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A little journalistic research through last week’s Chicago Tribune provides what we might call food for thought, if it were not so difficult to choke down. On November 20, the front page headline read “6 minutes, 7 new faces,” next to bright pictures of the beaming grandfather of the seven McCaughey babies. And the first page of the second section read “DCFS takes 8 kids from freezing home” with the second lead “single mother of 9 suspected of neglect.” You may have seen and read more about the McCaugheys, but probably not about Charmaine Rogers, who, according to the article had been “receiving extensive public assistance.” In the article, a relative of the mother’s claimed to have a document dated October 20 from a program called Individual Family Services Plan, which, according to the relative’s assertion showed that the mother had asked for help in dealing with the cold in her apartment. On November 21, an article on p.3 of Section 2 announced that the mother had been charged with “battering some of her 9 children,” and on the 23 November, on p. 3 of Section 4, we could read that six of the children had been “released to maternal grandparents.”

OK, faithful, are you troubled? I think we could probably guess which issues will be the subject of any number of scholarly and churchly conferences on reproductive ethics. I suspect that more chairs of Christian ethics are busy with the serious matters of human reproductive technology than are trying to account for—much less solve—the problems of Charmaine Rogers and her nine children. Which multiple births should we in the Church be most concerned with?

Perhaps it is wrong to be so agitated over what is perennial: since the earliest of times, poor people’s children have been subject to abuse and neglect. Winter newspapers in every northern city have stories like this one. “Children removed from freezing apartment” is a headline like “Dog bites Man.” It’ll never sell papers. On the other hand, as technology becomes more elaborately capable of giving us what we might want, the field of reproductive ethics baffles us with new and strange problems. We do need professional ethicists (see the Book Review section of this issue, for example) to study the complexities of genome research, fertility drugs, artificial insemination, surrogate parenting, cloning, organ farming. Because the questions and problems are intriguing, they naturally draw the attention of people with keen minds, people with the intellectual resources to do the thinking that needs to go on so that we can be guided through these new thickets of ethical possibility. But nobody needs an expert to understand the problems raised by a case of eight children in a freezing apartment. We do not need to guess that what is morally right is to get the children warm, as quickly as possible.

But how clear are we, in fact, about this situation? Most everyone with a keen eye for a troubling issue will have noticed that no father is ever mentioned in the articles about this case. And no doubt it is also evident that the mother did deliver all these little children, so about eight times she must have rejected advice to abort. (At least two of her children were twins, six year old girls. Did I
say that all nine of the children were under eleven years old? The oldest was out with his mother, looking for a new apartment, when a tip to the Children and Family Service's Hot Line sent an investigator out to their building. The mother is now in jail.) We have set up our social systems so that this poor woman has the freedom to fail at the task of motherhood she has evidently taken on, even though the costs of her failure are borne by her children. Who would not be driven to distraction by this failure, and these costs? We put a higher priority on her freedom from "government intervention" than we do on the health and safety of the children, apparently because we care more about parental rights than about real family well-being. Only when the mother has convincingly failed does our system allow for direct care to the children by the state, so that the state's care of children becomes the direct consequence and dramatic confirmation of parental failure, not the result of a commitment to make each child's life safe and healthy.

Somehow this anomaly seems especially strange in a society which derives many of its principles from a religion claiming that its God entered human history as a human baby. You might imagine that fundamentally we Christians would perceive in each baby the reproduction of this "great and mighty wonder" we are about to celebrate. You would think that no principle of individual freedom, or of parental rights, would weigh as heavily for us as the well-being of each child born into our midst. That we would make it almost impossible for a mother to fail at providing food and shelter for her children. That when we looked at our beautiful images of another poor mother with a cold baby, we would see in them an imperative to prevent such cold, such sense of helplessness and failure on the part of any mother and any baby, ever again.

Perhaps we have merely been seduced into thinking that the mechanisms of the state cannot reflect the imperatives of our faith. But perhaps we have become so used to the beautiful images that we do not wonder any more at the amazing goodness they represent. We look at the mother and the baby, we have pious thoughts, but we are not struck silent by what is represented there. We do not wonder at this visitation from the great God, but are ready simply to acknowledge it, to go through the motions we have made many times of marking its appearance, and then move on. It will be New Year, it will be January, it will be Valentine's Day. How much of our calculating social pragmatism is the result of a failure of wonder? If we do not feel that we are the receivers of unmeasured goodness and acceptance, we cease to wonder at the glory and beauty of the world around us, and we cease to respond to the world's needs out of our sense of gratitude and joy.

More than a magazine would be needed to rekindle such wonder, but in this issue of The Cresset, it is at least the subject for thought. However far literature has strayed from the arts of wonder, we are reminded in John Ruff's essay of its necessity and value. In pictures, in poetry, in the arts of translation, contributors have worked to make you wonder, and that alone could be a fine first step toward a joyous sense of the goodness of God in the incarnation. If we had more of this sense, perhaps we could make the difference we need to make for Charmaine Rogers and her nine children.

Peace,

GME
Lewis Carroll’s Humpty Dumpty:  
a cautionary tale for critics,  
or, who’s talking nonsense now?  

*John Ruff*

*The highest as the lowest form of criticism is a mode of autobiography.*  
—Oscar Wilde, from the Preface to *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*

Many many wonderful things happened to me when I was a graduate student at the University of Washington during the 80s, including the opportunity to teach with Roger Sale. Another teaching assistant and I were asked if we’d be interested in teaching with Professor Sale a course in children’s literature. I had mixed feelings. Of course I welcomed the opportunity to work with Sale, a terrific scholar and teacher, and from all I had heard a real character. However, I was used to working pretty much on my own—I had a remarkable degree of autonomy in my teaching as long as I didn’t screw up, and more than that, I had little or no interest in children’s literature. At the time I was preparing myself to be the next great Pound or Joyce scholar. All the talk then was about theory, about Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, Barthes, Bakhtin, Gramsci, and Said. It seemed to me the action was clearly in the Frankfurt School, not Christopher Robin’s Hundred Acre Wood.

But I accepted the position. As things turned out, Roger Sale was himself a sort of intellectual Cat in the Hat, who really shook things up, set things spinning for us. Pedagogically it was like playing in a jazz band. As I look back on it now, it was the only truly collaborative teaching I have had a craving for ever since. But more than that, I was particularly affected, profoundly affected, by the works. Strange as it may sound, Winnie the Pooh would turn out to be a more significant influence on my graduate school education than Derrida or Foucault; I’m not embarrassed to say that I discovered in Kenneth Grahame’s *Wind in the Willows*, in the friendship of Ratty and Mole, one of the deepest, most beautifully rendered relationships in western literature, and while I am on the topic of that great novel, I would challenge anyone to name a character phenomenologically richer or fuller than either Ratty or Mole, who are, in their own ways, little, so childlike, independent and therefore adult, fully animal and fully human. Fully fully. That semester while my friends were diving into Walter Benjamin, I was studying Jean deBrunhoff, creator of Babar the Elephant, hero of the first large scale full color picture book series; it was in Babar, not Barthès, that the semiotics of dress became interesting for me; in deBrunhoff rather than in Said or Spivak where I began to see what a colonialist perspective looks like on the page, though to deBrunhoff’s credit, I only learned to see the limits of his vision, artistic, ideological, and epistemic, because his artwork teaches one to look carefully, and to read slowly.

I will never forget the amazement I felt seeing to what an extent the authors and illustrators we were dealing with were magicians, conjurers of the highest order—how for example, between two images Ernest Shepherd transforms a stuffed animal being dragged backwards down the steps into a living breathing character, the unforgettable, the inimitable, Winnie the Pooh. Rembrandt never did anything more miraculous with a greater economy of line. So as things turned out, at a time when I think many of my peers were in the process of deconstructing whatever sense of wonder and mystery and romance about literature that had brought them to graduate school in the first place, my sense of wonder, mystery, and romance was being rejuvenated. Lucky me.
As luck would have it, not too long before the job market collapsed, I got a teaching position at Valparaiso University, in Northwest Indiana, where on occasion I still get to teach children’s literature. I will teach it this spring, in fact. Many of my students are in this class because it is required of them by the State of Indiana because they are elementary education majors. Some of my colleagues are glad not to have to teach them. They are not highly regarded as students of literature. The flat fact of the matter is, however, that the knowledge and attitudes they pass on (or do not pass on) to their students about literature and reading may have implications that last longer, and run deeper, than what ordinarily happens between me and my students. So I take my job very seriously teaching children’s literature to these elementary ed. majors. That is to say, I do everything I can to make it possible for them to get access to the deepest pleasures of that work we explore; I tell them on the first day my goal is to addict them to stories and poems, with or without pictures, with hopes they will spread that addiction widely and irresponsibly.

This is harder work than you might think, because many of them come to a literature class with the same good intentions Plato brings to The Republic—that is, they will let literature earn its living helping us to mold citizens, to teach morals, to inculcate the right desires and eradicate the wrong, and if it can’t do those things, they will send it packing. Many of them are not at all disappointed that Disney cleaned up and sugar ed up the Grimms’ Tales, and some would censor them broadly because of their violence, or because women can’t do what princes get to do, or simply because they deal with lots of nasty behaviors. The stories they tell me they loved best they’d throw out first: “Little Red Riding Hood,” “Hansel and Gretel,” and “Rapunzel.”

Two of the texts that really throw them for a loop I am quite sure Plato would have never placed on his approved reading list: Lewis Carroll’s Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and its wonderful sequel, Through the Looking-Glass. My sense is that no pair of books was ever written more directly against the pressures felt by people writing for audiences that include children, to be plainly, single-mindedly didactic, to reward the good and punish the bad, to model good manners, good hygiene, good sense, and good grammar, than the Alice books. I don’t know if Carroll was intentionally, consciously, or by divine inspiration, playing with Plato’s theory of mimesis when he took us with Alice behind the Looking-Glass; in 1889, seven years before Carroll published Through the Looking-Glass, Oscar Wilde had resurrected Platonic dialogue to turn Plato’s notion about the relationship of life and art on its head in his classic essay The Decay of Lying, so that sort of thing was in the air. Certainly Carroll is with Wilde in fleeing headlong from Plato’s moral seriousness, which to my money is what’s really behind the smokescreen Plato puts up in The Republic, where he pretends the thorny issue is the truth claims of artistic representations, be they of chairs or of Zeus. We get closer to the heart of the matter in “Ion,” where I think Plato shows himself less interested in the truth of images and more interested in their power, power the artist can’t always fully control or account for; power that moves an individual, or a large audience, in ways beyond their rational control. Plato knew how powerfully artistic representations work on the body, on the emotions, and Plato’s idea was that the good governance of individuals and commonwealths depended on leaving the body, and the emotions, at home or behind.

Now back to Carroll. Very early in Through the Looking-Glass, Alice finds herself looking at a poem in a book. At first it appears to be in a language she doesn’t know. It turns out she’s only partially correct—she realizes she is looking at a “looking-glass book,” which can only be read by holding it up to a mirror, which she does, only to discover she’s reading what has since become one of the best known poems in the English language—“The Jabberwocky.” When I say it is one of the “best known” poems in English, I have to qualify what it is I mean by that. What I mean is that it is a poem many many people have read and many many people know by name, and of course, not only in English, as it has been translated into many languages. How well anyone knows, really knows, “The Jabberwocky” is a question we still need to answer. Because “The Jabberwocky” is what we call “nonsense verse,” and nonsense as we usually understand it resists being made sense of.
THE JABBERWOCKY by Lewis Carroll

"Twas brillig and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

"Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!"

He took his vorpal sword in hand;
Long time the manxome foe he sought—
So rested he by the tumtum tree,
And stood awhile in thought.

And, as in uffish thought he stood,
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
Came whiffling through the tulgey wood,
And burbled as it came!

One, Two! One, Two! And through and through
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead and with its head
He went galumphing back.

"And hast though slain the Jabberwock?
Come to my arms my beamish boy!
O frajous day! Callooh! Callay!"
He chortled in his joy.

"Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

It was with "The Jabberwocky," and other verse in the Alice books, and certain poems by Edward Lear, that this whole new category of verse came into existence during the nineteenth century—this category called "nonsense verse"—though there again, as soon as I use that term I feel a need to double back, to qualify it. "Nonsense" in common parlance is a derisive term often used to dismiss something that doesn’t come up to the level of what some person, or group, or population, using the term, deems sensible, or to be making sense. If we can make sense of "The Jabberwocky," is it nonsense? Between sense and nonsense there does not seem to exist a third term, which I hope to demonstrate is unfortunate.

Dismiss it as "nonsense" if you like; there is ample reason to honor "The Jabberwocky." It is, after all, the birthplace of many wonderful words, including the word "chortle," which the O.E.D. defines as a blend of "chuckle" and "snort." This year we celebrate the centenary of the word "chortle." Wouldn’t it be wonderful if, somewhere in this issue, a la "Sesame Street," it were noted that this issue is being brought to you by the word "chortle"? Wouldn’t it be wonderful if all
of us found ourselves chortling more often, at home and at work. We also celebrate this year the centenary of a literary term, the “portmanteau word,” invented by Humpty Dumpty while he’s explaining to Alice how “slithy” means “lithe” and “slimy,” paraphrasing the first stanza of “The Jabberwocky.” “You see,” he says, “it’s like a portmanteau—there are two meanings packed into one word.” So the next time you and your pals are “unpacking” some rich passage, remember Humpty Dumpty and the origin of that metaphor.

I wonder how many removes for the truth Plato would put “The Jabberwocky,” and why Carroll situated it thus—a mythological creature that appears in a poem, which appears in a book, which is read in a mirror, all part of a dream, maybe Alice’s dream, maybe the Red King’s. Could a fiction be flimsier, with no connections whatsoever to what my students call, voices deepening, “the real world,” and nothing to tether it to Plato’s world of ideal forms either? But there it is, wherever “there” is. After Alice finishes reading it, she says merely that “It seems pretty.. .but it’s rather hard to understand.” A narrator’s voice, descending to the parenthetical, is quick to put us in the know: “You see she didn’t like to confess, even to herself, that she couldn’t make it out at all,” which isn’t exactly right. “Somehow,” she adds, “it seems to fill my head with ideas—only I don’t know what they are. However, somebody killed something, that’s clear at any rate.”

Yes. The beamish boy seems to have killed the Jabberwocky, to the delight of beamish boy’s dad, though “The Jabberwocky” as a poem survives heroically. It is immortal. And I read important lessons in its continued glorious existence. I think the poem comes up again during the zany dialogue of the Humpty Dumpty chapter for good reasons, which I will now attempt to explain. At the end of the Humpty Dumpty chapter of Through the Looking-Glass, Alice sums up her encounter with the famous nursery tale egghead reborn by saying aloud to herself “‘of all the unsatisfactory’—(she repeated this aloud, as it was a great comfort to have such a long word to say) ‘of all the unsatisfactory people I’ve ever met . . . ’ ” Given all the unsatisfactory people Alice meets in her travels, one has to wonder, first of all, how Humpty Dumpty deserves this special singling out for dubious distinction. Secondly, of all the unsatisfactory people she could have asked, why does she ask him to “kindly tell [her] the meaning of the poem called ‘Jabberwocky.’ ” And thirdly, what are we to make of that encounter between arrogant egghead and the poem?

To answer question number one first, Humpty Dumpty is portrayed to us as an arrogant, contentious, name-dropping, know-it-all, who constantly swells himself up in the process of deflating Alice. He does this the very first time he looks at her, the first time he speaks directly to her, saying to her “Don’t just stand chattering to yourself like that” (she’d been reciting the nursery rhyme)—“tell me your name and your business.”

She replies, “My name is Alice, but—” and before she can finish her thought he interrupts, saying “It’s a stupid name enough” and then, “What does it mean?” “Alice but” may not be a stupid name, but it is funny, in a sophomoric sort of way, though it is hard to laugh with Humpty Dumpty, such a jerk, who while berating Alice for her name immediately revels in his own, telling Alice “my name means the shape I am, and a good handsome shape it is too. With a name like yours, you might be any shape, almost.” Now we are in rich territory, when we consider how language, and more specifically, names, are involved in knowing the self, in becoming a self, in knowing and relating to the world or what’s outside the self, and Carroll deals with such issues from the very beginning. It is a crucial issue in The Garden of Live Flowers chapter—a funny title, really when you stop and think about it—why not just “Flowers”? Why “Live Flowers”? The answer, I think, is that in the world behind the looking-glass, “Live Flowers” means “Speaking Flowers,” as it is their speech that makes them lively. It’s a crucial issue in the Looking-Glass Insects chapter, where we get a gnat’s perspective on what names are for, and for whom. Alice and the Gnat are discussing insects, with Alice telling the gnat which ones she likes:

“I like them when they can talk,” Alice said. “None of them ever talk, where I come from.”

“What sort of insect do you rejoice in, where you come from?” the Gnat inquired.

“I don’t rejoice in insects at all,” Alice explained, “because I’m rather afraid of them—at
least the large kinds. But I can tell you the names of some of them."

"Of course they answer to their names?" the Gnat remarked carelessly.

"I never knew them to do it."

"What's the use of their having names," the Gnat said, "if they won't answer to them?"

"No use to them," said Alice; "but it's useful to the people that name them, I suppose. If not, why do things have names at all?"

Good question. The implication is you give things names so you can control them, so when you call them, like good ol' dogs they will come. Or if it's something you fear, you are better off for being able to name your fear. This is a place in the text I want to visit with my students, especially so they can hear Alice's answer to the Gnat's question, "What sort of insect do you rejoice in?" I hope that when they find themselves someday in a job interview, someone asks a similar question: what sort of books, what sort of stories, what sorts of literature, do you rejoice in? And I would hope my students would have a rich full answer. I would hate to have them say that they don't rejoice in any sort, that they are afraid of books, but can say the names of some of them.

To return to Humpty Dumpty, and his perfect name and shape, Martin Gardner, in his book *The Annotated Alice*, cites a study by philosopher Peter Alexander, remarking how in "real life proper nouns seldom have a meaning other than the fact they they denote an individual object, whereas other words have general, universal meanings." In Humpty Dumpty’s realm, the reverse is true. Which is to say, if we follow out the implications, that Humpty Dumpty’s shell is a solipsism that is linguistic as well as psychological. "Why do you sit out here all alone," Alice asks, not willing to begin an argument, but really hitting the philosophical nail on the head. "Why," he replies, with perfect logic and characteristic bad manners, "because there's nobody with me." You can say that again. Not now and not ever.

This exchange is typical, as every effort Alice makes to begin conversation Humpty Dumpty transforms into a riddle, which exist for him only as occasions for verbal combat which he inevitably wins at Alice's expense. It doesn't matter who serves up the question, be it about Alice's age, or Humpty Dumpty's cravat, birthday presents or unbirthday presents, Humpty Dumpty takes the point.

So he's an egghead with an attitude. We see it as he relates to Alice, his audience; it's evident in the way he uses language, and we'll watch it in action when he attempts to explain "The Jabberwocky." I'd like to consider a dialogue briefly that brings these issues together—what makes him so unsatisfactory, why Carroll gives him the role of explaining to Alice what the poem means, and what that encounter amounts to. We'll never get to the explication of the poem itself. And that's o.k., because the real action takes place before we get there.

We join a dialogue already in progress between Humpty Dumpty and Alice about unbirthday presents and, according to Humpty Dumpty, their great superiority to birthday presents, which Alice prefers. When all is said and done, all the figures tallied, there are three hundred and sixty four days in which a person can receive an unbirthday present, and only one day to receive birthday presents. "There's glory for you," says Humpty Dumpty. Alice responds that she doesn't know what he means by "glory," and Humpty Dumpty responds characteristically:

"Of course you don't, till I tell you. I meant 'there's a nice knockdown argument for you.'"  

"But Glory doesn't mean 'a nice knockdown argument.'" Alice objected.

and here comes the good part:

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."

"The Question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many things."

"The Question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "Which is to be master—that's all."
It’s at this point that I see Humpty Dumpty fully assuming the role of imperial critic. The attitude he takes here towards language he will take toward “The Jabberwocky.” His goal is to make it come to heel, to master it. The passage continues in this same vein—he relates how he bullies language, adjectives especially. “I can manage the whole lot of them! Impenetrability! That’s what I say.”

You can say that again. And what he means, when Alice asks? “I meant by impenetrability that we’ve had enough of that subject, and it would be just as well if you mention what you mean to do next, as I suppose you don’t mean to stop here all the rest of your life.”

Because none of you means to stop here the rest of your lives either, let me try to sum up where I see all this leading, and answer at least my own questions. The last claim Humpty Dumpty makes before he begins to explain to Alice “The Jabberwocky” is that he can explain any poem that’s ever been invented, and a lot that haven’t been invented too. And Carroll lets him try to do the deed with “The Jabberwocky.” And if you look at The Annotated Alice, you’ll see lots of others have joined in the fun. Even Alice tries her hand at it, explaining what “Wabe” means, and for once in the chapter, for the briefest moment, they work in concert.

Humpty Dumpty’s gloss used to annoy me; it seemed to me an attempt to wrestle that incredible creation towards referentiality, which domesticated it somehow; I like it better unexplained, left in its original state, to put ideas in my head, to paraphrase Alice. In this way I resembled some of my students, who think analyzing literature is a way of ruining good stories. Now I know sometimes they are right, depending, I guess, on the spirit of that encounter. However, I’m softening from that position of anger towards Humpty Dumpty and what he does. My thought now is that Carroll has Humpty Dumpty attempt to tame “The Jabberwocky” only to fail, to fall very short, albeit comically, nonsensically. “The Jabberwocky,” as Carroll created it, won’t take to the bit; it won’t take to the saddle. It’s a wild, unruly creature, that is untamable, in some ways unnameable. Call it nonsense if you like; it has plenty for the senses. You can’t read it aloud and not feel good about what’s happening in your mouth, what great sounds are passing through your lips, what images are forming in the mind’s eye. I like to think the poem exists at least in part to remind us that in all works of great literature there is some spirit, some life force, some active ingredient, that we can’t control. We can get close to it, we can come in contact with it. We can, of course, be deeply affected by it. I’d say it’s somewhat anarchic, this life force; maybe it’s dangerous, probably it is holy. Plato may be right—perhaps all great books should be sold in brown bags with warning labels—something like: What is in these pages may be mind altering, addictive, and redemptive.

One last thing: the antidote to the attitude I see in Humpty Dumpty that I sense permeates literary studies, where poems become jungle airstrips critics and theorists take off from or return to but never dwell in; where critics as anthropologists study literary texts as forms of ritual behavior, and artists as primitives to be explained to the rest of the civilized world (that is, other anthropologists); where text and author become territory, real estate, to be “discovered,” “explored,” ultimately, colonized. For the antidote, we visit once again the Looking Glass Insect chapter. Here, very briefly, Alice finds herself in “a wood where things have no names.” She realizes she doesn’t know her own name, or the names of other things either. She has an encounter with a fawn, that ends when they pass out of that woods and the fawn realizes who it is, what Alice is, and bounds away. It is a classic rendering of our Fall into Language, into difference, one might say, which is, of course, inevitable. But I love that first exchange between Alice and the Fawn, who says gently to Alice, “What do you call yourself?” Alice can’t say; she asks the Fawn, “Please, would you tell me what you call yourself?” There is such a different feeling in this exploration than the feeling in “Tell me your name and your business.” I want for my students periodic visits to this wood, as they encounter literature, as they encounter themselves. I want for them brief respite from names, from that urge for control and dominance so much a part of Humpty Dumpty, so much an aspect of our times and intellectual climate. I want more chortling, less impenetrability. I want them to realize that the Question is not which or who will be master.
Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live...."

from Ezekiel 37:1-14

"Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

from John 3:1-16

Polar air has been sweeping down through the Midwest these September days, down across the wheat fields and the lakes and the farms and the smokestacks, taking with it the congestion that clings to late summer days like overripe fruit to the vine. Early September often brings such an airborne cleansing; it is why I have always liked the description of this time of turning in northern parts of the world as the season of Pentecost’s “second wind.” The jet stream shifts, and in comes an air mass that invigorates us for another season of labor and productivity, especially for those of us whose lives are ordered by the school year. So, too, the power of Pentecost is never exhausted, even though we are a long summer away from that first rush of mighty wind in a Jerusalem upper room. The Spirit comes again and again to renew the face of the earth, to renew us who walk that face.

I can think of no better time of year to do what we are doing today. The rededication of an organ is a time, to put it simply, when we celebrate that instrument’s second wind.

The pipe organ is somewhat remarkable among human machines these days in that there is the possibility of a second wind. My toaster, my VCR, my Plymouth, even my last-year’s-new Pentium—and, might I add, many of the appliances used even in churches—these have little such hope. They represent that crowning achievement of the Industrial Revolution known as planned obsolescence. Their destiny is a landfill boneyard, or at best, that mystical reincarnation known as recycling. The pipe organ, on the other hand, when well-crafted and cared for and periodically restored, can catch its breath and keep on singing and serving for many generations.

I know there are those who say new winds are blowing that bode ill for the organ’s future. And it is true that the church can and ought to make good use of many other instruments in worship. Like most royalty these days, the king of instruments must reject imperialism and adapt to living in a democracy. But as long as we are persuaded that honest music for worship is led by living, breathing human beings, the organ’s versatility, efficiency, and amiability to the human voice will make it a treasured gift. This rededication, the investment it represents, and the commitment of this University to teaching the organ not as a historical curiosity but as a vibrant and forward-looking tool for ministry—these are an act of faith and a welcome sign of a second wind not only for this instrument but for a musical heritage claimed as contemporary gift.

For this assembly, gathered in worship, let me go on to suggest that this rededication is also a sign. A sign of the second wind by which we, the baptized, live. A sign of the second wind by which the Church lives.

Art in the service of the Church means dollars, as any practical person knows. This sermon was preached as the organ at Valparaiso University’s Chapel of the Resurrection was re-dedicated after a major completion and restoration in 1996.
Of course, God’s first wind is surely the place to start in this day’s thanksgiving. The first wind from God swept across the face of the waters in the beginning, and from those waters God whipped up a world: a good world, a land of streams and springs, a land of wheat and sweet corn, a land of olive trees and oak trees, a world of teeming oceans and hills decked with cattle, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills we mine copper and tin. This first wind from God was not only a cosmic sweep but a microcosmic breath, just enough to fill the lungs of a mound of dirt, enough to suscitate thereby all humankind and to keep that breath going twelve or so times a minute in each one of us.

The life that the Reddel Memorial Organ has enjoyed and inspired since 1959 is grounded in such a good creation. Fashioned of wood and iron, lead and zinc and tin, knit together with leather and copper... filled with wind that dances across the lips of pipes and sets reeds aquiver, stirring the molecules of the atmosphere so that sound waves in turn breathe music into our ears. ...there are the ears themselves, homely but effective little traps, catching the vibrations that our brains then translate and occupy with meaning. ...and what of those who play, the hands and feet, eyes and reflexes and all the synapses in between, skills whittled and sanded and polished hour upon hour and year upon year. ...there is the building that captures and shapes the sound, a joyous valley echoing back the song—all of this, the marvelous accumulation of created gifts that takes place when instruments and voices and rafters combine, this alone would be reason enough today to praise the excellent greatness of God.

Yet there is more. Today we not only renew our thanks for the outpouring of created gifts that enable music to be made for God’s praise and for our joy, but we give thanks for a gift restored and brought to completion. The rejuvenation of an organ is accomplished with a great deal of painstaking work, the replacement of parts that wear, the addition of new sounds and colors and technical possibilities, the balancing of sounds old and new through voicing and tuning. It is complex but humanly achievable.

The second wind by which the world lives, by which we live, by which the church lives, is another matter. What needs restoring in creation and in us is something more than the wear and tear of 37 years of toccatas and fugues, though many of us around the age of 40 detect some sag in our springs. The empty spaces in our lives are not something that can be easily filled by a new division of colorful sounds. The dissonance in our world cannot be coaxed into tune with a little bag of tools and a good ear.

I was in the chapel the day last year when the organ began to be dismantled, those massive pipes lowered gingerly by ropes over the balcony rail. But the rebuilding job that confronted God in the brokenness and sin of this creation was something far more challenging. Imagine what Lynn Dobson, the organ’s rebuilder, would have faced had another, more destructive wind ripped through here. It might have looked... well, a lot more like a valley of bones. Not a pipe left in a row. Not a bone left on bone. This is the place where the exiled people of Judah found themselves. Scattered and dismembered as a people. Not just a Schlicker in their temple, but city, nation, temple, promise, hope—everything lay in rubble.

Our world has such valleys. We have walked in them, or we find such places in ourselves. Where we think we have it all together, and suddenly our life is in pieces. Where our praise and prayer and faith, once so supple and strong, become brittle and shrill. Where anxiety grips our chest and makes it hard to breathe. Where we look desperately for a vision of what our vocation is to be, or where we have lost the energy for carrying on one we are in. Where loss invades and leaves us dismembered within or from one another, our hopes strewn around like rusted wrecks in a junkyard.

There is no shop on earth that can repair such damage. But there is the wind from God. In the valley of dry bones the wind that swept the world at creation is called forth again. At the word of the Lord bone comes to bone, knit together by sinews and skin like a new set of leathers. From the dust of the ground these bodies catch God’s second wind and come to their feet. Rank on rank they stand, and at the word of the Lord their voices fill with the new song of hope where hope was lost,
of life from the grave, of a home regained, of not only breath but the Spirit of God dwelling within. This second wind is God moving in to restore shattered creation and scattered people. This is the wind that blew all night to divide the waters from the waters so that the children of Israel could pass through, rescued from the stranglehold of slavery and bound for the promised land. This is the wind that brought quails to feed the people in the wilderness. This is the wind that stirred the tops of trees to signal victory for King David. This is the wind that blew through the voices of the prophets to proclaim God's judgment and mercy.

But above all this second wind of God came in a microcosmic breath, just enough to fill the lungs of a startled infant emerging into our world. As Martin Franzmann has taught us to sing, the very God who breathed life into creation now "came to breathe our poisoned air, the dark despair that strangled our reluctant breath." Jesus walked this valley littered with death, he breathed his last lifted high upon the cross, he shared our grave. But God breathed again: "These bones shall live!" This second breath not only animated the risen Christ, but that very day came upon the disciples in their valley of despair: "These bones shall live!" That gentle breath of Christ's peace grew to become the mighty wind of Pentecost, a gale to turn the world upside down, a saving breath for every child of earth.

From the first wind of God we and all creation received the breath of life. By water and the same Holy Spirit, as Nicodemus learned one night, we receive our second breath and birth. Into the fears that keep us from speaking, into the grief that catches in our throat, into the doubts that blow us this way and that, into the death that stops our lungs, God breathes! and our life is restored. We are not a pile of bones, stitched together with carbon compounds, landfill at life's end. The Greek word from which "organ" is derived suggests something else. Each of us is God's ergon, God's good work in creation. We are newly created in Christ Jesus for a life of good works. And God who has begun in us an ergon for good will complete that work in the day of Jesus Christ, when with every capacity for which we have been prepared we join in the hymn of all creation.

By this second wind of God, the breath of resurrection life, the Church also lives. Even as an organ of this size consists of a number of balancing components or divisions, and beyond that of pipes arranged into stops with distinctive sounds, so the body of Christ is organic in that it is made up of many members, many parts that cooperate in an interdependent way, the properties of each reaching their full potential only by integration into the whole. To paraphrase I Corinthians 12, there are varieties of stops, but the same Spirit, that wind of God, is activating and sustaining and sounding through them so that they become a single organism. And, like the organ that is periodically restored by faithful builders, the church is in need of ongoing reform to ensure that the living voice of the Gospel speaks clearly to each new generation.

Like clean, refreshing northern air, the second wind of Pentecost is sweeping through here today, invigorating all within this place to breathe again:

_Breathe again, great organ! Let your breath, steady and sure, support ours. Keep the song going even when tears of sadness or remembrance or ecstasy cause us to drop out from time to time. Excite our joys so that we open our throats and lungs in a voice we might be embarrassed to use anywhere else. Challenge the creative gifts of those who dedicate themselves to learning and doing ministry through music. Unloose our minds and hearts with wordless sound to express what is unverbalizable in lament, mystery, awe, play, joy, glory._

_Breathe again, my soul! Breathe again, sisters and brothers! From every valley of death and discouragement, rise up and sing! Reborn in the Spirit, let that breath of God sound not only through our song but through every word and deed. Breathe again, Church of God! Despite your sad divisions, may that voice still be heard in unison which sings of God's love lifted up in Christ for the life of the world._

_Breathe again, all creation! Let everything that has breath, and (why not?) everything that hasn't, bless the Lord._

_Breathe again, 0 God, in us. Restore our life. Complete your work. Fill, now, our song._

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Martin Seltz is Editor for Congregational Song at Augsburg Fortress, the publishing house of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
Windy, bleak, and cold,  
Christmas comes again this year.  
I trudge the busy street,  
sludge of the day beneath my feet,  
scraps of a shopworn carol in my ear—  
and suddenly I’m four years old,  
in a country church, on Daddy’s knee—  
in a memory clear as a snowfield in the sun,  
two voices make two melodies that twine and meld as one—  
and heaven and nature sing again for me,  
in my heart a rose blooms red  
out of a stalk I thought was dead.

Oh loving Lord,  
I know the day will come  
when I can find no word  
to make a psalm for you—  
when cadences go dumb  
and metaphors are soiled and few.  
   Lord, in that day  
take not your harmonies away.

But when our words go wrong,  
send us a phrase of song—  
when bard and sage go mute  
speak through the argument of the flute—  
speak in the eloquence of the bells  
   where language fails.  
Come tune the stammer that we make  
even for our lowly Savior’s sake,  
that in the ashes of the soul  
the birth of Jesus Christ may burn like a living coal.

William R. Mitchell
“Within the long permission of God’s hope”: learning as sanctification

a review essay

Lisa DeBoer


Anyone who thinks about what it might mean to be a scholar and a Christian will find in this slim volume provocative reading. A collection of nine essays on Christian scholarship, Keeping Faith was published to mark the inauguration of Gaylen J. Byker as the eighth president of Calvin College, a mid-sized denominational college owned by the Christian Reformed Church and located in Grand Rapids, Michigan. This book makes a good companion to another recent book on Christian higher education, Richard Hughes and William Adrian’s Models for Christian Higher Education (Eerdmans, 1997, reviewed in these pages, June, 1997). Whereas Hughes and Adrian give readers a sense of the variety of approaches to Christian higher education by surveying how seven different Christian traditions conjoin faith and learning, Keeping Faith offers a substantial introduction to just one of those traditions—that of the Dutch Reformed.

The arrangement of the essays is already one indication of how this tradition operates. The book falls into three parts. The first four contributions meditate on the fundamental commitments of Reformed education. The next four essays demonstrate how scholars use those commitments as lodestones for their work. In the final essay, Nicholas Wolterstorff brings us back to those fundamental tenets in order to speculate about how the college should change in order to remain a place of fruitful and faithful service. In this tradition, normative thinking based on a Reformed worldview is always the foundation for scholarly investigation. Thus, it is fitting, though perhaps jarring as well, to turn to the first essay and find oneself reading a sermon.

In “The Maturity Mandate: A Sermon,” Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary and a former member of Calvin’s philosophy department, spins out the implications of three key Reformed themes in his understanding of Christian scholarship: the sovereignty of God over all of creation whether natural or cultural, the deep brokenness of God’s creation, and the call to loving engagement with creation. Taking Ephesians 4:13 as a guide for Christian educators (“...until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ”), Mouw states that maturity in Christ should be the goal of our labors. But, Mouw insists, this maturity is not limited to our personal relationship with Christ. Since Christ is lord and redeemer of all creation, maturity in Christ also requires a deep relationship with the world around us. We must not only study the fossil record, or family life, or history, or the human psyche, “we must also look deeply into it, and love it. The earth is the Lord’s—in all of its confusion and brokenness—and the fullness thereof, the world and all that dwell therein. Jesus entered into the deep places so that he might fill all things.” As Christian scholars, we too, should “go deep,” and expect to meet Christ in our labors.

What this experience of “going deep” feels like, however, is quite different from a cognitive understanding of its tenets. “The Dream of the School,” the poem by Lionel Basney that follows Mouw’s sermon, literally and figuratively envisions Calvin as a place where scholarship is understood as faithful service. Whether it is the farming immigrants who gravely remind us, “We gave our money to build this place,” or the scholars who “work in the bewilderment of time,” or the people

Some Reformed answers to questions about whether colleges can keep the faith. Do we have the energy for continued reformation?
on campus “walking from dark to light to dark to light,” all who join in this work must have a strong conviction of things not seen. Working “within the long permission of God’s hope” becomes an act of faith—with all its attendant fear and trembling.

There is little fear or trembling in the next essay, Gaylen Byker’s inaugural address. As Calvin’s new president, Byker takes the opportunity to outline what he sees as the major tensions that will shape the college in the years to come. Some of the challenges Byker enumerates are similar to those William Adrian identifies in the conclusion of Models for Christian Higher Education: balancing ethnic identity and diversity, maintaining Christian simplicity amidst American consumerism, strengthening denominational ties as well as ties to the professional academic establishment, and becoming involved in the world of information technology while not becoming overwhelmed by it. Other challenges may be more particular to Calvin—recognizing individual achievements while upholding an egalitarian campus ethos, for example, or balancing both the pietistic and the intellectual strains in the Reformed tradition. As Byker argues, such tensions are part of the fabric of creation and historically have often proven to be engines for tremendous creativity. Therefore, rather than attempting to resolve each of these strains on the college by making either/or choices, Byker exhorts the Calvin community to embrace these tensions and actively seek productive ways of harnessing them to the greater mission of the school.

While Byker’s essay breathes excitement and confidence, James Bratt and Ron Wells, writing as historians, are more circumspect in their speculations about Calvin’s future. “Piety and Progress: A History of Calvin College” is a skillfully written history of the people, ideas, and circumstances that have had a hand in shaping Calvin. Using the physical location of the college as a metaphor, beginning with its first incarnation in 1876 in an “upper room” next to Grand Rapids’ noisy railroad yards, to its current suburban setting between a mega-mall and a mega-church, Bratt and Wells trace the shifting relationships between Dutch Calvinism and American culture, and Calvin College and its Dutch-American subculture, with grace and good humor. They introduce us to important people in the history of the school: Gerrit Boer, the intrepid minister who founded the school in 1876 and single-handedly taught its seventeen-subject curriculum; Abraham Kuyper, the late nineteenth-century Dutch theologian and statesman whose animated articulation of Calvinism re-invigorated the tradition, and whose ideas were to have a lasting impact on Calvin College; Barend Klass Kuiper, the history professor whose Kuyperian vision helped launch the four-year liberal-arts college, but who was fired twenty-five years later for going to the movies; Harry Jellema, the professor who put Calvin’s philosophy department on the map and whose critique of Calvin’s curriculum, borrowed wholesale from the University of Michigan in 1921, resulted in curricular reform; and Nicholas Wolterstorff, another philosopher, who guided the formulation of the new curriculum, and who, more than anyone else, has been this generation’s visionary leader.

Ideas have also played a large role in the history of the college, especially ideas of what it means to be “Reformed.” Wells and Bratt introduce the two strains of neo-Calvinist thought, both derived from Abraham Kuyper, that have battled for ascendency. The “positive” strand, emphasizing the extent of God’s common grace and the broad reach of God’s redemptive work, advocates vigorous and transformative cultural engagement—though its critics say it too easily slides into cultural accommodation. The “antithetical” strand, emphasizing the fundamental opposition between the worldview of the godly and that of the worldly, proclaims the necessity of beginning every task directly from Christian principles and is deeply suspicious of any cultural institution with secular origins—a stance which critics say leads to cultural withdrawal. As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that history and sociology had at least as much to do with which idea reigned supreme as did any intellectual commitment to the one formulation or the other. For the recent immigrants struggling to define themselves in a new country, American culture was a convenient foil and clearly “antithetical” to the values and beliefs of their community. As this same community became more materially prosperous, the surrounding culture began to look more like “us” and less like “them,” and negotiating life in this culture required a more “positive” kind of engagement. It is precisely this move which makes Bratt and Wells worry that Calvin’s commitment to transforming culture may in
reality be transforming the college. Their parting words sketch out one possible future for Calvin as “world-affirming enough to remain respectably middle-class, world denying enough to keep religion private, and worldly American enough to shop the malls without the guilt or anxiety that Calvinism has always thought the anteroom of conversion.”

Though it is not necessary to read these first essays before delving into the next five, the essays by Mouw, and Bratt and Wells in particular do introduce and explain some of the key themes animating the work of Gallagher, Monsma, Botman, and Romanowski. All these scholars assume that a Biblical understanding of God and of God’s creation will helpfully inform their work, and all assume that as Christians they are compelled to use their work to challenge and engage the culture around them—whether feminist, political, theological or popular. For readers curious as to how it is, exactly, that one’s faith can inform one’s scholarship, these essays will give some demonstration. It is particularly unfortunate, then, that none of the contributors is a natural scientist. For it seems that in any discussion of faith and scholarship, the natural sciences always seem to be the test case, i.e. how would being Christian affect one’s work as a biologist? That said, the four essays that are included are cogent examples of how these scholars’ faith commitments shape the content and direction of their work.

In “Once More Unto the Breach, Dear Friends,” Susan Van Zanten Gallagher, professor of English at Seattle Pacific University, claims gender as an important aspect of God’s created world and therefore worthy of study. Picking up on Byker’s exhortation to embrace tensions, Gallagher calls us to examine tensions within current feminist thinking and tensions between feminism and the church. After a brief summary of several feminist positions and their governing assumptions, Gallagher moves on to discuss the lessons learned from how women’s studies and gender studies have been positioned in American higher education at large. Understanding these differing feminisms and their institutional histories, she argues, can help us discern how gender studies in all their multiplicity can be integrated into a Christian educational environment. By wrestling with the whole variety of feminisms in light of the Biblical witness of men and women as both created in the image of God, equally fallen, and equally redeemed, we may come to new ways of thinking about men and women—ways that challenge students and faculty to be, in the words of Calvin’s mission statement, “agents of renewal in the academy, church, and society.”

Stephen Monsma’s essay takes up the question of religion in the public sphere. A professor of political science at Pepperdine, Monsma is interested by recent rulings by the Supreme Court that display two different understandings of church-state separation. The one, dubbed the “no-aid-to-religion” tradition has a long history in the United States, and is based on enlightenment assumptions about the private character of religious belief and the ability of reasonable people to come to a consensus on ethical questions without recourse to religion. The other approach, tagged “equal access,” is a much more recent development, and since the mid-80s has existed alongside the no-aid-to-religion stance. The equal-access argument grows from the right to free-speech and assembly protected in the Constitution, and maintains that allowing religious people and organizations access to public forums does not imply public endorsement of that religion. Religious groups may be accommodated if the same access is provided to all other groups, religious or not. Monsma sees this as a hopeful development, and concludes by challenging the Calvin community to persuasively articulate for a larger audience what many Christians have always believed, namely, that religion in general, and Christianity in particular, has great relevance for the public life of a democratic nation.

The juxtaposition of Monsma’s essay and Russel Botman’s “‘Dutch’ and Reformed, and ‘Black’ and Reformed in South Africa” is sobering. If Calvinism is known for its emphasis on the totality of creation’s fallenness, then the manipulation of religion to legitimate political oppression must be acknowledged as one of the most tragic manifestation of human sin. Botman, a theologian at the University of the Western Cape in South Africa, asks what role the Reformed churches in South Africa, both Dutch and Black, can play in shaping the new South Africa given their tortuous history. In order to answer this question, Botman first explains how the doctrine of creation and an enthusiasm for cultural engagement—hallmarks of Calvinism—were twisted by the Dutch
Reformed Church of South Africa to argue that separation of peoples and cultures was part of God’s design for creation. The creation story, so the argument goes, is a story of divisions, between light and dark, between earth and sky, between animal and human, and ultimately, at Babel, between peoples themselves. The consequence of this “aberration of Calvinism” was an aberrant society. Botman goes on to identify the moves the Reformed churches in South Africa must make (and the likely obstacles Reformers will encounter) in their attempt to participate in building the new nation.

If Botman underscores the troubling capability of Reformed Christians to abuse real power, Romanowski’s essay, “You Talkin’ to Me?: The Christian Liberal Arts Tradition and the Challenge of Popular Culture,” returns us to the world of an immigrant population that imagines itself as powerless and embattled. Though the furor over movie-going that reigned in many evangelical circles earlier in this century seems at once amusing and pathetic to current sensibilities, the arguments that have been used over the decades to reject or embrace popular culture merit our attention. Romanowski uses a trajectory similar to that of Gallegher, and begins with a brief history of mass culture and the consequences of its bifurcation into perceived “high” and “low” realms. Rejecting an earlier view in which “high” culture was uncritically aligned with Christianity and good taste, and popular culture was equally uncritically demonized as an attack on Christian and civil values, Romanowski enumerates the important social functions that popular culture has absorbed. Arguing in characteristically Reformed fashion that all cultural realms, whether “high” or “popular” are fallen, and in need of redemptive engagement, he lays out a program for integrating the critical study of popular culture into a liberal arts program.

The last piece in the book is by Nicholas Wolterstorff, who, more than anyone else in recent years, has influenced Calvin College. As a member of the philosophy department for many years, and now as an occasional visitor on campus from his position at Yale, Wolterstorff’s winning articulation of what Reformed Christian higher education is about has helped realize the vitality and relevance of this particular tradition. In fact, the short title of this volume, Keeping Faith, is borrowed from a lecture series Wolterstorff offered ten years ago for new faculty at Calvin. In this essay he challenges the college to meet the challenges of the next century by becoming “a place where the Christian community does its critical thinking about the major social formations of contemporary society.” By social formations, he is thinking of such phenomena as business, church, politics, media, medicine, education, law, art and architecture. In order to do this, Calvin will have to augment its current liberal arts curriculum. Reiterating the Reformational rejection of any kind of dualistic divisions that would elevate the life of the mind over the life of the body, Wolterstorff suggests our liberal arts curriculum should take “the work of our hands” very seriously as an object of study. Careful and normative critique of the major social formations of our day is not only in keeping with the Reformed commitment to cultural engagement, such study would also be a legitimate contribution to public discussions about the function and direction of these formations.

Wolterstorff’s recommendations mark a departure from the “chastened and cheerful” rhetoric of “positive” Calvinism that Bratt and Wells identify as the governing ideology of Calvin College. Re-evaluating the utility of the “positive” and “antithetical” impulses that have played such a role in the history of the college, Wolterstorff’s emphasis on normative critique once again underscores the fundamental “antithesis” between how things are and how they ought be. But rather than attempting to transform these social formations from within (as the rhetoric of “positive” Calvinism advises) or, conversely, simply giving up altogether and withdrawing from secular social institutions as much as possible (the direction of the “antithetical” strain), Wolterstorff’s new synthesis results in a kind of resigned prophetic stance. “Expectations will be modest but genuine....Rarely will participants speak of ‘transforming’ American society; they will be content to make a difference. Sometimes not even that will be possible; then they will work to keep discontent alive. For we live in the expectant hope that God will someday take those differences and that discontent and effect the transformation.”

Underlying this new vision for Calvin College, though, and consistent with the preceding essays, is the basic conviction that a scholar’s intellectual life is intimately bound up with his or her
spiritual life. That, in fact, it is not merely wrong-headed, but simply wrong to try and separate the two. In the process of making his case for shifting the emphasis of the liberal arts curriculum at Calvin, Wolterstorff reflects on the reasons why Christians have been interested in liberal learning. Firstly, he says, “Christian integrity requires it.” Secondly, the Christian community needs it “to give content to the community’s voice and direction to its action.” But neither of those two reasons, worthy though they may be, captures what he has always felt to be at the heart of Calvin’s commitment to Christian education: Gratitude. In his words, “To be human is to be at that place in creation where God’s goodness is meant to find its answer in gratitude. I think what has always inspired my own engagement in Christian learning—inspiration picked up from my teachers here and reinforced by my colleagues—is the conviction that Christian learning is an act of gratitude to God. Not the only act of gratitude, obviously; and not an act to be performed by every Christian. It is one of the community’s acts of gratitude to God.” And beyond gratitude lies shalamic flourishing. “I have always believed that learning, faithful learning, contributes to our human flourishing. No doubt it is of use for the alteration of world, society, and self. For me, though, what has always been more important is that it makes the glories of human culture available to us, helps us to interpret what is baffling in our world, provides answers to our questions, suggests new questions. Christian learning is both a eucharistic act and, when properly done, an eirenic, or shalamic, act.”

Though certainly not unique to the Reformed tradition, this little volume of essays reminds us of a truth we often lose sight of: that the longings and desires that brought us to our work as scholars can also point us toward God. Keeping faith is something we do everyday as we teach, read, discuss, experiment, and write.

LUKE

Overhead a star
probably no brighter
than many others
pulled the sidereal
universe askew:
nothing would ever
be the same again.

The iron Roman order
was cracked apart
by the gentle breath
of a sleeping peasant child.

Herb Fackler

Lisa DeBoer,
an art historian,
teaches in
Christ College and
the art
department at VU
in her
second year
as a Lilly Fellow
in Humanities and
the Arts.
Vom Himmel Hoch

Martin Luther

1
Vom Himmel hoch, da komm' ich her,
Ich bring' euch gute, neue Mär,
Der guten Mär bring' ich so viel,
Davon ich sing' und sagen will.

2
Euch ist ein Kindlein heut' gebor'n
Von einer Jungfrau auserkor'n
Ein Kindelein so zart und fein,
Das soll eu'r Freud' und Wonne sein.

3
Er ist der Herr Christ, unser Gott,
Der will euch führ'n aus aller Not,
Er will eu'r Heiland selber sein,
Von allen Sünden machen rein.

4
Er bringt euch alle Seligkeit,
Die Gott der Vater hat bereit,
Dass ihr mit uns im Himmelreich
Solz leben nun und ewiglich.

5
So merket nun das Zeichen recht,
Die Krippe, Windelein so schlecht,
Da findet ihr das Kind gelegt,
Das alle Welt erhält und trägt.

6
Des lasst uns alle fröhlich sein
Und mit den Hirten gehn hinein,
Zu sehn, was Gott uns hat beschert,
Mit seinem lieben Sohn verehrt.

7
Merk auf, mein Herz, und sieh dorthin!
Was liegt dort in dem Krippelein?
Wer ist das schöne Kindelein?
Es ist das liebe Jesulein.
[ANGEL]
From high in heav’n I’ve come to earth,
To tell you of the Christchild’s birth.
This glad announcement that I share
Shall echo here and everywhere.

The best of women brought to light
This child, who is the world’s delight,
This darling baby, born today,
Shall all your sinful debt repay.

This is the Christ, our God, whose will
Is to redeem you from all ill.
He will himself deliver you
From sin and death, all clean and new.

Salvation is the gift he brings,
From God, who gives us all good things—
So you will live with us and be
In heav’n for all eternity.

Observe the signs of humbleness,
The manger and the simple dress:
The little child is sleeping there,
Who all the world’s vast weight shall bear.

So let us all be greatly pleased
And with the shepherds go to see
What God has given to everyone,
Presenting us this much-loved Son.

[RESPONSE/ INITIAL REALIZATION]
Observe, my heart, and look inside:
Who is the pretty newborn child,
Who’s lying where the cattle eat?
It’s baby Jesus, dear and sweet!
8
Bis willekomm, du eldler Gast!
Den Sünder nicht verschmähet hast
Und kommst ins Elend her zu mir,
Wie soll ich immer danken dir?

9
Ach Herr, du Schöpfer aller Ding',
Wie bist du worden so gering,
Dass du da liegst auf därem Gras,
Davon ein Rind und Esel asz!

10
Und wär' die Welt vielmal so weit,
Von Edelstein und Gold bereit',
So wär sie doch dir viel zu klein,
Zu sein ein enges Wiegelein.

11
Der Sammet und die Selde dein,
Das ist grob Heu und Windelein,
Darauf du König gross und reich
Her prängst, als wär's dein Himmelsreich.

12
Das hat also gefallen dir,
Die Wahrheit ansuzeigen mir:
Wie aller Welt Macht, Ehr' und Gut
Vor dir nichts gilt, nichts hilft noch tut.

13
Ach mein herzliebes Jesulein,
Mach dir ein rein, sanft Bettelein,
Zu ruhert in mein's Herzens Schrein,
Dass ich nimmer vergesse dein!

14
Davon ich allzeit fröhlich sei,
Zu springen, singen immer frei
Das rechts Susaninna schon,
Mit Herzenslust den siissen Ton.

15
Lob, Ehr' sei Gott im höchsten Thron,
Der uns schenkt seinen ein'gen Sohn!
Der freuen sich die Engel Schar
Und singen uns solch neues Jahr.
We bid you welcome, noble guest,
We who are needy and oppressed.
You have not scorned us, lost in sin.
How may I thank you, where begin?

Vast Lord, Creator, God of all,
How did you come to be so small,
To lie upon the lowly hay,
Where cows and donkeys ate today?

Our world, enlarged an hundredfold,
Prepared with precious gems and gold,
Would still be poor, would still be small,
To cradle you, who compass all.

No velvet bed and silken robes,
But rather hay and swaddling clothes,
Set off your glory, shining bright,
Eternal sovereign light from light!

So it has pleased you graciously
To demonstrate this truth to me:
What this world loves and much admires
Are idle, useless, worthless lies.

Prepare in me a clean, sweet bed,
Where you may lay your infant head,
Then mind and heart will be aware,
How you are always resting there.

So I shall evermore rejoice,
Leap up and freely raise my voice,
To sing this lovely cradle song
With all my heart the whole year long:

Sing praise to God, most holy One,
Who gave us Jesus, precious Son,
Wherefore the angel host [choirs] appear,
To wish us all a glad new year!
A glance through my latest pile of academic book catalogs indicates a great deal of interest in, and fear of, the “Christian Right.” In a basically secular and liberal culture, this is quite understandable, with suspicions by those in the arts and sciences that evangelical power translated into policy would make for a sterile and inhibited culture, and also among those—like me—who are just different, suspecting that such power means persecution and suppression. The history of sectarian power is not comforting, and so when we hear big talk about creating a “Christian America,” the image that comes to mind is barbed wire and burned books. Nor are we comforted by some of the drearier activities of religious Rightists, which often seem to run counter at least to the spirit of the Founder of their religion, and also some of the more lurid social and historical fantasies of such eminent divines as Pat Robertson.

They don’t scare me. For someone who grew up in the Bible Belt, there always was a Christian Right, and from my perspective in some measure they don’t have the kind of social power they once did. I can recall the veto power local churches held over such matters as liquor laws, Sunday “blue laws”, abortion laws, library censorship, movie fare, prayer in school, and so on. Now much of that local power has disappeared, and, to their horror, increasingly the secular culture further erodes their sense of a past moral culture. This is no doubt an American adaptation of the myth of the Fall, since now folks in small towns can and do rent porn movies, buy Hustler magazine, watch “Ellen” on TV, drink liquor on Sunday, have legal abortions, go to school with Muslims and Buddhists and atheists, work and play with and marry African-Americans and Hispanics. The edenic world of segregation and conformity and intolerance has been superceded by a more openly pluralistic and hedonistic and free-wheeling culture. (Local battles do still go on, to be sure, but it is interesting that the religious Right in desperation has gone national: ironically, their last hope for “turning America around” or somesuch would be Federal intervention at the local level.) Despite its moral objections, the Christian Right is now constantly beset by the question characteristic of a widespread culture of self-indulgent narcissism and privatistic individualism committed to the acquisition principle and the pleasure principle: “Who are you to tell me what I can or cannot do?” (Such American questions also include: “It’s mine, ain’t it; why can’t I do with it as I want?” and the anti-intellectual killer, “If you’re so smart, why aren’t you rich?”) Nothing illustrates this undermining and threatening social process of legitimated fun than the proliferation of legalized gambling. This is one of the more astounding popular-cultural developments of the last thirty years. Solidly “conservative” states now have state-run lotteries that use advertising to lure their citizens into the habit of gambling, and into the incipient belief that their hope for financial security is not in savings and investment but in the luck of the bet, reinforcing belief in the randomness of success and living for the moment. It is amazing to witness little old Baptist ladies buying blocks of lottery tickets, and busloads of retirees gleefully working the slot machines in casinos and showboats. No less than the state of Mississippi has become a major hotbed of casino gambling (especially “Casino Strip” south of Memphis, and on the Gulf Coast in Biloxi). Where once Klansmen and Freedom Marchers glared at each other, now black and white together lean

Jim Combs writes extensively about the theatre of American political life, which he observes from deep within rural Virginia. He has written for The Cresset for a number of years.
over roulette tables and study each other warily not over race but over poker stakes. Both public and private interests have collaborated in making us into a nation of gamblers (including speculators in stocks, commodities, and metals) whose prayers are not for righteousness but for the smile of Dame Fortune. And as wholesome entertainment: "Gambling," one casino brochure proudly states, "once a vice, is now part of a family outing." The American city on a hill turns out to be Las Vegas.

Alas, the moral plight of the Christian Rightists is the fact that they perceive they are up against a culture in which virtually anything goes, and all those activities that were "once a vice" are now legitimate fun. It is no wonder they hate and fear the preponderance of popular culture, since from their perspective what is available, for example, at the local tape rental store (or for that matter, what is being shown at the film series at the local college) seems to overwhelm both common taste and morality. They do err in believing that the vibrant and often outrageous popular culture of America stems from the philosophy of "The Enemy," the forces of moral relativism. In fact, the moral relativist, like the moral absolutist, takes morality seriously as something to be valued and practiced. The former usually believes in the principle of tolerance and the latter in the principle of principle. But the larger society values and practices the principle of moral, or more correctly amoral, pragmatism, of doing whatever works to get what you want—the bulk of the estate, the girl with connections, the abortion for your daughter, the contract with the government, the inside trader stock tip, the "soft money" payoff to politicians (we used to call them "cheap politicians," but that is a misnomer—now they are quite expensive.) The moral pragmatist is quite at home in the world after the Fall, and regards the exhortations of the righteous to be fine on Sunday, but bad for business the rest of the week.

In many ways, then, the contemporary Christian Rightist is a spiritual descendent of the Puritan movement. It is thus a mistake to think of such groups as the Christian Coalition as merely modern exemplars of Matthew Arnold's barbarians and philistines. True, an uncritical approval of wildcat capitalism or "welfare reform" supports shameful barbarity, and bourgeois Christianity (as I recall it) can be awfully philistine—as Arnold described it, a "dismal and illiberal life," stiffnecked, boring, dull and perverse. But there is always plenty of barbarism and philistinism to go around among the Babbits and Snopes and Legislators. The true plight of the political Rightist of religious conviction is the earnest desire for individual and social perfection, which similarly motivated the Puritans of old. Michael Walzer has argued that the English Puritans were responding to their experience of urbanization and cosmopolitanism, of coming to and living in London. The shock of exposure to the "evils"—people making money any way they could, having fun however they pleased—of the city led to psychic separation into self-defined sainthood, and given the political chance, to reform recalcitrant society into enforced virtue that would make the wicked at least ostensibly virtuous—sobriety, hard work, family life, and social discipline. (The Puritans punished by death such offenses as blasphemy, the cursing of a parent by a child over sixteen, and the third offense of burglary or robbery—three strikes and you're out, for good.) They gave impetus to work, acquisition, and the rise of capitalism, so had to deal with the business mentality, and attempt to mitigate the greed that drove people to acquire still more. The major difficulty was, and is, that the Puritans were, and are, against people choosing to have what they think is fun. There is a grain of truth in the Menckenesque crack that Puritanism is the fear that somewhere, somehow, someone is happy. Popular culture then—gambling, drinking, playgoing, bear-baiting—as now, involves the pursuit of pleasures that make people temporarily at least happy, or at least diverted and relaxed. Now eventually—recall the famous Weberian thesis—the Puritan virtues and the rise of capitalism married sobriety and the work ethic with practical experience, ironically culminating in contemporary America in Daniel Bell's "cultural contradictions," the divorce of capitalism and moral absolutism, the rise of a play ethic and decline of a sober and earnest attitude, the acceptance of the principle of fun as the practical, if not the moral, goal of life.
No less than their Puritan forebears, many contemporary Christians vacillate between withdrawal from the world of frivolity and greed into purified selves or communities and political quietism, and participation in the world in order to purify it. Often this dilemma is expressed in individual or collective gestures of self-purification. The recent Promise Keepers march on Washington may have seemed to some a rally of Christian soldiers marshalling their forces for a *putsch* against secular powers (the Federal Government, the National Organization for Women) and popular principalities (Disney). To me, it seemed in fact something of a Christian variant on the contemporary practice of public self-revelation and -abnegation, closer to what is supposed to lead to self-purification, a preface for instance) and, some fear, a political agenda. It put a quiet dignity. The “culture of confession” favors open displays of bawling humiliation, the testimonial in mass, the *mea culpa* for everyone to see and enjoy. Here we had the public spectacle of men swearing they will never do it again, whatever It might be, subjecting themselves to voluntary shaming that is supposed to lead to self-purification, a preface to facing their social responsibility (as husbands, for instance) and, some fear, a political agenda. I remain dubious on all counts: such peaks of emotional display are themselves momentary if heartfelt fun, but often disappear in the valleys of social habit and family condition, and often they don't translate easily into reviving old Puritan crusades such as spying on neighbors or banning books. The Promise Keepers may return home better husbands and fathers, but one doubts they will avert their eyes from the Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders or master the metaphysics of abortion law. Such gatherings might turn out just another variant of that great American escape, the road trip.

Religious activism in politics is often frustrated by popular resistance to group fanaticism, to be sure, but also by the fear on the part of zealous reformers that crusading for a moral agenda will reveal what they really don’t want to face, the fact that society doesn’t *want* to be reformed. The “rule of the saints” of whatever stripe tends to Procrustean overrule, and eventually evokes the subsequent normalcy of business-as-usual and the return to the pleasures of Thermidor. True belief is undermined by expedient belief, and goodness morality cannot undo fun morality. As the Puritan saints discovered, it took a Cromwell to enforce goodness until there was a counter-revolt away from the stringency and dreariness of godly rule, resulting in the outbreak of delightful fun-loving during the Restoration. In the present American milieu, however, it is difficult to see how the hedonism built into the social structure of desires and the system of rewards could be reversed or transformed into a thoroughgoing asceticism justified by a sectarian power. I find it difficult to believe that Americans could take an American Cromwell seriously. A visage that grim and an agenda that draconian we would find either forbidding or laughable. Since Reagan, we prefer politicians who preach rhetorical puritanism but acquiesce in social hedonism: don’t do as I say, just do as thou wilt, especially make and spend money, on pretty much whatever you like.

The New Puritans of both Right and Left nibble around the edges, and maybe enjoy an occasional victory in stopping or condemning someone else’s choices or fun—smoking, lechery, binge drinking. But they cannot stop or undo the individual and institutional moral pragmatists who sell and buy happiness defined as gratification, and who equate virtue with prosperity, and vice with not having the wherewithal to enjoy yourself. (Matthew Arnold speculated that “perhaps we have not the word because we have so much of the thing”, and no less than Cotton Mather said of Plymouth Colony, “Religion begat prosperity and the daughter devoured the mother.”) It is a constant theme among religious thinkers that prosperity somehow destroys virtue, at least of the Puritan variety, but it is seldom stressed that somehow prosperity also creates new virtues, such as generosity, playfulness, and perhaps most importantly for the sustenance of the American way of life, consumption. “The thing” that we have so much of is the core of many people’s beings, in that they define themselves by what they have. The most sincere Puritans defined themselves by who they were, but now we are so imbued with the “fables of abundance” of the consumer society that calls to enforce the abandonment of pleasure would be a threat to our selves and our practices. If someone tells us we cannot have
what we have convinced ourselves we deserve, then why should we heed such a voice of denial and self-restraint? The Puritan Word becomes in that way a moral threat rather than a moral promise.

Keeping promises—a fundamental moral precept learned at the kindergarten level. Surely it is no wonder in a society imbued with breaking promises that people would try to reassert this most elemental of rules. But if the Christian Rightists see clearly, they will discover that many of those who claim to be their friends are prominent and often quite cynical promise breakers. Promise breakers in business are committed to the art of the practical deal and if necessary the double deal, and in politics are not inspired by the example of the Cross but rather by the efficacy of the double cross. And they will also see that there are many ways to break promises—the phony rhetorical promises of politicians who pledge to them the impossible; the slick seductions of religious advertising and marketing, that promise all of us easy redemption and instant success and a ticket to heaven; the cultural magnates who promise uplifting and moralistic fare but who pand to every popular appetite and cheap thrill that sells. The poor and despised and neglected and condemned can tell them much about broken promises, including the promise of the faith that professes to care about and for them. And, if the Christian Right in power becomes the wrathful agent of persecution and punishment of the wicked—meaning those they hate and fear—then they themselves have become promise breakers, demonstrating once again to the skeptical that the use of power to enforce a vision of a Heavenly City ends up making the earth a lot more like Hell.

INTERVENTIONS

"Why, who makes much of a miracle?"—Walt Whitman

A girl may go to a well
and while she is drawing water for the house
she is aware of an angel, sitting there,
saying “Ave, blessed one, the Lord is with thee”

A man may watch by the meager fire
dull from the cold, resigned to grief, and
suddenly, between a drowse and fitful sleep
waken to bright chorales

A man may plot his life with craft and care
dress down his hopes to drab reality
and while he is stacking shekels, one may come
and touch his hand, and murmur “follow me”

A man may trudge an empty street, some casual Christmas,
may turn aside, though callous, to take shelter
where a crude door creaks on a dry hinge in a gritty wind
and find, in a cattle crib, a lovely child.

William R. Mitchell
Letters from the Front

the sense of wonder

Tom Willadsen

It couldn’t have been more than a week before Christmas, and you know how five-year-olds get as the Big Day Approaches. I was definitely a hundred pounds of excitement in a fifty-pound package. I was more excitement than our house could hold. So Mom told me to walk around the block. I was an obedient kid. Besides, there was a connection between my being out of the house and Mom getting my presents wrapped, so I put on my coat and walked around the block. A little more than halfway around I saw a dandelion in someone’s yard. It must have been December 20 and there was an honest-to-goodness little spot of yellow, sign of spring, harbinger of hayfever, growing right there on the 1700 block of Peoria Avenue.

I don’t remember what I got for Christmas that year.

_The shepherds saw an angel surrounded by the glory of the Lord and they were terrified._

In college I lived across the hall from a magician. Literally. He had a top hat and cape, magic wand, the works. Once we persuaded him to perform at a dorm event and he said something that I’ve never forgotten: “Magic,” he said, “works best for an audience of little children, junior high aged people are the worst audience.” (He didn’t bother to tell us what kind of an audience college people are.) He proceeded to do some tricks with help from members of the audience and we were all impressed at what Steve had learned to do. Like a good magician he didn’t reveal his secrets, and like a mature audience, we didn’t ask him to. We were impressed, but not overwhelmed. We were entertained, but not awed.

We, the sophisticated college audience, believed that there was some secret behind his slightofhand, and if we practiced the techniques, we could do magic tricks too. We were impressed that Steve had spent so much time perfecting his show, but we knew it wasn’t magic. I’ll bet Steve liked to perform for young children best because they believed their eyes—they knew there was magic, because they had seen it. . . .

_Suddenly there was an army of angels, praising God, saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors.”_

One of my colleagues at Wednesday Bible study reported something his confirmation class said a few weeks ago: Christmas isn’t special to them anymore because there’s no mystery left in it. I heard similar grumblings among the senior high group last week. They just weren’t in the Christmas spirit yet. Maybe that’s because all the snow melted, one thought. Another thought that Christmas was coming too fast this year, we should only have it every other year . . .

_Everyone who heard what the shepherds told them was amazed. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart._

Ten years ago I was going through my Puritan stage. Everybody said so—my family, my classmates, my boss. I went on a crusade against Christmas trees. I refused to believe that there could be any possible connection between Jesus’ birthday and killing a tree, dragging it into the house and hanging stuff on it. Wasted electricity. Fire hazard. People were homeless in our city and we were decorating a dead tree. Humbug.

Nine years ago I became a reformed Puritan. Mom pointed out that it’s her house, she paid for the tree and if I didn’t like her tree, I didn’t have to look at it. As I hung my ornaments that year I started to cry. I’d missed a year’s worth of memories. I hadn’t gotten to
remember how important these bits of styrofoam and cardboard and glitter had been to me. How they signaled “my side” of our trees of past years, how they connected me to those thrilling days of yesteryear, to magical times of awe and wonder, excitement and anticipation.

Jesus went to the synagogue in his hometown and after he read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah he told them that the reading had been fulfilled. Everyone was astonished at his gracious words. They asked each other, “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?”

An old and beautiful tale tells of a rabbi’s child who used to wander in the woods. At first his father let him wander, but over time he became concerned. The woods were dangerous. The father did not know what lurked there.

He decided to discuss the matter with his child. He took the boy aside and said, “You know, I have noticed that each day you walk into the woods. I wonder, why do you go there?”

The boy said to his father, “I go there to find God.”

“That is a very good thing,” the father replied gently. “I am glad you are searching for God. But my child, don’t you know that God is the same everywhere?”

“Yes,” the boy answered, “but I am not.”

Once a man who was paralyzed was brought before Jesus and Jesus said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven you.” Immediately he stood up and carried away what he’d been lying on. Amazement seized everyone who saw this, and they glorified God, and they were filled with awe, and they said, “We have seen strange things today.”

Remember the Christmas of ’83? It was 20 below in Peoria. And you know what happens when it’s cold and clear like that, don’t you? The sunlight hits ice crystals high in the atmosphere and it gets refracted and you see little wadded up rainbows on either side of the sun. They’re called sundogs. These were the brightest ones we’d ever seen. We went outside and looked at them while the turkey cooked.

One day Jesus was in a boat with his disciples and a windstorm swept over the lake, and they were in danger of drowning. Jesus got up and yelled at the wind and there was a calm. The disciples were afraid and amazed.

Sometime during this season, we’re sure to see an ad on television showing a child with a gleeful and wide-eyed look of wonder. Children are good at that. For a lot of people the only experience of awe at Christmastime comes in watching the faces of little ones. Environmentalist Rachel Carson described the natural awe of children in her classic book, The Sense of Wonder, this way: “A child’s world is fresh and new and beautiful, full of wonder and excitement. It is our misfortune that for most of us that clear-eyed vision, that true instinct for what is beautiful and awe-inspiring is dimmed and even lost before we reach adulthood.”

Carson believes that everyone can experience wonder, but because we do not open ourselves to what is wonderful, we lose the ability to be lost in wonder. The sense of wonder is essential for every believer. It is the beginning of faith and Carson writes, that it is “an unfailing antidote to boredom and disenchantments of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from the sources of our strength.”

What takes your breath away? What inspires awe? What is so tremendous that you can’t begin to understand it, and so you just try to appreciate it? Which of life’s mysteries have you given up trying to solve? When did someone do something to you that was so unexpected and so kind that you couldn’t even say “thank you?”

Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stopping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

On Christmas night we gather to celebrate the story that began with a mother who heard amazing things, and wondered at them, and treasured them in her heart, and continued as the mother’s child grew and did things that left people stunned into silence... amazed... astonished... and astounded.

It continues still in the eyes of a child. It continues still with colors in the sky. It continues still when people see weeds growing out of season. It continues still with little boys looking for God, where God can find them. My prayer this Christmas is that you will begin to understand and take part in this story. As we ourselves are astonished... amazed... and stunned into silence. Amen.
grow with...

The Cresset

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sources of uncertainty (episode one):
English Department contact with the Mars Probe

Arvid Sponberg

On a news show the other day, a NASA scientist was talking about the loss of contact with the Mars probe. He wasn't disappointed, he said, because it was only designed to last a month anyway and had lasted almost twice as long. It transmitted enough data to keep him busy for years, and, most important, the data would considerably reduce the “sources of uncertainty” in his understanding of Martian geology. With that phrase, deployed not unlike the Mars rover amid the arid vacuum of media discourse, the NASA scientist grasped a geode of truth.

It applies to all knowledge. For is it not true that, though we seek truth, we settle more often for reducing the sources of uncertainty?

Some recent scenes on campus produced a survey of sources:

Scene 1: Words, Words, Words
Place: Duesenberg Recital Hall, Center for the Arts
Time: 7:30 p.m., Thursday, November 6
Dramatis Personae: A poet and 150 enchanted listeners

The poet, Sharon Bryan, began her reading here on November 6 with some words about words, their uncertainty. As a child, she was always “hearing an ordinary piece of language at an odd angle.” She remembered that as a very young baseball fan she especially liked the song “Take Me Out to the Ball Game.” But for a long time she thought that the word “out” had the same meaning all three times that it occurs in the song. (“...take me out with the crowd...for it's one, two, three strikes you're out at the old ball game.”) Her misunderstanding led her to believe that if she struck, say, a wall three times, then she would be transported magically “out” to the ball park.

This memory may inspire a children’s book: *The Lion, The Witch, and the Dugout*.

She also had trouble, as I did, figuring out that getting a “hit” meant more than just making contact with the ball.

But this fluid capacity of language bedevils adults, too. In particular, Bryan singled out cookbooks as deep sources of uncertainty. Purporting to reveal the secrets of the kitchen, in truth, they conceal mysteries: consider the phrase, “bone the duck.”

Scene 2: The Standard Model
Place: Room 222, Neils Science Center
Time: 3:30 p.m. Friday, November 7
Dramatis Personae: A physicist and 30 astonished participants in the weekly colloquium of the physics department

Professor Jeff Wolinski, of Calvin College and Fermilab, told us the story of the search for the top quark, a critter tinier than a faculty salary increase, more elusive than a vision statement, and so fast that not even a curriculum committee
can slow it down. (In fact, Wolinski revealed that, due to budget cutbacks, Fermilab no longer uses expensive exotic metals in its particle detectors; instead, the physicists recruit faculty committees from their home campuses. Packed into hot, dark cubicles adjacent to the great accelerator near Batavia, IL, many faculty regard the experience as not unlike riding elevators at conference headquarters hotels. Asked why they do it, one group agreed that they reduce the sources of uncertainty more by standing elbow-to-kidney in a particle beam than they do by listening to each other’s papers.) Curriculum committees have been found to be especially effective at registering resistance to the eensiest changes in velocity and direction.

The Standard Model attempts to explain everything in the universe, a little to my surprise, given the name. Noting the ambition to omniscience, I would have expected it to be called The DeLuxe Model. Unfortunately, it is, as we in the literary line are wont to say, a WIP (frequently and understandably confused with Wimp)—Work in Progress. Without getting too technical, this means, in drama, for example, that the author has one act finished, at least two characters in an at-present unresolved predicament, but still hasn’t figured out whether the second act should be set in a saloon in Winnemucca in 1896 or the UN General Assembly in 1986. (And don’t ask whether it’s going to be a play, a play with music, or a musical.)

In the case of the Standard Model, “work in progress” means that there are just two or three comparatively minor details in the universe yet to be accounted for—such as why some things called “coupling constants” don’t “converge,” and what determines particle masses, and—um—let’s see—there was another one—um—oh, yeah—gravity. Like batteries, it’s not included. However, the DeLuxe Model, which will be out next year, or maybe next decade, or maybe next millennium—or “soon,” as they say at Fermilab—will come with batteries—uh, gravity.

Anyway, the top quark is a VIP—a very important particle—in the Standard Model and will also be a featured player in the DeLuxe Model. It has five co-stars and their stage names are Up, Down, Charm, Strange, and Bottom. In Europe Top and Bottom are billed as Truth and Beauty, but their American agents thought those names sounded too “soft” for the domestic market. (And don’t ask me how a character from A Midsummer Night’s Dream got mixed up with five other actors who couldn’t get a callback to the Seven Dwarf’s auditions. The whole quark shtick was dreamed up by James Joyce in Finnegans Wake—“three quarks for Mr. Marks”—and Dr. Murray Gell-Mann bootlegged the word into physics.)

Now Professor Wolinski didn’t explain quarks like this, but you know I tend to see things in theatrical terms. So the way I figure it is this: Quarks are kind of like roadies. They’re not the act—which is called The Electrons—but they travel with The Electrons. They set up the stage, run the sound checks, control the crowd, strike the set, and shlep the whole shebang to the next town. Wolinski and his gang have known for years that to keep the show on the road, you need six quarks but getting them to ink their contracts has been nearly impossible. Up, Down, Charm, Strange, and Bottom straggled in one by one but Top has been holding out for years. No one knows exactly why. Some think it’s the money, some think its the half-lifestyle. The thing is, Professor Wolinski swore on a stack of Bibles that Top Quark has been signed. Now he and his pals can get on the trail of a stand-up comic named Higgs Boson. (Correction: Don Koetke says it was a stack of silicon particle detectors. Now I’m uncertain. They did have black sides and gold edges, and Professor Wolinski does teach at Calvin. They might have been Bibles.)

Scene 3 - “Don’t Cry for Me, Valparaiso” (A Flashback - with dramatic shift in mood from the previous scene)
Time: Pre-Commencement, 1997
Place: a suitable banqueting hall
Dramatis Personae: Professor Richard Lee, Christ College, and 70 or more graduating seniors at the Christ College Honors Banquet.

Professor Lee retired from Valparaiso University, with which he had been affiliated since 1955 as an undergraduate, faculty member, and founding member of Christ College. In his remarks, he walked the graduates through the original dream of Christ College and contrasted
what he had been hoped for with what had happened. He summed up, in part, as follows:

"Now, very little of what I was dreaming... was achieved—for reasons I cannot rehearse at this time. The blueprints for Melanchthon Hall and Bonhoeffer Hall have now turned yellow. The residences were not built—we got a windowless and airless basement under the college instead—and I never got my job as residence hall counselor. I had to fall back on a substitute life of teaching in the College instead.

"Well, a substitute life is still a life, and teaching in the College certainly helped me achieve a much-improved Bachelor of Arts education. I like to think that all I have taught these past thirty years has helped to repair what was lacking in my own undergraduate education at Valpo in the 1950s. Perhaps, at last, I am truly ready to graduate.

"But, before I go, please indulge an old man one last dream, that I am among you, as your residence hall counselor, pouring each of you your last Christ College sherry, and bidding you farewell in the gleam of that crackling fire in the Commons. Like many old people, I live equally contemporaneously with all the times I have lived, now and then, then and now.

"I will tell you what we told honors seniors then, in those early days of College. Draw close and listen.

"We reminded them, as I now remind you, that [of] those to whom much has been given more will be required. We reminded them, as I now remind you, that all the intellectual achievements for which we honor you tonight, now make it possible for you to pursue an independent intellectual life. To be brief, distinguished seniors, there is no rest for the gifted. School’s almost over. Your intellectual life is not.

"An intellectual life is not necessarily a life of happiness, unless we understand that happiness is, as Aristotle tells us, activity according to virtue, or as Paul tells us, discipleship according to Christ. As intellectuals, you may now imagine more of life’s alternatives, be conscious of more choices to make, be more burdened with freedom, be called upon to take up more leadership roles, be aware of more gaps between the real and the ideal, and possibly be more aware of life’s sadness than the rest of us who lack the intellectual gifts to know as much as you now know and, please God, will know.

"Perhaps most fateful at this honored point of your graduation, you will now hold yourself to very high standards of achievement the rest of your life. You may even fail more often, by your own standards, than those of us less gifted who couldn’t even try to achieve what you can achieve and, please God, will achieve.

"Finally, over sherry at the Christ College fireside thirty years ago we would have told honors seniors that intellectual achievement entails, implies, indeed requires leadership. In those days we would have linked intellectual achievement and leadership with our Lutheran understanding of vocation and the priesthood of all believers.

"But good Lutheran theology aside, many of you will simply not be able to stand idly by while others bungle your affairs and those of your neighbors. Some of you will take up positions of leadership in exasperation and by default.

"Your intellectual achievements will, of course, open many doors—fellowships, grants, career hints and handups, networks, mentorings, internships, yes, even jobs—but the price of your intellectual achievement will always be leadership. Whether you like it or not, you will have power over others, most less intellectually able than you are and whose lives will be affected by your leadership. Do not be cynical—not all power is money, or celebrity, or propaganda, or the privileges of your race and class and nation. Your intellectual power is also leadership power, and your task is to use it energetically and well.

"Well, that is something like what we would have told the honors students in Christ College thirty years ago..."

"What would I add today for the class of 1997? Probably this: yours will be the same burden and glory of the first graduates of the College, but you will likely have the additional challenge of leading your intellectual life in an increasingly post-intellectual society. Yours already is a world of overwhelming information, technologically delivered in convenient and omnipresent formats, though less and less of it is weighed or judged or even thought about very much at all.

"You may have the added task of getting a fresh hearing for reasoning that considers ends
more than means, that discerns more than it calculates, that more often questions "why?" rather than "how much?" A post-intellectual society is one where few think critically and the rest do not listen to the few that do. It is a fraying democracy where the majority do not vote, fewer read, fewer discuss, and fewer care as education dumbs down, culture stupefies, and all that entertains is true. You may be entering a society of so many pleasing fictions that your first intellectual task may need to be the fresh invention of reality.

"A post-intellectual society is one where public relations substitutes for public policy, where one mass media image can wipe out many careful arguments, where sound moral character means feeling good about yourself, and the increase of freedom means more consumer choices. It is, finally, a society where intellectuals are very comfortably kept thinking about what they are told to think about. I suppose the biggest difference in the past thirty years is that the intellectually gifted now have so many more places to sell out. Freshman with any smarts at all now arrive at universities eager to become commodities.

"You are, of course, now more than ready to criticize your teachers, or we have been remiss. But, if anything I’ve said is true about our society today, many of you will have a special challenge added to your intellectual lives. And so on this night of your honors, I especially wish you well in getting a hearing for the life of the mind in whatever is your walk in life.

“Happily, to that weighty, yet delicate task, many of you will bring the ballast of the Christian intellectual tradition. Most of you can steady your intellectual life without wandering off into idols and ideologies, fads and fashions. To your intellectual life, you bring a special understanding of the human condition, a view of the self and history, and finally a Providence which transcends all that you may think and do, which can save you from both sentimentality and despair.

“Still others of you may bring the gift of Christian faith to your intellectual life. You will likely have a special capacity for irony and humor, audacity, and charity. Because you trust the ultimate truth is grace, you will be most able to put all your partial truths out for the service—and correction—of your fellow men and women. God knows, your lives especially will never be dull, and tonight I bless especially the adventure of every intellectual life lived in faith.”

Amen, Professor Lee. And may all our partial, uncertain truths lead us at last to that Grace.
In exile Israel asked “How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?” (Ps. 137:4) Immigrant churches often ask the same question: “How can we sing the old songs in a new language?” Translators are regularly called upon to provide words in a by-now familiar language that will fit the original melody. In 1854 the Rev. J. J. Fast of Hudson, Ohio, printed “Cantica Sacra, a collection of church music embracing, besides some new pieces, a choice selection of German and English Chorals . . . from the best European and American authors . . . with text in German and English.” The music is set out in shaped-notes with the melody in the tenor, and introductory chapters instruct the singer how to read musical notation. This hymnal for German Lutherans takes the form of American singing-school music books, uses an American system of melodic notation, and provides most of the the German chorales with both the original text and also an English version. In this issue of The Cresset Madeleine Forell Marshall gives us from the German yet newer translations in words that sound like us, now singing the Lord’s ancient songs in a land once strange but now become our home.

Wm. Eifrig
When morning nears, see Venus shine
Philipp Nicolai
translated by Madeleine Forell Marshall

When morning nears, see Venus shine,
An emblem true, God’s gracious sign;
Prepare to meet the bridegroom!
My promised king, of David’s clan,
Most royal, righteous, gentle man,
My heart is yours forever.
Jesus pleases;
  Great and splendid
  he befriended
  us and gave us,
All his rich life blood to save us.

My golden crown, pearl of great price,
Both God and Mary’s sacrifice,
Christ Jesus, King celestial:
Your Gospel lessons, rich and sweet,
Delight my heart, my joy complete,
You are the bread from heaven.
Jesus feeds us;
  Sing hosanna
  for the manna,
  for this pleasure,
Milk and sweetness without measure.

Fill all my being with your grace,
Claim and transform each secret space;
May I your love embody.
Make me a limb, a branch of you,
My life responsive, through and through,
To you, my head, Christ Jesus!
Shine divinely;
  Love so active
  all attractive
  burning ever,
Draw me fast to you forever.
When you look deep into my eyes,
My heart leaps up, my soul replies;
This joy is right and godly!
Sweet Jesus Christ, my perfect good,
Your word, your body and your blood,
Give life and health and gladness.
Tend me, friendly;
   Love expressing,
   joy and blessing,
   mercy showing,
God's own grace and peace bestowing.

My love has promised me, his bride,
Life everlasting at his side,
Where I shall ever praise him.
With this assurance, I am free
From fear, from sharp anxiety,
My bridegroom is my savior.
Such bliss as this
   Calls for singing,
   loud bellringing,
   jubilation,
Wild and joyful exultation!

Let music flow, rich waves of sound,
With grateful joy rise and resound,
The ring of love eternal.
My love is all the world to me,
Both first and last, both “A” and “Z.”
My love is God incarnate.
So I leap high,
   Recreated,
   elevated,
   only yearning,
For the day of your returning.

Interpretation is as natural as breathing. Whether (dis)obeying traffic signals, reading a newspaper, or watching television, one “is at every moment an interpreter” (2). Interpretation is fraught with challenges. Recently, theologians, philosophers and literary theorists have so questioned our ability to interpret correctly that to speak of “the” or “a” right interpretation of a text is often dismissed *a priori*. Somewhere between these extremes falls this work. Though sometimes disagreeing, its contributors recognize “that sustained reflection on hermeneutics may deepen the Christian mind and discipline Christian interpretive practice” (2).

Roger Lundin presents the material in four parts, each consisting of one essay followed by critical responses. The first, Philosophy, opens with Nicholas Wolterstorff’s essay, “The Importance of Hermeneutics for a Christian Worldview.” It argues that the speech of the biblical writers has been and is authorized by God so that one may hear and understand what God meant and means to say through it. Although not limited to Scripture (Augustine, for instance, discerned God speaking through a child (Confessions, XIII, 12)), the primary locus for such “double discourse” is the Christian canon. Wolterstorff thus navigates between those insisting the Bible inerrantly preserves the Word of God and others countering that the Word cannot be discerned apart from the tradition of the reading community. He has also guaranteed criticism from both groups. Howard Marshall emphasizes the Bible’s historical accuracy and an evidential approach to interpretation while Merold Westphal counters that tradition, not authorial intent, enables one to distinguish those praiseworthy interpretations from the rest.

Having so set the debate, Lundin moves to the second part, Literary Theory. Donald Marshall’s “Truth, Universality and Interpretation” sketches Aristotle’s paths to knowledge. Episteme—certain knowledge based on reasoning from sound principles—provides the conceptual framework without which rational inquiry is impossible, but no more. Techne—practical knowledge based on our active shaping of the material world—also plays a constructive, if limited, role. It has produced “a vast body of information about the text of Scripture, the archaeology and history of the Near East, and the historical variety of religious ideas among the Jews” (78). Neither constitutes the ultimate goal of Christian Bible-reading; personal transformation does. So Marshall introduces phronesis—knowledge shown in the choice of right actions. By visibly witnessing to the truth of the biblical text, phronesis forms the backbone of Christian claims to universality. Although Marshall admits that one can now but distinguish between better and worse interpretations, he hopes for an “eschatological fulfillment . . . when the meaning of the whole of history will be revealed and consummated” (82). Ellen Charry counters that phronesis alone is insufficient; in order to provide the universal scope claimed by the Christian worldview, phronesis must
be subordinated to core Christian doctrines in a critical theological realism.

To this point, the essays address hermeneutics as a problem within Christian communities; the third section, Sociology, embraces a wider context. In "Sliding in all Directions? Social Hermeneutics from Suspicion to Retrieval," David Lyon challenges postmodern Christians to reintroduce central themes in the biblical narrative into social debate. Willie James Jennings cautiously affirms the proposal, but is less optimistic; for him sociology must become not Lyon's agon in which Christians participate, but a "theological and ethical discourse upon the social," which prayerfully contests the claim that truth is an illusion (118).

Jennings thus introduces part four, Theology. In "The Spirit of Understanding: Special Revelation and General Hermeneutics," Kevin Vanhoozer argues that contemporary hermeneutics "is bound up with the modification or the rejection of orthodox Christian positions. Secular literary theories are theologies or anti-theologies in disguise" (133). He then calls a "hermeneutics of humility" quietly to challenge the "hermeneutics of violence" to read any book like the Bible—to read the Father's Word through the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Vanhoozer's weak point, which Dallas Willard exposes, is precisely the Spirit's illuminatory role. The Holy Spirit is reduced to "hermeneutical occasionalism" (167)—an attempt to bridge the gap between our limited perspective and "the (or a) right interpretation of a text" (168). Nevertheless, Willard remains in general agreement with Vanhoozer's "thesis of the primacy of the theological for all understanding" in contexts from the academic to the political, social and personal (172).

Lundin has edited the material such that each part leads to the next; the disciplinary boundaries are transcended, but in a manner respecting their integrity. Further, the work raises issues crucial not only to academics, but to Christians generally. How are the fallibility of the biblical authors and the infallibility of God reconciled in the Bible? Can truth come through an interpretation? Can the Christian narrative contribute to, even redeem, social theory? Can theology deconstruct the deconstructionists? All begin with and expand upon the assumption that the Church, the City of God, is on pilgrimage in the City of Man. This is its chief strength: a clear reminder that the Christian academy exists in, by, with, and for the Church as a whole.

T.S. Perry


The essays in this volume are collected in honor of James Gustafson, who was a teacher (and often, dissertation director) for all of the authors. And indeed, to have such a collection of students—many of them well known—working in the field of Christian ethics is itself a tribute. The editors say that they asked their contributors "to set out the 'state of the question' on a given topic in religious ethics, identifying the current issues and positions they consider to be most significant or problematic, and then developing a constructive argument or answer." In a brief Afterword, Gustafson himself comments on the volume, though without undertaking any detailed review of or response to particular essays. The essays are grouped in two sections corresponding roughly to those concerned with theoretical matters in theological ethics and those concerned more with practical reasoning and particular questions of the moral life.

In the nature of the case, the essays sometimes vacillate a little uncertainly between discussion of Gustafson's own work and the particular theme under discussion. After all, learned as Gustafson is and influential as he has been, surveying themes of his work is one thing, surveying the "problems and prospects" of Christian Ethics is another. Still, many of the essays manage these simultaneities well. Thus, one can read Stanley Hauerwas explaining why he turned away from the concept of agency that had figured prominently in his dissertation, Margaret Farley reflecting upon the role of experience in moral reasoning, Gene Outka analyzing the "particularist turn" in recent theological and philosophical ethics, James Childress dissecting carefully the ways in which moral norms are used in applied ethics, Joseph Allen outlining recent theological discussions of democracy—and much more. This is probably not a book to be read from start to finish but, rather, a book to be used on a variety of occasions. It is aimed mainly at scholars in the field, but it ranges widely enough that it is likely to be used in many different settings.

Gilbert Meilaender

Larry Rasmussen is, I suspect, no stranger to the readers of this journal. The Reinhold Niebuhr Professor of Social Ethics at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, he is a well-known Lutheran ethicist whose previous works—for example, *Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life* (Augsburg, 1989; coauthored with Bruce Birch), *Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Fortress, 1990, coauthored with Renate Bethge), *Moral Fragments and Moral Community* (Fortress, 1993)—have rightly brought him much acclaim. He is, in short, one of the leading Christian ethicists writing today. His latest book, *Earth Community Earth Ethics*, will do nothing to diminish his reputation. Indeed, his stature will only be advanced, since along with Paul Santmire’s *The Travail of Nature* (Fortress, 1985) and James Nash’s *Loving Nature* (Abingdon, 1991), *Earth Community Earth Ethics* is one of the most comprehensive and stimulating and passionate single-author volumes in Christian ecological theology and ethics to be written in recent memory. [An early version of Part I was published in *The Cresset* in May of 1996. Ed.]

Through all three parts of the book—from “earth scan” to “earth faith” to “earth action”—Rasmussen knowledgeably and eloquently argues this thesis: “Our most basic impulses and activities must now be measured by one stringent criterion—their contribution to an earth ethic and their advocacy of sustainable earth community” (xii). Sustainable community, Rasmussen insists, is one of the central goals and norms of a Christian faith and ethic attentive to the best of its own tradition and informed by knowledge of how the world works. This central category is given extensive discussion (at least five chapters deal directly with this theme), especially in view of the regnant competing paradigm of “sustainable development.” The sustainable development model suffers from a number of fatal flaws, the most serious of which is that it “runs against the grain of nature itself and creation’s integrity” (114). The present human economy of “freeway-and-mall monoculture,” Rasmussen concludes, “resists this ethic of biology” (126)—an ethic which, for example, realizes that there is no “away,” prizes diversity and variation, and lives within its limits by reclaiming, reusing, and recycling.

The limitations of this review do not permit an examination of the rich and suggestive ways Rasmussen mines common natural symbols (“Trees of Life”), holy scripture (“Adam, Where Are You?”), contemporary science (“ReBeginnings”), the Lutheran tradition (“Returning to Our Senses”), and the theology and testimony of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (“Song of Songs”), all with the aim of disclosing our “apartheid habits” (31) and our “autistic theology” (35) and our “docetic economics” (115) and thereby seeking to convert us to more authentically Christian and earth-friendly ways of life. The book is, in short, a prophetic work—in the best sense of the term—employing Annie Dillard and Alan Paton and Alice Walker as well as Luther, Bonhoeffer, and the Berrys (Thomas and Wendell). Along the way Rasmussen offers helpful insight and clarity on the meaning of “the integrity of creation” (99ff), the nature and relation of important moral norms (172), and the spectrum of visions of human identity (228ff).

All is not, however, sweetness and light. For my scholar’s sensitivities there are far too many second-hand citations (and at least two instances, both with regard to Augustine, in which no reference is given) and citations taken from *The New York Times*. Also, there is some confusion as to whether the perspective being advanced is biocentric (18) or theocentric (231, 235). And there is, surprisingly, only one passing reference to pioneering ecological (fellow Lutheran) theologian Joseph Sittler (278). More substantively, it is unclear whether Rasmussen has successfully argued the case that “the need now is for those symbols that effect a reenchantment of the world” (194; cf. 346). That we need “a fearsome respect for creation’s integrity” (325) and a wider circle of moral considerability (345) and a “return to our senses” (274) is quite clear. How this implies a reenchantment of the world is not. Also, while great (and creative) attention is given to an ecological *theologia crucis*, especially as that precludes any deification of nature or refusal to take sin seriously, not much is done with the resurrection and the Pauline hope which arises from it. Indeed, “hope is real” and “there are good grounds for it” (351); but more attention to these grounds is needed.

Despite these qualms, this is an important book. Its expansive scope and thoughtful wrestling with many complex issues is impressive, as are the passion and the insight Rasmussen brings to his inquiry. While certain sections of
the text may be difficult for the
mythical “educated layperson,” the
book is fully accessible to most
readers. Furthermore, it is a timely
tome if we are to redemptively
address earth and its distress. As
Rasmussen states on more than one
occasion, “all the createds are
relateds” (29). Given our funda­
mental kinship with all creatures,
and given our identity as priests of
creation—called to serve the earth
for its own sake (Gen. 2:15), Earth
Community Earth Ethics is a much­
needed primer on Christian voca­
tional identity amidst the groaning
of creation. May we have the
courage and humility to learn.

Steve Bouman

C. Steven Evans. Why Believe:
Reason and Mystery as Pointers to
God. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,
1996, 154 pp., $13.00 paper.

The purpose of this book is to pro­
vide a brief, but compelling case for
the essential features of historic,
orthodox Christianity. Although
the book is philosophical in nature,
it is written in a distinctively per­
sonal style. In the preface, Evans
relates the story of a former stu­
dent, ‘Andrew,’ who struggled to
make sense of the Christian faith,
but was unable to accept it as true
and eventually committed suicide.
“Someday,” says Evans in the
preface, “I knew I would want to
write a book for Andrew and others
like him I have met along the way.”

The book is divided into
two main parts. In the first part
(chapters 3-8), Evans argues for the
claim that God exists and that
Christianity provides the best
account of God’s nature and inten­
tions for human beings. In the
second part (chapters 9-11), he pro­
vides responses to some of the most
common objections to Christianity,
including the charge that it is sexist
and oppressive of women, unscien­
tific, and the tool of a reactionary
politics. Although Evans covers a
broad range of issues in the philos­
ophy of religion, he is clearly writ­
ing for the non-specialist. The
book opens (chapters 1-2) with a
general discussion of faith and
reason, and concludes (chapters 12­
13) with a brief, but helpful, treat­
ment of central Christian doctrines
and the nature of religious commit­
tment in a pluralistic world.

This book is a concise
introduction to many of the issues
that bear on the reasonableness of
Christianity. It is well-written and
engaging, and displays competence
in several different fields of special­
ization, including philosophy, the­
ology, and biblical studies. Some
topics are treated too briefly, but
that is to be expected from a book
of its size. In any case, Evans com­
pensates for this by including sug­
gestions for further reading on all
the major topics he discusses. Why
Believe is a revised edition of The
Quest for Faith (InterVarsity
Press, 1986). Substantial additions
have been made to chapters 1, 5, 8,
and 11; notes to the text have been
filled out; and the list of suggested
readings has been lengthened. Nei­
ther work contains an index.

It is perhaps worth noting
that, although Evans thinks that a
strong case can be made for Chris­
tianity, he rejects the view that
establishing or defending the ratio­
nality of belief in God requires
arguments of any sort. According
to Evans, one’s belief in God can be
rational even if one has no evidence
God’s existence. This view about
the rationality of religious belief,
commonly referred to as “reformed
epistemology,” is by no means
uncontroversial. Nonetheless, it
does represent an important trend
in contemporary philosophy of reli­
gion and so deserves the popular­
ization that Evans gives it.

Jeffrey E. Brower
on poets—

Herb Fackler

teaches at University of Southwestern Louisiana at Layfayette, Louisiana. He has published in a variety of literary magazines from *New Laurel Review* to *Rolling Stock*, from *Chachalaca* to *Doggerel*.

Madeleine Forell Marshall

drives a variety of teaching appointments at California State/San Marcos and Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary. She is a translator of considerable experience, having translated for hymnals in the Moravian tradition, the United Church of Christ, as well as the ELCA’s recent *With One Voice*. “When Morning Nears” was published in the January 1997 issue of *Cross Accents*, the publication of the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians, and is reprinted here by permission.

William R. Mitchell

has been for many years a Professor of English at Oklahoma Baptist University. He last published in *The Cresset* in the Christmas/Epiphany issue of 1995.