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the “Jesus” industry

Jesus is showing up everywhere these days, and not just in the places that I’m used to finding him. All of a sudden, Jesus is in the movies, on the cover of spy novels, and even on the New York Times Bestseller list. The problem is that I don’t always recognize the Jesus I see in these places. The best selling book—now a major motion picture—The Da Vinci Code tells a story about a married Jesus and his children. The National Geographic Society trumpets the recovery of the Gospel of Judas Iscariot, which promises to tell us the “real” story of Jesus of Nazareth, a story in which Judas is Jesus’ closest confidant and privy to his most important secrets. Books entitled The Jesus Papers and The Jesus Dynasty are currently displayed on a local bookseller’s “New Arrivals” table. There’s money to be made in Jesus.

Even though this pop-culture pseudo religion doesn’t interest me much, it does concern me. The promulgators of commercialized, pop-culture fare hardly seem the most trusted custodians of the story of the life and death of our Savior and of the church he founded. Some will defend these films and books as “just entertainment” to be enjoyed and not taken seriously; however, the purveyors of this entertainment casually weave together so much fact and fiction that it is hard to know which is which. Historical fiction can be powerful stuff. A high school history teacher I know tells me that he still can’t teach about the Kennedy Administration without students in his class correcting him with “facts” they gleaned from Oliver Stone’s JFK.

Not only do these works of historical entertainment blend fact and fiction, they usually blend it in artful ways that appeal to those who prefer alternative versions of history. The Da Vinci Code gives us a church that accords women a central role in the faith. The Gospel of Judas tells us about a kind of Christianity founded on an inner-perception of truth, free from burdensome, external institutions. Whether or not these visions of what the church should be are true, the fables spun to support them are patently false. Authors like Brown treat Christianity as merely one ingredient to be blended with other bits and pieces of pop culture as they concoct a brew more palatable to twenty-first century American tastes than the historic faith itself. Even Mel Gibson’s The Passion of the Christ, though better received among Christians and more faithful to scripture than other recent offerings, expanded on and manipulated Christian tradition to a troubling extent.

More interesting to me than this pop-culture Christianity has been Christians’ responses to it. Concerned by the confusion that The Da Vinci Code’s fables could create, Christian leaders of all stripes were prepared to respond. A few groups boycotted the film and picketed theaters. Some priests and pastors asked their flock not to see it. Others have used the film’s release as an opportunity to get out their own message. The Christian press is churning out responses to Brown and his ilk, and the Internet and airways are filled with contra-Da Vinci Code talking points. If fictions like Brown’s get people asking questions, then what better time to have some good answers ready?

There is a too obvious contrast to be made with the Muslim response to publication of the infamous Muhammad cartoons. When a Danish newspaper published a series of unflattering caricatures of the Prophet, the result was riots in the street. Angry mobs attacked Danish and other western institutions throughout the Islamic world, and many Islamic leaders demanded that Western governments prohibit the publication of such blasphemy. For some Christians, there is a temptation to be a bit glib when noting this contrast. It seems that Christians debate their opponents, while Muslims burn down their houses. Of course, that’s not fair. The difference between Christians and Muslims is not—in this case—their religion, but their political context. Most Christians who respond to films,
books, or museum exhibits that offend their faith do not need to resort to coercive censorship or street riots. Until recently, Christianity has thrived primarily in Western, liberal democracies with well-established traditions of public debate and disagreement. Although even in Western democracies, Christians occasionally have resorted to legal censorship, they generally understand that a response of public persuasion is both more appropriate and more effective. This is why Christians have not (as of publication) begun fire-bombing theaters where The Da Vinci code plays or ransacking bookstores selling National Geographic.

On the other hand, most Muslims—and particularly those Muslims who reacted violently to the cartoons’ publication—live under authoritarian regimes that rule through force and fear. These nations have little or no tradition of peaceful, public discourse. In a society dominated by sheer force, the only way to be taken seriously is to marshal sufficient force of your own to make the authorities come to the table and listen to your demands. Often, the only known way to defeat an opponent is through violence or intimidation. The protests and riots we saw on television probably can teach us less about the Islamic religion than they can about the weak political cultures in the societies where they took place.

Christians have learned through experience that religious faith does not need to be protected by the state to survive. Many scholars now recognize that, contrary to some expectations, Christianity remained strong in the United States precisely because it lacked such protection. (See for example Finke and Stark’s seminal 1992 work The Churching of America, 1776–1990.) Without the guarantee of state protection, American Christians had to work harder to spread their faith. As each new Christian group developed methods of evangelization and made a place for itself within the nation’s pluralistic landscape, Christianity in the United States thrived. In contrast, the established, state churches of Europe had no reason to work hard to attract new members; as a result, their publicly-funded cathedrals now are filled primarily by American tourists.

We need to keep this in mind whenever the latest batch of “Jesus stories” come out. Christianity has thrived for hundreds of years in a culture that allows others to misappropriate our faith for their own purposes. Our task in responding remains what it has been for centuries: to present the truth more compellingly than they present their fictions. The genius of America’s religious marketplace is not that it allows religion to be boiled down to the least offensive common denominator—although that is always a danger. The genius is that it leads Christians to become better defenders and evangelists of their own faith, so that by their own efforts they can ensure that the truth prevails.

The Cresset notes with sadness the May 13 death of Jaroslav Pelikan, Sterling Professor Emeritus of History at Yale University. Pelikan, the author of dozens of books, including the authoritative, five-volume The Christian Tradition (University of Chicago Press, 1971–1989), was among the world’s leading authorities on Christian theology and medieval intellectual history.

Many Cresset readers also will recognize Pelikan as a former editor of this journal, and some even remember him fondly as a colleague and friend. During a two-year stay at Valparaiso University in 1947–1948, Pelikan taught history, philosophy, and religion while assisting O. P. Kretzmann with The Cresset. He stayed in close touch with Valpo over the years and influenced generations of faculty and students here. At later positions at Concordia Seminary-St. Louis and the University of Chicago, he taught many future members of the Valparaiso University Department of Theology. He also returned to campus frequently for lectures and to visit old friends. His writings continue to be read and enjoyed on our campus to this day.

We are pleased to reprint in this issue, one of the earliest essays published in The Cresset by Jaroslav Pelikan, friend and former editor of this journal, who now has joined the nearer presence of the Lord.

--JPO
stigm(ate)a
facing the mirror of the wounds of Christ

Lisa Deam

I

N MY MEMORY, I AM IN SEVENTH GRADE, SITTING IN
my science class next to a boy I like. The boy
sits to my right. This is good, because my right
side is definitely my best. At one point during the
hour I go to the front of the room to collect an
assignment. As I walk back to my desk, I am fac­
ing the boy from the other direction. That's not so
good, because it means that he's seen the left side
of my face. Now he's looking into my eyes. He's
asking me a question, but he doesn't use words.
Instead, he takes his index finger and traces a pat­
tern down the side of his face.

"It's a birthmark," I say, in answer to what he
obviously wants to know. I keep my voice level
and my eyes down, like a virtuous young woman
from the Middle Ages.

"Oh," he said. "I thought it was a rash or that
maybe you got burned."

I sit down, and I don't say anything else. What
else is there to say? But I remember.

Mostly, I remember the way my classmate's
finger moved down the side of his face, as if trac­
ing the pathway for a coursing tear. And I remem­
ber feeling accused. In my mind, the boy's slender
finger grows long and bony, and he points it at me
in a gesture of horrified discovery of what I really
am: a marked woman.

To be marked carries many connotations. In
Western culture, body markings long bore a puni­
tive meaning and were associated primarily with
slaves and criminals. In ancient Greece, for exam­
ple, masters tattooed their slaves as a form of
punishment or ownership, and the Greek term for
this type of body marking—stigma—has become,
via the Latin, part of our own language. Greek tat­
too sometimes took the form of an emblem, such
as the owl of Athens for prisoners of war, and
sometimes of written words. The phrase "Stop me.
I'm a runaway," for instance, might be inscribed on
a slave's forehead in case of escape. Slave owners
and other authorities favored the face for such
markings since, unlike tattoos on other parts of the
body, such as the arm or leg, facial tattoos could
not be concealed easily (for above, see Jones). As
these authorities recognized, the face speaks. It is a
tablet on which, willingly or not, each person
inscribes his or her physical identity. Through our
faces we recognize self and others, we express
emotions, and we both mirror and see mirrored the
approval—or disapproval—of the society of which
we are a part. We always strive to present our best
face to the world. When slave owners marred a
face, they initiated a series of far-reaching exclu­
sions, like ripples that spread across a pond after a
stone is thrown in. Tattoos negatively affected a
person's sense of self and then redefined that per­
son's presence within the community (Gustafson,
25). Physical stigma became social stigma.

Like the punitive marks of Greek slaves, my
own "stigma" is inscribed on the left side of my
face, for all to see. I bear the type of birthmark
known as a port wine stain, the result of an excess
of blood vessels that formed beneath the surface
of my skin when I was still in the womb. The
extra blood resulted in a splotchy mark, medium
red in color, that extends from my temple to
below my cheekbone.

Like a Greek slave's tattoo, my birthmark
defined my physical and social existence from an
early age. Transforming my appearance, it set me
apart and let everyone know that I was different.
The exchange with my seventh-grade classmate
typifies my experiences. A glance, a question, a
word of pity—all these responses taught me that
I belonged on the fringes of society. I learned to
live on the edges and in the dark corners.

Eventually, life on the edge turned into a life of
hiding. I spent hours shut in the bathroom peer­
ing into the mirror, admiring my good side, and
thinking that if it weren't for that other side, the
one I didn't want to look at, I'd be almost pretty,
almost normal. I learned to case a room and choose a spot where I could put my bad side to the wall. Capitalizing on my intelligence, I undertook difficult tasks and set high goals to make up for my less than perfect appearance.

When I turned thirteen, I chose makeup as my ultimate form of hiding. I began using Lydia O'Leary's Covermark, the first cosmetic, as its website proudly announces, to be patented to hide skin imperfections. While other girls used the lightest of powders and glosses, I stood in front of the mirror every morning and applied the creamy, heavily tinted Covermark with a trowel, pairing it with a finishing powder that I dusted on my cheek, left for ten minutes or so, and then brushed off.

The beauty industry calls the art of hiding skin imperfections "cosmetic camouflage." The military overtones of this phrase are entirely appropriate. When I wore makeup, I dressed in fatigues so that I would blend in with the landscape around me, and I did battle with myself. If, for example, a girl in my French class asked me why I wore so much foundation, I couldn't give her an answer. I had to let her believe in my hopeless naiveté because the whole point, after all, was to hide my imperfection. I couldn't blow my cover by talking about why I wore the makeup. This kind of tortuous reasoning dictated my days and nights as my life threatened to become a kind of adventure plot where I constantly sought new ways of hiding from the enemy.

The whole issue came to a head during my sixteenth summer, when I attended a two-week arts camp in Oklahoma. I played the French horn (one of those difficult projects I insisted upon undertaking), but I hung out with the ballet students. They were lean and willowy, so at ease with their beautiful bodies and glowing faces. How I wanted to be like them. I wanted to wear tights and lip gloss, to sweep my hair off my face in a careless bun. I wanted the art students to sketch me as I lay first in one graceful position and then another. Instead, I spent my days hunched in a chair, a permanent indentation above my upper lip from ramming my horn’s mouthpiece into my face, my birthmark glowing lightly from the exertion of it all.

One night, the tornado sirens went off after lights out—this was June in Oklahoma, after all. Procedure dictated that all campers file out of their cabins and head for the main building. When the lights went on in our cabin, my roommates groggily roused themselves while I grabbed my hand mirror and frantically went to work. The other girls laughed. “Oh my God! She’s putting on makeup!” I think that some of them actually liked the idea, although they probably didn’t understand why I, a shy girl who always kept her face to the wall, became our cabin’s leader in the twenty-four-hour cosmetics revolution. I couldn’t join them in their laughter, though. I didn’t have time if I wanted to finish my job in the seconds before our counselor herded us out the door. I joined my dancer friends—languorously stretching—in the hallway of the lodge, makeup in place and emotions firmly in check.

That night, I so wanted to be beautiful. This one desire lay behind all my attempts to camouflage my face. But I also wanted to rest—and not because I’d gotten up hours before the break of day. I yearned for relief from the exhaustion of covering my birthmark and holding back my emotions. As I discovered, hiding leads to isolation, which is a kind of emotional and spiritual death. This is nowhere more poignantly illustrated than in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter, in which poor Arthur Dimmesdale suffers and dies because he could not bring himself to reveal the stigma hidden on his chest. Confession would have uncovered the ugly truth, but it also would have saved his life. In the end, it is Hester Prynne, living like a marked slave of the ancient world, who finds freedom from pain and guilt. The moral of the story is clear. “Be true! Be true! Be true! Show freely to the world, if not your worst, yet some trait whereby the worst may be inferred!” the narrator exhorts (Hawthorne, 1991:198). But Hester’s freedom comes at great cost, and for a long time I could...
not solve the dilemma the story poses. Is it a greater kindness to be forced to show your worst or to be able to hide it? Should I walk freely but in ignominy or travel at night, like a runaway slave?

Slaves themselves received a kindness when, in 316 AD, the emperor Constantine—who three years prior had legalized Christianity in the Roman Empire—forbade facial tattoos in recognition that the face "has been fashioned in the likeness of the divine beauty" (Gustafson, 21). Constantine's own portrait head of 313 AD pays monumental tribute to this idea. Standing over eight feet high, the emperor's face is youthful and clean-shaven, with large, geometric eyes that gaze heavenward, toward the vision of the cross that earned him victory on the battlefield and made him God's appointed ruler on earth.

In forbidding facial tattoos, Constantine made a bold statement about the heights to which human beauty can soar. Flawless faces, he claims, approach the divine. Constantine may have had the Christian deity in mind when he gave his edict, but as far as visual models go, he possessed numerous examples of divine beauty in the pagan artistic tradition to which he was heir. In Greek and Roman sculpture, especially works of the Classical bent, the gods take on idealized human form. They are often larger than life, like Constantine's portrait head, and assume elegant poses. A close look at their faces reveals symmetrical features, restrained emotions, and—needless to say—no hint of physical defect. The satirist Lucian, writing two centuries before Constantine's rule, adopted Phidias' statue of Athena Lemnia as a paragon of divine beauty. He singled out this Athena particularly for "the outline of her whole face, the softness of the sides of her face, and the well-proportioned nose" (Pollitt, 63). Phidias' goddess possessed the type of flawless profile to which slaves—and rulers—in the ancient world surely aspired.

And so did I. Indeed, I believed wholeheartedly in the promise of Constantine's edict. And I didn't have to know a thing about art or history to understand it. Under other names, the Classical ideal had a foothold everywhere I looked: in the media, the cosmetics industry, and even my childhood church, which was full of well-preserved men and women who seemed made to showcase the link between divinity and flawlessness. Constantine may have legalized Christianity, but for me, "divinity" was a nameless god whose game was perfection. And so Mr. Dimmesdale's dilemma came to be solved, for a time. I went to
school, attended church, and continued to apply makeup, all the while dreaming of being born again, this time into a perfect body. I took art history courses in college and adopted Botticelli's Venus, rising newborn and perfectly formed from the waves, as my image of rebirth. I wanted everything: the blond, rippling hair, the gently curving body, and most of all, the rosy skin with nary a mark. I was willing even to stand forever in contrapposto to get it.

The opportunity for such a transformation presented itself the summer I graduated from college, when a laser surgeon, wielding a small gun, covered my face with red dots the size of pencil erasers. This procedure went far beyond my feeble attempts at hiding. The surgery presented nothing less than an opportunity for rebirth. I seized this chance to become my own Venus, rising newly formed from the doctor's table the way that Botticelli's goddess rises from the foam-speckled waves. I gritted my teeth through the pain of the laser gun, which felt like the sting of hundreds of rubber bands snapping against my skin, and hoped for an alteration so complete that my father wouldn't recognize me when I emerged from the doctor's office.

As the dots faded over the course of six weeks, they took a good deal of my birthmark with them. It shocked and stung, however—just as the laser gun stung my skin—when I realized that they didn't take it all. However minimized my birthmark may be, it won't ever completely disappear. My dad still recognizes me, and when I look in the mirror, I see the same old face staring out.

I had hoped, by undergoing surgery, to bypass Mr. Dimmesdale's dilemma once and for all. Instead of deciding whether to hide or not to hide, I sought to wipe out my marks and attain a shimmering, classical beauty that surely approaches the divine. But Hawthorne again calls this very desire into question, this time in a story that has even more bearing on my life. In Hawthorne's dark and moralistic tale, "The Birthmark," the prominent scientist Aylmer becomes fixated by the only physical flaw possessed by his wife, Georgiana: a small hand-shaped birthmark on her left cheek. Save for this mark, Georgiana is a perfect specimen of womanhood. The mark threatens to destroy their marriage until Aylmer successfully removes it in a prolonged medical procedure. However, he did not count on the mark's strange power. "The fatal hand [the birthmark] had grappled with the mystery of life, and was the bond by which an angelic spirit kept itself in union with a mortal frame," the narrator informs us (Hawthorne, 1987:130).

Only Georgiana, as she lies dying, realizes Aylmer's mistake. She tells him, "Do not repent that, with so high and pure a feeling, you have rejected the best that earth could offer" (Hawthorne, 1987:130). Of course, Aylmer had a good deal for which to repent. In his zeal for perfection, he could not see an important truth: Georgiana's birthmark was inextricably tied with her life.

Given my experience with a similar medical procedure, Hawthorne's story disturbs and provokes. It implies that I, like Georgiana, might have died (physically? spiritually?) had all vestiges of my birthmark disappeared. Indeed, the story suggests that flaws are a necessary part of human existence. They even contain a spark of the divine (recall that Georgiana's birthmark is the "bond by which an angelic spirit" kept her tied to life). In my own flawed mortality, perhaps I, too, possess a hint of divinity. But then, it all depends on what kind of divinity we're talking about. I have come to realize, albeit reluctantly, that no unblemished Venus beckons me.
toward a rosy-cheeked future. I am modeled after a different god, one who became a man—and then suffered and died. My path takes me away from the classical ideal and over the Alps to the gory, dripping-with-blood crucifixions of the Northern Renaissance.

In Italian art, the suffering Christ often seems to be related to the Greek gods. Even on the cross, he is muscular, strong, and unmarked, a true bearer of divine beauty. Northern artists, by contrast, celebrate Christ's brokenness. In Dutch and German crucifixion scenes, blood flowing copiously down Christ's side follows the curving contours of his body and falls into chalices held aloft by angels. Matthias Grünewald's Isenheim Crucifixion, in particular, dwells on pain and suffering. In this painting, Christ's body erupts in festering sores and bristles with splinters. His fingers splay in agony. His feet swell, his arms pull from their sockets, and his skin turns a gangrenous green. His sagging face drips with blood from the crown of thorns pressed upon his head. Ah, that wounded head. Some artists even made a special study of it so that viewers could come face to face, so to speak, with the pain radiating from Jesus' eyes. Through its emphasis on anguish and gore, Northern Renaissance art unabashedly appeals to the viewer's emotions. It seeks to draw us in and make us participants in the pictured drama. And as Northern artists recognize, there exists no greater drama than the suffering of Christ.

Whether or not all modern viewers appreciate so much blood and gore, the Northern Renaissance artists got one thing right. For Christians, the real pin-up figure is not Venus but the crucified Christ. Instead of smooth skin, we revere scars—in the form of Christ's suffering on the cross. There are, of course, many aspects to Christ's life that the faithful study and appreciate: his miracles, his teachings, his treatment of the poor and dispossessed. But to call Christ our savior means that, above all, we celebrate what he did on the cross. Christ accomplished his real work by suffering and dying. His wounds, in turn, deliver us from death. How can they not be seen as utterly beautiful?

Ordinary people have come to see their own marks of suffering as beautiful, too. The apostle Paul, for example, bore numerous physical injuries
witnessing for Christ. In his letter to the Galatians, he compares these injuries to Christ's wounds: "Let no one cause me trouble, for I bear the brands of Jesus in my body" (Galatians 6:17). Originally, the Jews underwent circumcision—another physical marking—as a sign of their participation in the community of God. Now, Paul says, Christ's brands are the only legitimate ones. Paul's own injuries testified to the integrity of his message and the completeness of his identity in the crucified Christ.

I read Paul's letter for years before discovering that the word he uses for "brand" is, in the Greek, stigma—the same word that described the tattooing of slaves in the Greek and Roman worlds (Jones, 10). In co-opting this term, Paul gives it new meaning. No longer are we slaves of our earthly masters, he says; we are now slaves of Christ. Marks of suffering sustained for Christ neither shame nor degrade. Instead, they point to the one who first bore his marks for us.

In the centuries following Paul's letter, many Christians began voluntarily to tattoo themselves with the sign of the cross or with words that proclaimed their identity in Christ. Tattoos had suddenly become subversive (Gustafson, 29-31). But perhaps the most dramatic turnabout in the history of body marking comes from those men and women for whom an affinity with Christ's suffering produces nearly continual wounds. These sufferers turn the word stigma completely inside out, even giving it a separate dictionary entry: stigmata.

Stigmata are the marks of the Crucifixion. They are wounds on the hands, feet, or side received by those who identify strongly with Christ's pain on the cross. Stigmata differ from all forms of earthly wounds, even those sustained by the Apostle Paul, because Paul's wounds, although holy, still bore association with the ancient system of slavery. In fact, Paul used the term stigma in order to make himself understood by people who lived in a slave system. The marks of stigmatics, by contrast, come from no human hand or earthly experience, but result from immersion in the suffering of Christ Jesus himself.

Saint Francis of Assisi became the first recorded stigmatic in 1224. As he prayed at sunrise on the Feast of the Holy Cross, he saw a vision of a six-winged seraph affixed to a cross. Francis wondered at this vision, and then,

His hands and feet seemed to be pierced by nails, the heads of the nails appearing on the inside of his hands and the upper side of his feet, and their points protruding on the other side. On the palms of his hands these marks were round, but on the outer side they were longer, and there were little pieces of flesh projecting from the surface which looked like the ends of nails, bent and hammered back. So too there were the marks of nails imprinted on his feet, and the flesh was swollen where the nails appeared. His right side was scarred as if it had been pierced by a spear, and it often seeped blood, so that his tunic and undergarment were frequently drenched in it. (Thomas of Celano, 96)

Francis's biographer describes his wounds in loving detail because, like Christ's wounds, they reveal a sacred beauty. They are vivid, bright red examples of what it means to suffer for and with the wounded savior.

Yet for me, modern conventions of beauty long vied with the beauty of Christ's wounds. I remember the day I first considered my own marks in relation to God. My therapist asked me if I could imagine Jesus being present as my younger-self applied heavy makeup in the midst of the Oklahoma tornado. No, I answered. I really could not. Instead, I wanted to yell at him, "Where the hell were you? Why did you do this to me?" I felt less like Saint Francis than I did like Amy, an angst-ridden teen from the TV drama Everwood. In one episode, Amy bursts out, "Daddy's being excruciating!" Her father answers, "Excruciating literally means experiencing the pain of crucifixion. I think we can all agree that Jesus had it worse." Amy's reply? "He wasn't here."

It is dishearteningly easy to believe in a classically restrained, non-suffering, and altogether non-present Jesus. But I have only to remember Jesus' own desperate prayers to correct this distorted vision. Jesus himself cried out against suffering and death. He, too, wondered why he seemingly had been deserted. I think that Jesus'
anguish legitimizes my own anger, but it also reminds me that he really was with me that stormy Oklahoma night. I just couldn't see his face for the cosmetic-ridden one in my mirror.

The only Jesus that could have been with me that night is the Jesus whose own face bled and scarred. No other Jesus makes sense to me. When I have trouble seeing past the ghost of Venus at the fringes of my reflection, it helps me to remember the Savior's ravaged face. I recall that just as Jesus knew our experiences of hunger, fatigue, and temptation, he also knew what it means to be scarred. My own wounds are memories, or vestiges, of Jesus’ wounds. They are stigmata—in the sense that they manifest Christ's compassion (certainly not in the sense of manifesting my own saintliness!). When viewed in this light, my marks change. My face opens like a flower turned to the sun, and my birthmark becomes a wellspring from which flows Christ's compassion, or co-passio; literally, his “suffering with.”

With the help of a friend—its a manifestation of co-passio—I have come to see the compassion enfolded in the seventh-grade incident with which I began this reflection. One day, I told the story to my friend, Julie. I was beginning my mantra, “He pointed an accusing finger at me,” when Julie stopped me. “Don’t you see?” she chided me gently. “That boy didn’t point a finger at you. He pointed to himself.” It startled me to realize that Julie was right. Literally, my classmate did not point his finger at me. He traced the pattern of my birthmark on his own face. In so doing, he took my birthmark upon himself. What I insisted upon seeing as an accusing gesture could just as easily be interpreted as a gesture of solidarity, of one person sharing pain with another. In this small yet monumental way, my classmate took on the role of a stigmatic or even of Christ himself, who suffered everything that we suffer.

I still find it difficult completely to escape the specter of slavery when I look in the mirror. I am gradually coming to realize, however, that a different and far kinder master owns this slave. I need feel no shame in my marks, for my master bears them with me. The blood pooled beneath my cheek is the same blood that trickled down his face when the thorns pricked his brow. It is the same blood that gushed forth when the soldier pierced his side, the blood that in Renaissance paintings the angels catch in chalices and bid us drink in the form of communion wine. Surgery may not bring results, and I may fail to rise from the waters like Venus. Instead, I rise with Christ, whose blood paints me in his image, a reflection of divine beauty. ♦

Lisa Deam is a writer and art historian.

Works Cited


LARGE BLUE HORSES

Somebody’s old fence must be down
because here they come,
galloping the great curving thunderheads
of their haunches
down the road to the river,
their black hooves rattling the mailboxes
and flinting the stones
out on the gravel.
They are mad, their muzzles foam-flecked
with freedom, sudden release,
the bulged pumping of their outlaw hearts.
Yellow wheels of April sun
are bowling down the alleys of their dust
as they thunder by the saddlebacks of new graves
and tremor the lead glass saints
in the seismic windows of the white church,
rattling them like brute, fallen angels.
Somebody’s bound to meet them—
someone on a narrow red bridge—
someone admiring his face in the water—
someone (like you or me)
who thought this was tame country.

John M. Solensten
Mr. Bell has cancer of the spine," my mother announced after the last PTA meeting she ever would attend. In six weeks, I would be finished with sixth grade and move on to junior high school where mothers began to specialize, becoming band boosters, football fanatics, or cheerleader chums.

Mr. Bell was the music teacher. He had a raspy voice and used a small round tuner he blew into to get us searching for the correct pitch twice a week when he visited our room while Mrs. Sowers disappeared for forty minutes.

We sang “Dixie” and “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” and “The Marine Corps Hymn” from the stapled book full of uplifting songs we stored in our desks. Mr. Bell told us we were all blessed to be born under a fortunate flag. For our first music exam in October, he’d listened to us sing, one by one, “The Star Spangled Banner” from memory, placing us exactly under the flag for our performances.

There was more to it than moving our mouths, he’d explained, showing us the proper posture for singing the national anthem, his back as straight as a soldier’s. All of us had kept eye contact with a spot slightly above his head so we looked patriotic and proud, working our way through the a cappella praise for home.

In January, for an earlier PTA meeting, he’d chosen four of us sixth graders to sing “America the Beautiful” and “Over There” for a room full of mothers. By September, my voice would crack and turn into something embarrassing, but on that January night I could carry a tune in close harmony with Paula Phelan and Nancy Housel and Jimmy Dunmire, all of us soprano and alto. Mr. Bell had introduced us, and we were a hit.

In October, just after I stopped singing in seventh grade music class, moving my lips like the rock stars on the Saturday night Dick Clark show, the Russians put Sputnik into orbit, and nobody at school cared about music anymore, or art, or even English and history.

Gary Fincke

Upstairs, after we’d finished to applause and been allowed to leave so we wouldn’t have to sit through the “business meeting,” the four of us watched the Tennessee Ernie Ford Show on the television that was kept in our classroom because Mrs. Sowers was also the principal. Tommy Sands was the guest. He sang “Teenage Crush,” and Jimmy Dunmire and I sang along while the girls stared at Tommy Sands. “I wish Tab Hunter was on,” Nancy said. “‘Young Love’ is my favorite song, and he looks so cool.” Jimmy Dunmire said he wished Mr. Bell would hand out a rock and roll song book instead of one filled with the second, third, and fourth verses nobody ever sang to all of those patriotic tunes.

Three months later, when my mother said Mr. Bell was as good as dead, she added, “Isn’t it something that he always has such good posture, and here he has it in his back?”

We finished sixth grade without any more music classes. Mrs. Sowers stayed in the room all day except for Friday afternoon art and taught us something she called “enrichment social studies.” We learned all of the Presidents in order from Washington to Eisenhower. We learned the names and dates of our country’s wars right up to the Korean (1950–1953). She taught us Democrats and Republicans, Federalists and Whigs. She had us memorize the states and their capitals, beginning with Albany, Atlanta, Annapolis, and Augusta. We needed to know everything about the United States, she said, including the names of the national parks and their spellings, or we’d become bad citizens, ones that the Communists could brainwash.

Now, more than ever, she explained, we needed to take care of our bodies and minds, and
that summer I finished getting my polio shots, my mother smiling as I walked out of the doctor’s office. “There’s one less thing that can jump up and get you,” she said, but shortly after school began, the Asian Flu cleared out half the students in every class I had. “We don’t have a quorum today,” Mr. Wargo said in history, but nobody knew what he was talking about, even when he shook his head as if a quorum was something to be taken seriously like Communism.

Millions of people around the world died from the Asian Flu, but everybody in my school returned within a few weeks. In October, just after I stopped singing in seventh grade music class, moving my lips like the rock stars on the Saturday night Dick Clark show, the Russians put Sputnik into orbit, and nobody at school cared about music anymore, or art, or even English and history. Everybody in the seventh-grade took a test, and by January thirty of us were assigned to advanced math and science, the chosen ones out of the three hundred or so in the seventh grade.

Our math book had letters as well as numbers in it. We said algebra instead of arithmetic and carried slide rules and copies of the Periodic Table. In ten years, we were told, we needed to be in charge of outer space, because if we weren’t, the Communists would be, and they would be certain to make our lives miserable from “up there.” “Somebody better learn something quick,” my father said, “or we’ll all be under the red boot.” It didn’t look good. One American rocket had blown up on the launch pad; one had just sat there until it toppled over. “We have Elvis Presley,” our science teacher said. “The Russians have Sputnik.” In November, the Russians sent a dog up in Sputnik II. “Laika,” the newspaper said. “The dog’s name means barker in Russian.” The dog spinning around the world made us study harder, but after a week it died when the oxygen ran out. “Just like the Communists,” my mother said, “to let it die like that.”

“How do we know it was inside?” my father said. “How do we know that dog didn’t die as soon as it blasted off?”

My parents gave me a microscope for Christmas. By the end of January, when the police were hunting for Charles Starkweather and his fourteen-year-old girlfriend Caril Fugate because he’d killed eleven people, I was tired of looking at bits of dust and strands of hair and drops of my saliva. By the time the police caught both of them in Wyoming, the United States had launched Explorer into orbit. “Our first satellite,” the science teacher said. “We should all be proud.” Except in science and math class, all we talked about was murder, how Charles Starkweather looked like a hard-nosed rockabilly singer, somebody with a haircut like the high school boys who didn’t take any science classes at all. And Caril Fugate was only a year older than we were. What girl did we know in eighth grade who would ride off with the boy who killed her parents? Vanguard, the next satellite, went into orbit in March. “Now we’re cooking with gas,” my father said.

In April, my old grade school building was declared hazardous. Its fire escapes were unsafe, something we’d all known the year before, but now a corner of the roof tore loose and fell into the playground ten minutes after recess ended. Jimmy Dunmire and I still played basketball there, stuffing balls through the eight foot high baskets we’d been happy to grab with our hands the year before.

We looked up at the missing corner and talked about where we’d stood for nut fights during fifth grade, when it was a craze to slap drilled buckeyes threaded through a shoestring against each other until one of them split and fell to the ground. It looked as if those bricks would have fallen right about where everybody stood around to watch the short, small duels.

I knew from listening to Mrs. Sowers that the window sills on the second floor were twenty-five feet above the asphalt playground. I guessed it was another fifteen feet to the roof. If you jumped from the windows, I said, you’d break your ankles. If you jumped from the roof, you’d probably die. We’d looked down from those windows from fourth to sixth grade and not once had either of us said he would jump for a dollar or even for five dollars. You could tell, just from looking, that twenty-five feet was too far for safety.

I started to calculate the velocity of the bricks when they hit the ground. I knew the formula, and Jimmy Dunmire nodded as if the numbers I cited...
meant I couldn't be wrong. He wanted to see more bricks fall. "That would be cool," he said, brushing his hands across his new flat top haircut. "I bought 'Kiss and Make Up' yesterday. It's so cool I played it fifteen times in a row."

Mr. Bell, my mother heard, had returned to teaching. "A miracle," she said, but we didn't see him because he only taught music at the grade school, and by May the talk of miracles had dissolved because Mr. Bell suddenly had "retired." Jimmy Dunmire stopped going to the school playground with me. He joined a singing group called The Coachmen who dressed in black and red and sang doo-wop songs like "Come Go with Me" and "Speedo." The other three guys were a year older. None of them were in advanced math or science.

Starting in July, I played "Summertime Blues" by Eddie Cochran over and over. "Now you can't use the car 'cause you didn't work a lick," I'd sing along in my deepest voice. I bought Chuck Berry and Little Richard records and had a flat top pasted into shape with some pink gunk that came in a tube I twisted up like lipstick. When I heard a doo-wop song like "In the Still of the Nite," I thought of Jimmy Dunmire and the rest of the Coachmen singing it, how they would sound.

The nuclear submarine Nautilus sailed under the North Pole, something that was sure to scare the Communists, and the first nuclear power plant at Shippensport, less than an hour away, was cranking out electricity. "See?" my father said. "See what America can do when it puts its mind to things?"

When Seventh Grade Began, We Learned simultaneous equations in algebra and created graphs that took on shapes besides straight lines. In science, we stood beside Bunsen burners and wore goggles and followed directions, no exceptions, in order to see, firsthand, how the world worked. "Science is war," our teacher said. Soon enough we'd see what he meant by that as he marked the map of the world hanging from the back wall with a flag that represented our class. When everyone had mastered how to calculate the lifting force of levers, he advanced our flag toward Moscow. When one of us mislabeled the water cycle, the Communists moved closer to our homes.

During the battle of electricity, AC and DC and the reason our light bulbs let us learn in the dark, the Soviets swept across Europe while he repeated "Filaments, incandescence, amperes, ohms." When he returned our unit tests, he smiled and moved the Communists back into Poland where they'd begun. The room was an atlas. We all drew accurate diagrams of a battery, ready to invade.

Outside of class, I didn't say one word about algebra or the intricacies of an electric circuit to anyone. I memorized all the verses to "Stagger Lee" and sang them to myself while I practiced my jump shot on a regulation basket another boy's father had put up on a nearby street.

On the First Day of December, there was a huge fire in a school in Chicago, so big that it was on television. For once, I watched the news, and my mother even bought a newspaper on Tuesday, something she never did, to read the story and look at a page full of pictures. There were more pictures the following day, and though that school, Our Lady of the Angels, was three times larger than my old grade school, it looked, from the side, to be identical. It had the same tall windows. The newspaper said the second-floor windowsills, like the ones at my old school, were twenty-five feet from the ground. The outside was brick, but the inside, like ours had been, was all wood that was dry and brittle from years of service. In fact, my old school was even older. Our Lady of the Angels had been built in 1910; Glenshaw School had been constructed in 1899. I remembered that date from the cornerstone close to where the roof had fallen because anything from the nineteenth century seemed so old it was like it had never happened.

There were almost one hundred dead students and nuns. "God have mercy on their souls," my mother said.

"And the ones burned and still alive," my father said. "They're in for it."

"Why didn't they all jump?" my mother said, but I didn't say a word about acceleration and what it was like to hit the cement from twenty-five feet up. Though the windows weren't as high off the ground at the junior high school, I had most of my classes on the third floor. That
Tuesday I looked down from the windows of each room I entered to see where I would land if I had to jump. Two of the drops led to cement. Some of those nuns had told their students to pray while they waited for the firemen to arrive with ladders, even the eighth graders like me who surely, I thought, would have ignored that advice and rushed for the windows no matter how far it was to the ground.

By then, Mr. Bell had been dead for three months. My mother found out a week after he died, two days after he was buried. Except for days of big news like the Our Lady of the Angels fire, we didn’t get a newspaper except on Sunday when it was thick enough, my mother said, to be worth it, and his death notice had run from Wednesday through Friday. Since the beginning of school, I had spent less time with Jimmy Dunmire because he wasn’t in the accelerated classes, which were filled mostly with boys who lived near Mt. Royal Boulevard, boys who’d attended the new grade school that was slung low like the houses they lived in, ranch style with big lawns that never had dandelions. On December 1, the day of the Chicago fire, we started junior high basketball practice, and I felt like I was playing alongside a stranger.

Just before Christmas vacation, Jimmy Dunmire sang with The Coachmen in the school talent show. They took first place, and girls crowded around them in the hall, the four of them in matching chinos and shirts. In Cuba, Fidel Castro was winning a war my science teacher was worried about. “He’s with the Communists, just you wait and see,” he said, “and here he’ll be right next door to us.”

I got a chemistry set for Christmas from my parents. Between Christmas and New Year’s, I made up my own experiments and stunk up the house when I started a small fire. “Don’t you know what you’re doing?” my mother said. “What are they teaching you over there?”

I listened to the radio from noon to six on New Year’s Day to hear the Top One Hundred songs of 1958. I sang “For Your Precious Love” and “Little Star” in my head where I sounded exactly like Jerry Butler and the lead singer of The Elegants. I played air guitar to Duane Eddy and Link Wray. “Rebel Rouser” sounded like the South would rise again; “Rumble” sounded like the world would end in a gang fight. When school began again the following day, I walked out of the locker room after basketball practice with Jimmy Dunmire, making fun of the whiz-kids in my science classes, boys who didn’t even try out for basketball, boys who, even now, couldn’t touch the rim of the eight-foot baskets at our old school playground.

Gary Fincke’s fourth collection of short stories, Sorry I Worried You, which won the 2003 Flannery O’Connor Award for Short Fiction, and Amp’d: A Father’s Backstage Pass, his nonfiction account of his son’s life in two signed rock bands, were both published in 2004.
TRAIN

clippity claps the voices of
far-off children or gravel beneath
screeching rails, the push of bodies
tunnels in and she must have been
remembering her children when the boxcar
pulled out of the grimy soot-filled station
smell of sweat and fear burning
acrid inside the nostrils and the
side-to-side motion of the metal
like being on a Ferris wheel that
won't stop swaying

only a crack of air seeps
through bars near the ceiling,
outside, cows nibbling on their
grass, the farmer with his pitchfork
pitching hay, the sun setting like borscht
over the patchwork farmland
today like any other except for death

pulling on her hair, creeping between
the passages of her throat, the hollow
behind the neck until she could close
her eyes and be swept into the sea
a piece of drifting seaweed
on quiet blue water,
the sweet piercing odor

of gas reminding her of those children
dark-haired creatures born from her
bones, their skin soft as plums
their small hands reaching out
for any kind of comfort.

Claire Drucker
a matter of time
the 2005–2006 theater season

Playwrights are time shapers. A plot has a beginning, a middle, and an end, observed Aristotle. Nothing logically can precede its beginning. That is obvious, or is it? Who decides where the beginning is? Where does the story of Oedipus begin? On the day Apollo's priest came to deliver the word to Laius of Thebes that his son born of Jocasta would murder him? On the occasion of the child's birth? At the dinner in Corinth where the drunk shouts out that the prince is not his parents' natural son? At the junction of the three roads where the young man unknowingly meets his father Laius, or later, outside of Thebes, when he confronts the riddling Sphinx? Sophocles, the great Athenian tragedian, begins with Oedipus' brother-in-law Creon returning from Delphi with the oracle's explanation for the plague wracking Thebes—the city is polluted with unavenged blood and the polluter must be found and forced out.

"In those days," begin the singing story-tellers in Walt Wangerin's The Book of the Dun Cow, and the audience is pulled off, somewhere back in or out of time. In these days, these February days of 2006, Randy Courts and Mark St. Germain's musical made its New York debut. Not exactly Broadway, though the West End Theatre is only a few blocks west in the 'eighties. The Prospect Theater Company, a vivacious young group, performs in half of a neo-Gothic church—the top half! After climbing up and up we entered into the performance space onto a floor which divides the apse into two halves, bottom and top where we watched the play on the night of February 11. It was the night before the fiercest blizzard in the city's history, but the opening song, "A Dream Away," whisked us to a place away from our time, place, and weather.

In those days, "the world was round as it is today," and much was the same except that the animals could speak and sing. In those days, Chauntecleer the rooster ruled his roost of hens and chickens and other barnyard denizens: a weasel named John Wesley, Tick Tock the ant, a Widow Mouse and her children, Lord Russell the fox, a rat, a mosquito, a deer, and the bluesy Mundo Cani dog, Chauntecleer's closest compatriot.

There is order here (a pecking order, if you will), but Chauntecleer rules over so many peculiar subjects that Courts and St. Germain have some difficulty in the early scenes sorting it all out for an audience trying to trace who's who. About midway through the first act, the spine of the play emerges as Chauntecleer takes to wife the beautiful and mysteriously sad Pertelote. Now the barnyard-kingdom has a queen for its king and, soon enough, three prin celerys emerge from their eggs to complete the royal family. It's too perfect to last. The dream turns all too soon into a nightmare.

Just like today, there is Good in Chauntecleer's world, and there is Evil. In those days, Evil was named Wyrm and was imprisoned underground. One day Wyrm sired a son named Cockatrice who would become Chauntecleer's imperial rival. And one day Cockatrice, at the head of an army of serpents called basilisks, marches against Chauntecleer's doughty forces. There is extended armed conflict in which the Good takes heavy losses, Chauntecleer and Cockatrice fight bloody claw to claw, and the lovable Mundo Cani loses his life in a desperate assault on Wyrm. In the end Good triumphs and Evil loses the battle, though, we suspect, not the war.

The seventeen member Prospect Theater company performed with the verve we would expect from a collegiate group. But director Cara Reichel was working with New York actors, many of them members of Actors Equity, and, young as they were, their talent and technique allows us to think that this show might someday satisfy in the way that The Lion King and Beauty and the Beast have. There is wonderful music in this score by Randy Courts including: "A Dream Away" for the open-
ing, “Remember This Day” for the wedding of Pertelote and Chauntecleer, and the animals’ anthem “New Harmony” (a tribute to the New Harmony play nursery, in Indiana, where this musical was hatched). The dancers’ execution of Jessica Hendricks’s vigorous choreography threatened to bring down the house, and did once. It takes nerve to put that much movement into that small a space!

Cramming Walt Wangerin’s universe into this tiny theater was no easy task, but designer Paulo Sexias provided a quite workable multi-leveled set topped by a barn that seemed to twist and fly like Dorothy’s farmhouse and a rotating sphere that marked the turning of the seasons. Even a large cast has trouble covering the many characters in the story and the costumes did not help the actors’ doubling as they needed to. The most strikingly theatrical element was the brilliant use of hand puppets for the baby chicks and mice. These were not Muppets but elegant wire sculptures wound around the fingers and palms of the actors whose skill and imagination transformed the wire into infant animals.

The trio of actors at the center of this fantasy, Brian Munn (Chauntecleer), Vanessa June Marshall (Pertelote), and Micah Bucey (Cockatrice) grabbed and gripped us heart, mind, and strength for much of the evening. On the other hand, while you can give Evil a name like “Wyrn,” it’s very hard to give it a shape and local habitation on stage. The Prospect Theater Company failed to conjure Evil.

Not so sadness. There was a deep, pervasive sadness that night lurking, mysteriously, just beneath even the happiest dancing and singing. Was the sadness more present for those of us who know the end of The Book of the Dun Cow or for those of us who are closer to the end of our lives than to the beginning?

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THERE WAS SADNESS TOO IN A VERY SATISFYING production of David Lindsay-Abaire’s new play Rabbit Hole. Daniel Sullivan directed Cynthia Nixon (Sex and the City) and Broadway vet-

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through ritual. They will finally accept an invitation from their once dear companions to the birthday party of their child, of one of Danny's friends. They will go to a toy store; they will pick out a present for Danny's friend; they will bring the gift home; they will wrap it; they will take the gift to the party; they will come home. And then? Then is too far into the future. Then, they will ritualize their way back through the rabbit hole and towards one another.

LIKE ANY REVIVAL, THE PRODUCTION OF STEPHEN Sondheim's Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street at the Eugene O'Neill recalls the time and circumstances of the original production in 1979. In that year, the team of Harold Prince and Eugene and Fran Lee constructed just about as gigantic a production as a Broadway theater could hold. On stage was a scenic image of the Industrial Revolution as alienating and disturbing as the age itself: grimy, screechy, stifling, its walls constructed of what looked like corrugated metal holding up an iron superstructure. Why did we love it so? Because it was phenomenal. (And because it starred Angela Lansberry and Len Cariou.) Yet, the story actually played out on a little revolving platform no larger than twenty by twenty feet and plopped in the middle of the hulking, rusty factory of a set.

Englishman John Doyle directed and designed the present Sweeney Todd in an acting space not much larger than the revolving platform in the original. Just behind the platform is a ladder of shelves twenty feet high loaded with cultural curios from nineteenth-century London culture. The dominating image on the platform is a black coffin. And therein lies a tale.

As the story goes, Sweeney Todd was an ordinary barber who turns maniacal when his wife is accosted and raped by a predatory judge. He seeks revenge first on the judge and then on the whole world of men by whom he believes he has been wronged. He is aided by a Mrs. Lovett, a penurious maker of meat pies come lately on hard times. The two hatch a plot whereby Todd will pursue his murderous project by grinding and disposing of the corpses, stuffing them into Mrs. Lovett's pies. The partners in crime croon their plans in one of Sondheim's most ingenious songs, "A Little Priest."

In the spirit of the Industrial Revolution, Sweeney invents a machine whereby he will slit his customers' throats as they sit in his barber chair awaiting a shave and a haircut. With a swift adjustment the back of the chair drops to the floor and the customer slides down with a sickening thud through a trap door and into a basement meat chopper. This became the central gesture of the play.

Doyle's production is justly renowned for his elimination of that staple of the Broadway musical, the pit orchestra. The accompaniment is, instead, played from the stage by the actors themselves. The orchestrations have been reduced somewhat, by Sarah Travis, but they are full enough to be effective. The stars of the show, Patti Lupone (Lovett) and Michael Cerveris (Sweeney), play tuba and guitar respectively, and all the actors take up musical instruments at one time or another and play them phenomenally well. (We met one of the actors at the stage door later and asked her whether they had been cast because of their musical ability. "No," she assured us, "most of us played a little before. I played clarinet in high school.")

Doyle has dispatched more than the pit musicians. He's gotten rid of the barber chair. The actors moved very little, and at times the whole thing felt less like Grand Guignol than Gothic cabaret. Doyle's patron saint is Bertolt Brecht and his Sweeney Todd is not so much a revival as a distillation of the original. What we get is the essence of Sondheim and Wheeler's musical. The violence is more purely violent; the malice more purely malicious; the evil is purely, jarringly Evil. This Sweeney Todd is not so much post-Industrial Revolution as he is post-Oklahoma City and Columbine.

Perhaps because of this macabre purity, this show is still beautiful, perhaps more beautiful than its 1979 ancestor. More than a few ecstatic spectators had tears in their eyes as they crashed their hands together in sustained appreciation for the marvelous performers. Yet I wondered how many of them really knew what exactly they were applauding. That big set and those realistic props told a story in 1979 with which this abstract expressionist version dispensed.

And, speaking of applause... about three quarters of the audience actually trudged through twenty or so inches of snow (talk about "The Great White Way") to see the Sunday matinee of John Patrick Shanley's justly lauded Doubt. When they emerged onto the stage, the actors might well have
been startled to see so many determined theater-goers in the seats when they might have expected to have a snow day off. At the end of the performance, the actors applauded the audience, not in a quaint gesture, but in a salute to those of us whose passion for live theater could not be dampened even by the historic winter storm.

In Chicago, it has been a year of noting the passage of time. The Steppenwolf Theatre has been producing plays for thirty years. We were never at their Highland Park church-basement venue of origin in 1976. We caught up with them a couple of years later when their break-out production of Lanford Wilson's Balm in Gilead moved to the Apollo Theater on Lincoln Avenue and their subscription series opened up at the Jane Addams Hull House Center on Broadway near Belmont. We followed them when they moved to a former dairy on Halsted Street and—in a long rectangular room seating 211 people and about the same number of lighting instruments under twelve-foot ceilings—thrilled to the best productions in their history.

In 1991, Steppenwolf moved to its new theater complex, further south on Halsted, where they have become an institution with multiple theater spaces, their own magazine, and their own parking garage! Fortunately, we note on the masthead of their magazine, three members of the original ensemble, Terry Kinney, Jeff Perry, and Gary Sinise, serve on an "Executive Artistic Board" to keep in sight the original vision of the ensemble formed so many years ago. There has been a new artistic team in place for several years now. Martha Lavey has served as artistic director since 1995. With only occasional residencies by ensemble members such as John Malkovich, John Mahoney, and Laurie Metcalf, the acting company has been anchored by Amy Morton and Tracy Letts.

The acting may not be as consistently searing as it was in the 1970s and 1980s, and the intimacy of their earlier spaces is gone, but the most interesting new work in Chicago is still to be found underneath the Steppenwolf marquee. Lavey has provided coveted opportunities for emerging playwrights to develop in the most supportive theatrical circumstances. The work of two of these playwrights, Bruce Norris and Richard Greenberg, are cases in point. Like other productions in New York and Chicago this year, these playwrights have become conscious shapers of time.

Norris fits comfortably into the Steppenwolf tradition. He lands his punches, tragic and ludicrous, with the regularity of a champion boxer. In an epoch of dysfunctional families, it would be hard to imagine a more destructive family than the one Norris has created for The Pain and The Itch. At the center is a nebbish house husband, Clay, under continuing suspicion of sexually abusing his five-year-old daughter, and his philandering wife, Kelly. They are quite wealthy, and their home and furnishings reflect their affluence. Predictably, the action, alternately hilarious and excruciating, is set at the time of a Thanksgiving dinner as the family is about to sit down to turkey dinner with Clay’s meddling mother, his brutish M.D. brother, and the brother’s trophy girlfriend, a drunken Russian floozy.

What makes The Pain and The Itch more interesting than a dramatized version of "The Addams Family," is Norris’s introductory story-telling of a competition among story-tellers reminiscent of Six Characters in Search of an Author. Which of the characters will prevail as the story teller? Whose version of the story will carry the day? At the beginning of the play, a Mr. Hadid, dressed in a white linen suit and speaking with an African accent, sits in the family living room. He has come to inquire about the recent death of his wife, who worked as a domestic employee in Clay and Kelly’s home. Members of the family seek, in turn, to comfort the grieving man, but their consolations are lost in description of their own problems told from their own perspectives. As they speak, their renditions of the corporate story come alive in flashback with Mr. Hadid sitting as a spectator in the middle of them.

There are as many plot lines as there are characters. Norris parcels them out to us in moments, keeping firm control of the pace of revelation until, at the end, the final incredible picture becomes clear. As for the cause of Mrs. Hadid’s death, the
family can barely remember the relatively unimportant incident on that tumultuous Thanksgiving Day. They suspected Mr. Hadid's wife of petty theft; they called the police who detained and kept her from taking a critical dose of medicine, and she died. Hadid wants only an apology, an expression of regret. Sensing his frustration, the family offers him money as if to make up for his loss. But now, no amount will satisfy him.

Bruce Norris alternates scenes from the present and the past in The Pain and the Itch. In Prolepsis, one of two plays Steppenwolf produced under the title A Well-Appointed Room, Richard Greenberg starts his characters on either end of a time continuum and moves them toward a middle where they barely will recognize each other. The play is a meditation on time itself, on our very notions of past, present, and future.

Mark will serve as our story-teller in this charming if conventional love story. He is an accountant and not the romantic type; a girl seeking shelter from a rain storm would be just that. But this girl is Gretchen, that one girl in a million. She is as soulful as he is cerebral—his perfect match. Mark invites us into a story that he promises will have a happy ending.

Mark and Gretchen marry and look for an apartment. They find a well-appointed room with lots of light and a view of the World Trade Center and begin a promising life together. Within a matter of months Gretchen is pregnant and the Twin Towers collapse into piles of rubble within their view. Gretchen feels the pain of 9/11 more deeply than Mark, but she would. Nothing seems out of order except that everything is out of order. Those of us who believe that everything changed on September 11, 2001, recognized the rip in the fabric of Gretchen's grip on reality.

Gretchen becomes more and more distant. All Mark knows is that she takes long walks at night alone. When she is away, Mark's narration ceases, to be resumed only when she returns. One rainy night we observe Gretchen's meeting with a bar-fly, a grisly former "arts journalist" with a very dark view of the future. His predictions unsettle Gretchen, and she returns to the apartment with a bad case of prolepsis, the title of the play; that is, the assumption of a future development as if it had already happened.

Gretchen's consciousness is now informed by the events of her entire life, including the future death of their son in the flower of young manhood. It will be a devastating loss for both of them. But, even more devastating is that the one-time couple will become two individuals living their lives in different directions. While his wife lives out of the future, Mark lives each day into the future. Gretchen is appalled by Mark's open-armed embrace of each new day; Mark is hopeful that what he perceives as Gretchen's insanity will pass, perhaps when the baby is born. Remember, he promised us a happy ending, and he's sticking to it. Gretchen returns to the stage sobbing, looking at the new-born in her arms as if the child is already dead. Mark protests that her tears are tears of joy. We think we know differently.

Across town, the Goodman Theatre has been mounting the first major retrospective of stage works by David Mamet, who wrote the majority of his plays for premieres in Chicago theaters in the 1970s and 1980s. The Goodman Festival bookended one of Mamet's latest works for the stage, Romance (2005), with one of the earliest, A Life in the Theatre (1977). In between have been three evenings of one-acts.

A Life in the Theatre opened in Chicago at the Goodman's tiny bricked-walled Stage Two across the lobby from the main stage. Downstage were a couple of chairs and a makeup table. Upstage was a curtain. When the actors John and Robert performed for an audience, the upstage curtains were drawn and the actors faced away from the audience. For the offstage scenes, the actors played downstage toward the actual paying customers. It was an elegantly simple solution allowing the actors to command the stage.

In the new Albert Theatre at the Goodman Theatre complex at the corner of Dearborn and Randolph, the two actors are dwarfed by towering rigging and lighting battens suggesting the stage of a huge Broadway touring house like the Cadillac Palace just down Randolph from the Goodman. The play itself is about the trajectory of two actors' lives, one a generation older than the other. On stage, they play a series of scenes from plays of many genres: a war play, a costume drama, a doctor play, a lawyer play, a melodrama, a comedy.
Offstage, they live out the phases of their dynamic relationship: mentor-protégé, rising star-falling star, wooer-wooed, dinner companions, confidantes, critics, but never quite friends. The actors here, David Darlow and Matt Schwader, direct us to countless insights into the triangle that includes Robert, John, and the Theatre. It is a hilarious, poignant, and tragic evening.

In the published version of A Life in the Theatre, David Mamet quotes Rudyard Kipling on actors, from “Epitaphs of the War 1914–18”:

We counterfeited once for your disport
Men's joy and sorrow: but our day has passed.
We pray you pardon all where we fell short
Seeing we were your servants to this last.

Darlow and Schwader find and communicate an extraordinary amount of men's joy and sorrow, and we feel genuine sadness that their day has passed.

As we drove Columbus Avenue toward the Near North Side on a recent evening, we looked to our left to see that the old Goodman Theatre had been completely leveled to make room for a new wing of the Art Institute. The old theater debuted in 1925. We had seen a good many wonderful plays there, too many to list here. It boasted the last remaining half-spherical plaster cyclorama. But its day had passed. And, the theater pulls us ever into the future with its eye on the next production rather than the last.

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OWNERSHIP

For Jack Leax

Sitting by the window, she watches
    a chipping-sparrow nag a seed from the feeder.
Her hand wants to touch its feathers, feel it flicker,

making brown trouble in the old routine of green.
    When it flies away, how easily it carries
the sky on its back. She'd love to give it to her husband.

This is for us, she would write on the card,
    and hang its cage in the kitchen. Lately her body,
she notices, wants to own everything,

to be everywhere at once. But even a window
    has an inside and an outside.
Her body always here, the sparrow always there,

wearing its own brown shirt,
    little machine for joy, what she can never
count on, what's present every morning.

Jeanne Murray Walker
I had a friend in college who believed the King Kong tale to be as psychologically profound as two myths appropriated by Freudians: Narcissus loving his reflection and Oedipus marrying his mother. My friend was especially enamored of the 1976 remake of the 1933 King Kong film because it added a reciprocal attraction between the seductive blonde actress and the big hairy beast.

I lost touch with this friend for several reasons—not least of which was her obsession with bellicose hairy men—but I have several times wondered what she thought of the most recent redaction of King Kong. Though Peter Jackson's three-hour film maintains the mutual attraction between the ape and Ann Darrow (played by Fay Wray in 1933, Jessica Lange in 1976, and Naomi Watts in 2005), it radically redefines how beauty killed the beast.

Jackson's film lavishly and lovingly quotes the 1933 King Kong—both visually and verbally. As in his Lord of the Rings trilogy, Jackson's attention to detail is stunning. The difference, of course, is that his source text for the Tolkien trilogy was itself a work of extraordinary artistry, whereas the source for King Kong was a film that had no pretense of being anything other than a B-movie thriller. For those who avidly avoid B-movies, the mythic plot goes something like this:

A film director named Carl Denham hires a ship to take his crew to an isolated South Seas island in order to get some extravagant footage. On the island, native savages capture Ann, Denham's fledgling actress, offering her as an appeasing sacrifice to a twenty-five foot gorilla on the other side of a huge man-made wall. In order to rescue Ann, both ship crew and film crew leave their boat, the S. S. Venture, to venture beyond the wall. There they do battle with primeval creatures until Ann's love interest, Jack Driscoll, steals the actress away from Kong, who has developed affection for his screaming plaything. After great daring-do (and multiple deaths), the men subdue the giant ape and ship it to New York to put on display as "The Eighth Wonder of the World." Shackled to a Manhattan theater stage, King Kong breaks his chains when flashbulb-popping cameras anger him. Ravaging Manhattan until he finds Ann, the huge creature then escapes to the top of the Empire State Building with her in toe—quite literally. On top of the skyscraper he swats at biplanes reminiscent of flying pterodactyls he had battled from the apex of his island lair. When bullets finally bring him down, the film ends with the famous line, "It wasn't the airplanes; it was beauty killed the beast."

Following this plot closely, duplicating word for word the closing line, Jackson spectacularizes the art-deco Depression-era settings that the 1933 film took for granted. However, while the original film begins dockside, with preparations for the voyage, Jackson begins with a close-up of a monkey, pulling back the camera to reveal that the animal sits behind bars in the New York City Zoo. On the soundtrack we hear a rendition of "Sitting on Top of the World" as the camera next pans through a Central Park shanty-town and on to a soup kitchen. The song, of course, wryly comments on conditions in the 1930s. But its juxtaposition with the monkey in the zoo also prepares us for the famous final scene, when King Kong sits on top of the highest building in the 1933 world. Unlike the 1976 film, then, which placed King Kong's final scene atop one of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center (ironically enough), Jackson returns us not only to the 1930s but also to the art deco of the Empire State Building for the ape's chest-pounding defiance of human interests.
Jackson, himself, seems to have developed the film in chest-pounding defiance of human interests. Failing to get financial backing for the project until his Lord of the Rings tour-de-force opened up Hollywood coffers, he spent much of his own money to finish the film, as obsessed with keeping the project alive as King Kong is with keeping Ann alive. Perhaps not coincidentally, Jackson adds a scene to his remake in which the filmmaker, Carl Denham, is ostracized by financial backers who want to pull the plug on his current project. Hence, it is Denham's obsession with getting his film made that drives much of the plot.

In addition to getting Ann on board the ship, literary art inflects the film through another significant change to the original script: Jackson adds a young sailor, Jimmy, who is reading Joseph Conrad's famous 1901 novella, The Heart of Darkness. As part of a steamer crew, Jimmy identifies with Conrad's narrator, Marlow, who mans a steamer bound for uncharted territory. Later, however, Jimmy asks his mentor, First Mate Hays, "Why does Marlow keep going up the river? Why doesn't he turn back?" And Hays replies, "There's a part of him that wants to, Jimmy: a part deep inside himself that sounds a warning. But there's another part that needs to know, to defeat the thing that makes him afraid." Conrad's Marlow describes this impulse as "the fascination of the abomination"—the ambiguity of which might summarize the King Kong myth. For not only does the Kong abomination become fascinated with Ann Darrow (as in the 1933 film),—but she becomes fascinated with Kong (as added in the 1976 film).

Significantly, after Kong absconds with Ann, Hays in a voice-over quotes from The Heart of Darkness as he and Jimmy join the search party: "We cannot understand because we were too far and could not remember because we were traveling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone." Jackson, through Hays, brings these words to bear on King Kong's island, where the
presence of dinosaurs and other primeval creatures gestures toward the “first ages” of evolution. Indeed, in the Conrad paragraph from which Hays quotes, Marlow makes a statement that could describe the island in all three King Kong films: “We were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet.” Jackson, however, has Hays quote a statement from Conrad’s next paragraph, because it better resonates with Kong, free and monstrous King of his island: “We are accustomed to look on the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there—you could look at a thing monstrous and free.” These words, of course, adumbrate the moment when King Kong will be shackled to a theater stage, a conquered monster put on display, like the caged monkey in the film’s opening shot.

Not long after Hays quotes Conrad, Jimmy looks up from his Heart of Darkness volume and says, “It’s not an adventure story, is it Mr. Hays?” This is perhaps Jackson’s biggest clue to us. His remake of the King Kong tale is not merely an adventure story. It is about the power beauty can have over the beastly; it is about the light that dawns in the heart of darkness. In the 1933 King Kong, of course, the power of beauty is equated with a highly sexualized blonde bimbo. Indeed, in a scene that was cut when the film was re-released in 1938 (after the Hays Code went into affect in 1934), the fascinated Kong pulls off Ann’s outer garments, fiddles with her body, and then smells his fingers.

Jackson not only eliminates blatant sexual implications, he entirely reinterprets the fascination of the abomination. After Kong absconds with Ann to his mountain lair, he attempts to intimidate her with ferocious, toothy howls. While the 1933 Ann is duly intimidated, spending most of her time with Kong either fainting or screaming, the 2005 Ann does vaudeville tricks once she notices that Kong is fascinated when she accidentally trips. She falls down and jumps back up, does cartwheels and flips, juggles rocks, walks like an Egyptian and Charlie Chaplain. The beast laughs, fascinated not with her sexuality but with her craft—as though in allusion to William Congreve’s famous lines, “Music has charms to soothe a savage breast, / To soften rocks, or bend a knotted oak.” When Ann stops performing, Kong pushes her over and trips her, laughing as heartily as the human audiences who had watched her vaudeville pratfalls earlier in the film. When the exhausted Ann yells, “No! That’s all there is! There isn’t anymore!” Kong has a temper tantrum, throwing rocks and knotted oaks off the mountainside, then sulks away after a loose stone conks him on the head. Jackson quite clearly shows that the abomination finds Ann’s art more fascinating than her sex.

Ann takes advantage of Kong’s sulking to run away, but subsequent attacks by multiple forms and sizes of creepy primeval monsters send her back to the protection of the ape. However, after once again carrying Ann to the apex of his mountain lair, Kong now becomes entranced by a beauty significantly greater than her craft. He ignores Ann, even when she juggles, in order to watch the sun shedding garments of red and orange as it sinks into the ocean’s bed. When Ann witnesses the power that a setting sun has over Kong, she repeats “It’s beautiful” while patting her heart with her hand. The creature taps his own savage breast while wistfully watching an azure sea extinguish a heart of brightness.

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Jackson’s Ann thus joins the beast as audience to the sun’s performance. Rather than an object of the male/ape gaze, she is an empowered subject of the gaze, collaborating in a love of beauty—as she had earlier done with the playwright. Jackson, in fact, establishes an explicit parallel between King Kong and Jack Driscoll. Just as Kong and Ann establish mutual empathy through the beauty of a sunset, the mutual attraction between the playwright and the actress begins against the backdrop of a sunset. Furthermore, Kong and Driscoll, the only two in the film able to rescue Ann from certain death, are similarly imprisoned by the self-serving interests of Carl Denham, who tricks them both onto his hired boat: Driscoll forced away from the New York theater scene, Kong forced away from his lovely island scenes. Significantly, by the time Driscoll had discovered Denham’s ruse, all the sleeping quarters aboard ship were taken. He therefore has to set up shop in a huge animal cage in the hold. Jackson frames several shots so that we see Driscoll typing away through the
bars of his cage, once with a sign in the shot, adjacent to his head, reading “Live Animals Inside.” Thus, just as Kong taps at his black chest to signify “beauty” to Ann, Driscoll taps out signifiers in black ink to create beauty with words, the gestures of both “animals” charming the young actress.

Jackson solidifies the parallel between man and beast through Jimmy, who values the beauty of The Heart of Darkness. The first time we see Jimmy on screen, he tries to steal, significantly enough, the writer’s pen after having brought food to his cage. Hays, who catches Jimmy in the act, explains to Driscoll that the young sailor enjoys hanging out around the cages: “That’s where I found him, stowed away, . . . arm broken in two places. He was wilder than half the animals in here.” It is as though Jimmy represents an evolutionary stage between the ape and the playwright, his evolution reflected and abetted by his love of literature. Jackson even connects Jimmy to Ann. In one quick scene on the deck of the ship, we see Ann teaching Jimmy to dance—against the backdrop of a sunset.

Jackson sustains the parallel between the ape and the playwright after the return to New York. Shots cut back and forth between two theaters: a huge and luxuriant space in which Kong is chained before an elegant throng, and an intimate off-Broadway venue where Driscoll’s words are staged before a small audience. In both, an actress plays Ann’s part. On the Kong stage, a blonde woman pretends to be Ann responding to the ape’s gestures; on the Driscoll stage, a blonde woman speaks lines the playwright imagines Ann to have thought in response to him. The pseudo-Anns cause despair in ape and man, Kong trying to break free from his production and Driscoll running from his production. Looking for the real Ann (as is Kong), Driscoll enters Denham’s theater, where the camera does several shot/reverse shot close-ups on the faces of the playwright and the ape, their disgust with the extravaganza expressed through their similarly sorrowful eyes. When Driscoll asks someone about Ann, he hears that the producers “offered her all kind of money” to perform in the Kong show, but that “she turned them down flat.” The shot then cuts to a small theater to deliver one of the most lyrical scenes in the film: Ann gracefully dances in the background with thirteen other ballerinas while a man soulfully sings “Bye, Bye, Blackbird.” We see that she has chosen to participate in beauty rather than to make money.

This scene toward the end of the film echoes one near its start, when Ann refuses the opportunity to make money in an exploitative girly-show. Denham, in contrast, puts Kong in the prime version of an exploitative girly-show—as an extremely hairy object of the gaze. His disgusted assistant satirically tells Driscoll that Denham “was right—about there still being some mystery in the world. And we can all have a piece of it—for the price of an admission ticket.” With Kong shackled in the background, Jackson implies that, when money is the primary motivator, the mystery of beauty is shackled.

After Kong breaks his chains, he ravages Manhattan looking for Ann. Unlike the 1933 film, Ann soothes the savage beast by walking up and offering herself to him. However, unlike the 1976 film, incipient eroticism is undermined by another lyrical scene. Kong, with Anne in hand, accidentally slips on a frozen pond in Central Park and then turns around for more. Ann laughs with glee as Kong slides and twirls on ice that glistens with the reflection of surrounding Christmas lights.

When the beautiful moment—and the ice—is broken by a mortar shell, Kong leaps and swings his way to the Empire State Building where he makes his iconic climb. Near the top, however, he
stops when he notices an incipient sun rising over the waters surrounding Manhattan. Kong sits down, forgetful not only of the army chasing him, but also of Ann, who so wants to participate in his reverie that she yells up to him “Beautiful!” tapping her breast. Not wanting to give up on one moment of beauty, Kong keeps his eyes on the russet colored skies, and taps his breast in reply.

At this moment, gun-toting biplanes rip through the russet-mantled dawn, and Kong’s savage yells return. After having been pierced with beauty only moments before, Kong climbs to the apex of the building where he loses his balance after bullets pierce his heart. As his body falls in slow motion to the street below, a soft requiem accompanies his descent. At the bottom, Denham pushes through a crowd in order to deliver the well-known closing statement: “It wasn’t the airplanes; it was beauty killed the beast.” But by now we realize that Jackson’s film functions as a midrash on the famous line, implying that, just as music soothes the savage breast, beauty kills the beast in us all. Whether directed at a setting sun or a rising playwright, appreciation for art signals the evolution from animal savagery to human nobility.

As Driscoll rises to the apex of the Empire State Building at the end of the film, where he takes the place of Kong in Ann’s embrace, Peter Jackson gives us a visualization of words written by Joseph Conrad nearly a century earlier: “The artist appeals to that part of our being which is not dependent on wisdom; to that in us which is a gift and not an acquisition—and, therefore, more permanently enduring. He speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty, and pain.”

Even though Peter Jackson’s King Kong is far from great art, it nevertheless reminds us that film, when in the hands of those who value beauty over money, can speak to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty, and pain.

Tap your heart if you agree.

Crystal Downing is Associate Professor of English and Film Studies at Messiah College.
music in our time

life with Mozart

Linda Ferguson

SOME YEARS AGO THE NEW YORKER RAN A MICK Stevens cartoon of a desolate landscape with flat ground and a dark foreboding sky. An old tire, a broken pencil, and an empty bottle appeared in the foreground. The caption was: “Life Without Mozart.” This past January 27—Mozart’s 250th birthday—musical people all over the world, including at Valparaiso University’s Duesenberg Recital Hall, gathered to celebrate the fact that for the past quarter millennium, we have not had to settle for “Life Without Mozart.” We gathered, not because we thought the honoree himself would show up, but rather to remind ourselves that he has been here all along...that in studying, performing, and comprehending his works, we have made Mozart part of our lives.

The Valparaiso celebration was modest but exuberant, and, to the amazement of the organizers, extremely well attended (the overflow crowd unexpectedly included numerous families with small children). And when the faculty performers concluded their selections of string, piano, and vocal works, the audience performed a spontaneous “Happy Birthday” song in the lobby as the cake was cut.

The child prodigy from Salzburg was born on January 27, 1756. Salzburg was at that time a small independent state under the rule of a prince-archbishop and known for its progressive, enlightened environment. Mozart’s father, Leopold, had come to Salzburg in 1737 to study at the University, then noted as a center of modern philosophic and scientific discourse. Although Leopold showed excellent promise, he was expelled after two years for poor academic progress. Within a few years he established himself instead as a chamber musician in the orchestra of the Archbishop. Thus assured of a steady income at age twenty-eight, he married twenty-seven-year-old Anna Maria Pertl in the cathedral. By contemporary accounts, they were the handsomest couple in Salzburg. Anna Maria bore seven children of whom only two survived: Maria Anna and Wolfgang Gottlieb. Both were musical prodigies.

Aged thirty-seven and thirty-six at the time of his birth, Wolfgang’s parents already had lived longer than he himself would. The little genius from Salzburg remains in our collective thoughts as ever youthful, since his life ended at thirty-five, at the end of the year 1791. Even his marker in St. Marx Cemetery in Vienna, a broken Grecian column and a weeping cherub, suggests a youthful life broken too soon.

Mozart’s life span is fully contained in the second half of the eighteenth century, an enlightened time, and he spent the last ten of his years in Vienna, that most enlightened of cities. At the time of Mozart’s birth, Johann Sebastian Bach was dead six years, George Frederick Handel was a very old man, and Franz Joseph Haydn at twenty-four already was establishing his career in Vienna. In the year of Mozart’s birth, the American Revolution was still thirty years away, the Seven Years War was about to commence, and Frederick II of Prussia would soon invade Saxony.

Mozart established for generations of pianists what solo piano music could and should be. His lifetime corresponds with important developments in the technology of the piano. Not only was he the first virtuoso pianist in concert life, but he developed and displayed his virtuosity on instruments that were far from reliable and consis-
tent. And his genius was not limited to the piano. Mozart's multiple talents, first as a performing toddler prodigy, and then as a youthful composer, proved so diverse that he is regarded, in the terms of the New Grove's Dictionary of Music, as "the most universal composer in the history of Western music." His excellence in every musical genre of his time sets him apart from the other masters we typically regard as "great." His compositional output is too extensive to summarize simply, and his expressive gifts too great to generalize in brief description. Yet it is fair to say that in three areas his short life exerted lasting influence: first, in writing for strings, both chamber and orchestral; second, in writing for the pianoforte, especially in composition of a large body of concerti; and finally, in his stage works which established the first real enduring opera repertoire.

In the great Mozart cities—Salzburg, Prague, and, especially, Vienna—the birthday celebrations have been scheduled to last the full year. In Vienna, Weiner Mozartjahr 2006 occupies an information and ticket center right outside the State Opera, which has presented more than 2,250 performances of Mozart operas since it opened in 1869 with Don Giovanni. But all of Vienna's distinguished opera venues, including the Volksoper Wien and Theater an der Wien, have joined in a cooperative festival presenting the full inventory of his stage works. All of his sacred choral works are also being performed in Vienna in 2006—some in concert and others in the context of worship—in more than thirty churches throughout the city. In the coming summer months, open air "spontaneous" unannounced concerts of chamber music are planned at key gathering points throughout the city. Newly authored stage works on the subject of Mozart, as well as new conceptions of Mozart's own works, fill the halls and the calendars. The souvenir shops inside the Ringstrasse are renamed "Mostly Mozart" shops and the customary souvenirs, such as the ubiquitous Mozart chocolates, have been joined by commemorative Mozart mugs, scarves, hats, shirts, tote bags, and key rings. Large posters in the subways exhort us to give Mozart a call. His number seems to be +43-5-1756-0, which apparently produces an audio commentary and musical selection when dialed from a mobile phone at one of the designated fifty historic points of interest.

And so it was a privilege, even without cell phone capability for accessing Mozart, to spend some days in Vienna in this festive year. Of particular appeal was the offering of the opera seria, Lucio Silla, dating from Mozart's seventeenth year, performed at Theater an der Wien. This theater, named for a river which no longer flows there, was built under the direction of Mozart's collaborator and friend Emanuel Schikaneder. It opened in 1801, so Mozart himself never worked in this house, but other notables did, including Beethoven, Schubert, and Johann Strauss. When the State Opera house was bombed in World War II, performances continued by that company in residence at Theater an der Wien. With the reopening of the main Staatsoper house in 1955, the Theater an der Wien faded into decline and was considered for demolition, but was reclaimed more recently for production of touring musical shows. In Mozartjahr 2006, it has been co-opted for opera performances once again.

Lucio Silla, a dramma per musica in three acts, was composed by the youthful Mozart for Count Firmian of Milan, likely with the hope of extended employment there. It followed the standard conventions of earlier eighteenth-century Italian serious opera, with extreme contrasts for dramatic effect, formulaic recitative-aria pairs with emphasis on the soloists, and plots revolving around the moral implications of the characters' actions rather than the actions themselves. It had a problematic early history: a flawed libretto that was revised late, requiring much music to be rewritten; an ailing leading man who had to be replaced on short notice; a complicated schedule of obligatory appearances for Mozart, occupying hours of needed rehearsal time; and an uneven and unruly roster of principle singers. At its first performance on 26 December 1772, the late arrival of a distinguished audience member and patron, the Archduke Ferdinand, meant that the 5:00 p.m. opening curtain was held until 8:00 p.m. Further, each of the acts was followed by a complete ballet, meaning that the entire entertainment lasted until 2:00 a.m., with many guests in an overheated hall standing for the entire duration. Subsequent performances that season in Milan fared much better.

In Vienna in 2006, the theater was again overheated, but no other historic problems seemed in
evidence. It was the last night of the run, and no one was holding back anything for later. In the pit Nicholas Harnoncourt conducted Concentus Musicus Wien performing historically correct instruments in historically authentic style. On the stage, a youthful cast of astonishingly skilled, attractive, and athletic singers, led by Canadian tenor Michael Schade in the title role, sang in historically authentic style, while the design and staging indicated something contemporary or futuristic. The setting in ancient Rome was suggested not by togas—the dress was vaguely modern-day—but rather by a stylized Coliseum set, which (mostly) contained the action. Schade’s Lucio was not so much the haughty, volatile tyrant of a noble empire but more the haughty, volatile tyrant of a street gang headquartered somewhere in the Roman underground. The male characters with soprano voice ranges (i.e. castrato roles) were sung, and at some points danced, persuasively by females. Lucio’s self-destructive impulses took multiple forms, including cutting with razors and handling hot coals. At times, Schade dared the audience to worry about him as he leapt from edge to edge across the set. With so much intensity, so much fine singing and playing, and so much visual interest, four hours seemed to fly by, despite the eighteen da capo arias.

The historical Lucio, portrayed in the writings of Plutarch as scheming, exhibitionist, and bloodthirsty, was depicted by the librettist Gamerra as also capable of generous and enlightened action, although the script leaves his true motivations obscure. Indeed, the historical Lucio apparently did, after a lifetime of greed, slaughter, and amorous excess, suddenly step away from his dictatorship and declare free elections. In the Mozartjahr 2006 production, even this enlightened conclusion becomes somewhat ambiguous when the central character reenters upstage with a menacing look over rejoicing reunited lovers just as the curtain falls.

Mozart’s last opera, La Clemenza di Tito, composed for the coronation of Emperor Leopold II in 1791 in Prague, was also an Italian opera seria that praised the right actions of a powerful tyrant, in this case a decision based on a prudential act of mercy rather than on the letter of the law. Clemenza, based on a libretto by the far more skilled poet Metasasio (who had actually critiqued and assisted Gamerra in the Lucio Silla script), is the work of an older—but not old—artist. The two works both suggest simultaneous goals of currying favor with powerful patrons while at the same time instructing and advising them in moral terms. Nicholas Till’s book Mozart and the Enlightenment describes Mozart as “the only member of the Viennese Aufklärung able to see beyond the Enlightenment’s limiting polarities to a more profound understanding of the spiritual as well as the social needs of humanity... No artist has been more acutely aware of the deeply unsettling nature of... [social] transition than Mozart...And no art has met modern humanity’s longing for wholeness and reconciliation as has Mozart’s music.”

If life without Mozart is a desolate landscape, what is life with Mozart? It is life with a vision of an eternally youthful spirit, of virtue, of clarity, of enlightenment: all the elements we hear in the Viennese musical style we have come to call “Classical.” Life with Mozart admits the possibility of tyrants transformed into humane forces in society. Because we live life with Mozart, we can share in the Enlightenment faith in a just universe; we know how order can prevail over chaos, for we saw it in Don Giovanni; we know how repentance and forgiveness can repair relationships and society itself, as we heard it in Marriage of Figaro; and we know how we can move from confusion and deception into the light of spiritual and moral truth, for we learned it in Magic Flute. Happy Two Hundred Fiftieth Birthday, Wolfgang, and many more. ♫

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I'M SURE SOMEONE ELSE MUST HAVE NOTICED THIS, but it is more than a little bit interesting that modern scholarship coincides with the spread of coffee addiction.

It all began in Oxford, and strangely enough, in the Oxford of today things seem to be returning to their previous mode, circa 1652. In the four years I spent living in Oxford, England, the coffee shop market went through a boom, a bust, a consolidation, and a re-entrenchment... the entire business cycle, so far as I understand the business cycle, which I won't pretend to do for more than a few seconds. In 1999, on my arrival, there was just one coffee shop, and that had opened up as recently as 1998.

Soon they were everywhere. Central Oxford is a very compact place, and soon—that would be by 2000—you could not find a view in central Oxford that did not have some chain coffee shop squeezing into the frame. That is not mere hyperbole, I assure you, but a calm statement of the facts.

Americans visiting for some romantic Anglophiliac experience found this very disheartening, even before Starbucks moved in and opened up two shops just around the corner from one another (both of which, by the way, are always very full of students). They wanted to find a tweedy, sedate, tea-drinking populace. Instead they found a fleece-clad, fast walking, coffee-swilling town. All very disturbing, to be sure, for people who have seen Shadowlands fourteen times running.

I'm not certain that Oxford is at all typical in this regard. A lot of strange things happen within the ring road around the City of Dreaming Spires that don't happen anywhere else in Britain, and coffee consumption is one of them. But, and here is more or less where I started, in its passion for coffee and millennial gusto for coffee shops, Oxford is reverting to form.

Al Zambone

For it was in Oxford, believe it or not, that the first recorded coffee shop in England was opened in 1649—by an Armenian Monophysite, if you can believe it. In a few years there were some twenty shops in Oxford, patronized by Dons and students alike. Anthony Wood, a crabby antiquarian and Fellow of Merton College, was appalled. His Paradise-Fall cycle of Oxford's history began with a loving memory of how, once upon a time there was learning in the University. Then came the coffeehouses, drawing the custom of the scholars, becoming the showcases of their febrile wit; while sound scholarship—done undoubtedly in solitude within a cold, dark study, just as Mr. Wood worked—suffered.

Wood was right. The kind of study that he associated with scholarship did suffer with exposure to coffee shops. But there was a new kind of scholarship that flourished with the internal application of caffeine, and that was the new natural philosophy. At Oxford its devotees, under the leadership and paternal influence of John Wilkins, the head of Wadham College, referred to themselves as the “Oxford Coffee Club.” When the company included Wilkins, Robert Boyle, Robert Hooke, and Christopher Wren, the conversation probably didn't need piped-in oldies to cover up the quiet moments.

A few years after its founding, the Oxford Coffee Club departed for London, where it was reconstituted with new members and (most importantly) wealthy and powerful patrons as the Royal Society. Yet the association of learning with the coffeehouse continued. Indeed, coffeehouses were often referred to (with a little of the same derisiveness that Anthony Wood felt) as “penny universities.” Indeed, at a time when there were by royal law only two possible universities, the coffeehouses—along with the academies run by clerics of dissenting Protestant denominations—were really the only possible
institutions for intellectual association other than the home.

This is territory rather comprehensively covered by the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas in his *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, a title that could win the Guinness Book of World Records title for “most-cited book in humanities essays.” Whether we’ve read it is of course another story, but it is worth noting that at the heart of such an influential study is consideration of a cultural shift brought about by the craving for coffee.

That aside, the coffee house is remarkable for its role as institutional midwife to periodical literature. The coffeehouse could glory in its title of “penny university” not only because of the variety of conversation found there but also due to the variety of pamphlets and other publications that coffeehouse owners were careful to stock. The influence that pamphleteers could have was greatly magnified by the institution of the coffeehouse, so much so that pamphleteers, never the most reliable of men or women, began to publish periodically, assured of a market for their “news-sheets.”

All in all, it is a pretty impressive record that the seventeenth century coffeehouse accumulated. But that leads again to the question, why do scholars find it so necessary to be buzzed? The conventional wisdom would be that they need to stay up late, but this is of course nonsense. Scholars seem to enjoy drinking coffee at any time of the day. A college freshman might become addicted to caffeine by the need to do double all-nighters, but the medicinal urges of a senior scholar with a husband and three kids seems to be as intense at three in the afternoon as the freshman’s is at three in the morning.

I remember some years back when a particularly innovative entrepreneur came out with a brand of bottled water that had caffeine added to it. This fellow apparently didn’t like the taste of coffee but wanted to get his jolt nevertheless. The end of the story is, I guess, predictable: a bunch of graduate students in the sciences at some research university started to make their lab coffee with the caffeinated water.

Surely the Oxford Coffee Club would have been proud; perhaps even envious.

Al Zambone lives deep in the heart of Virginia.

E. L. Doctorow’s *The March* recounts the climactic episodes of the Civil War as it follows General William Tecumseh Sherman’s infamous invasion of Georgia and the Carolinas. From just after the fall of Atlanta in September 1864 to the final surrender of Joe Johnston in North Carolina in April 1865, we travel with a diverse cast of characters. “It became apparent,” Doctorow narrates, “that not merely an army was on the move but an uprooted civilization” (239). As Sherman’s army marches, first across Georgia, and then across the Carolinas, it picks up former slaves seeking freedom, former slave owners who have lost everything, Confederate turncoats and spies, and a host of others: a German-born surgeon, a Southern judge’s daughter, a white Northern photographer and his African-American assistant, to mention but a few. The plot and point of view jump rapidly among these figures, each trying to understand their new reality.

Doctorow gives us a set of stories depicting the interior dimensions of this grand drama and does so with great fluidity and ease. By the end, we come to care about a great many of the people we meet, even though Doctorow never allows us to linger too long with any one of them. Alongside these more intimate portraits, Doctorow tells a larger story about the war itself and about what it has meant to the generations of Americans since its conclusion. Doctorow’s larger story is about language and memory. He cleverly plays with the conventions of historical fiction, especially that specialized and much-loved subgenre, Civil War military fiction. The novel is Doctorow’s rumination on the craft of memory making, a topic of great current interest in cultural studies. Towards the end of *The March*, Doctorow writes of a meeting between Sherman and Confederate General Joe Johnston. Lincoln is dead, Lee has surrendered at Appomattox, and now Sherman and Johnston are deciding the terms of surrender for the final Confederate army in the field. Sherman muses: “And so the war had come down to words. It was fought now in terminology across a table. It was contested in sentences. . . . No cannonball or canister but has become the language here spoken, the words written down. . . . Language is war by other means” (348).

Historian David Blight, in *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (2001), echoes Doctorow’s Sherman, noting, “Americans have had to work through the meaning of their Civil War in its rightful place—in the politics of memory. And as long as we have a politics of race in America, we will have a politics of Civil War memory” (4). So what kind of intervention is *The March* in our cultural memory? What does Doctorow’s Civil War look like? The title, *The March*, brings to mind the historical novels most beloved by historical-fiction “buffs”—books like Michael Shaara’s *The Killer Angels*, a novel about the battle of Gettysburg replete with battlefield maps—but in its focus on the moral and psychological consequences of the war for individual lives, Doctorow’s book stands more closely in the tradition of *Gone with the Wind*.

The war Doctorow gives us, his main contribution to memory making, is fiercely unsentimental. If the book leaves one final, lasting impression, it is the confirmation of Sherman’s famous aphorisms: war is hell, war is cruelty. We do encounter occasional moments of eloquence, of love, of sorrow, but no rapturous testimonials to the grand causes of Union or Emancipation. *The March* instead shows us, overwhelmingly, war as stench, as mud, as severed limbs and rotting corpses. In Fayetteville, North Carolina, Doctorow recounts, as Sherman’s army is leaving: “[T]here was a terrible smell. People in the streets had
handkerchiefs wrapped around their faces... because horses and mules were everywhere lying dead on the grassy banks of the river” (267). In Columbia, South Carolina, Sherman walks anonymously among his men as they ransack the town. At first shocked at what he calls “the moral dismantlement of his army,” Sherman soon explains away their debauchery: “He had sworn to wreak terror, hadn't he? His orders were being followed. All these riotous, drunken arsonists, these rapers and looters... what were they but men who needed a night of freedom from this South-made war that had disrupted their lives and threatened still to take them?” (185). The surgeon Wede Sartorius displays the same lack of sentiment on a more intimate scale. “If there was any compensation for the barbarity of war,” Sartorius reflects, “it was an enriched practice. The plethora of casualties accelerated the rate of learning” (272). Such is Doctorow's war, a war of cold calculus, free of romance or glory.

In addition to providing these small portraits of war's savagery, debasement, and—sparingly—transcendent humanity, Doctorow's book intervenes directly in the politics of memory by subverting many of the cherished myths of the war. He challenges Southern apologists’ Lost Cause memory with great deftness. The book contains no rants about the inhumanity of slavery, no political harangues about racism. Set, as it is, in 1864 and 1865, the novel avoids controversy over the cause of the war. Doctorow does not weigh in on state’s rights, federal tyranny, or the Slave Power Conspiracy. He refuses to allow even Sherman, instrument of all this destruction, to reflect upon any larger significance. Once he has received Johnston's surrender, Sherman seems lost. Victory was his end, it seems, nothing more: “now, as the march dissolves, so does the meaning,” Sherman muses, “and the terrain thereby left blank... ineffable, a thing once again... completely insensible and without any purpose of its own” (359).

Yet, in spite of the matter-of-fact portrayals of brutality, and in spite of these soliloquies on the meaninglessness of it all, Doctorow does take stands. When Stephen Walsh, an Irishman from New York, and Pearl, a light-skinned runaway slave, first meet, Doctorow offers his most overt passage of social criticism. Walsh is a patient in the care of Dr. Sartorius, and Pearl his nurse. Once Stephen realizes that she is a “white Negro,” he imagines the racial future if the Confederacy should win the war: “In this strange country down here, after generations of its hideous ways, slaves were no longer simply black, they were
degrees of white. Yes, he thought, if the South were to prevail, theoretically there could be a time when whiteness alone would not guarantee the identity of a free man" (188). As their romance progresses, Stephen and Pearl approach the question of their future together in the North, and the matter of her living as a white person. If she wants to live black and free, Stephen cautions, "You will have to let the world catch up to you" (362). When Pearl asks how long that might take, Stephen pre­ciently replies, on the last page of the novel, "It may take some time" (363). His grim answer invokes the decades of racial suffering to come in the wake of the war. Stephen's bleak vision of what life might be like after an imagined Southern victory is matched with our own know­ledge of the far-from-perfect world that emerged after the real Union victory.

Doctorow uses the story of Arly, a Confederate soldier, and Calvin, an African­American photographer, to provide his most explicit treatment of the theme of memory. Their tale becomes an allegory of the perils of remem­bering and misremembering. After Arly's friend Will is killed, Arly takes refuge with Will's body in an abandoned house. When Calvin and his boss, the photographer Mr. Josiah Culp, pull up in their wagon, Arly, intrigued, ventures outside to investi­gate. Culp explains his purpose as a photo­grapher to Arly this way: "The government recogn­izes that for the first time in history war will be recorded for posterity. I am making a pictorial record of this terrible conflict, sir. That is why I am here. That is my contribution. I portray the great march of General Sherman for future generations" (173). Arly sees a portrait of General Sherman in the back of Culp's wagon and hatches a plot to pose as a photographer and assassinate Sherman. Arly hijacks Culp's photowagon, and, after Culp dies of a heart attack, assumes his identity, taking Calvin along as a kind of hostage. Calvin, though, subtly resists Arly's schemes, frequently remind­ing himself of his duty to history. "Making photo­graphs is sacred work," Calvin tells himself. "It is fixing time in its moments and making memory for the future. . . . Nobody in history has ever been able to do that. There is no higher calling than to make pictures that show you the true world" (308).

Given the limitations of the technology in the 1860s, however, photographers could not capture battle as it happened. They were left with document­ing only preparations and aftermaths. Moreover, Civil War photographers frequently resorted to stagecraft, arranging scenes of daily life to appear spontaneous and even arranging corpses on the field for emotional effect. Doctorow the storyteller understands full well photography's conflicted relationship with real­ity. The March carefully avoids the historical novelist's fantasy of giving us an authentic past, and Doctorow carries this theme into his discussion of photography. The photographer Culp, in his first encounter with Arly and the dead Will, asked Arly to prop Will's body up to better arrange the photo he wanted. Later, when we first meet President Lincoln, Dr. Sartorius recounts the shock of the encounter, for the frail President, according to Sartorius, "was not the resolute, visionary leader whose portrait photo­graphs were seen everywhere in the Union" (331). Doctorow reminds that photos too can lie and distort, and that, even in this most
seemingly real of memory-making arts, appearances can be deceiving.

Calvin, the freed slave, is determined, as the great photographer Matthew Brady was, to tell the truth of the war, while Arly, the Confederate, contrives to use photography to deceive and kill. Arly eventually does get close enough to General Sherman to take a shot. He is quickly captured and executed for the offense. When the deceitful memory-maker from the South assaults the hated Union General, Doctorow’s allegory of the politics of memory reaches its climax. A stray bullet strikes Calvin in the eyes, leaving him temporarily blind. The African American guardian of historical accuracy is rendered helpless and can no longer fulfill his sacred work. The South lost the war—Arly is executed—but he managed to strike a crippling blow in the battlefield of memory, dashing the hopes of the African American chronicler to tell the story of the war “as it is.”

As contemplative as The March is, Doctorow also has crafted a compelling, sweeping narrative, driven forward with energy and grace. Fans of Doctorow undoubtedly will appreciate the references to beloved characters from other novels, especially the acclaimed Ragtime. Appreciating Doctorow’s great achievement in these pages, however, requires no knowledge of his previous works. In recounting Sherman’s march, Doctorow manages to bring together intimate human stories and grand allegory into a single thrilling and moving novel.

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SCAR

My brother, thirty and balding—
if he were still living—winds through
my cortex fog as Friday draws down
the cover of night. His body,
all shoulder pad and lug wrench,
always three days before dying,
tackles me on the living room floor.
His legs churn fast as pistons
after he knocks me whiter than carpet,
his hair reeking of old cantaloupe.
My anger slides into his grunt,
his jaw pushing the wind
out of my stomach, face ruddy
as an Idaho sunset. Wherever the lunge
came from is mystery, like a moose
in the backyard, or tire tracks
one morning carved into our grass.
He flails his right hand against my exposed
cheek, digs a nail through two layers of flesh,
a cut so clean the sting will last for a week.
Then springs up as if he's delivered
a gift, strides like an actor going
to his next gig. Near midnight it all returns
not shattered like the mind
after waking from a dream,
just this sacked bean bag of a child
stumbling after his brother, crying
in and out of the curtains behind the couch,
bleeding like the night when it begins to run.

Mark Bennion
pulpit and pew
after Pentecost

Almighty God, we thank you for planting in us the seed of your word. By your Holy Spirit help us to receive it with joy, live according to it, and grow in faith and hope and love; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."

Lutheran Book of Worship
Prayer of the Day for the Eighth Sunday after Pentecost.

T
his year is the one hundredth anniversary of the Azusa Street revival, the birth of the modern Pentecostal movement, still spreading like wildfire around the globe. These summer months come in the Christian liturgical season that has been called "after Pentecost." And after Pentecost, but before the parousia of Christ, is the time in which all Christians live: those who speak in tongues and those who read our prayers out of hard-bound hymnals. When the first Christian Pentecost is represented in art, the tongues of fire over the disciples' heads are always bright red, the same color worn by twenty-first century Christians—young and old, women and men—to celebrate the festival sometimes called the birthday of the church. The next week, however, all the paraments have been changed to green for ordinary time and almost no one bothers to coordinate their clothing, although the altar cloth and pastor's stole will seem to mimic the Midwestern landscape's emerging, verdant color through the whole season.

In April 1906, the Holy Spirit animated first a house-full, and then crowds, and eventually a multitude of people in Los Angeles. Like the disciples in Jerusalem many centuries before, these Christians began to speak in languages they did not know. This they took to be the work of God bursting into their lives barely a week after a mighty earthquake and the fire that followed it devastated San Francisco only a few hundred miles away. The Spirit's fire did not burn down any buildings on Azusa Street, but it did break down walls between people. As astonishing as the speaking in unknown languages was the variety of the crowd: African-Americans, Latinos, Asians, and Anglos. Drawn together by the gospel message preached by William Seymour, an African-African, some were healed of illness and many were given faith. The excitement and spectacle attracted both the curious press and eager pilgrims. The movement spread from Los Angeles, across the nation, and around the world where it continues to grow and bear fruit.

Why this movement is called Pentecostalism is obvious. The power of the preaching and the wonders of the Spirit's work that spring recall a similar episode recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. When Jesus' disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, the multitude of witnesses in Jerusalem were perplexed and bewildered by what they saw and heard: tongues of fire on the disciples' heads and many languages coming from their mouths. Although the speakers were all Galileans, onlookers from all around Rome's empire heard their own languages. Naturally the amazed hearers assumed that the disciples were drunk. Peter's alternative explanation turned the crowd's attention to the scriptures. Quoting the prophets Joel and Isaiah and the Psalms, Peter spoke of God's mighty works and of Jesus' resurrection. The harvest that day was about three thousand people who repented and were baptized.

Christians call this event Pentecost because it coincided with Shavuot, the Jewish festival of weeks held fifty days after Passover and sometime designated by this Greek word. Shavuot has both agricultural and historical significance; it celebrates the first fruits of the spring harvests and the giving of the Torah. Since the destruction of the Temple, Jews no longer make a pilgrimage to bring the first fruits to Jerusalem, though today
many decorate their synagogues with greenery for this festival. They also read the story of Ruth, the Moabite ancestor of King David—a redemption story in which the grain harvest figures prominently. The story also points to the steadfast love of God who freed the Hebrew people from slavery and gave them the law to direct their living in freedom. Although some devout Jews spend the whole night before Shavuot studying the scripture, the name of the festival points to the giving of the Torah, since receiving God’s law is the work of a lifetime and cannot be completed even in a night and a day.

When Christians today observe Pentecost with red clothing and multilingual readings from the book of Acts, we celebrate the giving of the Holy Spirit. Naturally those of us who read prayers out of books and sing hymns in languages we have learned may be amazed and perplexed by the story of Peter intoxicated with the Spirit and the three thousand baptized in Jerusalem that day. Similarly, the excitement and spectacular wonders in contemporary Pentecostalism that attract the curious attention of the media may bewilder or embarrass us. Even as we rejoice in the gift of the Spirit on the church’s birthday, we may question or mock such extraordinary manifestations of the Spirit.

The nineteenth-century American preacher Charles Grandison Finney provides us with another perspective on these mighty works of the Spirit; he may remind us that the Jewish Pentecost was a harvest festival of thanksgiving for God’s bounty. Finney’s controversial methods have become emblematic of the Second Great Awakening, even though the revival was well under way by the time he began to preach. In his “Lectures on Revivals in Religion,” he defended the role that these techniques play in conversion. Is conversion a miracle, or is it something produced by the evangelist’s techniques? Finney described the evangelist’s active role as similar to the farmer’s: “In the Bible, the word of God is compared to grain, and preaching is compared to sowing seed, and the results to the springing up and growth of the crop.” Just as the farmer attributes the growth of the grain to God, but still takes responsibility to plant and till, Finney continued, so too the evangelist must preach the word which God germinates and brings to fruition. By analogy, Finney contended that revival was no more of a miracle than a field golden with ripe wheat. The same analogy helps us to recognize and receive the harvest of God’s word in seemingly miraculous, perhaps exotic, fruits as well as in ordinary barley and wheat.

Every week Christians confess our trust in God who loves steadfastly, who gave life to the whole creation, who freed the Hebrew slaves, who raised Jesus from the dead, who repairs and sustains life, and who promises to return. When this love catches fire in unexpected ways, we may be surprised, but we need not be alarmed. Rather at Pentecost, we pray for wisdom to recognize God’s word and to hear it with joy. If the Spirit does not give us the gift of tongues or heal our diseases, we still pray that God’s mighty love will break down barriers built by indifference, prejudice, or hatred. If tongues of fire do not appear over our heads, we still pray that divine fire will burn away the weeds that choke out our efforts to live godly lives that bear the fruits of love, joy, patience, and the like. Then, in the long summer days that comprise the weeks after Pentecost, we study the scriptures and pursue the life-long task of receiving the Word of God while the green fields turn to golden harvest and the hymnal reminds us to trust God for “the silent growth while we are sleeping.”

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MILAREPA

He returns to Tibet. To the sparrow’s nest of his hut perched on a granite outcrop high in the Himalayas.

He has wandered for years, casting out demons like dishwater, scrubbing the souls of the sick. Waiting for him are his own one hundred devils. Doubts rising from layers of dust, fears dripping from rotted rafters, resentments lying white and gray, cold as hearth ash. Milarepa, they say, sings to the demons who would guttue his soul, smacking their lips against the rind of his enlightenment. He bows in respect, blesses the misshapen claws that rip their own infected flesh, opens the gate to his heart. Ninety-five disappear. The five that remain are bent, tangled, and broken. Teeth poke through pieces of lip, gape for Milarepa. He whispers into holes where once were ears, singing his stories of lotus and lily, tulip and lemon. Four more disappear, leaving one to devour his sweet, ripe, unbroken body. Milarepa places his head into its swollen black mouth, they say, to feed its empty heart. How else can he honor his demons?

How else but bent, tangled, and broken?

Stephen McDonald
Radical Lutheranism sounds like an oxymoron. Just visit a Lutheran parish at any given worship service. Most parishioners appear strikingly conventional. The designation “Radical Lutheran,” however, applies not to Lutherans but to a specific theological program developed by the late Gerhard Olaf Forde (1927–2005).

For several decades, Forde served as Professor of Systematic Theology at Luther Seminary in Saint Paul, Minnesota; he was also a contributor to Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue in the United States and the author of numerous books, articles, and reviews. On the eve of the formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in 1988, Forde argued that Lutherans should seek neither to be conservative nor liberal, but to be radical.

Many claim to be radical. Even some Augustinians today claim to be “radically orthodox.” For Forde, if Lutherans stay true to the gospel, they will proclaim a gospel more radical than any other Christians proclaim—one which, in contrast to all other claimants, renders a negative judgment not only on human evil, but also on human good.

There are many ways to understand human good. Some see it as human participation in the true, beautiful, and good through imitation of the life of Christ. Others find it in the quest to fulfill universal standards of duty or to create a just, equitable, and sustainable society, or in the actualization of individual self-expression. Forde, following Martin Luther, rejects all of these understandings of human good. He accords no value to human behavior whatsoever. Indeed, all human pretensions before God are extinguished and the human is left at the mercy of God’s justifying work. To clarify the doctrine of justification by faith alone, Forde advocated use of the often neglected metaphor of death and resurrection.

Traditionally, the Protestant doctrine of justification had been crafted in terms of a legal metaphor—as a forensic decree. Pictured as a judge, God acquits or pardons the guilty sinner for Jesus’ sake. This view was easily ridiculed as a legal fiction, having no bearing on people’s lives. God’s pardon became the basis from which the Holy Spirit could begin to urge believers to choose to grow in holiness and thus become more godlike. Hence, if it was to impact daily life, “forensic justification” needed to be supplemented by “effective justification.” Along with God’s mercy in Christ, the law still was needed to show Christians the way. Even if the believer was not able to initiate this growth in holiness, the believer could cooperate with God in this quest. Many contemporary theologians meld this notion of effective justification with a modern anthropology that accentuates human potential, rendering the doctrine of justification by faith alone fairly harmless, if not impotent.

In contrast, throughout Luther’s writings effective justification was presented not primarily as our contribution, initiated by grace, to our growth in imitation of Christ. Rather, Luther stressed that we must recognize that our relationship to God is established not by our own faculties but by God’s decree. God has judged that the entire world outside of Christ is dead in sin; not even our virtue is God-pleasing. God has consigned all to sin, because all have participated in the murder of God’s son, Jesus Christ. However, that word of judgment, of the accusing law, comes with a second word, a promise: for Jesus’ sake your sins are forgiven you. In light of that pardon, a more radically forensic decree, a whole new mode of living, is created. Aesthetically, we are moved into harmony with the creator, and our view of created things is not of commodities but of modes of God’s address to us, both law and gospel.
For Forde, the doctrine of justification by faith alone precludes an anthropology in which some aspect of the will could cooperate freely with God for its salvation or for growth in holiness, even after the impartation of grace. Instead, Forde sees life through a baptismal lens that reveals our daily dying and rising until our inborn, independent free will is completely dead and Christ is active in all that we do. From Forde's perspective, and from Luther's, "free will" is the direct opponent of God. Free will exists only as a divine attribute, and so humans are incapable of exercising it. There is no neutrality at the core of human being; we are bound to rebel against God until lives on the new playing field of Christ alone, imbibed with an "alien" righteousness, in which one is truly free. Such genuine freedom is captivated by Christ's promise that God is pleased with you on account of Christ.

Forde's position allows us to address two current issues in the church: 1) advocacy for Christians to overcome quietism and be more engaged, and 2) the increasing emphasis on ecumenical unity among branches of Christianity. First, many agree with theologian Horst Symanowski that today's quest should be not for a God in Christ creates a new person. Thus, our lives are directed either by God or by the devil. Once saved, the self-justifying old self, obsessed with salvation (however perceived), is extinguished. The new being in Christ lives outside of itself in honor of God and for service to neighbors and creation, apart from any concern for personal merit or political self-legitimization.

More to the point, it is not our misdeeds of commission or omission that make us sinners. Counter to everything we think, it is God who makes us sinners. God does this when God decrees not only that our sins are unrighteous but that our righteousness—our ethics, our compassion, anything by which we would justify ourselves—is likewise unrighteous. All possibility of active righteousness is removed. Every rationale for self-justification is taken away, and only a receptive, passive righteousness given in the Holy Spirit's gift of faith remains.

Forde's is fundamentally an eschatological approach to theology from the perspective of the last things. The last judgment already has been rendered in the death of Jesus. It declares that we sinners will seek ourselves in all we do, especially in our piety or ethics. In this judgment, we are reduced to nothingness, but from this nothingness, as from the formless void prior to the original creation, God re-creates. The last judgment already has been rendered in the death of Jesus. It declares that we sinners will seek ourselves in all we do, especially in our piety or ethics. In this judgment, we are reduced to nothingness, but from this nothingness, as from the formless void prior to the original creation, God re-creates.

Undoubtedly, the unmasking of social relations as mere masks for power is helpful. However, we must admit that the most fundamental power struggle is between humanity and God himself. Like Jacob, we struggle with an unnamed wrestler, and it is not always clear if we are struggling with God or with a malicious demon. We want recognition, abiding worth. And so we consistently name as "evil" anything with which we wrestle and name ourselves and our human enterprises "righteous." We look to our achievements, our putative righteousness, for that. But in the face of death, only an external, alien righteousness will do. Christ—victorious over the powers of death that render us and all creatures powerless—is that alien righteousness.
The doctrine of justification is not exclusively a personal, existential matter; the doctrine of justification recognizes that the personal and the political intermesh. We often establish our personal identity in the jostling for recognition inevitable in social relations. A radical doctrine of justification by faith alone judges all such jostling as not merely foolish but even wicked. For Luther, a good tree bears good fruit. Our works are a result of our being. And, our being results from our relationships. Related to other sinners, we remain sinners. But God claims each sinner for the sake of Jesus Christ who, as Luther put it, is the greatest sinner, and who bears all our sins away. Related to Christ (on God’s right hand), we do good in the world (God’s left hand). In this sense, Forde’s radical Lutheranism is both breathtakingly personal and deeply political.

Second, ours is an ecumenical age, as witnessed in the signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. Current ecumenical endeavors are driven by the fear of secularization: “We Christians must band together in a world no longer defined by religious values.” Ecumenists appeal to the doctrine of justification as the shared ground between all Christians, since it advocates that we are saved by grace alone. Such grace allows us to participate, finally, in the triune life itself. Forde’s radicalized Lutheran theology could undermine Christian unity in the doctrine of justification. His teachings seem keen on outdated doctrinal polemics and indifferent to the danger of secularization.

However, the real point of contention between Roman Catholics and Lutherans has never been that grace alone saves. It is rather that faith alone is both necessary and sufficient for salvation. Roman Catholics, unlike Lutherans, cannot affirm that faith alone is sufficient. They believe that faith, if it is truly alive, must be supplemented by works of love. For Lutherans, faith is not a conviction or a decision. It is one’s very being as defined by Christ. Christ works through us to do good for the neighbor in the world.

Unlike most contemporary ecumenists, we ought not to be so presumptuous as to assume that Roman Catholics and all stripes of Protestants share the same spiritual reality, albeit expressed differently. The gospel is always a question of truth; it evokes dispute. The bottom line in any theology is not whether it motivates an idealistic utopian agenda or furthers the cause of ecumenism; the bottom line is whether or not our theology drives us to Christ. Forde’s radical approach passes that test.

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I was in my teens when I encountered the story of Mary and Martha, or, at least, I was that old before I gave it any thought. In a passage found only in Luke, a woman named Martha invites Jesus into her home. She has a sister, Mary, who sits at Jesus' feet and listens to his teaching while Martha scurries around trying to feed Jesus and most likely his disciples because she is “distracted with much serving.” She becomes annoyed and asks Jesus to make Mary help her. Jesus answers, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:41-42). When I heard the story, I sympathized with Mary. First, I had never waited on anyone. Second, I would have vastly preferred to listen to Jesus. Of course, Mary was in the right. What a difference marriage and motherhood makes. Now, I not only empathize with Martha; I am Martha. And frankly, Jesus’ words no longer make sense to me. Who would have served him if Martha hadn’t? Of course, she is anxious and troubled. She has unexpected company. She has much to do and no one to help her. She probably is someone who likes to be in control and has certain standards, and what is wrong with that? People such as Martha keep the world humming along. Moreover, Mary probably lets her do the majority of the work most of the time. Women like that drive me nuts. Jesus is a man and just doesn’t get it. Alright, he is God too, but in this case he is acting just like a man. These are my unedifying thoughts when I read this story as a woman in my forties.

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So what is Jesus’ point? Since I identify so strongly with Martha, I suppose I am obliged to ask that question. Clearly, Martha is a generous person who understands the importance of hospitality and serving an honored guest. She willingly receives people into her home with no advance notice. She is highly responsible and hard working. Yet she fails to recognize what is most important when it is right before her eyes. She is so caught up in the concerns of this life that she is blind to the needs of her soul. Even her service to others becomes a source of distraction from the eternal.

The story of Mary and Martha is especially relevant today. We may be the most distracted people in history. Distraction is almost the definition of our lives. We seek out distractions. Although we think we are busy, in fact, we have more leisure time than ever before. According to Time for Life, the book based on the University of Maryland’s “Americans’ Use of Time Project,” Americans since 1965 have gained nearly an hour more free time per day. How do we spend that time—watching TV and surfing the internet. We are inundated with useless information and led to obsess about the acquisition of material things, which we are happy to research for hours on end. It is almost impossible to clear one’s mind.

Even if we try to avoid such distractions, we find ourselves pulled in many directions. During Mass on Sunday morning, I often review everything that I have to do that coming week. I think about my kids’ schedule and how I am going to get them to their various activities, about what meals I am going to prepare and what I need from the grocery store, about what days I can possibly get to the gym to work out, about what clothes need to be washed or to go to the dry cleaners, and so on. I will catch myself and shake my head to dispel the thoughts. Minutes later they start creeping in again. I have given the problem a name—the Martha syndrome.

Men and women both suffer from the syndrome, but women seem to have a more serious version. Judging from the content of women’s magazines, all women today are anxious and troubled about having too much to do. The buzz word is “stress,” and there are endless articles on
how to deal with it. And what is the answer—to take more time for ourselves, of course. Take a vacation, or if you can't do that, take a bubble bath, go to the spa or gym, go shopping for yet another pair of shoes. In other words, find more ways to distract oneself. But Jesus doesn't suggest Martha needs more time to herself. He tells her she needs more time with him.

Our lives are not too busy; they are out of focus. I recently read Raymond Arroyo's biography of Mother Angelica and was reminded that extraordinary spiritual leaders maintain an almost inhuman pace, often getting by on very little sleep. Mother Angelica ran a television empire and a convent, yet she dedicated hours each day to contemplation and prayer. As I have studied the saints, I have learned that many of those who served others in the world were contemplatives at heart, spending long hours each day in prayer. This was true of Pope John Paul II. To stay focused, we must spend time at the feet of Jesus. For Catholics such as Mother Angelica, that means spending time with Jesus in the Eucharist. It also means reading the Bible and listening to his word. John Newton, the English clergyman and author of the hymn “Amazing Grace,” wrote in a letter to a friend that the one thing needful is “to have our hearts united to the Lord in humble faith.” He goes on to say, “Except Jesus dwells in our hearts, and fills them with his power and presence, they will be filled with folly, vanity, and vexation.” This, it seems to me, is a description of our contemporary lives. They are filled with folly, vanity, and vexation, and we are convinced the answer to the problem is more folly, vanity, and vexation. We pile on one distraction after another, thinking one day we will be fulfilled.

But we won't, which is why we, the most pampered people on the face of the earth, complain about being under increasing amounts of stress. How do we break the cycle? By choosing the good portion. We must empty ourselves so that Jesus might dwell in us. This means placing Jesus and our relationship with him at the center of our lives, day by day, moment by moment. We need to heed the example of Martha's sister Mary and seek him out in worship, in the Eucharist, in prayer, and in Bible study. As our hearts become filled with his power and presence, we will learn to serve him and others. Our service will no longer be a source of anxiety, anger, or distraction as it was for Martha. To unite our hearts to the Lord in humble faith means to serve him and others with grateful hearts. That will happen when we make our relationship with him the primary focus of our lives. That is the lesson of Mary and Martha, one that I needed to learn.

Jennifer Ferrara, formerly an ordained minister of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, is a Roman Catholic lay woman. She resides in Pennsylvania with her husband, twin sons, and daughter.
THE OLDEST TREE AND A VIEW OF FLORENCE

It is cold, the landlord said, 
too cold to sit on the terrace. 
It was warm and sunny, 
the blackbirds jubilant, 
flying north to their spring 
on February 1st.

There is a nest 
in the knothole of our tree, 
stem split at the base 
to a goblet of air, 
like glass blown to hardness 
those thin layers of bark 
keep the tree fed, 
the oldest tree in Florence, 
in ancient ceremony of sap.

Spirit upholds the flesh 
as flesh shapes spirit to itself 
like water in a glass: 
the souls in Dante's hell 
look like themselves, 
are recognized 
despite corrupted scars. 
Even in Paradise 
a radiance encoils 
where body was.

Francesco's mother does not die. 
Silent at ninety-six 
she has become 
a phosphorescent skeleton. 
At home, winter is settling in. 
We had brought it with us, they said. 
Next day, the sun was wan and clouds 
grayer than rain.

Inside a still life: 
green bottle on glass table top, 
an open book, the rind 
of a clementine, wild on white, 
fragrance of cyclamen. 
The wind shivers outside. 
Green shutters fold themselves 
around the house.

Soon wisteria will cascade the balcony 
and the unseen cuckoo will call, 
persistent, to his unseen mate.

Jean Hollander
The chattering classes seem to be in a near panic that the United States soon will become a theocracy. Two particular examples of this general fear have appeared recently. *The New Republic* recently featured on its cover a hatchet job on Richard Neuhaus’s new book, *Catholic Matters* (Basic Books), in which the reviewer claims that Neuhaus “longs for an omnivorous Catholic Church to devour and to absorb American culture and public life.” In early April, many papers carried a short piece from Kevin Phillips’s *American Theocracy* (Viking), in which he claims that we are in the process of fulfilling all the marks of a theocracy.

These worries take their place with other semi-hysterical exaggerations: that the separation of church and state is being broken down by religious fanatics; that evangelicals and fundamentalists (usually conflated by the worry-warts) comprise a unified phalanx on all political issues; that the so-called “Religious Right” actually calls the shots in modern American political life; and that Jewish neo-conservatives are directing American foreign policy.

One cannot tell if the anxious ones really believe these far-fetched fears or whether they are cynically using them to whip up the troops. In either case, the claim that America is moving toward theocracy is ridiculous. For one thing, no one of importance is proposing that the clergy rule or that sacred law replace secular—the technical definition of theocracy. What’s more, evangelical and fundamentalist Protestants together represent less than one third of the population. While they may count the President among their number, they certainly possess no corner on other high officials, senators, representatives, governors, and, indeed, voters. The “commanding heights” of the culture—the print media, the television networks, the entertainment industry, academia, big business, and the professional guilds are all safely in the hands of secular people whose freedom of expression and political clout show no signs of being curtailed. The polls indicate that the “theocratic” party—the Republicans, if you can believe that—could suffer real losses in the coming elections of 2006. Our countervailing powers are working quite well to prevent any imagined “take-over.”

Because these theocracy charges are so bizarre, it is difficult to decipher what they really mean. My hunch is that these irrational fears actually mask the left’s real complaint: “people who formerly did not participate in politics are now doing so on behalf of public policies that we abhor. What’s more, what really angers us is that they are having some effect. We demand that they disappear from public, political life.”

But all these hated “theocrats” are citizens and have every right to participate in the political process. They can argue from whatever premises—including the religious—that they wish. That is what the First Amendment is all about. Demanding that they enter the public sphere operating solely from secular premises privileges secular points of view and robs those religious people of the opportunity to argue from their own most cherished values. Far from pressing for theocracy, they simply use political levers to push for policies that they believe are moral and humane from their religious point of view.

When one looks closely at many of the issues that generate political activity among them, it is interesting to note how many of these issues have been provoked by judges who have substituted their own judicial biases for the democratic will of the people. It is not that these “theocrats” have initiated an aggressive political agenda of their own. In most cases they are fighting a liberal aggressive agenda that has been foisted upon them.

For example, these “theocrats” believe—as do many thoughtful liberals—that the Supreme
Court in Roe vs. Wade made a bad decision in overruling state laws on abortion. They believe that abortion is killing a developing human being, so they engage in politics to diminish that killing.

For another, they believe that law in this country is gradually being disconnected from its moral and religious basis. Thus, they work for the appointment of judges—like Roberts and Alito—who believe that there is a moral foundation to the law.

Most believe that a perfect instance of that disconnection is the effort legally to redefine marriage—an age-old social and religious institution based upon the union of a man and woman for the procreation of children—into a contractual arrangement in which any sexual admixture, and soon any number, can participate. So they resist by supporting state and federal amendments to constitutions.

These “theocrats” believe that faith-based organizations can be more effective in mending lives than many public ones. Therefore, they work politically for access to federal funds by such organizations on an equal basis with secular ones.

Many of them believe that justice would be served by allowing poor families to have vouchers to send their kids to private and parochial schools in big cities. So, they work on the state and city levels for the institution of such voucher systems.

Many believe that the quality of education has declined in the public schools and that the courts have denuded public education of respect for traditional religious and moral values. So they have organized their own schools, many of which do a better job of training for citizenship than do the public.

Many believe that the state of Israel continues to have religious meaning, as well as profound political significance, and therefore they have become the most reliable supporters of Israel among non-Jewish Americans.

Many are convinced that we are in a worldwide struggle with an intolerant, militant wing of Islam and that we cannot afford to lose in Iraq. Therefore, they continue to support a “stay the course” policy in Iraq.

These efforts admittedly move toward the right side of the political spectrum. Most are mainly reactions to changes initiated by “progressives” that religious conservatives find unwholesome or unjust. But theocratic in the sense that they move toward clerical or ecclesiastical rule in which biblical law replaces secular law? This is nonsense. Religious conservatives understandably and justly want a seat at the table, and they are getting it.

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On October 5, 2005, after considerable negotiation and threats of a presidential veto, the United States Senate voted 90-9 to add the McCain Detainee Amendment to the 2005 Defense Appropriations Bill. This amendment attempted to modify the United States Army field manual to prohibit inhumane treatment of enemy prisoners. President Bush signed the bill into law on December 30; however, when he did so he added the following statement pertaining to the amendment: "The executive branch shall construe . . . the Act, relating to detainees, in a manner consistent with the constitutional authority of the President to supervise the unitary executive branch and as Commander in Chief and consistent with the constitutional limitations on the judicial power. . . ." Translated this means that, despite the fact that he signed the bill, the president, as Chief Executive and Commander in Chief, does not consider himself obligated to obey a law that intrudes on his Constitutional authority and the courts do not have the authority to review the president's actions. Or perhaps what the President really would have liked to say was, "Nice try Senator McCain, but we simply don't believe that Congress or the courts can limit our ability to interrogate people in whatever manner we think most effective. And if that includes inflicting pain up to and including '... serious physical injury, such as organ failure, impairment of bodily function or even death,' (Office of Legal Counsel Memoranda 2002, p. 1) we're just going to do it and there's not really much you can do about it."

While most in the media were surprised by this statement, research by Phillip Cooper indicates that this was not an isolated incident but only one recent example of a tool that the Bush administration has used extensively. Cooper notes that during President Bush's first term in office he issued 108 signing statements that raised 505 Constitutional objections to various statutory provisions. This far exceeds the number of statements issued by previous presidents. More important than the quantity of these statements is their substance. Past presidential signing statements often were rhetorical or political statements designed to make a point about ambiguous provisions or statements designed to make symbolic gestures to satisfy various constituencies. In Bush's hands, according to Cooper, these statements often have been "...dramatic declaratory judgments holding acts of Congress unconstitutional and purporting to interpret not only Article II presidential powers but those of the legislature under Article I" (Cooper, 530). In the case of the McCain amendment, the President was sending a clear message to all members of the executive branch, including the military and the CIA, that they could disobey this act of Congress. Recent events suggest that they understood the message.

President Bush's use of signing statements is only one small component of this administration's extremely broad assertion of presidential power, particularly pertaining to the use of the military and the control of foreign affairs. Consider the following assertions made by the Bush administration:

The president has the sole power to use the military anywhere in the world to protect the nation. This includes the power to use the military for preemptive attacks on individuals or countries. It also includes the right to attack nations that have been suspected of harboring or supporting terrorist organizations.

The president has the power to determine who are "enemy combatants" and detain them for as long as he wants, and it does not matter whether they are captured in
this country or other countries and whether they are United States citizens or not.

The president can create military tribunals to hear cases of suspected "enemy combatants." Persons brought to trial in these tribunals have limited rights, and the actions of these tribunals are not reviewable by civilian courts.

The president has the power to authorize the interrogation and "torture" of enemy combatants and suspected terrorists. This power cannot be limited by Congress, the courts, or treaties.

The president has the power to conduct warrantless surveillance. This includes the interception of both domestic and international communications and could include physical searches and access to doctors' and lawyers' confidential statements.

The president has authority equal to the courts to interpret the Constitution as it pertains to his power and authority.

Bush is not the first or only president to hold such an extreme view of presidential authority, and most constitutional scholars would not deny the existence of prerogative and emergency powers to be used during emergencies. What distinguishes the Bush perspective, however, is the claim that these are not simply extra-constitutional powers brought forth during emergencies, like the powers claimed by President Lincoln during the Civil War, but are rather legal powers consistent with the Constitution (Kleinerman, 2005).

the administration's argument

Whether or not the president "legally" has all of these powers has been the subject of debate. The Bush administration argues that the text of the Constitution, the structure of our government, historical precedent, and the actions of the Congress and the courts clearly support its view of executive authority. When arguing from the text of the Constitution, the administration points to the president's role as Commander in Chief, which includes the power to recognize the existence of a state of emergency and to take actions necessary for the security of the nation. This power to make war is not shared with Congress and gives the president authority to take any actions—defensively or preemptively—anywhere in the world. In the final analysis, the president has complete discretion to use the military to protect the nation, and this power has been endorsed by various Supreme Court decisions such as Curtiss-Wright (1936) and the Prize Cases (1863).

In addition, at least 125 historical precedents ranging from George Washington to Bill Clinton clearly support the president's unlimited use of the military without Congressional authorization.

Article II of the Constitution begins, "The executive Power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America." Following the theory of the unitary executive, this means that all executive authority is vested in the president, and this means that the president has complete control over the executive branch, including the power to interpret the Constitution as it applies to him and his subordinates. Article I—which vests power in Congress—is worded differently. "All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress..." This limits Congress's powers to those "herein granted," e.g., those listed in Article I, section 8. The implication of this is that while Congress's powers are enumerated, the president's include unenumerated powers. Hence, when the Constitution is silent about a certain power, "the Vesting Clause provides that it remains among the President's unenumerated powers" (Office of Legal Counsel, 2002, 4). Even when the Constitution is silent, Congress apparently loses.

In addition, Congress itself has recognized and supported the president's claims for broad authority. Although the Bush administration objects to the War Powers Resolution Act's requirements that the president report to Congress whenever the armed forces are deployed in a combat zone and that Congress must approve such deployments within sixty days, it is quick to point to the section of the law that clearly confirms the president's power to use military force without limitation in a time of emergency. Furthermore, both the Authorization of the Use of Military Force of September 2001 and the Authorization of the Use of Military Force in Iraq of October 2002 clearly recognize and support
the president’s authority “to use all necessary and appropriate force.”

why Congress still matters

Despite these arguments, it is difficult to accept the vast and virtually unlimited powers asserted by this president. First, it is hard, if not impossible to square these views with generally accepted notions of the separation of powers and a balanced government. While much of the Framers’ intent is debatable, there is little doubt that a core principle was the system of “checks and balances.” As Madison noted in Federalist 47, the only alternative is to allow one office to accumulate all power, which, “... may justly be pronounced the very definition of tyranny.” The idea, as Madison noted in Federalist 51, is to give each office the means of keeping the others in their proper places. The Framers did this not by simply dividing the powers of government—executive, legislative, and judicial—along functional lines into three distinct branches; they did this by devising a system in which each branch shared in the function of the others. It is a system of “separate institutions sharing powers” (Neustadt, 42). The intent was not to create a system in which all executive power (or any other power) was exclusively in one set of hands, but to create a system in which the president and the Congress would have to work together to exercise their powers.

Secondly, these broad assertions of presidential authority are difficult to square with the text of the Constitution. For example, the Bush administration argues that Congress’s power to declare war is obsolete and even the Framers understood it to be so. But to conclude that Congress has virtually no role in determining whether we go to “war” or not is to behave as if Article I of the Constitution were never written. It is hard to imagine that the Framers included the phrase “To declare War” within Congress’s power knowing that this power would be meaningless. If Congress was not to have any role in matters of war or power over the military, it also is puzzling why Congress was given powers such as: “To define and punish Piracies and Felonies committed on the high Seas, and Offenses against the Law of Nations; ... To grant Letters of Marque and Reprisal, and make Rules concerning Captures on Land and Water; To raise and support Armies; ... To provide and maintain a Navy; To make Rules for the Government and Regulation of the land and naval Forces; To provide for calling forth the Militia to execute the Laws of the Union, suppress Insurrections and repel Invasions; To provide for organizing, arming, and disciplining the Militia, and for governing such part of them as may be employed in the Service of the United States.” It is difficult to read this list of powers without concluding that the Framers intended Congress to play at least some role and to be a partner in many activities related to war and the conduct of foreign affairs.

The argument that history supports the president’s broad assertions of authority is also questionable. On the one hand, there is little doubt that during certain periods presidents have acted unilaterally and that there has been a gradual expansion and concentration of power in the hands of the president. At the same time, what presidents have done—and gotten away with—depends on what historical period you look at. For example, presidential power in foreign affairs during the pre-Watergate and early Vietnam era was at its peak and gave rise to the notion of the “Imperial Presidency.” In the post-Watergate era, however, we find a quite different presidency—and a quite different Congress, one that substantially reigned in the powers of the presidency with a series of actions like the War Powers Resolution Act (1973) and the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (1978). Even the Supreme Court—which historically had opportunities to address this issue, but generally has either failed to do so or has sided with the president—stood up to the president in cases like U.S. v. Nixon (1974) and Nixon v. Administrator of General Services (1977).

While these debates are couched in legal terms and will have significant legal consequences, the outcomes will be determined more by politics than by any “legal” process. According to Murray Edelman (1988), politics is all about getting your interpretation attached to ambiguous issues or events. From this perspective, the battle to define executive author-
ity is a classic political struggle. One could argue that President Bush is simply doing what the founders thought a president would do; he is pursuing his own self interest and attempting to maximize the power of the office. As Madison wrote in *Federalist 51*, our constitutional design allows ambition to counteract ambition. The problem is that the other actors in our constitutional system—particularly Congress, but also the public—have abdicated their responsibility. With their fortunes tied to the Bush Presidency, the Republicans in Congress have refused to mount any meaningful challenges. Although some members of Congress have taken a stand against torture, it seems that even on this issue the President eventually will get his way.

The last president to assert presidential authority in terms similar to Bush was Richard Nixon. Congress and the public, however, stood up to Nixon. He lost the political battle, and his views on presidential authority did not become accepted and "legal." The problem is that if Bush wins—and right now he is winning—we all lose. If this President’s view of executive authority goes unchallenged, it will leave us with a president who has virtually unlimited authority to conduct war and foreign relations. Given the administration’s track record so far in Iraq, this is, at best, quite unsettling. Perhaps more importantly, if Bush wins, one of his legacies will be the "legalization" (Kleinerman 2005) of extensive and permanent presidential prerogative and emergency powers. This is an even more unsettling thought. ¶

Many of the documents are quite similar. The three that provide a good starting point for understanding the administration’s perspective would include the government’s brief in the case of *Rumsfeld v. Padilla* 542 U.S. 426 (2004); the Office of Legal Counsel, "Re: Standards of Conduct for Interrogation under 18 U.S.C. 2340-2340A," *Memorandum for Alberto Gonzales, Counsel to the President*, August 1, 2002; and Office of Legal Counsel, "The President’s Constitutional Authority to Conduct Military Operations Against Terrorists and Nations Supporting Them," *Memorandum of Opinion for the Deputy Counsel to the President*, September 25, 2001.

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**Notes**

* The following summary of the Bush administration’s argument is based on a wide variety of sources.

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**Bibliography**


books

Christendom in an age of enlightenment


Early in Oliver O'Donovan's The Ways of Judgment (WJ), the author draws a link between this book and his 1996 work, The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology (DN). Describing them as constituting "a single extended train of thought," O'Donovan "dare[s] to dream of the occasional reader who may take them one after the other in succession" (WJ, x). Rare, indeed, the reviewer who can fulfill an author's dream! Yet the notion of engaging not only with a notable new book, but with a decade-long project by a leading thinker, motivated me to take O'Donovan (Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology at the University of Oxford, and Canon of Christ Church) at his word and return to The Desire of Nations before proceeding to The Ways of Judgment. The two books do, in fact, form an extended train of thought. Reading either one is time well spent: reading both in succession opens up a host of essential questions, showcasing the considerable depth of O'Donovan's account of the relationship between theological analysis and social and political life.

The Desire of the Nations is the product of deep and sustained reflection on the connection between the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian New Testament, and on the political implications of the former for the tradition grounded in the latter. Its second chapter, "The Revelation of God's Kingship," is quite simply remarkable, a tour de force inspired by a deceptively straightforward question: What did it mean when First Temple Jews said, "Yhwh is King"? (DN, 32)

O'Donovan's answer to this question is elaborate. It involves a discussion of the theological and political importance of salvation (God's deliverance of God's people from peril), judgment (the public distinction between justice and injustice), and possession (the land of Israel itself); and presents a conceptualization of political authority that includes the important roles of king and prophet and the complex dance of authority and dissent they so often performed. These political reflections bear fruit in an ethic that provides for the centralized exercise of political authority alongside the guarantee of a voice for individuals via the complaint-psalms and the prophetic and wisdom traditions, yielding a communally-grounded individualism that offers the best chance for social cohesion and self-defense:

[The conscience of the individual members of a community is a repository of the moral understanding which shaped it, and may serve to perpetuate it in a crisis of collapsing morale or institution. It is not as a bearer of pre-political rights that the individual demands the respect of the community, but as the bearer of a social understanding which recalls the formative self-understanding of the community itself. (DN, 80)]

This discussion of politics in the Hebrew Scriptures leads into the ensuing discussions of the Christian tradition and the ongoing importance of the Israelite example. O'Donovan places the ministry of Jesus squarely within its Jewish context, noting that Jesus proclaimed the coming of the kingdom while the church told the story of what happened when kingdom came (DN, 120). Mark's emphasis on Jesus' authority—the conjunction of word and power—emphasizes the unorthodox notion of politics at work in the New Testament, most explicitly displayed in Jesus'
proclamation to the (spiritually and materially) poor and his call for the deep cultural transformation of Israel. "Spiritual poverty" is not a mere analogy to material poverty; it is material poverty that has generated a spiritual orientation: dependence upon God and openness to his kingdom" (DN, 98). Using political concepts to illustrate spiritual realities, O'Donovan argues that "the Gospel of the Kingdom offers liberation to an imprisoned political culture" (DN, 119).

The Desire of the Nations culminates in a provocative defense of "Christendom," a daring attempt to rehabilitate a notion in serious disrepute of late, arguing that Christendom need not evoke the specter of compulsory religious establishments, pogroms, or the persecution of dissenters, but instead can be viewed as a recognition of the church's mission by the secular state. "The core-idea of Christendom is...intimately tied up with the church's mission," O'Donovan argues, and the "story-tellers of Christendom do not celebrate coercion; they celebrate the power of God to humble the haughty ones of the earth and to harness them to the purposes of peace" (DN, 195, 223). O'Donovan concludes by gesturing toward a theological analysis of justice, founded on the basic principle of authority being "reordered toward the task of judgment" (DN, 286).

The Ways of Judgment continues this project, and similar scholarly virtues are in evidence. Taking The Desire of the Nations as its starting-point, the political analysis of The Ways of Judgment is organized around the concepts of judgment ("an act of moral discrimination that pronounces upon a preceding act or existing state of affairs to establish a new public context" [WJ, 7]), representation (the process by which a people recognize themselves in their political rulers), and communication (the holding of things in common, the foundation of community). As in The Desire of the Nations, O'Donovan is at his most persuasive when outlining the theological underpinnings of his political vision. His careful connections between, for example, judgment and mercy (chapter 6), judgment and punishment (chapter 7), representation and legitimacy (chapter 10), and communication and work (chapter 14), are some of the finest sections of the book and link theological reflection with political analysis in astute and eloquent ways. O'Donovan presents a robust understanding of human freedom, arguing that political institutions exist to preserve the integrity of public life and that effective political judgments prevent the fragmentation of public space (WJ, 23, 55). This explicit recognition of the value of public life is especially welcome in these days of simultaneous privatization and globalization in both economics and politics. And O'Donovan relentlessly insists on the public and communal implications of theological reflection, pointing out that "[p]olitical theology has set its face from the beginning against an a-political theology—that is to say, a theology that simply disinterests itself in the order of social life and the practice of judgment, and presents the Gospel wholly as a realm of the spirit available to solitary individuals" (WJ, 233).

Several central concerns in The Ways of Judgment carry on and further develop insights central to The Desire of the Nations, serving to unify O'Donovan's overall enterprise and make it an especially robust and important undertaking for our times. From the first page of The Ways of Judgment, O'Donovan emphasizes the importance of government's judicial function. "The authority of secular government resides in the practice of judgment" (3), he writes, and he follows up on the promise of The Desire of the Nations (147–51) by exploring the various types of judgments that governments may render (political, economic, social) and the ways in which those judgments can facilitate the spiritual and material lives of citizens. By locating judgment and the judicial function at the heart of political authority, and representation as the process by which a people "sees itself in the face of an individual thrown forward for the occasion" (WJ, 164), O'Donovan leads his readers into a deep reflection on the significance of democratic practices and values, both institutional forms (penal systems, legislation) and the moral commitments that underwrite them. And if the political task is one of judgment, enhanced by legitimacy and representation, then O'Donovan's insistence on human freedom as a public, moral category leads naturally to his focus on communication, and to his careful concern with a vibrant public sphere in which people experience the fullness of communication in their daily lives through the practices of work and fellowship.
"Donovan is at his most persuasive when engaging in careful conceptual discussions linking the theological with the social and the political. Conversely, he is on shakiest ground when proffering broad generalizations about modern life, many of which contain just enough truth to make them truly misleading. Consider a few examples. O'Donovan takes issue with “the” Enlightenment contention... that practical reasoning begins on its own, apart from history” (DN, 14). The further one reads, the more clear it becomes that O'Donovan equates modernity with “the” Enlightenment, and “the” Enlightenment with Kant, Rousseau, Hobbes, and a certain atomistic reading of Locke. Such a broad brush conceals more than it reveals: we too easily forget, among many others, the English Enlightenment of the eighteenth century so clearly elaborated in B. W. Young’s Religion and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England (Oxford, 1988); the entire Scottish Enlightenment tradition, with its endorsement of humankind’s moral sense; and the many-faceted American Enlightenment, so powerfully articulated by Henry F. May’s The Enlightenment in America (Oxford, 1976). Given the opening pages of The Ways of Justice, and the way in which O’Donovan explicitly links the two works, it makes sense to talk of Oliver O’Donovan’s “project,” but talk of “the” Enlightenment or “the Enlightenment project” is not analogous, and is largely a myth created by critics. Such claims about an “Enlightenment project” (or, even more troubling, “the” Enlightenment project) reduce a philosophically and politically diverse movement to an undifferentiated mass, flattening out national differences and philosophical nuance in the search for a stick with which to beat contemporary society.

A totalizing and reductionist view of “the” Enlightenment yields a totalizing, and equally overstated, view of “modernity” or “the modern.” The reader gets a hint of this view of modernity in the Acknowledgments section of The Desire of the Nations, when O’Donovan recounts that his 1986 sabbatical was spent “reading Hobbes’s Leviathan very slowly” (DN, xi). Hobbes, O’Donovan argues, “marks the point at which the Tradition, as it were, abdicated, leaving the characteristic problems of modern political theory in its wake; and so he affords a point of view from which the contemporary value of the Tradition can be grasped afresh” (DN, x). Almost everything about this statement—the use of one thinker, Hobbes, to stand in for “the Tradition”; the capitalization; the unitary notion of “the” Tradition itself—suggests a reductionistic uniformity that masks the fact that “the” Tradition, and any tradition, is a series of contested issues, not a proper noun that can serve as the subject of verbs. Relatedly, O’Donovan contrasts his own notion of political authority to the “modern view” that understands such authority as constituting what rational agents would devise, or did devise (WJ, 53), a clear reference to Rawls and the contractual tradition. But only a highly truncated understanding of modern thought could so quickly subsume modern views of political authority this way. What are we to make of Charles Taylor’s call for Christians to “find our voice from within the achievements of modernity” (A Catholic Modernity? Oxford, 1999)? Or of Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams’s suggestion in a 2005 lecture at Oxford University that we explore an “interactive pluralism” faithful to “the Christian—certainly the Augustinian Christian—sense of the hopes and limits that can be seen in political life” (available online at http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/articles/40/25/acns4038.cfm).

To be sure, a “humanist family of theories... ha[s] shaped the modern West,” but it is by no means the case that this family of theories, without exception, has emphasized “the self-alienating character of the human will” (DN, 31). O’Donovan places “the notion of the absolute will, exercising choice prior to all reason and order” at the heart of modernity (DN, 274). What makes these overstated claims about “modernity”—and O’Donovan’s persistent distinction between the modern world and something earlier, more religiously-grounded, more amenable to the Christendom-ideal—so troubling is the way in which they prevent us from confronting the complexity of our own times. In this way, the religious critic too readily falls into the trap of believing the secularization thesis’s own advertisements. On this view of modernity at war with religious values, the presence of widespread religious belief (say, in the United
States, where both belief and church attendance remain extraordinarily high compared to Europe) can only be explained as a kind of vicarious holdover from earlier times, bound to fade; and not, for example, as authentic exempla of a more complex and religion-friendly modernity than one might expect from merely reading Hobbes and Kant. How else, for example, can we make sense of the claim that “modernity is child of Christianity, and at the same time it has left its father’s house and followed the way of the prodigal. Or, to paint the picture in more somber colours...modernity can be conceived as Antichrist, a parodic and corrupt development of Christian social order” (DN, 275), if not by understanding its author to be positing a stark dichotomy between things “Christian” and things “modern”?

The culmination of this tendency to overstatement comes in O'Donovan's treatment of the modern conscience at the conclusion of The Ways of Justice. As opposed to an earlier understanding of conscience as the voice of God within—what O'Donovan calls the “discursive character of conscience” (308)—modern individuals, we are told, view the conscience as “a voice in the soul that immediately and simply, independently of reason, without appeal to the Gospel, commands us in the name of God, and sanctions its commands with torments of anxiety and fear” (308). But how many individuals behave in such a way, arriving at moral decisions “immediately and simply,” without drawing on reason or their religious traditions? I can think of no one among my friends, family, or colleagues, who behaves in this way. Even if such a manner of proceeding has been called for by certain Enlightenment thinkers (though I can think of none here, either), it certainly does not describe the way actual, modern human beings operate. Alongside “moments of moralistic and ideological judgment which permit no reflective or deliberative interrogation,” argues O'Donovan, “modern man is distinguished by a resolute and inexhaustible self-doubt” (308). This is a familiar line in certain strands of religiously-inflected political thought, one that laments the transformation of “conscience” over the course of several centuries. There is simply not space here to address the oversimplifications inherent in this account of the development of conscience in the Anglo-American tradition, nor to highlight the important political goals that have been served by expanding our notions of what constitutes authentic conscience and the ways in which such an expansion has served to advance inclusive politics and a pluralistic public sphere.

To be sure, O'Donovan distinguishes between “early” and “late” modernity, and aims his attacks largely at the latter. Yet it is clear that, to him, there is a direct connection between the two. “What makes life in the late-modern period different—its high level of technologisation, its sexual permissiveness, its voluntarisation of birth and death, its concept of politics as economic management—can all be traced back to seed-thoughts that were present at the beginning of the modern era, and are aspects of a necessitating web of mutual implications” (271). Carrying on with the botanical metaphor, O'Donovan argues that these late-modern pathologies are the direct result—flower from seed—of early modern thought. “The flowering of an idea comes when it assumes a structural role that determines what else may be thought” (272). This flower-seed metaphor is worth pausing over, since it presents a radical and highly-debatable claim about the relationship between the ideas of one historical era and the practices of another. Such an understanding seems simultaneously to overstate the multiplicity of historical origins of various contemporary practices and understate the power of ideas, and grows out of the same impulse that imputes an Enlightenment “project” to a diverse group of thinkers. By emphasizing the role of ideas, and by presenting late-modern life as the inevitable result of early modern ideas, O'Donovan offers a deterministic view of the relationship between philosophy and life. But is this the best metaphor for describing the complex process of historical change? After all, a seed can produce, at most, just one variety of flower. Does O'Donovan really mean to suggest that the relationship between ideas broached in the seventeenth century and social practices in the twenty-first century is as causal, single-handed, and deterministic as that between a flower and the seed from which it grew? If so, the reader is entitled to a fuller explanation of his view of historical change.
O’Donovan famously objects, in the first chapter of *The Desire of the Nations*, to the debilitating effects of the hermeneutic of suspicion preached by such thinkers as Foucault and Freud. Yet perhaps, while admitting that such procedures can threaten to infect our practices unduly, we should retain a certain level of awareness about the implicit dynamics of O’Donovan’s own project. For example, he claims that “Christendom” offers a reading of Scriptural political concepts and a reading of “ourselves” (*DN*, 194). Given contemporary ethnic, religious, and moral pluralism, proposing to rehabilitate even a modified form of Christendom as “our” tradition (or, as he elsewhere puts it, “if...not our tradition...our great-grandfathers”) [*DN*, 226]), requires some careful treading. There seems, in both books, a surprising lack of attention to plurality both within the Christian tradition and in ethically diverse political contexts. Several references to figures such as Stanley Hauerwas and John Howard Yoder notwithstanding (*DN*, 151-52, 215-17, 223-25; *WJ*, 266), O’Donovan seems often to be offering up a rather monolithic view of what counts as “ours”—indeed, who “we” (moderns, or Christians, or Protestants) actually are. And if the First Amendment to the United States Constitution really does represent, as O’Donovan argues, “the symbolic end of Christendom” (244), perhaps we should be even more wary of traveling down this road to Christendom. Perhaps what O’Donovan says about a “Christian state” is true:

The idea of a Christian state, then, need not be the idea of a coercive state. Imagine a state that gave entrenched, constitutional encouragement to Christian mission not afforded to other religious beliefs, and expected its office-holders deference to these arrangements as to constitutional law. Such a state would have no need to restrict the civil liberties of any non-Christian, even to the point of allowing the highest offices to be free of religious tests. (224)

If so, however, one wants to know a great many things about what he has in mind, beginning with definitions of “coercive,” “entrenched, constitutional encouragement,” “expected,” “deference,” and “civil liberties.”

I have dwelt at length on these larger issues because they serve needlessly to distract the reader’s attention from the important contributions made by O’Donovan’s two-volume project. In other words, I see nothing in *The Desire of the Nations* or *The Ways of Judgment* that leads me to believe that the considerable insight of O’Donovan’s political vision depends upon an overdrawn contrast between early and late modernity, or between pre-Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thought. O’Donovan’s work offers a rich set of resources for thinking about how spiritual commitments implicate themselves into our ethical and political lives, regardless of other intellectual, cultural, or political trends that may or may not be going on around us. As mentioned at the outset of this essay, reading either volume of O’Donovan’s political theology repays the reader richly: reading both opens up exciting new ways of thinking about both politics and theology, as well as the ways in which they have intertwined at the core of human experience.

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At last my chance has come. . . . You have asked me to write you a note for the Pilgrim. . . . I must confess that I have half hoped and half feared that you would. . . .

This isn't the first note I've written you in the two and a half years we have worked together. . . . I wonder how many there have been. . . . On some students' personal problem. . . . On some classroom situation. . . . Wondering whether we'll get the magazine out this month or ever. . . . Swapping impressions of the life of the Church beyond our campus, out there where what we lecture about really matters or doesn't matter at all. . . . But somehow, those notes were different. . . . Scribbled on the little yellow slips from your outer office. . . . Returned to me with your penciled comments in the upper left-hand corner. . . . And that's all—except to try to do what you suggest in those cryptic remarks.

But now I have the feeling that somebody else might read the note. . . . That makes it tough, because they expected to read some notes on your pilgrimage. . . . Or at least on the pilgrimage of one of our learned Associates. . . . I still remember our Music Editor's observations on steak and salads in this column, back in the days when he was unsuccesfully trying to teach me Greek participles. . . . And, more recently, the wisdom and wit of our campus elder statesman and my foreman. . . . But those men spoke from the wisdom and experience of the years, and I have little experience, less wisdom, and very few years to my credit. . . . Besides, I have never put more than one period between sentences before, and it feels strange.

on being young

It feels strange, too, to be a pilgrim. . . . So far I've only been a wanderer, and that's one short step from being a tramp. . . . Young hands can easily grasp a pilgrim's staff, but young feet have a hard time walking on a pilgrim's path. . . . It is hard to hear the trumpets sounding on the other side when they and it seem so far away. . . .

And yet many men my age and even younger have died in the years since you first picked up the Pilgrim's staff. . . . Being young in the twentieth century means more than serving an apprenticeship for the years of productivity. . . . More than sitting in an ante-room and waiting for maturity to beckon. . . . Growing up slowly is a luxury we can't afford any more. . . . Too many men, young and old, have died, and too many others are living in prisons built by men's hands or men's minds.

It's probably symptomatic of this situation that most of the men at Oak Ridge are young men. . . . Young enough to want to do something about the thing they have released. . . . Young enough to hope they still have time to do it. . . . Young enough to brood over it when night falls in Tennessee. . . . Young enough for God to get at them before it's too late for them. . . . And for us. . . . A wise man said once, "The devil can use young men, too." . . .

But so can God. . . . All of this sounds like an apologia pro vita sua, and that's probably what it is. . . . But to any young man working in the Church it's a real problem. . . . That Melanchthon wrote the first handbook of Protestant theology at twenty-four. . . . And Calvin one of the greatest handbooks of Protestant theology at twenty-seven. . . . In fact, you will recall that both these handbooks got worse as the men got older. . . . The first editions are more valuable than the later ones not only as collectors' items, but also as testimonies to the Cross. . . .

Maybe there is the blessing of being young. . . . Young eyes have not yet seen enough of life's success and life's defeat to
forget the greatest defeat in history that was history’s greatest success. Young minds have not yet become “practical” enough to forget the radical implications of the lordship of Christ. Young hearts have not yet succumbed to the prudential allure of being moderate when the situation demands a clear-cut Either/Or. The world’s reformers have often been its young men.

The world’s destroyers have often been its young men, too. The young Alexander. Augustus Caesar. Bonaparte. Marx. All of them started their damage before they were thirty. Often, too, the young idealist becomes the aged cynic.

... For cynicism is idealism with a hangover. My barber assures me that what we need is more realism. Not, I trust, the realism of “The Artist as a Young Man.” Perhaps the realism of the Savior as a young man. For He was never old as men measure age. But He was from everlasting, wise in the realism of God, who alone sees things as they really are.

What passes for realism these days is often a demonic thing. The realism of a Stalin, whom the years have blessed with cynicism but not with wisdom. I strongly fear that the Iron Curtain doesn’t have a patent on such realism.

the hazards of being a Christian

Young or old, it seems to me our greatest danger in the twentieth century is in such realism. After all, so the line runs, one must be practical. It is all well and good to speak of ethics, but I must make a living. Give me a religion that works. Works for me, that is, and not for God. You can’t expect a man to live up to the imperative of the Cross. And nobody is perfect.

Christianity has been tolerated for so long that being a Christian and being a gentleman are almost the same. This is due to the effect that Christianity has had upon civilization and society for these many years. But a good part of this unfortunate equation stems from the fact that the demands of the lordship of Christ have been watered down to a conformity with the ideals of existing society. Emily Post’s Etiquette is classified in libraries right next to books on Christian ethics.

This domestication of the Christian faith has been effected in the name of realism and practicality. It is respectable to be a Christian. No one would dare aspire to the Presidency of the United States who did not belong to some church or other. I sometimes suspect that Christianity has paid dearly for the respect it enjoys in the eyes of the world. This was, you will remember, the theme of Søren Kierkegaard’s Attack on Christendom. And of St. Luke 6:26. “Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you.”

It is no accident that the Roman Emperors who persecuted the Church were among the best Emperors Rome ever had. They knew what they were doing.

If the Church was right, then the Empire was wrong. For if God had really spoken in Christ’s life and acted in His death and resurrection, then Caesar was not God. Rome was not divine. But if Rome was not divine, neither is America. If Rome fell, so can America. The State is the idol of the twentieth century, and the Iron Curtain doesn’t have a patent on that, either. Maybe it’s time we Christians took a long look at our identification of Christianity and respectability.

That is a theological task. I have often heard you say that the times call for theology. Not a theology that constantly apologizes for itself before the world. Or that strives so pathetically for relevance that it forgets to be Christian. Or loses itself in abstraction and rarefaction. Or, at the other extreme, tries to be “practical” in the worst sense. A theology for our times must be what one of our contemporaries has called “a full blooded, loyally Biblical, unashamedly ecumenical, and strongly vertebrate system of Christian belief.” Only such a theology is suited to the crisis of our age. Only such a theology is worthy of the responsibility and opportunity entrusted to us by the Lord of the Church.
Such a theology can also uncover the hazards of being a Christian. . . . It is hazardous to be a Christian in the U. S. S. R. because that is an “atheist state.” . . . It is hazardous to be a Christian in the U. S. A. because this is a “Christian state.”. . . Communism tempts men by telling them that they need no Church. . . . Western men are tempted by the theory that the State has become the Church. . . . The Church is very popular today as a bulwark against Communism. . . . Men are admonished to turn to God in order to save a political or economic system. . . . But God—or, at least, the Christian God—refuses to be the means to an end. . . . He will be God regardless of what happens to any political or economic system. . . . And He desires to be loved for His own sake. . . . Otherwise, He and His Church become tools for defense against whatever I don’t happen to like. . . . As in Franco’s Spain. . . . And Czarist Russia. . . . And, now, Soviet Russia, when the Church has muffled its witness against the State. . . .

To be faithful to its Lord, theology must emphasize again the primacy of His will and work. . . . “Seek ye first the kingdom of God.” . . . And nothing else matters. . . . “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.”. . . That’s hard to say when the national income is over two hundred billion. . . . Harder still to believe it. . . . And hardest of all to live as though it were true. . . . Because it is. . . .

Such a task requires the time and talent of all, regardless of age. . . . Each has his contribution to make. . . . And as you have often told me, that contribution does not consist in sitting at a desk. . . . But it comes in working for people. . . . And for God. That’s all for now. . . . I must get back to that work. . . .

As ever,

JARY ♦
Mädchen im Spiegel (Girl with Mirror) is a painting by Nicolae Grigorescu (1838–1907), a Romanian artist who studied and worked in Paris during the late-nineteenth century. Influenced by the Barbizon School, a group of landscape painters who emphasized realism in their portrayals of rural life, Grigorescu found his subjects among Romanian peasants as they lived and toiled in the countryside of his homeland. Grigorescu—himself born to a peasant family—treats his compatriots with sympathy and restraint, revealing their thoughts and emotions only through subtle hints—a wisp of smile on the face or a simple gesture of the hand. As the young girl's body reclines at rest, her mind is clearly restless. And as she gazes into the mirror, our eyes are drawn to hers. We wonder how she feels about what she sees. Does her placid face reveal a hint of vanity? Or is this an image of boredom and distraction? With a few simple strokes, Grigorescu suggests a soul that is both enchanting and enigmatic.

on poets—

John Solensten

has published three novels and two short story collections. He also has published more than twenty individual short stories and memoirs and more than eighty poems. His plays have been produced by theaters in Minneapolis, Duluth, and Oklahoma City.

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