Understanding Our Place in God’s Creation
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Subscriptions: Regular subscription rates: $20.00 per year; Student/Senior subscription rates: $10.00 per year; single copy: $5.00. International subscriptions add $8.00. Subscribe online at www.valpo.edu/cresset.

Letters to the Editor: Readers are encouraged to address the Editor and staff at cresset@valpo.edu. Letters to the Editor for publication are subject to editing for brevity.

Postmaster send address changes to The Cresset, Huegli Hall, Valparaiso University, 1409 Chapel Drive, Valparaiso, IN 46383–9998.
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in luce tua
Seeking Hope in History

“ONE CANNOT KEEP THE HOPE WITHOUT THE HISTORY.” Jaroslav Pelikan wrote that in *The Cresset* in 1966, which was not a particularly hopeful time. University students of 1966 were of the first generation born after the end of World War II, the first to grow up fully aware of the destruction humanity had wrought at places like Auschwitz and Hiroshima. Pelikan saw a generation of students that was cynical about the present and almost despairing about the future. In their eyes, the universities they attended looked more like the lingering remnants of previous generations’ failures. And to them, the promise of the Christian gospel seemed absurd, “...too good to be true.”

Pelikan acknowledges that society in his day desperately needed some sort of “creative revolution,” but the student leaders he encountered seemed capable only of a “negative and destructive whine of protest.” A creative revolution requires “...a sense of purpose and direction...” “...an openness toward the future and an eagerness for what is yet to be.” But as Pelikan saw it, the young people in universities of the 1960s had lost hope. They had lost hope, he thought, because they lacked a sense of history; however, he realized that this fault was not entirely their own. Rather, these young people had been failed by the church and by their universities, both of which continued to speak to them in a language “no longer fit to account for reality as man experiences it.” The church and the university must help the young develop a “deeper and richer awareness of history.” For the university, this means helping students cultivate wisdom through a familiarity with the story of human history. For the church, it means fostering an awareness and thankfulness for the work of God within that history. Pelikan argued that history is the best source of hope for the future, but he also recognized that both church and university must find new ways to help that history speak to youth of the present.

Every so often, I grab an old volume of *The Cresset* off our shelves, page through it, and find a gem like this Pelikan essay (“And the Greatest of These is Hope,” May-June 1966). When I read it, I thought about my own students. There is an optimism in my students today that was absent in Pelikan’s, but it is a postmodern sort of optimism. If today’s young have hope for anything, it’s usually for themselves. They don’t embrace the past, and they don’t try to overthrow it. They just walk away from it and do their own thing. Today’s young are usually charming and amiable, because they believe themselves to be the authors of their lives, of their own truth. They can afford to be indifferent to the failure of their culture, because they think that failure is irrelevant to them. Again, the university and the church must find new ways to give these young people a sense of history. Pelikan’s essay challenges us to find ways to help them understand their lives as part of something beyond themselves and to embrace their work in this world as their participation in God’s work of redeeming it.

Many of America’s best known Christian intellectuals have published in the pages of *The Cresset*. Every time I leaf through an old volume, I find something by the likes of Martin Marty, Stanley Hauerwas, Richard John Neuhaus, or Jean Bethke Elshtain. For some time, we’ve offered samples of past issues in “The Attic,” but we’re going to start trying to do better. At the end of last year, we made all of Pelikan’s essays in *The Cresset* available in the Archives section at our website (www.valpo.edu/cresset). Recently, we added some of O. P. Kretzmann’s columns to the online archive. As time permits, we will try to share as much of our history with you as we can. And hopefully, you will find something in this history that speaks to the world as you experience it today.

—JPO
The Arlin G. Meyer Prize is awarded annually to a full-time faculty member from a college or university in the Lilly Fellows Program National Network whose work exemplifies the practice of the Christian artistic or scholarly vocation in relation to any pertinent subject matter or literary and artistic style. The 2007 Prize has been awarded to the author of a work that emerges from his or her practice of the vocation of the Christian scholar in the humanities, in accord with the principles and ideals of the Lilly Fellows Program. In subsequent years, the Meyer Prize will honor those who practice in the fields of non-fiction, creative fiction, performance art, and music. The $3000 prize honors Arlin G. Meyer, Professor Emeritus of English at Valparaiso University, who served as program director of the Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts from its inception in 1991 until his retirement in 2002.

Winner of the 2007 Arlin G. Meyer Prize in Humanities

The Way That Leads There: Augustinian Reflections on the Christian Life
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Phyllis and Richard Duesenberg Professor of Christian Ethics, Valparaiso University
Eerdmans, 2006
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Softcover: $16.00

Finalists

Practicing Mortality
By Christopher Dusting,
Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Philosophy, College of the Holy Cross, and Joanna Ziegler, Professor in the Department of Visual Arts, College of the Holy Cross
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ISBN: 0230600913
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Dialogue and Drama: Elements of Greek Tragedy in the Fourth Gospel
By Jo-Ann Brunt, Chair, Department of Bible, Religion, and Philosophy, Goshen College
Hendrickson Publishers, 2004
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The Gift of Story: Narrating Hope in a Postmodern World
By Emily Gritsinger, Professor of English, Azusa Pacific University, and Mark Eaton, Professor of English, Azusa Pacific University
Baylor University Press, 2006
ISBN: 1932792473
Softcover: $19.95

“Women, Religion, and Insanity in Mary Lamb’s ‘The Young Mahometan’”
By Julie Straight, Assistant Professor of English, Northwest Nazarene University
Will Barret, the central figure in Walker Percy’s novel The Last Gentleman, is driven by an insatiable desire to be a true gentleman, to live a right and righteous life, but he is crippled by his inability to distinguish the practical steps that this would entail. Christians may often feel like Barrett when they reflect on complex environmental problems, such as global warming, deforestation, or species extinction. Christians may feel a deep love for God’s creation and yet feel overwhelmed by the sheer scale and complexity of environmental problems and by the contradictory information they receive from competing sources. For example, should an educated layperson follow the thousands of scientists who believe in anthropogenic climate change or the hundreds of scientists who deny it?

Unfortunately, there is no simple formula to answer all of our environmental questions. There is no substitute for careful investigation of particular environmental issues and a substantive dialogue between Christian ethics and the natural sciences. Indeed, Christian environmental theology and ethics provide critical insight for environmental stewardship precisely because they do not lead to a robotic moral calculus. One of the things they do offer is an anthropology of paradox that illuminates the inherent tensions of environmental stewardship. Human beings transcend the rest of the creation as creatures made in the image of God. At the same time, human beings are creatures bound inextricably to the rest of creation and its fate.

How does an anthropology of paradox help Christians who are struggling with Will Barret’s dilemma? It certainly does not determine how one should assess the Kyoto Protocol or cap and trade mechanisms under the Clean Air Act, but it lays an important foundation for Christian environmental ethics and action. First, an anthropological understanding of God in creation and the Earth is fundamental for an understanding of human responsibility and stewardship. The creation of the world and the human vocation to care for it is a key theme in the Bible. The apostle Paul wrote, “So we see that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, and that God justifies a man by faith in Jesus Christ, that his hand may be shown in justice” (Rom 3:28). This verse highlights the central place of faith in the Christian understanding of human responsibility to care for the creation.

Much of the argument presented here is drawn from the contemporary Protestant theologian Jürgen Moltmann, who challenges the dualistic tendencies in Western thought, including the tendencies to understand God over and against the creation, human beings over and against nature, and the human mind over and against the body. For Moltmann, Genesis provides a critique of western dualism without denying the essential distinctions in these relationships because it describes them as fundamentally paradoxical in nature. God transcends the cosmos, yet God is fully immanent in the creation. Human beings are made stewards of the earth, yet they are also what Aldo Leopold called plain citizens and members of the earth community. The human mind transcends the body in acts of self reflection, yet it is inextricably linked to body. These paradoxical
relationships help to advance and revise recent work in environmental philosophy to extend the idea of human health to the environment metaphorically.

God and Creation

Moltmann's challenge to Western dualism is rooted first and foremost in the paradoxical relationship between God and creation. His doctrine of creation is important for orthodox ecotheology because he insists that there is a middle ground between the tradition of absolute monotheism, in which God transcends the creation impassively, and the tradition of pantheism, in which the identities of God and creation are collapsed into one. Moltmann's alternative approach, which he calls "panentheism," emphasizes the paradox of God's simultaneous transcendence over creation and intimate presence in the creation. While his panentheism is not without its own theological problems, it is instructive for Christian environmental ethics.

Moltmann uses the differentiation of the Trinity to help clarify God's simultaneous transcendence and immanence. "In the beginning," Genesis reads, "God created the heavens and earth." The Christian tradition generally has held that God created the world ex nihilo—out of nothing—emphasizing God's transcendence over all creation. Here it is God the Father who, in complete transcendence, resolves to create the heavens and the earth, yet when the Father calls the world into being, it is through the intimate work of the Spirit and the Son. The Spirit, Genesis 1 reads, is God's breath that hovers in darkness over the waters. The Spirit is God's presence at the dawn of creation. The Son, John 1 reads, is God's Word through which the creation is given form and meaning.

Throughout the Bible, the Spirit appears as God's creative and immanent presence, and the Holy Spirit is still the link we now experience between God and creation. Indeed, Moltmann explains, "the whole creation is a fabric woven by the Spirit" (Moltmann 1993, 99). Although Moltmann draws heavily on the Orthodox tradition, in which the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is more prominent, his own Protestant tradition long has emphasized the Holy Spirit's sustaining presence. As one Reformed theologian writes:

This inward, invisible something [that sustains the universe] is God's direct touch. There is in us and in every creature a point where the living God touches us to uphold us; for nothing exists without being upheld by Almighty God from moment to moment... And as the Holy Spirit is the Person in the Holy Trinity whose office it is to effect this direct touch and fellowship with the creature in his inmost being, it is He who... sustains the principle of life in [every] creature. (Kuyper 26)

In other words, the creation and each creature in it is threatened by the possibility of non-being, and it is only the presence of the Holy Spirit that protects the world from this fate.

God's presence or dwelling among His people, his shekinah, illustrates something further about the way in which the Spirit is bound to the creation. God made his dwelling with His people in the Spirit, and the Israelites experienced Him as both "the Lord" and "Israel's servant." Israel therefore understood that "God was suffering with them" (Moltmann 1993, 49), and it was the Spirit's self-limitation and faithfulness that made such an experience of God possible.

The same Spirit that was present with Israel and led them into the Promised Land is present in and faithful to the entire creation: "the triune God not only stands over against his creation but also at the same time enters into it through his eternal spirit, permeates all things and through his indwelling brings about the community of creation" (Moltmann 1992, 181). Furthermore, the Spirit of God is the guarantor of God's promise for creation's fulfillment. The sustaining presence cannot be understood as a conservation mundi alone, as if God simply preserves the world for its own sake. God preserves the creation in light of its eschatological future: the "original creation and its preservation serve a goal... God preserves his creatures for their consummation. His preservation of creation is itself already a preparation for their consummation" (75).

Just as it is God's Word that gives form and meaning to creation in the beginning, it is the incarnation, death, and resurrection of God's Word, Jesus Christ, that gives form and meaning to the
new creation. The incarnation reveals, in Christ's flesh, God's immanence and God's unwavering commitment to the creation. In Christ's death and resurrection, we see God's triumph over the forces of sin and death that distort not only human beings but the whole of creation. What is more, Christ's resurrection goes beyond the sustaining power of the Holy Spirit in history. It is the beginning of the new creation—creatio nova. This new creation is our redemption and our future, and we share it with the earth.

A robust articulation of creation nova challenges the tendency in Western Christianity to understand the work of Christ solely in terms of individual redemption, because it recognizes Christ as both creator and redeemer of the whole creation. As one theologian explains, Jesus Christ "is connected with nature because he is its Creator, and at the same time connected to grace because, as Re-creator, he manifested the riches of grace in the midst of that nature" (Bratt 173). This is essentially a paraphrase of Colossians 1:15-20:

[Jesus Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created... all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together... For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (1:15-20, NRSV)

Thus, Jesus Christ as the creator and redeemer is reconciling the world to God not so that human beings might escape from the earth to heaven, but so that the entire creation might be consummated in a new heavens and earth. This is why Paul writes in Romans 8 that the entire creation groans under sin and death, waiting for the liberty of the children of God.

**Humanity and the Nonhuman Creation**

God's presence in and commitment to the creation offer hope for the earth's future and defies those strands of Western Christianity that have viewed God as a detached and dispassionate creator. God's relationship to the earth also challenges any understanding of human beings as detached and dispassionate rulers of creation. If God Himself is bound to the creation, then how much more are human beings, God's creatures, bound to the rest of creation?

Western theology and culture, particularly since the dawn of the Enlightenment, have employed a dualistic model in which the human soul, or mind, is understood over and against the body, and the rational human being is understood over and against the irrational, non-human creation. Moltmann argues that this model has encouraged "a one-sided relationship of domination" (1993, 2) between humanity and the nonhuman creation, to the detriment of both.

The dualistic model is wrong not only because of its consequences; it is wrong because it is fundamentally distorted both biologically and theologically. Biologically, human life depends upon relationships with other forms of life. This means, Moltmann insists, that humanity must be understood in its dependency for life on the non-human creation and that the non-human creation, with its web of connections and relationships, cannot be understood as merely an object of inquiry (1993, 50). Theologically, human beings both transcend the nonhuman creation and are at the same time inextricably linked to it. Pointing to the Genesis account of creation, Moltmann affirms the essential identity of human beings as creatures who have been made in the image of God—imago dei—but he also insists that human beings have an
equally important and often overlooked identity as creatures that have been made in the image of the earth—*imago mundi*. The first identity is one of transcendence; the second identity is one of immanence. In the Genesis account humanity does not stand outside of “nature” or the “environment” but is an integral, though distinct, member of it, both *imago dei* and *imago mundi*.

Adam’s character as *imago mundi*, and therefore his connection to the earth, is demonstrated by several details of the creation account. First, his very name refers back to the *adama*, or earth, out of which he was formed. Adam is connected to the earth because he is formed out of it. Moltmann argues that the author makes a special point of this to correct the tendency to elevate human beings too far above the rest of creation since none of the animals are described as being created out of the ground (1993, 187). Second, Genesis 1:30 and 2:7 show a clear link between Adam and the other living creatures, for God gives them both the “breath of life.” This emphasizes the biological link between humans and animals in their dependence on the earth for air, food, and water, thereby highlighting their shared creatureliness. Third, God’s command or blessing to be fruitful and multiply is given twice in the creation account, first to nonhuman creatures and second to human beings. This basic gift of procreation and flourishing is part of what we share with other living creatures.

Parenthetically, it is curious to note the similarities and differences between God’s blessing to Adam in Genesis 1 and God’s blessing to Noah in Genesis 9. To both, God says, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth,” yet the blessing continues in two very different ways. God speaks to Adam in the imperative: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and conquer it, and hold sway over the fish of the sea and the fowl of the heavens and every beast that crawls upon the earth.” In contrast, following the command “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth,” God speaks to Noah in descriptive terms: “And the dread and fear of you shall be upon all the beasts of the field and all the fowl of the heavens, in all that crawls on the ground and in all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are given.”

The clear parallel between the two creation narratives are not accidental, so there is good reason to think that the differences between the accounts are important to the author of Genesis 9. Clearly by this point in the Genesis narrative, human beings have not only demonstrated their dominion and conquest over the earth but also have used their acquired power to conquer and kill one another. As C. S. Lewis writes in *The Abolition of Man*, “What we call Man’s power over Nature turns out to be a power exercised by some men over other men with Nature as its instrument.” We are left to wonder, then, why God commands Adam to conquer the earth and hold sway over its creatures but does not repeat that command to Noah. The primary event that separates Adam in Genesis 1 and Noah in Genesis 9 is sin; thus, one possible interpretation is that human beings, acting under the power of sin and death, should no longer be commanded or encouraged to conquer the earth because the history of our conquest is checkered.

Nonetheless, even though human beings use power over creation for evil as well as for good, God has not abandoned human beings. We cannot, despite our sin, escape our role as God’s image bearers precisely because this identity is not ours to possess or to lose. The *imago dei* is sustained because it is rooted in God’s ongoing relationship and faithfulness to human beings.

There remains, then, a fundamental distinction between humanity and other living creatures described in Genesis, and this distinction always comes in the form of a call to image God, the great gardener and caretaker of creation. Indeed, Moltmann argues that because of humanity’s dual identity, we act as priests who mediate between God and creation (1993, 185–190). We represent God to the earth through the *imago dei*, and we can represent the earth to God through the *imago mundi*. Beyond this priestly metaphor, human beings are clearly mediators between God and creation because God has deigned to make us stewards or vicegerents of the earth. God’s command in Genesis to conquer, serve, and till the earth makes it clear that human beings are representative rulers over the earth and are qualified for the job precisely because we were formed out of the earth and share in its fate. Thus, Christian environmental stewardship, based on a biblical anthropology, stems from obligation to God and, in a subordinate sense, from obligation to the earth. Understanding this relationship helps
to explain why Paul, in Romans 8, suggests that the creation's redemption is somehow tied up with human redemption. Creation waits for "the sons of God to be revealed."

Living Out the Kingdom of God

For the Will Barrets of the world, humanity’s paradoxical identity may add one more layer of confusion because it does not provide a formula for righteous living. On the other hand, it may also be liberating because it suggests that lacking a formula is no cause for anxiety or despair. Want of a formula does not doom us to failure. Indeed, our lack of clear, formulaic directions fosters two critical attitudes: it engenders humility, and it deepens our longing for a new heavens and a new earth. Said another way, in reflecting on our clear limitations, we are driven finally to the foundation of Christian faith, which is God’s faithfulness to us.

Understanding environmental stewardship as a labor of hope requires some considerable imagination, for we labor in hope of that which we cannot see. Paul reminds us that this is the very meaning of faith, for we have caught a glimpse of God's Kingdom in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but we still see through a glass darkly. Or, as academic theologians put it, God's Kingdom is proleptic. It is already here among us, but it is clearly not yet here in fullness. The creation groans, Paul writes in Romans 8, as in the pangs of childbirth, and the long awaited child in this image is a new heavens and earth that is free from sin and destruction.

The essayist, novelist, poet, and agrarian Wendell Berry describes the human predicament with language that Lutherans should recognize, for he draws our attention to two kingdoms: the kingdom of the sinful earth and the Kingdom of God. For Berry, the earth's kingdom is delineated by the industrial economy. This economy fails, he insists, because it is an impostor. It claims to be sufficient; it claims to be comprehensive. But the industrial economy fails to care for the earth and its creatures—including human beings—precisely because it is not comprehensive enough. As Berry puts it, the industrial economy fails because it "tends to destroy what it does not comprehend, and... it is dependent upon much that it does not comprehend" (Berry 54–55).

What the earth needs, Berry argues, is another, larger economy. It needs an economy that takes all things into account, thus it needs nothing less than the Kingdom of God. Only God’s Kingdom, or economy, is comprehensive enough to grasp the entire earth in all of its complexity and diversity and to rightly order the earth’s complex relationships. The Kingdom of God is, in fact, the creation's true purpose, and we cause harm and suffering when we violate its principles and order. Our problem, Berry notes, is that by definition, we cannot know "all the creatures that the Kingdom of God contains or the whole pattern or order by which it contains them" (54–55).

What makes Berry so helpful is that, at the end of the day, he is using the Kingdom of God as a theological metaphor to describe our concrete ecological predicament. He uses the Christian eschatological hope to spark our stewardship imagination. Berry suggests that there is one driving principle of God's Kingdom that a limited human economy can emulate, and that is permanence and stability. It is important to note that he does not use these terms to denote something static or immutable, for he recognizes that the earth is dynamic and even chaotic. As he explains, a "good human economy... conserves and protects its goods. It proposes to endure. Like the Great Economy, a good human economy does not propose for itself a term to be set by humans. That termlessness, with all its implied human limits and restraints, is a human good" (60). This echoes Aldo Leopold's famous statement of environmental ethics: "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise" (Leopold 262).
Contemporary ecology and environmental philosophy suggest that proposing to endure—what these fields currently refer to as environmental sustainability—is indeed a complex and dynamic task. Philosopher Bryan Norton explains it this way:

Sustainability is a relationship between dynamic human economic systems and larger, dynamic, but normally slower changing ecological systems, such that human life can continue indefinitely, human individuals can flourish, and human cultures can develop—but also a relationship in which the effects of human activities remain within bounds so as not to destroy the health and integrity of self-organizing system that provide the environmental context for these activities. (Norton 25)

Neither human communities nor environmental systems can remain static without withering away. Instead, both human communities and environmental systems can endure only as long as they retain their ability to adapt and reorganize over time.

If this seems abstract, perhaps another metaphor from the contemporary environmental debate will help. Philosophers and environmentalists have tried to make the idea of environmental sustainability more accessible by extending the concept of human health metaphorically, or for some people literally, to the environment. Although the metaphor breaks down rather quickly, as many metaphors do, it has immense value because human health is at its root a concept of dynamic stability. Human health cannot be neatly defined, for it is not simply the absence of diagnosable disease. When most of us talk about health, we mean some set of conditions and biophysical relationships that promote human flourishing. The ambiguity and dynamism of human health is what makes the metaphor so useful, and it is worth discussing at least a few of the stewardship principles that the metaphor suggests.

First, caring for our bodies requires that we manage our bodies in the face of considerable uncertainty. This uncertainty, and therefore insecurity, is what makes us so vulnerable to health fads. Each time a doctor or guru offers a new formula for perfect health, whether it be a new diet, a new vitamin, or a new exercise routine, many of us rush out to the store to buy the new formula and all of its expensive accoutrements. The darkest part of our addiction to health fads is not simply the amount of money and energy we waste but our myopic tendency to abrogate responsibility for our health by turning all management of our bodies over to experts. I am in no way denigrating doctors, nutritionists, and fitness instructors; I am simply suggesting that human health is too complex to be turned over to a handful of experts. (Wendell Berry makes this point eloquently. See Berry 1977, 17–26.) What we ought to have learned from our disappointments, first with the low-fat diet and then with the low-carb diet, is that there is no simple formula for health.

In a similar way, uncertainty and anxiety about the earth’s future have led many of us to turn environmental care over to experts and made us vulnerable to environmental fads. In doing so, we risk reducing environmental stewardship to hybrid cars, energy star appliances, and two tickets to a rock concert called Live Earth. As with doctors, nutritionists, and fitness instructors, I am not denigrating energy-saving technology or concerts to raise awareness about global warming. Rather, I am pointing to the danger that these resources become the substance of our commitment to environmental stewardship and even become a costly indulgence to cover our environmental sin.

Second, caring for our bodies cannot be an isolated responsibility, as the health fads suggest. Instead, caring for our bodies is deeply relational, and we tend to succeed when we are supported by family and community. One of the more important and interesting changes in medical training in recent decades has been the growing emphasis on treating patients as whole people instead of as biological machines. Doctors today are far more likely to ask patients about stress in their families and work environments because they recognize that stressful relationships and work environments can be a very real health risk.

In a similar way, caring for the earth cannot be an isolated responsibility which we fulfill through our membership in the Sierra Club or tree planting
on Earth Day. Environmental stewardship is collective and relational. For example, one interesting aspect of the 2007 US Farm Bill, considered in Congress last year, is the amount of money allocated to support local farmers markets, suggesting that the human relationships involved in food production and distribution may be as important environmentally as whether or not the food bears the organic certification. Indeed, one prominent food writer, Michael Pollan, argues that buying food locally from people that you can get to know personally is more important for both human health and environmental protection than buying organic food imported from Chile.

Third, human healthcare is a dynamic field that changes with new information and perspectives and with the recovery of older information and perspectives. Its progression is not linear improvement. Sometimes there are great improvements through technological or biotechnological breakthroughs, and sometimes these new procedures are demonstrated to have caused more harm than good. Healthcare changes as practitioners listen to and observe the effect of treatments on their patients. In a similar way, caring for creation is a dynamic area of human knowledge, varying over time and over space. Working with limited knowledge, land managers, even those with the best intentions, will cause harm instead of promoting health. Nevertheless, improvement of our stewardship is possible, especially when we pay attention to God’s creation. Like doctors, stewards of the earth can make progress by listening to their patients and learning from them.

Conclusion

Until God recreates the heavens and the earth, Christians will never be perfect stewards of the earth. In the meantime, we labor on in the hope that God ultimately will fulfill His promises to the creation, and we try to imagine and live out God’s Kingdom in a limited way. The doctrine of creation, which in the last century so often has been treated solely as a story of origins, provides Christians with a picture of how God manages the creation, and it is out of the doctrine of creation that we understand our calling to image God to the creation. Jürgen Moltmann’s Trinitarian doctrine of creation is an important resource for revising the Enlightenment’s articulation of God’s relationship to the creation and of our own relationship to the non-human creation. Understanding in each case that there is both distinction and intimate connection transforms the way that we value the nonhuman creation. As Christians, we cannot view the non-human creation dispassionately as nothing more than the raw material of our industrial economy; we must view the rest of creation as God’s creation, created first for God and His glory and second for our use and enjoyment.

Learning to care for creation as God’s creation is an uncertain process, but it is one that has a certain future. God, who has demonstrated His faithfulness through the act of creation and most clearly through the incarnation of the Son and sending of the Spirit, will be faithful to creation and will renew the earth. In our own struggle to care for creation, the church cycle of prayer—thanksgiving, confession, and supplication—is an important part of Christian environmental ethics. We offer thanks for the good things of creation and for God’s sustaining presence in the creation; we offer confession for our failure to image God in our stewardship; and we offer supplication for the health of the earth’s biotic systems and for wisdom in its care.

Jamie Skillen is a Fellow at the Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts at Valparaiso University.

1 I am grateful to my colleague Greg Hitzhusen at Ohio State University for helping me through these texts.

Bibliography


WE ARE MISSIONARIES TO AFRICA

My parents have chosen to die
deep in the dust bowl of Kansas,
where dust to dust is hardly a figure of speech.

My father's sermons,
still coming to him at eighty-three
are chock full of personal anecdotes.
He sprinkles them into scripture
like holy sugar.

Recently my brother found a photograph
of the two of us
dated 1949.
He is five and I am two, dressed oddly
in frumpy hats and too big clothes.
On the back my mother wrote:
*We are missionaries to Africa*,
words my older brother declared to her
after dressing us for the journey.

Immortal souls are fine
but the sweet ache of this world,
this skin, these dress-up clothes,
the mom, the dad, the kids,
become more precious by the minute.
Where our bodies will go from here,
to dust or to the Congo armed with bibles
and cast-off clothing, or somewhere else
is bothering me just now
as my father in Kansas removes his glasses
and thinks hard
about the new heaven and the new earth.

Miriam Pederson
Holiness is God’s Alone
The Heritage of Luther’s Use of Hymns in the Western Rite

Amy C. Schifrin

IT WAS NOT MEANT SIMPLY TO BE SPOKEN, but sung: A holy refrain shaping the identity of a people. *Shema Yisrael Adonai Elohenu Adonai Ehad.* “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.” The commandment was sung before it was written, and even when it was written, God could not remain silent, and so it was sung again and again.

Since ancient days, the singing of the first commandment has shaped the piety, the faith, the spirituality of a people. They are not holy; God alone is holy. The one God and his holiness is to be sounded again and again. No golden calves to be seen here but voices to be heard. Blessed are you who have not seen and yet have come to believe. *Shema Yisrael Adonai Elohenu Adonai Ehad.*

Have you ever asked yourselves why God’s people are always singing? Not just in the synagogue but in cotton fields, in dictator’s dungeons, in Gothic cathedrals, in the monastery’s choir stalls, in sod-walled prairie churches, when a loved one’s breathing is labored, when the water is poured and the bread broken? In the human voice, the divine voice sounds. *Fin tum capax Infinitum.* Text, held in sacred suspension on a printed page, cannot be sung or even spoken without some evidence of life, without some type of intonation, be it exhilaration or resignation, victory or sorrow, coloratura or basso profundo. Not simply made in His image, but sung into His sounding, the community that simultaneously listens for His voice as it proclaims His voice experiences the holiness that belongs to God alone.

It is Luther’s place in this eternal song to which we tune our ears today. Luther, who understood the Psalter to be commentary on and exposition of the first commandment; Luther, who looked to Israel’s hymnbook that numbered one hundred and fifty; Luther, whose hymns were catechetical and doxological, and whose ritual placement of such hymns within the Western Rite, the *ordo,* continually place all that we are and all that we do within the sacred canopy of the promise, “I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other gods before me.”

Luther—unlike Calvin, who confined the texts to be sung solely to the Psalter—uses the vernacular hymn in a more homiletic way, whereby the lived context of the people is woven into the sung proclamation. These hymns, in which the sounding of the Divine voice is manifest in the assembly’s voice, become juxtaposed to Epistle, to Gospel, to Sermon, and to Creed, which after 1526 may itself be sung as “We All Believe in One True God” (*Wir Glauben All*). They surround the *Sanctus,* the *Agnus Dei,* and even the Benediction so that the holy conversation calls forth the people’s voices, that in words new and old their fear, their love, and their trust in God is renewed for yet another day. The First Commandment, exeged by Luther within a Trinitarian hermeneutic, is given voice in the congregation in the vernacular hymn. The ritual function of such a doxological expression opens up layers of potential meaning to all that is spoken, sung, and enacted with the ordinary and appointed props of the Mass. This “thickness” of meaning that comes from the ritual placement of the vernacular hymn bears witness to the ever living voice of the holy One. Thus the assembly sings with His voice even as they joyously are possessed by it.

A Mutual Reading

Hymns are text and tune, but in their mode of performance as congregational song, the text and tune “lose their separate identities” (Harmon 267). Like a sung liturgy they are, at one and the same time, discursive and non-discursive language, and so, unlike the unison spoken responses of an assembly, or unlike a purely instrumental musical offering, in a hymn, the tune and text read each
other as well as relate to all that is either spoken or sung surrounding them. There is a difference between understanding the relationship of tune and text as mutual reading and the more common manner of speaking in which we might say that a hymn text is given a “musical setting.” Setting implies that the meanings evoked by a hymn come from its text. Reading implies a mutuality, in which each part is necessary for a fuller understanding. Like a parent’s tense wait for a baby’s first cry, sound reveals life. And when it comes to sound, often the words are barely necessary in order for us to comprehend what is ultimately being communicated.

_When I survey the wondrous cross_  
_On which the Prince of Glory died,_  
_My richest gain I count but loss,_  
_And pour contempt on all my pride._  

—Issac Watts, 1707

If you are a little older, or came from a Lutheran congregation that was slow to change hymnals, you might have learned it from the first tune given to it in _The Common Service Book, Breslau_. In unaccompanied form, this tune carries a hint of a minor mode, which matches the movement of the text in its third stanza. In each case, the pairing of text and tune creates a new hymn. With the ritual strategy of the vernacular hymn and its potential juxtapositioning within the Mass, the evocations of meaning are ever new. For as Walter Buzin once said of the complementarity of music and theology,

Who is content to speak a doxology? If we accept... that a doxology is a song of praise to the Triune God, then will we find in the doxologies of Christendom another reason for insisting that theology and church music are of the same cloth, that both are twin bearers and interpreters of the _Verbum Dei_. And if the two are...
twins which share each other's qualities, then will we become more aware of why Christian people should sing their theology and theologize their music... We are not surprised to note... that Luther put theology and music aside of each other and that he did not subordinate music to theology. When he did subordinate, he subordinated both theology and music to the Verbum Dei... (1956)

Manner and Meaning

Our little exercise with Watts's text may help us to know the importance of a sung text, and not just with any tune. Consider Erhalt Uns, Herr, "Lord, Keep us Steadfast in Your Word." (LBW 230). This is one of Luther's catechetical hymns, used in connection with the teaching of the Lord's Prayer, which, like the sung Psalter itself may yet be a further performative exegesis of the First Commandment from the mouth of Jesus, where he teaches us to pray for what God has commanded so that we would receive what He has promised with thanksgiving.

Although Erhalt Uns, Herr has undergone textual revision from specific threats to the word (Pope and Turk) to more general ones, it is a multi-layered doxological expression that embeds Trinitarian structure (three verses for the three members of the Trinity), to a catechetical/theological reflection upon the Lord's Prayer. Jesus who prayed the Psalter, and who, as proclaimed by the quartet of blessed evangelists quotes the Psalter ninety-three times, teaches his disciples to pray in this way, "Our Father, who art in heaven..." When sung within the Mass by the reformation assembly, this life of prayer within the covenant established by almighty God is now used to set the framework through which the assembly will hear the Gospel.

This is the point at which both the general use of music and the particular music that is used come into focus. It is an evil lie that Luther went to the bars to find his best tunes (an evil lie perpetuated by antinomian megachurch advocates who believe that humans rather than God alone are the source of our liturgical gatherings). "Secular" folk tunes that were well known and well sung in his day were just one of his sources as were more "religious" folk songs. Luther did provide new texts for such tunes, known as contrafacta. But Luther also adapted the tunes of Gregorian chant and of the lyric poets known as Meistersingers, and then he and others simply composed new ones. The tune by which we read this particular text, "Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word," is believed to be one of Luther's musical compositions which was very, very loosely based on a fifteenth century adaptation of the twelfth century plainsong, "Veni Redemptor Gentium" (Stulken 309).

The congruency of text and tune is among the means by which theology is communicated. With hymnody, as with liturgy in general, "Manner... has everything to do with meaning" (Lathrop 119). The wedding of tune and text within a defined repertoire creates a habituated knowing, a sense of what is natural and right. This is how ritual works, through action, through sacred frame, through repetition. (Understanding and identity comes through repeated action until subsidiary gestures and words that participants attend to become implicit knowledge.) Evangelical Catholics receive not only the habituated knowing of a particular hymnal but the habituated knowing that hymns are an integral part of the liturgy, not an addendum.3

Luther and the early reformers set up an annual cycle of sequential hymns that enabled the assembly to voice the life of Christ through the seasons of the church year. Such a pattern of suggestions, with a wider variety of hymns, is still present in current Lutheran hymnals, suggesting, in particular, that the de tempore hymn always needs to be tied to the proclaimed scripture, especially the gospel appointed for that liturgical day. Such hymns are intended to draw the assembly into the sacramental action of preached word and holy meal that is rooted in the ongoing prayer of Christ, our great High Priest, celebrated now through the anamnetic liturgical year. Just as in preaching,4 this sacrifice of praise that ushers forth from the assembly's lips as performative doxological exegesis of God's eternal promise and command assists the assembly to take part prayerfully in the totality of the Mass. Within the preacher's meager and even inadequate words, the divine word is yet revealed. Now in the assembly's voices, God reveals the doxological reason why he gave humanity a voice. Indeed, in the assembly's song, God proleptically reveals the final destina-
tion of the human voice in a sound that continues far beyond human perception and that can only be understood in faith. Now, in the Mass, the sound of this assembly is joined to the great choir to come, where angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim, sing their praise around the Lamb’s throne: Holy, Holy, Holy.

While many would not speak of Luther as a great liturgical reformer, his use of the ancient form of the strophic hymn, a hymn with multiple stanzas, in the sung and spoken language of the people opens new dimensions of the Western Rite. The strophic hymn has become, for many, the filter though which the assembly comprehends the church year and through which it appropriates those rites which define the life transitions of birth, baptism, marriage, and burial. Because the word does not come to us in unmediated form but in the form of a strophic hymn, the strophic hymn used to define such rites carries the power of the living tradition.

Surrounding the proclaimed word with singing is an ancient practice. We know of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs from the Holy Scriptures. We even hear canticles from the lips of handmaidens and old men. We believe they were sung before they were written and written so that they would continue to be sung. We might even say that such songs were the living canon before their sound was flattened into a readable text. Following such a ritual pattern, the liturgical inclusion of vernacular hymns creates a new juxtapositioning of canonical and indexical elements. When Jesus unrolled the scroll of the prophet Isaiah (Luke 4), the assembly experienced a canonical act. When he proclaimed that God’s word was fulfilled in their hearing, it was an indexical act, for preaching is indexical, i.e., it takes that which is canonical and juxtaposes it to this present time so that what is canonical reads these present people. Just as the earliest hymns become part of the canonical scriptural witness, so the use of hymns in the liturgy becomes an extension of the pattern of that witness. Vernacular hymns within the ordo contain both canonical and indexical elements. That is part of their beauty as well as their polysemous nature. They are in a form that is repeatable and movable within the ordo, and that becomes part of the ongoing living witness of the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church.

Within the ordo, the holiness of God is voiced as the preacher sounds the biblical text and subsequently preaches, but preaching is not merely to be understood as the interpretation of the text. The sounding of the Biblical text and sermon is also to interpret the people’s lives (Fulfilled in Your Hearing, 20), and as the movement of God’s holy breath is given sound in the people’s voices through the hymns, they are shaped into a holy people, a royal priesthood whose identity is continually defined by the sung proclamation of God’s holiness, as their very bodies have become the vehicle for God’s activity in the world. They, as the church, are sacramental material, God’s holiness voiced and en-fleshed for the sake of the world.

**Hymnody and Identity**

As Reformation chorale and hymn express in form the “we-ness” of the royal priesthood to which the baptized are called, the assembly’s voices are the sacramental material in which God’s glory/holiness is sounded. Tied to one another through the production of a common sound, a common identity emerges. We are baptized as individuals into the body, we receive from the table with that same particularity within a greater wholeness, but now all of our voices are needed together, at the same time to create this one sound where God’s holiness sings. When we sing together in the
Eucharistic liturgy, we experience a dimension of our true identity in sound, in a manner which is more than the sum of our parts, in a manner in which our neighbor is as important as we are, and in a manner that we could not produce as individuals, for as boldly and as confidently as one Pavarotti-esque tenor could sing, he cannot mimic the sound of a two-hundred member congregation whose voices are raised in Christ's victory song. If we agree that in singing hymns within the liturgical ordo the true nature and destiny of the human is revealed, and that in singing hymns together the true nature of the body of Christ is revealed, then I would assert that as those voices are joined as one in praise of God and the church comes to be what it is called to be, a doxological identity—an identity rooted in God's holiness—is created in the lives of believers through the very sound that issues forth from their mouths. That sound in the Reformation assembly, especially since the advent of Luther's Deutsche Messe, is shaped by the chosen hymnody, simply by what was sung in that ritual setting, and such sound becomes the vehicle that identifies an assembly's spirituality.

The hymns given to a congregation to sing shape an assembly's self-understanding through both the structure of the hymn and its cultural and ecclesiastical associations. As such hymns are then bound as a corpus, as a hymnal they create a "model of" and a "model for" reality in which the assembly's members come to understand the self, the world, and the divine (Geertz, 112). For although we are capable of knowing a philosophical assertion or theological proposition without saying it is our own, the ritual of hymn singing—of breath, pitch, rhythm, and even words issuing forth from our bodies—particularly in the sacramental context of the ordo—engages our humanity in a way that take on personal significance as it joins us to God and neighbor. Sound is a "vast connective tissue" carried in the living memory of the human voice (Harmon 270). Rather than being told about who they are as the saints of God, through the act of singing as one voice, they experience who they are as God's holy ones.

Paradoxically, the music need not be ever newly-composed to communicate a newness of life, and therein lies some of the beauty of a standard hymnic repertoire. Each doxological "performance" is ever new, not only depending upon who is in the assembly on a given day but also upon the appointed texts, the homily, the liturgical season. Unlike sermons, which we hope will voice God's holiness in ever-new ways hymns work through the gift of tacit knowledge, a knowledge gained in the body, a knowledge that comes from being able to close the hymnal and still sing boldly, a knowledge that begins when a small child sleeps in her mother's lap while she sings the hymn tune which her own mother sang to her when she was a babe in arms. In such a case, one grows with a knowledge of the hymn in their bones, for in conscious memory, there was never a time when one did not know the tune.

This knowing that creates identity occurs in the singing body, in the repeated action of such hymn singing, and in the community that is continually born through this action. Drawn beyond ourselves, we are sung into our sacred identity, one in which the individual's identity is tied up with the whole, with the saints who surround us, the saints who have sung this sacred repository into our hearts, and with the saints who we pray are yet to come. This identity is reinforced through the portability and memorability of the hymnic form, which through its use of one tune for many stanzas is ever self-rehearsing (besides its often internal repetitions). Even when we forget all the words, we do not as easily forget the tune, which will carry us through until the words are given to us again. (This is also why hymns survive with immigrant communities until they are eventually translated into new vernacular.) It is not just Luther's hymns that have multiple reinforcing functions. All hymns that can either be remembered or reproduced in an accessible form, such as a hymnal, can grow in depth of meaning. Might one make a connection between the table of the Lord and the evening dinner table, when the hymn that was sung in the former is now sung at the latter? Might not hymns be the connective tissue that opens the eyes of a child of God to know that all life is intended to be Eucharistic... one of thanksgiving and praise, and that all of life is a window to God's holiness?

**Dust, Breath, and the Confession of Faith**

God reached into the dust and breathed life into the man's nostrils, and the man became a living being. The risen Jesus came to the ever-
fearful disciples speaking peace and breathing the power of the Holy Spirit into them, and Thomas cried out, “My Lord and my God.” The ordo is that pattern in which God gives us breath so that we would breathe and we would proclaim where all breath comes from and to where it is headed, alpha and omega, source and destination, Genesis and Revelation. Hymns are one way within the ordo that God’s intention in giving us breath, of God’s intentions giving us life, is patterned.

Ancient texts, newly preached Word, meal of mercy, and voices of the assembly joined in praise... the assembly sings... it breathes together in a performative doxological exegesis, “All Glory be to God of High.” It sounds the holiness of God in the confidence of the First Commandment, in the confidence of the One who breathed life into the universe, who breathed life into the first man, who breathed life into the darkest tomb, who breathed life into me and to every one of my neighbors. Give such words and music to a child, in and out of the sanctuary, in a catechetical and doxological form, that they might learn something of the holiness of God and their relationship to such a gracious God. Give such words and music to a child in hymnic form and you will shape their spirituality. Give such words and music to a child, to an adolescent, to an adult over and over again, so that when the evil gods of this world are enshrined in anything from a golden calf to a golden Grammy for “Christian Pop,” they will recognize their falsehood and turn to the One Holy God, who showers his mercy upon his saints forever and whose love will never cease to sound.

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Notes
1. Hull stresses the importance of the concept of mutual reading. His thesis is that “text and music interact with one another to produce meaning, the music by creating a reading (not just a setting) of the text, and the text by specifying a ‘hearing’ of the music. Text and music each do this by providing a context within which the other is perceived and understood.” This framework, which Hull relied upon, comes from Cone and from Hull (14). See also Kroeker and Oyer. “The music does illumine the text, but its role goes beyond that of being a vehicle for the words. The reverse may be true as well: The text may enable the tune to ‘speak’ as the door example, the varied musical settings of the Kyrie Elison will elicit quite a different response to the text. The intensity of the lamenting or pleading quality could cover a wide range of emotions and place emphasis on the music” (165).
2. “How is [God’s will] done?” Luther asks in his Small Catechism’s explanation to the Third Petition of The Lord’s Prayer. He answers, “When God curbs and destroys every evil counsel and purpose of the devil, of the world, and of our flesh which would hinder us from hallowing his name and prevent the coming of his kingdom, and when he strengthens us and keeps us steadfast in his Word and in faith even to the end. This is his good and gracious will” (The Book of Concord, 347; italics added).
3. A distinction is to be made here between Evangelical Catholics and Protestants who, even within a liturgical/ritual setting, use hymns without any regard to the ordo or the liturgical calendar but merely to advance some thematic agenda.
4. “As Luther put it in a fine passage, popular sermons ought to be nothing else than expositions of the Mass, since the Mass is the very substance and sum of the gospel... For... the spoken word mediated the presence of God as did the Supper” (Gerrish 26).
5. Sequential hymns vary in their function in the deep formation of a community depending upon their cyclic and repetitive use within the church year. When they are sung repeatedly according to their association with festivals and seasons, their iconic function binds the larger community as one. For example, no matter which North American Lutheran assembly with northern European roots one is worshipping in on All Saints’ Sunday or Christmas Eve, Palm Sunday or Good Friday, they will sing, respectively, “For All the Saints” (Sine Nomine), “Silent Night” (Stille Nacht), “All Glory Laud and Honor” (Valet Will Ich Dir Geben), and “Oh, Sacred Head Now Wounded” (Herzlich Tut Mich Verlangen). In the assembly’s performance, the sequential hymns with their narrative texts have created the way in which the festival, liturgical season, or yearly cycle may be understood. The lection-
ary texts and propers are given before hymns are chosen, yet, in practice, the ambiance of the festival will not be as integrally en-fleshed in the people without their voices making the day what it is, so that even the biblical text is filtered through the hymns.

Bibliography


Remembrance Days

ONE APRIL A FEW YEARS AGO, I DROVE DOWN South Carolina Highway Six through Eutawville to a wide spot in the road where a road sign said simply “Eutaw Springs.” Just a little past that sign is about an acre of ground encircled by a black-painted wrought iron fence. There are trees here and there and a few monuments and markers scattered around. It looks like a graveyard. In a way it is. Both inside that fence and in the fields around it the bodies of roughly two hundred men are buried not too far below the surface of the sandy soil.

The brown sign with the white lettering gives some attempt at explanation. It says “Eutaw Springs Battle Ground.” I pulled up beside it and took a picture of it, wondering why Carolinians call them “battle grounds” while everyone to the north calls them “battlefields.”

I wandered through the wrought iron gate and walked to the middle of the enclosure. It wasn’t the first time I had been there. About two years ago, I had come on a steamy August morning and looked about with much the same incomprehension that I felt now.

Eutaw Springs was the last battle in the American Revolution’s Southern Campaign. It was also the last battle that Nathanael Greene commanded, and since I hope someday really soon to start writing a biography of Greene, it is a battle in which I am particularly interested.

If battlefields are texts, they are ones which immediately after being written begin to be buried, until few might believe a battle had ever taken place anywhere near this McDonald’s, or this auto-body shop, or the Apollo Theater in Harlem (to speak only of the battles of Monmouth, Harlem Heights, and Brooklyn).

As I stood at Eutaw Springs, wondering what all the strange hummocks and knolls in the ground were, and just where the heck were those springs, a car pulled up and parked next to mine. Then another. And another. Men in woodland camouflage and black berets pulled over their foreheads emerged and walked slowly into the field. A short, brisk man with a beret pulled down at a jaunty angle detached himself from the growing crowd—there were now about six or seven cars parked up alongside mine—and approached me. On his shoulders were the eagles of a colonel. Once again the United States Army was arriving at Eutaw Springs.

Kings Mountain

"Battlefields, in their way, are as dissimilar as human faces. Not only are there abundant physical differences — hill and plain, swamp and mountain, desert and suburb — but their less easily defined ‘feel’ — their personality, if you will — is different too."

—Richard Holmes

I had come south to attend an academic conference on religion and church history held that year in Savannah. On the way down, I had made a leisurely progress through the Piedmont of the
Carolinas, seeing old friends, attending a lecture on Virginia anti-slavery activists, eating barbecue, doing some light hiking—but mostly I was there to visit battle grounds.

The first of these was near the border of North and South Carolina. Kings Mountain is like an enormous frying pan set face down onto the Carolina Piedmont, visible from a surprising distance across the rolling plain. From the top, it seems as if you are much higher than you actually are, an illusion I have noticed in England, where just a small height above a flat plain makes you feel that you are atop a minor Alp.

Here on this hilltop, on 7 October 1780, a force of a little over one thousand Americans led by a Scotsman made their final stand. They were all American Loyalists, led by Major Patrick Ferguson, a son of the Scottish Enlightenment, whose father was a colleague of the bench with Lords Kames and Monboddo, the latter of whom once had argued over the Ferguson son's education with David Hume, another friend of the family. Of those thousand, just Ferguson and seventy New Yorkers and Jerseymen of the American Volunteers were in uniform, and like the American general Daniel Morgan, Ferguson wore a hunting shirt over his uniform. All the rest were Carolinians who had flocked to Ferguson's call to defend their homes and the King's government against the rebels in control of their states.

Opposing them were men much the same as they. The majority were Carolinians. But there were also men who would in time be known as the "Overmountain Men," settlers from the other side of the Smokies and the Blue Ridge, from far western Virginia and from what is now far eastern Tennessee. The Overmountain men had been persuaded by their commanders that once Ferguson was finished dealing with the Patriots on the eastern side of the Appalachians, they would be next. So they had ridden over the mountains, and now they surrounded Ferguson and the Loyalists on top of the hill. The only way to tell between most of the soldiers on either side was that the Loyalists wore pine twigs in their hats while the Patriots had squares of white paper attached to theirs.

The battle began at 3:00 pm, after a morning of rain. It was over in about an hour. Ferguson was dead along with 156 of his men. One hundred and sixty-three were so badly wounded that they were left to die by the Patriots on the hillside. On their march into captivity, nine of the Loyalist militia were hung after the merest figment of a trial.

As you drive up towards the Visitors Center at the Kings Mountain National Park, you parallel an old road which lies sunken along the modern paved road, like a broad ditch. The battles fought out here in the Carolina Backcountry, you realize, were not fought in a completely howling wilderness. They were fought along a road network, however primitive that might have been. The battles of Cowpens, Kings Mountain, and Eutaw Springs were all fought along roads whose traces remain on the palimpsest of the Carolina landscape, writings seen only if you are looking for them.

The British historian Richard Holmes claims to find Kings Mountain possessed by an eerie presence. I cannot say that I felt it. It was a beautiful spring afternoon, and were it not for the interpretive films, the Visitors Center might have felt like the backcountry registration center at any national park. There were people out on the paths through the battlefield who seemed oblivious to any presence, eerie or otherwise. Some were in very high tech clothes, speed walking the paths. The park was, for them, just a venue for physical fitness; any other associations were accidental. It could have been any recreational park.

Except for the grave. The grave is the jarring note. It lies on the slopes of the ridge facing the
Visitors Center, at the end of the circle hike around the northern base and back across the top of Kings. An elaborate marker is there, a high tombstone marking the grave of Colonel Patrick Ferguson, which was not his rank, of the Seventy-First Highlanders, which was not his regiment—in fact, it hadn't even been formed by the time Ferguson died. The inaccurate tombstone is really a monument to Anglophilia, dedicated in 1930 in the presence of the British ambassador.

Behind it is another monument that, though as artificial as the tall 1930 tombstone, is nonetheless very powerful. Some time in the late nineteenth century, a retired officer in the area began to build a cairn over the grave where Ferguson and many of his men lie. He followed a Highland custom—or a romantic interpretation of a Highland custom—of placing a few stones atop the pile each time he visited. Ferguson, it must be said, was no Highland chief. He was born and bred in Edinburgh, in a townhouse to which David Hume, Lord Kames, Adam Ferguson, and Adam Smith were all frequent visitors. His family's tomb in Scotland is not beneath a pile of rocks, but in a mausoleum in a city churchyard. Yet it is not, after all, an inappropriate way to memorialize the man whose shattered body, pierced by at least five .54 caliber rifle bullets and perhaps as many as fifteen, was wrapped in the hide of a freshly killed bull and buried with the Americans he had commanded. Even the speed walkers stopped for a while to stare at the cairn and wonder.

Cowpens

The day before they cornered Ferguson atop Kings Mountain, the Patriots had camped for the night at the Cowpens, a little less than thirty miles west of Ferguson's last stand. It was a backcountry stockyard, where herds of Carolina cattle were gathered before being driven towards Charlotte, North Carolina, or to low country South Carolina. Thus it was a backcountry crossroads, a place where trails and what passed for roads came together. On 15 January 1781, it became a battle ground.

The essentials of what happened are, as they are for most battles, fairly simple to comprehend. An American general pursued at top speed by a very young British cavalry commander decided to stop. He let his men eat and sleep, and he waited for the battle. The next morning they fought, and about two hours later, Brigadier General Daniel Morgan had annihilated the British force under Colonel Banastre Tarleton. Only one hundred or so of the British force, including Tarleton, escaped. Every other soldier was killed or captured.

The essential narrative is easy, but everything else is difficult. Take the place itself. Cowpens, to use Richard Holmes's metaphor, has a very different face than Kings Mountain. At Kings, it is obvious what has to be done: if you are a rebel, take that hill; if you are a loyalist, hold that hill. From whatever perspective, the hill is the obvious and overwhelming fact. The ground at Cowpens, in contrast, is subtle and elusive. It has qualities that are not easily seen. At first, it looks like an open park. Then, as you walk it, you begin to see the folds and swales and slopes that you previously had missed. You realize, suddenly, that Tarleton did not see them either and that within every swale and behind every slope is where Daniel Morgan carefully placed his men. Battle grounds—or, rather, the ground upon which battles are fought—do indeed have personalities, as Richard Holmes suggests. If Kings Mountain were a face, we would think of it as open; Cowpens we would think of at first as open, but then would on acquaintance with the personality behind it realize was open to nothing. The first task of the commander, before he contemplates his enemy, is to understand the personality of the land on which he will risk his men. That understanding is inextricably bound up in aspects of the commander's own personality.
The military historian Mark Grimsley has argued provocatively that interest in personalities of the Civil War is related to the interest men have (and yes, it is invariably men who are so interested) in these figures as models:

I have long noticed that Civil War buffs, as a rule, are not really interested in the Civil War. It's not so much that they have a restricted view of history (although they do). It's rather that only certain aspects of the conflict comprise elements that belong within the sphere of personalities and events known as the “American Iliad,” a term first coined by amateur historian Otto Eisenschiml in 1947. Within this sphere, the emphasis is disproportionately on great statesmen and generals, and within that subset, the emphasis is mostly on their personalities. A team of Clydesdale horses could not make me let go of the notion that what is going in here is a sort of men's studies hidden in plain sight: Iron John Goes to See the Elephant.

Grimsley does not, I think, mean to be provocative so much as truthful, and he does not condemn this interest, but simply notes it.

If ever there was a worthy topic for this area of Men's Studies, it is the American commander at Cowpens. Dan Morgan showed up in Winchester, Virginia, in 1754. He was about sixteen or seventeen years old and arrived just in time to be a teamster in the wagon train that followed Braddock to his defeat near Pittsburgh. A year later he struck a British officer and received the standard five hundred lashes for this offense, timed by the beat of a drum, a corporal punishment that was often capital. In Morgan's case, it was 499 lashes, for he forever claimed that the drummer miscounted. He recovered from that, and just as miraculously gained an appointment as ensign in George Washington's Virginia Regiment, and later recovered from an Indian's bullet that passed through his cheek or neck, knocked out half his teeth, and exited through his upper lip. The French and Indian War over, he went back to brawling (which damaged him further), roistering, drinking, and driving wagons. By 1775 he had himself a freight business, a wife, land, and a certain amount of respect in the Valley of Virginia.

But it was the Revolution that showed that, whatever his other abilities and gifts, Daniel Morgan was a tactical genius. He knew how to lead his men; what to get them to do, and how to get them to do it. He also understood how to place those men on any given bit of ground. At Saratoga he used his chosen band of riflemen and sharpshooters from the Shenandoah Valley as if they were themselves one great sniper rifle under his personal control. He aimed them at the heart of the British army, killing its officers, breaking apart key formations, and allowing other Continental Army regiments the opportunity to exploit the chaos he had created. Yet Morgan was also, like just about every American officer, a man from humble origins who wished to be recognized as a gentleman. When he was passed over for command of the new light infantry wing of the Continental Army, he left the army in disgust. The honor of a would-be gentleman demanded nothing less.

It was only the return of his friend and neighbor Horatio Gates to command in the South, and a commission as Brigadier General by Congress, that drew Morgan out of his Shenandoah Valley retirement. He had not reached the Southern Army before it was destroyed at Camden in August 1780, and Gates was disgraced for both the loss and his hasty flight from the battlefield. Despite the departure of a man he regarded as a friend, Morgan stayed. The new commander, Nathanael Greene, gave Morgan command of most of the elite formations of the Southern Army, and sent him west into the Carolina backcountry to make trouble and yet avoid defeat. That was how Morgan came to be at the Cowpens the night he decided to stop running from Tarleton.

There is, of course, no good reason why Morgan stopped. He gave several contradictory ones in subsequent years, with varying degrees of tactical and strategic rationale. But the fact was that he stopped with an untested army and with his back against a river, cutting off his retreat. He was opposed by some of the best soldiers of the British Army, led by a commander who had been highly successful in destroying the American units he had encountered. Why did he stop?
In the end, all the military doctrine and theory in the world cannot help the historian who contemplates the decisions of a commander, or any soldier, or indeed any historical actor. Dan Morgan, semi-retired semi-professional brawler, did not feel like running any more. He had had enough of it. He thought he knew his men well enough to trust them with their own lives and his honor, and he thought that Banastre Tarleton couldn't take a good hard jab to the gut. So he stopped and waited.

Leave the battle to one side. Maybe Grimsley is right. When we study these things, come to these places, we are looking for simpler answers to simpler questions than we often know. To quote him again:

Behind the general's scowl, the politician's grin, the diplomat's gaze of cool aplomb, are men, mere human beings, wrestling with questions, trying to squeeze them into answers? The questions most important to them rarely concern affairs of state, no matter how momentous. Instead they involve more personal issues, the same puzzles that afflict less famous, less powerful men. Who am I? What is the world around me like? How can I be happy? Which things, in the last analysis, are truly of importance? Each man answers these questions differently, but his answers affect every other decision he makes.

SOUTH OF COWPENS IS THE CITY OF SPARTANBURG, and in Spartanburg is a legendary greasy spoon known as The Beacon. It is a deluxe burger joint with excellent onion rings, and if you visit more than once a year you should probably put a cardiologist on retainer. As I was confronting my “Chile-cheese-a-plenty,” more food than any person should eat in two separate meals, two men came into the dining room, both probably in their early sixties. One was black; one was white. They sat down together, and then the white fellow hopped up and got utensils and ketchup and things. The Beacon was segregated not all that long ago, something these two gentlemen can easily remember. They grew up as kids with segregation being their great social reality. Now here they are, eating together, with a white man fetching condiments for the black man.

It is a simply amazing sight. That is what Yankees don't realize about the South. It is adaptable. John Shelton Reed, who knows more about this than I do, claims that the South is really more European than any other part of America. But what I saw at the Beacon anecdotally shows me that the South is America in its essence. It shapes and remakes itself every generation. Just like Daniel Morgan.

**Eutaw Springs**

The Colonel who approached me at Eutaw Springs explained that he and his officers were serving in the South Carolina National Guard. They were on a staff ride, a mobile seminar on a battlefield dedicated to explaining and understanding the tactical problems confronted by previous officers. As National Guard officers they were lineal descendants of the men of the South Carolina militia who had fought at Eutaw Springs under the command of Francis Marion, usually known as “the Swamp Fox.”

Marion was, as the Guardsmen’s guide David Reuwer explained, just one of the notable personalities in the field that day. Also present was Nathanael Greene, the American commander in the Carolinas; Harry Lee, cavalry officer and father of Robert E. Lee; Andrew Pickens, the sober Presbyterian elder who also had fought at Cowpens; and John Eager Howard of Maryland, after whom about half of all geographical features in Baltimore seem to be named; and Wade
Hampton I, after whose family half of the things in South Carolina are named.

David gives a fine lecture, not only because he knows so very much about each fork in the road and each knoll and hummock in the ground at Eutaw Springs, but because he conveys all of this with fire and enthusiasm. When someone expressed surprise at the number of historical notables who were at Eutaw Springs, David responded, “That’s why this is sacred ground—because such men fought here.”

Sacred? That word brought me up short. I had just come from a three-day conference of the American Society for Church History, and I didn’t think I had once used the word sacred, and I don’t remember hearing the word in any of the sessions I attended. I had come to Eutaw Springs to hear the word for the first time that weekend.

A while ago, I had a mild argument with my friend Andy on whether places could be sacred. I argued that they could be. He didn’t think so. In the end, I think we had partially convinced each other so that, while we didn’t wholly switch positions, we were closer to a median. Andy told me that he had changed his mind when he heard of someone moving into a house where a terrible murder had been committed and of the new owner’s intent to transform the room where the murder had taken place into a playroom for their children. Surely, he thought, this was more than just a little strange.

What Andy was thinking, I believe, was that blood changes things; it is a fluid that, where it is spilt, alters the landscape. Indeed, it sets it apart, and setting things apart is the essential action at the heart of sacrality. That occurs even before one can assess the reasons why that blood was spilt. Such an understanding seems to be a very common human reaction. Perhaps we need to be scholars in order to ignore it.

There was certainly enough blood to spread around at Eutaw Springs. Compared to a battle of the Napoleonic Wars, or the American Civil War, it was a minor skirmish. Yet proportionally it was as terrible a battle as any in the Civil War. By the close of action, there were approximately thirty to forty percent casualties on both the American and British sides.

Nathanael Greene had been commander of the Southern Department of the Continental Army since November 1780. He had not yet won a battle, but he had engaged in one of the most extraordinary and artful series of maneuvers in American military history, the result of which was to leave the British Army with only its main base in Charleston, South Carolina and a series of other outposts in the Carolina Lowcountry.

Yet Greene wanted to win a battle. He wanted to smash the British Army and with that one bold stroke remove their presence from the Carolinas. Like other American revolutionaries, by 1781 he found the presence of British troops on American soil to be a foreign intrusion, an affront to the new nation’s honor.

He had, moreover, his own honor to think of, for he could not boast of a victory won on his own right. By defeating the British in open battle, he could put a proper finish to the strange career that took him from being an anchor smith and private in a Rhode Island militia company to a major general in the Carolinas.

This seems a fairly offensive motivation to a modern audience. The idea of a general spending the live sof others for his own honor is repugnant—even the idea of his spending his own life for honor is repugnant. But there are indications that Greene’s soldiers had their own sense of honor. At the siege of Fort Ninety-Six in June 1781, several sources indicate that Greene agreed to a final desperate assault on the British position because a representation was made to him from the ranks of the soldiery—particularly those serving in the regiments from Maryland—that it would impugn his and their honor to end the siege too precipitously. Honor had not been much of a concern, at least in theory, for Greene when he was a Quaker businessman in Rhode Island, but now he was a gentleman desirous of maintaining his position. Honor had not perhaps been a concern for jobless Irish immigrants in Annapolis and Baltimore before they had enlisted for the duration of the war in the First and Third Maryland Regiments, but they too thought of themselves differently now that they were the ones who had remained in the field, had suffered while others were at home, who had watched militia come and go while they stayed. They were now, as their commander had called them, “the Stamina of American liberty.” They, too, wanted to be not only survivors but also victors.
VIOLENCE, as some historians have begun to realize, creates identity for those who employ it. We can see this, I think, in the story of Cain and Abel. Cain in his violence murdered his brother, apparently in an attempt to cover his own shame. In doing so, he created a new identity for himself, became the father of a new race. This was his curse, but it was also, perhaps, what he was seeking all along. In killing his brother, he also killed his father, and became the father of his own people. One of the many lessons of Genesis is humanity’s inability to recognize curses for what they are, instead initially seeing them as a sought-after blessing.

Greene the ex-Quaker, and the immigrant Irishmen of the Maryland Regiments, found radically new identities through organized violence. Perhaps this is part of the fascination that they and other warriors have for those who visit battle grounds.

The contemplation of battle grounds inevitably leads to contemplation of how people interpret the historical past. Death, personality, and the sacred are things about which humans are inevitably concerned. It is not too surprising that these subjects are sought on battle grounds, or, better put, that these subjects seek those who visit battle grounds. How people approach the historical past should probably not condition how historians present the past. But it should inform us. It should give us pause when we find ourselves in solipsistic conversation with ourselves.

People in the twenty-first century will seek transcendence in the strangest places. Battle grounds will not be the strangest of them. They are places where clues to the self, to life’s meaning, and to the nature of a good death will be earnestly sought.

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MORNING WITH THE DYING MAN

I broke bread with the dying man and slept in the dying man’s house and in the morning before the sun rose sat with him at table and drank the coffee he had made, chatting about ordinary things. At first we were surrounded by darkness. The breakfast lights shone and the window looking out to the sea and the storms became a mirror in which all we could see was ourselves, our cups, our faces. But the surf was booming in the distance. We could hear it. And gradually the light seeped back and we could see the edges of trees and the waves cresting beyond the mouth of the river, just as we knew we would. The wide sea. The sky. It was always there, the dying man said. It’s the world, the enormous world.

Christopher Anderson
Failing to Fight for the Christian Legacy

F or anyone unfamiliar with the works and personality of Slavoj Žižek, the recent (2006) documentary by Astra Taylor about the Slovenian philosopher/critic/politician/psychoanalyst might give a mistaken impression. The Christian element of Žižek’s thought has all but vanished from the film, hanging about less tangibly than the specter of capitalism or the insidious stain of Lacan’s Real (a couple of his favorite theories that do remain prominent).

In no way do I want to suggest that Žižek! is a bad film. It is an entertaining, if somewhat misleading, introduction to some heady philosophy and the personality behind it. So why might we be concerned about this omission? Naturally, not all of Žižek’s ideas could be squeezed into the film’s seventy-one minute running time. As the author of over fifty books, countless articles, and a lecture circuit that rivals Tony Robbins, Žižek threatens all strategies of containment. (He describes this volubility and potential redundancy by calling himself “over-prolific.”) Taylor selects her material carefully, choosing to focus on human moments in the life of this veritable publishing house. We see Žižek playing with his son, typing with one finger, buying DVDs, receiving the awkward praise of graduate students, lying shirtless in bed, and ordering food. These mundane curiosities coupled with his incessant chatter in four languages give us the portrait of a quaint, likable, brilliant eccentric who might be your Eastern European uncle or the neighbor who buttonholes you to discuss Schelling while you get the mail.

This celluloid version of Žižek is a character, a lovably human cartoon far from the self-description he offers. “I’m a monster!” he says, “not a human.” He speaks with concern about the tendency for documentaries on intellectuals to humanize their subjects by showing routine foibles we all share. One cannot help but think of the recent Derrida (2002) which showed the Father of Deconstruction unable to locate his car keys. Instead, he argues, theorists should be pure theory and disavow the urge to be a warm human being like everyone else.

But his dismissal of humanity is countered by a sensitivity to effective communication. In one telling moment, we watch Žižek watching a video of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan introducing his theories for French television in 1974. Žižek studied psychoanalysis at the University of Paris with Jacques-Alain Miller, Lacan’s student, and identifies himself as a “card-carrying Lacanian.” During a deleted interview, he confesses an inability to explain, meta-critically, his attraction to Lacan: “It is the Truth!” So it may seem strange to watch him exclaim that the style of the video is all wrong, that Lacan’s didactic way is poor communication. The images of Lacan monotonously iterating his positions and striking the air with his palm is, according to Žižek, “ridiculous emphasis,” and an “empty gesture in a total fake style.” This criticism of his intellectual grandfather is a rarity and suggests Taylor’s felicity in drawing out an element of her subject far less commonly seen than his own flamboyant gesticulation, nimble philosophizing, and pop-cultural wit. And it suggests that Žižek’s approach to communication, with its abundance of personality, may be precisely his humanizing gesture.

Taylor steers away from hagiography, largely by eschewing the self-important voice-over technique common in documentary film. And her refusal to sanctify her subject allows her to expose the ridiculousness of some of Žižek’s fans. One young fellow approaches the perspiration-drenched Žižek after a lecture and awkwardly hugs him. Žižek’s wide eyes jittering say more than any voice-over could.
Yet a touch of hagiography might be what is needed in the film to provide Žižek a religiously-inflected context to strain against. At the offices of Verso, his publisher, he describes his new book, tentatively titled *The Parallax View* (unless, he notes, they look on Amazon and find too many books with that title). The first section of this work will be on philosophy and theology, one of the few references to Christian thought in the film. Being relegated to a passing fancy does more harm to Christianity than any amount of misrepresentation. It is repressed, and only in the most subtle moments does it threaten to return.

In several of his books, including *On Belief* (2001) and *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (2003), Žižek has tried to offer a materialist theology that takes Pauline Christianity as a pre-secular vehicle for social revolution. In *The Fragile Absolute—Or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (2000), Žižek critiques both the “post-secular deconstructionist” position that affirms a hazy pseudo-spirituality, as well as the “old liberal slander” that Marxism is simply a “secularized-religious-sect.” Instead of denying the liberal charge, he follows Alain Badiou’s work in *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* and whole-heartedly adopts the view that “Christianity and Marxism should fight on the same side of the barricade against the onslaught of new spiritualisms—the authentic Christian legacy is much too precious to be left to the fundamentalist freaks” (2). By claiming a radical core for Christian social thought and asserting that St. Paul may be profitably revitalized through Lacan, Žižek hopes to divest Christianity of its “religious” trappings and utilize its energies for political ends. This is the necessary element lacking in Taylor’s presentation of Žižek as the roving wild-man of Theory and “academic rock-star.”

As an introduction to the philosopher’s personality, Žižek! succeeds admirably. But as a primer for his philosophy, the crucial absence of Žižek’s Christian thought suggests a failure to understand Žižek and the Christian legacy he believes is worth fighting for. ♣

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And Death Shall Have No Dominion

J. D. Buhl

When your eyes are as worn
as the seams of your pants
and the thought of romance is gone.

An electric bass is striking the root of each chord
like a quiet death knell as she continues:

When the soft of her skin
and the light in her eyes
are a plaster refrain

Then death shall have no dominion
And death shall have no dominion
anymore.

“And Death Shall Have No Dominion” is the final
track on The Life You’ve Always Wanted by the Bittersweets. It follows ten other equally excellent tracks
to make up this Oakland, California, quintet’s 2006
debut album. The songs here range from Petty-esque rockers to acoustic bluesy ballads with never
a lyrical gaffe. All are drenched in the rich hues of
the Wurlitzer, Rhodes, B-3 organs, and guest David
Henry’s cello.

The Bittersweets’ songwriter is Chris Meyers.
He handles the vocals on the observational “Houston” and “Shooting Out the Sky,” an acoustic guitar-driven lament wherein “blue is the color of the sky,
dear, is the color of the heart that just won’t let go.”

The remaining songs are sung by Hannah
Prater, a hushed and husky vocalist who can do
weariness and resolve without sounding pitiful.
She convincingly takes on the voices of a “roadside girl with her arm in the air,” a once-happy but
hopeful wife, a had-enough lover who asks if she’s
“the ugliest kind of sword,” a homeless mother
who feels left behind by the rapture, and a consoling
preacher.

Prater even gives voice to Adam. In a stunning
portrayal of the first man’s despair, she breathes life
into these poignant lines:
I can't walk the road that I've been dreaming of
like I can't see beyond the valley and the rough
and as I stare into these mortal hands
I crumble like the dust I am.

Elsewhere, Adam complains that he's been stumbling, "since I pawned my life for some forgotten petty lifeless whore." What at first sounds like a swipe at Eve reveals itself as a reference to pride, the whore that has kept many wandering far from the garden.

A most discomforting scene of the crown of creation's isolation precedes each chorus:

and they're breaking out the bottles
singing songs about tomorrow
but I'm wrapped inside my memories
I've got nowhere else to go.

After reading Mark Twain's "The Diary of Adam and Eve," my 2007 eighth grade class performed in-character monologues of their own. They reveled in Adam's imperfection. Never had the co-star of Genesis seemed so human, so believable, so much like them.

The word that appears most often in Meyers's lyrics is "home." When he and Prater sing together in keening harmony, they sound like a brother and sister act with skeletons in the closet and hearts full of hope. The songs sing of brothers and sisters torn apart, of homes run from, run towards, and dreamed of. "Houston" nails somebody with the accusation "it's one more road, not some destination that you're running from," while the woman in "Rapture"—for whom "it's just the same old day in the back seat"—grabs the kids and makes home out of whatever is at hand. It's a hard way to go, Prater sings, "when the rapture comes [and] there ain't nowhere to go."

Meyers's most affecting use of Christian imagery is found in the album's last two tracks. "Prison" employs classic blues form (the first line is repeated; the third line resolves or foreshadows) to depict an encounter between Jesus and someone struggling against apathy. Despite slashing slide guitar, the song betrays no truck with blues clichés. Meyers even injects a chorus. After verses beginning "I built this prison with my own two hands" and "the devil caught me with my hands behind my back," the band roars into:

Apathy is drunkenness
on anything but loneliness
and loneliness means dying here alone
so please now Jesus take me home.

What's left but an admission that "My savior caught me with a stone still in my hand," and the final verse's confession: "I walked to Calvary, fell down on my knees."

"And Death Shall Have No Dominion" is then the musical moment when at last that stone is dropped, and the almost-completed prison is seen stark against a gathering sky. Facing down death is not only a human experience after all but something God already has done.

When the hospital smells
like the end of an age
and the righteous have come and gone

When the bordertown walls
fall like feathers below
or a nail through your heart
then death shall have no dominion
then death shall have no dominion
anymore.

So much in life can quickly become a plaster refrain. So many CDs, in fact, sound like one. As Meyers sings in "Shooting out the Sky," "they move like there's something that's covering up their real side." The Bittersweets let their real side show. Consequently, The Life You Always Wanted is one of those albums you always want: musically exciting, texturally diverse, and pleasingly consistent. Since "life is less than what it seems/when people give up on their dreams," the Bittersweets provide you with eleven lovingly rendered reasons not to give up. Every song reminds you that, even though death might be able to kill and break faith and create doubt, there is more than just death. ♦

J. D. Buhl teaches English and Literature at Queen of All Saints School in Concord, California. He reports that the Bittersweets are currently recording a new album in Nashville.
Richard Russo opens his latest novel with a discussion, in part, of how lives can be constrained. Lou C. Lynch, who narrates much of *Bridge of Sighs*, explains that he has lived in the same small New York town all of his life, that he has been married to the same woman for almost forty years, and that others sometimes express their embarrassment for his narrow existence. Lou’s voice makes this novelistic opening inauspicious. His pace is leisurely; his attempts to analyze himself and his wife are cautious. Lou is an unceasing optimist with a “goofy” smile, who was nicknamed “Lucy” as a boy, and he recognizes that people seem embarrassed even to like him. Russo hints on the novel’s first page that our patience with this leisurely narrative will pay off, however, when Lou explains that “lives can also be constrained by a great many other things: want, illness, ignorance, loneliness and lack of faith, to name just a few.” Much of the novel is set in Thomaston, New York, and much of the novel seems to be about Lou’s resistance to leaving Thomaston, yet instead of admitting this as a weakness or even as a significant constraint, Russo asks us to consider the kinds of forces that do limit lives in significant ways. *Bridge of Sighs* is the story of characters striving to overcome these limitations and sometimes faltering, and in Lou Lynch, Russo offers us an unlikely and unwitting philosopher.

The fictional Thomaston, New York, cannot be abandoned, even by those who are not at all resistant to leaving. Its hold on its inhabitants’ lives can only be loosened, not broken. Thomaston’s hold on characters manifests itself in nostalgia—a desire to relive the past or to maintain it within the present—but it also appears as something more insidious. Thomaston’s principle industry has been its tannery, and Russo traces its effects from economic displacement to cancer. “Can it be that what provides for us is the very thing that poisons us?” Lou asks. “Who hasn’t considered this terrible possibility?” In this novel about secrets and exposure, poisoning and providing, fear and courage, Russo examines the ambiguity of moral positioning. The politics of class and race in America appear microscopically in Thomaston, but no one character or group stands firmly on the side of the just. All of the central characters are damaged, and no character can claim moral righteousness. They all lie to each other, sometimes by telling untruths and sometimes by withholding the full truth, and they all fear. But they are not defined by these failings and thus not completely constrained, for they are also courageous and truthful and forgiving. Russo’s affirmation of the human condition in *Bridge of Sighs* is shaped largely by Lou’s hopefulness that is at once melancholy and resilient.

Multiple points of view increase the philosophical complexity of the novel, which unfolds as Lou narrates his life in the present day, as he writes the story of his childhood—the working title of which is *The Dullest Story Ever Told*—and as an omniscient narrator provides the perspectives of Lou’s two childhood friends—Sarah, who is now his wife, and Bobby. All are now aged sixty, and Lou and Sarah have not seen the rebellious Bobby since high school, since he almost killed his father and fled the country. Bobby has reinvented himself as a famous painter, Robert Noonan, who lives in Venice and is considering a return to New York City for a show and a possible teaching appointment. Lou and Sarah are themselves planning a trip to Venice, where they
hope to visit him, a plan tinged with unreality despite their detailed preparations because of Lou's fear of leaving Thomaston and the familiar. Their past binds them across time and continents, but the secrets of the past threaten their stability. Sarah has loved Bobby; Lou has loved Bobby; Bobby has perhaps loved as well but submerged such a precious emotion under cynicism, serial marriages, and multiple affairs. And finally, Russo complicates the narration of the novel further by incorporating stories of two other generations—Lou's parents, Sarah's parents, Bobby's parents, Lou and Sarah's son and daughter-in-law—and of the townspeople whose histories are intertwined with theirs—the Beverleys, who own the tannery; Gabriel Mock, the African-American man befriended by Lou as a boy; and a score of eccentrics. Lou's leisurely narration grounds the text, prompting our own circumspection in piecing together Thomaston's history and the impact of these multiple friendships.

Lou finds time to tell The Dullest Story Ever Told in part because much of the savvy and sweat needed to maintain his family's chain of convenience stores comes from the female characters. Like his strong and determined mother, Lou's wife has spent the last forty-five years of her life caring for their well-being. The young Sarah Berg appears at the midpoint of the novel, when Lou's memoir reaches his eighth-grade year, and while she shows almost as much self-doubt as Lou in the scene of their first meeting, she also identifies what she wants and claims it. By the following day, she is sitting outside the Lynch family's struggling corner market, sketching it at Lou's request, and including in the scene a couple holding hands. "She had drawn us together," Lou says, "Which was how I learned that we were." Their togetherness defines their adult lives. Their relationship is pleasurable and affectionate, seemingly without passion despite their having a son, yet deep and clearly lasting. Even this relationship cannot escape the threat of poison, however, especially as it mirrors Lou's parents' marriage, in which the doting, "goofy" optimist Lou Lynch Sr. seems not to realize that he has married a woman who has loved another man. The way that parents provide for their children—both through nature and nurture, as they pass along their genes and their habits—is perhaps one of the most significant constraints portrayed in the novel. Sarah realizes at one point, "That's who I am. The kind of girl who can love two boys," but unlike her mother, she chooses to marry the one whom she loves placidly, fondly, as much for his family as for herself. She chooses the man who desires the "small, good thing." Despite that determination not to duplicate her mother's missteps, Sarah must ask if her own marriage fosters sustenance rather than want, and she must finally confront the ways in which she cannot help but be like her mother.

Russo wrestles with, and asks us to wrestle with, the scope of a human life. He has said in an interview that sixty is the age at which we begin to see "the figure in the carpet," the age at which we seek to know what drives us and why. The characters in Bridge of Sighs are looking at their lives, wondering for how much they are responsible and how much has simply been out of their control. They are struggling to reconcile their present with their past without losing the present, to recommit to living as though they are unconstrained. In his darkest moments, Lou says, "She is ever Sarah, just as I, alas, am ever Lucy Lynch." In Venice, Bobby struggles with this darkness as well, recognizing that sixty was the age at which his abusive father died. While Bobby left Thomaston to reinvent his life, his capacity for violence and destruction seems always to threaten his precarious stability, and his cosmopolitanism hides an underbelly of fear.

When his friend, the art dealer Hugh, notices his recurrent emotional breakdowns, he asks Bobby what he is afraid of, and Bobby replies, "Right this minute? Every little thing." What Lou loves and what Sarah chooses—the "small, good thing"—is what Bobby fears—"every little thing"—and what he has used violence and anger to destroy. Yet, as Hugh points out in this same passage, that destruction has enabled his art. After every outburst and desertion, he produces a great painting. With his increasing fits of uncontrollable weeping in public places and powerful nightmares, however, Bobby has to decide anew whether to flee or to stay. The unusual painting currently on the easel of his studio suggests his internal struggle. It is a portrait of his father, but when Hugh mistakes it for Bobby himself, we
understand that it is just as much a self-portrait. The symbol of the Venetian Bridge of Sighs does not have an overwhelming presence in the novel, but here is one of its appearances—looming behind the figure of the self or the father in Bobby’s painting, reminding the viewer of the prisoner’s journey from condemnation to enclosure and death, of hope lost. Thousands of miles away in Thomaston, Sarah is also working on a painting of the Bridge of Sighs, using the photograph in her Italian travel book as a guide. Is to be poisoned, Russo seems to ask, the same as being condemned?

Although Russo privileges the symbol of the bridge in the title of this novel, the metaphor of the “spell” is more potent. Lou has had spells ever since he was locked in a trunk in the woods by elementary-school bullies. He loses touch with the real for a period of minutes as though he’s in a trance, and he comes back to himself exhausted but with a feeling of well-being. But, of course, well-being comes with a price that Lou does not admit even to himself: his spells invite others to protect him, and they serve as another reason for never straying far from home. Sarah, too, describes herself as under a spell when she first falls for Bobby even while dating Lou, and she hopes that the spell will break itself over time. Finally, Bobby loses touch with the real even as a boy, but for him this means giving himself over to his rage—“vacating his own body,” as when he beats the bully Jerzy Quinn almost into the ground. For all three characters, spells come from powerful emotions that need outlets or controls or explanations. The characters are spellbound, striving not to succumb to the poison within, not yet ready to understand it or to see it as anything but constraint. For the adult Bobby, spells of rage have become spells of weeping or of terror in the night, and we might see in him more clearly again the capacity for transformation from cynic and ironist to one who values the “small, good thing.”

Transformation shapes the end of Bridge of Sighs, but Russo does not write only of change within the scope of an individual life; he writes also of change for families and neighborhoods and communities. Thomaston is a town divided carefully into three sectors: the lower-middle class East End, the industrial and poorer West End, and the wealthier Borough. For Lou Lynch, growing up includes realizing that these divisions do not have to be barriers. His sixty-year old self says,

 Though we now live in the Borough and have done so for years, I doubt anyone in Thomaston is more democratic and egalitarian than my wife and me. I myself, in a sense, am spread all over town by virtue of owning property in both the West and East Ends, and I’ve been a walker of Thomaston streets all my life. Even now, I walk at least an hour a day through Thomaston’s different neighborhoods, where I’m recognized and, I hope and trust, respected in all of them.

This might at first seem naïve—that one could be democratic simply by walking or owning property—but Lou has lived in all three sectors at different times of his life, and his friendships have crossed many of the divisions that seem to exist along racial or class lines. He walks to bridge time, to bridge division, and his “hope” and “trust” is that others will desire the same.

Near the end of the novel, Bobby says to Hugh, “Irony isn’t everything,” and while it might be tempting to read this line ironically, the final pages are awash in honesty. In both Bobby’s words and in the others that conclude the novel, we hear Russo’s affirmation of both truthfulness and love as worthy of artistic consideration. Just a few pages earlier, Sarah thinks to herself that “a work of art, any work of art, is a hopeful thing.” Like the drawings and paintings that his characters create, so many of them of family members past and present, Russo’s novel is continually working to reconcile division, to acknowledge provision, to find value in human interaction. Finally, this novel does—Russo does—what seems rare in contemporary fiction; he affirms our capacity to love and finds that meaningful.

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There easily can be a disconnect between the faith of the church, expressed in the ecumenical creeds and the Lutheran Confessions, and the beliefs of individual members of the church. This probably always has been true. St. Paul's letters to the churches he planted deal with views held by some members of the congregation that he regards as contrary to the gospel he proclaimed and taught. The thousand years of the evangelization of Europe north of the Mediterranean basin (from roughly 400 until 1400) was aimed at the conversion of nations, not individuals. A pastoral issue the church had to deal with throughout the Middle Ages was the fact of lingering paganism. Individuals may have been baptized, but their worldview—their perception of reality—remained unconverted. The medieval church addressed this problem by trying to baptize the culture, that is, by forming a way of life that was infused with Christian doctrines and practices. The continuing practice of infant baptism presupposed a Christian culture in which the baptized could be formed. This is why the reform of the church also presupposed social reforms that affected marriage and family life, education, and the role of temporal as well as spiritual authorities.

By the end of the sixteenth century, Lutheranism had become the confessional reality of some Catholic churches in the lands and cities of northern Europe. Catechism, liturgy, and hymns had formed people in doctrine and a way of life that was becoming inculturated in these societies. When Lutheran emigrants left Europe for the New World, they brought this church culture with them. They came from different lands and were separated by language, but they held in common the creeds, confessions, liturgies, and hymns of their Lutheran homelands. In the cultural context of denominationalism that flourished in the pluralistic societies of North America, these ingredients of a religious culture provided a source of stability for Lutheran people and, eventually, the basis for institutional unity through the creation of synods and church bodies and the mergers of these bodies into larger denominations.

Unlike the church situation of Europe, however, Lutherans could not depend on the culture of their society to shore up their beliefs and practices. American government was secular in that it recognized no established church, while American society was religiously pluralistic with denominations competing with one another in an open religious marketplace. Because of their ethnic base and use of languages other than English, Lutheran congregations and denominations tended to comprehend those who were Germans or Swedes or Norwegians rather than persons out of the whole American population. Once the ethnic base was expanded through intermarriage and new members coming out of different ethnic or racial backgrounds, Lutheran congregations and denominations could become more comprehensive of the general population.

Today, Lutheran congregations and denominations are made up increasingly of members who do not have a Lutheran background and whose formation in the Lutheran culture cannot be taken for granted. It may take years before some of these newer members really have grasped the essence of Lutheran faith and practice. At the same time, there is a religious culture to which all our members are subjected by the mass media. Our church members may be listening to Robert Schuller, Joel Osteen, or Rick Warren as well as their own pastor, persuasive preachers in the Reformed tradition who are more in touch with the current American cultural mindset than our own teachers are. Or they may be imbibing the New Age spirituality promoted by Hollywood celebrities and television personalities. Without a solid grounding in the creeds and confessions of the church, they lack the means to
discriminate between the wheat and the chaff as they listen to other voices.

In the meantime, denominations have become less important to people as part of their religious identity because of social mobility and the cultural divisions within American society. An individual's denomination is no longer a good predictor of his or her beliefs or behaviors. Denominations are also besieged by caucuses of the left and the right and are now less capable of representing one side or the other in the partisan divides between liberals and conservatives. What Martin Marty earlier had called the “two party system” in American Protestantism increasingly cuts across, not between, denominations. The sociologist Robert Wuthnow has concluded that denominations are not where the religious action is. Instead, religious “special purpose groups,” both federations like the Christian Coalition and *collegia pietatis* like Promise Keepers, have been enlisting commitments. He says that these parachurch agencies have replaced denominations in the loyalty and identity of church members (see Wuthnow).

With all this in mind, how do we bring together the faith of the church and the faith of the pew? The glue lies in the cultivation of a church culture informed by the creeds, confessions, and liturgy of the church. The process of cultivating a religious culture is the inculcation of piety. The Latin word *pius* suggests the outward expression of devotion.

What I want to discuss in this essay is normative Lutheran piety. By “normative piety” I mean those practices that are recommended in authoritative sources of Lutheran churches, such as the confessions, church orders, and worship books that have received some degree of support in actual use. The fact that a practice may not be in use today does not make it abnormal. For example, Lutherans regularly practiced individual confession and absolution for three centuries, and a form was provided in Luther’s Catechism. The fact that this practice has fallen out of use does not make it abnormal. From the standpoint of the Lutheran Confessions, it is normal. On the other hand, normative Lutheran piety excludes practices that may be valued, such as the small group meetings of the *collegia pietatis* or contemporary twelve-step programs, but which are not available or recommended to all. Normative piety is social, not just individual. Its practices belong to the entire community of faith and are encouraged of all the faithful. This includes such practices as behavior in church (for example, engaging in silent prayer upon entering the sanctuary), devotions at home (for example, meal and bedtime prayers), and body language (for example, making the sign of the cross). But for the purpose of this essay, I want to focus on two practices of devotion that are available to all Lutherans and are recommended to all: receiving communion and listening to sermons.

**Receiving Communion**

The highest act of Christian piety is to receive the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ in repentance and faith. Luther teaches in his Catechism that the most important thing to know about the sacrament is that it was instituted by Christ for the forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation. This is a great spiritual benefit that Christians should desire to receive. Luther and the other reformers were combating the practice of infrequent communion from the Middle Ages. Christians were required to receive communion at least once a year, at Easter, after first making a confession and receiving absolution. The most pious lay people may have received communion no more than four times a year. Thus the Reformed practice of preparing the whole congregation to receive communion quarterly was at least a more frequent practice than could be found in the pre-Reformation church.

The Reformed counted on church discipline to bring people to the Lord’s Table. Lutherans preferred evangelical persuasion. Luther encouraged a frequency of reception based on personal need. In his Large Catechism he stated that “...those who
claim to be Christians should prepare themselves to receive this blessed sacrament frequently.” He did not want people to be coerced or compelled to receive the sacrament. “Nevertheless, let it be understood that people who abstain and absent themselves from the sacrament over a long period of time are not to be considered Christians.” The Apology of the Augsburg Confession testifies that “In our churches Mass is celebrated every Sunday and on other festivals, when the sacrament is offered to those who wish for it after they have been examined and absolved” (Article 24, italics added).

The Lutheran Confessions promote reception of the sacrament as an individual decision based on spiritual need more than as an act of church. This has proven to be a liability in restoring the practice of frequent celebration of holy communion (as opposed to frequent reception of the sacrament). The case needs to be made that the Eucharist constitutes the church. It establishes the fellowship of the church. Christians are in fellowship who can eat and drink together at the Lord’s table. It is not just individuals who need the sacrament. Moreover, since the sacraments of baptism, holy communion, and the office of the keys effect reconciliation with God, the use of them is part of God’s mission of reconciling the world to himself (see Senn). Therefore, the church in obedience to our Lord’s commands must offer them. The availability of baptism, holy communion, and confession and absolution is not conditioned on a vote of the congregation. The offering of these means of grace is the responsibility of the pastor as the ordained minister of the word and the sacraments.

Preparing to Receive Holy Communion

Since the first century, participation in the Lord’s Supper presupposed that those who shared the supper were reconciled also with one another. Effort had to be made to reconcile squabbling Christians before they could receive communion together. The kiss of peace was a ritual signifying a state of reconciliation among the communicants. In the late Middle Ages, this was expressed by passing the pax board through the congregation, each person present kissing it. These boards, which often were wooden crosses on which were painted a picture of Christ, were regular liturgical accouterments by the time of the Reformation in much of Western Europe. Even the pax board was a diminishment of the kiss of peace because it entailed a sequential kissing of an object rather than neighbors kissing neighbors (Penn), and this failed to force squabbling neighbors and warring families to reconcile with each other before receiving communion, especially at Easter. But the Reformers did away utterly with the ritual of the pax, and in none of the Reformation churches was reconciliation associated with the greeting of peace.

In matters of piety, the Reformation churches shared similar practices, whether Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, or Roman Catholic after the reforming Council of Trent. So we must note that the pax did not fare much better in Counter-Reformation Catholic practice than in Lutheran practice. After 1600 the Roman Congregation of Rites began treating it as a form of honor rather than as an act of reconciliation. At Solemn High Mass the celebrant greeted the deacon, the deacon greeted the sub-deacon, and so on down through the ecclesiastical ranks. It was confined to the clergy and the choir, except for magistrates or nobility, and it was never given to women. As social historian John Bossy observed, “for the most part the formulators of opinion in early modern Christendom in the West were markedly concordant in detaching the Eucharist from the rites of social reconciliation” (Bossy 58).

On the other hand, the office of the keys received a great deal of emphasis in the writings of the Reformers. Luther regarded “the office of the keys exercised publicly” as an outward mark of the church, along with preaching the word and celebrating holy baptism and holy communion. “That is, as Christ decrees in Matthew 18:15–20, if a Christian sins, he should be removed; and if he does not mend his ways, he should be bound in his sin and cast out. If he does mend his ways, he should be absolved” (Luther’s Works, 41:153). Luther applied this to both public and private forms of confession and absolution.

The office of the keys exists as an independent means of grace. But it also served the purpose of “fencing” the communion table. We noted above in the citation from The Apology of the Augsburg Confession that people received communion “after they have been examined and absolved.” One of the concerns of the Reformation was a stricter
“fencing of the table” in terms of who could receive holy communion. This generated practices that limited more frequent reception of communion by more people. In Lutheranism, it became customary to request in person to the pastor to receive communion. Potential communicants were then examined as to their beliefs and their lives. This practice had been recommended by Luther in the section on “The Communion of the People” in his treatise on The Form of the Mass and Communion for the Church in Wittenberg. Communicants might be asked questions from the Catechism to see if they “understood” the meaning of the sacrament or they might be “shriven” in confession and absolution. Luther provided a form of individual confession and absolution in his Small Catechism and an “Exhortation to Confession” in his Large Catechism.

The Counter-Reformation may have taken more ideas from Luther on the linkage between confession, catechesis, and communion than its promoters would care to admit. In its own way the Catholic Church took to heart Luther’s objection that the scriptural phrase “penitentium agite” means “repent,” not “do penance” (see Bainter 67). While the Council of Trent affirmed that the three essential elements in the sacrament of penance are contrition, confession, and satisfaction, it assigned more importance to contrition than to the acts of satisfaction that had been so important to the medieval practice of penance. This is because the emphasis in the use of confession shifted from social sins to personal guilt, from family and community relationships to the individual soul. Archbishop Borromeo of Milan was instrumental in promoting the practice and attitude toward penance that was to characterize the post-Tridentine Catholic Church. He not only invented the “confessional box,” which privatized a ritual that had been conducted in the open in the Middle Ages, but his pastoral instructions to his priests specified that absolution should be refused or delayed where the confessor felt that there was no genuine repentance.

At the same time that the Counter-Reformation Catholic Church was trying to regularize obligatory confession, it tried to establish a mechanism for the catechizing of children where none had existed before. Bishops made it a duty of parish priests to catechize children on Sunday and feast day afternoons and an obligation of parents to send their children to catechism classes. This worked better in towns than in rural parishes. It was once again Borromeo who tried to rectify the problem by requiring Schools of Christian Doctrine to be established in every parish subject to his visitation, under the supervision of the parish pastor. We note that in Lutheranism, too, the responsibility for catechizing children passed from the head of the household (as specified in Luther’s Catechism) to the parish pastor. Also in Anglicanism it became the responsibility of the parish vicar to catechize the children, usually on Sunday afternoon before Evening Prayer.

Hearing the Word

Hearing sermons became an important part of Reformation piety, both Protestant and Catholic. The medieval church did not lack in preaching. In fact, preaching became a major form of popular entertainment in the late Middle Ages. Celebrated mendicant friars came into towns greeted with much fanfare. Sometimes pulpits were built out-of-doors, attached to the side of the church building or on a wooden platform erected for the occasion in the town square. These preachers could elicit great emotion with gripping accounts of the terrors of hell or lyrical outpourings of the love of God shown in the passion of Christ, although the transcripts that survive are but a shadow of the oratorical reality. In the Rhineland and other cities of the Holy Roman Empire, there were endowed pulpits in the great churches to which more scholarly preachers were called, such as Johann Geiler of Kaysersberg (1445–1510) who was called to the pulpit of the Strasbourg Cathedral.

Many of the preachers occupying endowed pulpits became early advocates of reform. In fact, many of the leading reformers were given pulpits in the chief churches of their cities. In the early 1520s Luther in the Stadtkirche of Wittenberg, Zwingli in the Grossmünster of Zurich, Andreas Osiander in the cathedral of Nuremberg, Wolfgang Capito, Martin Bucer, and Caspar Helio in the several preaching posts in Strasbourg, Johannes Oecolampadius as Pastor of Basel, and Olavus Petri in the Storkyrka of Stockholm all used their pulpits to advocate reform in doctrine and practice. They also developed a style of preaching that was exegetical rather than topical and served as a powerful example to their colleagues. Some of their
sermons were collected into Postils that could be used by their less-capable contemporaries (Smith 3:323–32). As sermons became literary forms, they were read also by the laity for devotion and instruction at home. Luther’s *House Postil* was a book of sermons on the church year that many immigrants brought with them to North America, along with their hymnal.

New ministers and pastors in Lutheran and Reformed churches were chosen for their knowledge of Scripture and skill in public speaking. The custom developed already in the Reformation period of delivering sample sermons, which were judged for content and delivery. But these preachers were elected by town councils or consistory rather than by popular vote. Training preachers who were capable of exegeting biblical texts in the original Hebrew and Greek required the reform of university curricula. Luther’s younger colleague at the University of Wittenberg, the humanist scholar Philipp Melanchthon, provided leadership in the reform of the universities and came to be called “the Praeceptor of Germany.” Less attention was given to the training of uneducated lay people to be able to listen to and understand these sermons. This is why the later Pietists encouraged small group study of the pastor’s sermons.

Another form of proclamation of or meditation on the word is hymn singing. Hymn singing became an important part of normative Lutheran piety. Not only did the people learn and sing hymns in church, they also sang hymns at home. Some well-known Lutheran hymns developed out of household devotions before becoming corporate songs of the church, such as Martin Rinkart’s *Now Thank We All Our God*, which was written during a time of plague as a thanksgiving for deliverance and was probably sung at table. It has become known as the Lutheran *Te Deum*. Lutherans purchased their own hymnals because before the nineteenth century, hymnals were not provided in churches.

Whether the use of hymnals at home can still be an expectation, it is a practice that ought to be encouraged, along with the use of the Apostles’ Creed and the Lord’s Prayer in daily devotions. The recitation of the Apostles’ Creed reminds us of the Trinitarian structure of the Christian worldview, and the seven petitions of the Lord’s Prayer comprehends everything that we should ask of the Lord in prayer. This kind of piety is normative in the sense that what is practiced in the assembly for public worship should be observed also by individuals in their everyday lives. It reduces the disconnect between the faith of the church and the beliefs of individuals.

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**Bibliography**


I have a high tolerance for chaos, personality inventories indicate, but this year Palm Sunday was going to be too much, even for me. While I am comfortable going with the flow, I have learned to spot those occasions when flying by the seat of my pants also requires other people to fly by them. Sometimes that’s too much to expect. So I asked the Deacons to put the communion elements on the table in back of the sanctuary for worship on Palm Sunday, April 1.

The Deacons make me crazy.

One of their tasks is to set up for communion on the first Sunday of each month and for Maundy Thursday and Christmas Eve. This year Palm Sunday fell on a communion Sunday, and when I considered the logistics of a processional hymn, thirty kids waving palm branches, some of whom would be wearing butterfly masks, twenty choir members also waving palm branches, all of them walking past the communion table, which blocks the stairs to the chancel... I knew we would have to move the communion table after the processional, and we could not do that with ten trays of cups of grape juice, ten trays of bread cubes, and the ceremonial loaf and chalice and pitcher on the table. The simplest solution was to have the Deacons set up the communion elements and put them elsewhere, until later in the service.

"Where?"
"On the table in the back of the sanctuary."
"How should we arrange them?"
"It doesn’t matter. They will be moved to the communion table during the service."
"We’re not doing that!"
"No, the communion servers will when they process forward as they usually do."
"OK, pastor, so you want us to put the elements on a cart and wheel them forward, when?"

It took ten minutes for them to get the concept of setting everything up as they usually do and putting it on a different table. Ten minutes of a sixty minute meeting for them to get one, single change: put the stuff on a different table.

The week before Palm Sunday, the Deacon moderator asked about the communion table. I said unto her, “You’re making me crazy. There can be no confusion about this. The communion table will be moved after the choir and kids have processed. The only thing the Deacons need to do is put the elements on the back table.”

There was confusion. I put a sign on the table:

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DEACONS!!
PLEASE PLACE COMMUNION ELEMENTS ON THIS TABLE!!
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I came to church betting even money that somehow, something would go wrong.

Half an hour before worship, the husband of the Deacon moderator (I’m thinking of him as an “unindicted co-deacon” at this point) came into my office asking about the communion table.

"We’ll move it during the passing of the peace, Ken, just have the Deacons put the elements on the back table."

"When should we put on the tablecloth?"

I had not thought about this. It might be difficult to move the communion table with the tablecloth on. Certainly there would be a tripping hazard. I made an executive decision:

"We won’t bother with it this week. We’re going commando!"

The very first lesson I learned in seminary was “A lot of ministry is moving furniture.”

I was the first student to arrive for a colloquium, which is Latin for, “It’s not exactly a course, but you’re expected to be here.”
The professor wanted the chairs in a circle. I helped him with this task. Welcome to the minis­

try.

I went to school for nineteen years to avoid work like this. I learned Hebrew!

The week before the service I sent an email to the burliest men in the choir, asking them to help
move the communion table during the passing of the peace.

The thing about moving the communion table
is you have to know where the little blocks of wood
are. Our sanctuary slants, by design, but the com­
munion table doesn't. So we need a block of wood
under the two legs that sit closest to the front of the
sanctuary. My first task on arriving at church this
morning was to find the two blocks of wood. They
were already in place, which was bad. The choir
was going to process and someone was going to
twist an ankle, or the kids would pick them up and
whack each other during the children's time—an
escalation in the arms race that would follow the
sword fights the palms had inspired.

I put the blocks up on the pulpit where they'd
be out of the way.

My second task on arriving at church was to
write instructions for how the communion serv­
ers were to bring the elements forward. Typically,
they process during the communion hymn and
sit in the front row. Two of the servers remove the
napkins from the trays of bread when they arrive
at the front. This month they needed to bring the
elements forward. I instructed them to walk single
file in this order:

Chalice and pitcher
Loaf of bread on a plate
Trays of cups (two servers)
Trays of bread (two servers)

Just before the service the chair of the worship
committee asked about the table cloth. "We're going
commando," I inform him. He makes sure I've got
the microphone off. His wife has put the blocks of
wood in place, for when the table will be moved. I
explain about the twisted ankles and the arms race.
She scoots and returns them, for the second time
this morning, to their proper, to me, place.

I admit I'm not very "high church." If some­
things is not where it should be when we celebrate

...
The first two people in the procession with the elements carried a tablecloth. We’ll go commando another time.

As the sacrament was being distributed, I asked the lay reader who he liked in the NCAA title game. This seemed like conversation appropriate to a joyous feast. He was pulling for Ohio State.

After the service, one of the servers said, “Considering we didn’t know what we were doing, it went pretty well.”

“You didn’t see the instructions on the back table?”

“What instructions?”

Someone else informed another person who said that she liked having the elements brought forward during the service. It was she who spread the table cloth.

Palm Sunday always reminds me of giveaway day at a ballgame. There’s Magnet Schedule Day, Baseball Card Day, Bobble-head Day. Once a year at church, we have Palm Sunday. I began the service by pointing out that the palms were free with every admission!

The lay reader, a retired economist, always disputes when anything is free. He pointed this out to me, gently, during the service. So just prior to the benediction, I corrected myself, “Keith reminded me, there’s no such thing as a free palm. So enjoy your complimentary palms as you journey with Christ in the week ahead.”

The choir closed with “Dona Nobis Pacem,” and the organist played a triumphal postlude. Just before the service, she asked whether this is Palm or Palm/Passion Sunday.

“Sarah, Palm/Passion Sunday is wack!” Sarah’s played at a lot of different churches, so I am comfortable throwing around theological jargon with her.

She needed to know whether to play something triumphant or foreboding to close the service. I was impressed that she was prepared for each.

My next words were, “The Lord be with you…” and we were off, on a glorious, confusing, chaotic, triumphant celebration. It was exactly what we needed, as we journey with Christ to the temple, cross, and tomb. And I’m really glad it only comes once a year.

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**life together**

**Seeing Through**

Edward Langerak

"We are put on this earth primarily not to see through one another but to see one another through." From one of novelist Peter De Vries characters, this is good advice for those of us who teach at church-related liberal arts colleges. But underscore that word *primarily* because seeing through one another is also an important part of a liberal arts education, including, *especially*, at a liberal arts college of the church. When we juxtapose "seeing through one another" with "seeing one another through," the latter probably sounds better because "seeing through people" seems to connote unmasking our pathetic hypocrisies and exposing our self-serving rationalizations. Actually, it is sometimes important for us to do this to each other. Juries and judges are routinely obliged to do it, and sometimes parents, teachers, and even friends can best serve us by seeing through our subterfuges and—sometimes gently, other times sternly—forcing us to confess our lies or helping us see through our own self-deceptions.

Keep in mind also that seeing through each other need not reveal only our dark sides. It can give us an appreciative understanding of the problems, even the demons, that others confront, an awareness of extenuating circumstances that elicit empathy, sympathy, and, when necessary, a willingness to excuse mistakes and forgive sins. Thank God that God does this. The One who sees through us perfectly forgives us and does so without the human trait of seeing the log in one's own eye while noting the splinter in another's. The latter point underscores the value of our seeing through *ourselves*. It puts into context and balance the issues we see when we see through others.

Let "seeing one another through" be a metaphor of caring for one another. Then when we juxtapose it with "seeing through one another," the latter is a metaphor that includes not just seeing *through* but also seeing *with*, seeing *past*, and seeing *into* one another. Or at least when we combine the two types of seeing *through*, we must admit the need for these additional metaphors and probably others as well.

Let "seeing with" connote the friendly phenomenon that when we try genuinely to understand one another—carefully listen and not just look for chances to refute the other—we often find unexpected common ground. And what a delightful thing consensus can be, especially when it is newly discovered. Psalm 133 is a celebration of agreement: "How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!... It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion." The reference to Mt. Hermon in the north and the mountains of Zion in the south alludes to the reunification of the northern and southern nations, and thereby also reveals, in hindsight, that the celebration was premature. The consensus did not last, and the tribes saw *past* rather than *with* each other.

Still, there is a lot more room for agreement and seeing with than we often realize, partly because in our contentious, litigious, and argumentative culture, we try harder to see *through* than *with* one another. This is because, in a pluralistic society, even careful communication often leads not to agreement but to clarity about how deep and wide are the differences between us. The nineteenth century philosopher John Stuart Mill thought that if we would just engage each other in free and frank conversations, the truth eventually would emerge and, naturally, so would agreement. He actually worried that his successfully opposing censorship would lead to unanimity. He even thought philosophers would have to be hired to play the devil's advocate, to argue heresy just to keep the population on its cognitive toes and keep healthy disputation going. Of course, it turned out that Mill...
did not have to worry about too much agreement. Good conversations do tend to raise our awareness of possible common ground but also tend to sharpen our disagreements.

And this sharpening can be healthy. Not only is disagreement interesting—and necessary for progress—too often the hope for consensus can overlook otherness and try to homogenize into a melting pot what should be seen as delightful differences or as difficult conflicts. That is why we must distinguish toleration from acceptance as well as indifference. Tolerance connotes the enduring of something we find disagreeable. Moreover, we should distinguish toleration, which involves not coercing one another's behavior, from the question of whether we can respect a position with which we disagree. Although sometimes we can and should attribute our disagreement with another to inordinate ignorance, stupidity, or depravity, we must also recognize that often the disagreement, though very real and possibly disconcerting in our pluralistic world, involves reasonableness on all sides. Sometimes it is appropriate to say to someone else, "I do think you are wrong, but I also think your position is reasonable, and it's one I respect." This is not a post-modern relativism of truth. You do think there is a right and wrong and you—perhaps with appropriate intellectual humility—think that you are right. But it is a relativism of justification. What is reasonable to believe is much wider than what is true.

Allen Bloom famously claimed in his book *The Closing of the American Mind* that the one thing liberal arts undergraduates believe or say for sure is that truth is relative. My experience is that Bloom is wrong. Rather, most students are trying to cope with the conflict of convictions and trying to do so in a way that allows them to be true to themselves and still be appropriately open to the differences they experience all around them. Indeed, my experience in teaching ethics is that the most difficult problem for students is not arriving at their own reflective view about hot-button issues such as abortion or gay rights (though that can be hard enough); the most difficult problem is how to respond to the fact that others flatly disagree. If we could dismiss those who disagree as comparatively ignorant, corrupt, or unintelligent, the cognitive dissonance could readily be resolved. But the problem is that, too often, we have to admit that those who disagree seem to be as informed, good-willed, and as smart as we are, and sometimes, to our chagrin, even more so. And when students struggle with this, they sometimes say things that sound to Bloom like mindless relativism.

On study terms abroad, this problem is underscored for college students. We faculty usually encourage students to be broad-minded relativists on all sorts of issues having to do with cuisine, etiquette, and teaching styles. However, students also encounter some moral and religious differences, and their own integrity and identity requires a response other than either light-hearted acceptance or dogmatic dismissal. When students abroad study other religions, for example, they tend to get taught by committed practitioners of these religions, rather than by missionary opponents. So the courses are not catechisms of how heretics, infidels, and the deluded can go wrong but loving portrayals of respectable viewpoints that, on at least some crucial matters, contradict students' own deepest moral and religious convictions. What is called for here is an appropriately nuanced perspective on pluralism, one that recognizes that the category of "probably wrong but definitely reasonable" which helps us see with one another even as we are also obliged to see past one another. It allows us to engage disagreement in frank but civil ways, to have open-minded respect for a view without either broadminded approval or shallow-minded dismissal.

Let us raise just one more metaphor: seeing into one another. When we look into one another or even into ourselves, what we see more often than transparency is depth, even mystery. And I don't mean mere murkiness, the dark stains that indicate confusion. Of course, we have to acknowledge that often we cannot be seen through just because we are all mixed up. Such confusion can be healthy. We sometimes envy those who always seem confidently to know what's up, but we should be suspicious also. The mark of a liberally educated person is to recognize and admit uncertainty, even when one is required to take a stand.

Thus, sometimes lack of transparency is due to clouds of confusion, but often the impenetrable depth found in humans indicates not confusion but richness of personality and mystery of spirit.
and soul. We are not talking about simply being unpredictable, strange, or weird (someone once said of a former US president that he suffered from the disadvantage of being mysterious without being fascinating). Instead, we are recognizing that persons cannot be summed up into a set of problems that can be solved. In terms of philosopher Gabriel Marcel's distinction between problems and mysteries, human problems are questions that we may hope to define well enough that we can investigate and answer them scientifically, while human mystery is such that even when we treat it as a problem, its data encroaches on itself in a way that the more we understand the more elusive and enigmatic it becomes.

Some scientific optimists think that science eventually will turn all mysteries into problems, and we cannot deny that well-placed National Science Foundation funds have done some of that, for example with the human genome project. However, I am quite certain that we will never reduce all mysteries to problems, though I must hasten to add that a few years ago I acquired an extremely good reason to be grateful for scientific problem-solving. Without any warning or symptoms, my heart stopped one Sunday morning after my wife, Lois, and I went for a walk and while I was doing some sit-ups. First it fibrillated, which means it went lickety-split, and then it got tired and, as I understand, arrested itself. Fortunately, Lois happened to hear me gurgle and came running downstairs and saved my life. She had just attended—somewhat begrudgingly—an evening long workshop required by her profession of Dental Hygiene, a workshop about how to use CPR correctly in just such cases. What happened to me is usually called Sudden Arrhythmia Death (SAD), but in my case is called Aborted Sudden Arrhythmia Death, which somehow sounds lovely to me. Only five percent of people are fortunate enough to have their SAD become their ASAD, and only one or two percent avoid serious brain damage (which I claim not to have, though I admit there's some epistemological circularity in believing me). Apparently, it is almost unheard of for a spouse to save a spouse. Even when they know CPR, they tend to panic and cannot define, much less solve, the problem. I also benefited from the almost immediate help of others, including a neighbor who is a graduate of my school's nursing program and another nursing student just about to graduate, all of whom were able to see into me, define the problem quickly and precisely, and then solve it.

For many years, I have appreciated having nursing students in my ethics classes. They always have seemed to me to be excellent models of combining the science and skill of seeing through and into people with the vocational call of seeing people through. But now I have a new reason to want them in my classes. What if my newly implanted defibrillator kicked off in a philosophy seminar? I can just imagine the dialogue between philosophy majors: "To be or not to be; that is the question." "And who knows what the answer is?" "Isn't the human condition a fascinating mystery?" Such questions are deep, which is why I love teaching philosophy students. But I also thank God for those who have the training to see and define the problem and the skill and calling to solve it.

Obviously, this business with my heart caught my attention. I have a cartoon of a man in his office and the figure of death appears: the grim reaper—the skeleton in the black robe with his scythe and all. The man says, "Thank Goodness you're here; I can't get a thing done without a deadline." For years, I taught a course on "Death and the Meaning of Life," so I am well acquainted with theories about how our awareness of our own mortality gives an edge to the human way of existing. I have never thought it was a good idea to follow the surprisingly common advice to live each day as if it were your last. I don't even know how one could do that day after day, apart from the joke about not buying

Sometimes lack of transparency is due to clouds of confusion, but often the impenetrable depth found in humans indicates not confusion but richness of personality and mystery of spirit and soul.
your bananas green. However, my experience with my heart really brought home to me the wisdom of living each day as if it might be your last. This allows you to savor each day—and its activities and relationships—as the gifts they are and also engage in long-range planning. Yes, dear reader, this conceivably could be your last day on God’s good earth, so rejoice and be glad in it, but do not neglect your 401k.

The upshot is that the certainty and uncertainties flowing from our mortality and, more importantly, from our existential imbedding of it in our living are some of the most important features of our existence that envelop us in mystery and not just problems. In fact, knowing that about one another is one of the most important ways we see depth in each other. And it is also one of the most important motivations for seeing one another through.

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JOHANNES-PASSION

John Bach, he had a feedbox for a mind
Where something godly intimately lay;
Plowman in manuscript, the man divined
That Faith, to bear sound fruit, must root in play.
And like some chemotherapeutic sub
Cell-hunting at the liver’s ocean floor,
The spirit of his music seeks the hub
Of human need—our plangent, aching core.
Take St. John’s Passion (in its English name):
Here Bach in deep humility of soul
And beauty born of consciousness of shame
Inhabits God’s death blindly as a mole.
What lends this music such integrity?
Bach’s sense—the old full one—of Charity.

Harlan Bjornstad
Associate Justice Antonin Scalia spoke on Valparaiso University's campus last October 18. His appearance nearly filled the Chapel of the Resurrection, and he gave a good account of himself. He's quite the appealing speaker, in both senses of the word. Even in front of one thousand listeners, he made us feel like we were all just relaxing at his kitchen table after a hearty meal of pasta and good red wine kickin' around the Constitution. He's understated and funny. Billy Crystal would approve of his sense of timing. Hillary, Barack, Mitt, and Johnny Mac should be thankful that the Justice is not running for President.

Justice Scalia is appealing in the other sense, too—appealing to our inner lawyer to break our desppicable habit of interpreting the Constitution as a "living" document. Justice Scalia hates the words "living Constitution" and the rotten, mushy, sloppy, gooey excuses for thinking that the words denote and promote, in his opinion. "Nothing is more seductive," he said, "than the theory of the living Constitution," implying that among the horrifying fates life reserves for us, none horrifies more than seduction. And this from the father of nine children!

Given the choice among induction, deduction, and seduction... I'm thinking, like Jack Benny's response when the robber told him, "Your money or your life."

But what is our alternative? "Originalism," says Justice Scalia. We need to discern what the words of the Constitution meant to the writers, the framers, the founders, the fathers, the brothers—but not the mothers, not the sisters, not me, O Lord!—the origin-ators, whatever words you use to denote the people who wrote the country's first terms—the term- inators, as it were.

"The Constitution is a legal document," said Justice Scalia. "It's like a contract." And whatever we discern the "original" meaning to have been, that meaning—that fixed, timeless meaning, in Justice Scalia's opinion—should control judging in our courts.

Defer for a moment the problem of how to discern the "original" meaning of the Constitution's words—or any words, for that matter—and first look at Justice Scalia's controlling simile. "It's like a contract."

Is it? I note that Justice Scalia did not say that the Constitution is a contract. He said it's like a contract. In making the comparison, Justice Scalia tried—at least such was my sense as I listened to him—at once both to elevate and limit the ways in which we access the Constitution. Elevate in the sense of raise above, place on a higher plane than ordinary, rarify by appealing to our sense of specialness, unusualness, even sacredness. After all, unless we are lawyers, most of us meet contracts only a couple dozen times in our lives. Here is a list of legal documents an ordinary American citizen encounters in the course of a lifetime:

Birth certificate
Immunization certificate
Academic transcript
Driver's license
Vehicle registration
Proof of insurance
Social Security identification
Check
Diploma
Employment contract
Ballot
Lease
Marriage license
Tax return
Passport
Visa
Loan application
Mortgage
Deed
Sales/service contract (invoices, receipts)
Medicare identification
Death certificate

Is the Justice saying that the Constitution is like one or more of these? Or is a “constitution” a separate category?

Each is authorized by a law or regulation that, in its turn, is authorized, ultimately, by the Constitution. The connections between these Little Contracts and the Big Contract seems like a family tree, so I suppose we should expect resemblances. But notice that each of these Little Contracts permits us to act in a certain very specific way in order to get on with our lives (even the last one, if you think about it). Whereas deciding the ways in which the Big Contract permits (or does not permit) our actions is precisely the task that we have hired Justice Scalia and his eight colleagues to do. (More about that later.)

Which brings up the second way in which Justice Scalia wishes to limit access to the Constitution. When Justice Scalia says the Constitution is “like a contract,” he may be trying to say that it permits us to act in certain specific ways and in only those ways. You can’t add, subtract, or change ways just because it’s convenient. You cannot use your birth certificate as a driver’s license. Well, you could try, but the officer asking to see your driver’s license, registration, and proof of insurance probably would smile wanly and then ask you to step out of your car. Just as we accept the limited intent, scope, and language of a Little Contract, so, Justice Scalia argues, we must read the language of the Constitution as if it were the language of a Little Contract.

But just as there are resemblances among members of a family, there are important differences. No single family member resembles the family as a whole. Family members have short lives while the family lives on.

Changing the analogy might make this clearer. Suppose that we imagine the relationship between Little Contracts and the Big Contract as like the relationship between appliances and a power plant. It’s easy to see that without the power plant
the lights, toasters, and televisions are useless. But that doesn't mean that a power plant is like a light bulb or a toaster. So even if the Constitution is like a contract, we're still left with the problem of discerning what sort of contract it might be, how it differs from other contracts, and what knowledge is needed to interpret it.

II

On the question of knowledge, in order further to buttress his case for "originalism," Justice Scalia said a surprising thing. He touched on the example of obscenity which he brought up to rebut the practice of interpreting the "living constitution" in light of "emerging community standards." He said, "I don't know any more about emerging community standards than Joe Sixpack—and, frankly, I'm afraid to ask." This line earned a hearty laugh.

Then he followed up by asking if we really wanted lawyers telling us what our standards should be, or words to that effect. That left me wondering what, exactly, was the value of the Jesuit education he got at Xavier High School in Manhattan and Georgetown University, and then the fine secular education at Harvard Law School, not to mention the legal career extending now into its forty-seventh year. I appreciate Justice Scalia's tipping his rhetorical hat to our democratic values, but if he really doesn't know more than Joe Sixpack about how standards of obscenity have changed in the United States during the last half-century, then why have we given him a lifetime appointment in a job paying $203,000 a year, about seven times the pay Joe Sixpack earns? What does a Justice need to know?

Apparently he needs to know how to determine the original meanings of contracts. How do you do that? Justice Scalia referred us to his concurring opinion in a famous flag burning case. He brought up Texas v Johnson (490 US 397) more or less to assure the fears of proponents of the "living constitution" that interpretations by "originalists" invariably favor political conservatives. Justice Scalia said that "originalism" had "handcuffed" him in his vote on flag burning. In his speech the justice didn't show us how he had snapped the cuffs, as it were, on his legal "wrists," so a look at a part of the majority opinion might give us some clues. Justice Brennan wrote the opinion. Justice Scalia concurred and did not write a separate opinion, so what follows can be only a rough guide to what Justice Scalia means by "handcuffed."

After publicly burning an American flag as a means of political protest, Gregory Lee Johnson was convicted of desecrating a flag in violation of Texas law. This case presents the question whether his conviction is consistent with the First Amendment. We hold that it is not . . .

The First Amendment literally forbids the abridgment only of "speech," but we have long recognized that its protection does not end at the spoken or written word. While we have rejected "the view that an apparently limitless variety of conduct can be labeled 'speech' whenever the person engaging in the conduct intends thereby to express an idea," United States v O'Brien, supra, at 376, we have acknowledged that conduct may be "sufficiently imbued with elements of communication to fall within the scope of the First and Fourteenth Amendments," Spence, supra, at 409.

In deciding whether particular conduct possesses sufficient communicative elements to bring the First Amendment into play, we have asked whether "[a]n intent to convey a particularized message was present, and [whether] the likelihood was great that the message would be understood by those who viewed it." 418 US, at 410-411. Hence, we have recognized the expressive nature of students' wearing of black armbands to protest American military involvement in Vietnam, Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School Dist., 393 US 503, 505 (1969); of a sit-in by blacks in a "whites only" area to protest segregation, Brown v. Louisiana, 383 US 131, 141-142 (1966); of the wearing of American military uniforms in a dramatic presentation criticizing American involvement in Vietnam, Schacht v. United States, 398 US 58 (1970); and of picketing about

Especially pertinent to this case are our decisions recognizing the communicative nature of conduct relating to flags. Attaching a peace sign to the flag, Reference, supra, at 409–410; refusing to salute the flag, 319 US, at 632; and displaying a red flag, 283 US 359, [491 US 397, 405] 368–369 (1931), we have held, all may find shelter under the First Amendment. See also Smith v. Goguen, 415 US 566, 588 (1974) (WHITE, J., concurring in judgment) (treating flag "contemptuously" by wearing pants with small flag sewn into their seat is expressive conduct). That we have had little difficulty identifying an expressive element in conduct relating to flags should not be surprising. The very purpose of a national flag is to serve as a symbol of our country; it is, one might say, "the one visible manifestation of two hundred years of nationhood." Id., at 603 (REHNQUIST, J., dissenting). Thus, we have observed:

"[T]he flag salute is a form of utterance. Symbolism is a primitive but effective way of communicating ideas. The use of an emblem or flag to symbolize some system, idea, institution, or personality, is a short cut from mind to mind. Causes and nations, political parties, lodges and ecclesiastical groups seek to knit the loyalty of their followings to a flag or banner, a color or design." Barnette, supra, at 632.

Pregnant with expressive content, the flag as readily signifies this Nation as does the combination of letters found in "America." (Texas v. Johnson 491 US 397 1989)

In just this passage, about one-twelfth of the full opinion, I count references to eleven different cases. If this is "originalism," I find it very difficult to distinguish from the principle of "stare decisis." Some evidence for this similarity can be found in Justice Scalia's dissenting opinion in Romer v Evans (517 US 620), the case overturning an amendment to Colorado's constitution prohibiting municipalities and government agencies from passing laws barring discrimination against homosexuals. Justice Scalia specifically criticizes the majority's argument for being "short on relevant legal citation," and he adds, "The foregoing suffices to establish what the Court's failure to cite any case remotely in point would lead one to suspect: No principle set forth in the Constitution, nor even any imagined by this Court in the past two hundred years, prohibits what Colorado has done here. But the case for Colorado is much stronger than that. What it has done is not only unprohibited, but eminently reasonable, with close, congressionally approved precedent in earlier constitutional practice" [emphasis added].

A problem still remains for this lay reader (I guess I'm a dull student for Justice Scalia): If the original meaning of the Constitution must be found by tracing "close, congressionally approved precedent," then how does one account for the manifest evolution of our laws? In Texas v Johnson even the "handcuffed" Justice Scalia concurs with Brennan's painstaking—I would say "baby-stepping"—process. Brennan reminds me of a quilt-maker hand-stitching another remnant into an already complicated pattern, fretting at every prick of the needle about whether the new piece "fits" in color, size, shape, texture, and position. How fervently judges must pray that the next piece out of the legal ragbag looks exactly like all the others. How consternating when it doesn't. God be praised, I say, that any change at all occurs—ever!

I'd like to bypass the whole "originalist" v "living constitution" argument by proposing an alternative view. While the justices may treat the Constitution like a contract, many of the rest of us Joe Sixpacks see it as a far more important sort of document—in fact, the most important kind of document yet produced by American culture—the Playbook. As any Super Bowl fanatic knows, every football player is issued a playbook containing detailed diagrams of every play a team executes. Furthermore, all football plays fall into one of three categories—running plays, passing plays, and kicking plays. The justices need to understand that the Constitution is the Playbook for the United States of America. In the Constitution, Congress
is responsible for the “running plays”—grinding out the yardage toward our national goals. The executive branch is responsible for “the passing plays”—deceptively and swiftly launching laser-like strikes from afar. The Supreme Court is our special teams. In life, as in football, sometimes your running game and your passing game cannot score. Then you ask your special teams to deploy their kicking skills and put the other team in bad field position or the ball through the goalposts.

To be blunt, we Sixpacks don’t care about the fine points of contract philosophy. We care about using any means we have to execute the National Game Plan—which changes from week to week and season to season, depending on the depth of our talent, whom we’re playing, and the field conditions on game day. I am confident that once Justice Scalia and his colleagues adopt the Sixpack theory of constitutional law and embrace their proper roles as members of the team, our National Pursuit of Happiness will improve a hundred and ten percent.†

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PRAYER IS THE STUDY OF ART
To Joshua, upon entering the monastery

Easy to say you’re dead
to me now, now that dying’s
your trade and lack your stock,
now that you’ve sold at a loss
your stuff and vested for
self-renunciation, complete
with a private studio/cell
and an ocean view.
So dasvidania and good luck
keeping—as our favorite starets
suggests—your mind in hell
and despairing not.

About suffering, we always
were wrong, as was the desert
monk who held each finger,
in turn, in a flickering candle
to resist the burning lures
of a stripteasing demon. Five
fingers survive the night—
not so bad a rule.
In your writing of icons,
where you in theory
no longer exist; in the face,
the image becomes a likeness
and color and shape graft
us to forms worth following.

For some reason I imagine
my one-armed granddad,
drunk as usual, a spent swimmer
treading water in Tampa Bay
as the boat races away,
pushed beneath its churned-up
wake and waving after his drunken
wife who'd bumped the throttle.
Unlike Brueghel's Icarus,
this scene inspires no caution
against ambition, although
it was the myth they told
us kids to make us risk-averse,
boiled down to: one-armed
men have no business swimming.
I love a woman because I am
a man, though this story proves
life with them, too, can kill you.

So next time you prepare to work—
nested in your studio/cell,
outfitted in the tempera-splattered
garb of your profession,
white-caps crashing below—
or do your kitchen rounds
remember us in your prayers.
It goes without saying, but about
suffering we remain wrong.
We think in terms of fixes
or shifts or, in the metaphors
of war, as a host to expel instead
of bear. There's an outside
chance it will become us.
Or vice versa. Otherwise our
mundane lives, in essence
if not energy, resemble yours—
except add in the vanities
needed to make a living wage:

I take refuge in my weakness
for bean soup; the sounds
of wood chopping; the misfits
of my sangha and the labor
of occupation.

John Estes
Good and Bad Ways to Think About Religion and Politics

Robert Benne

The country is abuzz with conversation about the religious identity of candidates for the 2008 election. Stimulated by the presence of a Mormon in the race, people seem intensely interested in the religious convictions of all the candidates for the Presidency. Among this year's candidates, we have had a Mormon (Romney), a former Southern Baptist minister (Huckabee), a former Lutheran-turned-Baptist pro-life libertarian (Ron Paul), an African-American recently grafted into the black Christian tradition and formally a member of the United Church of Christ (Obama), a Methodist (Clinton), an indeterminate Catholic (Giuliani), a Baptist turned Methodist (Edwards), a member of the Church of Christ (Thompson), and a crusty Episcopalian turned Baptist (McCain). All claim their membership in their preferred religious body and do not distance themselves from their religious identity. What to make of this profusion of interest in the personal religion of politicians, and the larger question of religion's relation to politics?

I

It seems that there are two wrong-headed interpretations of the role of religion in the candidate's political appeal or in the voters' attraction to him or her. One interpretation is that the religious convictions of the candidate should make no difference whatever, either to the candidate's political appeal or to the voters who might vote for him or her. The other is that the candidates' religious convictions should make nearly all the difference to both the candidate and his or her possible voters.

Both camps come in different varieties. Among those who argue that religion should make no difference are the militant atheists who are so popular among the chattering classes these days—Dawkins, Dennett, Hitchens, and Harris. These writers are so hostile to religion that they believe that religious beliefs are damaging to everyone and everything, that religion is the major source of violence in the world. Dawkins even suggests that teaching religion to young children is a form of child abuse. These atheists obviously would prefer to have political candidates with no religious belief at all, but such are few and hard to come by. So the fall-back position is to insist that their religious convictions play no role in their public, political life.

A more sophisticated version of this separationism is offered by Mark Lilla in his influential book, The Stillborn God, in which he argues that religion that appears in public inevitably becomes "political theology," a very bad thing indeed. Political theology, if it actually becomes influential, will lead toward theocracy. Lilla fears that the vigor of conservative religion in the United States is in danger of undermining a fragile, liberal democracy. Thus, he much prefers that religion remain separate from politics in the American democracy. Closely allied to Lilla's argument is the one that holds that intense religion is dangerous. If people hold their religion lightly and with sufficient skepticism, it does not become dangerous because it will not have enough energy to carry it into the public sphere. (Alan Wolfe, Damon Linker, and many academic folks claim this perspective.) One would guess that Mike Huckabee would throw this camp into the vapors.

Closely related to this sophisticated separatism is another variety that holds that expressing religiously-based moral values in political life is a violation of the principle of separation of church and state. These separatists—the ACLU, Americans for Separation of Church and State, and a number of secular political philosophers come to mind—believe that the Founders meant for only secular, "public" reason to guide the political sphere. Religious convictions were by their own nature so parochial, irrational, numerous, and arbitrary that they ought to remain private where
they could do no harm. Only rational, universal, secular moral arguments ought to be exercised in political life. This camp demands that these religious candidates for the Presidency keep their religiously-based moral convictions to themselves and not express them in their political efforts.

Some defective interpretations of the Lutheran two-kingdoms doctrine hold—wrongly, almost everyone agrees—that the realm of politics is totally autonomous, therefore completely separate from religion and even morality. Politics runs by its own principles that should not be influenced by religion, or, for that matter, any kind of universalist ethics. This Machiavellian, or perhaps Nietzschean, interpretation, subscribed to by some German Christians during the Nazi time, is rarely offered in its theoretical form. But many persons view politics that way in practice. Politics is an amoral game guided by the will of those who are able to grasp power. Religious values inject sentimentalities into the political process. Of course, this claim that religion leads to sentimentalities in politics is the opposite objection to those who see it leading to violence.

Other interpretations of the Lutheran two-kingdoms doctrine contend—wrongly, I think—that politics ought to be guided solely by reason and prudence, two virtues accessible to Christians and non-Christians alike. These interpreters are fond of citing Luther’s famous but unverified statement—“I would rather be ruled by a wise Turk than a foolish Christian.” For them, politicians should be assessed on the basis of these worldly criteria, not by those flowing from the revelation or the tradition of thought based on revelation. Indeed, the two kingdoms doctrine is meant to protect the Gospel by not mixing it with the work of the Law as it is appropriated by reason and experience. On the other hand, the doctrine is meant to protect politics from the sentimental and dangerous notion that the Gospel can govern the world.

There are other Christian perspectives that lead toward separatism. Some forms of pietism are so focused on the “religion of the heart” that they see no connection between the warm, intimate movement of the heart and the cold, contested world of political life. Sectarian religion holds that the political world is so fallen, so given over to violence and coercion, that religious persons ought to stay clear of it. The neo-sectarianism of Stanley Hauerwas and his many followers, while neither uninformed nor inactive in political life, still distrust it so thoroughly that they contend that Christians should not hold political office. (Or, as Hauerwas once put it in a panel discussion at which I argued that the Christian could of course embrace politics as a calling: “Well, perhaps a Christian could be a Senator, but only for one term because he or she would propose such radical policies that they would be immediately impeached or voted out of office.”) I would guess that if such folks vote at all they vote for those most likely to lose because those candidates are out-of-sync with the dynamics of political life. Similarly, Radical Orthodoxy seems to believe that the modern world—especially its politics—are so fallen and corrupt that Christians ought to remain aloof from its tawdriness and concentrate on building up a more humane “ecclesial culture.”

So there are quite a number of parties wanting to separate religion and politics. One set wants to protect politics from the oppressive and destructive effects of religion in public. The other wants to protect religion from the fallen world of politics. The Lutheran approach keeps them separate to protect both the Gospel and the worldly business of politics. But I believe the classical Lutheran approach needs revision, about which more later.

II

If one approach to the religion and politics of candidates is to separate the two, another set of proponents want nearly to fuse or combine the two. Many of these proponents are sincerely religious. They commend exactly what the separationist secularists most fear, a direct connection between religion and politics.

Before we take up the religious “fusionists,” though, it is important to point out that many leaders—whether religious or not—have used religion to sacralize and energize their secular causes. Political figures and movements can be very adept at using religion for their own purposes. World history is full of such abuse of religion. The so-called Wars of Religion can probably be understood better as nascent states using religion to further their quite nationalistic purposes rather than as genuinely religious leaders defending their religion.
Similar analyses could be applied to conflicts in the Balkans, Northern Ireland, and Africa, which often have been fomented by leaders who have few genuine religious convictions. Islam is used for other, quite worldly, purposes of wealth and political power by the likes of Saddam Hussein. Some on the Left assert that the United States—and its political leaders—use Christianity to further their imperialistic designs.

If such use actually takes place, it destroys the integrity of authentic religion by undercutting the religion’s own claims to truth, transcendence, and universality. Religion becomes merely an instrument, a damaging secularization of religion.

Back to the religious “fusionists.” Again, this set comes in several varieties. One group does not exactly insist on combining theological notions with political ones, but rather measures the political attractiveness of candidates by whether they hold orthodox Christian beliefs and are sincere in their practice of the Christian virtues of faith, love, and hope. They believe that theological criteria ought to determine the candidate’s political viability. Some evangelicals, for example, are ready to vote against Mitt Romney because his Mormon faith does not measure up to their criteria of Christian orthodoxy. Others find Giuliani’s Catholicism suspect and refuse to vote for someone who pays so little attention to his church’s teachings.

Another group does fuse theological notions with political ones. They engage in what I call “straight-line thinking.” They expect a Christian candidate to move straight from his or her central theological convictions to highly specific public policy positions. They are oblivious to the fact that as a political leader moves from central religious convictions to specific public policy options, he or she passes through several stages of argument in which Christians of good will and intelligence can and often do part company among themselves. Such “fusionists” expect a straight line when there simply ought not and cannot be one.

For example, a pacifist contingent of fusionists imports the radical ethic of the Sermon on the Mount—self-sacrifice, forgiveness, nonviolence—directly into foreign policy. They draw a straight line from certain biblical teachings to specific policies in international relations—forgiveness of debt, turning the other cheek to aggressive nations, disarmament, etc. They expect political candidates to support pacifist policies. Not only is this a confusion of the radical ethic of the Gospel (the right hand reign of God) with what belongs to the Law (his left-hand reign), but it grossly over-simplifies the way that love relates to a fallen world. Reinhold Niebuhr roundly criticized the sentimentality of this approach.

Many liberal Christian groups and individuals expect a candidate’s commitment to Christian love and justice to issue directly into support for an increase in the minimum wage, solar power, universal pre-school, a single-payer healthcare system, pro-choice policies on abortion, affirmative action, high taxation for the wealthy, etc., as though these were “Christian public policy positions.” The positions taken by the advocacy offices of the mainline Protestant churches would lead one to think that there are such Christian policies and that we should vote for candidates who support them. There is a near fusion of basic Christian belief with specific public policies.

(In a conference dealing with public policy, I criticized our Lutheran advocacy office in Washington for such straight-line thinking by rhetorically asking whether Christian ethics always leads to liberal policies. That question stunned one of my Lutheran colleagues who innocently asked: “Well, don’t they?”)

On the other hand, conservative groups such as the Christian Coalition and many conservative Christians perform straight-line thinking of a different sort. They believe that it is an undeniable Christian duty for Christians in politics to agitate for the overturning of Roe v Wade, to support tax cuts, education vouchers, an expansionist foreign policy, school prayer, creationism in the public schools, the Federal Marriage Amendment, etc. These are their version of “Christian policies.”

Adding to suspicion about this kind of straight-line thinking is the fact that liberals want their candidates to work for liberal political policies that presumably follow from liberal religious beliefs, while conservatives want their candidates to support conservative policies that presumably follow from conservative religious beliefs. When it becomes predictable that one is necessarily bound to the other, suspicion arises that the tail (politics) is wagging the dog (religion). Political ideology is
the dominant factor in the fusion. Then we have merely another more subtle instrumentalization of religion, one in which religion is used to give legitimacy to public policy. Again, true religion loses its integrity.

It is fascinating that secular separationists protest only conservative straight-line thinking and acting as a dangerous move toward theocracy. Similar thinking and acting on the liberal side is not only not feared, it is applauded. It is very unlikely that fusionists of either a conservative or liberal kind will be able to impose anything resembling theocracy in this country. There are simply too many countervailing forces for any such possibility. It is more likely that conservative and liberal fusionists will do far more damage to their religion than to their society in their unseemly tendency to draw straight lines.

In summary, separationists believe that religious claims should not be comprehensive, i.e., apply to the larger world of culture, politics, and society. They should be confined to personal religious life or the life of religious communities. The religion of political candidates should be basically irrelevant to political life. The fusionists believe that religion has a comprehensive dimension, but either use that comprehensive dimension for other purposes, or exercise that comprehensiveness badly by moving too simply and directly from core theological convictions to public policy. They want candidates to use religion for their own pet causes or they expect those candidates to exercise their Christian duty by supporting “Christian policies.”

III

The Lutheran view— with revision— offers a better way. Let’s call this the “critical engagement” model to distinguish between what I have termed the separationist or fusionist models. It affirms the comprehensiveness of the Trinitarian Christian vision: God reigns over the whole world but in different ways. Thus, God works his will in the political sphere in a hidden way. He uses the Law— implanted in us in our reason and corroborated by historical experience— to help us guide public life. Christians and non-Christians alike share in the capacity to participate authentically in the public sphere because they share in the capacities of reason and experience. Moreover, that reason and experience is manifested in political philosophies, empirical assessments, varied ways to rank and order values, and practical judgments that are not derived directly from the Bible or from core theological affirmations. Reflective Christians do not move in a straight line from the Bible and central theological commitments to specific public policies. It is far more complicated than that. There is critical engagement between Christian core convictions, on the one hand, and those philosophies, assessments, orderings, and practical judgments, on the other. As one transverses the space from the core to specific public policies, each stage of the movement can be the occasion for Christians to take a different direction than their brothers and sisters in the faith. Thus, Christians who agree on core biblical and theological commitments often disagree on specific public policies which are transversed as one moves toward concrete public policies.

For example, Christians, out of great concern for all persons created in the image of God, could well agree that everyone ought to have access (a positive right) to basic medical care. But it would be foolhardy to expect that those same Christians all would prefer the same public policy to distribute basic medical access universally. Moreover, it would be naïve to think that the church has special expertise in concocting such policy. Christians might come close to consensus on the goal of such policy but would disagree vehemently on the means.

Given this, then, Christians in politics ought to be assessed primarily, but not solely, on their personal competence and integrity, their political philosophies, their judgments of the situation, their ordering of moral and political values, and their practical commitments to specific policy agendas. In short, they ought to prefer policies that they believe fit and improve a fallen world that is by no means abandoned by God.

However, while there is a distinction between the two ways that God reigns in the world, there is no separation. Luther thought that the two ways that God reigns intersect in the vocation of the Christian, even as they do in the vocation of the church. Thus, serious Christian politicians ought to bring something special and different to the political sphere. They ought to bring a deeper level of
meaning to their political calling. They are answering God's call to serve their neighbor in politics. They also ought to bring a different motivation; their faith becomes active in love through their political activities. Their faith in Christ frees them from having to work out their salvation in their political lives. Their self-esteem does not finally hinge on their political prowess. Of course, none of these Christian qualities are pure or utterly constant. We are sinners and saints at the same time. Moreover, these qualities are difficult—but not impossible—to discern in particular candidates.

Moreover, Christian politicians also ought to bring something even more than these internal qualities to their political vocations. They ought to bring the Christian moral and intellectual tradition to bear in the political work they are doing. They do not operate solely on reason and experience, because those capacities are also fallen and confused in this deeply distorted world. Rather, they bring important insights from the Christian tradition on a number of profound issues. For example, Christians believe that all humans have been created in the image of God and redeemed by the saving work of Christ. Persons are precious—sacred, if you will—and must be respected. The Christian also brings insights into the nature of the human predicament—the inevitably of sin in individual but especially collective life. They also know that Christ alone liberates humans from their predicament, not politics or social improvement. Positive change, though very important in the political sphere, has distinct limits. The Christian ought to operate from a moral tradition that has a major but complicated impact on political life. The commandments of God are more clearly revealed in the Bible and the Christian tradition than in reason, and they provide guidelines and limits for political action. Indeed, Christian politicians ought to employ those parts of a comprehensive Christian intellectual and moral vision that critically engages their political judgments, not woodenly or simply, but importantly. That vision is also the source of a prophetic "no" when public policy becomes downright evil.

This additional gift the Christian politician brings to the exercise of his or her vocation goes beyond what the Lutheran two kingdoms tradition generally allows. That tradition usually limits moral and intellectual resources to those stemming from the First Article of the Creed, while I am contending that the Christian brings resources from the whole Trinitarian faith. Therefore, he or she does not simply rely on reason and experience to make judgments, as important as they may be. The Christian ought to employ the relevant parts of the whole Christian intellectual and moral tradition to bear on worldly vocation, and that should make a difference. That employment does not lead directly to specific policy, but it certainly conditions it. That is why the candidates' religious commitment—and level of seriousness about it—is important in politics for both the politician and the voter. (This modification of the two-kingdoms doctrine applies also—and crucially—to the world of Christian higher education, where Lutheran reliance on only the First Article has deprived the Christian intellectual and college of precisely the kind of "critical engagement" I am commending for Christians in political life.)

Churches have come to recognize the importance of this "critical engagement" for both their politicians and their lay people. Churches have tried to stimulate the conscience of both by bringing Christian teaching to bear—to "critically engage"—the issues of the day without presuming to draw a straight line to what specific policies politicians or voters ought to support. The Catholic Bishops have their "Faithful Citizenship," the ELCA Lutherans their "Called to Be a Public Church," and the evangelicals their "For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility." All point to important issues that the churches believe their members ought to engage from a Christian point of view, but do not presume to identify the specific public policies that will address concretely those important issues. Our vigorous public conversation about religion and politics, the reflections on that topic by the politicians themselves, and the ongoing concern of the churches, all indicate that religion is and ought to be deeply involved in political life. The question is not whether but how. Neither separation nor fusion, but rather "critical engagement," is the way to go.

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Sam Fentress's mesmerizing new book, *Bible Road: Signs of Faith in the American Landscape*, comes as a wonderful relief. Ours is a moment saturated with analyses of religion, much of it sadly simplistic, as both our domestic politics in this presidential season and our foreign policy seem to pivot on making distinctions between good religion and bad. Such tendencies accentuate trends already evident in far too many journalistic and scholarly treatments of religion, which often reduce faith to economic, psychological, or political phenomena, and people of faith to saints or fanatics. Sam Fentress, an award-winning photographer trained at Princeton and the Art Institute of Chicago, will have none of this. His book of photographs, taken over twenty-five years, depicts America religious life without moralizing, distinction-making, or sociological scrutiny. He does this with only images of signs—handmade road signs, billboards, graffiti, murals, storefront advertisements, and other inscriptions of Christian faith seen along the way. The book contains a brief, meditative foreword by Paul Elie and an even briefer Afterword by Fentress explaining the genesis of the project, but otherwise the only text in the book—other than the words captured in each image—is a simple caption indicating the place and date of each of the one hundred and fifty photographs. Birmingham, Alabama 1995. Waxhaw, North Carolina 1985. Oakland, California 1998.

The French sociologist and semiotician Roland Barthes observed in his 1981 book *Camera Lucida*, "In the Photograph, the event is never transcended for the sake of something else . . . it is the absolute Particular, the sovereign Contingency," (4) and Fentress's images certainly bear this out. These pictures show us the varieties of American Christianity in all their beauty and lived particularity. Though the book contains almost no images of human beings, every page resonates with humanity. The words are the subject of these images in the way a human face is the subject of a portrait, an instantaneous impression of a lifetime of worry and joy. The signs in each photograph stand along roadways, tacked to trees or scrawled on overpasses, asking to be read and understood by passersby, presented as proclamations of faith, as calls to revival, as markers of identity, as inspiration, cries for forgiveness, warnings, hope. Fentress's photographs, on the other hand, only ask to be witnessed. "Jesus. Hope" says a telephone pole; "Trust Jesus," a mailbox; "Prayer Really Works," a tree.

Many of the images portray the seamless interweaving of sacred and profane in modern America, and Fentress clearly delights in capturing the interplay of signs representing, especially, the commercial and the pious. "Repent Final Warning" declares a homemade sign beneath the power lines in Georgia. Inches below, on the same pole, using the same stenciling, we see the much more comforting call for "Mack's Bar-B-Que," on I-95 at Highway 144. Alfie's barbeque in Los Angeles tells us "Jesus Is Real" while MY-T Burger in Pasadena, Texas, proclaims on the marquee, "Praise the Lord. Burger & Fries, 99 [cents]." Fentress gives us these images not as juxtapositions, nor to decry some defamation of the pure and sacred by the crassly capitalistic, but rather to show us faith as it actually happens in the reality of lived lives. If we did not praise the Lord when buying or selling burg-
ers and fries, and repent when driving to the barbeque stand, when would we?

Fentress's humor sparkles throughout. He gives us a yard sign advertising lawn mowers for sale across the street from one announcing, “Salvation Is Free.” In the cover image, of a gas station front lot, a hand-painted board proclaims “Christ is the Answer,” next to another board, also homemade, with similar black letters against a white field; “Full Service Reg. 1.12,” it reads, prompting one to wonder just who indeed provides full service. For all the humor in these images, Fentress manages to let us smile without demanding that we leer or mock. Indeed, we are not even asked to evaluate or analyze. These are images of beauty, humanity, and life, rather than testaments to consumerism, poverty, apocalypticism, revivalism, devotion to the Virgin, or any other phenomenon scholars or journalists might fruitfully, or fruitlessly, dissect. Fentress's pictures simply want to be experienced. “Look,” he says. “Look.”

Those images that do ask us to think do so not as sociology but much more intimately, as neighbors peering over a fence, observing the full particularity and contingency that Barthes reminds us to watch for. A large, sturdy sign along a rural highway in North Carolina, at a bend in the road near a stand of trees, reads “Jesus Wept.” This verse is famous among generations of Sunday school trivia buffs as the shortest in the Bible—but why put it on a sign? What is the desired response? Did Jesus weep because of my sins? Must I repent? (You know, there was that time...) Is it a prophetic social rebuke, a denouncement of injustice? Does Jesus weep for the trees no longer here? For the unborn children who never took a breath? For those growing up in poverty in this land of plenty? Or is it a confession? On this, as on every page, we are left to wonder who, why, when. We imagine a face in a workshop, carefully peering down at sketched-out letters; or a group gathered in a church basement debating color, spacing, size. These are lives as full of anger, love, guilt, and hate as our own. “Become a Catholic;” a voiceless voice tells us, in graffiti amid the gang tags on an abandoned building in Harlem. “Hail Mary—Full Of Grace” begins the first two of fifteen signs perched on a barbed-wire fence in Missouri. “Pray For Us Sinners—Now And At The Hour—Of Our Death Amen—KC Council 5898” the series concludes. Which one of us used a boarded up storefront in St. Louis to cry out, “God Forgive Me. I have Sined. Give Me The BLOOD of JESUS. I AM Sorry. Please Send THE HOLY GHOST. Amen”? The collection of photographs in this book represents a wide array of Christian sentiment from locations across the country, as Fentress traversed forty-nine states in his decades of work on this project. Yet in spite of this wonderful catalog of faith, the impression that lingers is one of beauty. The brilliant blue sky and deep green grass that frame the yellow corrugated factory of the United States Plastics Corp. The streak of taillights and the fading crimson sunset behind a neon sign declaring “Jesus The Light Of The World.” The play of shadows in a used hubcap lot. Bible Road is a book to be enjoyed, a book of sadness and hope, wonder, and delight.

Matthew S. Hedstrom
Princeton University

The nature of the child remains a relatively underexplored phenomenon by theologians. clichés and even more grounded assertions recognize that the future of any society is contingent upon the health and well-being of its youngest generation. Regardless, many theologians fail to include the child in their efforts. To his credit, Martin E. Marty in *The Mystery of the Child* seeks to offer a theological exploration of the child. In doing so he contends with voices that leave the impression that the child is a problem to be managed. In contrast, Marty argues that the child is a mystery to be appreciated.

In terms of his argument that the child is a mystery, Marty offers that “the provision of care for children will proceed on a radically revised and improved basis if instead of seeing the child first as a problem faced with a complex of problems, we see her as a mystery surrounded by mystery” (1). In the end, he is “interested in a nonclinical question: how to conceive of a child” (1). Aware of the possibility that many individuals will dismiss his project as not immediately practical, Marty appropriately asks us to summon the patience needed to explore the underlying assumptions we carry in relation to the child. He claims that his project will prove to be practical as it offers “meta-guidance or meta-advice, treating issues that are situated behind or beyond those involving practical counsel” (1). As a result, he is hopeful that individuals charged with caring for the child will see him or her in a different light. The mystery of the child, for Marty, is rooted in the child’s paradoxical nature. Marty views children as “immortal teachers because they are complex. Their simplicity and their complexity in interplay make them beguiling and promising candidates for research, observation, and care” (6). The challenge Marty makes to those of us charged with care for the child is to transfer our impulse to reduce complex phenomena to one of appreciation.

In order to develop his understanding of the child as a mystery, Marty initially draws heavily on the work of Gabriel Marcel, in particular Marcel’s *The Mystery of Being*. As a result, Marty states that “Mystery refers to something fathomless…. What is fathomless is open to discovery and revelation without end, but it never finds resolution or conclusion” (16-17). Beyond Marcel and his larger framework of mystery, Marty also draws upon the efforts of theologians like Gordon Kaufman and Karl Rahner. For example, given his starting point with Marcel’s notion of mystery, Marty finds Kaufman’s “analogical argument promising” (63). The child is thus seen as manifesting “the ultimate mystery, especially when recalled as created in the image of God” (64). Finally, Marty also draws heavily upon the work of José Ortega y Gasset. In particular, Ortega y Gasset offers Marty an understanding of the complex and ultimately fluid nature of human identity. As a result, an inextricable dimension of the child as a mystery emerges when we view the child as a “pilgrim of her being” (143). Experiences in the past may provide the only fixed line in a child’s identity. Regardless, “they also open him to new possibilities” (144).

Despite the significance of Marty’s efforts, we should not underestimate the pressures against understanding the child as a mystery. Although theologians have remained relatively silent on the topic, not all disciplines have shared this posture. In particular, developmental psychologists have gone to great lengths to quantify the child and thus often to reduce the nature of the child to that of a problem. Marty contends that “They can tell much about the chemistry of our makeup, but they offer little that the one who deals with the mystery of the child favors most: asking questions about how to live” (149). Developmental psychologists often overstep the boundaries of their discipline and “claim predictive power and at least implicitly tell people how to live” (149). As a result, “Adults often employ these explanations to reduce the wonder of both boys and girls and to rationalize how their elders would exert or withhold discipline” (154). In contrast, mystery cannot be quantified. In the absence of an appreciation for the child as a mystery, the
child as a problem becomes the default to which we collapse. Strategies for controlling or managing children offered by developmental psychologists fill a perceived need even if that need is more illusionary than real.

Perhaps one of the locales in which this perceived need is most acutely felt is the Christian community. Early in his book, Marty turns to the works of James Dobson, Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo, and John Rosemond as examples of such efforts. In particular, Marty’s concern focuses on “the implicit claim that the child can be understood, explained, and somehow cut to size, and thus will turn out in ways that will please adults with their various cultural preconceptions” (49). However, perhaps Marty’s most sustained form of engagement with these kinds of efforts rests with his discussion of Roy Zuck’s Precious in His Sight: Childhood and Children in the Bible. Marty ultimately argues that if “Zuck approached the Bible with the mystery of the child, not the problem of the child, in the forefront, there might have been more accent on enjoyment, for adults and children alike” (96–97). Marty challenges Zuck on the grounds that the cumulative weight of the Biblical record that Zuck cites affirms a view of the child as a mystery and not as a problem.

Marty’s argument for the child as a mystery is developed over the course of ten chapters which tend to move from the theoretical to the practical. For example, Marty’s text opens by developing an understanding of mystery and then quickly unfolds it within the particular context of the child. Marty then proceeds to juxtapose his understanding of the child as a mystery with the child as a problem. The differences between these views become most evident when Marty places them within the context of care. If the child is viewed as a problem, then control becomes the objective. If the child is viewed as a mystery, then wonder becomes the objective. By the time Marty reaches his seventh and eighth chapters, he is ready to apply his understanding of the child as a mystery to various circumstances and particular contexts. He offers details in chapter seven concerning the significance of resources such as stories, songs, and visual forms of art and in chapter eight concerning how providers of care can re-stimulate a sense of wonder in children. Marty’s volume ends with a postscript and a prescript which he entitles “The Abyss of Mystery.” In essence, Marty concludes his important argument concerning the child as a mystery by asserting that certain qualities of this understanding apply to all of us—even adults are to open themselves to seeing the world as a child. By doing so, “We will be receiving the gift of each new day, and with that gift the presence of children in our midst, mirrors of the divine mystery that represents both an abyss and a promise” (246).

Although Marty’s project is admirable and leads theologians and others who dare to follow in a positive direction, the methodology of his argument leaves something to be desired in relation to his larger goals. In particular, Marty’s use of Kaufman’s analogous argument leaves me with two questions. First, who initiates appreciation for the ultimate mystery? Second, what is the nature of its context? Kaufman, as quoted by Marty, identifies the individual human agent as the point of initiation for an appreciation for mystery. In places, Rahner also appears susceptible to comparable forms of thinking. From this perspective, theology becomes the language of the private self and is thus unable to muster the critical presence needed to challenge more public forms of language such as developmental psychology. Although admirable in its intent, Marty’s argument is left incapable of fully subverting the understanding of the child as a problem. The way to rectify this weakness in Marty’s argument is to insert a more robust ecclesiology. When Marty mentions the church, he mentions it as one among other societal equals. When best understood, theology is the language one learns via the practices of the public that is the church. These practices initiate an appreciation for God as a mystery since God initiates the gift of grace—the gift we then recognize in the child.

In the end, Martin Marty is to be commended for his efforts in The Mystery of the Child. He rightfully challenges our propensity to reduce and quantify human identity, particularly
our propensity to view the child as a problem. As a result, Marty charts a new course by proposing that we view the child as a mystery. Perhaps future generations of theologians can recast Marty’s vision for the child in terms that do not view theological discourse as private in nature. Only under such conditions can theology challenge the claim that disciplines such as developmental psychology have laid on our understanding of the child. In essence, efforts to care for the child are too important to settle for anything less.

Todd C. Ream
Indiana Wesleyan University

AFTER PENSEES
for Pascal Bruehler

“There would be too great darkness, if truth had not visible signs.”
Blaise Pascal

Maybe it’s a kind of genius that makes you seize, the tubers on your brain prodigious visitors who ask repeatedly if we are paying attention. Settled here among us, they pose only the important questions. You’re as much a philosopher as the one you’re named for,

little man, your tremors the minor collisions that force us to envision and avoid a crash. You’re a prophet, slow to speak, your crooked smile as shy as shadow, your eyes sometimes heavy from the medicine, their faint flickers somehow keeping every God-shaped void alit.

Mary M. Brown
During World War II, the bombings of London were carried on so incessantly that for awhile it seemed as though the whole city would be wiped out by the explosions and the fires that always followed the bombings. During a particularly heavy night of bombing, an elderly Christian gentleman was watching the fire and smoke and the destruction which had just taken place. In an account of that evening's feelings, he states that he felt that it seemed as if the whole city would soon be destroyed. He also thought that if men did not learn to live at peace, soon the whole civilized world would be ruined.

The smoke from the burning buildings on this particular evening was so heavy that he could scarcely make out the buildings in the distance, but through the smoke and the fire he continued to strain his eyes. Suddenly, a strong gust of wind cleared the air for a moment. As he looked up he saw the cross on the spire of the cathedral which was a short distance away. According to his statement, to him this became a symbol of the fact that the world would survive.

In a somewhat similar vein, we now approach the somber and sacred season of Lent. Amid the sadness and defeat which seems to be so much a part of the Lenten story, there seems to be very little about which man could be cheerful. As we know so well from the Biblical record of the Lenten story, and as we recognize from the sinful actions of men today, it was the dark cloak of sinfulness that made the crucifixion necessary. However, through all the gloom and darkness of the Lenten story, there still shines the cross of Christ. The cross of Lent is cruel and horrible and evil, but still it is the cross of forgiveness and salvation.

To the Christian whose heart has been touched by the Spirit of God, the cross always is viewed as an act of God's suffering love. The resultant effect of God's having touched the heart of the Christian and drawing him unto Himself seems to be summarized in Ephesians, Chapter 3, where we read, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which pas-

Luther P. Koepke

seth knowledge that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God."

Some students of the Scriptures feel that when Paul refers to the breadth and length and depth and height of the love of God, he is thinking of the four arms of the cross which so completely exemplifies God's love for man. The cross of Calvary demonstrates the all encompassing nature of God's love. It is so high and so broad and so deep that we, as mere human beings, cannot comprehend it. We, as Christians, accept by faith the meaning of the cross and are assured of this meaning for ourselves through the continuing operation of the Holy Spirit.

The breadth of God's love is so wide that God was concerned about doing something that would draw all men unto Himself. Therefore, the redemption story as it climaxes on Good Friday reaches out across the bounds of time and of space and encompasses the history of the universe, even before the world began. So it is that the Lenten story, depicting this suffering love of an all-encompassing Christ, stretches out wide
and extends His arms to the entire universe.

The length of God's love reaches back beyond the bounds of time and stretches into eternity itself. For even before the foundations of the world were laid, God in His love had determined the salvation of mankind. The length of God's love, also, stretches forward into all eternity, encompassing all of time. This expansive love of God, therefore, stretching from eternity to eternity, becomes meaningful to the Christian as depicted in the events of the life of Christ during Lent and Easter.

One of the problems that man has made for himself in the atomic energy plants is the problem of what to do with the waste materials. These waste materials remain radioactive for such a long period of time that the greatest care must be taken in their disposition. In a similar but in a positive sense, the Cross continues to send forth its forgiving love to the end of time and even into eternity.

The height of God's love, like its other dimensions, is really easier to feel than to explain. We know that human love can become depraved; human love frequently is selfish. Divine love as seen from the Cross always is motivated by the complete concern for human beings. This Divine love does not overlook sin, but it takes care of it. Divine love does not turn away from evil but replaces it with good. Divine love does not stop when man turns away from it, but it continually follows him unto the end of his days. The height of God's love, therefore, stretches from the heaven above into the heart of man.

The depth of the love of God reaches down into a sin-blackened world and into the innermost recesses of the heart of man. Regardless of who a man is, or where he is, or what he is, the depth of the love of God is there to reach and to touch and to change. Regardless of how low man may have sunk, God can reach down and lift him up. In spite of the accumulative effect of sin on the world and on the lives of men, the love of God can still penetrate and redirect. Regardless of the chaos that men cause in their own lives and in the world at large, the depth of the love of God can pierce through the sinfulness of man and can change a sinner into a child of God.

It is our prayer that during Lent we may try just a little more to understand and to experience what is the breadth and length and depth and height and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.

Oh, the height of Jesus' love,
Higher than the Heavens above,
Deeper than the depths of sea,
Lasting as eternity.

Love that found me,
Wondrous thought,
Found me
When I sought him not.

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on the cover—

Sam Fentress is a photographer who grew up in both Detroit and Memphis and now lives in St. Louis. During twenty-five years of travel around the United States, he photographed hundreds of religious roadside signs. This collection has now been published as Bible Road: Signs of Faith in the American Landscape (David & Charles, 2007).

In the foreword to Bible Road, Paul Elie writes, “Photographs of biblical signs and suchlike have served as material for documentarists since the Great Depression, and I’d guess that most of us have seen those signs in photographs more often than we’ve seen them through car windows on actual roadsides. Sam Fentress’s photographs stand apart from the ones we know well. His is more than a documentary effect; he doesn’t record those messages so much as transpose or transfigure them into the permanent light of photography. It is this—a kinship of heightened means, a shared sense of what is at stake at the side of the road—that gives them their radiant originality and expressive power.”

Please see page sixty for Matthew Hedstrom’s review of Sam Fentress’s Bible Road.

on reviewers—

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on poets—

Miriam Pederson

is Associate Professor of English at Aquinas College, Grand Rapids, Michigan. She is the author of a chapbook entitled This Brief Light and exhibits her poetry regularly in collaboration with her husband’s sculpture in regional galleries.

Christopher Anderson

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