The Child in Christian Thought*); Beasley on Hughes (*How Christian Faith Can Sustain the LIfe of the Mind*)

30 Chuck Huff / *spot: light on technology*: learning from the Luddites

32 Thomas C. Willadsen / *pulpit and pew*: ghosts of Christmas present

34 Tricia O'Connor Elisara / *world: views*: refined by fire

35 J. T. Ledbetter / requerdo (verse)

36 Xiangui Su / *world: views*: philosophy at work

38 A.P. / *vocation*: rookie cop

39 Saul Bennett / obedience street (verse)

40 Jean Bethke Elshtain / *the nation*: the importance of words

42 Mary M. Brown / on failing to answer (verse)

43 *the attic*

47 Kathleen Mullen / remains (for Bill Koch) (verse)

49 *things we said today*

50 notes on cover

51 notes on reviewers, poets, and *the attic*