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See inside back cover for notes by Art Editor, David Morgan.
On the evening when Clinton blustered through his exculpatory speech to the American public, I went to see Saving Private Ryan instead, and this juxtaposition has set a number of contrasts going in my mind. In this issue of The Cresset, film critic Rick Barton has his eloquent say about the film, and I don’t want to tread on that here, but both the subject of the film, and its treatment by director Spielberg, bear directly and inescapably on character issues. And character, both private and public, is “what it’s about, stupid.”

You do not have to be a film critic to realize that what has captured director Spielberg’s attention in this story are the qualities of personal character in the soldiers his film follows. The most immediate of these qualities must be the capacity to accept duty without whining. That’s not to say the soldiers never complain; they complain plenty. But there is a sense universally shared among them that if life demands something difficult of you, that’s life. As a philosophy, it may not receive here its most eloquent expression, but it is powerfully expressed nonetheless. In my imagination, I kept hearing the contrast between these voices—of my father’s generation—and those of my own and younger generations as they respond to the demands of difficult obligations. The contrast was not pretty.

More pertinent for these comments is a second quality of character, which comes up in the final moments of the film, as the veteran stands in the Normandy cemetery. Overwhelmed at the sight of all these graves, he asks his wife to reassure him that his has been a good life; he wants to be reassured, since he has survived and they did not, that his life has been worth the lives represented by all those crosses and stars in front of him. It is an odd moment for this modern film, since it seems to recreate a stock moment from classic war movies of the past. What is it that strikes us as so un-contemporary about his question? Why is it so impossible to imagine someone today asking that question in these circumstances?

The old soldier demonstrates an ability to love and to praise his former comrades. Beyond that, however, he has the capacity to wonder at the awesome mysteries of life and death. The scene itself seems stilted and artificial, as though even Spielberg is baffled at how to present an experience so foreign to our sensibilities. A modern audience watches this climax with a kind of suspicious fascination. The old man stands there in tears, measuring his own worth, his own being, in relation to others in genuine humility, in an agonizingly authentic desire to be found “worthy.” He demonstrates thereby qualities of character that appear to have slipped beyond our grasp. Beavis, Butthead, the Simpsons, the Seinfeld quartet—they all demonstrate with more or less dazzling accuracy our expertise in the clever belittling of anything and everything. All experience is an experience of finding out smallness and insufficiency. Every experience is just another version of discovering that the Wizard is only a silly old man behind a curtain. “No big deal” might be the watchword on the banner most of us carry around with us. Who do we hear today who wants to be judged “worthy” in comparison with others who have sacrificed or struggled or lost more? The theological implications of such a question are intriguing, for the immediate answer is of course that no one is “worthy” in any ultimate sense, and any desire to be so reassured is bound to be frustrated by the limited nature of any human judgment. But before leaping into the theological dimension of the old soldier’s
question, we would do well to think for a few moments about its social implications.

Why should the capacity to wonder, and the ability to feel awe matter? If these qualities are missing from a private personality, does this make a difference to public life? I think it does. Because control and the appearance of control have become ever more important as the means of fixing our status in relation to others, it has become necessary to avoid appearing to wonder at anything. To be in control is to close oneself off from surprises, to insulate oneself from the possibility of something that remains resolutely outside the power of the self to shape and determine meaning. If you can spin, you never need to sense the un-spin-able. Wonder becomes the forbidden emotion, and the capacity to wonder—with all it implies about vulnerability and incompleteness in the self—is stunted.

In part because of Tom Christenson's musings, this issue of *The Cresset* has developed into an extended meditation on wonder. Wonders of the sort that surmount even deadly political attack. The everyday wonder of our culture's popular pastimes. The natural, the mortal and the miraculous. Gus Sponberg brings us up-to-date on campus doings, and describes—mirabile dictu!—a curricular undertaking of surprisingly rigorous dimensions for VU's new students. With Ron Dooley's pointed reminder that the dominance of the worst of male character in business may make it too early to say goodbye to feminism, and David Morgan's choices of covers that hint at the breaking through of divinity into the ordinary, readers should have plenty to wonder at.

But it may be too easy, even after these eloquent and thoughtful explorations, to reduce the capacity for wonder to a mere element of personal choice: "I choose to be a wonderer, she does not." Such a reduction misses crucial dimensions of character as the link between private virtue and public life. Any ordinary listing of the qualities of character needed for leadership would include such virtues as integrity, sympathy, and the capacity to do difficult things without whining. But how much more would we gain if we were to cultivate as a necessary element of character the capacity for wonder? We would regain an understanding of the relation of self to others, the sense of awe and gratitude and humility without which integrity is only stiff pretension and sympathy a mere emotional security blanket. It might be that we would sense again the connection which hymnwriter Charles Wesley saw long ago when he wrote that in contemplating the divine, we are "lost in wonder, love, and praise." Not until we experience that kind of being lost can we hope to find ourselves properly.

Peace,

GME
Ways of Wonder

Tom Christenson

Wonder is a grammatically polymorphous word. It occurs as a noun, as a verb, and in adjectival and adverbial forms. But unlike many nouns that have recently become verb-ized (“He fingered the perpetrator”) or verbs that have become noun-ized (“We’d like your in-put,”) “wonder” seems always to have had these uses as noun, verb, adjective and adverb. “Wonder,” when used as a noun, curiously, is also polymorphous. It can designate 1) the thing(s) encountered in such an experience, “They beheld many wonders,” as well as 2) the emotions and affective states generated by such encounters, “We were stunned to silence as we stood in wonder,” as well as 3) the quality of the thing experienced, “To marvel at the wonder of the commonest flower,” and 4) the quality of the lived experience itself, “I will never forget the wonder of that moment.”

Along with its grammatical variety and the denotative variety of “wonder” as a noun, “wonder” as a verb also has a range of meanings. On one end of the spectrum we have uses of the term as synonyms for “to think,” “to speculate,” or “to be curious about,” as in “I wonder who will win the next election.” Connected to such uses is the use of “wonder” as a verb expressing doubt or puzzlement; “I wonder about that,” can mean “I doubt it,” as well as “I don’t understand it.” On the other end of the spectrum, to wonder is “to be amazed at,” “to marvel at,” “to be perplexed / astonished / surprised by,” even “to behold a miracle.” In the former case the word is active and agentive, describing more or less intentional actions. In the latter cases the experience moves more toward the passive voice. It is this sense, what I would call the strong sense of wonder, that most interests me; the sense that wonder is not so much an action or relation that we undertake intentionally, as it is something that we suffer, something that assaults us, surprises us, blasts our wits, derails us, and overtakes us—often in spite of our inclinations (and sometimes our efforts) to the contrary. It is about this sense of wonder that Sam Keen writes: “We can no more create a sense of wonder-ment than we can plan a surprise for ourselves” (28). Even Lewis Carroll witnesses to this with Alice’s precipitous fall into Wonderland.

Many uses of “wonder” are connected with pleasure and joy. To wonder thus is to experience with extraordinary attentiveness, interest, openness, and value. But at the extreme end of the spectrum, “wonder” also begins to overlap with the bizarre, the uncanny, the strange, the shockingly vivid, the disorienting, the reorienting, the miraculous, the sacred. One of the most evocative synonyms for “wonder” is “bewilderment,” i.e. literally to be lost in the wild. This conveys the profound sense of disorientation, of not-at-home-ness, (“We’re not in Kansas anymore!”) that can also occur in the experience of wonder.

A brief examination of the etymology of “wonder,” reveals a kinship, at least in the English, German and Scandinavian languages, with the root for “wound” and “to be wounded.” Some phrases in English still pack the wallop of wonder as a wounding experience: “to be overcome by wonder,” “to be wonder-struck,” “to suffer an attack (or fit) of wonder,” “to be rapt in wonder,” “to have fallen into wonder,” etc. The old English word, “wondsome,” conveys the perplexity of the experience very well as it means, “to be beset with difficulties.”

experiencing wonder

In spite of the fact that we sometimes speak as though wonder or wonders are the objects of experience, wonder seems to have more to do with how something is experienced than what is ex-
The most profound and amazing things can be encountered by many without any accompanying sense of wonder. Rachel Carson writes:

> It was a clear night without a moon. With a friend, I went out on a flat headland that is almost a tiny island, being all but surrounded by the waters of the bay. There the horizons are remote and distant rims on the edge of space. We lay and looked up at the sky and the millions of stars that blazed in darkness... I have never seen them more beautiful: the Misty River of the Milky Way flowing across the sky, the patterns of the constellations standing out bright and clear, a blazing planet low on the horizon. Once or twice a meteor burned its way into the earth's atmosphere.

> It occurred to me that if this were a sight that could be seen once in a century or even once in a generation, this headland would be thronged with spectators. But it can be seen many scores of nights in any year, and so the lights burned in their cottages and the inhabitants gave not a thought to the beauty overhead; and because they could see it almost any night perhaps they will never see it. (54, 55)

On the other hand, the simplest and commonest things can be occasions for wonder for the awake and attentive person. Consider “Between Walls” by William Carlos Williams:

> the back wings of the hospital where nothing will grow lie cinders in which shine the broken pieces of a green bottle

Williams does not romanticize the bottle, nor the cinders, nor the rear of the hospital. He records the details in a very plain way, not embellishing them with “poetic” adjectives or similes but celebrating their plainness, their ordinariness, their cast-away-ness. Still he is able to show us, by the way he attends to them and arranges the simple fragments of verse, that they are an occasion for wonder.

**three characteristics of the wonder-awake**

What’s the difference between those, like Carson and Williams, for whom wonder is a continuing possibility, and those who have lost (or never have found?) what would make such an encounter possible? There are three characteristics the wonder-awake seem to share: openness, even a hunger for experience; questioning of dominant experience-shaping categories; willingness to make oneself woundable by and vulnerable to what one finds. Let us examine each of these three characteristics more fully.

**openness**

We all, more or less, experience the world. But within the realm of experience there are such qualitative differences! Some experience the world as though sleep-walking; some as at least occasionally fully awake and aware. Some experience the world like a man who, while eating gross amounts, does not taste what he eats; others know how to savor every mouthful. Some experience the world like a bored but greedy child opening birthday presents; she tears them open one after another but shows no interest in them nor can she enjoy them once opened. Some, on the other hand, know how to relish each moment as a gift. These are differences not only between people, but differences within the range of our own experience. Sometimes I can be awake to the world in ways that open me to wonder; yet at other times I am too preoccupied and too sense-deadened to notice.
Joyce Cary, in his delightful novel, *The Horse's Mouth*, presents the following exchange, which I've written out here as a bit of dialogue:

Jimson [quoting from William Blake]:

*And every minute has an azure tent like silken veils;*
*Every time less than the pulsation of an artery*
*Is equal in its period and value to six thousand years,*
*For in this period the poet's work is done.*

Cokey: You haven't got six thousand years this afternoon.

Jimson: Half a minute of revelation is worth a million years of know nothing.

Cokey: Who lives a million years?

Jimson: A million people, every twelve months. (108)

How we experience the things we encounter—the difference in the quality of attention we bring to things—is crucial to wonder. Poet Mary Oliver, writing about the source of inspiration for poetry, writes:

No one has yet made a list of places where the extraordinary may happen and where it may not. Still, there are indications. Among crowds, in drawing rooms, among easements and comforts and pleasures, it is seldom seen. It likes the out-of-doors. It likes the concentrating mind. It likes solitude. It is more likely to stick to the risk-taker than to the ticket-taker. . . . Its concern is the edge, and the making of a form out of the formlessness that is beyond the edge (5-6).

**questioning**

Most of us, walking behind Williams' hospital in Patterson, New Jersey, would have said to ourselves, and consequently would have instructed our eyes, “There’s nothing in this alley worth seeing.” Consequently we would not have seen what or how Williams saw. Seeing with the eyes of utility and the eyes of pre-judged importance we don’t see what is in front of us. Opening our eyes and other senses frequently requires, as a pre-requisite, the opening of our minds. Frederick Franck, explaining a Japanese concept kindred to wonder says:

*Kami-sabi* [refers to] the perception of a sacred presence in all things. . . . *Kami-sabi* demands that total openness by which one escapes from “the grave of custom” as Thoreau called it. It is the profound “ah!” of firsthand seeing. (133)

Sometimes opening our eyes requires the admission that we have no categories at all for what we encounter. Thoreau wrote:

I begin to see [pond & meadow] when I cease to understand it and see that I did not realize or appreciate it before, but I get no further than this. . . . I am made to love the pond and the meadow, as the wind is made to ripple the water. (*Journal*, Nov. 21, 1850)

To experience wonder we must question, if not abandon, the categories that so thoroughly shape the way we customarily experience things. One of my most dramatic encounters with the experience-shaping power of categories occurred when, as a graduate student, I made myself a “guinea pig” for some psychological experimenters at the university. Among the many tests they ran on me was a series that tried to find out how thoroughly “married” people were to conventional categories. In one such test the psychologist flashed a set of slide pictures very quickly on a screen and asked me to describe what I saw. At first the pictures he showed seemed quite normal, but then he began to slip in some weird things—a picture of a calico cat with a rhinoceros' head, or a queen of diamonds where the diamonds were colored green instead of red, or an octagonal red sign that said “POTS” instead of “STOP.” In each case he wanted to see whether I would see what I “knew was right” or whether I would see what was actually there. At the end of the test he told me that some subjects never saw anything unusual, but saw only what they supposed was there and fit the categories they had brought along: a kitten, a queen of diamonds, a stop sign, etc.
In another test I was taken into a small room and was told to take a good look, explaining I
would later be brought back there to tell them what, if anything, had changed. I studied the objects
in the room in detail, trying to notice the number and placement of chairs, pictures, lamps, pieces of
chalk in the chalkboard tray. Before they returned me to the room they first made me put on a pair
of goggles, then let me re-enter. They asked me to tell them what, if anything, was different and
they started the stop-watch. I looked around the room quickly, taking an inventory of the furnish­
ings. Finding no change in the objects in the room, I happened to glance out the window at the end
of the room and saw that the building across the street was tipping over toward us at about a 45 de­
gree angle! I gasped, then saw that the wall at the end of the room was doing the same, and finally
that all the space in the room was a-tilt in the same way. I told them what I saw and they pushed the
button on the stop-watch. Thirty-five seconds had elapsed. At the end of the testing they said that
out of the one hundred tested that only three had noticed the change immediately while over a
dozen never noticed the slant of space though they were left in the room with the goggles on for
well over an hour! This demonstrates that many of us “correct” what we experience to match our
assumptions about what is there. I also did that as long as I was focusing on details, focusing on
“doing well” at an agenda I had brought along. Only when I gave up on that project was I freed to
notice how the space of the room and the surrounding world had changed.

I believe that the experiencing of wonder is analogous to this; it is a breaking free from our as­
sumptions of what the world is like in order to notice freshly what is actually there. Wonder is a lib­
eration from the world as it is too well known, from the customary, the complacent, from a “hard­
ening of the categories.” It is a liberation toward the fresh, the surprising, the child-like, the disar­
mingly apparent.

wound-ability

The experience of wonder may require, not just an encounter with a new thing, and a new
way of relating to something, but it may require a new self in the bargain. As the last part of Rilke’s
poem, *The Archaic Torso of Apollo*, so pointedly states:

If there weren’t light, this stone would look cut off
where it drops so clearly from the shoulders,
it’s skin wouldn’t gleam like the fur of a wild animal,

and the body wouldn’t send out light from every edge
as a star does ... for there is no place at all
that isn’t looking at you. You must change your life.

Sam Keen expresses it this way:

Every wonder-event requires a cognitive crucifixion; it disrupts the system of meanings that secures
the identity of the ego. To wonder is to die to the self, to cease imposing categories, and to surrender
the self to the object. Such a risk is taken only because there is the promise of a resurrection of
meaning. (30-31)

And perhaps it is this same sort of loss of self that Emerson is referring to in this passage:

Crossing a bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight, under a clouded sky, without having in my
thoughts any occurrence of special good fortune, I have enjoyed a perfect exhilaration. I am glad to
the brink of fear .... Standing on bare ground, —my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into in­
finite space, —all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball. (4)

“I am glad to the brink of fear,” what a telling expression for the combination of risk and joy
that is possible in such an experience! The fact that wonder involves such a personal risk, a risk of
pre-established self identity as well as a questioning of the categories we have on hand to interpret
the world in our customary way, may go a long way toward explaining why the experience is not
more common, particularly among well-established adults. The rigidity of our world picture and the solidity of our self-understanding are directly related. Questioning “the way things are” requires a willingness to examine ourselves. It requires someone, whether child or poet or philosopher, who is willing, as Mary Oliver suggested, to risk looking “over the edge,” to tell what they see there.

the disciplines of wonder

I begin this section with misgivings about its title. The word “discipline” is sometimes associated with the idea that there is some kind of prescribed method, an algorithm which, if followed, will lead one to the desired outcome. There certainly are no “disciplines of wonder” in that sense of the word. Yet there are some paths that one may traverse that lead one in wonder’s direction, and these paths do require something of us and are disciplines in that sense of the word. In the title for this essay, “Ways of Wonder,” I use “way” in the oriental sense (Tao in Chinese, do in Japanese). In that sense sitting in meditation, tea ceremony, learning a martial art or other art/craft could be considered a way. Frederick Franck writes in connection with a particular way he practices that he calls “seeing/drawing”:

Ways ... [are] lifelong disciplines that lead you to where you really live, that liberate you from the programmed prejudices of your time and the pretensions of the little Me, to reveal the truth that is your own Truth. ... It [seeing/drawing] consists of allowing the eye to be fully awake to life as it presents itself ... five little pears on your table, a bird gathering sprigs of grass to build its nest, a woman pushing a baby carriage on a country lane at dusk ... . Epiphany of the commonplace. (18 - 19)

There are such disciplines or ways of wonder. But we should not take this to mean that they are automatic means to some guaranteed end, nor that they are the only ways to wonder. The problem about talking about the disciplines of wonder is that one is likely to think of some sort of exclusive or preferred list. Please do not do that. Wonder is always a gift, grace. But just as there are means of grace, places and acts where we are assured grace can be encountered, so there can be ways and disciplines of wonder. How horrible to turn the means of grace into obligations or into exclusive categories! They are means of grace only in the sense that they witness to the everydayness of the occasions (eating, drinking, washing, speaking, hearing) where grace is manifest. The “disciplines of wonder” discussed here should be of interest to us in this same way; they can indicate to us the diversity of ways of opening ourselves to wonder that are possible.

the discipline of asking questions:

The disciplines of wonder can be things that have a long tradition attached to them, things that take a long time to learn, or at least to master. But they can also be things utterly simple and immediate. Rachel Carson writes:

Exploring nature with a child is largely a matter of becoming receptive to what lies all around you. It is learning again to use your eyes, ears, nostrils and finger tips, opening up the disused channels of sensory impression.

For most of us, knowledge of our world comes largely through sight, yet we look about with such unseeing eyes that we are partially blind. One way to open your eyes to unnoticed beauty is to ask yourself, “What if I had never seen this before? What if I knew I would never see it again? (52)

These simple questions can re-orient the see-er, just as we may relate differently to a loved one if we suppose we are seeing him/her for the last time. These questions bring us to experience with different expectations, or perhaps better, with fewer expectations. We need to raise into question the way in which we usually sort our experience. We need, as our discussion of the Williams poem earlier showed, to question our prejudices about what is important and un-important. How would our perceptions be re-shaped by the question, “What if the highest truth, the deepest revelation, the sublimest happiness, if, indeed, God Him/Herself were manifest in this simple thing I see before me now? How would I have to attend to it?” Witness Walt Whitman in “Song of Myself”:
I believe a leaf of grass is not less than the journeywork of the stars,
And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and the egg of the wren,
And the tree-toad is a chef-d'oeuvre for the highest,
And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven,
And the narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn all machinery,
And the cow crunching with depress'd head surpasses any statue,
And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels.

Asking the right questions (asking a question is not the same as reciting a question) may help us break out of the hold that our conceptual categories have over us. They may facilitate the opening, the unpeeling, the re-awakening of our senses necessary to re-encounter the world. It is this possibility that the ancients pointed toward in connecting the experience of wonder to philosophy. Plato wrote, “Wonder is the source of philosophy.” Without a continuing questioning of its own foundational principles philosophy becomes a new doctrine, a new method, a new orthodoxy. What amounts to the same thing, it loses its sense of wonder.

Does an increase of knowledge destroy our sense of wonder? I do not think it has to. As a child I spent hours peering through a homemade telescope at the planets and star clusters I could see. I do not think that my wonder diminished as my knowledge grew. In fact, as I began to understand more about the vast spaces (and consequently the vast times) I was seeing into I became more amazed, more aware of what a mind-stretching thing the cosmos is. I have personally known many physicists, biologists, geologists, etc. whose inquiry is laced with wonder. I have also known some for whom it is not. So when does knowledge destroy wonder and when not? Sam Keen offers the following analysis:

[I question] the fallacy of the romantic notion that an increase of knowledge leads to an eclipse of wonder. Knowledge destroys mystery and wonder only when it is used hostilely to reduce the dimensions of meaning in an object. 

It has been widely suggested. . .that the process of abstracting, judging, reasoning, is somehow the villain responsible for the loss of wonder. . .we must look for the causes. . .not in the activity of reasoning, but in the attitude in which it is carried out. Nothing in the normal process of the development of reason in a child automatically leads to the eclipse of wonder. (26, 57)

I would say that in addition to the reductionism that Keen mentions, rational thought disables wonder in two other related cases: first, when it is narrowly utilitarian, when it leads one to see the world as fitting categories established to suit some prior agenda. The person who sees a forest only as board feet of lumber is not likely to meet wonder there. The person who sees nature only as economic resource or waste is not likely to be fully engaged by an encounter with another creature. Second, rational thought disables wonder whenever epistemology dictates ontology, that is, where we determine in advance that there can only be in the world what we assume can be known. But there is no reason why thought and experience cannot be open, appreciative and contemplative. The utilitarian, epistemological and reductionistic models of thought are not, fortunately, the only models there are. Abraham Heschel writes:

The greatest hindrance to knowledge is our adjustment to conventional notions, to mental cliches. Wonder or radical amazement, the state of maladjustment to words and notions, is therefore a prerequisite to an authentic awareness of that which is .... Wonder rather than doubt is the root of knowledge. (11)

the discipline of poetry

Many people have an idea that poetry is “plain ideas dressed up in fancy language.” I hope that the poems quoted thus far in the text have freed us from such a supposition. Certainly there is nothing “fancy” about Williams’ language nor Whitman’s liberating images. They come to us in language that clears the palate and sweeps out the mind. The same thing is true, I find, of the Japanese
poetic tradition of haiku. These simple, three line poems are meant to be the most direct communication, not a roundabout or prettified way of saying something. They are meant to wake us up like a splash of cold water in the face, not lull us into a dreamland of verse and imagery. The best of them also help us to turn a conceptual and sensory corner. We do not come out of a haiku thinking or seeing in exactly the way we went in. That's their point. Consider these examples from Harold Henderson’s Introduction to Haiku:

To wake, alive in the world, 
What happiness!
Winter rain.
Shoha (15)

Scooping up the moon 
In the wash basin, 
And spilling it.
Ryuho (47)

To ears bruised by too many sermons, 
Finally a song!
The cuckoo.
Shiki (28)

Well settled and asleep 
On the temple bell, 
A butterfly.
Buson (142)

wonder and other arts

If poetry can be a discipline of wonder, why not the other arts? Obviously they can be as well. But frequently there is a problem, for the fine arts in the west often do not have this liberating power. This follows from the fact that our established western art forms bring so much cultural baggage with them. Institutionalized, “high-culture” objects, they are not interwoven with ordinary life. An engagement with art ought to open us up to a more lively and more profound experience of the world, but unfortunately often the fine arts are experienced as a new way of dichotomizing experience, dictating a new hierarchy to bow down to.

Though there are many arts that can both induce and stifle wonder, I would like to focus on the deceptively familiar art of photography. The way most of us usually take photographs does not free up our sense of wonder. We take standard shots of standard scenes, framed in conventional ways. We often use these photographs to “see” the places we were too preoccupied to fully experience on our vacations. They give substance to a time that was lived through but not fully savored. So the question arises, how might one make photography into a revealing and self-revealing art? I recently read a description of the self-imposed discipline of Minnesota wilderness photographer Jim Brandenburg:

I had set myself the challenge that for 90 days between the autumnal equinox and the winter solstice I would make only one photograph a day. There would be no second exposure, no second chance. My quest was both arbitrary and rigid. Arbitrary in that no one had compelled me, or even asked me to perform it. Rigid in that once engaged, the constraints I had chosen would force me to examine myself and my art in a manner I’d never before attempted.

I include here his account of just two days under this discipline:

One of my favorites [photos] was made on day 23 when I despaired of capturing anything of value. The day was dark and gloomy, and my mood reflected the weather. I had slogged through dripping forest all day long. Tired, hungry and wet, I was near tears. I was mentally beating up myself for having passed up several deer portraits and the chance to photograph a playful otter. Then, perhaps because I had been patient and centered and without comfort … I became open to a new possibility. This was revealed by a single red maple leaf floating on a dark-water pond. My spirits rose the instant I saw it. Although what little light there was fleeing rapidly, I studied the scene from every angle. Finally, unsure of my choice, I made the shot anyway, thankful at last that the day had ended.

On this day [day 25] I was forced to find a subject without the luxury of allowing the proper time to lead me to it. Walking to a granite ridge not far from home, I searched for a scene “worthy” of my one photograph. I was tense and more than a little irritable. And
then a breeze blew. If you have been in a paper birch forest...you know that tatters of birch bark rattle in the breeze like parchment scrolls clattering to the floor. Hearing that sound, I turned to a tree just behind me. Torn and hanging from it was a sheet of chalky white bark, revealing the apricot colored underlayer. Pressed by time, I “settled” for this subject...when I later viewed the printed image, I was pleased to be reminded of something I had long ago learned: Sometimes less is truly more.

(National Geographic, Nov. 1997, pp. 99, 100)

wonder, and the disciplines of meditation and worship

Meditation is definitely a discipline of wonder. The large literature of the worlds’ religions attests to that. Christians, Jews and Muslims may enable wonder through a discipline of prayer, Buddhists in sitting or walking contemplation, Hindus in yoga, Indigenous Americans in the sweat lodge or in communal dance. The forms are often quite different, yet the outcomes are surprisingly the same: i) a transcendence, a moving beyond the selfish ego; ii) a sense of communion with others, sometimes with the whole of creation; iii) an awakening to sacred presence, to unmeasurable depth and joy in the commonplace; iv) a re-orientation to life, a new sense of what is important and what is not.

A sense of wonder seems to be absolutely essential to the life of faith. Without a common experiential foundation theological language begins to be merely a revered verbiage, an attachment to the name of something the meaning of which we no longer remember. Yet frequently we educate young people in the faith nominally while we do next to nothing to nurture people in the faith experientially. Mainstream Protestant Christians, at least, tend to make belief focal in the life of faith. This tends to make experiential manifestations of the faith of lesser importance. But just the opposite is true in other religious traditions, e.g. Indigenous American traditions, where experience counts for everything and belief is not focal at all. My own view is that experience must be the foundation and that belief and theology belong in the superstructure of faith. Such seems also to be the view of Sam Keen:

[How]. . .we continue to talk about God is not so important as whether we retain the sense of wonder which keeps us aware that ours is a holy place. (211)

And Dag Hammarskjold, from Markings:

God does not die on the day when we cease to believe in a personal deity, but we die on the day when our lives cease to be illumined by the steady radiance, renewed daily, of the wonder, the source of which is beyond all reason. (56)

Religions, and perhaps all human institutions and endeavors, are constantly plagued by the temptation to identify their living center with the calcified structure that is constructed around it. It is as though we mistook the clam for its shell, the university for its buildings, the spirit of a country for its monuments, etc. So religions create structures of governance, belief, explanation, and so on, which are easily mistaken for their living essence. The same thing can happen with worship; we may come to think of it as a form and structure rather than an openness, an attitude, or an experience induced by a form and structure. This is not an argument for continuous novelty. Novelty can become just as deadly a pre-occupation as unquestioning loyalty to tradition can. The question to ask about any form is always “Does it work?” Is anyone led to be more worshipful by it? Is anyone led to wonder, awe and reverence by means of it? Are any deadened eyes and hearts enlivened by it?

Religions are also tempted to value the past (the sacred time of its scriptures) more highly than the present. As Thoreau so well put it:

It is remarkable that the highest intellectual mood which the world tolerates is the perception of the truth of the most ancient revelations...but any direct revelation, any original thoughts it hates like virtue. The fathers and mothers of this town would rather hear the young men at their tables express reverence for some old statement of the truth than utter a direct revelation themselves. They don’t want to have any prophets born into their families—damn them!...we check and repress the divinity that stirs within us, to fall down and worship the divinity that is dead without us...
think they love God! It is only his old clothes, of which they make scarecrows for the children. Where will they come nearer to God than in those very children? (Journal, Nov. 16, 1851)

Wendell Berry similarly argues:

[In the] outdoors, we are confronted everywhere with wonders; we see that the miraculous is not extraordinary but the common mode of existence. . . . Whoever really has considered the lilies of the field or the birds of the air and pondered the improbability of their existence. . . . will hardly balk at the turning of water into wine—which was, after all, a very small miracle. We forget the greater and still continuing miracle by which water (with soil and sunlight) is turned into grapes. (103)

universalizing wonder

David Hume, in his discussion of miracles, defined a miracle as an unusual and unnatural occurrence, one, in fact, that runs counter to the laws of nature. Not surprisingly Hume went on to argue that miracles do not occur. Contrast to this Walt Whitman’s claim: “I know nothing but miracles.” So here we have two opposed tendencies: one so severely restricts a concept that one can find no instances of it, the second so generalizes the concept that there are no instances of anything but. I believe we face the temptation to move toward these two extremes with many of our concepts, including the idea of the sacred, the idea of sacrament, and the concept of wonder. The temptation is, on the one hand to say that “only the officially religious is sacred,” or “only those things authorized as sacraments are sacraments,” or on the other to say “the officially sacred or sacramental functions to alert us to the sacramentality of all of experience.” I have to admit that I am much more tempted by the latter excess. I would much rather err on the side of Whitman than on the side of Hume. But I think, in more careful moments, that both are excesses. As Cornelius Verhoeven puts it, “Wonder is not a house in which it is possible to live.” (13)

the call to wonder

Wonder is the experience of surprise, joy, and sometimes fear that we encounter on reawakening to the world. It is literally a “coming to our senses,” a meeting again, but as if for the first time, what we have complacently been present to all along. Wonder may be occasioned by knowing and it may be occasioned by the realization that we do not understand at all. It requires a breaking open of our rigid patterns of thought and our conception of self.

There are many things that I wish for my children: a sense of humor, caring companions, and good work are near the top of my list. So is an abiding sense of wonder. I would even go so far as to say that we realize our humanness in proportion to our ability to wonder. This is why it is so tragic that we live lives where wonder is so often eclipsed. We are tempted by many things in our culture to experience in one-dimensional ways, to become one-dimensional functionaries, to have one-dimensional relationships, to substitute a lust for quantity for the less well-advertised joy of quality, to believe that owning a Jeep is the same as a wonder-awake encounter with canyons and pine mountains.

Let those who know how to enable and encourage wonder share this great gift with us. If you have found a way to wonder, practice it and, as Rumi does in his poem, “Unmarked Boxes,” lead us there:

God’s joy moves from unmarked box to unmarked box, from cell to cell. As rainwater, down into flowerbed. As roses, up from ground. Now it looks like a plate of rice and fish, now a cliff covered with vines, now a horse being saddled. It hides within these, till one day it cracks them open.
works cited

ST. BLASE

(for David Tigan)

Fishbone, for instance.
You’ve left thousands lying around campsites.
Tossed a million more
into fly-swarming trashcans at the lake,
wrapped up with sunfish guts
in old newspapers.
Maybe, after removing the larger flakes
from a trout, a walleye, or a salmon steak
you’ve thrown a strip of fishbones
in the cat’s bowl to be licked.
Or flicked a missed bone out of a filet
setting it at ten or two o’clock
on the rim of your plate.
Except when they annoy you,
who thinks about fishbones?
Probably not that little boy of his parents
at the inn in Asia Minor
until a single bone went down wrong
at dinner, the night Blase was a guest.
The wheezing twelve-year old
began staggering,
hammering the table with his fist,
the mother shrieking
and the father whacking
his son’s back and shouting nonsense.
Blase walked in and with an arc
of his open hand on the boy’s neck
below his radish-red face,
he reached in to extract
a thorn of cartilage, with no more alarm
than if he’d picked up a fork.
“A miracle!” the mother blubbered,
“You got here just in time!”
Blase shrugged and made no remark
though he considered telling the mother
You can’t imagine how much
happens ‘just in time’—
that God, in fact, had stitched
this moment into the knit of events
since the heavens were still dark.
But he said nothing.
Saints know miracles are common as fishbones.
Reconstructing Hearts in Rwanda

Jonathan Frerichs

Despite global conventions against genocide and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the international community did little to prevent one of the century’s worst genocides in Rwanda in 1994. Now, after four years of aftershocks, Rwanda’s citizens still suffer incalculable social and psychological consequences. Staffed largely by Rwandans, a Lutheran World Federation program there has so far withstood severe tests. Now the fate of years of relief and rehabilitation work is tied increasingly to a new partnership with pastors and the church.

Pastor John is the kind of person the killers were looking for that night last March. Of Tutsi origin, he grew up in a family who had fled to Tanzania and is now settled back in Rwanda. When killers struck at a Lutheran World Federation community site, he and others came to comfort and to take a deeper look at what had happened and why. “We are here to reconstruct hearts,” says Pastor John Rutsindintwarane, leader of the newly formed Lutheran Church in Rwanda. As such, he and his LWF co-workers may be symbols of a new Rwanda.

To the human mind, the old Rwanda is the grimmest of lessons in the failure of politics and the horror of civil war. To the heart, it is an even deeper tragedy, a catastrophe of the human spirit. In a century of several holocausts, who can say how once again so many lives were shattered?

For Lutherans, the question might best be understood with the carpenters, truck drivers, social workers and, now, two pastors who assist the Lutheran World Federation in Rwanda. All are being asked to stay on the job despite the violence that still ripples across parts of their country. LWF is determined to stay—especially at the site attacked in March—despite a drop in financial support for its work there. “We are making an extra commitment there even if we haven’t got a cent,” says LWF country representative, Jaap Aantjes. “It’s the last place we’d leave.”

That “last place” is Bukora in Rwanda’s relatively quiet southeast. There, on a former ranch, people driven from Rwanda during 40 years of strife are starting life again. Like Pastor John they are the living tally of Rwanda’s turmoil: Tutsis who fled massacres as long ago as the 1960s and Hutus driven out in 1994. In today’s Rwanda the two groups of refugees are called Old Caseload and New Caseload, respectively. Under the new government, “Tutsi” and “Hutu” are labels no longer allowed.

While violence has often stymied resettlement and reconstruction efforts elsewhere in the country, the Bukora area has been calm. LWF has solid standing here, thanks to decades of work in neighboring Tanzania and a key role in the recent, massive repatriation. The Old Caseload, when they became refugees in the 1960s, settled in Tanzania and Uganda with LWF assistance. Then, in 1994, the New Caseload found refuge in huge border camps which LWF helped supply. These millions who left are now trying to settle in back home.

The Bukora project had done well. New homes, schools, clinics, roads and garden plots transformed ranchland into a vision of Rwanda finally on the mend. Troubles to the west and north seemed far off—where the militia of 1994 still operate almost daily, where the army carries out reprisals and pre-emptive strikes, where 1994’s guilty killed 1994’s witnesses and vice versa.

‘Far off,’ that is, until the events of March 11, 1998. At nine o’clock that night staff were socializing after supper at the office. Armed men approached silently in the dark, then shouted that they had come to kill Tutsis. They called for certain staff members by name. In the ensuing melee three died: Rubayita Donath, a tractor driver; Karimba Johnson, a truck driver; and Ngaramba In-
nocent, a carpenter. Rwamuhabwa Paul, another tractor driver, was seriously wounded.

The 30 attackers next turned their guns, machetes and hoes on the resettlement community itself. They selected Old Caseload residents, killed five people and wounded two.

Casualties could have been worse. It had rained heavily that day, stopping several LWF staffers who had planned to be at Bukora for the night. The killings could have shattered the community along Rwanda’s old fault lines. Where violence has been ethnicized, all people from the victims’ ethnic group fear further attacks; all those from the killers’ ethnic group become instant suspects. Some residents fled.

Others cowered. Work on the settlement stopped. Fragile hopes for a common future in Bukora were shaken. But were they dashed? Bukora was civilians facing men in arms, but it was also a community, afraid of something else—that, just as violence had forced other aid groups to leave other places, LWF would now leave Bukora.

The answer was not long in coming. “We are determined to stay with the communities,” Aantjes told Ecumenical News International in Geneva, within days of the murders. “Our success is directly related to staff being present on the ground.”

The Rwandan army went on alert in the area. Resettlement work gradually resumed. But defense of a different kind was mobilized as well—renewed efforts to ensure that traumatized citizens might live together side by side. Amid the tools, tractors, houses and plans of the LWF community program, small groups met to discuss a different development agenda: fear and forgiveness, new life and hope. “We found them afraid,” says Rev. Peter Munyeshili, a Pentecostal clergyman who works with Pastor John. “We tried to gather them, to talk over the incident. We gave them the Word of God and promised to come back.”

The Word that Pastor Peter gives includes John 10:10, the verse about Jesus coming so that people might “have life in all its fullness.” Killers come like thieves to destroy that life, he tells his listeners. Rwandans are ready to believe in the miracle of life, he says. Why? Because, amid horrors, some saw miracles happen in 1994.

In fact, just to have survived is a miracle for many, he says. “Reconstruction of people’s hearts,” says Pastor John, “is essential back-up for the reconstruction work that is visible to the eye—where LWF already plays a big role.” He credits Aantjes and LWF for grasping the connection between the seen and the unseen, and for a ready commitment to pastoral work, especially since the March attack.

But making hearts new is a far slower process, he hastens to add, than rebuilding a war-ravaged country. 1994 constricts his pastoral work today. It is as if people’s motives then still conspire to keep their consciences prisoner now.

On the one hand, many were forced to kill their neighbors in order to save themselves or their loved ones. Others knew what was going on but did not or could not resist. Extremist propaganda prepared the whole nation for the unthinkable, and then solid planning gave the horrors a life of their own. Also, almost everyone—from guiltiest to most innocent—has suffered since in crowded refugee camps, while internally displaced or under the new regime’s severe measures to maintain security. On the other hand, some killed or simply took advantage of massacres and civil war in order to gain land and property.

Guilt still seems to prevail against contrition and forgiveness. Classic confessions do happen but are relatively rare, according to Pastor John. Once, in a refugee camp, some young men were chopping wood. One with an ax in hand confessed to the others that in 1994 he had been forced to kill eight people. “Will God ever forgive me?” he asked his fellows. Pastor John came over to him and said, “Yes, God does forgive us. You are forgiven.” The young man was deeply touched.

But there is still no magic moment for many. What of the dreaded interahamwe militia, for example? Has anyone forgiven them? “Yes,” Pastor John says readily, “I know two people who have. One is a woman whom the militia wounded. ‘I forgive them even if they did it because I want to die as a Christian,’ she told me.” Even in the bid for heaven’s absolution her earthly rationale prevailed.
Pastor John and other church leaders in the Kibungo region around Bukora preach love and consolation. As part of the LWF's work he also holds monthly community meetings. Participants were reserved at first, he says, but now more and more are warming to the subject. In a country where they see few hints of compromise either from those associated with the 1994 massacres or from hard-liners in the current, minority-led government, they know how many hearts must change. They ask that community forums be started in other troubled places.

Pastor John has few illusions about what Rwanda requires and yet much faith. “Some hearts on both sides are eager to listen and learn. That was true in Benaco (the huge 1994-era camp in Tanzania) and true here,” he says. “This thing needs people who speak from the heart. It will take time for hearts to change, but if we are committed, it is possible. With God nothing is impossible.”

Such grassroots diplomacy for peace does not take place in a vacuum. It stands beside LWF’s “social program” that aims to build community spirit with local churches through sports teams, church choirs, theater groups and the care of vulnerable people. There is also the shelter and infrastructure work mentioned above and, finally, economic programs that encourage local small-business cooperatives.

All programs are intended to meet basic needs while breaking down barriers that can cripple mixed communities. Alice Mukayirangw, an LWF worker at Bukora, sees progress. “Bukora was very bushy and had no food when the people came,” she says. “Now they are getting crops from seed they have planted. The residents are not hungry anymore. By next year they will not need any more relief aid.” Aantjes agrees. “The people here realize that they share common needs with former enemies,” he says.

Yet even as more is asked of staff, such programs are increasingly squeezed for funds. LWF member churches are giving less and less for the agency’s work in Rwanda.

Alice was targeted by the raiders in March, but she and other LWF workers say they are not afraid. The army has stepped up patrols in the area, and the raid is under investigation. However, safety also has a deeper, social foundation. As community programs succeed, the LWF is betting that residents and staff will become safer. Security is basically a community responsibility, say LWF officials in Kigali and at headquarters in Geneva. Thus, whenever possible, staff will keep living in the communities they serve, helping guarantee security with their neighbors. Meanwhile, since the attack, LWF takes daily operational precautions and keeps in close contact with civil authorities.

Security is spiritual as well. In a country where genocide divided the church as deeply as it divided society, Pastor John puts himself squarely on the moral front lines. “A shepherd cannot betray his sheep,” he says. “As a pastor, I am anointed to serve and I must stand for peace. Our message of assurance is based in hope. Our commitment to peace goes with action.” His words embrace the wounded body of Christ. Lived out, these words will bear witness to a new Rwanda and to a new Rwandan church as well. 

Tell the story of Rwanda in church and pray for those who, like LWF workers there, minister to others amid violence and suffering. Here is a prayer from South Africa:

We pray that we will be:

- In the midst of struggle and in the heat of battle—servants.
- In the midst of violence, oppression and hatred—prophetic.
- In the midst of hopelessness and pain—hopeful.
- In the midst of compromise—committed.
- In the midst of bondage and fear—liberated.
- In the midst of intimidation and silence—witnessing.
- In the midst of suffering and death—liberating.
- In the midst of failure and disappointment—believing.
PRAIRIE NIGHT

The fireflies light up briefly as they rise
Through the cool night
Like ashes glowing briefly
As they lift from the flames.

And the grasses brush each other
In the fragrant dusk
And the housecats move through the foxtails
Silent, alert
To every rustle of mouse.

And the solitary peach tree is bent
Down under its fruit.

And a few clouds shine white in the west
Becalmed in a sea
Of luminous, silvery blue.

How odd that philosophers
Rake the world for meaning:
As though the grasses were no
More than empty words,
As though the cats had no
Intrinsic charm,
As though we could give life meaning
When, in truth,
A meaning gives us life.

Now the air in the hollow turns cold
Like the patches of cold
You found when you swam in the pond.
And the brown hummingbirds
Take one last turn through the phlox.
And then the horizon dims,
And darkness falls.

Barbara Bazyn
Though I did not understand it for a very long time, I was taught my first lesson about war when I was in the third grade. The summer I was eight years old, I was assigned responsibilities for mowing the lawn on the large suburban New Orleans lot where I lived. I passed the time during this hot, boring duty by playing “Civil War.” My lawnmower was a Gatling gun, and the blades of grass vile Yankee soldiers. I amplified the mower’s hum with declarations of “eh, eh, eh, eh” and warnings to myself to watch out for blue-coat-sympathizing azaleas that scratched at my legs as I snaked the mower underneath them. My father heard my mutterings one day and asked me what I was doing. When I explained, he was aghast and immediately sat me down for a lecture about the horrors of war, assuring me that I had no idea what it would be
like to shoot a man or come myself under machinegun fire. I would like to claim that I was genuinely edified by this experience, but I wasn’t, of course. I was merely irked that my father took things so seriously and that I was thereafter forbidden to play “Civil War” while mowing the lawn.

Two years later, I found a brown army uniform in a dusty trunk in our family’s attic and came to know that my father had been a soldier himself during World War II. He did not deny this fact when I asked him about it, but neither did he elaborate. Eventually, I learned from discussions with uncles and grandparents, and in my father’s answers to direct questions, that he entered the Army Air Corps on his 18th birthday in February of 1943. A year and a half later he was scheduled to fly in the aerial support for Operation Overlord which began on the Normandy beaches on D-Day, June 6, 1944. But he broke his thumb playing touch football while awaiting orders and was kept at the rear, thus missing service in one of the most storied battles in all of human history. When I was twelve, I asked him once if he didn’t regret missing out on that monumental experience and was openly shocked when he told me he wasn’t, that on the contrary he felt his broken thumb was a blessing. He could see my befuddlement at that response, but didn’t try to press an explanation save to say that he suspected I’d come to understand as I grew older.

My father’s very sober attitude toward his own war experiences made my evolution into an opponent of the war in Vietnam far easier than it might have been. Though he volunteered to serve in World War II, and I spent years fighting the Vietnam draft two and a half decades later, we were never at odds. Still, to the end of his life my father remained almost mute about World War II and the Overlord campaign from which fate sidelined him. Men with whom he served were not so lucky. Men with whom he served gave up their lives at Normandy in some of the bloodiest, most terrifying combat the world has ever known. My father wasn’t there. But he knew at close hand what happened there, and knowing what he knew changed him in ways that I will never entirely apprehend. Just after my father’s death, in the late spring of 1997, I traveled to the American memorial atop the bluffs at Omaha beach and walked awe-struck among the 9,000 white crosses and stars of David, reading the names of my father’s compatriots who sacrificed themselves for their country. Standing on the narrow beach below, gazing up at the ninety-foot embankment where Hitler’s soldiers manned their concrete-bunkered machine guns, I was astonished at the enormity of what they braved. To see this now tranquil place is to be overwhelmed at the odds American soldiers faced that day, a hill so high, a beach so naked, an enemy so protected. Some units took casualties in excess of ninety percent. Many soldiers were killed without firing a shot, many without even getting out of their landing craft. Yet they kept coming. And if they hadn’t, these men of my father’s generation, so many of whom wouldn’t live to be fathers themselves, if they hadn’t kept coming, the world would be a very different place.

I was reduced to tears at Omaha Beach over the enormity of what happened there. And I found myself weeping anew in the opening moments of Steven Spielberg’s wrenching Saving Private Ryan when an aging veteran of the Omaha Beach assault walks with his family among the headstones and falls on his knees atop the grave of a man with whom he fought. The power of this movie and its shattering material is so great that it sticks its fist into your intestines from the opening moments.

Saving Private Ryan cuts from the memorial park to that morning fifty-four years ago when Eisenhower’s citizen soldiers stormed ashore as the Nazis rained death on them from above. The film’s next thirty minutes provides a relentlessly realistic reenactment of the invasion’s first wave, not as Daryl Zanuck did in The Longest Day from the point of view of the generals directing the attack, but rather from the point of view of the grunts taking the fire, vomiting in their helmets as they splash toward shore, dying without ever getting a rifle to their shoulders, leaping into the water from the backs of Higgins boats and drowning under the weight of their equipment and weapons, making it to land but finding no place to hide, hunkering down in the sand, trying to inch forward, watching in horror as their buddies are blown to bits by mortar rounds and shredded to human hamburger by machine-gun fire. Spielberg shows us what happened that terrifying day in all its gory detail, and it is horrible to watch, men with their intestines oozing between their fingers, men picking their own severed arms up out of the sand, men trying to hobble forward on the stumps of missing legs, men my father’s age, still in their teens, crying for their mothers.

Somehow, miraculously it would seem, our
soldiers ultimately prevailed. And the final two hours of *Saving Private Ryan* tells the story of eight survivors of Omaha Beach who are given a peculiar assignment. It has come to the attention of General George Marshall (Harve Presnell) that an Iowa mother has suffered the deaths of three of her four soldier sons within seventy-two hours. Her fourth son, Private James Ryan (Matt Damon), is a paratrooper who has landed behind enemy lines in the Normandy interior. Marshall determines to get Private Ryan out of the war immediately, and the chain of command chooses Captain John Miller (Tom Hanks) to lead the expedition. Miller selects Sergeant Mike Horvath (Tom Sizemore) to accompany him and six other men. Miller and Horvath have been fighting together throughout the war. Miller is a high school English teacher. He is quiet, and steady, but the war is taking an obvious toll on him. His right hand shakes horribly at times from the stress. Ninety-four men have died under his command since the war began, and though he tells himself that those deaths may have saved the lives of ten times that many, he feels the weight of each lost soul. Like someone that Ernest Hemingway would have brought to life in the pages of a novel, Miller sometimes has to go off by himself to cry, but he always returns to duty.

The mission to find Private Ryan takes Miller and his men into three more firefights with the enemy, in a village where paratroopers are trying to root out Nazi snipers, along a roadside where a Nazi machine-gun crew is nested for a hedgerow ambush, and climactically, in defense of a bridge which needs to be held against an armored German counterattack. The men with Captain Miller have already survived the long odds at Omaha Beach, but their peril continues. Not all of them make it, and we feel the loss of each man viscerally. *Saving Private Ryan* is not a perfect film. There’s a salute near the end that feels far too Hollywood and cheapens the incredible emotional surge that precedes it. Spielberg pulled off something comparable at the end of *Schindler’s List* when he photographed himself among those placing rocks of remembrance on Oskar Schindler’s grave. That worked because it stood outside the narrative of the film as a silent acknowledgment of Spielberg’s own personal connection to those of his fellow Jews whom Schindler helped saved. Here, the character’s salute resides interior to the narrative and feels contrived, a clumsy ges-
ture for the audience that doesn’t ring true to the character who makes it.

Elsewhere I was both somewhat confused and more than a little perturbed by the character construction of Corporal Upham (Jeremy Davies), a linguist drafted into the squad to help Miller communicate with French citizens. Upham has been working behind the lines and hasn’t fired a shot since basic training. Certainly the circumstances in which Upham finds himself are as terrifying as anything anyone could ever experience, but his utter paralysis under fire isn’t quite convincing. His fear is so nightmarish he can’t even fight in immediate self-defense. In a film of such brutal action, yet deeply rooted in character, Upham seems a salient cliche, the egghead coward. In some regard, I think, Spielberg and screenwriter Robert Rodat are trying to work a reversal on us. The stock move would turn Upham into a day-saving hero, redeemed by necessity. And part of the filmmakers’ point, no doubt, is that weaklings didn’t always rise to the occasion. This whole stratagem would have worked so much better, however, had Upham not been so physically frail on one hand and, on the other, had his cowardice been more decisively self-protective.

Upham’s story causes other significant problems as well. In a scene of central importance, Upham insists that the American G.I.’s not execute a Nazi prisoner they have no means to supervise. After much discussion and a threatened mutiny, Captain Miller decides to let the Nazi soldier go, assuming he will be captured by American troops elsewhere. Instead, the German manages to return to his own lines where he fights against Miller’s squad in the climactic battle over the bridge and sheds the blood of those who have (however reluctantly) spared him. This passage is particularly thorny for it seems to argue that mercy in wartime is suicidal idiocy. Saving Private Ryan is so very skilled at depicting the horrors of war, it is, in that regard, a powerful advocate for avoiding war whenever possible. But in this instance, at least, the film seems to embrace the war’s own barbaric logic: he who spares his enemy is not just a fool but a danger to the men with whom he serves.

And in the final analysis, I am not sure this picture is all that well served by its central premise about eight men being sent to save one. There were precedents in World War II and other wars of mothers losing a number of sons in a short period of time. The letter that General Marshall reads from Abraham Lincoln to one such mother from the Civil War is a real one. And, indeed, 101st Airborne ranger Fritz Niland was ordered to the rear after his mother was notified that his three brothers were killed during a single week of fighting during June, 1944. But the army sent a chaplain after Niland, not an entire squad. The film’s premise provides a certain element of drama as the grunts under Miller’s command understandably grouse about their many lives being risked to save that of a lone soldier. And the situation provides the context for Miller’s dramatic imperative that Private Ryan “earn” the sacrifice the other men have made to save him. Still, since the army didn’t actually send a squad of men out on such a mission, it is perhaps unwise to imagine that it did. As a result, the film’s narrative frequently focuses on the wisdom of such a decision, upon the merits of a mission like Captain Miller’s in the very midst of the pivotal military campaign of our time. Films like Peter Weir’s haunting Gallipoli rightly excoriate the sometime habit of military leaders who lose sight of the preciousness of the men they send into the field. But that particular concern about this particular war, at least in this precise sense, is an invalid one. The drama of the Overlord campaign is certainly great enough to have sustained this film had it simply chosen to follow one group of soldiers as they met the enemy first on the beaches and subsequently in the Normandy hedgerows.

Such failings, though, in no way diminish this picture’s impact or transforming brilliance. Just as he did in Schindler’s List, Spielberg uses the tools of fiction to deliver an invaluable history lesson. Viewed from the end of the twentieth century, in an era of sustained prosperity and relative peace, the allied victory in World War II takes on a aura of inevitability. A child sees D-Day as a glorious adventure and can’t understand a father’s relief at having missed it. An adult analysis judges Hitler’s Germany no match for America’s size and industrial might, and there can be no question that we enjoyed advantages in this regard. But victory still required the will to fight, a will that Hitler gambled America and the G.I. at the front just did not have. He was wrong. But this story, in horrifying image after horrifying image, drives home the terrible price of exerting that will. It was hardly inevitable that we would triumph on the beaches of Normandy, and if we had not, the war would have taken a frighteningly different and by no means predictable course. With the western Allies licking the wounds of defeat, would Hitler
have been able to turn more decisively to the east? Given more time, would his nuclear scientists have placed atomic weaponry in his hands? Could he have mounted such weapons in the rockets being perfected? On the contrary, might Russia's steamroller from the east have swept clear to the Atlantic? Any of these possibilities, and all are genuine, are to varying degrees disturbing.

By starting with fighting at Omaha Beach and then taking us on to the horrors of the interior, Spielberg illustrates that the incredible will to fight had to be exercised over and over again. Survival in one place simply brought peril in the next. Victory in one battle only changed the location of the battle that followed. The success of Operation Overlord did not bring the war to an end, and even though we had the upper hand in its aftermath, ultimate victory was still not assured. Men had to keep fighting and kept on dying for another eleven months before V.E. Day.

_Saving Private Ryan_ has many things to teach us, among them that war is chaos, that among its countless terrors is its disorder. Generals at the rear may devise grand strategies, but even when successful they defy neat execution. Clouds kept the Air Corps from providing promised support on D-Day. Winds blew paratroopers miles from their drop zones. Naval bombardment failed to drive the Nazis from their reinforced bunkers. And the grunt still had to go ashore. In the chaos of front-line officers dead and platoons cut in half and more, men had to devise organization on the spot. When officers survived, the American GI, used to freedom of speech, like Private Reiben (Edward Burns) in Miller’s squad, didn’t always agree with his commander’s directive. In scenes associated with the reviled war in Vietnam, but true as well in the “good” Second World War, thousands of rebellions and potential rebellions had to be faced and overcome.

Only Samuel Fuller’s _The Big Red One_ remotely approximates what Spielberg accomplishes here in terms of making a viewer grasp the enormity of the grunt’s experience, the quaking fear as he lay in iffy ambush listening to the grinding approach of enemy tanks, the soul-ravaging frustration of listening to a wounded friend cry out for help that can’t be risked. Through the decades Hollywood has minted money with its slasher flicks, showing innocent people fighting off the rampages of killers with knives. War, Spielberg reminds us, is the time when such nightmares become reality. Out of bullets and face to face with the enemy, one of Miller’s men, Private Mellish (Adam Goldberg), is forced to wrestle over a knife with a man determined to stab him to death. At some level the _Halloween_ and _Friday the 13th_ movies make us laugh because we know they are mere thrill concoctions. No one laughs as Private Mellish struggles for his life. In a related scene, we see the rank fear of finding oneself suddenly weaponless. Sergeant Horvath and a Nazi soldier are facing each other when both run out of ammunition at the same time. In a scramble to find some means to protect themselves, they both end up throwing things at one another, whatever is at hand, first empty guns, finally helmets. In another context, this could certainly seem funny, but we feel the soldiers’ frenzy of fear all too palpably to want to laugh.

Even in survival the soldier in the field experienced a gnawing anxiety that what he has seen and endured, what he has chosen to do, been forced to do and held back from doing, have collaborated to change him into something other than himself. Miller says he’s afraid that the wife he so longs to return to won’t recognize him when he gets home. All these things certainly make us understand why a tough man like Sergeant Horvath carries around three canisters of dirt, one of soil from North Africa, another from Italy and a third with Normandy sand. For Horvath these canisters are his most valuable possessions each beyond the purchase of money, each bought with blood. All these things made me understand something I thought I was above understanding. They don’t make me approve nor even justify. But they did make me understand why a good man might shoot down an enemy who has thrown away his weapon and raised his arms in surrender. This ultimate horror, perhaps, this understanding of rage so great as to reveal a willing murderousness in us all, is what my father understood and what sobered him. And he understood it at close range and not in the comfortable confines of a motion picture theater. War is hell.

As historian Stephen Ambrose has written, our entire civilization owes a debt it can never repay to those of my father’s generation who braved the hell at Normandy in 1944.
CLEOME

(for Curt Hoffman, 1945-1998)

So thick on the ground they look like weeds,
Cleome come up, it seems, from every
Seed they sow. Winter doesn’t daunt them,
So in spring they’re a small carpet spread
Between the daffodils, a soft, mild green.
Soon it’s textured; some (part of some design)
Rising above the rest, so saving their lives.
Their stems grow thick as toothpicks, skewers,
Pencils, dowels over the long season.
Downy stem hairs coarsen, pricking careless hands.

All this noticing came after I’d planted
Them myself. Before, they were only tall, feathery
Flowers in Curt’s garden—pink, shades of pink
From hot to pale to blush; elegant
Lacy globes of bloom, some a handspan full,
Small parachutes that kept opening upward,
Flowers for dreaming in, for cradling
The intricate airs, the light of the world,
And for starlight. He taught me
The name—clee-OH-me—rounding the sound with
A kissing mouth, planting them
Part of the passionate universe.

Not a man’s flower, you’d think, not phlox
Or hosta, or pungent marigold.
But Curt could surprise you that way. Spiky
And strong-stemmed, he could bloom in a minute
With tenderness, hold out a delicate
Hand, invite you to dream. Soft as petals,
His eyes would widen at the spaces his
Imagination held, the light cradled there.

My cleome came up on their own this year,
Some mixed in with the four-o-clocks,
Three in the sidewalk cracks. One’s pink, but I
Remember planting only white last year.
Likely that’s accident, just seedy persistence,
Some way, through several seasons. Or I’m just
Forgetful.

But maybe it’s a gift
From that same passionate universe where my friend
Lives now, still teaching and naming and
Growing, at home in the surprising light.

Kathleen Mullen
Campus Diary

"...full of many wonders of the spheres..."

Arvid Sponberg

straightening-up time

Coming home from a holiday to resume preparing for a new academic year imposes tasks upon which the author gloomily ruminates in the following lines:

At the end of summer
before classes begin,
if you’re living a life like I’m
there come a few hours
of woebegone labor
known as straightening-up time.

‘Mid the mounds of the mail
and bags of books
and folders festooning the floor,
I sag some and sigh
as term draws nigh
if I’m living a life like you’re.

To file or to toss
or refer? Lose or keep?
Whether I must or I mustn’t?
These queries perplex
‘till I query myself:
Are you a wuss or wussn’t?

Then I dig in a fury—
the air gets blurry
with paper storms, rages, and fits.
But as clear space emerges
my orderly urges
subside and now straightening-
time’s up and, boy, I’m glad it’s.

travel time

Few experiences revive a sense of wonder more than travel, especially to places that seem remote or exotic when viewed from home. Probably VU faculty and staff are no more peripatetic than folks at other universities, but I suspect that the following items might spark wander-/wonderlust in any soul. No matter where you’ve been, another person’s travel feast always includes tasty morsels you wish you could savor.

Rick DeMaris (Theology) and Sara DeMaris (German) traveled to Greece. They worked on Roman pottery in the excavation of Old Corinth supervised by Tim Gregory of the Ohio State University. Rick has been assisting Jean Marty, formerly of the Getty recently of the UNC-Asheville. Sadly, Prof. Marty died of breast cancer last December and Rick and Sara worked for a month to prepare her notes, files, and databases for her eventual successor.

Bill Smriga, Union director, also hit the Roman trail a little farther north: He, his wife, Elaine, and son traveled along the Rhine for two weeks in May. They stayed at Burg Stahleck above Bacharach where Bill, a history buff, “felt the passage of time since the Romans.” Michael Kumpf (Classics) was in Germany, too, with his family.

Also in Europe was Sy Moskowitz (School of Law). He devoted three and a half weeks to continuing his education in Yiddish at the University of Vilnius in Lithuania. He studied at the Center of Judaic Studies Annual Summer Program in Yiddish Language and Literature. Mornings dedicated to instruction through immersion, afternoons to lectures. He lived with a Yiddish-speaking family and completed level two of the Center’s four-level program.

Marian Rubchak (History) returned from Ukraine and Russia with reports that Kiev is undergoing a complete renovation—buildings, streets, sidewalks, transportation. In a few years, it will rival (surpass?) Prague in interest. In the meantime, Moscow falls into ever-greater disrepair and despair, signified by deserted streets and scarcities of even such basic amenities as bottled water.
Travelers to Norway included Kris Kispert (Church Relations) and Chuck Schaefer (History) and his wife, Kathy Rowberg, while Sweden was the destination of Jana French (Lilly Fellow/English) with husband Peter Gotsch. Ceyhun Ozgur (College of Business Administration) got home to Turkey. Dean Schroeder (College of Business) consulted with Toyota in Greece and in Sweden with ABB (Sweden’s GE), Marabou Chocolate, Vattenfall (a utility), Profel Gruppen (aluminum extruder), and Danisko (sugar beet processor). The thread: how companies integrate employee expertise into company and community planning. Jim Stuck (College of Business) and his wife, Lois, traveled in the UK, Netherlands, Spain, and Belgium, where Jim’s brother serves as a “missionary/mechanic,” helping to maintain car and van fleets of church and non-governmental organizations. Karen Racine (History) studies exiled 19th century Latin American political leaders and so she went to London again because that’s where those beached Numero Unos hung out.

Missionary visiting also carried Gil (Chemistry) and Nancy Cook to Ivory Coast. Gil’s sister, Janet Arnold, and her husband, David, have been missionaries there for 41 years and have started over 60 churches. However, Mirtha Toledo (Spanish) came home from Madrid with tales of tourists tricked and assaulted.

Since April, Jan Gurband (College of Business) has been to Chile, Peru, and Tahiti, which is about halfway between the U.S. and China to which a bunch of VU folks traveled in May for a three-week adventure. The band included: Meredith Berg (History), Kathleen Mullen (English), Mary and Rick Christ (College of Business), Wendy Pirie (College of Business) and her husband, Steve Graham, both couples CBA, John Steven Paul (Theatre and Television Arts), Margaret Franson (Christ College), Cynthia Russell (College of Nursing) and her husband, Doug Lemster. Group leader Zhimin Lin (Political Science), won praise all around for his balanced and reasonable planning of the itinerary, his deft handling of logistical details, and his steadfast optimism.

John (English) and Gloria (Brauer Museum) Ruff flew to Dublin. John delivered a paper about VU’s new Freshman core program, which he directs, at an international conference on the first-year-of-university experience.

Closer to home, visitors to various Caribbean sites have included: Arlene Wallace (Police Department) who visited St. Thomas for the third time. Willis Dickens (Police) traveled to Cancun. Terri Durko (Student Union) appreciated the “remote isolation” of St. Lucia, while Lori Mandred (Institutional Advancement) appreciated the more lively happenings of Jamaica. Norm Wells (Institutional Advancement) crewed all over the Caribbean on a sailboat.

Travelers to some less frequented places in the U.S. included Sandy Michelsen (Education) who resorted to her cabin on Beaver Island in northern Lake Michigan. Alaska has its share of worshippers at VU and this summer’s pilgrims included Jan Schmidt (Dean of Arts and Sciences Office) and her husband, Walter; Karen Grote (Registrar’s Office), and Heidi Jark (Institutional Advancement). Ted Ludwig (Theology) trekked on horseback into the John Muir Wilderness of the Sierras with his three sons. Ted says that horses are not so surefooted on high, narrow switchback trails as he thought they would be and, consequently, there were moments when he felt closer to his Maker than he ever does in Valparaiso.

A different sort of adventure awaited Leah Sample (Student Union) in the canyons of New York City. She’s part of an 11-person planning team for the International Conference of Association of College Unions scheduled for New York in March of 2000. From her “base camp” at the Marriot Marquis she explored Times Square and a good deal of Manhattan. She reports that the refurbished Square is “fabulous [and] so clean.” Highlights included sightings of the exotic “Bring on Da Funk” and “Titanic” tribes. Betsy Burow-Flak (English) time-traveled in Elizabethan England by space-traveling to the Folger Library in Washington, D.C. for an NEH institute, which also was a site for historian Colleen Sequin (Lilly Fellow/History).

Barb Livdahl (Education) and her husband, Roger, revived at their cabin on the north shore of Lake Superior while I and my family did so on the south shore. My wife, Bonnie, daughter, Erica and I followed with a 12-day trip up from Los Angeles to Seattle, for the purpose mainly of visiting colleges for Erica but not neglecting attractions along the way such as the Monterey
Peninsula and Japanese Cultural Center, Ansel Adams Photographic Institute, and the De Young Museum in San Francisco. We availed ourselves of the VU Guild Bed and Breakfast network and commend the hospitality of Ane Ertzner of San Jose who made us feel at home on the Bay.

And, finally, you could dip into the VU roster just about at random and find the name of someone who went to Holden Village: Mark Schwehn (Christ College) and Dorothy Bass (Theology) directed the educational program and before the summer was over Paul Contino (Christ College), Tom Kennedy (Philosophy), Fred Niedner (Theology), and Chuck Schaefer (History) sailed up Lake Chelan to the village on the east slope of the Cascades.

Does all this travel add up to some thing? No—and that’s the point of bringing up the topic and hitching together these strings of sojourns. All these experiences, now incarnated in the persons named, somehow restore, revive, recreate the spirit which we impart—or try to—to the students who join us, wherever we meet them, wherever we gather and maintain resources for their learning. We call this place a university, but it is not. Even multiversity fails to name the thing. Cosmo-verse, though a barbarism, gets closer to the truth.

the first year

Lest non-travelers feel a little frosty towards the foregoing, I hastily add that I yield heat to no one in my enthusiasm for “traveling” while staying at home, for which the material requirements are a comfortable seat and the right book. We intend that our first-year students will become “stay-at-home” travelers of just this sort. I’d like to give you an idea of the sort of journey we have planned for them. To follow the previous segment with another list suggests that I’ve lost the last shred of writerly judgment and grossly overestimated your patience. The fact is, however, that the reading list that follows constitutes the biggest news on this campus. On August 25, all VU freshmen, except those in Christ College, began a new first-year course: two semesters, 10 credits, meeting, in effect, 5 days per week. The course is called The Human Experience and the reading list is as follows:

First Semester

**Birth and Creation**: Willa Cather, *My Antonia*; Gilgamesh; Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*; *Gospel of Luke* (ch. 1, 2); Anne Bradstreet, selected poems.

**Coming of Age and Education**: Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women*; Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*; Augustine, *Confessions* (Books i-ix); Richard Rodriguez, *Hunger of Memory*.


**Second Semester**


Al Trost, Dean of Arts and Sciences, envisioned this course, supplied the resources and continues to do so. John Ruff, professor of English, selected the faculty, led them in planning, and continues to do so. The story of how this list emerged from two years of discussion and a pilot version of this course is long, complicated, aggravating, and inspiring. How more than thirty faculty from nearly every field in the university will lead our students into and beyond these texts is a story about to begin. Depend upon it, the trip will be wonder-full. At the moment, only three elements are needed: your interest, your comments, and your prayers.
According to many historians, the tenth century in the “common era” was nasty and fractious, with bitter and violent struggles over dynastic succession and with the dynamic new force of Islam. In that sense, the period 900-999 was not exceptional but rather, sad to say, more typical of the endless and needless cycle of pain our curious race seems determined to visit on one another. But that time did have one thing going for it that we in the twentieth century share: the century ended in a year with three zeroes. The tenth century proceeded with the year 1000 A.D. in mind, and this nearing temporal event offered everyone aware of its imminence the opportunity to predict its significance. It was, after all, the Millenium, thought to be a thousand years since the birth of Christ and thus among both the intelligentsia and populaces of Christendom an occasion to be anticipated as the moment of glorious fulfillment or of dreaded apocalypse. The Manichean struggle between holy good and unholy evil implicit in popular theology was about to be played out. Those confident of their place in the Elect could look forward to The End of Time with eager anticipation of their Divine selection; the rest—no doubt a much larger group—awaited the millenial dénouement with fear and trembling. For priests and itinerant preachers and prophets conjured up the apocalyptic drama of the Book of Revelations in all its lurid bloodiness.

In his book A.D. 1000, Richard Erdoes portrays Rome on the last evening of the year 999. In the Roman streets and churches and the old basilica of St. Peter’s, people wept and prayed and awaited the Day of Judgement. Many people gave all their possessions away, had mortified their flesh for months, entered churches in sackcloth and ashes, and even fought street battles over access to saintly relics that offered a ticket to Heaven. Eminent and humble divines argued for years on the sequence of events that would occur at the Millenium—would Armaggedon occur first? Would Christ appear on the Feast of the Annunciation, or in the thousandth year of the Passion, or when? Signs and wonders abounded: a meteor lit up the English sky; in Aquitaine, the sky rained blood; images of Christ spoke to suppliants; and the Antichrist, in the shape of a dark homunculus, lurked in ancient ruins in Brittany. And also in Rome: was not the Pope himself (one Sylvester II) the Man of Sin destined to serve the Evil One? Had he not learned astronomy and mathematics—obviously black arts—from Jews and Moors? Did he not believe the Earth was round? Did he not have a Muslim mistress who as a witch taught him to fly through the air and see the future? And did he not doubt that The End was necessarily at hand?

Nevertheless, the Pope gamely conducted a midnight Mass at the appointed hour, while many of the faithful and fearful lay prostrate on the marble floor of St. Peter’s. (Legend has it that the entire population of Iceland was converted to Christianity at this moment; even at this remote outpost of the spreading Western culture, the fervency of the moment seems to have impelled hasty action. Against such imminent peril, Odin would no longer do.) When the fateful bells began to strike all over Europe (other peoples—the Chinese, Moslems and Jews, Africans and Americans—not only had their own religions but also their own calendars), there were reports of people dying on the spot. But we may take the reaction of those in
St. Peter's as typical: when the moment passed without Divine Incident, there was much, well, relief—weeping and laughing, embracing and reconciliation, momentary suspension of personal grudges and class distinctions, vows to do better and offers to do lunch, and general joy all around that life was going to go on pretty much as it always had. The End of the World is, after all, rather upsetting if you have just bought a villa or your wife is pregnant with your first child or you have a good store of olive oil up for sale. We may only wonder how much irritation was directed at those priestly prognosticators who had assured everyone of the sure and certain fulfillment of the Divine Plan, and what we must do in order to prepare to meet our Maker. Those anxious folks who gave everything away likely entertained some darkly murderous thoughts.

As we approach the Second Millenium, the world is obviously a very different place, but psychologists talk about the recent appearance of “P.M.T.”—pre-millenial tension. This usually is manifest as some sort of behavior inspired by the imminence of the millenial turn. As the experience of the tenth century indicates, there is plenty of precedence for millenial intensity, including fanatical movements that embrace belief in either earthly transformation or heavenly transportation. Norman Cohn, in his classic The Pursuit of the Millenium, focused on millenial groups in early modern Europe. But here too the constraint of time was critical: the rhythms and habits of life common to peasants and artisans were swept away in “the autumn of the Middle Ages,” giving rise to “mass disorientation and anxiety,” and thus for the most disaffected the occasion for true belief. Faith is then mobilized in movements oriented towards an immediate millenial goal of “a world reborn into innocence through a final, apocalyptic sacrifice.” Imbued with the sense that time is running out, such groups transcend the palpable for a state in which Time must have a stop, and a meaning beyond the clock and the calendar.

It is one of the oldest habits of civilizations to try to make sense of time, as if organizing time led to understanding it. A vast apocalyptic and cabalistic literature exists that purports to understand time, explaining what has happened, predicting what will happen, and when time will climax and end. Everything from the Great Pyramid to Stonehenge to Easter Island and the writings of Paracelsus and Nostradamus and the Dead Sea Scrolls have been studied for their insight into the ultimate course of events. This endless human activity stems from our wish to know and prepare for the future, but I fear much of this is a search for some kind of temporal talisman, a tout sheet that will tell you which historical horses to bet on. In periods of P.M.T., the search for such touchstones and timemarks lead people into apocalyptic thinking and group identities, anticipating the onset of the horrific, and in some ways, delicious End of Things as We Know Them. At its most extreme, this can lead to cult suicides that transport the new beings to a UFO trailing the Hale-Bopp comet. More familiar is the evangelical literature predicting the Last Days corresponding with the timemark of 2000. A glance at this venerable scenario reveals some familiar Megaevents—war in the Holy Land, the return of the Jews, the Rapture and the New Jerusalem, but with some contemporary effects, such as chaos on the highways because of the disappearance of raptured drivers, and some Unusual Suspects (feminists, homosexuals, and environmentalists, in league with an old favorite, communists—remember them?), who will suffer the usual awful fate. Word comes from Israel that orthodox Jews, anxious to rebuild the Temple necessary for the coming of the Messiah, have struck a deal with American evangelicals to deliver them a pure red heifer (from a Mississippi Red Angus herd) that will serve as a sacrificial prelude (read Numbers, Chapter 19) for the messianic drama of two faiths (Moslems in Jerusalem are less enthusiastic). Not to be outdone, in the American Great Plains, a rare white buffalo female calf has been born; plains Indians believe that she heralds a new era of peace and humaneness everywhere, and happily does not have to be slaughtered.

Such activities do indicate that people gripped with P.M.T. are determined to believe that, and with the heifer collaborators help along, their conception of history should arrive and depart On Time. But it strikes me there is something a bit presumptuous about this: trying to ascertain the Divine Schedule on the basis of human constructs, no matter how divinely inspired, puts people in the position of trying to
force what has already been predetermined, or
is at least way out of our hands, through such
acts as conducting an Iron Age ritual or identi-
fying the latest Antichrist. Somehow such pop-
ular thinking seems a regression from philosoph-
ic or theological thought about the meaning of
time to a kind of animistic view, wherein the
great mystery of Time is so fearful and unfath-
omable that we must depend on magical or ca-
balistic interventions, ancient rituals or lore that
give life and potency to symbols, and offer oc-
cult interpretations for us of the potent and ani-
mated symbols we shall witness in awed silence.
Such enterprises are complicated by the fact that
ancient calendars and histories are notoriously
capricious. Some scholars think that Christ was
actually born in 4 B.C.; if so, then by the logic of
thousand-year fulfillments, He should have re-
turned in 996 or 1996 under the Gregorian cal-
endar, unless you insist on the stricter idea that
millenia actually begin in 1001 and 2001. Some
metaphysical humility is called for here: the
Cosmic Mystery that created Time has Her own
schedule, of which we have hardly a clue. Fid-
dling with Time at this level of human ignorance
may well be a variant of the insightful crack that
if you want to make God laugh, tell Her your
plans.

Millennia, then, brings out a curious form
of the human impulse to impose our plans on the
passage of time, even though we have every
reason to know that timemarks are largely a
human invention. Such passages inspire rites
and ceremonies at various levels of seriousness
and sophistication. Rites of passage include pu-
rification rites, wherein people of various per-
suasions seek to purify themselves or society in
order to be worthy of the new world that fol-
 lows the millennial turn. At its best, this impulse
involves renewals of faith and commitments to
good works that make people feel better, as a
sort of New Millenium's Resolution. At its worst,
the urge to purify turns mean and persecutorial.
Perhaps future historians will interpret the cur-
rent Washington melodrama, entitled The Per-
secution and Assassination of Clinton by the In-
mates of the Madhouse of the Grand Jury Under
the Direction of the Marquis de Starr, in that
context. Starr and his minions appear to see the
indiscretions of the presidential membrum virile
as a evil to be exposed and purged from the body
politic; unable to check electoral affirmation of
his political body, they attack his personal body.
The impeachability of sin will add a whole new
dimension to constitutional law, one that will
keep the obsequious clerks of the thinktanks
busy; and the Office of the Independent Counsel
adds a whole new branch of government, in the
grand inquisitorial tradition of the Witchfinder
General. In any event, one may wonder if such
a bizarre event could have occurred at any time
other than in a pre-millenial period. Starr and
his allies may well see themselves doing God's
work here in purifying the presidency for the ad-
vent of a newer and more sacred post-millenial
Order. Clinton's demise would thus be a ritual
sacrifice, a kind of flawed political red heifer
that must be butchered, that insures the triumph
of a millenial vision. (But what can they find on
Al Gore? An unpaid library fine from the sev-
enth grade?)

Among the general population less imbued
with such ghastly political bloodletting, there is
considerable evidence that as the millenium
nears, people seek help and advice from various
sources, imagined and real. In his Omens of Mil-
lenium, Harold Bloom explores in detail our fas-
cination with heavenly and hellish beings, and
our current search for "gnosis". In popular cul-
ture, it seems to me that the day of the Devil is
over. Satan ruled most widely during the 1970s,
if popular fare such as the movies are any guide.
The 1990s, by contrast, is the era of the Angel.
A walk through any large bookstore reveals a
vast pop literature on the activities of angels—
how to contact them, know how to use them,
why you should rely on them, what their ubiqu-
osity augurs, and so on. Similarly, a walk through
tape rental stores shows how many movies have
been made about angelic help. Obviously, an-
gels are much more welcome non-corporeal be-
ings than demons, with their benevolent gnostic
powers able to help us cope with life at the cusp
of great change and uncertainty.

The current ascendancy of the angel
should give us a clue to popular attitudes to-
wards this millenium. Despite political deadlock
and inertia, many people express qualified optim-
mism about the post-millenial future. Some of
this no doubt stems from the astounding pros-
perity of the Nineties (Clinton may be remem-
bered for Dow Jones and not Paula Jones), and
the non-apocalyptic end of the Cold War (remember the post-civilizational fantasy of the 1980’s, with reversion to barbarism in ruined cities and deserts, a la Terminator and The Road Warrior?). Now people sense that many things are ending, and other processes are threatening, but I don’t find widespread antipathy towards and fear of the future. Demonic scenarios seem on the wane, or at least are presented so tongue-in-cheek we cannot take devils and demons seriously. In his The Sense of an Ending, Frank Kermode wrote that unlike, say, those obsessed with political or religious purifications, most people live in “the midst”, the middle of history rather than its imagined endings and beginnings. (Will Durant, using the Heraclitan image of historical change as a river, called them “the people on the banks”). But if there is no widespread fear in the Middest of impending Doomsday, neither is there despair over imminent descent into dystopia. Contemporary popular culture has mitigated much P.M.T. by its infinite capacity to reduce everything to simplistic, and ultimately non-threatening, stories. When the end of the world becomes a summer movie, then you can expect that people will approach millenial change with a light heart.

Secular intellectuals, no less that political or religious ardents, do not live in the Middest, and thus are at the moment no less taken with endings and beginnings. (Think how many books that have come out in the last few years with “The End of...” or “Post-” in the title.) In fact, the year 2000 has long been a timemark for futuristic speculations. No less a prognosticator than Nostradamus predicted that in the year 1999 would come “from the sky a great King of terror.” Jules Verne’s An Ideal City and Edward Bellamy’s Looking Backward see the year 2000 as respendent with technological marvels and social engineering; in “reply” to Bellamy, heir to a robber baron fortune John Jacob Astor wrote A Journey to Other Worlds, also set in 2000, wherein socialism has ruined Europe but America is ascendant as a capitalist haven and for wondrous inventions and gadgets, including space travel. Astor’s prediction may have been provocative, but he didn’t live to see many of them, since he went down on that newest of wonders, the Titanic. (We should also mention that Fritz Lang’s 1927 film Metropolis, set in 2000, depicts a world with a leisure class at the top—literally, in penthouses, pursuing idle and childish pleasures, while most people toil as drones below.)

Nowadays most secular jeremiads about the future center on environmental degradation. There are others, to be sure: economists worry about the chances for a world economic collapse, political scientists about the potential for chemical/biological/nuclear war, sociologists about the effects of a world committed to mere technique, epidemiologists about the spread of formerly contained diseases, computerists worry about all the computers crashing (that would truly be an act of Divine Benevolence), and academicians about kids hating school. But I suspect that the millenarianism of the twenty-first century will center on purifying the environment, and by extension, ourselves as denizens of Gaia. This will inject a new source of fanaticism into the world, and a secular version of apocalypse. Unlike some old millenarianisms, at least environmental degradation can be subjected to scientific inquiry. But we may wonder whether saving the environment will take a movement with the same demand for faith and dedication. Science in itself is a cold master; the glow of millennial hope for a future freed of pollution, both in the environment and in ourselves, may be the next big movement, perhaps even religious in nature. As the planet becomes increasingly uninhabitable, the worship of the Earth—truly an reversion to animistic thought—might become more urgent and devout.

Which brings us finally to another wonderment. In the tenth century, the First Millenium was observed by a European world moving from pagan to Christian culture. Is it the case in the Second Millenium that the Western world is moving from a Christian culture towards a pagan one? (Fans of Xena: Warrior Princess need reflect on this.) The now nearly universal popular culture one encounters in Bangkok and Nairobi and Rio strikes me as uncommitted to little beyond enjoyment, and gives credence to a kind of ubiquitous hedonism that is difficult to contain. The Second Millenium has become not something to fear, or even to reflect upon much, but rather to enjoy. The apocalyptic fare of summer movies—Independence Day, Starship Troopers, Deep Impact, Armageddon, and so
on—pit humankind against some defeatable external enemy, and by golly, we win! No fear, just symbolic resistance against non-ideological and non-human enemies that a bit of the right stuff can knock out pronto. Even though the *Titanic* sinks, earthquakes level L.A., volcanoes cover Oregon, and so forth, always with great loss of life and destruction, nevertheless the beatitudes of American wisecracks get us through. Whereas at the First Millenium people feared that life would not go on, at the Second people are reassured that life will. If some thought then (and now) that The End is Near, the popular message at this turning is that *It Will Never End* (for good or ill). Even though Scully and Mulder of “The X-Files” know they will never find The Truth that is Out There, they are undaunted in their neverending quest. P.M.T. becomes the emotive basis for rather satisfying fun, no matter the gravity of the threat. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse may try their worst, but they can’t scare jaded movie and TV audiences who have seen it all, including the cheery optimism of the survivors who stand in the rubble.

At the Second Millenium, the Middest seem to like the semi-confident popular message that we will Muddle Through, and to dislike those (like Mr. Starr) who threaten the middling march of normalcy through the shoals of history, avoiding the Scylla of purification and the Charybdis of apocalypse. For at the moment, it seems that the most widespread observation of the Millenium will be rituals of celebration. Rather than cleansing rites or blood sacrifices, it looks as if the world is going to conceive the Millennium not as an End Time but as a Big Time, with parties all over the world. The people on the banks see the twenty-first century as a time of hope rather than purity, of enjoyment and not sacrifice, and popular culture will continue to cater to these desires. A spirit of celebration is rooted in their bet that the human story here on Earth will go on, and is not over by a long shot. Whatever the Higher Meaning of history is, its Middest meaning is not for breakage but rather continuation. We will never be pure nor abjure enjoyment, so our lives, as lived in the eternal now, will just have to do. ♦
Sparks

the company we keep

Reinhold Dooley

The media has recently pronounced feminism dead. Publications such as Time and programs such as John McLaughlin’s “One on One” have discussed the demise of the feminist agenda amidst the ruins of political correctness. The notion that we have outgrown our need for feminist activism is easily countered by objective data demonstrating the violence done to women because of their gender, the ongoing inequality of women’s wages, the disproportionate number of women below the poverty line, and the under-representation of women in positions of political and corporate power. But such statistics merely skim the surface of the entrenched sexism that continues to define society and its institutions.

We as thinking Christians, before even flirting with the notion that feminism is outmoded or unnecessary, must challenge ourselves constantly to observe and deconstruct how sexism permeates the very structures of our institutional norms in the business, social, and even religious spheres.

A recent movie, tellingly titled In the Company of Men, illustrates not only the blatant sexism to which we’ve apparently become immune, but the more insidious sexism which infects the dynamic of both the business and social realms. In the social realm sexism is taken for granted as the natural way of things; in the economic realm it is accepted as “good business.”

As the movie begins, two businessmen, Chad and his wishy-washy boss Howard, are complaining bitterly about their girlfriends who have deserted them. They remonstrate about women in general and about their presence in the business world in particular. Women, they say, are “all the same, meat and gristle and hatred, just simmering....We are doomed as a race—men like us, guys who care a smidge about the workplace—as long as there are women. We can’t even tell a joke in the workplace.” They fantasize about the “good old days” in India when women would immolate themselves on their husband’s funeral pyre. They conclude that something must be done. Thus for the sake of maintaining their man’s world, they decide to avenge themselves by seducing and then coldly abandoning a randomly chosen woman, but preferably someone who is a vulnerable wallflower. While on a six-week business trip they make a deaf secretary named Christine their victim. Howard, however, falls in love with Christine and becomes jealous of Chad; in the ensuing unravelling of the plot Howard falls to pieces in his professional and personal life.

The characters thus openly articulate a more often unspoken sexist sentiment, that women are “naturally” to blame for the problems of men. They assume further that women can be used with impunity as means to both social and business ends. And such neanderthal assumptions are, unfortunately, still prevalent in today’s society, as a typical Jerry Springer show would amply illustrate.

But what is more telling about the movie is not the blatant and outrageous sexism of the characters, but how it reveals the structural sexism that exists in the business world. In this world the governing principle is that masculine identity is paramount and anything feminine is a detestable threat. It reveals that sexism is part and parcel of the ideology of the business world, a world which, as the title suggests, is still a company of men.

The very language of business has become sexualized in a stereotyped fashion which exalts the masculine and denigrates the feminine. The
language used by Chad and Howard, most of which is too vile to print, illustrates how machismo and business are intrinsically related. Accordingly, to be top man in business is to be the man on top sexually. In business, where "women and work are out of balance," masculine muscle must constantly be flexed or lose its potency. To be vulnerable in business or with women is to have your "thing hanging out of [your] pants." It is a figuratively sexualized world where each man must "watch his back," and "cover his butt," to avoid being taken by a more powerful businessman. In the most vulgar sense, they must avoid being "screwed."

The language of the movie, which flirts with virulent hetero- and homosexual associations, suggests that in order to be successful in business, one must above all else establish one's manhood and avoid being equated with the feminine and its cognates, the juvenile and the homosexual. In the business world, as in society at large, machismo finds itself threatened not simply by the female but by anything unmanly, which includes boys and especially gay men.

This principle is dramatically and coarsely illustrated in a scene between Chad and a young black man. In an exercise of power over the man, Chad presumes to offer advice on how to succeed in business. "It's a company of men," he stresses, where there is no place for "juveniles who want their mommies to wipe their bottoms every time they potty." It is a place for manly men, men, as he crudely states, who have "balls." Chad then asks the man point blank to drop his pants to reveal his manhood.

Chad explicitly articulates the basic principle which structures business in the company of men: "you have to wear your balls on your sleeve. That's what business is all about. Who's sporting the nastiest sac of venom and who will use it."

In some ways this may seem familiar territory. Business has been criticized as predatory since the rise of capitalism. Arthur Miller, in "Death of a Salesman," stated the motto of the successful business icon: "Don't fight fair with strangers." But what is fascinating is that today the metaphor has been translated into specifically sexual, anti-feminist terms.

And this '90's vision of the workplace comes with a transgender twist. Chad lives by this sexist principle both in his treatment of Christine and, as it turns out, in his treatment of Howard. Chad first seduces and then coldly spurns Christine as retribution against women and as a perverse affirmation of manhood. Like a child pulling the wings off of a fly, he savors her misery. As the movie's sexualized language suggests, he is the man on top while she has been both literally and figuratively "screwed."

The structure of Chad's professional world, this "company of men," encourages and rewards such predatory behavior. And so Chad takes advantage of this structural sexism in a similar power play over Howard. Chad reveals to Howard that he had engineered the entire plot against Christine in order to assert his masculine power not so much over Christine as over Howard. Once the plot took its toll on Howard's obviously "effeminate" sensibility, Chad would be able to usurp his position at work. He has in essence done to Howard what he did to Christine, seducing Howard into participating in the "game" well knowing his vulnerability to women. But what was supposed to be a game turns out to be strictly business for Chad. After crushing and humiliating Howard exactly as he had Christine, Chad tells his girlfriend in bed that it was all simply part of the "program" for work. The scene concludes with him basking in his "manliness" as his girlfriend proceeds to gratify him sexually. Howard, on the other hand, has by the end of the movie been "reduced" to the status of a woman. The last scene finds him screaming hysterically and impotently, his outcry falling on the deaf ears of Christine. Howard has thus lost all vestiges of "manhood"; he is no longer a member of the company of men. In a sexist world, where both the business and social realms are governed by a predatory law which may crudely be put as screw or be screwed, Howard finds himself on the receiving end.

Are there larger lessons to be learned from this pessimistic view of the secular world? The sexualizing of the business dynamic evidenced in the movie may be similarly corrupting some of our religious institutions. Is it possible that some Christian institutions feel the need to reassert male authority precisely because women have gained a measure of power and independence? How else explain the Baptist conven-
tion's recent modification of its dogma which now requires women to "submit graciously"? The change was made out of a desire to keep the traditional family intact, but their solution in essence suggests women are to blame for the demise of the family. Rather than examine the complex social pressures affecting the stability of the modern family, the Convention, like Howard and Chad, reductively points the finger at women.

And what should one make of the popularity of the PromiseKeepers? They too find a sexual cause for the disintegration of the family. They argue that men have been weak; they have allowed women to usurp their masculine power and take control of the business of running a family. Like Howard in the movie, men have allowed themselves to be "feminized," "reduced" to the status of woman rather than claiming their rightful position on top of the family hierarchy. In such a sexually charged atmosphere the noble image of "standing in the gap" thus evidences a sexualized subtext, indeed a graphic image, of male domination over the body of woman.

While threats to the family may be very real in our world today, our religious institutions may be getting sidetracked by an obsession with male power. We must resist simplistic sexist logic and formulaic solutions to complex social problems. And most importantly, we must be ever vigilant to keep the Church from being nothing more than a company of men.

*Beyond the Cosmos* is the latest book from astrophysicist Hugh Ross. His previous works, including *The Fingerprint of God*, the *Creator and the Cosmos*, and *Creation and Time*, deal with the relationship between 20th century physics and the Biblical account of creation. Ross is to be commended for his desire and ability to take both science and the Bible seriously. He believes that God has revealed Himself through both creation and Word, and that a correct understanding of both sources of truth will produce harmony rather than conflict. He tries to do justice to both fields without forcing one into a straitjacket imposed by the other. His earlier works attempt to demonstrate how the most recent developments in physics and astrophysics are consistent with and even provide evidence for the existence of the God of the Bible, and they offer much for both the thoughtful believer and skeptic to consider.

However, the focus of *Beyond the Cosmos* differs somewhat from that of its predecessors. Here Ross has an admirable concern to equip believers and seekers with tools to help them resolve difficulties in understanding basic Christian doctrine, especially beliefs over which historic divisions in the Church have resulted. He finds such tools in unlikely places, such as the implications of "string theories" of high energy physics. String theory assumes that at the most fundamental level all matter is composed not of pointlike particles but almost infinitesimally tiny "strings". They are thought to vibrate according to the energy they contain, but are far too small to be directly observed by any conceivable experiment. Yet theories based on these assumptions predict that the universe may consist of at least eleven space and time dimensions, rather than the four (three spatial and one temporal) dimensions that we experience.

The Big Bang theory of cosmic origins tells us that the universe began with the creation, not only of matter and energy, but of the very space and time in which we live. Ross argues that God, as the Creator of both space and time, exists outside the dimensional boundaries of His creation, and thus His action in history is not confined to them. Ross then uses this premise, along with what he sees as evidence for the existence of additional dimensions, in an attempt to resolve the paradoxes inherent in some key Christian beliefs. He includes short chapters dealing with the Trinity (How can God be both one and three?), the Incarnation (How can Jesus be fully God and fully human?), the Atonement of Jesus Christ (How can one man's death atone for the sins of the great multitude of believers?), God's sovereignty and man's free will, the security of the believer's salvation, evil and suffering in a world created and governed by a good and loving God, and even the compatibility of God's love and the existence of hell.

How does he hope to resolve such age-old paradoxes? Ross offers the simple analogy that a triangle can be rotated in three dimensions to form a cone, which is composed of a series of concentric circles. He uses this to show that the statement "a triangle can be equal to a circle," which seems contradictory in two dimensions, is actually true in three dimensions. By this analogy Ross intends to illustrate how ideas which appears contradictory from a human viewpoint can make sense when viewed from God's "extra-dimensional" perspective.

There is much of value in this book. When discussing paradoxes inherent in Christian beliefs about God, Ross reviews the formulations of historical creeds as well as analogies that have been given to illustrate teachings such as the Trinity (i.e., the existence of water in solid, liquid, and gas phases in some way reflects God's nature as Father, Son,
and Spirit). He also challenges believers to move beyond the statements of creeds by considering the "extra-dimensional" attributes of God which allow Him to transcend the boundaries of space and time He created. He clearly hopes to inspire in his readers more wonder, love and praise of God the Creator and Redeemer, and thus the book concludes with a marvelous chapter discussing how the delights of heaven prepared for us by God will far surpass anything we can experience in this life.

However, the book has several shortcomings as well. Ross' attempts to resolve theological paradoxes are by their very nature tentative. The author acknowledges this when he writes:

The connections made in this book between scientific data ... and scientific methods ... represent not a fixed set of conclusions and solutions, but a suggestion of where to begin a new chapter in our age-old pursuit of spiritual truth and understanding. (210)

Despite the above comment, he unfortunately overstates his case at times. The "staggering" evidence he presents in favor of string theory is actually quite speculative, and the author fails to distinguish between necessary and sufficient conditions for its validity. While some form of string theory may turn out to be the long-awaited "supertheory" which is able to unify the fundamental forces of the universe, currently there is no experimental evidence to substantiate it; indeed, the most persuasive argument in its favor is its beauty and elegance. This is certainly not a trivial factor, but it is hardly overwhelming. I question whether string theory is even relevant to the book's fundamental argument. Ross establishes that God is outside of our time dimension because He created time itself; doesn't the same kind of conclusion follow from God's creation of space as well? Since it appears that string theory is not required to establish the author's claim of God's "extra-dimensionality," why does it appear? And why is it given such prominence here?

Ross is a better popularizer of science than theology. His occasional oversimplifications in the technical realm are excusable in light of his intended audience; however, the book is marred by several naive statements regarding historical theology. For example, Ross indicts the Puritans for their supposed insistence that the twin truths of God's absolute sovereignty and human freedom are "undeniably true and yet undeniably contradictory" (52). He goes on to lament, "if only Christian leaders had recognized the 'contradiction' for what it is, a paradox, the church could have avoided untold damage and heartache." Perhaps I am overly sensitive to this because the Puritans are my own spiritual heroes, but these statements distort the Puritan theological tradition and grossly oversimplify the 17th century controversy between Calvinism and Arminianism. Regrettably, the footnoted reference for Ross' claim about Puritan teaching does not even address the issues of sovereignty and freedom. Of course the author is not a trained theologian, but this kind of sloppiness is disappointing.

In his discussion of how God's will and our will "interact" to produce a particular outcome in our lives, Ross seems to imply that human nature is morally neutral, able at any moment to choose either what pleases God or what God condemns. This does not do justice to the biblical teaching that the whole person, including the will, is in bondage to sin and is in need of spiritual rebirth in order to obey and please the Creator. At their best, Ross' experiments in theological conflict resolution may be helpful to a Christian believer who is struggling with one or more of these issues, or to a sincere seeker who finds the path to faith blocked by her inability to comprehend, for example, how God can be both one and three.

In his previous work, Ross has sought to remove obstacles from the path of those who have scientific objections to Christian faith, and Beyond the Cosmos may play a similar role for some. But I am reminded of the words of C. S. Lewis, who also found some measure of resolution between seemingly contradictory Christian beliefs through the idea that God exists outside the one-dimensional timeline we experience. Yet in concluding his discussion of this topic, Lewis cautioned:

This idea has helped me a great deal. If it does not help you, leave it alone. It is a "Christian idea" in the sense that great and wise Christians have held it and there is nothing in it contrary to Christianity. But it is not in the Bible or any of the creeds. You can be a perfectly good Christian without accepting it, or indeed without thinking of the matter at all.

Stan Zygmunt


That God's existence can be neither proved nor disproved is the one article of faith that I can bank on my students confessing in class. It is an article of faith of theist and
atheist alike (for atheists, like everyone else at my university, are nice, i.e., tolerant and non-militant), and it is an article of faith. It is the rarest of students who is aware of the philosophical tradition of theistic proofs when she first steps into a philosophy class. Never having met a theistic proof they consider successful (for they have met precious few proofs at all), they confess that the existence or non-existence of God is beyond proof, and, as such, that belief is a matter of private belief/disbelief. Thus, few philosophical endeavors strike my students (and, all too often, their other professors) as so futile as the arguments for the existence of God.

No doubt one thing that motivates this faith is the very decency of students in my community. Truth is divisive and truths about God especially so. If in advance we can agree that God's nature and existence are unknowable, then we can each quietly and inoffensively believe what we will about the divine and we can live together in peace. However well-motivated, and a desire to live peacefully is an especially noble motivation, this should strike us as a peculiar and a particularly troubling attitude especially when voiced within the academy. Politeness, or something masquerading as politeness, here trumps a search for truth, as though inoffensiveness were a necessary and sufficient condition for genuine peace. To be sure, atheists and theists alike are impervious to criticism given this attitude, so there are gains in a type of equality. But that type of equality is one no university can long afford. If God does not exist then those who believe in God are making a significant intellectual mistake, a fact no intellectual community should ignore. If, on the other hand, God does exist then a university is negligent in failing to ensure that every student devote some careful attention to the matter. In either case, at a university the question of God's nature and existence is neither optional nor merely personal.

I can think of no better single source for reflecting upon the theistic proofs for God's existence than Stephen Davis' God, Reason, and Theistic Proofs. Davis writes for students new to the study of philosophy and for the "educated reader." His book is marked by clarity rather than creativity; readers will discover no new arguments and little in the way of new spins on old arguments. They will find, instead, a clear and careful exposition of traditional as well as new theistic proofs with some especially winsome illustrations and amplifications of moves in the arguments.

The book opens with a discussion of what a theistic proof is and what is the point of a theistic proof. Davis teases out the assumptions of the project of theistic proofs and addresses the objections (some of them theological) to the project. He then turns to the proofs proper, moving from the ontological argument to the cosmological and design arguments interspersed with chapters on theism and religious realism and foundationalism. He then examines the argument from religious experience, some other theistic proofs (such as the moral argument for God's existence) and Pascalian and Jamesian appeals to the "will" rather than reason. He concludes with a return to the question of the value of the theistic proofs.

Is there at least one successful proof for the existence of God, according to Davis? One is tempted to respond, "Read the book and see." Suffice it to say, however, that the question is not so simple as that. Davis does not, in fact, think that there are proofs that can establish the irrationality of atheism or agnosticism. He does think, on the other hand, that there are proofs (or an accumulation of proofs) that may well establish that theism is more rational than either atheism or agnosticism.

God, Reason & Theistic Proofs is an invaluable resource for those who want to think hard about the existence of God, whether they be theists or atheists. Davis is as good a guide for the general reader as there is currently. He knows the terrain well and he almost never points in the wrong direction (his placement of the ontological argument before the cosmological and teleological arguments is the only point I would challenge). He is fair and he is wise. This is a book worth reading, indeed, worth re-reading.

TDK


What is the relation between faith and reason? In the modern period they are thought of as distinct and usually as rivals of some sort. Where reason runs out, faith supplies the deficiency; or, whatever reason cannot validate must be relegated to the realms of (blind) faith. Neither alternative can be made to accommodate an earlier conception in which faith and reason are close allies in the pursuit of understanding. As the title of this book might suggest, Helm is engaged in resurrecting what he calls "the faith
seeking understanding project,” and he characterizes it as follows: “The core idea is of an articulation of the propositions accepted by faith into a more developed form that displays their inherent structure and hence contributes to the reasonableness of believing them”(128).

The book falls into two parts. In the first, Helm sets himself to explain the nature and value of this project, and to distinguish it from two other conceptions with which it is easily confused—the role of reason in natural theology (including its modern revival at the hands of Kretzmann and others) and the relation of faith to philosophy in the post-Wittgensteinian treatment of religion (notably in D. Z. Phillips). In Part II, Helm offers five “case studies” of the project in which he is interested—Augustine on time and creation, Anselm on the ontological argument, Anselm on the incarnation, Jonathan Edwards on original sin, and Calvin on the *sensus divinitatis*. As he himself notes, this last case study is somewhat different from the rest and has more to say about Plantinga and the project of Reformed epistemology than it has about Calvin. Indeed, Helm argues that “those who look to Calvin as the *fons et origo* of Reformed epistemology”(201) will find that Calvin is not in fact interested in epistemological questions at all, though this does not, in my view, say much about the plausibility or implausibility of the use to which Reformed epistemology put the idea of the *sensus divinitatis*.

As this brief description shows, Helm’s book has a number of features which mark it out from the many books in philosophy of religion which have appeared of late and for this reason it is to be welcomed. While it discusses important contemporary trends and writers, it also focuses on much less widely discussed topics. How many philosophers pay close attention to Jonathan Edwards, Calvin, Augustine in the *Confessions* or Anselm on the Incarnation? These were for me the most interesting parts of the book, though they are largely expository with only a limited amount of critical assessment. The very same features however, raise this question: where is the likely readership for such a book?

The book is billed on the backcover and in the accompanying publisher’s release as “an introduction,” and part of a series for “students and educated general readers.” To describe it in this way seems to me a distortion brought about by the insistence of publishers today that everything must be geared for the general reader and/or the college market, and may seriously mislead prospective purchasers. I cannot imagine that the general reader, however well educated, would easily make headway with this book, and only students at an advanced level (probably in theology rather than philosophy courses) would find a real use for it. The truth is that, whatever the publisher may say, Helm has written, and probably meant to write, a book *within* rather than *about* philosophy of religion and it is as a contribution to rather than an introduction to the subject that it should be judged.

On this criterion, how does it stand up? The answer, I would say, is that it is interesting and worthy, rather than innovative and exciting. Those who read it will have spent their time profitably enough, but those who do not will not have missed a special opportunity. And if it must be thought of as a book for students, I would say it is a useful addition to, rather than an essential element of, reading lists in philosophical theology.

Gordon Graham


As if to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Babe Ruth’s death, the New York Yankees are having one of the best seasons in the history of major league baseball. As of this writing, Bernie Williams, Derek Jeter, David Cone and crew are on pace to become the winningest single-season team in baseball history. The sterling pitching staff and near-perfect mixture of timely hitting, speed, power, and defense have oft-cranky George Steinbrenner in a jolly mood and talking new stadiums not new managers. Even Yankee traitor Jim Bouton was invited back from his *Ball Four* exile to play in this year’s old-timers’ game.

All said, Story Line Press—a continent away in Oregon—couldn’t have picked a better time to release Rodney Torreson’s *The Ripening of Pinstripes*, an entire book of poems which commemorate, remember, and ellege the huge celebrities, forgotten players, rivals, and famous games of baseball’s most successful franchise.

Forget about the actual poetry for a moment—just as Yankee Stadium could never completely contain Reggie, the characters in *Pinstripes* continually elude language and even their own mortality. Reggie Jackson courts and seduces the moon in the 1977 World Series. Gil McDougald hears his bat “cry
like a lonely rib in the body of the first man.” Paul O’Neill takes on “five daggers of an unleashed star.” Babe Ruth’s called shot supersedes time itself, “breathing forever and ever / into box scores.” And God, in the book’s final poem, “Slips a finger into the middle of Yankee Stadium... to wear it, / finally, as His ring.”

For Torreson and many others, Yankee greats—the Babe, the Iron Horse, the Yankee Clipper, the Mick—symbolize the game of baseball itself, and the book inevitably becomes a hymn to the national pastime and why we love it. Dave Winfield’s heart “harnesses / the unraveled beat / of factory smoke.” Bouton stoops “to the level / of a laborer.” Roger Maris is “the son of a railroad man.” And like our own lives, Yankee history is marked by tragedies as well as celebrations—Thurman Munson’s plane crash, Rex Chapman’s bean-ball death, Herb Score’s career-shortening injury, Don Mattingly’s bad back, and so on.

This tension between myth and mortality becomes one of the most interesting points on which the book turns and proposes yet another reason why baseball is such a compelling and complex American invention. On one hand, fans are glad that Joe Dimaggio never betrays his youth by playing in an Old Timers’ game. “They’re glad you never bat, / bucking feebly against the gray / with some rocking chair swing.” On the other hand, Torreson gives it up for passing heroes, mere mortals who somehow find their way into the Yankee limelight. “Hooray for the bright neon swing,” he cheers, “of little Andy Stankiewicz,” an unheralded 27-year-old rookie whose heroic half-season disappeared from baseball and most everyone else’s memory.

And the poetry? Pinstripes doesn’t seem to claim any profound poetic inheritance (even though poets—like Walt Whitman, Carl Sandburg, and Robert Pinsky—have long written about baseball) and the verse is as serviceable as it needs to be. Ultimately, however, Pinstripes is poetry rooted in the novelty of its subject matter and theme rather than in style or language—which I think is fitting. For even in post-strike baseball, baseball fans—alack and alas—still outnumber poetry fans.

Mike Chasar
on poets—

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The photographs on the covers of this issue evoke different experiences of wonder as it is discussed by Tom Christenson in his fascinating article. What's so wonderful about these images? For me, it is the way in which they unveil different worlds, or at least conjure them up.

In his final and most profound study, Camera Lucida, the French critic and theorist Roland Barthes suggested that each photograph possesses a punctum, a singular point that punctures or wounds the viewer. We look at the image and see across time and space the life-world of another person. We gaze into the living eyes of a dead man; we look upon the countenance of someone who is no more. “Photography,” wrote Barthes, “has something to do with resurrection.” I thought of this recently as I examined eighty-year old photographs with my mother. Staring at me with cocky assurance was the small figure of my grandfather, twelve years old, the age of my daughter. Pricked by the ghostly presence summoned in the photograph, I felt both a pain and a sense of wonder at the magical act of the past revived, of absence changed into presence. That’s him, I said. There he is! But he was also already gone.

Tom Christenson points out that the modern word “wonder” shares the same root as the word “wound.” You realize this looking at old photographs. And you realize why Barthes spoke of the “grace of the punctum” and likened it to a gift.

On the cover is a picture of a copy of the Miraculous Black Christ of Esquipulas, Guatemala, created in 1595, as it is displayed for veneration by the faithful in the Cathedral of San Fernando in San Antonio. Devout Latino Catholics bring photographs and other articles of personal significance to this crucifix and place them there with prayers for Christ’s miraculous intercession on behalf of lost or injured loved ones. The photographs, linked to the wounds of the dying savior, are visual petitions for wonders wrought by a merciful God—mediated by a copy of a crucifix four hundred years old.

On the back cover is a different kind of wonder, another form of visual piety. Taken by my brother in the home of a Lutheran farmer and his wife in Iowa, this image discloses the world of white, middle-class American Protestantism in a manner reminiscent of Grant Wood’s American Gothic. It is a spare world, highly ordered, encoded in the modest decor of a worn couch, an old lamp, and an inexpensive reproduction of a painting by Warner Sallman. This is the world of hard work encrusted in tattered overalls and gnarled hands, a world in which Jesus knocks quietly and patiently at the heart of each person, pleading that he be allowed to enter the soul, blood-free and glowing.

It is a glaring contradiction when you think about it: what would a farmer have to do with such a god? And why can polaroids pray louder than the sobs of heartbroken mothers? Why are copies of copies of copies able to deliver the power of the original? Why do memories hinge on moldy photo-albums? So much depends on such meager things. Wonders never cease. At the heart of us is a mystery whose pain is sweet. It’s all very strange. Scandalous, really.

David Morgan