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Valparaiso University

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THE CRESSET

A review of literature, the arts, and public affairs

Lent 2007



Humility
Norman Wirzba

Why Cook Dinner?
Agnes Howard

Friendship and Its Language
John von Heyking

Pondering Conscience
Marie Failing

Trail Maintenance
Paul J. Willis

Politics as Gardening
Peter Meilaender



THE CRESSET

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Teaching to Learn

THE WINTER SEMESTER BEGINS PEACEFULLY. When students return in the fall, they arrive all at once, loud and energetic as they reclaim a campus left to faculty and staff back in May. But in January, they slip back into town quietly, perhaps less glad to be here than they were in August. Perhaps less energetic too, fattened up nicely from holiday feasts. The cold and darkness of winter slows them down, and the season for feasts gives way to the season for fasts. It is a good time to focus on one's studies.

It is also a good time to focus on one's teaching, as I have been doing lately. There is an endless supply of books written by teachers for teachers about teaching. This may be because—as anyone who spends much time in the classroom quickly recognizes—teaching is a mysterious craft. I never know when the best class sessions are going to happen. When they do happen, I'm never certain exactly why. Was it my carefully chosen reading assignment? My well crafted lecture? My discussion questions? Most likely, it wasn't any of those things. I've concluded that no matter what I do, a large part of what makes my classes go well on any given day is beyond my control. Did the students do the reading? Did the basketball game go into overtime and keep them from the library? Did they get any sleep last night?

Still, I read some of the teaching books, hoping for insights. One that I looked at recently was Patrick Allitt's *I'm the Teacher, You're the Student* (Penn, 2004). The title tells you most of what you need to know about Allitt's pedagogy. He is the teacher, and his students are not allowed to forget it. They are in his class to learn from him, not from each other. Allitt seems almost obsessed with maintaining authority, rules, and proper distance. From his students, he wants no excuses, no hats in class, and absolutely no information about their personal lives. He also comes off as a brilliant, engaging, and creative teacher, someone I would

have loved to take a class from, but I don't believe that his authoritarian approach is what makes him a good teacher. Although I respect (even envy) the control that Allitt maintains over his classes, the more I read of his book, the more I became convinced that his rules and regulations contribute far more to simplifying his teaching than to facilitating his students' learning.

Experience has taught me that I need to enforce deadlines, hold students accountable, and watch for inappropriate classroom behavior. When I fail to do those things, my job gets much more complicated than it needs to be. I already have enough work to do without allowing students to create more for me. At the same time, I don't believe that any student ever learned anything simply because I graded him down on a late paper. At least, nothing other than to get his papers done by the due date next time—which is something, but that is not the kind of teaching that excites me.

In something else I read recently, I found more valuable insights about the craft of teaching.

For who is so foolishly curious that he sends his son to school to learn what the teacher thinks? But when they have explained, through words, all those sciences that they profess to teach, even the sciences of wisdom and virtue, then those called students consider within themselves whether the truth was spoken, looking, in fact, at that truth within them to the extent they are able. It is then that they learn, and when they find, within themselves, that the truth has been spoken, they give praise.

Augustine wrote those lines in a dialogue called "On the Teacher" (included in Mark Schwehn's *Everyone a Teacher*, Notre Dame, 2000). These are words that will keep a teacher humble. Teachers can be wise and learned and teach the truth, and it might not matter at all. All our efforts

will come to naught unless our students take the next step and “consider within themselves whether the truth was spoken.” That moment—the moment when a student considers what we have said, compares it to what she already knows or believes, and decides whether or not to accept it as true—is when learning occurs. Even when they reject what we have taught, students learn, and they learn mostly because of their own efforts.

Most teachers at least would assent to Augustine’s point, but I’m not sure we always teach that way. I have no doubt that I usually walk into my classroom with expectations far too high about what my students will learn during that single hour of their day. I constantly have to remind myself that my job is not to convey large quantities of information to my students but to give them both the tools and the motivation to learn more on their own.

Many students, I suspect, would reject Augustine’s argument outright. Many, if not most, students today don’t go to college seeking truth of the sort Augustine had in mind. They go to college seeking credentials that will get them the job they want, and they expect teachers to help them get that job. This attitude can make them very passive about their role in their own education. They expect to receive some sort of knowledge—hopefully “useful” knowledge, and, in their opinion, a good teacher is one who finds clever ways to pass this knowledge on to them. Many students actually tell me that they prefer traditional lectures to class discussion, because they agree with Allitt that they aren’t in class to learn from the other students but from the professors.

Augustine’s words serve as a reminder to both teachers and students who think like that. Teachers must remember that what they teach is not the most important part of their students’ education; students must recognize that unless they are actively engaged in their own education, they are not going to learn much. As teachers we can help our students to read, to think, and to search for the truth, but we cannot give it to them.

But is Augustine’s understanding of education still relevant in today’s academy of modern sciences, pre-professional programs, and credential seekers? It makes me cautious when Augustine goes on to say that the truth within our

students—the truth against which my words are to be measured—is a truth taught to them by Christ, “who is said to dwell in the innermost man.” Augustine reminds us that God is the only teacher of truth.

Most contemporary academics are not accustomed to thinking of their teaching in quite those terms. I am a political scientist, not a pastor or priest. I believe that what I teach is true, but I doubt that my courses often lead students directly to “Truth”—or at least the kind of truth that Augustine meant. Most of the things that I teach about—nations, constitutions, ideologies—are transient. They come and they go. I may suggest that some of the things we talk about in class—for example justice and virtue—are more lasting and not so contingent on place and time, but my goal is not to make students believe one thing or another about such ideas. My hope is that taking my class will lead students to become thoughtful and articulate about this particular forum of human knowledge, and that they will become accustomed to doing what Augustine says they must do, to considering within themselves whether the truth is spoken.

The ultimate goal of teaching in any discipline—humanities, social science, professional—is not to convey a particular set of facts, concepts, or propositions. It should be to help students learn how to look within themselves and use their God-given rational abilities to sort through everything they are taught and everything that they experience in their lives. In any class in any discipline, good teachers do this. They teach their students to think, to examine their world and themselves with honesty and clarity, to consider whether what they believe is really true.

It is worth remembering this now, because the present season is more than just a good time to be focused on our studies. This season of fasts is a time for us all to examine ourselves and our beliefs with honesty, to simplify our lives so that we can reflect with clarity. Good teachers help their students learn how to do this, and, when we do, we help them learn about things far more important than anything we teach inside our classrooms. †

DIE GLEICHHEIT

Is Emma still an *immigrant* having arrived here from Ingersheim
some fifty-three years ago, just behind Helmut and with two

children, Suse and Bernd, in tow? They were just old enough
to know that *gute deutsche Kinder* do as they are told, just young

enough to learn to speak English without the telling gutturals
their mother would never give up. Is she still an *American woman*

and *German Frau*? Never a Nazi and so not now. Is she still
the *Lutheran* she was born and raised to be, the widow she became?

Is she still *Mama* to Bernd, who, twenty-some years ago, handlebars
gripped, turned to look, then tipped his motor bike for the last time,

Mama not only to Suse, but also to George, beloved son-in-law,
not German at all, born on a Florida orchard, who's called Emma

Mama now for forty-some years? To Kristy and Matt for whom *Mama*
means *Grandma*, and for Erin and Thomas for whom it means, well,

Mama, and who do not remember *Mama*—not even her spaetzle or
sauerbraten—except as she was the last years, not knowing them at all,

but seeing in them her own childhood, her own beautiful *Deutschland*?
Is she still the *seamstress*, maker of drapes at House of Reagin, bending

over pleats and gathers, thrilled to be earning such a decent wage,
to have a clean, neat place to go each day, well into her eighties?

Is she still Betty's roommate, sleeping through, oblivious to
the snoring, no trouble at all, *Mama* to the babydoll Suse brought

her, now the pleasant child she is, herself? As we carry the meagerness
of her things through the tiled corridor and to the truck borrowed

for this last task, we wonder whether she lives in the ashes that she
has been burned to, just miles down this Indiana road: if they still

speak of her in the accent—

Emma, Mama, Heilige Frau.

Mary M. Brown

Humility

ON AN AMISH FARM NORTH OF TORONTO, I recently had a vision in which I saw our best hope for the healing of the world. It happened on Alva Stoll's farmyard and focused on the face of his four-year-old granddaughter. More exactly, it was her regard for me and her quiet witness at the scene of our gathering that took me in and gave me hope. Her vision was both attractive and unsettling, since it communicated clearly and with profound simplicity how worthy and beautiful life is, and how difficult the path would be leading us from our current waywardness to our true happiness and good.

Alva and his nephew Paul had welcomed a group of us to their farm and agreed to answer our questions about Amish life, how and why they live the way they do. Not long into our discussion, Alva's granddaughter joined the group. She stayed in our company for thirty minutes or more, holding her Opa's hand and smiling at us the whole time. There was nothing dramatic about her appearance with us. She displayed simply the quiet, yet powerful testimony of a child perfectly content to be with her grandfather, on her farm, happy to contribute to her family's welcome of us. The calm and serenity of her presence made it plain there was no place she would rather be.

My thirteen-year-old daughter was with me on this occasion, and I asked her if there was anything unusual about this child. She noted how other children likely would have found this adult scene, maybe even the farm itself, utterly boring, and so would have acted out in some way, clamoring for attention or diversion. Clearly she had escaped the soul damage wrought by our entertainment and marketing industries! We also remarked how attention and patience disorders of all kinds have infiltrated child and adult worlds alike. More and more, we seem unable to rest quietly and non-contentiously in the summer shade or in the embrace of a loving family

Norman Wirzba

member. Such tranquility, we seem to think, lacks drama and is altogether too ordinary.

The memory of this girl has stayed with me, mostly because she embodied (at that moment at least) something about our common humanity that is being forgotten and is virtually lost. She demonstrated that human life is at its proper best when it is humble. Humility is a form of life that acknowledges and honors our rootedness in place and community. It connotes a way or manner of being that tries to be faithful to and responsible for, rather than aggressively exceed or overreach, a person's life-giving contexts. It comes to fruition as we learn to receive, enjoy, and cherish each other and the world as gifts. In the presence of this little girl, I came to understand how so many of our social and environmental problems stem from human arrogance and our inability (sometimes outright refusal) to live sympathetically and harmoniously wherever we are. I also saw that if our communities and habitats are to have a future worth protecting, then we had better learn to adopt the ways of humility.

I have no doubt that the attentive and patient ways modeled by her Amish elders had a lot to contribute to this girl's humble sensibility, as did the care and kindness they showed to their animals and each other. A grandma pulled a younger girl around the yard on a wagon much of the time we were there, thus allowing her to sense her place in the community and on the land. Equally important is the experience of childhood itself, experience that at its best is immersed in play and discovery. To experience the world and our place in it with childlike wonder and trust leads to humility, because it is in the context of the world's grandeur that we begin to see the true silliness of our often pretentious ways. When we live a humble life, we help create a world in which respect, restraint, care, peace, and celebration can flourish.

I am sure Alva's granddaughter is not perfect, and that she has her share of trouble. Nor do I wish to romanticize her Amish community as the unending and thorough display of humility. What I want to emphasize is that her community, the way it lives and thinks, makes possible and more likely (in a way that our society clearly does not) the humble disposition so clearly in evidence in this young girl. We need to remember that even as the Amish work through problems of their own, they at least are not directly responsible for the litany of woes we now face: degraded soils, contaminated water, anxious livestock, nuclear waste, bio-pollution, super pests, antibiotic-resistant pathogens, melting ice caps and glaciers, communal disintegration, massive personal and national debt, the sense that war is inevitable and even normal—all indicators that we have not yet learned to live humbly with each other on our lands.

Our adult world, the world governed by ever-expanding markets and violent aggression, cares nothing for this childish humility. It has been pushed aside and relegated to the margins, much like Amish culture. Humility has been dismissed as a "monkish virtue" that is both foolish and dangerous, because it impedes progress and casts a depressing shadow over human greatness. It even has been characterized as a vice and blemish that leaches on the strength, daring, ingenuity, and dignity that elevate us as a species. Admonitions to humility are the most miserable sign of self-imposed decadence, and therefore humility ought to be rejected as a character trait. Humility strenuously pursued, on this view, eventually will lead to self-hatred.

The trouble with this criticism is that it bears no relation to the farm scene I have been describing. Alva's granddaughter, as well as her family members that I met, showed no signs of self-hatred, depression, or decadence. Indeed, the beauty and order of their farm, as well as its rich productivity and health, suggested the opposite—a sustained affirmation, even celebration, of the community and place in which they lived. Rather than being a

drain or damper on life, the humility in evidence on this farm showed how it is possible to work and play in ways that ennoble and honor it.

In making a case for humility, we are not helped by the fact that it is extremely difficult to speak honestly or rigorously about it. Quite rightly, we are suspicious of those who talk about humility too much, for what could be more ridiculous than to argue for one's own humility? Moreover, shows of humility are often false or deceptive as people only feign meekness to secure some personal advantage. False posturing and insincere flattery, while suggesting the recognition of one's "humble" rank, actually turns into mockery as we play the insecurity of others to a self-serving end.

Whatever advantage we achieve in this manner turns out to be a sham, since it is generated through the debasement and corruption of each other.

The medieval monk Bernard of Clairvaux, in a spiritual guidebook called *On the Steps of Humility and Pride*, said humility is "the virtue by which a man recognizes his own unworthiness because he really knows himself." Iris Murdoch, the late British philosopher and novelist, described humility as a "selfless respect for reality and one of the

most difficult and central of all virtues." Both of these definitions suggest that an inflated ego is one of the prime obstacles to an honest assessment of our condition and place in the world. To live truly and faithfully with each other requires that we first get this ego out of the way. And so Murdoch continues, "The humble man, because he sees himself as nothing, can see other things as they are."

Many of us bristle at the thought that we are "nothing" or "unworthy." This is the kind of talk that leads to poor self-esteem as well as a low self-image. But before we dismiss these ideas out of hand, we first should consider what they mean and why they were defended by people who clearly were intelligent (and fairly well adjusted). We also need to be attentive to how these definitions can be abused and misrepresented,



Bernard of Clairvaux.
Engraving by
Ambroise Tardieu.

because we know how these admonitions to humility have been used in the past to keep individuals and groups—most notably women and slaves—down.

When considering humility, context is literally everything. Bernard's articulation of the issue was firmly rooted in his understanding of persons as creatures made by God. His immediate concern was how we, whether monastic or not, can live honestly with each other and in ways that promote peace and neighborliness (his treatise is peppered throughout with calls for us to become merciful and gentle). Why is this a main concern?

Bernard is convinced that it is possible, even likely, for us to forget who we are. When he, and other spiritual writers like him, suggest that we are unworthy and nothing, he is pointing us to an unarguable fact: that we did not bring ourselves into being and so must depend on others (human and non-human) for nearly every aspect of our living. This is what it means to be a creature. Whatever life we enjoy is finally a gift given by a creator God. As creatures, our most important task is gratefully to receive and share the gifts of life, nutrition, photosynthesis, friendship—all graciously given, and to a large extent beyond our comprehension and control. In our conversation on the farm, Paul made it abundantly clear: the work he and his family does is inspired by and in response to God's prior generosity and care for them.

Depending on one's frame of mind, this can be a hard truth to accept. We like to think we are self-reliant, dependent on few others, the captains and purchasers of our own fate. Indeed, many of us have difficulty accepting the generosity of others. We feel humiliated acknowledging that we need another's help. But when we forget that we are creatures, and start to think we can live "on our own terms" and experience the world "on demand," then it is likely that discord and aggression will reign in our communities as people jockey for position and power and that destruction will mark our places as we consume the world to death. In our forgetting of who we are, we lose the basis and starting point for a life of care and peace namely that we all depend on each other for the requirements of life and so

must work to strengthen and celebrate the bonds that nurture and sustain us.

Humility is central for Bernard, because it reflects an understanding of how we are so richly benefited by the unfathomable generosity—what spiritual writers term "grace"—of our creator. Why is God so generous and hospitable to us (but *not only us*)? We don't rightly know, other than to say that the bounty, beauty, and diversity of creation, its preciousness, reflects a God who surely loves creation and takes delight in its well-being.

If creation is the concrete, physical manifestation of a creator's love, then we plainly can see how damaging any form of hatred is. The self-loathing often associated with humility, and the idea that humility renders us utterly worthless, is entirely out of place, since it represents a denial of what God already has proclaimed worthy of love and care. If God loves creation, thinks it worthy of being made, who are we to say that any member of it is deserving of our contempt or abuse?

In the smiling face of Alva's granddaughter, the sense of the goodness of creation, the sense that she is lovingly well-provided for, was unmistakable. The manner in which she carried herself communicated supreme trust in the world. Her countenance showed no fear or suspicion, but rather delight and contentment. The thought that if she is to live well she must take the world by cunning and force, or that to be worthy she must first become a celebrity, had not yet entered her mind.

Bernard was clearly aware that fear and distrust can quickly overwhelm our living. After all, it is a terrifying thing to come to terms with the fact that at the core of our being we finally must trust in the kindness of others, or live the faith that God will provide. We cannot live humbly and well alone. We need the encouragement of each other to sustain us in the ways of fidelity and hope. When worry and faithlessness do take over, however, our inclination is to deny that we are creatures made to live in interdependent wholeness, and so we try to secure as much for ourselves as possible. We then become sinful and proud, defensive and arrogant, envious and anxious, claiming more than we properly should. And so creation and communities, rather than being at peace, unravel and begin to fall apart through mutual contention.

It is remarkable how ecological Bernard's understanding of humility is. His appreciation for creation as an interdependent whole lines up fairly precisely with the scientific understanding that by ourselves we are quite literally nothing. The peculiarly modern invention of persons as self-standing, disembodied egos is, in fact, a dangerous delusion. Insofar as we breathe and eat, it is only because of vast webs of energy that intersect through us and everything else. To live responsibly in a place, most obviously through our bodies but also intentionally with our minds, we must honor and nurture our life-giving communities. One of the clearest signs that we have entered a path of humility is that we pause to enumerate with some regularity all the gifts that feed into and form our being, and then express genuine gratitude. It is hardly surprising, then, that Sabbath worship and celebration serves as the high point of an Amish week.

If we fail at this humble task of thanksgiving and instead choose paths of self-glorification, communal disintegration will be the result. What Bernard could not have known is how in a technological age, combined with immense mechanical power, the orders of creation that hold all life together would come apart. He likely would consider our blasted mountains, degraded coral reefs, depleted oceans, vanishing forests, disintegrating families, anxious and stress-ridden workforce, and urban and rural slums as the clearest signs that in our culture sin has taken a firm hold.

When we understand that *in terms of ourselves* we really are nothing, the possibility emerges, says Murdoch, that we will "see other things as they are." This point's significance cannot be overestimated, particularly since we now live in a world that has been profaned on multiple levels. By its profanation I mean that reality—forests, farms, wetlands, neighborhoods, whole towns—now signifies an idolatrous reflection of our own

ambition. The world exists to serve us rather than, as Bernard would have said, to praise God. The value of things is increasingly measured by their utility or economic benefit. The sense that our natural world is holy or an iconic realm of deep mystery and sanctity pointing beyond itself to something higher is mostly gone.

How did we come to this conclusion? Clearly, this is a very complex matter, but Murdoch gives us a context with some clues. "We are not isolated free choosers, monarchs of all we survey, but benighted creatures sunk in a reality whose nature we are constantly and overwhelmingly tempted to

deform by fantasy." Murdoch is suggesting that at root our problem is that we do not care to live ordinary lives. We prefer the excitement and possible grandeur of fancy. Our yearning for another life, a "better," more luxurious, comfortable, and safe world, would not be so great a problem if it did not have such destructive effects.

The humble person confronts this yearning head-on by encouraging

us to start our thinking and evaluation where we in fact are, here and now. A moment's self-reflection ought to reveal to us how frequently we start somewhere else, a place that is definitely not ordinary but glamorous and dramatic. Rather than beginning with an honest assessment of who and where we are, and thus learning to work within our limits and potential, we despise ourselves and our homes. No doubt various forms of media and marketing have a lot to do with this, since they encourage us to treat the present with contempt and as beneath what we deserve.

Such contempt, besides being immensely destructive, is finally a lie. Everything we need to live well is here, provided we take the time to nurture and care for it. Our longing to be somewhere else, and the thought it will be better there, is a fanciful delusion because it does not appreciate the silliness of its starting premise: if the place

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where I am is irredeemably boring and ordinary, then finally every place *by my being in it* must finally appear as similarly boring and ordinary. Fanciful projection, besides inducing a never-ending state of homelessness, becomes a recipe for perpetual ingratitude and unceasing (often destructive) competition and consumption.

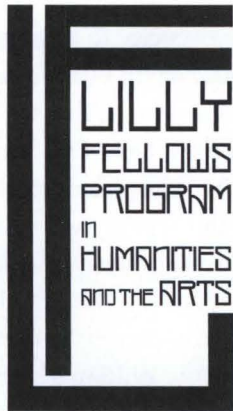
To be caught in a fanciful world is to see reality as we want to see it, not as it in fact is. When we become arrogant, we go one step further and believe that reality should become as we want it. As we all know, there can be considerable distance between these two worlds, the world of our dreams and the world of contingent creation. As our history so plainly shows, the preferred means for bridging the distance has been to unleash a stream of force and violence upon places and communities.

The violence cannot end until we rightfully take our place as creatures, not as lords over creation but as responsible members within it. To accomplish this aim, we will need to get our ambition, but also our fear and anxiety, out of the line of sight. We must, again, become nothing so that others *and we ourselves* can appear in all their freshness and wonder, all their costly grace. In this respect, we must become again as little children who have not yet learned to see reality primarily in terms of an agenda. Only then will magnificent and at times incomprehensible beauty shine through.

There is a paradox at the heart of humility: to achieve the fullest, most honest, affirmation of life, we must first practice the discipline of self-denial. Failing such self-restraint and self-control, the wonder of the world—its graced character—simply will pass us by. The capacity to be at peace in our communities and places will evaporate.

Rowan Williams, the current Archbishop of Canterbury, perceptively has noted, “The hardest thing in the world is to be where we are.” We want to be the center of the world, rather than take our humble and peaceful place within it. Failing that, we yearn for another world, all the while destroying the one we currently occupy. For many, perhaps most, of us, Williams’s observation is undoubtedly true. But not, I suspect, for the Amish girl I met in Ontario. Will she continue to be a witness to the serenity and contentment of humility as she becomes an adult? I can hardly know for certain. But I do think she is better positioned than many of us, because she lives within a culture that takes humility seriously as the acknowledgement that everything we have and are is finally a gift that must be treated with respect and received in gratitude. †

Norman Wirzba teaches *Philosophy and Theology* at Georgetown College in Kentucky. He is the author of *The Paradise of God* and *Living the Sabbath*.

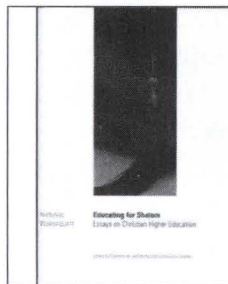


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In addition to his notable work as a premier Christian philosopher, Nicholas Wolterstorff has become a leading voice on faith-based higher education. This volume gathers the best of Wolterstorff's essays from the past twenty-five years dealing collectively with the purpose of Christian higher education and the nature of academic learning.

Integrated throughout by the biblical idea of shalom, these nineteen essays present a robust framework for thinking about education that combines a Reformed confessional perspective with a radical social conscience and an increasingly progressivist pedagogy. Wolterstorff develops his ideas in relation to an astonishing variety of thinkers ranging from Calvin, Kuyper, and Jellema to Augustine, Aquinas, and Kant to Weber, Habermas, and MacIntyre. In the process, he critiques various models of education, classic foundationalism, modernization theory, liberal arts, and academic freedom.

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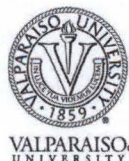
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Why Cook Dinner?

“THE VOICE OF LIFE AND SALVATION SAYS: WHY will a person chew on a grape and still wish to remain ignorant of the nature of that grape?” So pondered Hildegard von Bingen, the twelfth-century mystic, suggesting that eating carries with it the responsibility to care about the stuff that sustains life. We find ourselves at a propitious moment for thinking about the nature of what we eat. A handful of provocative books on food and eating have appeared while Americans are, happily, between diet fads. We have passed through low-fat and low-carb regimes, the latter condemning the stuff on which most people in the world survive, like rice, potatoes, beans, pasta, even the staff of life itself. While there legitimately may be holy indifference to food—

contentment to subsist on locusts and honey—it also can seem a species of ingratitude to take our food for granted, caring about it only on the level of taste or nourishment.

Michael Pollan, a self-proclaimed “food detective,” takes up Hildegard’s challenge in *The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*. The dilemma is this: the abundance and variety of American food, plus violent swings in dietary fashion and the absence of long culinary traditions, leave us unsure of what to eat. If, in Alexander Schmemmann’s terms, “the whole world is presented as one all-embracing banquet table for man,” Pollan is troubled to discover that we literally do not know any longer what will nourish and what will kill us. For him, food choices are

Agnes R. Howard

moral choices, not just aesthetic preferences, because of their ramifications in economics, ecology, and society.

Pollan reveals how far-flung is our food chain, how unlikely and unappetizing the path to our plate. He takes eating-as-an-agricultural-act to extreme if logical lengths, following his own steer from feedlot to slaughter, watching corn become syrup, chilling with produce in an organic lettuce

warehouse. His aim is to help readers see that the journey from chicken to Chicken McNugget is costly. Industrial food systems encourage us to forget or ignore where food originates: “[I]f we could see what lies on the far side of the increasingly high walls of our industrial agriculture, we would surely change the way we eat.”

Caitlin Flanagan. *To Hell with All That: Loving and Loathing Our Inner Housewife*. New York and Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 2006.

Cristina Mazzone. *The Women in God’s Kitchen: Cooking, Eating, and Spiritual Writing*. New York and London: Continuum, 2005.

Michael Pollan. *The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*. New York: Penguin, 2006.

Pollan is keen to distinguish heroes from villains. Corn tops the list of the latter. In the rogues’ gallery are agribusiness giants that produce it, farm lobbies that ensure its subsidies, and confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs) that feed animals not naturally disposed to eat it. On the side of the angels are local produce, grass-fed animals, small-batch cheeses, foods eaten simply as they are. Organic products and their distributors fall into a grey area in Pollan’s accounting, virtuous in intentions and pesticide avoidance, but almost inevitably compromised by large-scale industry and mass marketing.

Although some readers might recoil from the faintest whiff of moralizing about food, Pollan is not really sanctimonious. After all, he takes his son

to McDonald's now and then, and he is not a vegetarian. For his "Perfect Meal," he shoots a wild boar and pulls abalone off Pacific coastal rocks, completing the feast with wood-gathered morels and a tart filled with cherries from a neighbor's tree. At the end of it all, he is grateful for the chance "so rare in modern life, to eat in full consciousness of everything involved in feeding myself: For once, I was able to pay the full karmic price of a meal."

Preparation for that single meal sprawls over weeks. While the author knows we usually do not cook that way, his admission points to a weakness of the book. The few meals we see him eat are so thought- and labor-intensive that they virtually disable every day cooking. The cook's participation in the omnivore's dilemma comes with difficulty. It is especially vexing for those responsible for feeding other people—a mother feeding a family, for instance. Pollan's earnestness is front-loaded into the gathering of food, so that the crucial link between the grocery bag (or farm-market basket) and the dinner plate goes largely unremarked. But that *is* a crucial link, especially with the kinds of whole foods—low on processing, preservatives, additives—that Pollan thinks we should be eating. Even if your groceries are organic, your produce local, your meat range-fed in a stress- and antibiotic-free environment, somebody still has to cook it.

Pollan's farmed and hunted meals reflect the aesthetic of the Slow Food movement, founded in Italy in the late 1980s to counter the homogenization wrought by fast food and preserve regional specialties. Slow Food chapters celebrate biodiversity and sustainability, grow heirloom vegetables, and host heritage barbecues. One of the delicious ironies of American culinary culture has been its idealization of peasant food. Italian cuisine seems particularly liable to this romantic approach, with many cookbooks assuming a lavishly illustrated, don't-you-wish-you-were-in-Tuscany model: behold the elegant simplicity of bread, oil, tomatoes, a handful of herbs. *Cucina povera*, the food of

the poor. Except this food of the poor is celebrated by people affluent and elegant enough to have been to Tuscany, or at least to develop Tuscan sensibilities. The key to success in such simple foods is that you must use the highest quality ingredients, a mantra repeated by the glossy cookbooks filling bookstore shelves: only the finest, the freshest, the ripest, the best.

This status inversion touts the food of the poor as the choicest of fare, provided that rules are obeyed and exact materials are employed to good effect. In another wrinkle, the same kind of

The same kind of cooks who tout local ingredients make us covet the produce of someplace else across the globe. Globalization breeds food envy.

cooks who tout local ingredients make us covet the produce of someplace else across the globe. Globalization breeds food envy. To make a dish the *right* way, you have to be using keffir lime leaves or powdered sumac or curly Treviso radicchio from a postage-stamp plot in northern Italy. But surely that is at odds with the spirit of peasant cuisine. Peasants may have had very fresh lettuce,

zucchini, tomatoes, potatoes, because they did not have much else. It is irregular, to say the least, to try recreating peasant dishes with only the finest ingredients. So while slow-food proponents have an easy target when they revile fast-food consumption as gluttony, insisting on only the finest is itself a kind of gluttony, with the immoderate appetite focused on daintiness rather than quantity.

A MERICANS COOK AND EAT FEWER MEALS AT home, spending more of the food budget on meals eaten out, but show ever more regard for their kitchens. A state-of-the-art kitchen is a status symbol in upmarket homes, even though those shining enormous appliances may be used rarely by their owners or anyone else. They are the trappings of cooking as hobby. Not a daily duty, but something done for fun, for therapy, to impress, on occasion, with an audience. We do it with virtuosity and all the right tools, or not at all. A magazine page advertising a gleaming "complete Viking Kitchen" names the space, sim-



Stilleben mit Früchten, Flaschen, Broten. Francisco de Goya y Lucientes, c. 1824–1826.

ply, “Rec Room.” The dream kitchen designed by Electrolux offers even more: “It’s an art studio. It’s a quiet table for two. It’s a clubhouse.” A high-end British oven manufacturer presents its product in aspirational, inspirational terms, noting “Aga is not just an appliance, it’s a way of life,” for “serious cooks, celebrities, even royalty in Europe.”

With such high standards for food and kitchens, we might feel that unless we cook something authentic, organic, beautiful every day, there is no sense in going through the trouble. That is why households maintain a stack of takeout menus. Why not say, as Caitlin Flanagan does in the title of her book, to hell with all that? Why do the work, peeling this, chopping that, with a pile of pots and pans and plates at the end—day after day? Why waste time cooking a dinner that just will be eaten, or worse, just messed with, when your kids would rather go to McDonald’s anyway?

Flanagan riles feminists and traditionalists alike, though probably the former more acutely. *To Hell with All That: Loving and Loathing Our Inner Housewife* draws on previously published essays to praise the vanished ideal of competent house-

wifery. Recalling her own mother, she shares what a good thing it was to have someone to clip coupons, put fresh cookies in the jar, be waiting when children came home from school, and be waiting again with dinner on the table when husband came home from work. In Flanagan’s accounting, these are things to be desired now but not necessarily to do. We might wish we lived like this, but insofar as it requires somebody to be the housewife, we are not willing to sacrifice talents, education, or salary for it. So we wistfully honor those things but must make do without them. Or else we monetize them, paying someone to do childcare, someone else to clean the house, someone else to do laundry, and perhaps someone else (or some place else) to cook dinner. Flanagan remembers her mother making pot roast but does not do it much herself.

She thinks she *should* cook dinner. A whole range of problems in the United States has been chalked up to the waning of the family dinner: obesity and other health problems, failed relationships, youthful delinquency, bad manners all around, all because we eat out instead of in,

separately rather than together, in the car rather than at the table. For his part, Pollan blames capitalism, as civilized dining habits were swept away by “the food industry’s need to sell a well-fed population more food.” Flanagan notes the absence of family dinner, but is not overconcerned. She would just as soon have her quality time in some other form (she enjoys her children more once they learn to talk, so she “no longer [feels] lonely” in their company) and finds the hand-wringing misplaced over “getting some macaroni and cheese into the kids.” Further, she points out, quite appropriately, that one reason family dinners slide in affluent households is that children are too busy with activities to get to the table on time, and so reviving dinner-time would signify a step down, not a step up.

Flanagan lauds housewifely thrift. Thrift is an admirable quality, but it is not the most we can say in esteeming the making and planning of meals. Cooking for a feast is easy, whether a real feast or a once-a-month dinner party, when time, ingredients, and care are bountiful. Regular cooking requires more prudence and discipline. What is available? How long does it keep? With what can it be combined?

Rather than setting out Manichean categories that divide fast food and slow food as evil from good, we might employ a different distinction: between fast and feast, or better yet, between fasting, feasting, and ferial cuisine. The distinction is nicely upheld by Robert Farrar Capon, whose quirky classic *The Supper of the Lamb* (Smithmark, 1996) taught readers how to eke four meals for eight persons out of a single cut of lamb. Roasts are for feasts, but “to the ferial cuisine belong all the rest—the dishes which take a little, cut it up small, and make it go a long way.”

Fast food and slow food are both wrong for every day. Vegetarians may reasonably disagree, but animals and plants are given to us as food, and it is a suitable way to respect their place in the order of things to eat them. Cooking should give those creatures their due. Waste, carelessness, excess, and

ingratitude denigrates what it costs, in matter, life, and labor, to feed us. In contrast, good cooking is quickening to creation, receiving the given with gratitude and ingenuity to make something flavorful and nourishing, out of it. Some days we eat low and might do so with contentment.

Dining together can be a great occasion of community, enjoyment of abundance, delight in flavor, but it cannot be “only the finest” every day. Some days we eat richly, and our food echoes our joy, or worship, or love. On feast days we *should* have oil

and fatness, sweets and abundance, and it should be food that takes special time to prepare. Even so, we can recognize an occasional fast-food meal as a special indulgence, especially for diners whose budgets do not stretch to Tuscany. Pollan’s son Isaac relishes fast food, and even the food detective himself

Vegetarians may reasonably disagree, but animals and plants are given to us as food, and it is a suitable way to respect their place in the order of things to eat them. Cooking should give those creatures their due.

has warm childhood memories of McDonalds: “I loved everything about fast food: the individual portions all wrapped up like presents...the pleasingly sequenced bite into a burger—the soft, sweet roll, the crunchy pickle, the savory moistness of the meat.” Fast food is hard not to like. Eating too much of it, though, can distort assumptions about how food should taste. French fries, potato chips, and Oreos please easily, but other foods might need practice to appreciate. Spinach and artichokes, olives and apricots are worth trying, worth developing a taste for. Cooking for children over the course of years is the way they learn what is good to eat, where it comes from, and how it nourishes.

READING PRACTICALLY ANYTHING ABOUT FOOD these days can make eating seem like a morally freighted pursuit, on grounds of health, aesthetics, or environmental impact. Nevertheless, food perennially has carried moral, even religious, significance. Jewish and Christian traditions have set apart symbolic meals, elevated some foods, and excluded others. Yet the fact that what we eat matters does not have to be felt only in guilt or self-righteousness, but in joy. Much attention has been paid to fasting and asceticism in the

lives of the saints, to pious women reputed to subsist on the Bread of Angels alone. While giving this tradition its due, Cristina Mazzoni instead is struck by how readily the preparation and eating of food appeared in the writings of holy women mystics.

The Women in God's Kitchen gathers an eclectic group—some desert mothers from antiquity, some medieval nuns and mystics, some modern converts and saints—around the focus on food, nourishment, and grace in their writings. Mazzoni's characters exemplify an old reason for getting back into the kitchen, one even better than current economic or environmental justifications. When done in a spirit of gratitude and charity, kitchen work might be a vital way to serve and live out our callings. It is a work of obedience, in Mazzoni's words, of "conforming one's behavior to God (for those who practice religion) or to the need of those who depend on us."

St. Teresa of Avila knew there was a time for penance and a time for partridge. Her nuns worried that kitchen duties distracted them from more important pursuits like prayer and contemplation. This complaint rings familiar, though currently expressed less in terms of godliness than in the language of business and busy-ness. Women have more important, more productive, more intelligent callings than the preparation of food. Teresa counseled, "[L]et there be no disappointment when obedience keeps you busy in outward tasks. If it sends you to the kitchen, remember that the Lord walks among the pots and pans and that He will help you in inward tasks and in outward ones too."

A task essential to the care of others, cooking can be humble but honorable work. So pronounced Angela of Foligno, a thirteenth-century *magistra theologorum* who joined the Franciscans after the death of her family. One day while washing lettuce, Angela was tempted by the devil. A wily voice asked why she considered herself worthy of her simple task. Angela answered that she was worthy only for hell—a dramatic reply that, Mazzoni notes, "shut the devil up." Surely this gifted, holy woman had better things to do with her time than rinsing grit from leaves? In Angela's writings, Mazzoni reads purity and security in the right attitude toward preparing food for ourselves and other to eat.

When I was just married, I puzzled over a question familiar to many newlyweds. What am I going to make every night for this man to eat? I was a decent cook already but wondered how, practically, to do this all the time. Still, I saw daily cooking as an effort to demonstrate competence: I can do this; we can live well on our budget. The moment of disenchantment came one steamy Virginia evening after we'd spent an afternoon gathering blackberries from the banks around abandoned railroad tracks. I came home to bake what my husband declared was his favorite dessert, blackberry cobbler. I mixed the berries with sugar and lemon, stirred together a biscuit crust, layered it all and sent it to bake. My hands and much of the kitchen counter were stained purple. After dinner I presented the cobbler: fragrant, gorgeously purple, sugared on top, served with a melting scoop of vanilla ice cream, as proud as a new bride could be.

My husband took a bite. "It has seeds," he said.

"It has what?" I asked. This was not quite the rapturous response I'd expected. "Of course it has seeds. Blackberries have seeds."

"Nanaw's didn't. Nanaw took the seeds out when she made blackberry cobbler."

I do not recall my reply, and it likely was not a very good one. Internally I was aghast, thinking of the sheer effort required to remove the seeds from all that berry pulp, the sheer waste of it, and relative unimportance of that detail in light of the glory of the finished dessert. But his point was made. His grandmother's cobbler was the standard against which others were judged, and a standard weighted by affection and memory.

In Margery Kempe's spiritual reflections, we hear God favoring her with a comparison to dried cod: "Daughter, you are obedient to my will, and cleave as fast to me as the skin of the stockfish sticks to man's hand when it is boiled." Margery's piety gives Mazzoni occasion to note that:

preparation of food involves a gift of self. As our fingers, hands, skin touch the various ingredients, getting them ready for the pot and for the table, an impalpable part of us—love?—cleaves to them, making cooking an intimate act of love....

Cooking, and more commonly eating together binds people to their loved ones, and, in celebrating life, the breaking of bread joins us in our shared need for both food and one another—as the skin of a stockfish is bound, tied fast, connected to the hand that prepares (to eat) it.”

Love clings when we cook. My grandmothers made pirohi (the Slovak version of the better known Polish pierogi), potatoes stuffed inside of noodle dough, a potato dumpling, starch on starch, the food of the poor made into something special by the small measure of eggs, and the great measure of labor, that could be added into it. Love clings, in our thankfulness for what God gives, for the way food of the earth smells, looks, tastes, and nourishes, and for those we serve. We sometimes eat with delight because food is made by someone who loves us with it. Even though chafing against mother’s food is a staple of children’s experience and literature—trading away the contents of one’s lunchbox, wishing for junk food banned from home cupboards—the very rebellion validates the assumption that, as Mazzoni puts it, “Mother’s food is best,” and that mother would not feed it to us if it were harmful.

Handling ingredients, preparing them for the pot, gives greater opportunity than just eating to ponder, observe, participate, and delight in a portion of the created order that has been given to us as our daily bread. Foodstuffs are possessed of certain scents, textures, flavors, properties, and we are

equipped with senses to apprehend these, to learn what things look, smell, and feel like, what they can do. Take the egg. Egg whites in a bowl start out as an insipid, pitiful puddle, but by beating turn first into seafoam, then marshmallowy mush, and then virtual whipped cream, except unlike cream’s density and velvet, this is resilient, firm, and glossy. Or the sugar routine: fling a few spoonfuls of sugar into a dry pan, turn on heat, and solid becomes liquid, colorless becomes golden, then amber, then burnt. Witness the smell of a peach at the stem end, the coarse nap on the skin of a yellow wax bean, the way an avalanche of spinach in a pan wilts to nearly nothing. It is all a wonder. It is good that things are so made and that we have the sense(s) to apprehend it. The kitchen is a place to learn, a varied education, worth having for oneself and teaching one’s children, not just in order to do but to understand. Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, a seventeenth-century Mexican nun, wrote to her superiors:

Well, and what then shall I tell you, my Lady of the secrets of nature that I have learned while cooking? I observe that an egg becomes solid and cooks in butter or oil, and on the contrary that it dissolves in sugar syrup.... It was well put by Lupercio Leonardo that one can philosophize quite well while preparing supper. I often say, when I make these little observations, “Had Aristotle cooked, he would have written a great deal more.”

Mazzoni’s women find nobility within the humility of the kitchen. But there is lowly, and then there is lowly. Flanagan contests the vein of feminism that characterizes cooking as “dogwork” or worse, quoting Joan Didion’s quip, “To make an omelet, you need not only those broken eggs but someone ‘oppressed’ to break them.” This characterization looks frankly boorish when set against the kitchen arts that women across the world master: handmade pasta rolled silken, curries made with spices fresh-ground and yogurt home-cultured, dark loaves baked from yeast conjured out of the air,



Großes Stilleben mit junger Frau. Otto Scholderer.

fruit pies with lattice tops and scalloped edges. Flanagan's audience, even those among them who personally would never peel a carrot, has been taught by food magazines and celebrity chefs to appreciate these. Still, it is hard to square contempt for kitchen work with appreciation of good food; desire for healthful, unprocessed meat and produce with inability to cook it; thrift with over-refined tastes. Cooking is quite appropriately seen as an art. Though to see it only as art is to forget the human need that drives it—to imagine *Babette's Feast* as just a display of virtuosity.

POLLAN'S BOOK TAKEN TOGETHER WITH Flanagan's lays a heavy burden on the mother trying to feed her family. The whole weight of environmental pollution, cruelty to animals, energy politics, the side effects of fossil fuels, if not the whole global economy, plus the health of her family, bear down on her whenever she reaches for a package of boneless, skinless chicken breasts. Her family might reasonably assume that if the cook picked and prepared something, it must be worth eating. Mother is gatekeeper, point of contact between the marketing and the eating of food. But she has ads and slogans ringing in her ears begging her to grant imprimatur to things that may not be worth eating, or promising too much that what is convenient for her is also good for them. There is a voluminous social science literature on American women as consumers, from nineteenth-century advice manuals to college majors in home economics, to advertising campaigns teaching moms to combine housewifery with convenience.

Here thrift alone fails us. At the end of the day, literally, thrift is insufficient rationale for taking the high road. When dinner needs to be on the table, drive-through, take-out, and pre-made are nearly irresistible. Grocery shopping might be simple if you have unlimited cash or no concern about how and where food is gotten or its consequences for health, but buying within the limits suggested by all three categories is hard. It is harder still with toddlers hanging off the side of the cart, for whom none of those categories apply. In fact, buying without those limits would be the way a toddler, left to himself, would go through the aisles, hardly something to aspire to. Caitlin

Flanagan contrasts starkly with her mother's housewifery, confessing, "child of my time, I could not tell you the price of a single item in my refrigerator. All I know—from long, unpleasant precedent—is that much of it is going bad and headed for the trash can."

But if we view Pollan's book through the lens of Mazzoni's subjects, we find fresh incentive to the daily task of feeding a family. From Mazzoni comes warm appreciation of the love and loveliness of food well prepared; from Pollan, stiff medicine on the broad consequences of one's eating. So the family cook does something of environmental and economic import when she buys food, and something of beauty and fidelity when she prepares and serves it. It is better to know something about what one eats, because we should wonder, even be frankly amazed, at the grapes we have to chew on. The work is not too menial for the very busy or very educated, nor is it predominantly for show or showing-off.

In this encouraging vein come cookbooks with titles like *Weeknight Meals*, *Everyday Mexican*, or *Everyday Italian*. Even Martha Stewart, with her peerless ability to beautify and complexify house-keeping, now maintains both a magazine and a PBS series titled, *Everyday Food*. These sources span a range of approaches to the problem of weeknight meals, from make-aheads reliant on crockpot and freezer to store-bought with add-ons, a style the magazine *Real Simple* (!) calls "Fake It Don't Make It." My favorite options would be plainer—soup and bread, beans and rice, lightly dressed pasta—choices perfectly acceptable if we allow that every day is not a feast day. To cook successfully does not require preparing "Crunchy Wasabi-Crusted Fish with Red-Cabbage Slaw" or "Jerk Pork Chops with Hearts of Palm Salad and Sweet Plantains," two entries from the Ten-Minute Mains feature of a *Gourmet* magazine, which favor luxury as a substitute for time.

Perhaps all this seems like inordinate care for bodily necessity, time misdirected to things that so quickly pass away. Here we might try to locate the limits of appropriate care for what we eat. It is a mistake to care too much, either for reasons of taste or for environmental sensitivity, to swell with righteousness at one's refined taste or clean conscience. We should care for the earth but not

make a fetish of it. Nor should we make an idol of the body: masking finitude with fitness, prostrating all to health and longevity, hoping through high fiber and flavonoids to cheat death. We should not be obsessed with food because either our appetites or our consumption or both are immoderate. And I think Pollan is wrong on this count: we never pay the full price for what we eat, karmic or otherwise. There are so many imponderables and unmeasurables linked even to the simplest bites that we never really have a right to the pride of thinking ourselves alone responsible for what we eat. Better to think measuredly of daily bread, and receive it with thanks.

Curiously, frequent cooking can insulate one from errors about food rather than making one more susceptible to them. Contact with food-stuffs exhibits the beauty and bounty of creation but also its fallenness and one's own fallibility. Things go wrong, collapse, burn, curdle, and crumble. My sister executes recipes better than I

do, but she compliments me on the ability to fix things that fall flat. It is, after all, only food. Admittedly, cooking can still sometimes feel like a mandala sand painting, the Buddhist art form painstakingly rendered grain by grain and destroyed upon completion to symbolize the impermanence of all that exists. Costly ingredients will be consumed, used up, fill the belly, just like common ones. Things spoil. And it is not the object of our eternal devotion: one sees hauntingly the speed of decay, noting how quick the time between freshness and rot. We are mortal creatures who do not have life in ourselves but must take in nourishment. Those of us who have the task of feeding ourselves and others might do so in a way that invites companionship and thanksgiving around daily necessity. ♣

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VERNA DAMEIER

Though Mrs. Jack Dameier's
Dressed in sweats and running shoes,
She can't outrun Alzheimer's,
But she does her best.

She is delighted
To meet her children:
"I imagine Jack
(Dead eight years now)
Is walking Roxy.
Don't leave, he'll want to meet you
When he gets back."

And such a vernal smile spreads
Across the soft ravines
Of her raised face,
Like forgetful grass
Brightening the weathered stones,
Like sunlight sleeping on
The shoulder of the land.

Charles Strietelmeier

Friendship and Its Language

FRIENDSHIP IS IN BAD SHAPE. LAST YEAR THE *American Sociological Review* published a study demonstrating that between 1985 and 2004, the number of Americans admitting they have no one with whom to discuss important matters nearly tripled. But lacking a confidant is only part of the crisis. Americans seem to have lost their ability to maintain even basic neighborliness. One of the study's authors observed how starkly Hurricane Katrina revealed the problem: "That image of people on roofs after Katrina resonates with me, because those people did not know someone with a car," said Lynn Smith-Lovin, a Duke University sociologist who helped conduct the study. "There really is less of a safety net of close friends and confidants." Similarly, the *New York Times* recently ran an article documenting the anxiety twenty- and thirty-something New York men feel when they spend time with one another doing things other than watching sports or cruising for women. The "man date," where two or more men enjoy conversation over dinner and wine, is considered "too gay" for most men, it seems.

Americans, even when not stranded on their rooftops, seem to have lost the art of friendship. They seem to be unsure just what to do with a friend. They know how to unite their bodies but not their souls. They seem to have forgotten a rich heritage in Western thinking on the meaning of friendship. The ancient Greeks thought that friendship at its best involved conversing about the noble and the good. Thus Xenophon reports Socrates proclaiming:

Just as others are pleased by a good horse or dog or bird, I myself am pleased to an even higher degree by good friends... and the treasures of the wise men of old which they left behind by writing them in books, I unfold and go through them together

John von Heyking

with my friends, and if we see something good, we pick it out and regard it as a great gain if we thus become useful to one another. (Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, I, vi, 14)

The Greek philosophers spoke frequently about friendship, which for them culminated in conversation about the good and noble.

The Bible mentions friendship less, but its intermittent references are critical. For instance, as Liz Carmichael observes in her exhaustive *Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love*, notable Christian thinkers have been drawn to John 15:15 as a central text on Christian love. There, Jesus proclaims his disciples will no longer be disciples, but friends.

Friendship also plays a strong role in the relationship of Adam and Eve. In Genesis chapter two, that enigmatic "second creation story," we hear in greater detail than chapter one what kind of world humans are to enjoy. God gave Adam enormous freedom in naming all his sustainers or counterparts. We share in this freedom, and awesome responsibility, when we name our children (or when children name their pets). But to name entire species! Adam's ability to name presupposes that he had an understanding of natural kinds—the difference, say, between a dog and a cat—allowing him to name species. It is for this reason Walter Benjamin called Adam the first philosopher. Whereas we had to learn the names of animal species from our parents, Adam would have known the stark difference between a world that is intelligible and significant and one that is not.

Yet, the joy of learning natural kinds left Adam incomplete. He acknowledges this incompleteness in his first recorded speech, which happens to be a poem (in Robert Alter's translation):

This one at last, bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh,

This one shall be called Woman,
For from man this one was taken.
(Gen. 2:23)

In recent years, this passage has been read as a patriarchal assertion of female bodily dependence on male form. This passage and its subsequent narrative, with its emphasis on the unity of flesh, frequently gets recited at weddings (although marriage frequently has been taken by numerous Christians as the height of friendship).

However, the text leads us to conclude that readings emphasizing gender inequality and marriage do not preclude us from viewing it as a statement of Adam's noetic participation in friendship. Adam has been naming, and therefore contemplating, natural kinds. In co-creating with God, in making a world of signifiers for humans, he has been exercising reason, his highest faculty. Yet, this world of signifiers is not fully significant. Adam needs a conversation partner. In Alter's literal and musical translation, we hear Adam's first words (which, as his first words, ineluctably draw the reader into the conversation): "This one at last." Adam has been searching for his own kind with whom not only to "go forth and multiply" in the bodily sense, but also in its noetic sense of praising and understanding creation. Even though he is lord of creation, Adam finds creation incomplete without someone with whom to communicate its glory. Since Adam speaks in verse that begins and ends with the feminine indicative pronoun, *z'ot*, "this one," we are also given to understand that Adam understands his own kind (human) but also the feminine that completes his maleness. That he speaks in verse suggests the importance of poetry, in the sense of music and of stories that engage both body and soul, in the conversation among human beings, including friends. Perhaps this is why, in his Vulgate, Jerome translates Paul's *politeuma* in heaven (Phil. 3:20) as *conversatio*, a term meaning

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know the whole person.*

not only conversation but also conversion and dwelling with. "Citizenship," as translated by the King James, seems too cramped.

But between our creation and our salvation, how on earth are we supposed to conduct friendly conversation in that fulsome sense? Three recent books go some way to uncovering the reasons for friendship's current crisis, as well as offering some remedies.

Joseph Epstein's *Friendship: An Exposé*, is a chatty reflection on the contemporary state of friendship. He thinks people today (himself especially) either have too many friends or they are lonely, which ends up being two effects of the

same cause. He observes that modern life is so fluid that our friends are like our wardrobe: just as we wear a piece of clothing for a while and then remove it, so too we interact with our friends (actually acquaintances) for a few hours, but we fail to know the whole person. Unlike Adam, who in sizing up Eve, had a pretty good understanding of who and what she was, we have "differentiated friendships" that take in a fragment of our

friends but not the whole person. Unlike Adam who gained self-knowledge in "at last" finding Eve, our superficial encounters deprive us of self-knowledge. As a result, Epstein observes that we try to compensate by seeking even more friends, which ends up undermining our sense of friendship with any one of them. Our friendships end up feeling like burdensome obligations. While friendships do carry their obligations (friendship includes justice, according to Aristotle and Aquinas), they do not necessarily *feel* like obligations. Friendship implies reciprocity, but friends do not keep scorecards. No one proclaims "at last" when they meet their obligations.

Epstein is critical of some of the modes of interaction we moderns frequently mistake for the essence of friendship, including intimacy, compassion, and confession. He also regards marriage as its rival. Epstein provides a thumbnail definition of

friendship as affection, shared interests, past, values, enemies, and delight in one another's company (21). But intelligent conversation is his focus, and telling stories about friendship is more important to understanding it than philosophical theories. Citing political philosopher Michael Oakeshott, Epstein finds friendship "dramatic," meaning our experience of it is inescapably participatory (45). He does not think friends need to share belief in God (20), by which he seems to reject a central definition of friendship (of Cicero, and shared with Augustine) as "agreement on things human and divine combined with goodwill and love." However, Epstein insists that friendship depends on having in common "certain unspoken assumptions about what is and what isn't important" (38). The ability of friends not to have to worry about debating the fundamentals of their common worlds places friendship "beyond intimacy," which enables them never to "run out of things to talk about or run out of good feelings for each other" (115). If friendship begins with respecting another's dignity, getting "beyond intimacy" entails reaching their (vaguely defined) "central fire," which ensures community (163). Friendship involves speech, but it is beyond speech. Epstein's understanding of friendship is closer to that of Cicero and Augustine than he lets on.

Epstein tries to be countercultural in criticizing our democratic demand that friends be equal. Quoting Francis Bacon, equality produces rivalry about which unequal friends need not worry: Achilles and Patroclus, Johnson and Boswell, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, and so forth. One could add Socrates and his friends, and recall that while Jesus preferred friend to disciple, only He is the Son of God. Epstein prizes his own friendship with the sociologist, the late Edward Shils, who was older and whom Epstein regards his intellectual superior. Epstein became Shils's friend after Shils and his equal, novelist Saul Bellow, broke off their friendship. Even so, the way Epstein describes his relationship suggests Shils regarded Epstein—despite inequalities in age, learning, and experience—his equal in having "a nearly complete understanding of his motives and his reasoning and, finally, the meaning of his life" (31). *At last*, Shils may have proclaimed in sizing up Epstein, he has found *this one*.

Stephen Miller's *Conversation: A History of a Declining Art* provides a history of conversation and shows the philosophical and cultural sources of the contemporary crisis in friendship. He identifies two broad enemies of conversation, and therefore of friendship: (1) the active life, which explains why the American founders were not good conversationalists (they were too busy founding their republic), and the obstacles commercial life places on it (too busy forging utilitarian relations); and (2) various forms of enthusiasm, which historically took the form of the Holy Spirit in Christianity and its parallel in the Romantic cult of authenticity, according to which nonverbal gestures convey one's essential humanity more adequately than verbal gestures. Examples of authenticity include Jean-Jacques Rousseau's symbol of natural man, which was inspired in part by his contempt for the conversationalists of French court life, Ernest Hemingway's laconic heroes, the nihilism of 1960s counterculture and its belief that authentic humanity comes through LSD and sex, the proclivity of rock stars and rappers who rely exclusively on vulgarities to express their sincerity about whatever it is they are sincere about, and, finally, the cult of individualism, whose devotion to expressing one's "unique point of view" diminishes conversation into a series of "intersecting monologues."

Miller's conversationalist defenders of friendship are the "clubbable men" of the English and Scottish Enlightenment: Adam Smith, David Hume, Samuel Johnson, and Jonathan Swift. The pubs, clubs, and coffee shops of London and Glasgow were the seedbeds of liberty and Enlightenment because such men were spirited conversationalists whose discussions covered the breadth of human experience. They surpassed the universities as sources of innovative thought. Their participants were more serious about their conversations than the French courtiers, who, according to English and Scots, were more interested in playing verbal games than in engaging in serious discussion (though Montaigne and La Rochefoucauld earn praise for their insights).

Yet, for all of Miller's criticisms of anti-intellectualism, he admits that reason alone does not make for good conversation. Raillery, which

Swift called “the finest part of Conversation,” keeps conversations both serious and ongoing. Raillery involves teasing, testing, antagonizing, and even making temporary enemies out of one’s conversation partners (5). For Epstein, and likely for Miller, raillery is more characteristic of male conversations (when they bother to converse) than it is of females. Even so, it has a way of cementing attention toward one’s friend and to the topic of the conversation.

Miller sees raillery as a key index of how politically stable a country is: “how much its citizens can engage in good-humored disagreement” (308). However, raillery shares with conversation’s prominent enemies, the active life and authenticity. Like one committed to action, raillery demands assertiveness and risking that one’s plans will come to naught. In conversation, raillery tests the other’s manly appetite for defending and asserting one’s viewpoints, thereby risking enmity with one’s partner. Like authenticity, raillery asserts one’s personality.

For the ancient Greeks (whose raillery, especially that of Socrates, Miller overlooks, although he summarizes the more docile parts of their conversational skills), raillery is an expression of *thumos*, the spirited part of the soul. *Thumos* gets aroused when one is compelled to defend oneself and those one loves, as well as one’s viewpoints. It enables political life. For Aristotle, it is the source of friendship and enmity (he and Epstein observe that one hates most those one previously has loved). As a result, it needs to be harnessed by reason so those two faculties of soul can perfect each other.

With Epstein and Miller, we find friendship sustained when reason rules the soul but also participates with what is above reason (“beyond intimacy,” “central fire”) and what is below reason (*thumos*). Liz Carmichael’s study of the central place of friendship in Christian love shows how this stretching out reaches its most differentiated expression in the Christian Trinity.

Carmichael laments that Christians have not sufficiently availed themselves of the New Testament friendship teaching. Her book covers the variety of ways Christian thinkers through the centuries have nevertheless drawn from John 15:15. While their neglect has numerous sources (monasticism being a major one), she points to the

Lutheran theologian Anders Nygren’s study *Agape and Eros*, published in the 1930s, as having a corrosive effect on Christian understandings of friendship in the twentieth-century. For Nygren, friendship is antithetical to Christian love, because it is too self-interested. Carmichael’s study of friendship in the Christian tradition disputes that claim in a number of ways, including the equation of *caritas* and friendship in the writings of Aquinas and in modern personalist accounts of the Trinity.

For Aquinas, “in the love of friendship, a man’s affection goes out from itself simply” (114–16, referring to *Summa Theologiae* I–II.28). Friendship as *conversatio* mimics the divine *communicatio* of God giving Himself to Himself. In ST I–II.38.2, Aquinas precisely formulates this *communicatio*: “But the Holy Ghost receives his proper name from the fact that He proceeds from Father to Son. Therefore Gift is the proper name of the Holy Ghost.” From this, one may infer that naming has something to do with friendship, that is, love and understanding a “who” in addition to a “what.” Aquinas develops a set of symbols showing how we can get into that conversation.

Paradoxically, we cannot strictly speaking get into that conversation. Friendship has no starting point in the sense that our affection for a friend precedes our recognizing that affection: “the appetible object [i.e., one’s friend] gives the appetite, first, a certain adaptation to itself, which consists in complacency in that object; and from this follows movement toward the appetible object. For the appetitive movement is circular” (ST I–II.26.2). In more familiar language, this means God’s love for us enables our love for Him, but it also points to the mystery of friendship according to which we necessarily find ourselves loving our friend before we recognize it. The appearance of our friend impresses his form onto us, which “complacency” (*complacentia*, the pleasure we experience in adapting our love toward the beloved) moves the appetite to desire union, which gets experienced as joy when achieved. Adam would have experienced “complacency” when he beheld Eve “at last.”

Aquinas says we experience uniting with our friends as “mutual indwelling” (*mutua inhaesio*). We are “in” each other insofar as we have impressed our form on one another’s soul—on

intellect and on appetitive power. We know we are “in” each other when we delight in one another. We also know we are “in” each other when we “strive to gain an intimate knowledge of everything pertaining to the beloved, so as to penetrate into his very soul” and where “it seems as though he felt the good or suffered the evil in the person of his friend” (ST I-II.28.2). Aquinas’s insertion of “it seems” indicates that the identity of friends is imperfect, or more precisely, they are both identical and different, and enough of each to allow for meaningful *conversatio*. The desire for complete identity is *in principle* antithetical to the practice of friendship, which, involving people sharing a common story, allows each individual to write his own lines in response to the other.

Friends also suffer ecstasy and zeal toward one another. Ecstasy literally means being taken out of our place. It is what we experience by having our friend’s form impressed upon us, our affection going out of us simply, experienced as delight in him and the desire to provide him his good, for his own sake. Jesus tells us the consummate act of friendship is to lay down our life for them (John 15:13). Zeal expresses what love shares with *thumos*: “the more intensely a power tends to anything, the more vigorously it withstands opposition or resistance” (ST I-II.28.4). We love what helps our friend and hate what harms him, including external harm as well as vice.

Twentieth-century critics distinguished friendship from agape by insisting only the former is self-emptying. However, Carmichael’s analysis of Aquinas shows how they missed the mark because she shows how, for Aquinas, self-emptying and sharing depends on maintaining a sense of self. Implicitly, by seeing friendship as falling short, these critics ask too little of agape.

However, Carmichael believes Aquinas did not go as far as modern thinkers in explicating the friendship of the Trinity. While the modern age invented the isolated individual, it also “thereby

opened up a path into a wholly new exploration of human inter-subjectivity” (159). Modern personalism, expressed variously by Kierkegaard, Simone Weil, and others, is more faithful to the Trinity than Aquinas, for whom one still “looks up” and thereby emphasizes God the Father, rather than “looking down” to the Son. For personalists, friendship is expressed through those concrete encounters with individual and particular persons. “Who” takes full precedence over “what,” or in Martin Buber’s terms, our friend is a “Thou” not an “it.” In preserving the Christian obligation to love one’s fellow human being, personalist thinkers have developed a variety of ways to express a fundamental stance with which we face “the Other.”

Kierkegaard distinguishes between “finding the perfect person in order to love him” from the Christian ideal of “being the perfect person who boundlessly loves the person he sees” (159). John Burnaby considers the Good Samaritan as the paradigmatic human encounter, where particular love is governed by the condition of need itself (165); Simone Weil considered that “creative attention” requires us to transcend our need of seeking our good and to experience “a miraculous supernatural transcendence which enables us to ‘wish autonomy to be preserved’ in ourself and the other” (170). Finally, all these thinkers insist on the irreplaceability of persons (175). These personalist accounts seem to share an appreciation that human beings do not choose their friends so much as find them along the paths they take, and that those paths are ineluctably formed by the chance encounters with our friends. This insight recalls Augustine’s observation, made in *On Christian Doctrine*, that our neighbor is he who “by chance” is nearby. Our lives and our friendships are formed by the manner in which we respond to our chance encounters, whose meaning only becomes apparent as we live out our lives with those friends.

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In some ways Carmichael overstates the novelty of the modern turn toward personalism. It can already be found in Aquinas, as well as in Augustine (as Peter Burnell has recently demonstrated). Moreover, behind the modern language of personhood, one can find Kantian notions of dignity and its assertion of autonomy, which in many ways conflicts with Trinitarian love. What can be gained by examining the modern turn toward personalism, however, is its reflections on the differing modes of encounter that chance brings about, and how those modes express our friend's irreplaceability. Each friendship encounter is experienced as a unique event. Yet, we share a latent though rarely understood humanity that is drawn out in those unique encounters. Some post-modern formulations (which celebrate chance) make friendship nearly impossible because they deny another self for one to love and understand, as well as one loving and understanding. While postmodernism's skepticism toward a stable self in many ways contributes to Miller's observation that contemporary conversations are in fact "intersecting monologues," Epstein's common-sense experience of friendship with Edward Shils, whose life's meaning Epstein divined, shows post-modernism goes too far in its skepticism.

Rather, personalism reminds us that friendship reveals itself in its concrete practices and iterations. Their descriptions of how friends connect with one another are vaguer than the delicately paradoxical language Aquinas uses to describe "mutual indwelling." This vagueness may be due to the isolation modern individuals experience, reflecting ambivalence as to how two souls unite. For Aquinas, friends mutually inhere with one another with their affection and with their intellects. With their intellects, we seem noetically to touch on a mysterious inner core or "central fire" (Epstein), but also through the more day-to-day encounters we describe to one another in a more reflective mode. The noetic and the reflective are inseparable.

Epstein rightly alerts us to the importance of stories about friends (35). Stories are the way the reflective part of our intellects participates with our friends. We share stories with our friends while simultaneously writing those stories with them. It always seems that after friends finish per-

forming some action, like backpacking in the Canadian Rockies, they feel the need to talk about it, frequently over drinks. Stories express and are examples of individuals participating with one another in a grander whole. Aristotle alludes to this when he writes: "And elsewhere Odysseus says that this is the best pastime, when human beings are enjoying good cheer and 'the banqueters seated in order throughout the hall listen to a singer.'" (*Politics* 1338a28-30, quoting *Odyssey*, 9.5-6). Ancient and Christian thinkers like Augustine frequently compared the aspired-to harmony of a city to a story or poem, and some of our best statesmen have been good story-tellers. Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill were great storytellers. Churchill's ability to tell stories was prodigious (many to Franklin Roosevelt, who frequently lacked the energy, and later the desire, to listen to them all), and he also wrote numerous books chronicling England's "island story." Lesser statesmen write only memoirs, but even these begin as stories they tell those around them.

Storytelling seems implied in Aquinas's evocation of the names of the Trinity because those names are of persons, that is, of relations of entities that are neither species nor particular instances (ST I.20). It seems also the lesson to draw from Adam's first recorded speech, which was a poem inviting us into the drama of humanity. However, the fluidity of modern life is a profound obstacle to our ability to live these stories with one another. We share chapters, sentences, a few fragmentary clauses, but the story as a whole is elusive.

Because stories seem difficult to share, people, out of lonely desperation, frequently seek a shortcut into the "central fire." Out of loneliness, the ecstasy and zeal about which Aquinas speaks gets deformed into erotic excitement, as well as the variations of Romantic authenticity Miller discusses. Zeal, unhinged from reason, gets expressed as rage and the sullenness of the lonely individual in the mob. Yet, Epstein points to the noetic vision of his friend Shils at the poignant moment when they both recognized they understood each other. That is the moment when their stories, their personalities, reveal themselves as a whole, an experience similar to witnessing the climax of a play. Many of us have had those moments of recognition (or had experiences we

thought were such moments—a mistake frequently causing confusion and heartache).

For the most part, though, we settle for intimations of such wholeness, which usually expresses itself in our desire for our friend's physical presence. Epstein and Miller speak of the special importance of physical proximity with friends. Gestures, eye contact, and simply sitting nearby not only amplify verbal meanings in conversation but also embody the human world in which speech is made: Adam had to see Eve; Aquinas notes the proper name for the member of the Trinity that was born is "Son." We frequently think of physical presence as an embodiment or instantiation of something greater (like the body serving as the instrument of the soul). Conversely, physical presence evokes wholeness, shorthand for a complete story. Churchill liked to have face-to-face dealings with foreign leaders, because it afforded each party an opportunity to stake his honor and to demonstrate their understanding of each other. Similarly, Elizabeth Telfer notes that liking someone (the prelude to loving them) is a matter of sizing them up, seeing if, like a painting, they "hang together" well in a unity. But we never fully see their unity because theirs is never fully present even to them and ours is never fully present even to us.

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The challenge of friendship then is to find a way to articulate the possibility for mutual indwelling in its appetitive, noetic (experiencing the "central fire"), and reflective modes (stories) in a way that acknowledges the limits of how modern man can remedy his isolation. Nostalgic yearning for a communitarian and rural past is inadequate and even dangerous. Such an attempt needs also to acknowledge that modern man seems to like a good part of his isolation, his unsociable sociability as Kant said, because that preserves his autonomy. Yet, is not the point of friendship to balance autonomy and love for another? Or is the virtue teaching of Aristotle and Aquinas irreducibly different than Kantian ethics? Does autonomy require that we stay well away from our friend's "central fire" lest we get burned? Kant cited this as one of the reasons he considered friendship a "minor virtue" and why it plays a relatively insignificant role in his moral thinking. The ethical state is governed by rules, not by friendships. Yet friendship is more humanly satisfying than rules and obligations. For this reason friendship will remain a central aspiration, if a problematic one, in our lives. †

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Pondering Conscience

Civil Disobedience in American Law and Same-Sex Dissent in the ELCA

Marie Failing

THE CONFLICT OVER MARRIAGE RIGHTS FOR GAY and lesbian couples seems destined to be one of the key defining fault lines for both the mainline Christian churches and American government in this early part of the twenty-first century. Despite pleas from church leaders, including Mark Hanson, much of the polity of mainline Protestant churches, including the ELCA, the Episcopal Church USA, the United Methodist Church, and others have been sharply divided over the issue.

The issue of same-sex marriage remains both contentious and politically important. Same-sex marriage proponents recently achieved legislative or court victories in Massachusetts and in New Jersey, which in December 2006 joined Connecticut and Vermont in recognizing civil unions. However, these proponents suffered defeats in seven other state elections, where voters adopted state constitutional bans against same-sex marriage, as well as civil union “equivalents” in some states. The legislative and court battles in the states on this issue are far from over. In Massachusetts, Gov. Mitt Romney has asked voters to override the legislature’s decision not to act on a same-sex marriage ban, while California’s high court has agreed to hear a lower court decision upholding such a ban.

The fact that there are now two different sets of marriage laws in the United States, and that many other traditionally Christian countries from Spain to Canada now recognize same-sex unions, poses two difficult questions for mainline Protestant churches. First, these denominations will have to decide how they should respond to legally married same-sex couples as well as those joined in civil unions. Even if voters ultimately overturn court decisions or laws recognizing same-sex relationships, many same-sex couples already will be married or joined in civil unions, and there would be serious constitutional prob-

lems with invalidating already legally recognized relationships.

Lutherans, along with other Reformation churches, traditionally have insisted that marriage is not a sacramental institution but an ordering of the “left-hand governance” to be defined and regulated by the state. In many states, legally married or joined gay and lesbian members can now make a more plausible claim that their marriages should be blessed by the church. The fact that they are legally joined would seem to shift the burden to opponents to argue why the state’s marriage law is so fundamentally contrary to the Word of God that the church should refuse to recognize the state’s authority to join these couples. Of course, the distinction between marriage and civil unions might play a role in such arguments, though it is not yet clear why it would for Reformation churches that traditionally have left the definition of marriage to the secular authorities. Moreover, the mainline ban on ordination of gay and lesbian pastors in non-marital intimate relationships rests in part on the argument that they are a “stumbling block” or scandal to other believers. That argument loses some of its force if gay and lesbian pastors, duly married or joined in civil unions, live in chaste and faithful relationships.

Conversely, the success of state constitutional bans and court cases turning back claims of same-sex marriage proponents in other jurisdictions poses perhaps an even more difficult dilemma that will be the focus of this essay: How should Reformation churches like the ELCA respond to “faithful dissenters” who argue, in conscience, that their congregations must recognize and bless legally unrecognized same-sex unions, or call gay and lesbian ministers in committed relationships? Though American churches increasingly have looked to American legal models to govern the life of the church, I will suggest that the current American constitutional model for responding to

“conscientious dissenters” is a very inapt model for Lutheran churches struggling with these issues, because it does not take seriously Lutheran understandings of the relationship between the state, the conscience, and the believer. In particular, American constitutional doctrine on religious dissenters does not accept four “Lutheran” community responsibilities: to acknowledge the dissenter, to submit ourselves to the lordship of Christ, to adopt the Other as a sister or brother in Christ, and to risk on behalf of the neighbor. Indeed, were I a member of the Supreme Court, I might suggest that the Court has something to learn from Lutheran teachings about how it treats religious dissenters, even though religious and legal models for responding to dissent would surely look different, given the different roles these “orders” play.

Dissent in the Church

It is tempting to borrow from American constitutional doctrine to think about religious dissenters in the church, especially given the increasing turn in the ELCA toward a political model in the resolution of theological disputes. Following the distinction employed by University of Chicago law professor Cass Sunstein and others in the legal academy, the ELCA’s decision making process often appears, at least from the outside, to resemble a pluralist or “democratic” process in which like-minded persons achieve victory for their interests or views of churchwide policy by forming coalitions and lobbying for a majority vote for their position in congregational, synodical, and churchwide assemblies. Examples of the adoption of the American political and legal model in ELCA decision-making include the convention floor protest over the anti-same-sex blessing position at the 2005 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, reminiscent of 1960s American political protests and ELCA disciplinary processes that strongly resemble the American secular “due process” model employed in criminal prosecutions and civil deprivations of public benefits.

Sunstein contrasts the pluralist or “democratic” governance model with a “republican” style of governance, in which decision-makers set aside their own agendas and come together to reason about the common good. While the “republican”

model has been encouraged by drafters of the ELCA’s sexuality studies, it is far from clear that ELCA congregations and political alliances on either side of the issue are willing to commit themselves to having it decided through a shared process of reasoning and prayer in which participants trust that God will participate with them in discerning God’s will for the world.

Perhaps it is not such a surprise that American democratic processes have so thoroughly influenced the church. While there are many ways in which one could still distinguish American democracy from Lutheran and other Reformation church polities, it is possible to overstate this difference. For example, it is not true that the ELCA is the kind of theologically homogeneous body of believers that would make a “republican” model work easily. This reality struck home when I was reading my local newspaper’s spotlight on one believer, who told the reporter that he believed if he were a good person in this life, he would go to heaven. His congregation was Lutheran. In both ethnically Lutheran communities and those where Lutheran congregations are growing quickly, many congregants will live their daily lives using theologies markedly different from core Lutheran doctrines on grace and works, the two kingdoms, natural law, or Scriptural interpretation, foundational ideas that are key to determining one’s position on same-sex marriage. Their views and votes are likely to be informed as much by upbringing and social and political beliefs as by theology.

In such an increasingly “American” church body, characterized by religious and theological diversity and borrowing from American political and legal norms in church governance, it is important to ask whether the “American model” of protecting dissenters through constitutional judicial review is instructive for the church in the “blessing and rostering” controversy.

Dissent in the American Constitutional Tradition

In describing such an “American model,” it is certainly difficult to categorize the wide variety of court cases that have arisen under the First Amendment’s Free Exercise Clause, the predominant American vehicle for protecting dissenting religious minorities. However, at least two streams of conscientious objection to mainstream political

decisions emerge. One category of Free Exercise cases involves traditional civil disobedience: in these cases, religious claimants attempt to “raise the consciousness” of the wider culture about a perverse systemic flaw in American political or social life that, in those disobedients’ view, threatens the moral structure of American society.

In the past half-century, the paradigm for these traditional disobedience cases before the federal courts is derived from the claims of pacifists like Elliot Welsh that war is fundamentally wrong, or selective pacifists like the Catholic Guy Porter Gillette who refuse to participate in unjust wars. They have been joined by other resisters who have hammered silos or sat in government buildings or poured blood on government documents to protest American acquisition of nuclear weapons or complicity in unjust military actions in places like El Salvador. The 1980’s Sanctuary movement that smuggled Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees into the U.S., revived today in humanitarian efforts by groups like No More Deaths on the Arizona-Mexico border, is a similar form of Free Exercise civil disobedience cases. Indeed, some of the Court’s recent Establishment Clause cases are essentially minority religious protests against the encroachment of majoritarian Christian religion on public life. Deborah Weisman’s protest against school-sponsored prayer at graduation, Daniel Donnelly’s attack on Pawtucket’s Christmas display, and Michael Newdow’s challenge to the “under God” language in the Pledge of Allegiance are some examples.

A second, much larger set of Free Exercise cases might be termed, for lack of a better word, “governing indifference” cases. In these cases, religious minorities ask the courts for protection against the government’s failure to notice that religious minorities’ spiritual practices are different from those of mainstream Christians or secularists, or sometimes, to welcome and accommodate those differences. For example, traditional Sunday closing laws or unemployment compensation laws expecting workers to be available on Saturdays reflected the majority’s obliviousness to the fact that Jews and Sabbatarians rest and worship on Saturdays. Yet, even when minorities pointed out the burden of these laws on their worship and rest obligations, many states were reluc-

tant to change their rules to permit these minorities to meet their religious obligations. Jews have the same struggle with military uniform requirements and meat slaughtering regulations, while Native American church members fought a long and only partially successful battle to protect their right to partake of their sacrament, peyote. The Amish and many conservative Christians who have asked for waivers from compulsory public school requirements similarly have had to turn to the courts to protect their right to educate their children as their conscience demands.

Acknowledging Dissent in the Church

Same-sex “blessing and rostering” advocates in the ELCA make both “civil disobedience” and “governing indifference” arguments to the church. At a most fundamental level, gay and lesbian members of the church are asking other members to notice and then welcome their difference, rather than ignoring or trying to hide the sexual diversity in their congregations. They protest that, when their sexual difference comes out into the open, the church is expressing indifference to the great loneliness and pain it asks them to suffer in order to meet its demand that they refrain from sexually intimate, loving, and faithful relationship with another person.

But in essence, “blessing and rostering” dissenters are also making moral claims against the fundamental presumptions of the Church community about which human beings and relationships are worthy. Although they sometimes dress up these claims in the inapt (in my view) language of rights and autonomy, at bottom these dissenters are rebuking the church for not taking seriously the fact that God has made them too in His image, that they are a good creation even down to the way in which their sexuality is bestowed on them. Moreover, in Lutheran terms, they essentially contend that their own efforts to live out of grace on behalf of the neighbor, including in intimate relationships, are not only disrespected but treated as a leprous sore upon the church and society.

Just as peace protesters rail at how the U.S. uses war to claim political and moral superiority and advance American economic self-interest, so “blessing and rostering” advocates essentially argue that the church elevates heterosexuals and their nuclear

family relationships as morally and religiously superior to all other forms of neighbor-love.

However, "blessing and rostering" dissenters should not be quick to turn to an American democratic model for relief. The Supreme Court's modern response to both "conscientious objection" or "indifference" claims by religious minorities leaves much to be desired as a model for Lutheran Christians. At least since 1990, when *Employment Division v. Smith* was decided, the Court essentially has affirmed the legal right of the political majority to be completely indifferent to the needs of religious minorities. In the *Smith* and the *Church of Lukumi Babalu Aye* cases, while the Court signaled that it was willing to protect religious minorities hostilely targeted for their faith under the Free Exercise Clause, it acknowledged the right of democratic polities to pass "neutral and generally applicable" laws that make it difficult or impossible for religious minorities to practice their beliefs. Thus, religious minorities have to seek help

from state or local legislatures to protect their forms of worship as well as their daily religious obligations. These constitutional decisions, which purport to protect majoritarian democracy, simply encourage democratic majorities to slide back into their old habits of ignoring religious difference.

Lutheran theology, it seems to me, asks for quite the converse from church communities. The first moment in Lutheran communities' response to conscientious dissent should surely be to acknowledge both the dissent and the dissenter in a way that respects difference as a gift of the creation, albeit a corruptible one. Refusing to give religious minorities their day in court simply masks the existence of conflict over conscience. Similarly, attempting to quell blessing and rostering dissent in the church by arguing that all matters of sexual behavior are conclusively settled by the biblical text for time and eternity papers over a diversity of conscience that should be acknowledged as a gift of the creation, mysterious as it may be to figure out.

Submission to Christ's Lordship

Church conflicts over differences in conscience also require submission to the lordship of Christ. Lutheran Christians are called to do more than simply "see difference"; they are called to reflect on how difference poses a challenge to the ways in which we all justify ourselves and our lives at the expense of the suffering of others. In acknowledging the challenge that minorities in the state or the church pose to those of us who live "acceptable lives" by majority standards, we begin to give up our pretensions that our own lives are the measure of good. Instead, we come to recog-

nize the ways in which God's surprising and often disruptive grace upends how we justify and prefer our own natures and lives. We give over the power to announce judgment and forgiveness to our Lord.

Seen through Lutheran eyes, the contemporary Court's construction of religious minority claims of conscience is perverse, because it fails to acknowl-

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edge the essential communal ties between religious majorities and minorities. In the imagination of many of the justices, religious minorities are not "of us," but are—to turn a well-known Latter-day Saints phrase on its head—a "peculiar people." In the justices' most benign readings, religious dissenters are like the quaintly odd Amish, who mind their own business and only ask for a small accommodation for their faith from the state. In other justices' darker imaginations, religious dissenters are social non-conformists with the temerity to ask for special privileges for themselves. Justice Antonin Scalia mocks them for thinking that they are "a law unto themselves" who owe no responsibility to their community (or, in the church's case, to the demands of the text) for the damage that their non-conforming behavior might cause.

In this American legal construction, religious dissenters are "other than us," the oddity or exception set apart from the "regular American" whose values and behaviors guide social life. Martha Minow has written compellingly of ways in which

majorities measure minorities from their own standpoint, failing to acknowledge the implicit norms by which such “peculiar people” are judged, and the colored perspective from which the majority looks down on minorities as odd, wrong, perverse, or irrelevant to social life. Moreover, she argues, such judgments on minorities embrace the assumption that the status quo is “natural, uncoerced, and good,” and thus an objectively fair standard to judge the Other rather than a partial, constructed standard by which we use our own preferences to condemn and feel superior to others. A judgment of this sort by any other name is sin, our failure to acknowledge our own attempts at lordship over the other, rather than the lordship that governs our lives.

Lutheran doctrine similarly demands that we honestly and humbly recognize the consequences of our own creatureliness, from the sin that infects all our attempts at judgment to the finitude that makes our evaluation of the Other’s conscience and life necessarily faulty and incomplete. And, it seems to me, repentance for our attempts to establish our positions as arbiters of God’s will also demands that straight Christians “walk in the shoes” of gay and lesbian Christians who are forced to make painful choices between obeying the demands of their faith community and sharing human physical intimacy. I often have wanted to challenge straight, married Christians who rail against same-sex marriage to give up physical affection and intimate relations with their partners for a year or two so they know truly what they are asking of gay and lesbian Christians in the name of God and the church. The very least such Christians can do, it seems to me, is to listen with an open heart to the stories of gay and lesbian Christians, indeed to every single story, and to walk with them as real partners through the tragically lonely path the church calls them to follow, rather than interrupting their stories with condemnation and beating them with Bible verses.

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members—must acknowledge
the human needs of those
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needs that do not disappear
because one is gay
or single or old.*

Adopting the Radically Other

In responding to conscientious dissent in the church, Lutherans must also affirm our adoption of the radically Other as a brother or sister in Christ, in stark contrast to the Supreme Court’s position on this question. Even the Court’s most “liberal” Free Exercise opinion, the 1963 *Sherbert v. Verner* case, which examines whether the state has a compelling interest to override the consciences of religious minorities, does not go this far. While the *Sherbert* case (now overruled by *Smith*) requires the state to consider seriously whether its objectives are important and whether it has respected, as much as possible, the religious difference of the other, it continues to assume that the religious dissenter is an “out-

sider” for whom the American people owe no responsibility except freedom. That is, the most a religious dissenter can gain under *Sherbert* is what the Founders called “toleration,” the right to be left alone. Yet, the notion of toleration, while superior to suppression or even indifference, not only continues to assume that the majority’s stance is superior and that any “deviance” is “tolerated” only because of

Americans’ preference for freedom. Toleration also puts the religious dissenter at arm’s length from the political majority, requiring no affirmative responsibility for the dissenting Other and confining the scope of dissent that will be permitted.

As Christians have used the word adoption as a metaphor to describe their entrance into the community of Christ, by contrast, they speak of the willing embrace of God for the Other in a lifelong relationship that cannot be broken by disagreement over politics or even moral behavior. As descriptive of Christians’ relationship with each other, adoption is a commitment to a person as person, not an assent to his or her beliefs, character, or even life choices. It is a commitment to engage those beliefs, character, and life choices without threatening to disrupt the relationship unless the chasm proves

much too deep. It is a commitment to faithfulness in moments of conflict as well as in moments of estrangement. And yet, adoption signals a responsibility assented to, as much internally embraced in the Christian's heart with joy as imposed from the outside by the church's moral teaching. It is a commitment to a stranger, a person whose biology is not shared, whose life story does not parallel the adopter's, who by definition is fully other.

This call to adoption of the Other, it seems to me, is the call that Bishop Hanson and others are making to both sides in the same-sex marriage controversy. Or, to use the ELCA task force's metaphor, it is a "journey together" under the call of a theology that quite simply and powerfully acknowledges that every person is a sinner, and that our salvation does not depend on either our family structure or our sexuality. It is a call for nothing less; neither the right to exclude one another literally or figuratively from the "true church," nor simply tolerance of each other's difference, but rather a life-long embrace. And it is a call to adopt each other not only in word but in deed. The life of the church—especially a church that is asking for such great sacrifice on the part of some of its members—must acknowledge the human needs of those without families and spouses, needs that do not disappear because one is gay or single or old. It must reorganize itself to live for the neighbor who comes to the church with those needs, without becoming simply a faux-family. If the church is so focused on glorifying and preserving the nuclear family that all of those who have much more critical needs for love, affection, and belonging are to be left by the wayside, the church becomes simply a part of the world, not a challenge to it.

Risking on Behalf of Neighbors

This commitment, it seems to me, requires the church to bear a risk with respect to dissenters that our government has been unwilling to bear. American "conscientious objectors"—those religious dissenters who insist that American society confront its deepest sins, whether of violence or indifference to human need—receive even less solicitude in the federal courts than those who are simply asking to be left alone. For example, those who have trespassed upon federal property in protest of nuclear weapons or American foreign

policy, or who have violated the law to save human lives at our borders, have met with no constitutional sympathy in the courts even when they have rested upon a claim of religious conscience.

This hardened stance by the courts against "conscientious objectors" is justified by the serious threat such disobedients supposedly pose to the rule of law. As Justice Scalia describes it, if we allow civil disobedients to break the law, there is no principled way that we can impose the law on others with less benign motives, thus creating anarchy where no person feels the need to obey the law. Because their claims threaten both the authority and equal enforcement of the law in this view, their attempts to expose the corruption of the law are shunted aside, and they are told that their proper recourse is to convince the majority to change the law. And, of course, the disobedient replies, "I wouldn't be here if the legislature had examined the moral propriety of sending arms to the brutal regime of El Salvador or passing a law that the homeless cannot sleep on the streets." At bottom, the Court's reception of disobedients suggests that it is not willing to embrace the risk their plea poses to the rule of law any more than the executive or legislative branches who also refuse them a hearing.

By contrast, Lutherans, certainly, are called to risk everything, including the comfort of authority and security, for the neighbor. We cannot forget that Luther meant this almost literally, exhorting Christians to risk their very lives against the plague in order to minister to the neighbor. This demand is not only that majorities see the anguish and need of minorities in the Church; it is a demand, as well, that minorities in the Church risk the censure and conflict that come with encounter of their neighbors who disagree with them. It demands that each Christian and each political collective respond not first with self-justification or condescension to the Other's attempt to witness to the truth of the Word as he understands it, but in willing service to the neighbor's need and in invitation to that neighbor's own story. Risk means, of course, that the church may get it wrong, even wrong in terms of "truth" and the "common good" of the church. But to refuse to risk everything except the Gospel itself for the neighbor, his soul as well as his life on this earth, is to refuse to

trust a promise that transcends any mistakes we may make in biblical interpretation or in moral discernment. †

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music

The Got Dang Song

J.D. Buhl

THERE MUST HAVE BEEN A SIGH OF RELIEF FROM music writers everywhere when the 2006 Grammy Award nominations were announced on December 7. Among the bizarre, the bland, the expected, and the inexplicable, “alternative-mainstream” singer-songwriter John Mayer earned five: one for *Try*, his first album with the John Mayer Trio (Rock Album of the Year), and another for *Continuum*, his third solo release, up for Album of the Year.

Thankfully missing from December’s mentions was *Continuum*’s “Waiting On the World to Change,” the chart-topping call-and-response single that many feared would be a shoe-in for Song of the Year. It seems that even the clueless enthusiasts of the Recording Academy recognize that the song is problematic, at best.

“This song’s lyrics frustrate me!” wrote “nmaiello” in September. In one of many Internet exchanges over the would-be anthem, the writer went on to say,

John says that our generation is misunderstood, that it seems our generation doesn’t care what’s happening in the world, when in fact we are highly concerned. However, he holds up the problems in the world and government as excuses for people to “wait on the world to change,” instead of taking action and making change! The song falls short of its potential and ends up just being pop, not protest.

That’s the gist of it, but my discomfort with the song runs deeper. I found a kindred listener in “no_one” who shares my belief that there is something disingenuous in the song’s very form. “No_one” wrote (sic):

When i first listened to it, i [thought] it must be a redo of an old Curtis Mayfield

and the Impressions number from the late sixties, something like “People Get Ready.” The song certainly follows in that tradition of beautiful, haunting, politically conscious community music... work located in trying to change the world and create a better day for people who suffer in the community.... and that whole black tradition of utilizing slick streetwise phrases as social prophecy and community righteousness, shaping them around a beautiful melody in an extended act of orature, so the message of the lines, the “slogan,” becomes memorable, something to go and change the world with once the artist’s “call” is responded to in antiphonal response by the listener.

YES, THE SONG IS ALL THAT, FROM ITS OPENING “me and all my friends, we’re all misunderstood / they say we stand for nothing and there’s no way we ever could,” to its final assurance that “one day our generation is gonna rule the population.” But it’s got no soul. Caught up in the groove, one may be fooled into thinking there’s a real call to which a listener can respond. Co-opting Curtis Mayfield to lend authenticity to his in-activism, Mayer’s message is not just charmingly ironic, it’s down-right dishonest. Or, as “no_one” put it, “the refrain ‘waiting on the world to change’ ain’t engaged politically enough for me.”

Back when “me and all my friends” were waiting for the world to change, “Curtis” (as he was affectionately referred to) was coming into his own. And so was the next level of soul music. Mayfield’s later work with the Impressions had provided the soundtrack for the civil rights movement. As the singing-group leaders of the 1960s became the solo artists of the 1970s, he was

more responsible than Martin Luther King, Jr., for the proliferation of white boys hanging posters of black men on their walls, or at least Mayfield, along with a few football players, was responsible.

By 1972, eleven of that year's twenty-one Number One hits were by African-American artists; ten of the forty-nine albums rated A- or above by Robert Christgau that year were from R&B singers. Al Green had become the supreme Soul Man, the Staple Singers were taking us there, and a kid my age from Gary, Indiana, was beginning his long day's journey into weirdness with a movie-song sung to a rat named Ben. So with the release of *Superfly*, I got off the Grand Funk Railroad and found a new musical hero in Curtis Mayfield.

The soundtrack to a blaxploitation movie, *Superfly* used all of Curtis's sweetness, but stung like tears in your eyes. The undercutting irony and sorrow of the album's lyrics seem remarkable now. To have gotten away with them at the height of the self-devouring commercialization of Black Power seems almost incredible. I couldn't have appreciated it then, but now I admire his courage.

Superfly is the soul classic, the work that will appear on "Greatest" lists in perpetuity. One year earlier, Mayfield had released his third solo album, *Curtis/Live*. Here is the soul of the man, a recording so full of warmth, humor, personality, and purpose that it still feels like it was recorded at the Bitter End last week. It is here that you will find the grooves Mayer mines for "Waiting": a little "People Get Ready," a little "We're a Winner." Mayer does not respond, however, to Curtis's call to "check out your mind." In this definitive version of "We People Who Are Darker Than Blue," Curtis sweetly urges, "don't let us stand around... and let what others say come true." Elsewhere he breaks into a spontaneous, "I believe!" "I'm here to say," Mayfield tells his audience, "that I believe we'll make it some day—sho 'nuff." It's not clear Mayer believes in anything other than his got dang song—and getting another on the airwaves as this one's moment wanes.

it's hard to be of assistance
when we're standing at a distance

so we keep waiting
waiting on the world to change

Curtis Mayfield would not think waiting is cool. Outdoor stage scaffolding fell on the singer in a windstorm in 1990. Using a wheelchair and paralyzed from the neck down, he was forced to wait five years before cutting what would be his final album. With no diaphragm, Curtis let gravity put pressure on his lungs, cutting the vocals for *New World Order* in 1996 flat on his back. His message of equality and acceptance remained the same as he came to represent another sector of its inclusivity—paraplegics.

The man dubbed "black music's most unflagging civil rights champion" by critic Nelson George died in 1999.

Mayer portrays his generation of twenty-somethings as already flagged and championing nothing. "Now if we had the power," he sings; Mayfield would tell him you *have* the power. "We see everything that's going wrong with the world and those who lead it," Mayer assures us; Mayfield would tell him you *do* have the means to rise above and beat it. "It's not that we don't care," Mayer insists, "we just know that the fight ain't fair"; "Never stopped me," Curtis would say.

On *New World Order*, Curtis sang "The Got Dang Song," one of those cheery calypso-beat numbers about oppression that major dudes can pull off. There the voices of victims world-wide—"standing at the bottom of the totem pole, carrying the weight for every got dang soul"—respond with stinging sarcasm to Mayer and Generation Wait: "Some folk say to suck it up / Ain't got no straw, ain't got no cup."

George wrote in *The Death of Rhythm & Blues* (1988) that "like a true nonviolent civil rights activist, Mayfield looked for the best in antagonists as well as friends, gently prodding for change and rarely pointing an accusatory finger in anger." Perhaps no finger should be pointed now. Mayfield and his generation certainly had manners; they knew their please and thank-yous. But wait for permission to change the world? Lord, no.

"Wait" has almost always meant "never," Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote in his letter from the Birmingham jail. Mayer's defensive optimism

may be good for a song or two, but Mayfield made a career out of a sincere concern for his fellow human beings, remembering what Dr. King told him: "History is the long and tragic story of the fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily." So Mayer and his friends can wait as long as they want. The world

ain't gonna change until they decide that "wait" will never again mean "never." †

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PSALM 137

Jerusalem the rivers here are not like your rivers.
We weep into them, and our tears float over the sluggish surface like drops of oil.

Jerusalem we tried to chant the old songs,
but could not even remember the shapes of our houses

although we dream of them every night. Our instruments hung
under the poplars, untouched. There, by the river,

the villagers asked us to sing, but we could not
remember the color of the dust once caked on our feet.

How can we sing the songs of the Lord wading in their muddy grasses?
What music in their harsh language?

Jerusalem I am already forgetting you. My hands shake when I touch my harp.

Jerusalem I hate the way they pronounce your name. Jerusalem
if my accent ever changes, let my tongue rot in my mouth.

Jerusalem I won't forget the smell of burning foundations.

Jerusalem sometimes I want to break everything in the house:
every one of the new water jugs, the legs of my Babylonian husband,
the arms of his first wife. And O God,

even her babies playing in the yard
might split open like pomegranates.

Hannah Faith Notess

film

Luther—A Reluctant Movie

Conrad Ostwalt

THE HIGH POINT OF MANY UNIVERSITY COURSES on Christian history occurs with the story of Martin Luther—students are riveted by the intrigue. A reluctant reformer perhaps, Luther accepted the responsibilities thrust upon him when events surrounding his protests veered out of control. As a result, this reluctant priest's mission led him to take a brave stance at a crucial moment in Christian and Protestant history. Luther's reluctance did not prevent him from becoming heroic; it propelled him toward greatness. Sadly, the same cannot be said of the movie, *Luther*. The movie's reluctance fully to embrace and explore the uncertainties surrounding Luther's life prevents it from achieving greatness, but only barely. Given the monumental task of portraying the life of Luther; the tumultuous political struggles involving Empire, nation, and church; and the lofty yet corrupt ideals of the sixteenth-century church in a mere two hours, director Eric Till has managed a fine and entertaining movie about Martin Luther, disproving the age-old student protest that history is boring.

Always with films about historical figures, one of the most pressing questions concerns how true the film is to the events as history understands them. Similarly with this film, one could debate, question, and analyze the historicity of the story, but this would be largely fruitless. One could debate whether Luther actually posted his 95 *Theses* on the door of the church in Wittenberg or whether he really said, "Here I stand" at Worms. But such elements have to be part of the filmic telling of Luther's story whether they are historical or legendary, because these and other episodes are so much part of the myth that defines Luther that they are indispensable to the story. Like good myth, these dramatic elements define the truth of Luther's story whether they are historical or not. One could also debate the historicity of elements of the story such as Luther's relationship to Hanna,

the peasant, or to the events surrounding his relationship to Katharina von Bora. Suffice it to say that Till and the screenplay are largely faithful to the recognized biography of Martin Luther, and the small liberties taken with the story are of little consequence to the plot. The movie faithfully represents the life of Luther up to the point of his marriage and the Augsburg Confession. Because this period covers some twenty-five years of the most tumultuous history in Europe, the film by necessity omits too many crucial contextual scenes and events. Thus, its historicity is impaired more from omission than misrepresentation. Finally, perhaps the greatest nod to historical importance comes with the film's visual sophistication. Beautifully filmed with impressive on-location sites, settings, and intricate costuming, this movie is visually gratifying and educational.

The plot highlights include some of the major events in Luther's early life. The film opens with Luther cowering in an open field, terrified by the lightning storm that turned his life toward God. The scene is not only effective in setting the biographical context, but also in setting the stage for the life of Luther, a life filled with lightning strikes, near misses, and thunderous upheaval. Luther's demanding father, tormented confessions, struggles with Satan, and trip to Rome are likewise treated early in the film as seminal moments in Luther's character and development. However, virtually all of these scenes gloss over the importance these moments had in shaping Luther, and the viewer gets only a bare hint at Luther as a struggling young man, who is unsure, anxiety laden, and depressed. As the movie continues, the familiar elements of the history unfold: Pope Leo X and his effort to raise money for St. Peter's Basilica; John Tetzel's indulgence peddling; Luther's posting of the 95 *Theses*; Luther's summons to Augsburg; the role of Prince Frederick the Wise; the climactic clash of empire, nation, and

church at Worms; Luther's exile and his translation of the New Testament into German; the Peasant Revolt; Luther's marriage to Katharina von Bora; and the Augsburg Confession. It's all there, more or less where it should be, but for viewers without a pretty solid grounding in the history of the period, it would be difficult to appreciate fully the personal, religious, socio-economic, and political turmoil that gave the Lutheran episode its world-altering impetus. Rather than depth, the movie settles for synopsis, stringing together a series of important events hoping the viewer does not notice crucial omissions and concluding that the Luther story paved the way for religious freedom with scarcely a critical thought allowed for the role of Luther and the events surrounding him.

THIS LACK OF DEPTH EXTENDS TO LUTHER'S OWN characterization and leads to the greatest flaw of the movie. While Fiennes does an admirable job of portraying the doubt Luther felt, he is constrained by the screenplay that does not allow him to plumb the depth of pain—emotional and physical—that beset Luther. What made Luther great was not his heroism or his genius; rather, it was his ability to overcome the great depth of depression and anxiety that defined his life and to adopt a public persona that captivated thousands, instilled faith, and was strong enough to stand alone before, even against, emperor and church. Fiennes is perhaps at his best when he portrays Luther lecturing to a class with the charismatic humor and irreverence that added to the reformer's popularity. But he has little opportunity to develop Luther's pain. Besides a singular mention of his "bowels" and another of being "depressed," the best glimpse we get of the man's turmoil comes with a couple of scenes where Luther argues with Satan. One of these scenes, the evening between his successive public appearances at Worms, is particularly successful and is the closest Fiennes comes to portraying Luther's angst. But the performance falls flat in the next scene when Fiennes delivers the climactic speech of Luther at Worms. When Fiennes quotes the defining words, whether legendary or historical, "Here I stand. I can do no other," his Luther seems to be saying these words more from resignation of his fate than from the

obsessive conviction that defined the man. The scene disappoints; it is anti-climactic and anti-heroic.

This avoidance of Luther's psychological and physical pain as seminal to his development is symptomatic of the film's deficient treatment of Luther's complexity. The film avoids Luther's possible shortcomings, obsessive behavior, crude language, and sometimes blunt assessments of others. Luther's harsh words against the peasant rebels are avoided; his egoism unexplored; his equivocations about domestic life not even hinted at in his relationship with Katharina. His weaknesses removed, Luther appears all redeeming. In contrast, Luther's enemies have no redeeming qualities. They are reduced to evil foils to prop up Luther's virtue. As a result, Luther comes off too "good looking," even appearing twentyish as a forty-two-year-old bridegroom. The film borders on hagiography through its characterization of Luther and by reducing most other characters to play the villain or a supportive role to the great reformer. An example here is the sentimental appearance of the peasant Hanna and her child, whom Luther befriends and supports. His sympathetic demeanor toward the pair contrasts sharply with other church officials who exploit the peasants, as dramatized when Hanna purchases an indulgence for her child. When Luther finds the child's abandoned crutches in the rubbish following the massacre of peasants, he is moved by the tragedy. The whole episode magnifies Luther's virtue in contrast to the unscrupulous ecclesia and the murderous civil authorities. However, the film does not explore Luther's own vituperative works in support of the civil authorities' efforts to suppress the peasant revolt.

Characterization in the movie then is flawed, reducing Luther's humanity by focusing only on his virtuous qualities, and diminishing other characters by making them props or foils or by focusing only on their sordid character. Pope Leo X is portrayed as a one-dimensional, delusional power broker intent on slaying the "wild boar" of the church. There is one exception here. Sir Peter Ustinov masterfully portrays Prince Frederick. Ustinov brings humanity, believability, and humor to the role of Frederick. Ustinov's Frederick is the only one of the protagonists who grasps

fully the political realities of the drama, and Ustinov brings this to the forefront with brilliance.

Criticisms of the film aside, this is still a fine movie worth seeing, both for its entertainment and educational value. From an educational standpoint, the film's decision to settle for breadth at the cost of depth serves viewers well by informing them about Luther's biography and the Lutheran phase of the Protestant reformation movements. The politics and human drama are there but submerged, and the theological and ideological intricacies are largely ignored, so it is incumbent to come to the movie armed with some awareness of the history. With this preparation, the film can give visual and aural bones to this important moment in Western history. From an entertainment standpoint, the movie is strong. While the plot is episodic, it is nonetheless clear. And while characters are a bit one dimensional (except for Frederick), the acting is seasoned and sometimes stellar (especially Ustinov, who is

brilliant). The staging and costuming are intricate and beautifully done. And although I cannot vouch for the period authenticity, the costuming and appearance of the characters add realism to the film. The result is a beautifully filmed feature that is a visual treat.

The final scrolling appendix to the film before the credits roll references Luther as the champion of religious freedom, one more troubling, uncritical, and hagiographical plug for Luther and the Protestant Reformation in general. There exists little here to suggest that Luther was the reluctant reformer that he appears to have been, and this movie's reluctance to take up that point prevents it from being the great movie it might have been. ♣

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rereading old books

Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi*

Harold K. Bush Jr.

IN 1882 MARK TWAIN SET OUT ON AN EXTENSIVE tour of the Mississippi River Valley. It was Twain's first return since the Civil War to the river scenes of his youth, and of his triumphant steamboat piloting years, and it included stops in Hannibal, St. Louis, Vicksburg, and New Orleans, where he would have long visits with George Washington Cable and Joel Chandler Harris, author of the *Uncle Remus* tales. The journey featured idle days aboard a riverboat called the *Gold Dust*, headed for New Orleans.

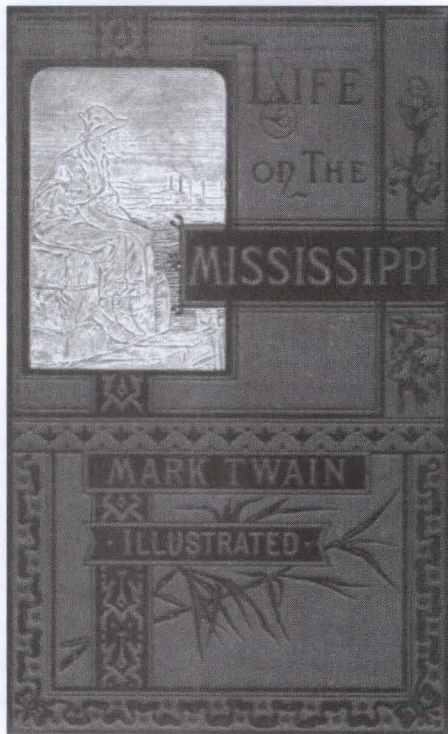
As the ship moved downstream, Twain experienced a kind of cultural regression—a slow, lazy drift into the outdated and thoroughly defeated society of the South. Despite the languid atmosphere, he had some hard work to do. The purpose of the trip was to gather interviews, anecdotes, and news accounts of the region: its history, geography, and the social and cultural conditions after the war. Specifically, the trip was meant to trigger a revision of his “Old Times” river sketches, which had appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1875. Those sketches would form the heart of the volume that became *Life on the Mississippi*, published in 1883.

Among other things, this underrated book has much to tell us about the American Civil War. Perhaps it is not surprising that this extended trip down memory lane would jar Twain's imagination back to the days when he, if ever so briefly, had his own firsthand experiences with the spread of secession fever. Young Sam had been

working the river and was in New Orleans in January of 1861 when the state of Louisiana officially seceded from the Union. He was there again in April when Fort Sumter was fired upon, officially beginning the war. Almost immediately, his work on the river came to an end, at which time he headed back to Missouri. During June of 1861, Sam Clemens joined briefly with fourteen other young men to form a militia unit of the Missouri State Guard, which they dubbed the Marion Rangers. During two weeks in the stifling summer heat, they marched, trained, slept out under the stars, and generally tried to act like actual infantry volunteers. For reasons that are not entirely clear, Sam left the Marion Rangers to journey out West with his brother Orion, who recently had been appointed secretary of the territorial government of Nevada.

For twenty years, Twain never said much about this brief experience in the Missouri State Guard, ostensibly protecting the state from the threat of invasion. Perhaps he was hesitant because of the possibility of being charged as a deserter. But in the 1880s, reflection on the War of Secession suddenly became a personal obsession—and a national one as well.

On his 1882 voyage, Twain was struck by the effects of the war on the culture and society he was inspecting. The memories of actual survivors of Civil War battles in such locations as Vicksburg brought Twain face to face with some of the most brutal tales of the war. Those tales are recalled, for



Original cover of Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi*, first published in 1883. Recently reprinted by Signet Classics, 2001.

example, in chapter thirty-five of *Life on the Mississippi*, entitled “Vicksburg during the Trouble.” The frequent bombardment of the city would result in “frantic women and children scurrying from home and bed toward the cave dungeons—encouraged by the humorous grim soldiery, who shout ‘Rats, to your holes!’ and laugh.”

The war tales were certainly tragic enough, but ultimately Twain learned much more about the prolonged, ravaging fallout of the war in the land of his youth, and how deeply it had penetrated the southern economy and culture. The book energized much more thinking about the war’s effects. In fact, the trip back down the river in 1882 also played a crucial role in the completion of his other key writings (directly or indirectly) about the Civil War: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and “A Private History of a Campaign that Failed.” Although these works treat many other topics, they go together well because of their common examination of “America’s religious war,” as Mark Noll and others have lately been calling the Civil War. In particular, these texts critique the myths and ideologies at the heart of the Confederate cause. They also provide inspired analysis of the changes that took hold in the South in the aftermath of the war, which contrasted so significantly with growth and progress in the north, especially New England and New York.

The title of the volume under consideration here, *Life on the Mississippi*, is suggestive of the book’s sociological content. The regional changes that Twain witnessed after more than twenty years were even more striking than he could have imagined, and he was both delighted and dismayed by what he found. He wrote to his wife Livy, “That world which I knew in its blossoming youth is old and bowed and melancholy, now; its soft cheeks are leathery and wrinkled, the fire is gone out in its eyes, and the spring from its step.”

One metaphor of this slow demise was the chief vehicle of the river, the steamboats. The bottom of the river south of St. Louis was littered with the buried hulks of sunken steamboats—a ghostly legacy of both the river’s untamable natural powers and of the war years. Viewing the dead ships was a poignant reminder of Twain’s own heroic days as a pilot. This image of the

wrecked steamboats would become one of the central images in *Huckleberry Finn*: the *Walter Scott*, on which was found the corpse of Huck’s despicable father, Pap Finn. Sir Walter Scott also became famous in Twain’s writing as a cultural shorthand for an entire host of features associated broadly with the South. His analysis of what he called the “Walter Scott disease” focused on the hypnotic powers of ideology:

[it] sets the world in love with dreams and phantoms; with decayed and swinish forms of religion; with decayed and degraded systems of government; with the sillinesses and emptinesses, sham grandeurs, sham gauds, and sham chivalries of a brainless and long-vanished society. [Scott] did measureless harm; more real and lasting harm, perhaps, than any other individual that ever wrote. (327)

Elsewhere, Twain added to the list of objects and ideas he associates with Scott by including duels, inflated speech, frilly architecture, “windy humbuggeries,” and in general what he calls the “jejune romanticism” of the South. One of his most audacious claims is his statement that “Sir Walter has so large a hand in making southern character, as it existed before the war, that he is in great measure responsible for the war” (327, 285, 328).

Twain’s trip down the Mississippi proved to be a mighty catalyst in bringing back the stories from that period. The opening chapters, about the myth of the river and the many great explorers (and often Jesuits) who “discovered” it, are quite interesting and provide a delightful introduction to the river as a central character in the plot of the story. Twain includes a lengthy description of the death of his younger brother Henry, killed in a steamboat explosion, that serves as an exclamation point at the termination of his own adolescence. Throughout, *Life on the Mississippi* is full of numerous other queer stories and tall tales.

Sadly, the book has gained a reputation of being itself rather windy. Some readers find the second half of the book to be inferior to the first. This may be primarily because the first half features the “Old Times” sketches, which many (including myself) consider to be among the finest

writing Twain ever did, which is saying a lot. The book does become episodic as it lengthens, and there is a certain quality to the book's second half that is suggestive of what today we might call a cut and paste job. But some of those episodes are full of fun and insight, and the book is denigrated (and even ignored) too often for those elements.

Certainly by comparison with the marvelous "Old Times" sketches, one must admit that the second half is not as compelling, as "great literature." However, it would be a grave mistake to think that Twain's attention somehow lapsed, or that there is no structure or an overall plan to the book, let alone genius. Clearly it is time for this minor masterpiece to recover a wider audience. The book as a whole is full of surprises, and the nuanced argument about the genesis of the economic and cultural disadvantages to southern society are as relevant today as they were a century ago.

Today, most educated Americans have probably read *Huck Finn* and *Tom Sawyer*, and possibly almost nothing else by the man often called the Great American Writer. That is too bad. His travel writings (such as *Innocents Abroad* and *Roughing It*) are still astonishing and very funny, his writing on the ambiguities of race (such as *Puddn'head Wilson* and "A True Story") are still powerful, and his social justice essays in later life (such as "The United States of Lyncherdom" and "To the Person Sitting in Darkness") still pack quite a wallop. Among all of Twain's writings that are generally ignored these days, however, none is more deserving of wider attention than *Life on the Mississippi*. ♣

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being lutheran

Lutherans in the Marketplace

Robert Saler

MARTIN MARTY BEGAN HIS BRIEF BUT PENETRATING biography of Martin Luther with an epigraph from W. H. Auden's oft-quoted 1940 sonnet, "Luther":

*"...All words, Great Men, Societies are bad,
The Just shall live by Faith..." he cried in dread.
And men and women were glad,
Who'd never cared or trembled in their lives.*

Auden's insight captures the feeling that haunts many contemporary Lutherans, both in the academy and in the parishes: have our lives, particularly the lives of those of us living out our Lutheranism in the relative comfort of North America, become such that we are no longer in a position to care, much less tremble, at the spiritual mysteries and gospel insights that Luther bequeathed to the church that bears his name?

Auden's fundamental suspicion was that Luther was an anomaly even in his own time, that his struggle to find a message of grace amidst the world's sinfulness and God's hiddenness was largely unique to him. In recent history, myriad critics of Luther have shared this suspicion. The nineteenth-century rationalists that largely evacuated most prominent theological traditions of their seemingly outdated "particulars" found little to like in a late-medieval monk who could not write for three pages without discussing such ungentle notions as the devil, sinfulness, and humanity's thoroughgoing need for undeserved grace. In the mid-twentieth century, as theologies linked to "demythologization" and existentialist worldviews gained prominence, Lutherans in particular began to ask aloud whether the question that has defined their church for centuries—namely, how humans find justification in the face of God's judgment—should give way to more modern formulations. Most commonly, these suggestions took the form of questions about how to

find "authentic" existence in the face of a threatening "abyss of meaninglessness."

And today that nagging fear of obscurity lingers on among Lutherans. Lutherans historically have had the sense that the core struggles of a church play a large part in shaping its identity. The questions define the answers, and both define the church. This compels us to ask: do the key issues of faith to which Lutheranism speaks require updating? Does the Lutheran church in all its varieties answer questions that few, if any, are asking? As both the Missouri Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America begin major outreach and evangelization initiatives in the face of declining numbers, these concerns are necessarily at the fore.

Seminarians who go out into the parish for the first time are often (and correctly) told that they must find ways of "translating" their knowledge of technical theological concepts into language that will be accessible to their congregations. As any good language scholar will agree, however, effective translation requires both sensitivity to the original source and a linguistic/conceptual alternative that will not utterly betray the meaning of the original. Lutheran theology is by nature scandalous in its particularity and severe in its self-imposed limits, which means that many of the translation options available today (here we can call to mind so-called "prosperity gospels" or those church growth strategies that would have us obsessing over "how many St. John's worshipped last Sunday") cannot translate Lutheran concepts; they can only traduce them.

It is certainly correct that the church's collective understanding of our Lutheran identity and the core questions of our faith should be revisited often and revisited well. However, the danger comes when these discussions take on what Richard John Neuhaus has called a "neo-philiac" tone: the unexamined conviction that the circum-

stances of one's own time and place are absolutely unique and unprecedented in human history, and therefore require radically new strategies on the part of those who wish to remain relevant in the new era. Two assumptions underpin this neo-philiac stance, particularly when addressing the role of churches. First, such a view necessitates that the human situation be regarded as mutable and variable across time; second, it regards "relevance" to a given setting as an unqualified good.

Lutherans, I would suggest, are in a helpful position to appreciate both the merits and the dangers of this stance. Paradigm shifts in our own perception do occur, and these shifts are often brought on by encountering people and/or situations that are genuinely foreign to our previous experience. Theology, for example, has benefited from the recognition that the proliferation of nuclear weapons has the potential to bring about unprecedented levels of destruction, that the scientific possibilities associated with genetics and modern reproduction create ethical dilemmas that our forebears could not have foreseen, and that one's perspective on such classical Christian virtues as humility and patience in suffering likely depends (more than we perhaps would like to admit) on one's gender, race, and economic status.

The danger of neo-philia, however, stems from the fact that its two aforementioned assumptions implicitly give rise to a third: that a church's willingness to change even its most fundamental assertions about the human condition is always necessary for effective gospel proclamation to those living out that condition in the contemporary world. It is this last implication that should give serious pause to Lutherans.

Part of the ambiguity comes from linking theological imperatives to one of the more pernicious aspects of contemporary consumerism. The persistent belief in constantly new possibilities and the wholly unprecedented needs that arise from them is, in fact, a crucial ingredient in free-market economics. As we are besieged by products and services that promise to offer satisfaction of a perceived need, we are meant to forget that a product that truly could produce *satisfaction* in a customer (literally, *satis facere*, "bringing about enough") would be financially disastrous for the seller. Nothing would be more detrimen-

tal to the marketplace *qua* marketplace than enduring (as opposed to fleeting) consumer satisfaction: the belief that one has enough, that no new products or services are needed, that indeed there is a benefit to conforming one's identity to what one already possesses rather than continually trying on new identities and new products to go with them.

The most disturbing thing about the assumption that the church must constantly speak to the "new conditions" of humanity is how peacefully such an agenda conforms to this logic of the marketplace. The relationship between a gospel message that preaches the sufficiency of God's grace for sinners and a belief that the church's message is continually inadequate to "changing times" must be antagonistic. Both cannot be correct. As Lutherans think about how we are to proclaim the gospel in the so-called "spiritual marketplace" of the North American church scene, perhaps we should raise the question of whether there is something beneficial in our message being somewhat "irrelevant" to the times.

Luther's own commentaries on the Bible, particularly the Old Testament books, show us the benefits to this "irrelevant" approach. Luther's interpretation of the Genesis narratives, for example, rendered the characters of Noah, Abraham, Eve, and Jacob marvelously contemporary. I can still recall a course in graduate school in which the beleaguered professor tried earnestly to explain, to a snickering class, why Luther thought that Cain's offering to God was rejected because "Cain wanted to be pope." But Luther's rationale for taking these liberties was very much in line with his theology: by positing the essentially unchanging character of the human situation before God, the gospel message of salvation—a message that begins with Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:15), continues through Abraham, and endures through the last days—becomes a word for all humanity at all times. Theologically asserting the unity of human experience is the ultimate historical inclusivism. This assertion, as much as baptism and the Eucharist, brings about the communion of the saints.

Such a proclamation, though, requires doing what Luther understood both Noah, himself, and the true church throughout the ages to be about: preaching the reality of the human situation

before God (with all the talk of sin, judgment, and death that such preaching entails) so that the message of grace in Christ Jesus could be heard with authenticity. In such cases, “relevance” by the world’s standards would be tantamount to falsehood. Only in rebellion against those standards can there be gospel. To paraphrase George Lindbeck, the point was not to conform this message to its time and place, but rather to conform the time and place to the message.

Luther, and the Christians down through the centuries who have identified with his legacy, rightfully have derived a deep comfort from the thought that there are abiding constants in our human situation before God—the chief of these being our need for undeserved grace. The comfort that this engenders is not one of complacency, of satisfaction with the status quo even

when the status quo has proven itself inadequate to the gospel. Rather, it is the sense of connection between an essentially unvarying human condition and an eternally trustworthy answer to that condition. In the midst of an ever-expanding marketplace whose life depends on complimenting us on our new needs in order to sell us new products, perhaps the most needed ministry of the church is to refuse to be “relevant” on any terms other than its own. In doing so, we will keep faith with all the saints through time who have sung praises to the One who “is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” †

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pulpit and pew

Owed to Mom

DON'T ASK THE MOTHER ABOUT THE 1960s. SHE doesn't remember any of the events that made the decade notorious. The upheavals in her life cannot compare to those of our nation. Americans merely faced three assassinations, the escalation of the war in Vietnam, the Bay of Pigs, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the civil rights movement, and the collapse of the 1969 Cubs.

The mother weathered more.

In 1960 her premiere son was born.

In 1962 her mother died.

In 1963 her father remarried.

In March 1964 her ultimate son was born.

In October 1964 her husband of six years died.

In February 1965 she returned with her two sons to her hometown.

In October 1965 her sister had a breakdown, divorced, and moved home with her father and step-mother.

In 1966 the Cubs hired Leo Durocher.

In 1968 her father suffered his second heart attack.

Through all these events, her ultimate son, with the perspective of more than three decades, marvels at the stability of his home life, the constants.

Soft boiled eggs or oatmeal for breakfast every Tuesday.

The celebratory, even sacramental observance of the first BLT sandwich of summer.

The one morning in eighteen years when he and the mother both overslept (also the only day he ate hot lunch in high school).

Jigsaw puzzles and chips and dip every year on New Year's Eve.

The one morning in eighteen years when there was no juice for breakfast, and his subsequent hissy fit at this failing.

Barbecued potato chips and Kool-Aid to

Tom Willadsen

watch the All-Star game.

Long-running games of Aggravation, Crazy 8's, Battleship, Clue, Boggle, gin rummy, cribbage, even backgammon. (The brothers do not play bridge to this day. The mother never taught them. She wanted to retain one game at which they would not, eventually, defeat her.)

As a grandmother she has been dragged into games of PokeMon and chess, with a gracious and cooperative, though tepid, enthusiasm.

FRUGALITY IS ANOTHER THEME IN HER LIFE. EVERY time the mother saved eight cents using a coupon for raisin bran, or received a \$1.50 rebate from the Mrs. Paul's fish stick people, that money was thrown into a jar. By the end of the year, these savings purchased the family Christmas tree.

Every time the mother got a fifty-cent piece in change, it went into a different place. Eventually enough was saved to go out for dinner. The family never went the same place twice. When the mother dropped the fifty-cent pieces at Pizza Works in 1975, the premier son, then fifteen, did not break stride as he headed toward the exit.

Starting in 1973, each December was marked by the preemptive announcement that "Christmas would be a little lean this year." The purchase of ultimate son's trombone, prompted by his overbite, caused by his thumb sucking, caused the paucity that year.

Still, on December 25, ultimate son found Battleship under the tree, a game that resides in his current home. Looking back at Christmases and birthdays, the brothers cannot recall anything other than the abundance and appropriateness of gifts. There were always books and stockings that included a toothbrush and were filled with what is now called "piñata chum."

Both sons enjoyed private music lessons; braces (which were more endured than enjoyed); vacations to see friends, relatives on the father's side, and historic sites; movies, especially when it was "bestly hot"; tickets to symphony concerts featuring Victor Borge and Benny Goodman; and special tenth birthdays.

In the premier son's case, his tenth birthday was his and his brother's first trip to Wrigley Field, that ivy-covered burial ground. Cubs 10 – Reds 2, winning pitcher, Bill Hands, home runs by Jim Hickman and Billy Williams.

Ultimate son enjoyed a surprise tenth birthday party that was truly surprising.

HONESTY AND HUMOR MARKED AND SHAPED their lives together. The mother could not send a get well card to someone who is terminally ill. That would be dishonest. She looked for cards that say, "I hope you're feeling better" or "I'm thinking of you." Both sons were honest with her, too.

Last month, ultimate son found himself seemingly channeling the mother's spirit in this conversation, with the Weasel Boy:

Daddy, a window on the garage broke!
No, no, "I broke a window on the garage."
I broke a window on the garage.
Did you get hurt? No? Good, let's clean it up.

The mother taught, "First you get the grammar and responsibility correct, *then* you deal with the mess."

The mother approached all of life's challenges with grace and rich humor. And her humor was always a reaction to the hand she was dealt. Rarely did she repeat jokes or introduce humor; it always came as a response. In life one either laughs or cries, and given the choice, it is always better to laugh.

The mother was wise enough to know that one is not always given the choice.

AS ADULTS BOTH SONS WERE IN A SEMINAR ON telling family stories. Ultimate son told the story of the last time he fought his

brother. He was about seven; premier son would have been eleven. The phone rang. The mother answered it. The boys started to fight.

Cause... effect.

No one remembers what they were fighting about.

They wanted to kill each other.

The mother put down the phone, ran to the kitchen, and got the Miro kitchen timer. "I am so damn mad at you kids! Fight! I want you to fight for five minutes! Fight!!"

(Another thing about the mother is she was judicious in her use of profanity. On those rare occasions when she dropped the D-bomb, it got attention.)

The brothers could not fight. They were too busy laughing, not at the mother and her rage, which was real and mighty, but at the absurdity of having been given permission, no, at having been commanded, to do what they had been forbidden all their lives.

They never fought again. Physically. Now they express their hostility through puns and snide remarks. And no, no one longs for the days of fists, fury, and headlocks.

And as the seminar wound down, ultimate son realized that the mother taught him that humor solves problems. It's not a mere palliative, the spoon full of sugar that helps the medicine go down; humor can make things right and whole again.

AS THE MOTHER TURNS SEVENTY, THE SONS weep tears of joy and gratitude, and tears of laughter, for the life the mother built for them, the foundation on which their own families are being built.

Honesty, humility, frugality, and laughter. In 1964 these were the only tools in the mother's tool box. Later, she added guilt, and used these tools to raise *a family*. ♣

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life together

Trail Maintenance

ONE SIZZLING AFTERNOON THE SUMMER AFTER kindergarten, I brought out every one of my toys to our shaded patio and arranged them for all the kids in the neighborhood to enjoy. I pictured groups of friends contentedly assembling, some shaping playdough, others coloring Mickey Mouse between the lines, others building orderly towns out of wooden blocks, through which yet others would lay tracks for a wooden train that snapped together. I spread out all of these things and more to give everyone sufficient room. Then, like the servant in the parable, I went out into the lanes and hedges of our block to compel the other children to this carefully prepared feast of recreational opportunity. To my surprise, I could persuade no one to come. Whether different ones of them had married a wife or purchased a yoke or two of oxen I cannot now recall. But nobody was interested. I went back to my patio and wistfully surveyed the ruins of my social utopia. Then I put all of the toys away.

What interests me now about this memory is not the failure of the experiment. (As I recall, I did not lack for friends or brothers to play with. Nor did I mind playing alone.) What interests me is the impulse behind it. "These are my toys," I wanted to say. "I want to share them with all of you. The more of you I can share them with, the happier I will be." Nor did I imagine anyone fighting over these toys. My generosity would somehow produce a perfect amity among all.

Some thirty years later, my wife and I took twenty-four college students to England for a semester of study. This was a group that did not always get along. Some were very angry with me for weeks at a time, for reasons I found hard to discern. Later in the semester, I discovered that a good many of these students had painful relationships with their fathers. Some had been physically abused, others abandoned. Others simply suffered an emotional distance. The anger directed at me

Paul J. Willis

by these students was anger that was transferred: in our *ad hoc* family for the semester, I was the father. Realizing this, however, did not make the situation much better. I still bore the anger of these students and slipped into a mild depression.

Back home after the semester was over, I sought the help of a therapist, who, as a good Jungian, told me to pay attention to my dreams. One of my dreams brought a sense of comfort. I was camped in an ancient hemlock forest with a whole variety of people: my wife and children and brothers and parents, my students and colleagues and old school friends, my teachers and pastors from the past, even authors dead and gone that I had read but never met. It was morning, and sunlight filtered through the hemlocks onto the moss and ferns and flowers. I helped everybody on with their packs, and we headed up a fresh, damp trail, ice axes firmly in hand. Setting a slow but purposeful pace, I was in the lead, and everyone else was plodding along agreeably behind me. Through gaps in the trees overhead we caught a glimpse of a snowy volcano, white and gleaming and hopeful against the morning sky. It was understood that this summit was our goal for the day. We were going to climb it. But we weren't going to hurry. We would go slow, and enjoy every step, and make sure that everyone made it to the top.

That was my dream. My therapist told me it was a dream of healing and wholeness. A dream that brought everyone in my life together, in a setting that I dearly loved. As I think about it now, the dream may be a wilderness version of sharing my toys on the back patio. In both there is a generous impulse. Here are my toys; here are the mountains that I love. And in both there is community. Everyone is playing together peaceably; everyone is hiking in a humble kind of gratitude. There is no jockeying for position. I am in the front, but only to take care of the others. I felt none of the burdens

of leadership in my wilderness dream. Only the joys of helping and of being helped.

I wonder: have I ever experienced this sort of thing in my waking life? I have been a college teacher for almost thirty years now. Has the classroom ever become this charmed space of community? There have been moments, of course. Moments I am sure that I have read a poem aloud in a way it deserves, or moments in which I have said something (unplanned) that seems to be the right word of understanding. Or, more importantly, moments in which I've really listened to something a student has had to say. For the most part, however, I have not experienced the sense of a shared gift in the classroom. I seem to grade a little too rigorously for the students' liking, and I am perhaps too much of an introvert to mount a charismatic presence. Every year, at graduation, my heart palpitates a little when the provost begins to announce the teacher-of-the-year awards. But every year the awards are given to persons with different gifts than my own.

What about my years as a mountain guide, the real-life place that the dream came from? Again, there are moments of full connection, and plenty of them. Finding Lewis's monkey flower at the foot of a thundering waterfall, crossing a river safely in the North Cascades, summiting a Sierra peak that no one thought they could climb, dropping packs in the evening by a quiet tarn. The memories come crowding in. But I also recall the whining, the complaining, the sheer human recalcitrance of people who are asked to be a little cold, a little tired, a little hungry, a little blistered, a little dirty, a little bug-bitten. I also recall the sheer boredom on the trail of listening to adolescents discuss the latest movies, the latest sitcoms, the latest, greatest video games. There are no perfect group experiences. Only in dreams. Only in the kingdom of God, which is sort of now, but very much not yet.

And yet. What I want to write about is a trail I made last year along a creek on the edge of our California campus. The trail follows a ravine that is thick with brush and otherwise not very accessible. It is wild and shady down there and almost completely out of sight of any of the college buildings or neighboring homes. With all of its branches, the trail amounts to about a mile of soli-

tary walking. It cost me seven months of slashing and digging to put the trail into place, and still takes me several hours a week to maintain. When I built it, however, I was only thinking of myself. I was feeling hemmed in by the routine geography of the college campus and the adjacent faculty housing where I live. I wanted a place to wander alone, a place I could take my dog off the leash. Also, my mother had just died of cancer, and I felt a need to clear a new way for myself, to release the energy of my grief. So I threw myself at the poison oak and sure enough cleared a way.

I didn't advertise this trail. I didn't go door to door and ask the neighbors to share it with me. I even took a little pride in obscuring the places it started and stopped on public roadways. But to my surprise, people began to find it. Perhaps they found the trail because they needed what I needed: a new way of being in the same place. Overworked faculty members and their maladjusted children. Stray students. Lonely visitors to the campus. And neighbors from beyond the campus. Lots of neighbors. Neighbors with dogs. Neighbors who had never had a kind word to say about the local college.

I didn't meet them all at once. They weren't in some long line, all hiking at my heels. But one at a time they'd find me working on the path and stop to thank me. Effusively. Some with strange tears in their eyes. A woman who, as a child, had suffered terrible abuse. Afraid of the woods, she'd decided this trail was friendly, and came to walk it every day. One morning, she told me, embarrassed that she had created a private name for every section of the trail, every turn. Another woman, recovering from a painful divorce talked to me about Buddhist circumambulation and mandalas and other things I didn't know much about, but when she sensed my confusion she simplified and let me know the trail for her was a place to pray. And a man who told me, "This is the best thing that has happened to this neighborhood in thirty years." I found him spraying poison oak along the trail with a homemade brew. In fact, he extended one branch of the path to his back door so that he could have direct access.

So here is the irony of it all. My best gift to a local community wasn't really intended as a gift at all. I created a path for myself and discovered

there is no such thing as a private trail. Though one person may carve it out, a footpath only continues to exist as communal expression. It is maintained not so much by one man's shovel and shears as by the feet of all who use it. It is like writing a book. One does so to satisfy one's own vision. But then, when the book is published, people read it or they don't. And if they don't, the book does not continue to exist, in any meaningful sense of that word.

Sometimes this communal reading and maintenance takes even more tangible forms. One part of the trail provides a leafy shortcut between the college track and the home of our college track coach, one of the most community-minded people I have ever met. His fourteen-year-old daughter is dying of a brain tumor, and the pain of this is etched on his face. He took her to the track by way of the trail once, when she could still walk a little, and very proudly let me know. But now she is waiting at home to die. One would think a tragedy

of this depth would preclude all outward vision. But one morning last month, our good coach had his whole team out on the trail with rakes and hoes and line trimmers, doing their bit to erase the encroaching growth of spring.

I think too of the neighbor from beyond the campus who now patrols the poison oak with his hand-pumped brew. When I first met him on the trail, he eagerly asked for my email address. For several weeks afterward he peppered me with questions about tools to use, thistles to cut, stream crossings to rearrange. Then the emails stopped. I learned from a mutual friend that his twenty-two-year-old son had just died of a heart attack. I sent him a fumbling message of sorrow, and I have not seen him since. But when I do, we will be sharing the same path. ♣

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Politics as Gardening

"Eternal gardening is the price of liberty."

—Charles Dudley Warner
My Summer in a Garden

I

NATURE IS A BIG DEAL THESE DAYS. AMONG my (mostly conservative, evangelical) students, environmentalism is the trendy issue. The cost of gas has everyone worried about energy prices. Even President Bush has become an enthusiastic cheerleader for alternative fuels. The market for organic food continues to expand so rapidly that even Wal-Mart, that most un-Bobo of chains, has gotten in on the action. Trade wars simmer over genetically modified foods. *Newsweek* last summer published a cover story on "The New Greening of America." You can't listen to NPR for more than fifteen minutes without hearing someone comment grimly about global warming.

Even more problematic than our relation to the natural world, however, is human nature itself. Is same-sex marriage "unnatural," for example? Or is the insistence that marriage is a relationship between a man and a woman a purely conventional prejudice? Do sex-specific social roles in general have any basis in human nature? Nor is sex by any means the only social battleground for debating human nature. Advances in biotechnology, the possibility of cloning human beings, stem-cell research, all raise difficult questions about the content of human nature, its limits, and its connection to the physical body.

Even economic issues, which might at first appear less likely to raise such controversial questions, ultimately involve important assumptions about human nature: how self-interested we are, how lazy, how driven to better our condition. Economic policy attempts to manipulate social behavior through the use of incentives, but

Peter Meilaender

that very attempt presupposes an understanding of human nature sufficient to predict our responses to policy-makers' carrots and sticks. Yet successful attempts at influencing behavior, by shaping our assumptions and habits, can in turn affect our likely responses—can, that is, alter what we had taken to be our nature. The nature of our nature is puzzling precisely because its content is impossible to demonstrate in any decisive way. For every plausible account of how some social convention arises from human nature, there is an equally plausible account of how social practices could have produced what we mistakenly take to be natural.

Nor do these disputes over the relation between human nature and public policy follow predictable partisan lines. On "social issues," especially those relating to marriage and the family, conservatives are likely to appeal to a fixed and unchanging conception of human nature, liberals to a more flexible one. On issues of crime and poverty, too, conservatives like to poke fun at liberals for having an overly malleable understanding of human nature, one that attributes such problems to unjust social circumstances rather than to unavoidable human perversity. In international contexts, however—President Bush's campaign to spread democracy notwithstanding—liberals are more likely to speak in terms of universal human rights, while conservatives defend cultural particularity, patriotism, and national sovereignty. Unless, of course, the issue is free trade and open markets, which conservatives promote despite their corrosive effect upon traditional cultures, but liberals view with suspicion, despite their ability to improve the lot of the global poor.

Though our understanding of human nature is thus closely connected to our views on many important issues, we lack a clear language for describing its dual role as both source and

product of human culture. As a result, we tend to oversimplify.

II

The debate over human nature and its political consequences runs like a faultline through the history of political thought. Aristotle declared that “man is by nature a political animal,” meaning that human nature develops fully only within the context of political (not merely social) community. The evidence for this, he suggested, is our capacity for reason and speech, which permit us to reflect upon and argue about the justice and injustice of our communal arrangements. Early modern thinkers, by contrast, typically claimed that political community is artificial, not natural (hence the need to create it through some social contract). Hobbes is especially emphatic on this point, conceding that some animals, like ants and bees, associate naturally, but that “the agreement... of men, is by Covenant only, which is Artificial.” Indeed, he turns Aristotle’s evidence on its head: reason and speech, far from pointing towards political association, are causes of human conflict, because they permit “some men [to] represent to others, that which is Good, in the likeness of Evil; and Evil, in the likeness of Good.”

Disagreement over the naturalness of politics tends to generate different descriptions of politics itself. By and large, those who think of politics as the appropriate fulfillment of human nature tend toward an educative conception of politics, while those who regard it as a conventional corrective to human weakness favor a coercive one. In Aristotle’s *Politics*, for example, there is hardly any discussion at all of the coercive role of legal force, whereas education is the central focus of his description of the ideal state. Hobbes, by contrast, concludes that because human agreement is only artificial, “it is no wonder if there be somewhat else required (besides Covenant) to make their Agreement constant and lasting; which is a Common Power, to keep them in awe.” We might also think of James Madison’s famous question from *Federalist* 51: “But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary.”

There is a Christian version of the same argument, most easily (if somewhat roughly) described

as a characteristic difference of emphasis between Augustinian and Thomistic traditions. Thomas, following Aristotle, treats politics as natural. In answer to the question of “whether in the state of innocence man would have been master over man,” Thomas replies (with reference to the *Politics*) that, while slavery would not have existed prior to the fall, some persons would indeed have been masters over others in the sense that “he who has the office of governing and directing free men, can be called a master.” Similarly, Thomas defines law simply as “an ordinance of reason for the common good, made by him who has care of the community, and promulgated”—without any reference at all to coercion. Augustine, by contrast, argues that God originally did not want man “to have dominion over any but irrational creatures, not man over man, but man over the beasts.” He therefore set up “the first just men... as shepherds of flocks, rather than as kings of men, so that in this way also God might convey the message of what was required by the order of nature, and what was demanded by the deserts of sinners.” Earlier in the *City of God* he asks, “Remove justice, and what are kingdoms but gangs of criminals on a large scale?” Later, however, he argues that *no* earthly polity possesses justice—suggesting a rather uncomfortable answer to his earlier question. Coercion, judgement, and punishment are ineliminable elements of political life.

Again, the point is not to pick sides in an admittedly oversimplified argument. Law and government in fact have both an educative and shaping role as well as a coercive function. But it is difficult to talk about this clearly without a better way of describing the nature of our nature.

III

I suffer from a pair of weaknesses endemic to the academic life: I cannot take up any new activity without reading a bunch of books about it, and sooner or later I manage to connect every such activity with reflections about my own field. A couple of years ago I bought my first house, so I’ve now spent a few summers fussing around in the yard, trying—with what a charitable observer might describe as very limited success—to improve its appearance. So I’ve taken to reading a few gardening books each summer. One of the

first was Michael Pollan's *Second Nature*. Pollan's theme is that gardening represents a middle path between two competing but unsatisfactory stances towards the natural world: on the one hand, a wilderness ethic that seeks to eliminate all human intervention and leave the world in its "natural" condition; on the other, domination and development driven entirely by human wishes. The former is inhospitable to human habitation, since nature, left to itself, is "indifferent to our survival." But the latter can provoke a backlash from nature, as our increasing understanding of environmental issues makes clear.

The garden, Pollan suggests, provides "a middle ground between these two positions." A garden is neither simply natural nor simply artificial, but rather both at the same time. It transforms nature without violating it, raising it up, rather, to a higher level, one that is welcoming and suited to human life. It is, we might say, natural, but it is no longer *merely* natural. "A garden is, or should be," writes Pollan, "a midspace between [raw nature] and the parking lot, a place that admits of both nature and human habitation. But it is not... a harmonious compromise between the two, nor is it stable... It requires human intervention, or else it will collapse." The gardener sustains the compromise by being attentive to nature and its demands, while also embracing the need for culture. "The gardener in nature is that most artificial of creatures, a civilized human being.... [T]hough he lives in nature, he is no longer strictly *of* nature." In the garden, the line dividing nature from convention cannot be identified; or, better, nature and convention cease to be dichotomous at all.

In this sense, gardening proves to be an excellent metaphor for politics. As an image, it nicely captures the complex relationship between human nature and human culture, one that helps us appreciate the insights of both the Aristotelian and the Hobbesian (or liberal), the Thomistic and the Augustinian traditions. Like a garden, human nature is never "mere" nature. We encounter it always and only as shaped by particular social and political environments, so that it becomes impossible to say with any certainty just what in us is really "natural" and what is "conventional." Indeed, the very attempt to draw that distinction is in a sense "unnatural." Human nature, like that

of a garden, is always (to borrow Pollan's title) "second nature." In a striking phrase from Burke, it is the "prerogative" of "that wonderful structure, Man... to be in a great degree a creature of his own making."

From a political standpoint, this means that every law or policy has an "educative" effect, exerting an influence upon the second nature that is our only nature. There is thus no question of remaining "neutral" among different cultural and political options, for every decision to act or to refrain from acting has its effect on us. Nor can there be a question of refusing to intervene and letting "nature" take its course; nor of discovering the one policy truly in accord with "nature." The question, rather, can only be whether the second nature that we together create promotes or undermines the conditions for a decent human life.

By thus abandoning the language of liberal neutrality, the gardening metaphor may appear to tip the scales in favor of the Aristotelian/Thomistic tradition and its educative image of politics. Indeed, the potential danger of the metaphor is that by calling to mind images of, say, an elaborately planned and formal French garden, it may encourage illusions of excessive human power and control, inviting an overly powerful, bureaucratic, regulatory, or just downright meddling state. Fortunately, such illusions of control are easily dispelled by, well, doing a little gardening. For if there is one thing the gardener is acutely aware of, it is that he is hardly in control. From storms and droughts to early frosts, from fungi and bacteria to the slugs that ate every one of the bean plants in my vegetable bed, the gardener is at the mercy of many forces. The garden's existence is fragile and threatened, no more self-sustaining than is our own second nature—as anyone knows who has left a garden unattended for a few weeks while away on a summer vacation. "The man who undertakes a garden," writes Charles Dudley Warner, "is relentlessly pursued."

He felicitates himself, that, when he gets it once planted, he will have a season of rest and of enjoyment in the sprouting and growing of his seeds. It is a green anticipation. He has planted a seed that will keep him awake nights; drive rest from his

bones, and sleep from his pillow. Hardly is the garden planted, when he must begin to hoe it. The weeds have sprung up all over it in a night. They shine and wave in redundant life.... You can't get up too early, if you have a garden.

Indeed, as Warner's hoe indicates, outright force is no less an element in gardening than is coercion in politics (as the early modern liberals correctly understood). "Weeding," says Pollan, "is not a nuisance that follows from gardening, but its very essence." In that sense, the preservation of life in a garden is intimately connected with the taking of it. The gardener knows that he inhabits a fallen world, not a paradise abundant with beauty and nourishment but a field of thorns and weeds where any flowers that grow will be watered by the sweat of his brow. Thus, if liberal neutrality is not possible, neither is any simple politics of the common good, not when the very content of that good is the subject of fierce political controversy. That is one dilemma of politics in a fallen world:

we are necessarily co-shapers of our nature, but cannot hope to agree about the goal of that shaping. Peaceful resolution of disputes over the cultivation of our second nature occurs only in the shadow of the hoe.

At once natural and artificial, the garden provides a metaphor for the political cultivation of our own nature, capturing its complexity more adequately than do more familiar but oversimplified appeals to human nature. The activity of gardening points to the permanent need for human culture, while reminding us of its very real limits. Gardening thus teaches humility, not overconfidence. But also not despair, for the gardener is the very embodiment of hopefulness. H. Richardson Wright refers to replanting an old orchard "with the fond expectation that we shall live long enough to enjoy the fruits of this new generation." Only, however, with the aid of eternal gardening. †

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INDICATOR SPECIES

More than 1,000 bird species face extinction because of an alarming and accelerating loss of biodiversity, a study warns today.

-The Guardian, 8 March 2004

More than a thousand, us
among them. No song to mourn
their absence in a universe of merely
inorganic flight. No machine can sing the sun
to light each morning.

A dark chorus of car alarms is the entire music of our loss.

Steven Schroeder

One Man's Fight

Barry W. Lynn. *Piety and Politics: The Right-Wing Assault on Religious Freedom*. New York: Harmony, 2006.

THE SUBTITLE OF BARRY LYNN'S NEW BOOK should be, "My Fight against the Right-Wing Assault on Religious Freedom," for this is a book about Reverend Lynn himself, before anything else. Executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, and a United Church of Christ minister, Lynn has been a public voice against "theocracy" on all of the issues his seven chapters address: freedom of religion, religion and public education, religious icons and public property, faith-based initiatives, religion and politics, sexuality, and censorship. And it is this voice that narrates the action here.

His introduction begins: "The Reverend Jerry Falwell doesn't like me." Some of the more spectacular clashes between these titans (as well as run-ins with James C. Dobson, Dan Patrick, and others) are then described. The first chapter begins the same way: "TV preacher Pat Robertson regularly calls me names... The Reverend Jerry Falwell routinely tells reporters that I'm not a real minister." By page 177 he is still saying, "My advocacy of these views [in this case women's reproductive freedom and gay and lesbian rights] and my refusal to join the Religious Right's puritanical moral crusades infuriates people like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, who loudly proclaim that I must not really be a religious person." Near the end of the book, Lynn recounts how Falwell once called him a liar on CNBC.

These and nearly identical statements throughout *Piety and Politics* make for tiresome reading. Anyone with Christian or libertarian interests can appreciate Lynn's indefatigable fight against Falwell and his followers' "use [of] the machinery of the government to impose [their] unpleasant deity on everyone else," but annoyance

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with Lynn's constant retelling of his own adventures in the name of church-state autonomy could dissuade a reader from finding some of his book's cogent—and useful—insights.

It may be true that fundamentalists view secularism as their avowed enemy; Lynn sees the secular state "as the great champion of religious liberty." "It is highly ironic," he writes, "that we wouldn't even have fundamentalist religions in America were it not for the fact that our secular state, by taking no positions on the truth or falsity of religions, allows the development of all kinds of new groups and religious structures" (123). Another irony is found in the Religious Right's "wholly unpersuasive" assertion that state recognition of same-sex unions would infringe on the rights of churches. "Every house of worship in America has the right to determine its own parameters for would-be married couples" (203). This means that the Roman Catholic Church can refuse to marry non-Catholic couples, couples who live together can be required to separate if they desire a church wedding, churches can refuse to marry an interfaith couple, can require premarital counseling, and can extract promises that children will be raised in the faith as a condition for marriage. "These conditions are absolutely protected under the First Amendment" (203). One of Lynn's strengths is catching his opposition in their contradictions.

Echoing a popular bumper sticker, Lynn writes, "God is not a Republican; God is not a Democrat. God does not care if a Senate or House bill passes or fails" (160). This is sound theology and a common-sense cornerstone in Lynn's approach to Christian faith. God does not "ordain" anyone to run for political office. "Anyone who claims to be running in God's name or with God's sanction is likely to be dangerous" (160)—a good thing for Christians to keep in mind. But the problem for Lynn is that his theological opponents

sometimes appear to be running Jesus himself for the nation's highest office.

The Religious Right's Jesus is a distinctly American creation. He's a creature of the free market, a right-wing Republican who lives in the outer suburbs. My guess is that the Religious Right's Jesus is a member of the National Rifle Association. The Falwellian Jesus doesn't minister to the poor; he hangs out with CEOs. (240)

This is the point. The Religious Right's goals "are primarily ultraconservative, not Christian" (240). He sadly concludes that, were Jesus to take the pulpit in Falwell's own church, most of the congregation "would get up and walk outside to follow Falwell" instead.

They have done so for years. They have listened and followed Falwell to a mean-spirited and narrow-minded place. He has led them to a dark, deep recess of American Christianity that often seems to dominate our national discourse these days. (240)

True enough. In a recent *Washington Post* opinion piece ("Let's stop stereotyping evangelicals," Nov. 8, 2006), Joseph Loconte and Michael Cromartie admit that "a handful of Christian figures reinforce the worst stereotypes of the movement." "Their loopy and triumphalist claims are seized upon" by those looking to make a sweeping condemnation. Lynn never uses the word "evangelical," opting to label his foes "fundamentalists." The distinction is welcome, and important. It is also not altogether clear: a reader can be unsure as to just how broad the designation "fundamentalist" is meant to be. It can then be said that Lynn spends too much of his time taking on the loopy and triumphalist instead of working with the thoughtful and gospel-driven. Certainly Lynn has run across the likes of Jim Wallis, Ron Sider, or Tony Campolo in his public appearances, but their presence is not felt here.

While Loconte and Cromartie insist that it is "no thirst for theocracy but rather a love for their neighbor that sends American evangelicals into harm's way," Lynn sees service to the neighbor by certain Christian outreach organizations—espe-

cially those notorious "faith-based initiatives"—as a move towards government-sponsored religion. Throughout his book he is clear: fundamentalists wish to "force all of us to live under their narrow view of Christianity" (17). These are people for whom the separation of church and state "is a myth, a dangerous, anti-Christian principle imposed on the nation by judicial fiat in 1947" (2).

For example, Lynn charges that fundamentalists refuse to recognize the social causes of poverty and other ills (124). For Loconte and Cromartie, evangelicals—who are "redefining social justice"—are "mindful of the material conditions that breed poverty and despair, but they emphasize spiritual rebirth." This is exactly the problem for Lynn. "Fundamentalists do not believe that providing for someone's physical needs is enough. There must always be a religious conversion as well" (124). It is fundamentalists' belief in "the fallen state of humankind... the essential wickedness of people and in the existence of literal demonic forces" that leads to the further conviction that if a person who is poor, addicted to drugs, or homeless would just "get right with God (by adopting fundamentalist religious beliefs) their problems will be solved" (124). This is solid evangelical—not just fundamentalist— theology, and Lynn treads close to insulting those far outside his narrowed "fundamentalist" target. But he sees conversion as the end goal of such activity and his point is well-taken: "[A]ny faith-based initiative that leans heavily on fundamentalist Christian providers will end up, by default, including government funding and support of specific religious views" (124).

One of the reasons Lynn is called names by his adversaries is his very secular insistence that "a person can be good, moral, and fundamentally decent without a belief in any form of god" (243). This may be going too far for many who consider themselves Christian, but for Lynn it is a way of approaching one elemental flaw in the drive for theocracy that may—he hopes—prevent thinking people from allowing it to happen. "Were I to assert," he writes, "that only Christians could be good and moral, I would also have to believe that the adherents of entire religious systems such as Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and others are not good and moral—an absurd stance" (243).

Thus distinguishing himself further from “fundamentalists”—and showing little sympathy for the position of evangelicals in general—absurd stances are attacked throughout his book, none more important than the idea that “the United States has some sort of special relationship with God” (245). This is indeed “a dangerous stance to adopt” (245). America is not the Israel of the Old Testament; it is not even the Palestine of Jesus’ day. And the ways in which it resembles the latter more than the former are exactly the sort of unfortunate circumstances Lynn’s fundamentalists do not want to face.

It could be that Loconte and Cromartie are right when they write that “it is dishonest to disparage the massive civic and democratic contribution of evangelicals by invoking the excesses of a tiny few.” But Lynn indeed perceives a thirst for theocracy and believes he has a case. It comes down to biblical interpretation and common sense, the difference between belief—and one’s right to it—and political power: opposing abortion does not have to mean withholding it from women in need; condemning sex outside of marriage and opposing certain forms of birth control does not have to mean the end of comprehensive sex education; belief that the creation story in Genesis is historically and scientifically true need not mean that evolution should not be taught in the public schools; believing that Leviticus condemns homosexuality is not necessarily the same as believing it should be criminalized; finding certain books, plays, films and recordings “blasphemous” does not have to lead to their being banned (250).

Ours is a secular state, Barry Lynn reminds us, and as such it should have no interest—or influence—in matters of religion. “Attempts to put a modern interpretation on ancient religious codes” form the basis of [fundamentalists’] ideal government” (251). This is not the government our founders fought for; this is not the government some members of the Supreme Court still believe we can have. And *Piety and Politics* is not the book to prevent such a government from coming into being. Lynn’s understanding of the problem and his exposure of the Religious Right’s agenda are correct and confirmable elsewhere. Theocracy is in the minds of many who claim to represent the gospel of Jesus Christ. He is right to point out how their views and aspirations differ from Jesus’ teachings, as they appear in the Gospels themselves. His book will prove entertaining for those who feel all they need do is be outraged. But tales of televangelists’ buffoonery can do little to satisfy the more sophisticated intellectual and theological demands of this very real threat.

Lynn acknowledges in *Piety and Politics* that “the job of a spiritual leader is to bring people together, not drive them apart” (160). His book does not provide enough evidence— anecdotal or otherwise—of Lynn following his own advice. In the end, it is a warning flare, and one to be heeded. It is neither creative nor reconciling enough to do much about the scene it illumines. †

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books

Dan McAdams. *The Redemptive Self*. New York: Oxford, 2005.

Dan McAdams is perhaps the world's leading personality psychologist, so any new book by him is eagerly awaited. His latest offering is *The Redemptive Self* (Oxford, 2006) and, in most ways, it lives up to the tradition of fine and innovative scholarship that he has brought to our understanding of the human person.

McAdams has been at the forefront of efforts to apply narrative theory to the study of personality psychology. During the 1980s, a number of psychologists began an attempt to apply narrative concepts to the description of human development and thinking processes. These efforts were only marginally successful until the publication of McAdams's fine book *The Stories We Live By* (Guilford, 1993), which provided an excellent theoretical framework and methodology for narrative research in psychology. His theory and research methodology have become a gold standard for the field.

Narrative theory in psychology and also in the hands of hermeneutic philosophers like Paul Ricoeur attempts to show how people construct their identities through storytelling.

Theorists like McAdams argue that life stories are constructed from personal and cultural materials gathered during childhood, and that they are assembled for the first time during adolescence when we begin to form our identity as a person. These are stories about us that are designed to be *told*, both to ourselves and to others. Our ideas about the story and its audience say a lot about the kind of people we are and our vision for life.

In this new book, McAdams takes his formidable narrative skills and applies them to the topic of *generativity*. First popularized by the developmental psychologist Erik Erikson in his great book *Childhood and Society* (Norton, 1963), generativity is the human need to support, care for, and pass something of substance on to a younger generation. Erikson thought that generativity was the primary task of middle adulthood and that it had much to offer both the person and the culture that supports them. With a few notable exceptions, such as some work by Don Browning, generativity has been a neglected concept, and McAdams's narrative perspective seems a good one to bring to the topic.

After an excellent review of narrative theory and the concept of generativity, McAdams

gets down to business and asks: What are the characteristics of narratives that are constructed by highly generative people? McAdams believes that this answer may vary between cultures, but that American generative narratives tend to be stories of *redemption*, "a deliverance from suffering to a better world" (7).

According to McAdams's research, the redemptive narrative of generative people is one of essential optimism. It typically begins as the person observes that they are born with special blessings in the midst of a world with much suffering. The person feels that they have a special calling to help. In their story, they surmount many obstacles, draw benefits from their struggles along the way, and eventually make a difference that leaves behind a legacy. A set of values and beliefs acquired during childhood provides an essential part of the system that helps guide and motivate them in their work. One variant of the redemption narratives is the healing and recovery narrative. This narrative tells a story of a good inner self that is in combat against a sometimes untrustworthy world, but that with the right plan can achieve almost anything, including the ultimate goal of redemption: per-

sonal self-actualization. Here redemption begins to sound like the triumph of the therapeutic.

One chapter in the book deals with the religious roots of generativity, and here McAdams comes up with results that will be surprising to some. Psychologists have a long established habit of bashing organized religion as the keeper of dogma and authority, arguing that the individual who breaks free on a lone spiritual journey is the model of health. McAdams found, however, that highly generative people typically have strong ties to organized religion and tend to do less questioning of their values and beliefs. In the language of the sociologist of religion Wade Clark Roof, they are religious dwellers as well as seekers. McAdams also points out a large mass of scientific evidence demonstrating that both generativity and religious involvement are positively related to a wide variety of desirable psychological states and better physical health. He leaves mostly unanswered the question of whether religious redemption narratives might differ in some fundamental way from other types of narratives. The strength of great psychological theories is their ability to see common patterns, but their weakness is the tendency to overlook small but fundamental differences amidst the commonalities.

McAdams asks how the black experience in America might lead to different kinds of redemption narratives. He

finds higher levels of generativity among blacks, as well as other advantages like stronger social networks. The black individuals he studied had redemption narratives that were similar to those of whites, although he also found some differences. Blacks spoke more often of early dangers and opponents to their progress, and the need to overcome setbacks to progress. There was also a lingering pain from early harsh experiences in many stories.

How should we view these American stories of redemption? Here McAdams's book turns from psychological analysis to social commentary. He provides a strong critique of the optimism in American redemption narrative. Or in his own words: "I come now not to bury the redemptive self, but I do not wish to idolize it either" (243). He points out that American redemption narratives have an internal contradiction: redemptive heroes are individualists who want to exercise agency over others, yet at the same time they want community and to be part of a collective effort. The narratives are also potentially stories of arrogance or naïveté, where the redemptive actor assumes that any problem is solvable by them, and that problems not solved can be trivialized. Worst of all, redemption narratives can be used as a justification for violence in the service of some greater good. American culture strongly supports the redemption narrative, making it difficult for both the narrator and the

audience to tell when a heroic redemptive story is completely fiction.

After the deconstruction of optimistic redemptive narratives, one turns to the last chapter in the book looking for an alternative redemption story. Here the reader will be disappointed. We are treated to some good reflections on the lack of meaning inherent in some radically postmodern views of the world, but otherwise we are left empty handed. McAdams has no answer to these problems because psychology, postmodern or otherwise, cannot on its own provide a sense of meaning and purpose to life. We must look beyond science to find this.

What might be a Christian response to the prospects and problems of the American redemption narrative? Certainly many in the church would share McAdams's skepticism about an individualistic healing and recovery narrative that ignores both our personal brokenness and the possibilities for trust in those around us. It is also easy to join him in criticizing the temptation toward arrogance or even violence that can be found in beliefs about the inevitability of redemption and our power to achieve it. History is littered with secular and religious examples of these failures.

Christian redemption narratives are ultimately about hope. Psychologists like C. R. Snyder argue that hope is about our ability to set goals and achieve them. However, the Christian vision of hope is not about getting what we want. It is an atti-

tude that life and the world are in good hands. For Luther, hope is more oriented to the expectation that God will be with us in the midst of difficulties, and that there awaits us a new life with God that will be more than we can imagine. This vision is not a call to passivity—certainly we cannot accuse Luther of that!—but it is a call to trust. It asks us to keep things in a broader perspective, and to trust that the outcome of things is safely in the hands of a God who can be trusted. Patience becomes a virtue along with energy. As Erik Erikson noted, this basic trust in the world helps us overcome a host of developmental challenges and avoid a life that lacks confidence and connectedness to others. It is the basis of an authentic redemption narrative.

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Crystal L. Downing. *How Postmodernism Serves (My) Faith*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006.

Heath White. *Postmodernism 101*. Grand Rapids: Brazos 2006.

“My pastor,” an evangelical friend instructs me, “cannot preach a single sermon without mentioning the word ‘postmodern.’” The good Reverend’s philosophical fixation is likely a symptom of his church’s proximity to a major university, but he is by no means the only con-

temporary Christian leader who feels the hot, espressotinged breath of Foucault and Derrida on the back of his neck. Indeed, “postmodernism” has become a buzz-word among many Christians who do not otherwise trouble themselves with philosophical matters. It is therefore understandable that much of the discourse on postmodernism that takes place in Christian circles is conducted with relatively shallow knowledge of just what “postmodernism” really is, or where it came from. Welcome, then, are two new books that attempt to explicate this phenomenon, specifically in the context of Christian belief. Both books, *Postmodernism 101: A First Course For the Curious Christian*, by Heath White, and *How Postmodernism Serves (My) Faith: Questioning Truth in Language, Philosophy, and Art*, by Crystal L. Downing, are written by and for evangelical Christians. Both are addressed to readers without advanced academic training in philosophy, and both aim to dispel some of the confusion and apprehension that surround evangelical understandings of postmodernism.

Of the two books, *Postmodernism 101* is the more compact (at 165 pages) and more straightforward. The stated purpose of the book is to elucidate the main ideas of postmodernism and offer some suggestions for how Christians ought to deal with this new way of thinking. White, an assistant professor of philosophy at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, executes

this task with grace and aplomb. His philosophical training and able pen allow him to communicate difficult ideas clearly and efficiently. The short, tidy chapters of *Postmodernism 101* are conceived thematically, with titles like “Truth, Power, and Morality” and “Culture and Irony.” White quotes sparingly from primary sources, offering instead his own *précis* of complex and sometimes convoluted ideas. Throughout the book, White employs a friendly tone and treads cautiously, acknowledging that such a brief treatment forces him to paint with “a very broad brush.” This caveat, and the modesty that accompanies it, is both salutary and necessary, because in many of his brief chapters White attempts to outline the premodern, modern, and postmodern perspectives on the issue at hand. Any reader who comes to *Postmodernism 101* with significant knowledge of any of the periods or issues under discussion will no doubt be frustrated at times by White’s boiled-down version of complex historical and theoretical actualities. But in the end what White loses in depth he gains back in breadth and accessibility. And what else is a 101 course for?

So much for the first part of White’s task. What of the second? How ought evangelical Christians respond to the challenges of postmodernism? White’s various answers to this question are pragmatic and thoughtful, leaning more towards the pastoral than the theoretical. For example, take

the marquis issue: moral relativism. Christians cannot, he writes, compromise on the issue of moral absolutes. But how to deal with relativist claims? One common response to statements denying the existence of absolute truth—moral or otherwise—is to point out that any such statement is itself a truth-claim, and thus the relativist seems to undermine his own position. White calls this tack the “nifty logic trick.” It may, he admits, have something to it as a logical argument, but it almost always will lack persuasive power. If one thinks, as many postmoderns do, that all statements of moral truth contain a threat of social control or violent domination, then a mere bit of self-contradiction seems a small price to pay for keeping blood off one’s hands. Instead, White advises his reader to treat the moral relativist with compassion, and to gently point out historical examples—the Hindu practice of *suttee* or South African apartheid—which seem to be obviously and absolutely wrong.

Readers with strong philosophical interests might appreciate a more substantive philosophical response to the problem of relativism, and it does not seem incredible to imagine that the non-philosopher who is engaged enough to read a book on postmodernism might be edified by such a discussion. But then again, one cannot do it all in 165 pages. White is making good on his offer of a concise, accessible first course.

Crystal L. Downing, associate professor of English and

film studies at Messiah College, has written a very different book in *How Postmodernism Serves (My) Faith*. As one might garner from her title, Downing’s posture towards postmodernism is less ambivalent than White’s. Where *Postmodernism 101* offers a survey and some modest practical responses to postmodernism, Downing’s book offers a deeper survey and an appreciation of postmodernism’s influence on Christianity. She has two main grounds for praising postmodernism. First, postmodern ideas have led to a greater openness to Christianity in the academy. Second, postmodern insights can help to free Christians from the corrupting influence of modern thought.

Along with some helpful, relatively in-depth explications of postmodern movements and specific thinkers, the book offers a personal narrative of the author’s evangelical upbringing, her intellectual maturation, and finally, her confrontation and rapprochement with postmodernism. Downing’s embrace of postmodernism could be recounted as follows: faced with a caste of thought (modernism) that seemed thoroughly anti-Christian, Downing “welcomed whatever might bring to ruin an intellectual edifice that [has] posted at its door ‘Christians not allowed’” (56). The beneficent vandal turned out to be postmodernism.

In the process of making her case for postmodernism as a servant of Christian faith, Downing demonstrates wide

reading in the postmodern corpus. The thematically organized chapters are packed thick with in-depth treatments of Lacan, Derrida, Foucault, and others. Downing augments her philosophical readings with a lively sense of the place that art has played in the modern/postmodern story. There is much to recommend Downing’s erudite treatment of how these forces play off one another in the sweep of history. But *How Postmodernism Serves (My) Faith* is ultimately, as noted above, an *apologia* for postmodernism’s influence on Christianity, not an even-handed examination. The reader gets just enough Thomas Huxley, “Darwin’s bulldog,” to recoil from the anti-religious “sneers” of “hubristic” modernism, and just enough Derrida to breathe a sigh of relief. In postmodernism, one feels, we have found a philosophy that “allows us to share [our] faith with impunity” (213).

For example, Downing quotes Derrida’s statement, made at the 2002 American Academy of Religion conference, that he “prays” to the “unnamable” god of negative theology—a god who Derrida generally refers to simply as “the impossible,” and who is not expected to answer. The negative, or apophatic, theology that Derrida refers to flourished in medieval Christian thought. Apophatic theology emphasizes the inability of human language finally to grasp the truth about God. Thus, if God is to be treated in language, he is best treated by

negation. All we can really say is what God is *not*. Many orthodox Catholic theologians, such as St. John of the Cross, pseudo-Dionysius, and Meister Eckhart are counted among the ranks of negative theologians. Indeed, there is a notable element of apophaticism in the theology of the "Angelic Doctor" himself (Thomas Aquinas) who writes that "no names belong to God in any sense that we can give them." Augustine, too, writes that if anyone describes what God is, then it is not God that has been described.

Downing treats Derrida's "prayer" in tandem with her brief treatment of medieval Christian apophaticism, highlighting the obvious analogy between the two. The problem is that she nowhere mentions Derrida's explicit rejection of negative theology. It is true that Derrida himself considers at

times the possibility that his project of deconstruction shares a great deal with Meister Eckhart's project of Christian apophatic theology. But in the end, Derrida indicts Eckhart for intellectual dishonesty. Eckhart, Derrida decides, illicitly has retained a residual confidence in his ability to know something about God. If we truly cannot say anything affirmative about God, how can we "believe" in him? What is to keep us from atheism? The only honest response to our linguistic limitations is, according to Derrida, to cease speaking of God altogether—to give up the thought that we can know him. How this part of Derrida's thought is compatible with Christianity is a problem that Downing leaves entirely untouched. (For an account of Derrida's relationship with Eckhart, see Denys Turner, "The

Art of Unknowing: Negative Theology in Late Medieval Mysticism," *Modern Theology*, Oct. 1998).

It is indeed a fact that the rise of postmodernism has contributed to the "return of religion" into the academic conversation. But one need not be a full-blooded modernist to look with some suspicion on the type of welcome that postmodern thought extends to Christian belief. It may be that such suspicion is unwarranted, but Downing has not here done enough to allay it. Despite these criticisms, though, both Downing's and White's attempts to equip evangelical Christians for this important conversation are, as I noted at the beginning of this article, most welcome. †

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the attic

Sin and the Love of God

(first published June 1957)

God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8

In our text the great Apostle, Paul, speaks of sin, the love of God, and the death of Christ. While we were yet sinners. The truth that we are sinners is, of all Christian teachings, the hardest for modern man to believe. "There is nothing wrong with human nature; man is a little weak, but fundamentally he is good," thus writes many a psychologist and philosopher. How different this estimate of man from that of Jesus who—and He knew what was in the heart of man—characterized His generation and all generations as adulterous and sinful. At the moment when man declared himself independent of God, he thought he was asserting himself; but, in reality, he was condemning himself to death, for *God alone is life*. When Adam and Eve disobeyed, they separated themselves from the very source of life. It is now man's tragic predicament that sin is inherent in him. By nature we make ourselves to be our own centers, our own laws. We have faith in ourselves and it's an evil self. Unless that center be shifted from ourselves to God, we live in sin and we are lost.

Listen to this from a lad who writes to his pastor: "There's a word in your sermons that always makes me shy off. It's the word 'sin.' I don't believe there is such a thing. Who's to say what's true and how serious it is to be wrong?" Simply and flatly the answer to this lad and to all men is: God in His Holy Word has said what is true and how serious sin is, and He has said it so clearly that ignorance on this matter is almost impossible. All through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries we were busy building up a philosophy which made right and wrong a matter of custom for the most part. God had very little to do with it. We've got to get rid of it. That philosophy has refuted itself in our world utterly and dismally. We can't desert it promptly enough. Down at the bottom of human life there is a will. God's will, that didn't arrive with evolution in 1850, or with relativity in 1900. It isn't a whim. It doesn't change with circumstances. It's a settled mind. And when you and I are out of line with the will of God, we sin. Yes, you and I have sinned. We have come short of the glory of God. Let us acknowledge that fact fully and freely today and say with David: "O Lord, I acknowledge my transgressions;" with Paul

Karl H. Henrichs

let us cry out: "O wretched man that I am"; and with the publican humbly pray: "God, be merciful to me a sinner."

In our text Paul speaks of the love of God. *God commendeth His love toward us*. Down through the ages the common cry of sinful man has been: "Wherewithal shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?" A holy God and a sinful man are the two poles of a moral world. How are we to reach God? Where is the creature that can do it? The affair would be desperate, indeed, if God would not come to us, since it was not in our power to rise to Him. The answer is "Emmanuel," a "God with us," some One divine who would join us and struggle for us; some One who sympathizes and agonizes. Yes, God hates sin, but He loves the sinner, and He in Christ dies for us that we might live. "Herein is love, not that we loved God; but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

God's love is not lazy good-nature nor foolish indulgence like that whereby some parents spoil their children; God's love is not merely a matter of closing an eye to sin; no, it is rigidly righteous, it demands a price; and therefore *Christ died for us*.

Do you raise the question: "How can God love and par-

don, and yet satisfy His justice?" In this world someone, somewhere pays for all error and crime. There is no state on earth that has no jail, no punishment, no court—however corrupt it be. To be simply pardoned will never satisfy. In order to have peace of conscience, you and I need to know that someone, somewhere, somehow has paid for the debts that we feel we have and cannot settle. You and I need to see divine justice not abolished, not put aside, but accomplished. Who satisfied the demands of divine justice? Christ on the Cross, when He died for us. "Christ His ownself bare our sins in His own body on the tree." (1 Peter 2:24)

Liberal theology pictures Christ as an ideal philanthropist and teacher and martyr who died for a cause. *We cannot worship the Jesus of modern theology*, for He is only a man, while faith demands an object higher than ourselves. Furthermore, if an innocent man had been nailed to the cross for the sins of others, the cross would be unfair and unjust even to human eyes. But, if this innocent One on the Cross is Christ, the Godman, God Himself—then what a change! What seemed injustice appears as mercy; the Judge becomes the victim; the One who is offended sacrifices Himself for the sake of His enemies. Yes, God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. When Paul, by the grace of God, understood this truth, he was

no longer a tortured man afraid of God's judgment, but a man at peace with his Maker. No longer is he terrified when he thinks of God; now the love of God absorbs him, a love that produces joy unspeakable.

God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. These words are spoken to all of you who are sorrowful, sick of soul, and laden with unhappiness because of sin. While we are grateful for inventions,

*God's love is not lazy
goodnature nor foolish
indulgence like that whereby
some parents spoil their
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political constitutions, international agreements for a lasting peace, financial schemes, and education, these are not enough. Human ingenuity and cunning can do nothing for you and me who have sinned. The world can tempt our souls; it can tell us that sin doesn't matter; it can assure us that the forbidden tree is as good to taste as to look at. But after the soul has sinned, do you think the world can do anything to take the stain away or heal the wound? The only thing it can do is either to keep silence or to mock us as the Scribes and Pharisees mocked Judas when his conscience had been awak-

ened and he flung down before them the thirty pieces of silver. But, my dear friends, as we behold Christ hanging on the Cross and giving up His ghost, I say, in God's name. He died for you. Your sin is condemned and punished. You have peace with God. Behold the living and loving God who in Christ is your Father in heaven!

These words are spoken to those who have been living unto themselves, without God. Money, honor, prestige, pleasure, learning, all these are good in themselves; but when they become the object of your heart's affection, they cannot and do not satisfy. Will you not today arise and worship Him who commends His love toward you?

These words are spoken to the nation. The present world crisis is the result of man's failure to acknowledge the lordship of God, who made and upholds the world. We are still a great nation, a great people; and the present crisis can be overcome if we change our attitude toward life and acknowledge the supremacy of God. The nation that repents will be forgiven and renewed. God blessed Egypt because of Joseph who feared Him and He will again bless America and the world when men return to the worship of Him who died on the Cross.

Let me tell you a story, and leave you with it at the foot of the Cross. It's a story about a young woman, and a nurse, and God. She was a girl of the slums and her life was nothing

pretty to look at. They had brought her into the hospital from the ambulance, stabbed and dying. Everything appeared to be and was quite hopeless; and the nurse was asked by the doctor simply to sit by until death came. As she sat there thinking what a pity it was that a face as young as that should have such coarse lines on it, the girl opened her eyes.

"I want you to tell me something, and tell me straight," she said. "Do you think God cares about people like me?" The nurse, startled, couldn't speak for a moment. Never before had she been asked such a question. She didn't dare to answer until she had reached out to God herself. Then she said, knowing now that it was true: "I'm telling you straight;

God does care about you; and He forgives you in Christ." With a smile the girl slipped back into unconsciousness; and when death set the lines on her face, they had changed. What do you think? Did something happen between that girl and God? And did it have anything to do with what happened long ago on a "green Hill outside a city wall?" †

on the cover—

The cover photograph was taken at the mountain village, Campesino, Tlamacazapa, elevated at six thousand feet and south of Mexico City. It was taken during a seven-day immersion experience called “Ministry among People Living in Poverty” sponsored by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The image can be found in *Imaging the Journey* by Mark Mattes and Ronald Darge (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2006). The book explores Luther’s theology of the cross by interconnecting photographic images with the world, life, and faith.

The photographer found his experience of this village to be a critical step in building connections and knowledge of a culture and people who are living in circumstances very different from our own. He was informed by the Campesino villagers about how and what it means to live daily in deepest poverty.

“Wealth and social standing are not of abiding values. Rather, one’s true worth is found in that God claims a sinner as his own. No other final value to life can be found. One is a sinner even in the poverty of one’s own resting place. Dust you are, and to dust you shall return. Still, from the dust of our last remains, God redeems to new life” (*Imaging the Journey*, 43).

on reviewers—

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