Malcolm X and Race in America
Curtiss Paul DeYoung

Lutherans, Slavery, and the Struggle for Racial Justice
Richard M. Chapman

Finding the Sacred in the Ordinary
Judith Valente

Breaches of Faith
Fredrick Barton
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on the cover, reviewers, and poets
Race still matters in America. This one thing we certainly have learned from a lengthy presidential primary season. While that truth should surprise no one, many Americans had hoped that this election signaled the beginning of something new.

Barack Obama’s rise as a presidential candidate has suggested a new moment in American politics. Obama appeared to be the first black American politician with whom both blacks and whites could wholeheartedly identify. African Americans trust that Obama is one of their own community, that he will voice their grievances and work to redress them. At the same time, Obama’s vision of American politics is appealing to Americans of all races. In his impressive “A More Perfect Union” speech in Philadelphia, Obama proclaimed, “...we may not look the same and we may not have come from the same place, but we all want to move in the same direction—towards a better future for our children and our grandchildren.” In Obama’s language, the challenge of race is about more than achieving justice for African Americans; it is about achieving a just America. It is a vision of American politics that transcends the bitterest divisions in our national life.

Sadly, the past several weeks of this campaign have shown how far we are from achieving that vision. National media reports on Obama’s association with the Rev. Jeremiah Wright of Chicago and the ensuing public outrage over Wright’s incendiary rhetoric have served as a rude reminder of our enduring racial divisions and the extent to which those divisions pervert our politics.

To the average white American, the things that Rev. Wright has said are beyond the pale of responsible public discourse. Most white Americans have never heard a preacher shout “God Damn America!” from the pulpit, and most likely would walk out of any church where one did. Few white Americans even have heard suggestions like Rev. Wright’s that our government intentionally inflicted AIDS on African Americans, and most of those who have consider the very idea to be absurd, beyond offensive.

Barack Obama never said any of these things. In fact, he rejected all of the Rev. Wright’s more extreme statements as soon as they became public. Regardless, they put Obama in a difficult situation. A white politician would have disowned Wright in a second—“thrown him under the bus” as the saying goes. Obama did not do that, at least not immediately. Obama knows that Rev. Wright’s comments, as wrong as they are, give voice to a powerful rage within some parts of the African American community. His words articulate the community’s anger over generations of racial injustices in America, over the lasting effects of those injustices, and over the continual experiences of racism to which African Americans are subject on a daily basis. Rev. Wright understands that rage, has given voice to it, and, unlike some black political figures, has tried to do something constructive with it; he has founded a church that has done many good things in the African American community of Chicago’s South Side. Obama knows that he cannot simply disown Rev. Wright. As he said in Philadelphia, “I can no more disown him than I can disown the black community.”

That is Obama’s dilemma. He wants to appeal to both black and white America, but black and white America remain two very different places, two peoples with different ideas about what it means to be American. If Obama is going to serve as an authentic voice for the African American community, he cannot distance himself from Rev. Wright or his church or completely disown that community’s anger. But if he is going to appeal to white voters, he cannot be seen as giving voice to or even tolerating the expression of that anger. This dilemma...
will dog him throughout the campaign. Contrary to the hopes of Obama and his supporters—and of most Americans, even those who will not vote for Senator Obama—race already has become a central issue in this campaign, even during the Democratic primaries. It will be no less so during the general election. Just as some political hacks have made a living by exploiting black Americans’ rage, others are likely to advance their cause by exploiting white Americans’ shock and fear.

This is the enduring legacy of race in America. While much progress has been made, many white and black Americans continue to live in two separate and very different Americas. I live in northwest Indiana, one of the most racially segregated areas in the United States. The city where I live, Valparaiso, has an African-American population of less than 2 percent. In the city of Gary, only fifteen miles away, African-Americans make up more than 84 percent of the population. Most of the predominantly white communities in the US still have better schools, more jobs and economic opportunity, and safer streets than most black communities. The Americas we live in are different, and thus our attitudes toward America must also be different. The reality is that the black and white races in America are still largely segregated—geographically, economically, and even spiritually.

Many of the articles in this issue look at the past and present of racial division and social justice in America. Curtiss Paul DeYoung’s profile of Malcolm X reveals the racial hatred that developed inside one gifted young African American and then considers how religious faith helped him overcome that hatred. Richard Chapman’s essay considers the involvement of Lutherans in the abolitionist and civil rights movements of the late nineteenth century and finds, likely to many readers’ disappointment, that few Lutherans took a leadership role in either. Ezra Rosser’s Law column considers the dilemma of Navajo Indians who are hindered in their efforts to create jobs for their people by outsiders’ expectations that Native Americans should do a better job of preserving the environment than the rest of us have.

Other essays in this issue depict life in America’s cities, where residents of all races experience both the wonders and failures of our nation’s struggle for justice. Judith Valente reviews the work of two Chicago poets, one of whom is a Franciscan monk who finds moments of transcendence even in the tragedies of life on his city’s sometimes harsh streets. Fredrick Barton’s essay and Aimee Tomasek’s photography depict post-Katrina New Orleans, a city whose people seem to have been failed by every branch of government that could possibly have come to their assistance.

These essays portray both progress and failure. Together they show a nation that has worked—sometimes earnestly, sometimes reluctantly—to move beyond the failures of its past. They also show us a nation that has much work left to do in the future. The Obama campaign presents a similar picture. The very existence of his campaign, the very possibility that he might be elected president, is a possibility that could never have been imagined by most of the African Americans who have lived throughout American history. But the course of this campaign also will serve as a reminder that race still matters, far more than we wish it did. Whether Barack Obama wins or loses this election, these divisions among us will remain. All of this is a reminder of the work that still must be done to create a more perfect union.

—JPO

Correction

Due to a too-hastily-done last minute change in the layout, a photograph on page twenty-nine of Ann Howard Jones’s “Robert Shaw: Teaching America to Sing” (Easter 2008) obscured a section of text. The editors offer our regrets for the failure to recognize the error before the issue was printed and our thanks to readers who promptly notified us of our mistake.

A complete version of the article is available on our website at:

www.valpo.edu/cresset/2008/2008_Easter_Jones.pdf

Your concerns or opinions about any article in The Cresset are always welcomed by the editors. Please feel free to contact us at cresset@valpo.edu.
“Recognizing every human being as a human being”
Malcom X and Race in America

Curtiss Paul DeYoung
Growing Up Malcolm Little
Malcolm Little was born on 19 May 1925, the fourth child of his parents. While Malcolm was in his mother's womb, Ku Klux Klan members surrounded his family's home in Omaha, Nebraska, terrorizing the Little family. This experience fore-shadowed Malcolm's lifelong struggle against racism, which produced intense issues of identity. Earl and Louise Little were members of Marcus Garvey's Back-to-Africa movement—an effort that sought to instill pride in African Americans and make cultural connections to Africa, with the possibility of relocation to the continent. Through Garvey's organization, they sought “to embrace a black God, a black aim, and a black destiny” (DeCaro 1996, 39).

In addition to domestic stress, skin color played a role in the Little household. Earl and Louise Little were fighting for their rights as black people in a racist society, yet they also played out the psychologically damaging impact of color consciousness in their family dynamics. Malcolm felt that his father gave him preferential treatment because of his light complexion, while his mother considered him her least favorite child for the same reason. Earl was very dark skinned. Louise looked nearly white. In his autobiography Malcolm X wrote:

My mother, who was born in Grenada, in the British West Indies, looked like a white woman. Her father was white. She had straight black hair, and her accent did not sound like a Negro's. Of this white father of hers, I know nothing except her shame about it.... It was, of course, because of him that I got my reddish-brown 'mariny' color of skin, and my hair of the same color. I was the lightest child in our family.... I learned to hate every drop of that white rapist's blood that is in me (1965c, 2, 3).
After Malcolm was born, the family eventually settled in Lansing, Michigan. Earl Little continued his work on behalf of the Marcus Garvey movement by preaching the Garvey message in local African American churches. A few years after moving to Michigan, the Littles purchased a house in an all-white area. Malcolm was four years old. Shortly after moving into the house, Earl and Louise Little were informed that their deed contained a clause that said, "This land shall never be rented, leased, sold to, or occupied by... persons other than those of the Caucasian race" (Natambu 2002, 4). Earl Little refused to leave his property. Their home was set on fire and burned to the ground. The police accused Earl Little of setting the fire himself. The family moved farther outside of the city. This time, their white neighbors hassled them and threw rocks at them, finally causing the Littles to move to a rural area.

When Malcolm was six, his father was found dead, run over by a streetcar. While the authorities called it an accident, some African Americans in Lansing wondered if whites had attacked Earl Little and placed him on the tracks in order to silence a man they considered an agitator. The strain of raising seven children, economic troubles, and an ever-present racism slowly caused Louise Little to lose her vitality and emotional stability. When Malcolm was thirteen years old, his mother was committed to a state mental hospital, where she would remain for the next twenty-four years.

As Malcolm entered his teenage years, his parents were no longer a part of his life. The welfare system separated him from his siblings and placed him in a foster home as a dependent of the state. His placement with a white family served to increase his feeling of otherness. Malcolm was often the only African American in his class at school. He was usually at or near the top of his class academically. In seventh grade, his class elected him class president. Malcolm wrote later reflecting on this occurrence, "It surprised me even more than other people. But I can see now why the class might have done it. My grades were among the highest in the school.... And I was proud; I'm not going to say I wasn't. In fact, by then, I didn't really have much feeling about being a Negro, because I was trying so hard, in every way I could, to be white" (Malcolm X, 32-33).


What Malcolm X described as the "first major turning point" of his life happened in the eighth grade. He was in the classroom with Mr. Ostrowski, his English teacher. Malcolm had received excellent grades in English class and believed that the teacher really liked him. Mr. Ostrowski asked Malcolm about his future plans, saying, "Malcolm, you ought to be thinking about a career. Have you been giving it thought?" Malcolm replied, "Well, yes, sir, I've been thinking I'd like to be a lawyer." Mr. Ostrowski responded, "Malcolm, one of life's first needs is for us to be realistic. Don't misunderstand me, now. We all here like you, you know that. But you've got to be realistic about being a nigger. A lawyer—that's no realistic goal for a nigger. You need to think about something you can be. You're good with your hands—making things. Everybody admires your carpentry shop work. Why don't you plan on carpentry?" Malcolm described how this made him feel: "I was one of his top students, one of the school's top students—but all he could see for me was the kind of future 'in your place' that almost all white people see for black people" (1965c, 37-38).

At age fifteen, Malcolm dropped out of school. He saw no purpose in continuing his education.
Relentless racism marked Malcolm’s life. Without the racial pride of his parents, he had no anchor to secure his identity in a sea of dehumanization. He moved to the home of his older half-sister Ella Collins in Boston, Massachusetts. After the death of Earl Little, she had reached out to her half siblings. Malcolm was impressed by the strength of her personality and her race pride: “She was the first really proud black woman I had ever seen in my life. She was plainly proud of her very dark skin. This was unheard of among Negroes in those days” (Malcolm X 1965c, 34). Collins hoped to direct her younger brother toward a more positive experience of his blackness through the thriving middle-class African American community in Boston. Malcolm X noted, “I didn’t want to disappoint or upset Ella, but despite her advice, I began going down into the town ghetto section. That world of grocery stores, walk-up flats, cheap restaurants, poolrooms, bars, storefront churches, and pawnshops seemed to hold a natural lure for me” (44-45).

Malcolm spent the second half of his teen years becoming more and more involved in life on the streets of Boston and New York City as a hustler known as Detroit Red. He sold and used drugs. He directed men to prostitutes, and he used women. Malcolm also burglarized homes, which eventually led to his arrest. He had internalized the racism that oppressed him, and he acted out this depersonalization in his choices.

**Prison**

The court sentenced Malcolm Little to ten years in prison, in February 1946. He arrived in prison a bitter and belligerent man. He regularly expressed his dislike for religion, earning himself the nickname Satan. While Malcolm X served time in prison, several of his siblings joined a small religious group called the Nation of Islam (NOI). The leader of the Nation of Islam, Elijah Muhammad, taught that the NOI was the natural religion for persons of African descent and that whites were devils. This teaching appealed to Malcolm X and other African Americans because “the possibility that white people are Satan incarnate has the force not only of religious metaphor but of empirical truth—a hypothesis by which one can at least explain why one lives in a rat-ridden slum and works, if at all, carrying the white man’s baggage and diapering the white man’s babies” (Goldman 1979, 34). Malcolm X converted to the Nation of Islam in the spring of 1948.

After his religious conversion, Malcolm X became a new man. He reshaped his life in preparation for a new vocation as a member of the Nation of Islam. He took greater advantage of the prison library to study a wide range of subjects: philosophy, history, world religions, mathematics, literature, etymology, science, the biographies of political leaders, African American history, and more. He wanted to support the teachings of the Nation of Islam using the “white man’s” history. On the weekends, he would study up to fifteen hours a day. Malcolm X reflected in his autobiography, “I knew right there in prison that reading had changed forever the course of my life. As I see it today, the ability to read awoke inside me some long dormant craving to be mentally alive.... My homemade education gave me, with every additional book that I read, a little bit more sensitivity to the deafness, dumbness, and blindness that was afflicting the black race in America” (Malcolm X 1965c, 182).

In addition to extensive study, Malcolm X developed a skill that would become a hallmark of his leadership: public speaking. He joined the prison debate team. Combining his strong debate skills with NOI teachings and the library studies that supported his new worldview, Malcolm X started to witness to other prisoners about his new faith. By the time he left prison, Malcolm X had gained the necessary knowledge and skills to be a minister in the Nation of Islam. Malcolm X’s friend Benjamin Karim writes, “Malcolm had made of prison a seminary” (1992, 25). Karim also notes that prison was Malcolm X’s place of salvation: “In prison, Malcolm told us, he found his salvation, because in prison he discovered Islam, which gave him a new life” (86). On 7 August 1952, he was released from prison.

**Minister Malcolm X of the Nation of Islam**

When Malcolm Little left prison he joined his family in Detroit. He found a job and entered the life of the Nation of Islam. His brothers were active as ministers. He soon received his “X” and officially became Malcolm X. The “X” replaced the slave master’s name, symbolized the lost African family name, and anticipated a new God-given name in
the future. This act was a powerful reclamation of a lost sense of humanity.

Elijah Muhammad recognized Malcolm X's passion for the faith and named him the assistant minister of the Detroit temple in June 1953. Soon he was sent to Boston to start a new temple. Next, he went to Philadelphia. Malcolm X was tireless in his work, expanding the ministry of the Nation of Islam. Only one year after he had been selected as an associate minister in Detroit, Malcolm X began to oversee the Nation of Islam in Harlem, the most important African American neighborhood in the largest city in the United States. He also continued launching new temples in other cities. Within three years of leaving prison, he took an organization of four hundred people with less than ten temples and tripled its size.

Malcolm X was a skilled organizer who knew his audience. The new members were poor and working-class African Americans from urban settings. Malcolm X clearly understood “their disillusionment, fear, anger, cynicism, rage, unhappiness, isolation, poverty, and desperation, especially as it related to the pervasive and destructive force of white racism on their lives” (Natambu 2002, 161). Later the Nation of Islam would attract black middle-class professionals who also recognized the impact of racism. Malcolm X was building a black African nation separate from whites.

The relationship between Malcolm X and his leader, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad—the Messenger of Allah, was like that of a father and a son. Elijah Muhammad promoted Malcolm X to national spokesman, the person who would represent the leader when needed. Elijah Muhammad’s message was central to Malcolm X’s preaching and teaching. Malcolm X sought to restore to African Americans their sense of humanity. He did this through telling the NOI’s truth about the white man and highlighting blacks’ cultural connection to Africa. He articulated the simmering rage of African Americans about racism.

Malcolm X also wanted African Americans to learn to love themselves as blacks. Many African Americans seemed to accept that the norm of humanity was whiteness. Too many African Americans were striving to be like whites—whether they were conscious of this or not. Regarding what he considered blacks’ inordinate love for whites he said, “It is not possible for you to love a man whose chief purpose in life is to humiliate you and still be considered a normal human being” (Quoted in Lincoln, 1973 69-70).

Leaving the Nation of Islam

Regular disagreements between Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammad reflected Malcolm X's growing frustration with the Nation of Islam's practice of talking tough but taking no action. “You know, we talk about people being bitten by dogs and mowed down by fire hoses, we talk about our people being brutalized in the civil rights movement, and we haven’t done anything to help them. We haven’t done anything” (Karim 1992, 138). Malcolm X wanted the Nation of Islam to engage in the political arena. Elijah Muhammad only envisioned the NOI as a religious group confined to religious aspirations. Malcolm X hoped for more than just change in individuals brought about by religion; he desired revolution in society.

The lack of action or political involvement was not the only factor in his growing frustration with the Nation of Islam. Malcolm X also hungered for a closer relationship with worldwide Islam. International students from Islamic communities would approach him after a speech and ask him to consider experiencing what they would call “true Islam” (Malcolm X 1965c, 325). Elijah Muhammad’s son Wallace had studied Arabic and the Qur’an.
He recognized that the theology of the Nation of Islam was not consistent with that of orthodox Islam. Wallace shared his concerns and knowledge with Malcolm.

Malcolm X began to change the way he presented his message. On a television interview show in March 1963, a reporter asked what it meant to be a Muslim. Malcolm X answered, “One becomes a Muslim only by accepting the religion of Islam, which means belief in one God, Allah. Christians call him Christ, Jews call him Jehovah. Many people have many different names but he is the creator of the universe” (Malcolm X 1963, 159). He also spoke about the practices of Muslims in ways that mirrored the practices of Islamic people around the world. This was quite a departure from his normal fare of presenting his faith in terms of black separation and the exalted status of Elijah Muhammad as one who had seen Allah in human flesh.

Malcolm X’s growing dissatisfaction with the Nation of Islam would more than likely have led him to attempt to reform the NOI from within. But he departed from the NOI when he learned that Elijah Muhammad had engaged in a series of extramarital affairs with his young secretaries. The leader of a religion that forbade sex outside of marriage and excommunicated those who had committed such offenses was guilty of this same immoral behavior. Malcolm X’s wife Betty Shabazz said that her husband told her, “The foundation of my life seems to be coming apart” (DeCaro 1996, 190). His older brother Wilfred Little, also a minister in the NOI, noted, “All the wind was taken out of his sails when he realized what the Messenger had done” (Evanzz 1999, 261).

Malcolm X did not immediately leave the Nation of Islam after learning of Elijah Muhammad’s cover-up of his adultery. He struggled to stay in an organization that had profoundly changed his life and the lives of many others. His disappointment with his leader, as well as his desire to move closer to traditional Islam and to engage with the civil rights movement, were not the only factors affecting his standing in the Nation of Islam. Malcolm X’s popularity and influence threatened Elijah Muhammad’s inner circle of leaders and family members at the NOI headquarters in Chicago. Their jealousy led them to sabotage Malcolm X’s credibility with the Messenger and to plan for his demotion or expulsion.

Malcolm X provided them with an opportunity in a speech he gave after President John Kennedy’s assassination in November 1963. Elijah Muhammad told him to make no comments on the president’s death. Kennedy was popular with African Americans and Muhammad did not want any bad press for the NOI. In a question-and-answer session following his speech, Malcolm X responded to a question about the death of Kennedy. Using an illustration from farming, Malcolm said that, given the involvement of the United States in the assassinations of other world leaders, Kennedy’s assassination was a case of the chickens coming home to roost. This remark gained national attention. In response, Elijah Muhammad suspended Malcolm X for ninety days. Soon, the ninety-day suspension was extended indefinitely. Clearly, Malcolm X was no longer welcome in the organization he helped build.

Malcolm X’s new freedom caused him to appear like “a man coming out of a lightless cellar and blinking at the day” (Goldman 1979, 136). He himself said, “I feel like a man who has been asleep somewhat and under someone else’s control. I feel what I’m thinking and saying now is for myself. Before, it was for and by the guidance of Elijah Muhammad. Now I think with my own mind” (Malcolm X 1992, 173). Malcolm X embraced an agenda much broader than that of the Nation of Islam and became an agent for change in the entire African American community—not just as a minister of the Nation of Islam. The break with
the NOI gave him time to reflect on how he had changed and the freedom to embrace a new path. His last fifty weeks of life were to be his most creative.

**Joining World Islam**

On 8 March 1964, Malcolm X announced that he was leaving the Nation of Islam and launching a new mosque in New York City called the Muslim Mosque, Inc. “This gives us a religious base and the spiritual force necessary to rid our people of the vices that destroy the moral fiber of our community.... The Muslim Mosque, Inc., will remain wide open for ideas and financial aid from all quarters. Whites can help us, but they can’t join us. There can be no Black-white unity until there is first some Black unity” (Malcolm X 1990, 5). The launch of a new mosque “more closely linked him to the Muslim world. Establishing links with Sunni Islam invariably meant that he had to become more global in his approach to matters of race, religion, and politics” (Al-Hadid 2002, 74).

In April 1964, Malcolm X traveled to Mecca to make the hajj, the pilgrimage required of all Muslims who are physically and economically able to make it. This act sealed his relationship with traditional Islam and gave him credibility as a Muslim leader. The pilgrimage was also a time of personal conversion. It offered him the opportunity to embrace the fullness of his own humanity. “In my thirty-nine years on this earth, the Holy City of Mecca had been the first time I had ever stood before the Creator of All and felt like a complete human being” (Malcolm X 1965c, 372). His vision for his life’s work was also refocused. “I’m for truth, no matter who tells it. I’m for justice, no matter who it is for or against. I’m a human being first and foremost, and as such I’m for whoever and whatever benefits humanity as a whole” (373).

Malcolm X’s embrace of orthodox Sunni Islam allowed him to accept his own sense of self without dismissing the humanity of others. The pilgrimage showed him that whites were not inherently evil racists, and this permitted him to accept the full humanity of whites. They were not born devils. This first struck him on his way to Mecca, surrounded by Muslims of all races, including whites.

Packed in the plane were white, black, brown, red, and yellow people, blue eyes and blond hair, and my kinky red hair—all together, brothers! All honoring the same God Allah, all in turn giving equal honor to each other.... In America, “white man” meant specific attitudes and actions toward the black man, and toward all other non-white men. But in the Muslim world, I had seen that men with white complexions were more genuinely brotherly than anyone else had ever been. That morning was the start of a radical alteration in my whole outlook about “white” men (1965x, 330, 340).

Malcolm X became inclusive concerning race and religion. He made speeches around Harlem and elsewhere proclaiming, “True Islam taught me that it takes all of the religious, political, economic, psychological, and racial ingredients, or characteristics, to make the Human Family and the Human Society complete.” He declared that even his understanding of friendship had changed. “Since I learned the truth in Mecca, my dearest friends have come to include all kinds—some Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, agnostics, and even atheists! I have friends who are called capitalists, Socialists, and Communists! Some of my friends are moderates, conservatives, extremists—some are even Uncle Toms! My friends today are black, brown, red, yellow, and white!” (1965c, 382)

The pilgrimage to Mecca was also part of Malcolm X’s overall strategy to prepare for ministry in orthodox Islam. When he returned to the United States, following his conversion in Mecca and his changed view of whites, he was asked if he would start calling himself by his Muslim Arabic name, El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz. He replied, “I’ll continue to use Malcolm X as long as the situation that produced it exists. Going to Mecca was the solution to my personal problem; but it doesn’t solve the problem for my people” (Malcolm X 1964, 310). Malcolm X never changed his mind that “white American society was deeply and perhaps irretrievably racist—that our past and present together had so poisoned all of us, black and white, that we could not even look at one another independently of color and all that color meant
between us. Mecca remained one thing for him, America another” (Goldman 1979, 226).

**Reaching Out to Build New Partnerships**

After the pilgrimage to Mecca, Malcolm X visited several African countries. What Mecca provided spiritually, the African continent provided culturally and politically. Mecca offered his soul a homecoming. Africa gave his African identity “the emotional bath of the homecoming” (Goldman 1979, 172). In Nigeria, a student organization gave him the name Omowale, which means “the child has come home” in the Yoruba language. Malcolm X had previously exclaimed to students in Ghana, “I don’t feel that I am a visitor in Ghana or in any part of Africa. I feel that I am home” (Malcolm X 1965d, 11). Malcolm X was on the African continent nearly half of his last year of life.

Upon his return from Mecca and visits to several African countries, Malcolm X launched a second organization, the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU). Whereas Muslim Mosque, Inc., was a religious organization, the OAAU provided a vehicle for organizing that did not require members to become Muslims. Malcolm X declared at the founding of the OAAU, “We declare our right on this earth to be a man, to be respected as a human being, to be given the rights of a human being in this society, on this earth, in this day, which we intend to bring into existence by any means necessary” (Malcolm X 1970, 56).

Malcolm X focused on recruiting three groups to carry out his vision for the OAAU. The first group was “composed of progressive segments of the Black middle-class and working-class activists in Harlem united around a community-based agenda of and struggle against the common forms of ghetto exploitation.” The work for unity among Harlem blacks was an outgrowth of Malcolm X’s years as a minister of the Nation of Islam in New York City. The second group was the result of his trips overseas to engage “allies in Africa and the Third World who could get international recognition for his organization.” Finally he sought to build bridges to leaders “in the Civil Rights movement who supported Malcolm’s desire for reconciliation.” Through reaching out to African American students in the civil rights movement
he also gained “access to the radicalized White students” (Sales 1994, vii, viii).

The partnerships with leaders in Africa were quite successful as a result of his trips there in his last year of life. His vision included movements for social change and human rights throughout the world. He recognized similarities in liberation struggles in Africa, Asia, and Latin America with civil rights movements in the United States. His goal of better relationships with the civil rights leaders in the United States required humility on his part. He had been a harsh critic of the civil rights movement and its commitment to non-violence. But he reached out and asked to be given a second chance at relationship, noting that he was a different person, independent of the Nation of Islam and post-Mecca.

Most civil rights leaders welcomed Malcolm’s entreaties, including Martin Luther King Jr. A few weeks after Malcolm X announced his independence from the NOI, he and King were both in the visitor’s gallery of the United States Senate building for the debate on the Civil Rights Act of 1964. After the session, they spoke to each other and were interviewed jointly by a reporter who just happened to see them standing next to each other (see Evanzz 1992, 226f). King made contact with Malcolm X through his lawyer, Clarence Jones, suggesting the two meet to discuss the petition Malcolm X planned to present to the United Nations. A meeting was scheduled but did not occur (Cone 1991, 207). But they did speak several times by phone. According to William Kunstler, a lawyer who served both Malcolm X and King, “There was sort of an agreement that they would meet in the future and work out a common strategy, not merge their two organizations—Malcolm then had the Organization of Afro-American Unity and Martin, of course, was the president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference—but that they would work out a method to work together in some way” (Gallen 1992, 84).

Malcolm X was also seeking to build broader alliances with whites. He began proclaiming a more inclusive view of whites. “You will find that [Blacks and whites] will eventually meet down the road.... So we’re not against people because they’re white. But we’re against those who practice racism” (Malcolm X 1992, 143, 150). Speaking in England to students at Oxford University he declared: “In my opinion the young generation of whites, Blacks, browns, whatever else there is—you’re living at a time of extremism, a time of revolution, a time when there’s got to be a change... and a better world has to be built, and the only way it’s going to be built is with extreme methods. And I for one will join in with anyone, I don’t care what color you are, as long as you want to change this miserable condition that exists on this earth” (Malcolm X 1965d, 25-26).

**Malcolm X’s Last Days**

Malcolm X did not live long enough to see his vision realized in concrete form. “I can capsulize how I feel—I’m for the freedom of the 22 million Afro-Americans by any means necessary. By any means necessary. I’m for a society in which our people are recognized and respected as human beings, and I believe that we have the right to resort to any means necessary to bring that about. So when you ask me where I’m headed, what can I say? I’m headed in any direction that will bring us some immediate results” (quoted in Goldman 1979, 222).

The last few weeks of Malcolm X’s life were stressful. He was under intense surveillance from local, national, and international governmental agencies. He received regular death threats from members of the Nation of Islam because he stated publicly that their theology was bad and their leader was an adulterer. On 14 February, his house was set on fire by Molotov cocktails as he, his wife Betty (four months pregnant with twin girls), and their four daughters were sleeping. Malcolm X was nearly bankrupt. He tried to obtain life insurance to protect his family in case he was murdered. He was denied.

Malcolm X was scheduled to speak at an OAAU rally at the Audubon Grand Ballroom in Harlem on Sunday afternoon, 21 February 1965. He arrived about 3:00 pm. Malcolm X had called his wife, Betty, earlier and asked that she and the children come for the rally. Just before he went out into the ballroom to speak, Malcolm X said to one of his colleagues, “I just don’t feel right” (Goldman 1979, 4). After he greeted the audience, three men near the platform shot Malcolm X as his family and friends watched. He died shortly after being shot.
Prince Mohmaed Al-Faysal of Saudi Arabia had met Malcolm X on his pilgrimage to Mecca. He said of Malcolm X's death: "I think he was a great loss, especially to America. Because here is a man who has, in spite of his starting as a racist, sectarian person, developed into a force of reconciliation. And had he been given a chance, Malcolm would have changed American society, more than anybody else in recent history" (Strickland 1994, 230).


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XANTHIPPE'S SIDE OF THE DIALOGUE

I mourn him. More than once,
More than once, I said: Guard your tongue,
Curb your ungodly thinking — or at least
Leave it here in the house along with
Your nastiest barbs about domesticity,
While you stroll reverenced among the young
At the school.. Here, your own hardly know you.
My lips have been tempted to the lip
Of the cup you took, but I stay
To care for the Whom you left,
The What you left in the keeping
Of the bright one at the school. If I said it
Once, I said it over and again: He'll be
The death of you, the bright one, bruiting
Your every last word about the agora. Thus it was.
And so, Socrates, have you arrived at the truth?

Nancy G. Westerfield
Just Enough? Lutherans, Slavery, and the Struggle for Racial Justice

Richard M. Chapman

Beginnings
Frank Daniel Pastorius inaugurates this story with a flourish. A recent Lutheran émigré from Windsheim in the region of Bavaria, Pastorius prepared and presented an anti-slavery petition, the first of its kind in British America, at a Friends' Meeting in Germantown, Pennsylvania in 1688 (Nothstein, 101-105). This was a remarkable first, probably helped along by the strong anti-slavery culture of early Quaker Pennsylvania and Pastorius's friendship with William Penn, but would it be a precedent? Looking forward a century-and-a-half, Lutherans resided across the regions of an expanding nation and figured somehow on all sides of the peculiar institution. In some instances, they became slave owners; in others, they opposed slavery, but rarely did they become ardent Garrisonians. Lutheran newcomers, from Pastorius’s time to the first Scandinavian folk migrations of the nineteenth century, were naturally occupied with their own lives and daily concerns. The evidence reveals only scarce contact with free blacks or their organizations and communities.

Slave-Owning
That some Lutherans became slaveholders should come as no surprise. Despite regional variations, by 1700 slavery existed throughout British colonial America, including the Lutheran hearth of the Middle Colonies. One finds evidence of both slave and free black members in New York City’s first Lutheran congregation as early as 1669. Much later, pastor Wilhelm Christoph Berkenmeyer, ostensibly concerned that slave members might leverage freedom based on their equal calling as Christians, anticipated and nullified potential claimants in framing the church’s 1735 constitution. “In regard to the Negroses, a pastor shall previously ascertain that they do not intend to abuse their Christianity, to break the laws of the land, or to dissolve the tie...
of obedience; yea, he must have a positive promise that Christianity will not only be entered upon, but that the same shall be practiced in life” (quoted in Kreider, 56). The constitution addressed his own circumstance: Berkenmeyer owned a slave couple. He performed their baptisms and conducted their eventual marriage (Stange, 272).

Led by the Palatinate Germans who moved down the Shenandoah Valley into Virginia and the Carolinas, growing numbers of Lutherans settled in the South during the first half of the eighteenth century, and some became slave owners. The Salzburger Lutherans, expelled from their German homelands for religious reasons, began settling at Savannah, Georgia in the 1730s. Although they initially followed the lead of John M. Boltzius, one of their pastors who strongly opposed slavery, the Salzburgers began to accept the practice as a necessary feature of plantation agriculture. Religious leaders such as prominent evangelist George Whitefield condoned the use of slavery in Georgia, and Rev. Ursilper of Halle, spoke to soothe Boltzius's troubled conscience: “If you take slaves in faith, and with the intent of conducting them to Christ, the action will not be a sin, but it may prove a benediction” (Stange, 276). The Salzburgers thus validated slavery as a means to protect bondsmen and to inculcate the faith, especially among the young. Halle’s emissary and church organizer extraordinaire Henry Melchior Muhlenburg denounced slavery, but southern slave owners included clergy like George Samuel Klug of Hebron Church in Culpepper, Virginia, who identified with the colony’s aristocratic gentry and favored the institution as a material blessing (Roeder, 140–141). Up to nine slaves toiled in Hebron’s fields to offset church expenses and pay Klug’s salary, a labor force that expanded after his pastorate ended (Stange, 274).

Aside from the Salzburgers in Georgia, we know relatively little about Lutheran efforts to serve blacks, slave or free, until 1818 when Gottlieb Schober of the General Synod advocated mission work among both slaves and free blacks in the South. “It is the duty of the elders of such congregations among which Negroes are living as slaves or free,” he urged, “to provide a place for them in our churches; or when that cannot be done to build them a house adjoining or near to the church” (quoted in Johnson, 108). If Schober’s call posed little to any political threat, it had little effect. At most, between 1820 and the Civil War, Southern Lutherans baptized or added to memberships perhaps 10,000 African Americans, using primarily a master-slave strategy, the least politically objectionable approach in which slaves were inducted into the faith and church of the master (Johnson, 123, 128–129).

After the Missouri Compromise, as opposition to slavery and the internal slave trade grew, defending slavery as a regional virtue received greater priority than Christianizing slaves. Passing a resolution in 1835, the South Carolina Synod condemned abolitionists’ demands as “unjustifiable interference with our domestic institutions, [a subversion of constitutional liberties], and contrary to the precepts of our blessed savior, who commanded servants to be obedient to their masters, and the example of [Paul] who restored to his lawful owner a runaway slave” (quoted in Johnson, 122). Such pro-slavery positions, proofed by scripture, were indistinguishable from the South’s defense of its unique way of life. When the Civil War broke out in 1861, the Virginia Synod expressed the sense of all the southern synods, being “fully persuaded” that the Confederate cause “is just and righteous” (quoted in Anderson, 49).

**Anti-Slavery and Abolition**

Eventually sectional tensions destroyed the unity that Lutheran leaders worked doggedly to maintain, just as they drove apart the fellowship of Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians. The General Synod split along regional lines in 1862. But not all Lutherans in the South saw slavery as worth defending. For instance, debate surfaced among Lutherans in the Upper South during the 1820s about the morality of slavery. When the Tennessee Synod held sessions in 1822, one delegate impugned slavery as a “great evil in our land” (Johnson, 110). Such views were more common in eastern Tennessee whose mountainous terrain did not support plantation agriculture and whose residents owned very few slaves. Half of the anti-slavery men in the North Carolina legislature in the 1820s were German (Johnson, 110). As debates over slavery after 1840 brooked little compromise, some Lutherans in the Upper South, wishing to free their slaves, moved north of the Ohio Valley to do so.
Most Lutherans, particularly in the Lower South, whether they were slaveholders or not, were likely committed to the Southern way of life, including slave-owning and white racial superiority.

In the North, Lutherans exercised even less evangelistic vigor among African-Americans, nor did they, understandably, agitate for the equal inclusion of free blacks in educational, political, and public life. At the time, very few whites challenged the northern color line. Samuel Schmucker, founder of the first Lutheran Seminary in North America at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania (1826), emerges as one figure who fused the tasks of building schools and seeking social justice that Marty observed were usually divided. An outspoken proponent of an American Lutheran church, Schmucker firmly opposed chattel slavery and used his offices to bring young theologians into the fold of abolitionism (Wentz, 167). Daniel Alexander Payne, foremost African Methodist Episcopal churchman of his generation, took his training at Gettysburg Seminary in 1826, emerges as one figure who fused the tasks of building schools and seeking social justice that Marty observed were usually divided. An outspoken proponent of an American Lutheran church, Schmucker firmly opposed chattel slavery and used his offices to bring young theologians into the fold of abolitionism (Wentz, 167). Daniel Alexander Payne, foremost African Methodist Episcopal churchman of his generation, took his training at Gettysburg Seminary in the mid-1830s and later received ordination at the hands of the tiny Franckean Synod of New York. Payne made clear from the start that he wished neither to join the Lutheran Church nor to be bound by its theological positions (Johnson, 120–121). Still, it is worth recalling that Gettysburg Seminary and the Franckean Lutherans sponsored Payne’s influential career.

The Franckean Synod later adopted a radical abolitionist stance in declaring moral war against slavery. In 1838, seven years after initial publication of William Lloyd Garrison’s strident Liberator, the synod’s president rallied his listeners to break silence on the slavery topic and railed against the “apathy of Christians and the silence of ministers of [the] gospel… to rebuke the sin of slavery.” The synod passed with universal accord a Garrisonian resolution: “That we conceive it to be our imperative duty to speak boldly and plainly against this great national and heinous sin [of slavery]” (Heathcote, 54–55). In the 1840s, the Franckean Synod introduced anti-slavery resolutions at General Synod meetings with little success; only two small Ohio synods and the Pittsburgh Synod followed its lead in the 1840s. The Franckean alone called for action (Fortenbaugh, 76f). On the whole, Lutherans did not become strong anti-slavery advocates, nor did they champion the cause of free blacks in the North or the South. Historian Abdel Wentz notes the partial exception of Norwegian and Swedish newcomers who easily preferred the Midwest over the South and viewed slavery as unrighteous even as their clergy extemporized (Wentz, 164–166). Many probably harbored private qualms that slavery was immoral while outwardly, most tolerated or passively accepted the practice when they did not support it outright. Since racial slavery was the law of the land, tethered to the Constitution itself, Lutherans apparently followed a familiar pattern of firm, if not absolute, allegiance to the temporal governing authorities, as Martin Luther himself urged his followers at the time of the Knights’ Rebellion and the Peasants’ War of the 1520s. That such was the central tendency and not an inevitable outcome can be discerned in the appearance of individuals, congregations, and synods of the Lutheran heritage determined to abolish slavery. In 1850 the Norwegian Eielsen Synod denounced the “fearful sin of giving our consent to the slave traffic,” and advocated “all possible diligence in bringing about… the freeing of the negroes” (Fortenbaugh, 90).

Reconstruction and Beyond

Lutherans participated in the great national drama of Reconstruction as four million slaves were freed and the nation confronted with uncertainty the emergence of black citizenship. As early as 1861, Lutheran congregations and synods sent financial aid, volunteers, and teachers to the South. Renewed missionary efforts followed and a permanent church-planting enterprise began in 1877, even as the light of Reconstruction flickered out (Wentz, 166; Johnson, 146–148). Lutheran leaders in the South fiddled between, on the one hand, maintaining the status quo ante bellum and, on the other, training and licensing black leadership to serve autonomous black congregations. Anticipating the future, the Tennessee Synod declared for the second of the two, “owing to the plainly marked distinctions which God has made between us and them, giving different colors, etc.” (quoted in Anderson, 211). Separatism as a strategy subtly recognized that freedmen, as in slavery, wished to form their own religious communities, showed little interest and less desire to follow white ecclesiastical authorities
or church regulations. Realistically, Lutherans could not hope to compete with Baptists and Methodists who held many advantages in claiming or retaining African-Americans, since their style, structure, and spirit were more attuned to the existential situation of black folk.

Even so, results were unimpressive. In 1869 the South Carolina Synod stopped reporting figures on black membership. The project to sponsor separate black congregations gained little momentum, became caught in organizational indecision, and succumbed to dwindling moral commitment and meager financial resources. It petered out in the 1880s. “The only ordained colored Lutheran minister in the world,” as D. J. Koontz was known, provided the notable exception. His North Carolina congregations, set adrift by the General Synod of the South and rebuffed by the General Synod of the North, appealed finally to the Missouri Synod who dispatched a missionary in 1891 (see Anderson, 215–217).

Lutherans’ gifts to black citizenship were thus marked by parsimony and limited to acts of mercy, yet works of mercy and charity were certainly necessary. Retrospectively, one wishes there had been more, not less mercy, in this historical moment. Tragically, the larger cause of racial justice was deferred.

One of us can change the lived past, yet its history remains malleable, inviting, ever open to fresh visioning. It would thus be a grave error to forget that Lutherans boasted several earnest, not so quiescent, anti-slavery members. They sought to achieve a civic justice for black Americans by conforming the nation’s social and political institutions to standards of peace, inclusion, and democratic participation for all.

This brings us to the present, ground on which historians are reluctant to tread. Sadly, whether we care to admit it or not, evidence has mounted for some time that we are rapidly retreating as a nation from the political commitment and moral vision required to roll back racial injustice. Hurricane Katrina and the plight of black New Orleans shock us into momentary recognition but represent just a microcosm of our racially divided society and its woeful inequalities. Our collective values and priorities are surely implicated in a society that relegates black males to the nation’s jails and penitentiaries in grossly distorted numbers (Loury), whose schools and neighborhoods are as “separate and unequal” as ever (Kozol), and whose system of rewards and punishments favors the victorious and leaves the losers behind.

Adapting John Rawls’s concept of justice, Brown sociologist Glenn Loury would have us ask ourselves: “What social rules would we pick if we actually thought that they could be us?” (61). With this simple yet provocative question, Loury turns the racial tables by positing an alternative world where the privileged get demoted to the base of the social pyramid. Going beyond an imagined inverted world—and its potential to challenge business as usual in the present one—a gospel of Incarnation points to a more active, radical understanding: “Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40). No distancing from the other is conceivable here. The terrain on which the seed of injustice takes root and sprouts is taken up. What difference would it make if our witness and work to advance racial justice took this as its starting point? I would like to believe that the results would amount to more than just enough.

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Works Cited


Finding the Sacred in the Ordinary


*Poetry and spirituality have long walked the same intellectual pathways, closely bonded cousins, if not quite fraternal twins. The Bible itself contains some of the world’s oldest, best-known poetry. Throughout the ages, great mystics like John of the Cross and Jalaluddin Rumi, in the Sufi tradition, wrote poetry as if poems were natural heirs to a life of prayer and contemplation. Arguably the most popular poet in America today is Mary Oliver, whose explorations of nature almost always lead to meditations on the life of the spirit. Oliver’s is a poetry of both the natural and metaphysical worlds, the body and the soul.

The priest-poet is also a time-honored tradition. John Donne was an Anglican clergyman, Gerard Manley Hopkins a Jesuit, and Thomas Merton a Trappist monk. Larry Janowski is a Franciscan priest from Chicago. Janowski’s is one of two collections with spiritual themes to emanate from small, independent Chicago presses in the past year. The other is “Chasing the Saints” by Donna Pucciani, a public school teacher who has written two previous collections.

The books are distinct in tone and theme. Janowski writes with gritty reverence about the city. He finds moments of transcendence even in the grim daily headlines of *The Chicago Tribune*. Pucciani’s book is a series of profiles and persona poems about Catholic saints. She subtitled the book “Poetic Encounters” and approaches her subjects much as a tell-all biographer might. She gives us a St. Francis with dirt under his nails, a Teresa of Avila who fears deep water and dislikes fishcakes.

Judith Valente

Neither collection, happily, descends into the pious, sentimental, didactic or devotional tone that plagues what often passes for “religious” poetry. If either collection is “religious” at all, it is so in one of the original senses of the word: to look upon the world around us with reverence and awe. Both collections confirm my belief that much of contemporary poetry is spiritual. This view runs contrary to conventional wisdom and would dismay those post-modern, post-narrative writers who believe experience largely has stripped language of meaning. But the fact is, many contemporary poems uncover the sacred in the ordinary. God may merit a mention in these poems, but God is in them, in the details.

Chicago is Father Janowski’s “City Of God” and his “Interior Castle.” Its immigrants, second- and third-generation Poles and Irish, its street people, salespeople and daily commuters are his modern-day prophets. The collection’s title poem relates the true story of an eight-year-old boy who witnessed his younger brother plummet from a window in the Ida B. Wells housing project. A group of boys had dangled the five-year-old out a fourteenth story window as punishment for refusing to steal candy. The older boy desperately races down flights of stairs to try to catch his younger brother. Two Chicago boys, the poet says “I never knew, who will not let go.”

...falling

is

like drowning...

but air cares even less

than water, lets you

slip through

without even a wake

to mark your passing...

From “BrotherKeeper”
Janowski reads the urban landscape as if it was a book of scripture. It is a reading that sometimes ends in solace, sometimes in insight but more often than not, in mystery. In the poem, “Get Your Streetwise!” (the title refers to newspaper homeless people hawk on corners for a dollar), Janowski encounters a feisty street person who accuses him of harboring a gun in his shoulder satchel.

I
always hold the bag like that
don't want it to slam into people
never touched a gun
can turn it inside out
spill guts on the street
here
look
ungraded papers
poetry books
candy wrappers
look look
pencils
nothing

From “Get Your Streetwise!”

Many of his poems are odes to the city where he grew up, and where he teaches writing at Wright Community College and says Masses for a small community of Felician Sisters on the Northwest side.

Chicago eats light, sucks it in
like a black hole, hoards it
like a radium dial planning
to stay awake all night because
light—like the grass and flesh
we devour, decays. We
need more. Always. But
unlike broad green leaves
that take their sun straight,
we cannot look full on light
and live. We need the tempering
of angels, moons, or cities...

From “Luminaria”

Janowski mostly shies away from poems that describe his life in a men’s religious order. He explains: “St. Francis used to say, when you have an experience of God, you shouldn't talk about it because you're somehow wasting it.” But there are deft references throughout the poems. He savors the hairdresser’s touch washing his hair. He looks with self-mocking humor at his naked body which “no one sees … except in the eyes off / locker room kind of glance.” Those poems that do deal with his priestly life are searing and authentic. In one, he takes an unsentimental look at the vow he took to forgo sexual intimacy.

If this is what
it costs to hold
at heart a hollow
where no sparrow
lives (nothing alive
that needs light),

if this is what God
expects from Yes,
then it is too much
today, although
I pay it anyway...

From “What Celibacy Is”

To read Janowski's poems is to gain a deeper level of seeing and believing, to arrive at a place, as Mary Oliver once described it, where one sees “through heavenly visibles to the heavenly invisibles.”

LIKE JANOWSKI, PUCCIANI IS A POET OF THE SACRED IN THE ORDINARY. Her collection “Chasing the Saints” builds on the premise that what makes these men and women holy is, in many ways, their very ordinarness. Her cast of characters includes well-known luminaries: St. Michael the Archangel, St. Patrick, St. Therese of Lisieux, St. Paul, and St. Anthony. But there are lesser-knowns too, like Blessed Kateri Tekawitha, a Mohawk Indian not yet a full-fledged saint, but on her way to canonization; St. Lutgarde, a thirteenth Century Belgian monastic who levitates at prayer, and San Gennaro, patron saint of Naples. A vial of his dried blood is said to periodically liquefy and bubble up in its case.

Occasionally Pucciani steps out of ancient times into the present or near-present, as when she
describes her grandmother Giuseppina’s bedroom shrine to St. Therese of Lisieux.

Black-veiled, brown-robed, with strawberry lips and wimberry eyes and hands full of roses, you stand a foot tall on the nightstand alongside St. Francis, a bird on his left shoulder, Jesus, his actual heart exposed and beating in arterial splendor, and Mary in chipped blue robes that need a good dusting…

From “St. Therese Meets Giuseppina at the Bedroom Shrine”

But Pucciani is at her best when she is imagining new narratives for her pious subjects. St. Jude, patron of hopeless causes, is reduced to hearing the pleas of the aged in nursing homes, who expect, well, miracles. St. Anthony, finder of lost items, has wearied of the people who can’t even locate what’s under their noses.

Favorite item today: umbrellas—it seems to be raining everywhere from Hong Kong to Beirut. Yesterday: sunglasses especially in Australia…

From “St. Anthony of Padua”

St. Cecilia, patroness of musicians, endures an eternal rest eternally interrupted by drummers, flutists, oboe players, and constant strains of Vivaldi, Wagner, jazz, and Motown.

At night I leave them to their own devices in jazz clubs or locked in practice rooms drinking black coffee and running arpeggios into the ground. But I promise I will wake them in the early clear-throated morning, gargled, lozenged and rosined, knuckle-cracked and ready to play…

From “St. Cecilia Tells All”

Despite her flights of imagination, Pucciani does stay close to the historical record, quoting often from the saints’ own writings (A final entry in St. Teresa of Avila’s breviary: Hold God, and naught shall fail thee). Many previous poetry collections have recast narratives of the Bible. It is a wonder that the saints have not come in more often for this same type of re-envisioning. Pucciani does it with humor and aplomb. ♦

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A NET OF SEVEN GRACES
four poems on some words of Meister Eckhart

1
like a word
unspoken, I slept
in what god knew
before
the first beginning,
for the last end.

2
nothing in common
In the soul, there is
a blood relative of god
that has nothing
in common with nothing.
It is not, like nothingness, nothing.
The I with which I see god
is the I with which god sees me.

3
if I did not know
Every creature possesses
an infinite capacity
to take god in, god
an uncontrollable desire to be
taken. God
falls, every time.

4
a net of seven graces
Drawn by a trinity with cords
of power, wisdom, love, it is
emptiness that takes us in.
Sin makes a satan
of the soul. It makes an
entrepreneur of intersections.
Every act of will contains eternity.

Steven Schroeder
The Dine’s Dilemma
Balancing Economic Development and Environmental Protection

Ezra Rosser

If you want to get from Farmington, New Mexico to Shiprock, New Mexico, there are two possible routes, each with distinct advantages and disadvantages. If you take the main route—the one that doesn’t require you to make any turns and directly connects main street in Farmington with the main drag, if you can call it that, in Shiprock—you experience the transition between southwestern border towns and Indian reservations.

You feel the transition first hand as you drive west. You do not need to see the sign welcoming you to the Navajo Nation, although the sign itself occasionally has tourists clustered around it, recording for posterity their entrance onto “Indian Country.” For northwest New Mexico, Farmington is a shopping mecca: a seemingly endless parade of big box stores. The cultural hub of the town is perhaps the spot where you can find the Farmington Mall on one side of the street and a Sam’s Club/Wal-mart complex on the other. But as you drive west of town, the shopping gets grittier, the box stores make way for a junk yard and Teli Txoi (literally “donkey water” in the Dine language of the Navajo), the last place you can get alcohol before you enter the dry Navajo Nation.

The road hurries you on to Shiprock, an on-reservation town that itself boasts a shopping center but of a sort that can itself be an “experience” for non-Indian tourists entering Shiprock for the first time. Small clusters of sand and an occasional ball of dried up sagebrush (“tumble weed”) dot the parking lot, and the shopping options seem limited: a grocery, a hardware store, a video rental store, and curiously a legal aid office. Used to shopping centers, many non-Indian tourists fail to recognize that the cluster of pickups they saw as they drove into town was an outdoor market, complete with amazing sandwiches of mutton wrapped in fry bread.

The other route from Farmington to Shiprock is known only to locals. It requires a slight southerly detour past a combination gas station, trading post, and laundry mat. Unlike the main route, this road puts you almost immediately onto the reservation. Continuing west, you go by a cluster of houses and from a sign you learn that these smallish ramblers were built by the Navajo Housing Authority. Just beyond that, besides a few trailers or hogans (a traditional eight-sided house made of logs and mud) and the requisite barking dog, the high desert landscape seems to open up. That is until you spot the power plant; a spectacle that is all the more surprising when it announces its presence through the million different lights that define its structure even at night. The image of this alien presence, with its constant plume of smoke, lingers with you all the way to the turn off onto the former New Mexico Route 666 (the name had to be changed because so many signs kept getting stolen) that takes you into Shiprock from the south.

In some respects the Navajo Nation is choosing as a nation to take this second route. If the tribal government has its way, a new coal fired power plant, owned in part by the Navajo Nation, will be built south of the existing plant. The Navajo Nation has long been involved in the business of energy, but the Desert Rock power plant breaks new ground because the tribal government is not merely selling coal to a mining company; it is putting its own weight behind the power plant. The plant promises to generate tribal revenue and local jobs as well as electricity. Given the poverty found on the Navajo Nation, where 31.4% of the population is below the poverty line and median household income is only $22,979 compared to $48,451 for the United States as a whole, supporting the power plant might seem the only option available to tribal politicians.
But though it has the support of the Navajo Nation, not all Diné are behind the power plant. "Diné" can be translated as “the people,” and it is the name tribal members call themselves, but on the issue of the power plant, some of “the people” are upset about their government’s decision to pursue economic development at the cost of the environment. In 1970, President Richard Nixon spoke to Congress about the situation facing Indian tribes. He said, “The first Americans—the Indians—are the most deprived and most isolated minority group in our nation. On virtually every scale of measurement—employment, income, education, health—the condition of the Indian people ranks at the bottom.” While Indian scholars now describe Indians more as political groups than as racial groups, and though a few Indian gaming tribes have come to dominate the popular perception of Indians, Nixon’s words remain true today.

The world is not black and white, but at times it can seem that way. When the United States government decided not to release a report that would have helped the Navajo Nation negotiate a better royalty rate for tribal coal on Black Mesa, the good guys could easily be separated from the bad guys. Peabody Coal Company paid $13,000 to get a close personal friend of the Secretary of the Interior to lobby on their behalf, a lobbying effort that was not reported to the tribe and that resulted in the Bureau of Indian Affairs’s recommendation about a proper royalty rate not being released to the tribe. The Secretary of the Interior supported Peabody over the Navajo Nation despite the United States’ legally recognized trust responsibilities to Indian tribes. Peabody and the United States: Bad. Indians: Good.

But of course, a simplistic worldview overlooks complications. The Navajo Nation did agree, albeit for a royalty rate that was falsely low, to the environmental degradation that took place on Black Mesa. Similarly, if the Desert Rock power plant becomes operational, the Navajo Nation itself will be initiating the environmental harms associated with the plant. As Winona LaDuke wrote in a recent Indian Country Today editorial opposing a similar power plant that is being planned near the Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota reservation in South Dakota, “there is no such thing as clean coal, as there is no clean coal strip mining.” Social justice minded people find themselves caught between conflicting, simultaneously operating progressive ideals: support of indigenous people and environmental protection.

Most Indian advocates resolve this conflict by pretending it does not exist. Indian tribes are sovereign nations and as sovereign nations should be able to pick their own path. If their chosen path upsets non-Indians, too bad. Or put more strongly, Indian sovereignty is meaningless if Indian tribes can only make the decisions that non-Indians would have them make. For example, in a 1993 law review article, Kevin Gover, now head of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian, together with Jana L. Walker, argued in support of the Campo Band of Mission Indians’ plan to open a solid waste dump on their reservation to serve demand generated by San Diego. They concluded: “The guiding principle and overriding goal of congressional policy toward Indian tribal governments are self-determination and
economic self-sufficiency.... Congress must avoid environmental paternalism... If and when a tribal community decides it wishes to pursue such a project, Congress should not only accept, but also respect that decision."

Yet the choice of the Navajo Nation to pursue coal-based power should not be so easily bracketed off as one not subject to debate. Economic development and poverty reduction must be a central focus of the tribal government, but Desert Rock is one of many options. Though uranium mining holds out the promise of generating revenue and local jobs, the tribal council recently banned all such mining on the reservation. The tribe also recently rejected a "big box store" proposal that would have brought some of the big box stores found in border towns into reservation towns. Attracting the box stores would have required the tribe to make a large bond issuance to finance the necessary construction. The tribe rejected this proposal because it was seen as risky and because it was seen as mortgaging the future. Desert Rock is not financially risky for the tribe—the Navajo Nation has high quality low sulfur coal—but it perhaps will have a more lasting impact on the future than commercial mortgages would have.

Legally, the Navajo Nation and other tribes should, as sovereign nations, have the right to pursue this and other sorts of economic development over the objections of non-Indians. Given the economic hardships facing many Indian communities, negative environmental spillovers onto non-Indian communities from on reservation coal-based power to some degree should not be protested. Indian tribes, including the Navajo Nation, in their advocacy of their rights to land, sovereignty, and justice increasingly have turned to international human rights norms and bodies. These bodies have shown a willingness to recognize rights that the United States Supreme Court has not, and to find violations of the rights of indigenous peoples that our own country denies are violations. The harder questions will come when those same institutions turn against tribes that pursue projects that go against other international legal norms, such as environmental rights that all people, Indian and non-Indian, can claim.

For those who like to think of the world in black or white, it would perhaps have been better never to have driven between Farmington and Shiprock, never to have had to choose between the main route and the alternative. Thinking about Indians from a distance allows us to imagine them as timeless peoples, existing above the tradeoffs that plague the rest of society. But as you drive from Farmington to Shiprock, you are forced to recognize the tradeoffs Indian nations face between economic development and commercialism or environmental degradation. Romantic notions of "Indians" must make way for a more nuanced understanding of the Dine.✨

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Breaches of Faith
Dispatch from the Continuing Battlefield
of Hurricane Katrina

Everyone has a story. For the last twenty-nine years, I have worked as an English professor at the University of New Orleans, and for twenty-two of those years, I have held positions in the UNO administration, since 2003 as Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs, the position I held when Hurricane Katrina blew through New Orleans in the summer of 2005. Katrina’s winds died away in a matter of hours, and its flood waters were pumped out in a few weeks, but the long aftermath of its devastation continues to this day in late April of 2008 and will continue for years longer. The only appropriate analogy for what happened here is that of war. Two years and eight months after the storm, little over half of our residents have returned to our city, not exclusively because only about half of our housing stock has been returned to habitability. Some 1,100 of our fellow citizens died, and a quarter million remain displaced, many now, no doubt, permanently. But among those who survived, all were displaced for at least a month while the city was drained and the burst levees temporarily patched.

The national media have portrayed the destruction of New Orleans as an African-American story. And since prior to Katrina 72 percent of our citizens in the municipality of New Orleans were black, and since our black citizens were more likely to be poor, documented suffering in the African-American community has been established as vast and profound. Nonetheless, Katrina was a color-blind and class-indifferent scourge, and the torments of her flood waters were inflicted on New Orleanians of every skin pigment and income bracket. The houses in the storied Lower Ninth Ward, where most of the residents were working-class African-Americans, were washed off their foundations. But the damage was just as extensive in New Orleans East where most of the residents were middle- and professional-class African Americans. And the flooding was even deeper in Lakeview where most of the residents were middle-class whites and in Gentilly, near UNO, where the races were about evenly mixed.

There can be no doubt that, as is always true, recovery has been easier for the more prosperous of our citizens. Those with adequate insurance have been able to rebuild more quickly than those who have had to rely on federal emergency funding that has been administered in the state bureaucratic Purgatory called The Road Home Program. But New Orleanians of whatever race or class still greet each other upon a first post-Katrina meeting by asking, “How did you do in the storm?” That’s because we all know that we all suffered to a greater or lesser degree.

Everyone has a story. And with regard to Katrina, this is mine, and because of the position I hold and the responsibilities that I bear, this is also the story of UNO.

My wife Joyce and I grew up in New Orleans, and neither of our families ever evacuated for a hurricane, not in the face of the direct hit by Betsy in 1965 nor the near miss of Camille in 1969. But with global warming and the radical disappearance of our coastal wetlands, which long served to absorb a storm’s fury and strip away its power, Joyce and I determined that we should best follow advice to flee in front of severe storms, and we did so for Category 4 Hurricane Ivan in 2004. Most of the city went with us. The evacuation was a harrowing mess. Traffic crawled at under ten miles per hour, and Joyce and I took eight hours, instead of the usual hour and fifteen minutes, to reach a motel on the eastern side of Baton Rouge, the only hotel accommodations we were able to secure anywhere within three-hundred miles of New Orleans. But Ivan twisted off to the east, and New Orleans was spared.

By Friday afternoon on 26 August 2005, New Orleans had fallen into Hurricane Katrina’s danger
cone, though the storm was still supposed to make landfall far to our east. Nonetheless, at 4:30 PM on that last day of our first week of school that fall, several administrators, including UNO Chancellor Tim Ryan, gathered in my office for a conversation about the storm. We agreed to watch the storm overnight and, if necessary, meet about it on campus the next day. We then adjourned to attend a beginning-of-the-year reception for faculty and staff.

After the reception, I stopped by the New Student Luau, which was just getting underway on campus nearby. As always our students arrived in a delightfully diverse mix. Just under half of our students qualified as minority, over half of those African-American. About ten percent were international students from almost one-hundred different countries. And all this wonderful rainbow of young humanity seemed to have turned out for the luau that night. So it was with bursting pride that I milled about that evening, greeting the new students. A good breeze was blowing, making the New Orleans summer night unseasonably comfortable, and I lingered with pleasure. UNO seemed headed in a promising direction, poised to realize our considerable dreams for it as an educational leader for our entire region. That night, with an energized enrollment of 17,250, is a place to which, approaching three years after the storm, we long to return.

When I arrived home that night, Joyce warned me that Katrina was intensifying, and now projected to go ashore on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, only about one-hundred miles to the east. By morning, the news was worse yet. Computers now had Katrina making a direct hit on our city as a Category 5 storm. Our UNO administrative group met on campus at 9:00 AM and activated our hurricane emergency plan, each of us in the meeting contacting our unit supervisors to inform them that we were closing campus, securing our buildings, arranging for the buses to evacuate those of our students without their own transportation and, to protect it from damage, shutting down our conventional Internet and email operations by the end of the day. As I rang off with each of the deans and directors who reported to me, I wished them safety and told them that I would see them soon, presumably on Tuesday, the day after the storm would pass. We hoped we could resume classes on Wednesday. But, ultimately, we would lose the entire beginning of the semester.

By the time I got back to my Uptown house around 2:30, Joyce had what then seemed encouraging news. She had managed to find us airline tickets on a flight out of town that night. We had joked in the early morning that we would be happy to book “tickets to anywhere,” just to avoid the inevitable traffic snarl, but Joyce had bought tickets on a 7:00 PM Delta flight to Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina, less than an hour's drive from Sanford where my mother lived.

The year before, for Ivan, we had packed our car with all kinds of supplies, had remembered to pack financial records and grab a bag of treasured photographs. We also packed a week's worth of clothes including business suits. But Ivan was a hurricane season's example of “cry wolf,” and our experience with Ivan diluted our fear. We'd be home on Tuesday, we presumed, so we took only four days' changes of underwear. We packed only jeans, shorts and T-shirts, no financial records, no photographs. Our major worry now became getting to the airport, which lay along the evacuation route toward Baton Rouge. Spaces were not available for airport parking, so we had to order a cab, and we knew that the ride, normally twenty minutes, was probably going to take three hours. We parked our cars next to one another in the garage with no inkling that we'd never drive them again.

The traffic was exactly as we feared, and Joyce and I worried our watches as we inched ahead. Along the way, we talked with our driver, a thin African-American man in a snap-brim cap who appeared to be about seventy. A hint of gray whiskers suggested he'd been working since early morning, but his pressed white shirt remained crisp. He told us he was probably just going to ride the storm out. He'd driven out for Ivan in a caravan with his brother, their mother, and their two families. They drove all the way past Jackson, Mississippi, up Interstate 55 but couldn't find a single place to stay. They ended up sleeping in their cars, and he wasn't going to do that again. Anyway, the weathermen always seemed to get it wrong because the storms never came to New Orleans. We told him we thought he ought to watch the news carefully and consider getting out, but he said he probably wouldn't leave this time under much of any cir-
cumstances. As he dropped us at the airport less than thirty minutes before our scheduled flight, we wondered if he would turn out to be the smart one. Just avoid the aggravation, go home, and wait for Katrina to turn east as had so many other storms before. I think of that cab driver often, always with a prayer that he changed his mind and got himself and his family to safety.

One might imagine that Louis Armstrong Airport was a madhouse, but it was more like a vast cathedral at twilight. The cafés and shops were closed. The unused gate lounges hunkered in darkness. As if a plane might leave before its departure time, no one milled about. And in those gate areas still operating, people spoke to each other in whispers. Joyce and I were on a plane departing from Gate 2. The rest of the concourse was dark. Joyce and I were on the last Delta flight out of Dodge. A nervous woman in her late forties sat down beside me. She was dressed in a pink suit and red shoes, and she looked tired. She was in town for a convention and was supposed to go home the next day, but she had learned that the airport was shutting down and wouldn't support any flights on Sunday. A few moments later an agent appeared at our gate, and the woman moved to speak with her, her shoulders sagging as the conversation progressed. Head down, she walked back past me toward the main terminal. I doubt she found an empty seat that night, and like the cab driver I have worried about her ever since. She would have had a hard time even finding transportation back to her hotel in downtown New Orleans, and she actually wouldn't have wanted to end up there anyway. I can only assume that the next several days were among the worst in her life.

As ticketed passengers, Joyce and I were far luckier, but if, for whatever reason, our plane didn't fly, we were in the same circumstances as the distraught lady in the pink suit, in our case about twelve miles from home and with no way to get there. You can imagine our discomfort when the departure was delayed. But finally, the boarding process commenced, and Joyce and I were able to settle into our seats. But a long delay followed after all the passengers were seat-belted in, and Joyce and I exchanged our concerns that the flight might be cancelled. Finally, a gate agent, a flight attendant, and a pilot stood together in the front of the plane to announce that the aircraft was overweight and that they needed four passengers to deplane. When no one volunteered, they offered enticements: hotel rooms in the downtown Hilton and $200 flight coupons. No one raised a hand, so they upped the ante to include $400 flight coupons. Still, no one agreed to surrender a seat.

I whispered to Joyce, “They aren't going to get anyone off this plane without a police escort.”

She said, “Fluff your jacket up around you and start looking skinny.”

I presume Delta solved the overweight problem by pulling off luggage, for no passenger deplaned. A few minutes later we pushed back from the gate and taxied away from an almost dark airport. Joyce and I held hands as we roared west down the runway, still spooked by the overweight announcement. Others, we learned, tamped down the same fear, and after the plane lifted off and seemed to gain critical altitude, relieved applause broke out throughout the passenger cabin. Out over the wetlands of the Bonnet Carre Spillway, the plane banked right and flew in a rising arc over Interstate 10 where cars with their headlights pointing west seemed to be parked for miles in either direction.

From the refuge of my mother's house in North Carolina, along with the rest of America, Joyce and I watched on television as Hurricane Katrina slammed ashore. New Orleans took the shock wave of wind and largely held. The levees, raised in the 1980s, proved high enough and were not overtopped. National news reporters assayed the damage and announced more than once that "New Orleans has dodged a bullet." But the news reports, of course, were horribly misinformed. The poorly constructed, inadequately maintained levees were high enough but not strong enough, and they burst from the pressure of the high water behind them. And seemingly, none of this was understood in its entirety for days.

Sometime on Tuesday, 30 August 2005, television news began to report the breach on the 17th Street Canal. Joyce and I knew instantly the horror this meant, and we didn't know a fifth of what was really going on because no one seemed to have discovered that other levees had failed as well. For a time we clung to a desperate hope that plans to drop railroad boxcars into the 17th Street Canal breach
Crying with the Saints and Sinners: NOLA

Aimee Tomasek

The effects of Katrina have been felt for years at this point. The sun has bleached the affected areas, and the smell is not as bad as it was two years ago, one year ago, one month ago.

The wind has blown loose debris away.

These images were made at Carver High School in the Upper Ninth Ward and Lawless High School in the Lower Ninth Ward.

Many lives were taken away, hope was taken away, many futures were taken away. Artifacts that remind us of the special history this city possesses are held only as memories in photographs that painfully and poetically document the events and effects of Katrina.

Aimee Tomasek
Assistant Professor of Art, Valparaiso University
would plug the hole and stop the flood. But as that
day wore on and gave way to the nightmarish blur
of the days to come, officials announced that they
had no recourse but to let the sea water “equalize” inside the bowl of the city. New Orleanians,
wherever they had fled, watched as our city filled
with water. Soon, the airwaves burst with footage
of terrified people being plucked from rooftops
in baskets lowered from Coast Guard helicopters.
And then came the wrenching reports of the suffer­ing of people abandoned in the Superdome and the
Convention Center. Buses didn't arrive to transport
them to safety. A vicious heat wave added to their
misery. Ultimately, outrage and anger flared. And,
inevitably, some violence too. But much of what the
broadcast media reported was exaggerated. No one
was beheaded. No children were raped. But there’s
little question that in the withering heat of the days
after Katrina, New Orleans went to hell.

Since our cell phones wouldn’t work, in
what now seems almost improbable foresight, UNO Chancellor Tim Ryan and I had exchanged the landline phone numbers of the family members offering us refuge, and so we were able to stay in contact. Eventually, we both discovered that text messaging on our cell phones still functioned, as did many other adults who had never used text messaging before, and with that understanding we were gradually able to make contact with our vice chancellors and deans. By Wednesday, 31 August, we decided that as soon as possible our team of senior administrators should gather in Baton Rouge to devise and implement a recovery plan for our university.

The primary problem with the plan to head­quarter in Baton Rouge was housing. Louisiana's capital city, only eighty miles from New Orleans, had suffered very little hurricane damage. But it was now chock full of evacuees. All hotel rooms were full for hundreds of miles around the city. New Orleanians were crowded into the homes of Baton Rouge family members and friends. UNO Chancellor Tim Ryan had evacuated to Georgia by car, and he returned to Louisiana on Thursday, 1 September. LSU System officials arranged an apart­ment for him at their Pennington Research Center.

But even though he was a senior state executive trying to take charge of an historic crisis, they did not provide these accommodations for him free of charge or even at a reduced rate. System officials made no comparable arrangements for UNO's other top administrators. We were completely on our own.

I needed to get to Baton Rouge as soon as pos­sible, but given that Joyce and I had flown out of New Orleans, getting back to the area was no easy matter. We found a used car to buy in a nearby town and salesman Pete Sanders showed us great kindness. He was quite concerned, however, when I explained that I wanted to write a check on a bank located in New Orleans, which was now under water, and I wanted to drive the car away that very day. Normally, a car dealership will be dealing with a local bank, or, in the case of an out-of-state bank, will want to hold the car until the check clears. I didn't have the time to open an account in North Carolina, and I didn't have time to wait for my check to clear. And Pete Sanders's bosses weren't thrilled at the idea of taking a three-by-six-inch piece of paper from a stranger and letting him drive away with one of their cars. Pete finally came up with the idea of driving me to an ATM where I could make a withdrawal on my savings account. The receipt would, and did, show that I had sufficient funds to cover my check.

With a car to get there, Joyce and I now had to identify somewhere in Baton Rouge to stay. All our research came up empty. Every hotel room in the city and for hundreds of miles around was occu­pied. Given that New Orleans was closed, the hotel residents had no place to go, so we had no reason to hope that hotel space would become available anytime soon. Finally, on Saturday, 3 September, Joyce called a sorority sister, Mary Lou Potter, who lived in Baton Rouge with her husband Bill. Joyce and Mary Lou had remained close for some time after college, but they gradually had lost touch, and it had now been some years since they'd been in contact. From almost any perspective save the desperation caused by Katrina, calling Mary Lou seemed a preposterous act of imposition. At that time, officials were speculating that the city might not be habitable for six months. "Hi. How are you? Would you mind if we moved in with you for half a year?" Of course, because Bill and Mary Lou are among the finest, most selfless people I ever have met, they encouraged us to come on. We arrived on
5 September, and the Potters opened their home to us. They gave us keys. They fed us. And through absolutely no fault of Bill and Mary Lou, Joyce and I have never felt so vulnerable, so helpless, so lost.

While the other institutions of higher education in New Orleans quickly suspended operations for the fall term of 2005, almost immediately upon gathering in Baton Rouge, our administrative group decided that we would try to restart a fall semester in early October. UNO owns a three-story former office building on Causeway Boulevard in Metairie in suburban Jefferson Parish, and it had not flooded. So we decided to offer as many classes as possible there, to schedule additional classes in public school buildings in dry areas of the region, and to put as many courses online as student demand might warrant.

Eventually, we settled on a restart date of 10 October, and our entire team of chancellor, vice chancellors, deans, and other senior administrators devoted the five weeks after reuniting in Baton Rouge to achieving our reopening. Though our sister school, LSU Baton Rouge, is housed in more than 250 buildings spread across a 2,200-acre campus, the LSU System provided us with two rooms from which to rebuild our university. The space we took to calling the Boiler Room housed a bank of phones and two dozen computers. Faculty and staff who could find accommodations in Baton Rouge worked in the Boiler Room communicating our plans to faculty who had evacuated elsewhere and ultimately assisting our far-flung students with advising and registration.

The second room we called the War Room formerly the conference room for the system’s human resources division. The room was designed as meeting space for perhaps twelve but became the day-long working space for twenty-two crowded around the oval table in the room’s center or facing the wall on tiny desks jammed into the room’s four corners. Here, the chancellor, the provost, the vice-chancellors, the deans, and other senior staff had as much “office space” as was taken up by a laptop and a square of tabletop for a cup of coffee. From these spaces, we ran the university for a month and a half. We were advised by system officials to begin laying off employees immediately, but we were determined to pay as many of our faculty and staff as were willing to work for as long as we had money to do so.

We were determined to acquire enough emergency Congressional funding to balance the 2005-2006 budget into which Katrina had ripped a gaping hole. State officials warned us sternly that these efforts would not succeed, but ultimately they did, and we were able to avoid forced lay-offs during fiscal 2005–2006. On 10 October 2005, we reopened at the Jeff Center, at our high-school sites and online. While all the other universities in New Orleans remained dark during the fall of 2005, UNO taught 7,000 students. Ten thousand students had vanished in an eyeblink, but 7,000 were hungry for education, and UNO clawed its way back to provide it. When the term ended that fall, 766 had earned their credits to graduate. They graduated and thereby were able to take the next steps in their lives, into the work place or on to graduate school.

Of all the many moments that I will cherish about my UNO career, none is more important than our graduation ceremonies at the end of the fall 2005 semester. And those days of standing together and defying the odds will remain, for all of us in the War Room and the Boiler Room, among the finest days of our lives.

About a week after Joyce and I moved into Mary Lou and Bill’s guest room, I was notified that a room for Joyce and me was available at the LSU Faculty Club. There were many ways in which remaining with the Potters was a superior living option. Their home was beautiful and spacious and located on a gorgeous lake. At the Potters’ we had access to a kitchen and laundry facilities for our shorts, jeans, and additional clothing we’d purchased at WalMart. We had comfortable furniture in which to lounge or read. And unlike the Faculty Club where we’d have to pay for our room, the Potters never mentioned, and I am sure would have been aghast at the very concept of, asking us to pay rent. But the Faculty Club was just minutes from my new work space at the LSU System office, whereas the commute from the Potters’ house was taking over an hour. Moreover, despite our hosts’ boundless generosity, Joyce and I were simply too old to be comfortable in someone else’s house, particularly someone’s house where we had invited ourselves to live. So we moved to the

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Faculty Club where, for the first time in two weeks, we could finally have our own private space.

The feeling of comparable freedom lasted until we were told by Faculty Club management that we would have to move out by noon on 22 September. “It’s the Tennessee game,” I was told by way of explanation. All over the state, people now living in hotels were sometimes running into problems with long-term residence—so much so that Governor Kathleen Blanco had issued an executive order restricting management from evicting their residents. In a hem haw way, I pointed this out to the manager of the Faculty Club. “I’ll be glad to make a reservation for you again next week,” she responded. “You just have to move out for the weekend. I’m sure you understand: it is the Tennessee game.”

And there you have one of the more enduring things I gradually and with abiding resentment came to understand about the dominant culture at LSU Baton Rouge. Tiger football trumps all else. I may have been the number two executive officer at the second largest university in the state, a sister institution to LSU. I may have been at the moment homeless. My energies may have been needed in trying to resurrect my school. But if I ever had dared to entertain such an idea, I was entirely wrong that the office I held and, more important, the institution I represented, resided in the same universe of concern as Tiger football. People who had their own homes to live in and their own beds to sleep in had football tickets and thus had made reservations at the Faculty Club long before my house had the discourtesy to surrender itself to Hurricane Katrina and my school the impudence to lose all its students in a finger snap. Surely I understood: it was the Tennessee game.

Joyce and I were finally able to make a trip to New Orleans to inspect our home on 13 September 2005, two weeks after the flood waters rose into eighty percent of the homes in our city. We bluffed our way past the National Guardsmen who guarded the entrances to the city by flashing my card as a staff writer for the local weekly, Gambit. I didn’t mention to the soldiers that I write a column of film criticism.

Two things struck us immediately when we reached our house. Our summer lawn and those of our neighbors should have been a deep, dense green, but instead they were all brown. And the air smelled like mildewing hay. The city was eerily quiet and almost totally empty. We did eight sweaty hours of clean-up at our house that day, but the only person we saw the whole time was a helmeted, rifle-toting National Guardsman on patrol in his battle fatigues, checking homes for dead bodies.

Hope is an amazingly resilient quality of the human psyche. Despite viewing satellite photos that showed our neighborhood had taken five-feet of water, we somehow each had dared to hope the water hadn’t gotten into our split-level house. But it had, of course. The watermark on the ground floor stood at thirty-nine inches. The heating and cooling systems were lost, as were the washer, dryer, water heater, and freezer. Joyce’s office was beyond recovery. Her old desk had collapsed, dumping her papers and legal files into the muck. We found them in gluey clumps on the ruined hardwood floor. The worst news was in the garage. Utterly beyond repair, our cars had become colorful and perhaps toxic terraria. Sickly orange mushrooms sprouted from the upholstery and steering wheels, while powdery golden mold grew on all surfaces save the glass.

But upstairs the news was better. The water had stopped short of reaching the living room floor, though the hardwood floors were slick with green mildew which also crept up the wooden legs of our furniture. Using disinfectants that we’d brought with us from Baton Rouge, we wiped away mildew upstairs and mopped down the flooded areas downstairs. Every weekend for the rest of September, Joyce and I bluffed our way into the city and worked on our house, first throwing things away in fetid heaps identical to those that pockmarked the city everywhere for the next year, then tearing out tongue-and-groove walls and taking the ground floor down to bare stud, then spraying mold killer on every surface that remained, then spraying a second time and a third. All of this labor was exhausting and numbing. Much of it was dispiriting as we saw formerly valued possessions, furniture, clothing, golf clubs, household tools, Christmas decorations, all ruined by flood waters, piled in the street until scraped away by earthmovers and dumped into refuse trucks.
But, as we should, Joyce and I count ourselves among the lucky. We remember with gratitude the generosity of our friends, Ray and Sharon Mize, who let us stay on weekends at their house in Kenner, which had escaped the flood waters, and who labored long, dirty days at our sides, emptying out the flood’s ruin and dealing with the appalling foulness of full refrigerators left closed and without power for a month before we could deal with them. And we place our losses in the perspective of those who lost much more.

Our house ultimately would need an entirely new roof, and like everyone whose residence flooded, we had to have our electrical wiring replaced. We had to purchase and install new HVAC systems and ductwork and new appliances throughout the house. But our insurance was good and relatively quick. Our uninsured losses we once would have considered staggering, but now understand as manageable.

Meanwhile, across the city, hundreds of thousands of our fellow citizens lost much more. In our own immediate professional circle, Chancellor Ryan, four of our vice chancellors, five of our deans, and too many of our faculty and students to list, lost their homes entirely along with all their possessions, including photographs and other keepsakes that documented the courses of their lives.

When UNO defiantly succeeded in reopen­ing its doors at the Jefferson Center on 10 October 2005, Joyce and I gave up our sometime room at the Faculty Club and took up residence at her family home in Carrollton’s Riverbend section, which lacked electricity but had not flooded. From that beachhead we hired the workers we needed to make our many required repairs, and we moved back into our house on Christmas Eve, four months after fleeing, lucky beyond a doubt since so many of our fellow citizens have not been and will never be able to return to their homes and, in many cases, the lives they led before the storm.

A quick example will illustrate what New Orleans faces approaching three years after the storm. In a five-block stretch along a single street near UNO, I recently counted in this once vital area, nine vacant lots where houses used to stand and twenty-four homes that appeared to have been abandoned. Rebuilding was underway in only eight homes, and only three houses appeared to be occupied. In the vicinity, both the Catholic and public schools were closed and boarded up. No rebuilding was underway. In a nearby commercial area along a thoroughfare, the grocery, the Chinese restaurant, the convenience store, the dry cleaners, the bakery, and a health clinic were either shuttered or demolished.

This appalling lack of progress is the direct result of ineptitude and worse on the part of our local, state, and national governments. And this small segment of Gentilly near the UNO campus is not exceptional. In neighborhood after neighborhood throughout the city, homes are windowless, abandoned, forlorn—properties melting into uselessness like soft plastic figurines left atop a hot stove. So short a time ago each of these decaying edifices was someone’s home where good, spicy food simmered in the kitchen and laughter of full lives echoed within the walls. Now the air smells of mold and mildew, and inside the walls silence reigns. Ruined lawns, broken sidewalks, rubble-strewn vacant lots, and snaggled streets breed despair, house to house, block to block.

The sorrow we face is registered in every destroyed school, its playing children vanished, in every church where hymns are no longer sung, in every store where goods are no longer sold, in every café, restaurant, and bistro where our meals no longer are served and where friends no longer gather. There is no excuse for this devastation not being repaired, because it could have been. Clear-headed, responsible, decisive, caring leadership at all levels of government could have brought New Orleans much closer to recovery than it stands today.

Consider a series of situations on the UNO campus. When we returned to fulltime operations on our main Lakefront campus in January 2006, housing for our students was a major concern. Much of our on-campus housing was uninhabitable, as were most privately-owned apartments. So UNO arranged with a FEMA contractor to place four-hundred trailers to house 1,200 students on our property. But a snarl of bureaucratic red tape began to knot almost immediately after the trailers were delivered. Throughout the spring term of 2006, they sat together empty as a taunt to students who were either paying exorbitant rents to live in
the city or commuting to school from many miles away. The trailers were never hooked up to electrical, water, or sewerage lines, thus never occupied, and in the summer of 2006, the FEMA contractors brought in their fleet of Ford F-150 trucks and hauled them away.

Also in the spring of 2006, because we registered fewer than 12,000 students, UNO was forced into financial exigency, a state of dire fiscal emergency faced by very few institutions in the entire history of American higher education. The State of Louisiana was, in fact, running a huge budget surplus. But because UNO had lost students due to the storm, the university’s state appropriation was cut by $6.5 million dollars. Louisiana could have assisted UNO in its darkest hour and barely nicked its surplus in the process. Instead, UNO was forced to eliminate eighty-three faculty lines and make other staff layoffs. Although not all the individual layoff decisions were mine to make, execution of the exigency plan fell extensively on my shoulders, and I will carry the burden of the decisions I was forced to make during that time for the rest of my days.

Now, thirty-one months after the storm winds died away, Katrina still stands stubbornly in our midst. Our University Center remains only semi-functional, its lovely atrium blocked with scaffolds, its ballrooms, meeting rooms, and offices out of commission. Reconstruction could have rendered it fully restored in less than six months, but state bureaucracy has kept the project even from going to bid, despite FEMA’s commitment to pay. Work on our west-side dining facility, the Cove, also has yet to begin. Our married student housing remains shuttered. Our arena will be completed only in the late spring of 2008, out of operation for three academic years. Federal money has been earmarked for all these projects, yet state red tape prohibits our recovery from moving forward beyond a snail’s pace. This is appalling, and it is inexcusable. Why should UNO students be condemned to have their educational experiences diminished in this way? And one thundering question stands out: Is there a single soul in the State of Louisiana who believes that identical facilities at the so-called flagship LSU campus, home of the National Champion Tigers, would remain un repaired and out of service in November of 2007 if Hurricane Katrina had struck Baton Rouge rather than New Orleans in August of 2005? A single soul? A single soul?

A comparable inquiry must be made about our city as a whole. Reports last fall out of Washington reveal that Louisiana, and therefore New Orleans, was shortchanged in the allocation of federal recovery funding. A disproportionate amount of the recovery money was dedicated to Mississippi where a Republican governor maintained close relations with the Republican White House. Katrina was a disaster which should have called upon our elected leaders to rise above the usual infighting of their political affiliations. But that didn’t happen, and the residents of our city are suffering from it to this day, still waiting for the lesser amount of money that has been set aside for them actually to be paid to them so that they can begin rebuilding their lives.

In sum, we New Orleanians know something about the great flood of 2005 that America as a whole has never fully grasped. It was a disaster made not by nature but by man. The waters of Hurricane Katrina did not sweep over our city; they broke through to our city. Our levees were high enough, but they were not strong enough. Our homes were lost, our lives were altered, not as an act of God, but as an act of negligence, not as the product of inevitability, but as the byproduct of irresponsibility. Moreover, it was a disaster that didn’t end when the flood waters were pumped back whence they came or a few weeks or months later. It is a disaster that isn’t over yet, and from the perspective of March 2008, it is a disaster that may not be over for years to come.

Yet, in whatever atmosphere of sadness and indignation, we fight on. Half of us are missing, but half of us are home. And when I think of UNO colleagues and my fellow citizens of our unique city, I think of language from Shakespeare’s Henry V, for Katrina was our St. Crispin’s Day and we will forever fiercely “stand a tip-toe when the day is named … and strip our sleeves to show our wounds... we band of brothers” and sisters who shed together our blood and our tears, who have received inadequate assistance, but nonetheless refuse to surrender. ♦

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BREAKING THROUGH
(Edwardsville, Illinois)

The teacher told them he was a sorry case and would not pass the third grade even though he smiled and sang the songs and looked at if not read his books. Missing school for two months would not do, she told them, not knowing they would search him out and beat him for sitting in an old washtub in the middle of the creek.

So it was no surprise to anyone after this breakthrough that he showed up for school with red welts on his back and legs ready to sit up straight and do his sums at the board with the rest of the third grade row, his mind and heart not for sale then or later or now as he writes and reads ignoring his sums and wishing for all the world he had a creek to put an old washtub in so his son could sit in it. And he with him. Sometimes. Not wanting to crowd.

J. T. Ledbetter
Surprises and Confirmations
The Changing Face of American Religion

Robert Benne

In February of 2008, the Pew Research Center released an important report entitled the “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey” (available at http://religions.pewforum.org). It is a massive study that was based on 35,000 in-depth interviews of a representative sample of American adults between May and August of 2007. It is certainly one of the largest and most accurate studies of American religion in recent history.

It contains some great surprises about American religion as well as some confirmations of what most of us already know. Many of the surprises for me pertained to the status of Catholicism in America. No American religion has lost more members than Catholicism: 32 percent of those raised Catholic have left the church. Half of those who left have become Protestants, usually evangelical, but the other half have disappeared from any church membership. Most of us in Protestant churches know a number of congregants who were raised Catholics, but I always suspected that Catholics migrated to mainline Protestant churches rather than to evangelical churches. And those of us who work in colleges and universities know many ex-Catholics who no longer claim any Christian identity. Most of the ex-Catholics whom I know have rebelled against the authoritarianism of a pre-Vatican II church and have extended their bitterness to all organized religion. They, along with ex-fundamentalists, are the most resistant to any talk about strengthening the college’s relation to the church. They see no gradations between a purely secular school and a fundamentalist one, and it is pretty clear which one they prefer.

However, many of the Catholics who have migrated to evangelicalism have moved in reaction to the slackness of the post-Vatican II church with its cafeteria Catholicism and reputation for widespread sexual abuse by priests. Twenty percent of Catholic Latinos have left Catholicism, mostly for evangelical and Pentecostal churches where they claim to have a more intense and intimate religious experience.

Given this huge exodus, one would expect Catholicism to be losing its “market share” in American religious life and dwindling in absolute numbers. Surprisingly, neither is true. In-migration of Latinos has maintained the church’s market share at about twenty-five percent and kept the church growing. Latinos now make up one-third of all Catholics and nearly half of all Catholics between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine! The Latino share of the overall American population is now at 14 percent and is projected to grow to 29 percent by 2050, so the Catholic church will continue to benefit from this immigration.

Continuing the list of surprises about Catholicism, 10 percent of all Protestants are former Catholics but 8 percent of Catholics are former Protestants. That 8 percent represents a considerable number, perhaps around five million. Converts to Catholicism usually are far more intense about their faith than cradle Catholics, so I suspect that this 8 percent injects new vigor into the church. In recent years, Catholics have gained a good deal of intellectual vigor from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The list of distinguished Lutheran scholars converting to Catholicism is long: Richard Neuhaus, Robert Wilken, Reinhard Huetter, Bruce Marshall, Mickey Mattox, and Leonard and Christa Klein come immediately to mind.

The final surprise about Catholicism is the increasingly benign and hospitable attitude that other Christians in America have about the pope, especially the last two. Even Baptists, who now represent one-third of all Protestants and close to one-fifth of the American population, have a “selective appreciation” for the pope. Increasingly, Christians of all stripes view the pope as the de facto leader of worldwide Christianity. This is quite a change from the years before 1960 when
Baptists led the charge against a Catholic becoming President. It is also a change for the many Lutherans who were brought up with strong animosity toward Catholics. As Protestants have more and more difficulty finding authoritative teaching in their own denominations, the Catholic magisterium looks ever more attractive to large swatches of the Protestant population.

Another much publicized surprise in the study is that 44 percent of adults have either switched religious affiliation, moved from being unaffiliated with any religion to being affiliated with a particular faith, or dropped any connection to a specific religious tradition completely. Most people certainly were aware of this mobility among religious groups, but the 44 percent figure was startlingly high. This shows how difficult it is to pass on a religious tradition to the next generation in the face of strong competition in the religious marketplace and of complete freedom of religious choice among potential members. An unpleasant surprise revealed in the study is the growth of the “unaffiliated” portion of the American population, now at 16 percent. More disturbing is the fact that three times as many people are moving into the unaffiliated category as are moving from it into the affiliated. Young people ages eighteen to twenty-nine are much more likely, at 25 percent, to be unaffiliated than the older population. College students, as we know, are now much more likely to check “unaffiliated” in their self-identification than they used to be. The unaffiliated category at Roanoke College, where I teach, runs at about 20 percent, which makes that category one of the largest on campus. The unaffiliated are present in a much higher percentage in the West than in other parts of the US. It is likely that that category will continue to grow in all sections of our land.

Yet a puzzling surprise is that one-third of the unaffiliated say that religion is “important” to them. They are adopting the European pattern of “believing without belonging.” And, even with the emergence of a mini-movement of militant atheism among best-selling authors, the atheist and agnostic portion of the population stands at a mere 4 percent. People are evidently “reading but not believing.”

A final surprise is the fact that Protestants are now only 51 percent of the population, soon to lose majority status in a land that was shaped decisively by the Protestant ethos. The growth of the unaffiliated and Catholic population will soon push Protestants out of the majority. So America will have more diversity but not necessarily the kind that most people assume exists. Other world religions represented in the United States have few adherents—under 2 percent combined. The diversity will be constituted in the near future by fissiparous Protestants, Catholics, and a wide variety of the unaffiliated.

There are many findings in the Pew survey that confirm what we already knew. The mainline Protestant churches—Presbyterian, Methodist, United Church, Episcopalian, and ELCA Lutheran—now garner only 18.1 percent of American adults. (The study puts Missouri Synod Lutherans among the evangelicals, a very interesting move.) The mainliners are “homogenous, aging, and diminishing,” even after all the huffing and puffing about “diversity” and “inclusivity” that these churches have put forth. The Missouri Synod—without quotas and without posturing about diversity—is marginally more diverse than the ELCA after the latter’s twenty years of fussing. But neither holds a candle to Catholics or Seventh Day Adventists. These mainline traditions still wield much influence in American life, but it is hard to see how that will continue given the high percentage of older people among their adherents. Further, they have low birth rates and do not do well in retaining their young. They are riven with conflicts over homosexuality and the authority of the Bible and tradition. The future does not look so good for the likes of us.

The study also confirms what we know about evangelicals. They now constitute the largest religious group in America at 26.3 percent. Unlike mainliners, they are young and growing. Nearly half of evangelicals are in non-denominational charismatic and Pentecostal churches. Like the mainliners, they are also divided, not over the authority of the Bible but over whether it should be taken literally or at least sometimes according to genre and historical context. Fundamentalists take the former path, while moderate and liberal evangelicals take the latter. Evangelicals are more likely to engage the culture; fundamentalists to reject it. Evangelicals are also broken into many,
many churches, with Baptists being by far the largest group among them at about 40 percent.

Perhaps the most interesting confirmation is that America continues upon its exceptionalist road. Among all developed nations, America continues to be the most religious. Only 4 percent are atheists and agnostics. Even with the growth of the unaffiliated (one third of whom are religious!), Christians represent 78.4 percent of the population. Other religions, including Judaism, represent another 4.7 percent, which bring America to 83.1 percent religious. Add the “unaffiliated religious” at 5.8 percent to that and the US reaches nearly 89 percent.

But there were a lot of religious people in Rome at the beginning of the Christian era, too. So the fact that 89 percent are religious cuts little ice. Disciplined, informed, Christian faith likely would show up as a far smaller percentage. And it is that serious faith at which we ought to aim, even if we are “homogenous, aging, and diminishing.”

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NOT MANY PEOPLE WOULD ASSOCIATE WILLIAM Wordsworth with Gone Baby Gone, Ben Affleck’s 2007 adaptation of Dennis Lehane’s 1998 novel. After all, the film focuses on a gritty working class neighborhood of Boston, with nary a flower in sight, while Wordsworth celebrates the visionary power “Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower.” In fact, the Boston of Gone Baby Gone is everything Wordsworth repudiates:

What anarchy and din
Barbarian and infernal—a phantasma
Monstrous in color, motion, shape, sight, sound!

* * * *

Oh blank confusion! True epitome
Of what the mighty City is herself
To thousands upon thousands of her Sons,…
Oppression under which even highest minds
Must labour, whence the strongest are not free!

(Prelude, Book 7)

Though Wordsworth is describing his experience of London in 1791, he encapsulates my experience watching the phantasma of barbarian and infernal characters in Affleck’s film: a murderous pedophile, a slovenly drug dealer, a gun-brandishing drug lord, a greasy and obese addict snorting cocaine off her floor, a tawdry mother who exposes her daughter to criminal activities. Even more disturbing is the film’s revelation that agents of law-enforcement often contribute to the “blank confusion.” Gone Baby Gone, then, is precisely about something that worried Wordsworth: “oppression under which even highest minds must labour, whence the strongest are not free.”

The highest minds of the film are Patrick Kenzie (played by the director’s brother, Casey Affleck), who has hung out his shingle as a “Private

Crystal Downing

Investigator,” along with his girlfriend Angie (Michelle Monaghan). The oppression under which they labor is signaled by a voiceover at the start of the film. As we watch a montage of sights in Dorchester, Massachusetts, we hear Patrick state “I always believed that it was the things you don’t choose that make you who you are: your city, your neighbors, your family.” This, in fact, echoes a Wordsworthian insight: that “the Child is Father of the Man,” that where one grows up molds one’s sensibilities. Wordsworth, of course, grew up among the gorgeous green peaks of the English Lake District, whereas Patrick grew up among the egregious incivilities of an industrial town.

The opening montage of that town ends with television crews interviewing Helene McCready (Oscar-nominated Amy Ryan), questioning her about the disappearance of Amanda, her four-year-old daughter. The girl’s aunt and uncle, Bea and Lionel (Helene’s brother), later approach Angie and Patrick about finding the child. This creates, if even slightly, the first of many ethical tensions in the film. Angie suggests that the case needs to stay in the hands of the police. Indeed, Bea complains “The cops don’t want me coming here; Lionel don’t want me coming here,”—but Patrick is willing to bypass proper channels. Angie, quite understandably, doesn’t want to get involved due to the brutality of the case, telling Patrick, “We have a good life. I don’t want to find a little kid in a dumpster.” Significantly, Patrick describes Angie’s childhood as “innocent, milking cows up in Vermont,” thus aligning her with the Wordsworthian pastoral. Like Wordsworth, Angie is deterred by what might prove “monstrous in color, motion, shape, sight, sound.”

The camera, however, returns us to just that: the “blank confusion” outside Helene’s flat. We see a dapper newscaster, impeccably dressed in suit and tie, speaking into a television camera. Our
camera, however, begins to tilt down the newscaster's body until it captures naked legs clad in tiny shorts and sneakers. This brief take (no pun intended) is highly symbolic. For as the film proceeds, we discover that first impressions cannot be trusted, that beneath impeccably controlled surfaces are morally-naked realities.

The first revelation of this theme immediately follows. Patrick has persuaded Angie to approach Helene before they reject the case altogether. Their visit reveals an underside to the mother who acted so worried in front of television crews. Helene and her friend Dotty slouch on the sofa like teen rebels, hurling insults and vulgarities at their visitors. We learn from Lionel that Helene drinks everyday, snorts coke twice a week, and hangs out in a bar frequented by disgustingly vile addicts. When Patrick and Angie visit the bar, they learn that Helene often brought the four-year-old Amanda with her, but on the night Amanda went missing, Helene was there without her, engaged in illegal activities. Problematically, Helene had told police that she was merely across the street visiting Dotty when Amanda disappeared from her bed.

Angie therefore confronts a bigger moral dilemma than subverting police procedure: the necessity of finding a lost innocent even while knowing her innocence may be lost once she is returned to her immoral mother. However, as the film makes very clear, Helene is upright compared to sexual predators who kidnap children in order to molest them. Along with Angie, we therefore endorse the search, our stomachs turning with each despicable criminal that Patrick encounters along the way.

Fortunately, Angie and Patrick are aided by a paragon of legal fortitude and integrity: police captain Jack Doyle, meritorious head of the Boston Crimes Against Children Task Force. Played by the distinguished Morgan Freeman, who carries with him his roles as a wise and patient God in Bruce Almighty (2002) and Evan Almighty (2007), Doyle exudes peace and strength. As we are reminded several times, he had a twelve-year-old daughter who was abducted and killed, making him the perfect bridge between the distressed parent and legal redress.

Like Angie and Patrick, we trust Doyle implicitly. He parallels the Spirit of Nature that sustains Wordsworth in the midst of London's "far-fetched, perverted things," a Spirit of "Composure, and ennobling harmony" (Prelude, Book 7). Significantly, the most Wordsworthian scene in the whole movie—a bucolic cottage far from the city, surrounded by verdant trees and lush grass—is identified with Doyle, who has a summer home in the country. Indeed, like nature itself, Doyle seems to carry "the burthen of the mystery, / In which the heavy and the weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world, / Is lightened" (Tintern Abbey).

However, as with the newscaster in knickers, all is not as it seems. Yes, Doyle carries the "burthen" of the film's mystery but in a way most viewers don't expect. To understand Doyle's role, we must consider the only other shot of Wordsworthian beauty in the film. The director invites us to connect the two scenes by starting each with a bird's-eye-view shot that enhances its loveliness. In the scene associated with Doyle, we look down on Patrick's car driving through a sunny valley framed by pristine hills and stately trees: a shocking contrast to the city's smudgy grays and dirty browns that dominate much of the film.

The same contrast heightens the natural beauty of the other Wordsworthian scene. The action has taken Angie and Patrick to a quarry outside of town. Since the word "quarry" elicits images of nature exploited, we are surprised at its majesty. The bird's-eye-view shot floats us over a gorgeous sunset reflected in the quarry lake, mammoth rocks framing the placid waters. We feel "a sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused, / Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns" (Tintern Abbey). Soon, however, a long shot shows us the Boston skyline in the distance, as though indicating the source of nature's degradation—brought close when we realize that many of the magnificent rocks have been violated with spray-paint.

Like Wordsworth, who repeatedly describes hopeful ascents in his poetry, Angie and Patrick ascend the quarry rocks hoping for a successful recovery of Amanda. They are expecting to meet with two detectives who Doyle has assigned to help them: Remy (played by the always riveting Ed Harris) and Nick (John Ashton). Remy and Nick have arranged for Amanda to be exchanged for the $130,000 that Helene and her scummy boyfriend stole from a drug lord. Gunshots shatter their hope
just as they climb over a spray-painted rock with a hard-to-miss sign painted on its side. Standing out in bright white paint against the black rock, a huge broken circle with the head of an arrow at one end seems to signal that things will turn in a different direction than Angie and Patrick anticipate. Sure enough, when they reach Remy and Nick on the other side of the lake, they find the drug lord dead and Amanda’s doll, Mirabelle, floating in the waters one hundred feet below. Angie, the child of rural nature, risks her life as she jumps into the lake, but to no avail; neither she nor later divers can find Amanda’s body.

The beauty of the quarry thus turns sinister, swallowing up the innocent Amanda. So also, we will discover, the beauty of Doyle’s Wordsworthian retreat has swallowed up Amanda. At this point I would offer a “spoiler alert” if I didn’t think spoiler alerts were the hobgoblins of small minds. To think a film experience is ruined if the ending has been revealed is comparable to thinking that Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel is not worth seeing because it depicts well-known Bible stories. The pleasure is in the artistry, and, like any work of art, a well-made film bears repeat viewings. Or, as Wordsworth’s friend Samuel Taylor Coleridge once said of Shakespeare’s art, “plot... is the canvas only.” What follows is some canvas and much of the art in Gone Baby Gone.

After the quarry fiasco, we see Amanda’s empty-casket funeral and assume the film must soon be over. But then Patrick is given a tip about an entirely different missing-child, and the action turns in a new direction, as though following the quarry’s circular arrow. Patrick recruits Nick and Remy to help him capture a pedophile holed up with two crack-heads. Another fiasco ensues. Nick gets fatally injured, and Remy gets fatally inebriated in response. In outrage, Patrick kills the pedophile, and in a drunken attempt to comfort him in his guilt Remy admits to manipulating the law in order to incarcerate child abusers. We are thus presented with another ethical conundrum: which is worse—illegally planting evidence on a deviant scumbag or letting him go free until he ravages another child?

After Remy’s confession, Patrick soon learns that Remy and Helene’s brother, Lionel, were Amanda’s kidnappers, and that they planned to demand as ransom the $130,000 that Helene had stolen. But, as we have already seen, complications at the quarry foiled their easy exchange of child for money, and during the mayhem Amanda fell into the lake. We realize that Remy is like the naked-kneed newscaster: merely putting on an act of professionalism for anyone watching. Significantly, Remy is the only person in the film who consistently dresses like the newscaster, with coat and tie (though Remy includes the slacks as well!). In his distinguished dress, Remy pretends to be an honest cop when, underneath, he’s “just like everyone else,” to use the words Patrick pretends to be an honest cop when, underneath, he’s “just like everyone else,” to use the words Patrick employs with Lionel, Remy’s accomplice: “You saw a big load of money and you wanted it.” A parallel has been established between the good guys and the bad guys, reinforced when the writers give the same phrase to Lionel, describing Amanda’s death in the lake, as they give to the pedophile describing a boy’s death in his bathtub: “It was an accident.” Underneath slick surfaces, enforcers of the law don’t seem that different from the criminals they chase.

As Lionel confesses the botched plan to Patrick—in a bar appropriately named “Murphy’s Law”—a man in an oversized Popeye mask bursts in, claiming it’s a hold-up, turning his gun on Lionel and telling him to shut up. The voice behind the excessively outrageous mask is so obviously Remy’s that the scene seems incongruous with—if not a flaw in—the film’s gritty realism. Things get even more far-fetched when the absurdly masked Remy seems pacified, lowering his gun, once Lionel yells, “I told [Patrick] that we took Amanda for ransom. Please, please.” Shouldn’t this admission anger Remy all the more? We barely have time to contemplate the strange psychology when the bartender shoots the masked intruder in the back. The injured Remy flees, and Patrick chases him out of the bar. Remy dies on a factory roof, telling Patrick, “I love children,” a strange dying statement for someone implicated in a kidnap-for-money scheme.

But, once again, not everything is as it seems. We soon discover that Remy’s “act” is far more outrageous than we ever dreamed—as outrageous as the Popeye mask he wears while enclosed in Murphy’s Law. By the end of the film we realize that the scene in the bar is not a flaw in the film; it operates, instead, like a mask covering over a mask.
When police interrogate Patrick about Remy's death, our protagonist gleans clues that lead him out of the squalid city to Doyle's Wordsworthian retreat. The lush beauty surrounding his journey prepares us for a happy ending. Indeed, as Patrick addresses the dignified Doyle in front of his quaint cottage, we once again feel strength and peace. In reply to Patrick's despair over Remy's mask—"He seemed like a good man"—Doyle calmly comments, "He was a good man. We don't know why people do what they do. Everybody looks out his own window." We are reminded of an earlier scene when Patrick looks through a hospital window at the dying Nick. In two different shots (to make sure we catch it), we see the dark—almost black—shadow of Patrick's shape on the window—a human shape that impedes a clear picture of Nick's shape through the window. This reflection (in both senses of the word) puts Doyle's statement in a different light. If everybody looks out his own window, might not the shadow of the self impede a clear view of right and wrong?

This, indeed, becomes the quintessential question of the film. And we are forced to grapple with it as the circular arrow is once again fulfilled: we, like Patrick, are utterly flabbergasted when a jubilant Amanda runs out of the country cottage and into Doyle's grandfatherly arms. Suddenly we understand the Wordsworthian nature setting. Doyle's retreat is a place that embraces and nurtures children: "Delight and liberty, the simple creed / Of Childhood, whether busy or at rest, / With new-fledged hope still fluttering in [her] breast" (Intimations Ode). We also begin to reassess the actions of Remy, revelatory flashbacks helping us along. Remy was willing to act like a corrupt cop pretending to be a moral cop in order to save Amanda from her immoral mother: a mask covering over a mask. Remy's dying words do in fact explain his actions: "I love children." That love is the shadow on the window through which he sees the world.

Patrick, however, looks through a different window. As Doyle tenderly cradles Amanda with his nurturing wife looking on, Patrick tells him that the child should be returned to her birth mother. When Doyle calmly explains "We're just trying to give a little girl a life," Patrick retorts, "It wasn't your life to give; Helene's her mother. If you thought she was a bad mother, you should've gone to social services." Here, then, is the climactic ethical tension of the film: Patrick stands for law; Doyle for new life.

Angie, bred in rural nature, takes Doyle's side. As sunshine glints off Amanda's baby-blond hair and in Doyle's loving eyes, we impatiently wait for Patrick to surmount the shadow of the self and see the light. The film thus brilliantly plunges us into the emotional tension of an ethical conundrum, manipulating us with Wordsworthian beauty to root on the side of illegal practices.

Ironically, Wordsworth himself might give us pause. In books nine through eleven of his autobiographical poem The Prelude, he describes his sojourn in France during the French Revolution. Like most young radicals, he supported the goals of the revolutionaries: liberty, equality, and fraternity (qualities of life that Remy, Doyle, and Angie want to give Amanda). With the passage of time, however, Wordsworth begins to witness what happens when revolutionaries, glorying in their freedom from the law, began breaking the law in new ways. Radically committed to "the good," revolutionaries like Robespierre instigated the Reign of Terror, killing everyone who disagreed with their definition of "the good." Wordsworth suffers an emotional breakdown from this ethical conundrum, later vows to follow:

... right reason, that matures
Her processes by steadfast laws, gives birth
To no impatient or fallacious hopes,
No heat of passion or excessive zeal,
No vain conceits—

(Prelude, Book 13)

Excesses like those of the French Revolution help explain why Patrick insists on the steadfast laws of right reason over the excessive zeal of "good" people. However, as the film quite wisely shows, it is not easy choosing the law over good intentions. The dignified Doyle is taken away in handcuffs, the contented Amanda is tearfully pried away from Doyle's wife, and the disappointed Angie tells Patrick she can no longer live with him.

The camera returns us to the city, as depressed as Patrick for what he has done. We witness another
superficial newscaster, this one making callow pronouncements about “little Amanda” returned “to the arms of a mother who never lost hope that she’d see her daughter once again” (what about the funeral?). As at the start of the film, we see Helene interviewed by television crews in front of her house. Her idiotic statement, “Thank you to all the policemen and firemen. I feel like 9-11 right now,” makes the newscaster’s summarizing comment, “Good news for everybody,” all the more disgusting. After seeing a lonely and disconsolate Patrick at his kitchen table and behind the wheel of his car, we once again get a montage of his neighborhood, one shot focusing on an adolescent girl standing on the exact same porch, dressed in the exact same trashy clothes, as she was during the opening montage. All these repetitions force us to question whether conditions will change for Amanda now that she has been returned to her legal mother.

This seems to be Patrick’s question as well. He stops by Helene’s flat, where the mother is swigging beer while dressing for a blind date with someone who saw her on television. Despite her protests in front of the cameras—“Never let your kids out of your sight; trust them to no one else; just keep them in your arms”—Helene has made no arrangements for someone to watch Amanda while she’s out partying. So Patrick volunteers. The film ends with Patrick sitting on the couch where a deflated Amanda passively watches television.

Two gestures in this last scene present us with the film’s final conundrum. First, Amanda lifts her arms onto the top of her head, in exactly the same pose Helene took earlier in the film. Does this signal that Amanda will turn out like her (il)legal mother? This, of course, was Doyle’s fear. If Amanda returns to Helene, “she’ll be dragging around a couple of tattered damaged children of her own” someday.

The second gesture encompasses the last words of the film. Patrick, from one corner of the couch, looks over at Amanda, who is cradling her doll that was rescued from the quarry. He asks, “Is that Mirabelle?” and the child emphatically answers “Anabelle!” The implication of this, the film’s last word, is as murky as several of the film’s ethical issues. Does it imply that Helene is so out of touch with Amanda that she misreported the name of the doll to the media? Or is it yet another indictment of the media’s superficiality, a television newscaster inaccurately calling the doll Mirabelle? Indeed, the closing shot of film is taken behind the television that Patrick and Amanda face, such that it fills a third of the screen, perhaps symbolizing how the media—and its misrepresentations—dominate their lives.

I would like to offer another, more hopeful, interpretation of the film’s final word. Just as Mirabelle escaped the waters of the quarry and changed to Anabelle, perhaps Amanda can escape the modeling of her mother and be baptized for the better. This, of course, was Doyle’s plan, but his tactic for change was illegal. How might one instigate rebirth and still honor the law?

The answer, perhaps, appears in the film’s final shot: Patrick sitting on the couch with Amanda. Rather than merely enforcing the law, Patrick takes responsibility for his decision, offering himself as a positive influence in the girl’s life. Significantly, several times in the film Patrick quotes his priest as a source of wisdom, most tellingly during the opening voiceover: “When I was young I asked my priest how you can get to heaven and still protect yourself from all the evil in the world. He told me what God said to all his children: ‘You are sheep among wolves. Be wise as serpents yet innocent as doves.’” Sitting on Helene’s couch, Patrick acts on those words. Though situated “in lonely rooms, and ‘mid the din / Of towns and cities,” he begins to fulfill Wordsworth’s description, in Tintern Abbey, of “a good man’s life,” exercising “His little, nameless, unremembered, acts / Of kindness and of love.”

Crystal Downing is Professor of English and Film Studies at Messiah College.
It's been forty years since the last Yardbirds standing, Jimmy Page and Chris Dreja, began auditioning vocalists and drummers to fulfill some Scandinavian concert dates.

They settled upon a handsome singer with several short-lived bands and two solo singles to his credit, and he directed them to a wild young percussionist already nicknamed "Bonzo." Then Dreja suddenly found himself out of the band he'd helped form in 1963. Another bassist, John Paul Jones, had replaced him, and the diabolical Led Zeppelin arose.

Robert Plant went on to become the archetypal rock front man: his fiery mane of hair and bared chest, the tight pants suggesting a member as enormous as the quartet's ambitions and appetites. These and similar images were thrust into a willing America through six separate United States tours in the next year and half. From then on it was all idolatry and adultery. The band's drunken hotel antics soon became as legendary as their music, a psychedelicized heavy folk-blues that reached the mystical heights the Yardbirds sought. Road stories linger like that last note in "Stairway to Heaven." Life journalist Ellen Sander noted how the group failed miserably to "keep their behavior up to a basic human level." Page was the only one of the boys who was not married; this, according to band biographer Stephen Davis, "only heightened the forbidden pleasures that [rock life] offered the band." Jones tended to stay to himself and avoid the orgies, and Page, with a taste for those at the younger end of the spectrum, was already comfortable sharing his fame with groupies. But young Robert and John Bonham—"country bumpkins from the Midlands"—were "amazed to find themselves pursued by beautiful young [girls] with kohl-rimmed eyes and big heaving bosoms hanging out of their brazen, near-frontless frocks." You can imagine the postcards home to the wife.

It's been a long time since Plant has rock and rolled in such fashion. The tour manager behind these early scenes, Richard Cole, has said, "All the so-called Led Zeppelin depravity took place the first two years in an alcoholic fog. After that, we got older and grew out of it. It became a realistic business." Those of us who read music magazines through the seventies know the growing out of it was not quite so instantaneous. But after Bonzo's drinking death and the retirement of the massive dirigible by 1980, Plant indeed went on to develop a new relationship with his fans, one based on artistic fulfillment as a realistic business.

To hear him return to 1969 and breathe life into Gene Clark's "Polly Come Home" is to catch wisdom in the wind. "Dreams cover much time," the dirge laments, "still they leave blind the will to begin." Producer T Bone Burnett puts plenty of dry heat behind the swaying guitars of Marc Ribot. "I searched for you there, and now look for you from within," Plant sings, scooping up a handful of coarse tenderness that trickles through his fingers all over Raising Sand.

Robert Anthony Plant also turns sixty this year, and he's still being pursued by beautiful young girls. His musical partner on Raising Sand, one of the biggest hits of 2007 and a sure-win for an album Grammy this year, is Alison Krauss: a beautiful woman, not yet forty, just as acclaimed and accomplished as he is. While Plant was playing the prodigal, Krauss emerged as a prodigy. The Illinois state fiddling champion at age twelve, she assumed leadership of the acoustic bluegrass band Union Station at fourteen. After her third album at age eighteen, Jimmy Ibbotson of the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band said "she's simply one of the best singers on the planet.” And she's only gotten better. Now the face of American roots music, gives off not a whiff of the debauchery that accompanied Plant's beginnings. Her first career peak was I Know Who
Holds Tomorrow, an exquisite gospel album with the Cox Family in 1994. As artist and producer, she can do pop, country, bluegrass and Celtic music; and on Sand, she shows how she can rock and roll. The luminous singer (who apparently preferred Foreigner to Led Zeppelin in her youth) has collaborated with Burnett on celebrated soundtrack work previously. This pairing with Plant is so stylistically adventurous that it shone immediately as the masterpiece of her twelve albums and numerous guest spots.

Writers have been all over this thing since the unlikely collaboration’s debut at #2. Its affecting harmonies most recently have been described by Mojo as “so gentle, attentive, and respectfully intimate” that the artists’ musical relationship “feels more like a courtship dance.” Krauss already has established herself as a captivating vocalist and generous duet partner. That Plant reaches a place where his involvement in a project could warrant such words is satisfying indeed; that this album comes after The Mighty ReArranger, the best of his nine-album solo career, is triumphal.

Much of his solo work has gone far a field from the Zeppelin crunch, and Plant has acquired the status of a musical man of the world with a fondness for Moroccan rhythms. By his last album, he had perfected a hushed, almost whispery update of his vocal style, much like Dylan had done with Oh Mercy. While the sound of Sand is all T Bone, Krauss brings her own authenticity to these proceedings. She represents a different kind of “world music”: the other side of the blues. This is the song tradition of mostly white immigrants to America, God-fearing and hard-working church people. Jimmy Page was known for bowing the strings of his electric guitar; when Krauss goes arco, it’s no show.

Another post-Byrds Gene Clark number gives the album its center. With Alison on lead and Robert harmonizing the chorus, “Through the Morning, Through the Night” leaves us with this haunting image: “I dreamed just last night you were there by my side / your sweet loving tenderness easing my pride.” That the lover awakes to find “you” not there is as ghostly and gray as Burnett’s sound that shrouds the album. Krauss and Plant’s musical union doesn’t have the tension of, say, Jessi Colter and Waylon Jennings easing one another’s pride. There is instead a calm, homely feel to the support they give each other.

Tenderness easing pride runs both ways. Who knows if they’re really engaged in a courtship dance, but Krauss and Plant are as convincing on “Your Long Journey” as Johnny and June Carter Cash singing about meeting each other on the far side banks of Jordan. This album closer, written by Doc and Rosa Lee Watson (also around 1968) is the faith-filled dialogue of an older couple nearing the end of their days, preparing themselves for the imminent departure of one or the other of them.

When God calls for you I’m left alone / But we will meet in heaven above.” Each verse winds high into a repeat of “oh, my darling,” until their voices gently land on “my heart breaks as you take your long journey.” To hear Plant give voice to such death-do-us-part fidelity is one of the few phenomena of late that deserves the word “awesome.” As transcendent as Alison’s singing and gut-wrenching fiddle can be, the greatest single moment on Raising Sand belongs to Robert. He pulls the 1962 R&B gem “Fortune Teller” from the old Yardbirds/Zeppelin repertoire (to which his partner adds an appropriately mysterious vocal bridge), and it is a wise and well grown-out-of-it former idol who delivers the verse,

Now I’m a happy fellow
‘Cause I’m married to the fortune teller
And I’m happy as we can be
And now I get my fortune told for free

The uncanny lilt and intonation of that one word free makes the twinkle in his eye audible.

J. D. Buhl is a junior high English teacher who has followed Robert Plant and Alison Krauss since 1970 and 1989, respectively.
I have been criticized for preferring novels with a trustworthy, if not omniscient, narrator who has a universal story to tell with a clear, heartwarming moral, even while excluding those tragic-comic dimensions actual life typically assumes. That is, I have been charged with holding all writers to standards John Steinbeck would meet. I may, therefore, lack credibility in reviewing Brock Clarke’s *An Arsonist’s Guide to Writers’ Homes in New England*. However, by immediately calling attention to my virtual unreliability, I do exactly what Clarke himself does with his main character Sam Pulsifer. This is one of those novels that calls attention to itself as such, and in doing so, falls into the by now well-established tradition that asks the reader: what is it—history, fiction, memoir, philosophy? This makes Clarke’s novel postmodern, since it poses questions about our inability to clearly distinguish between knowing and therefore telling truths of various kinds, the relative power or importance of stories, our demand for good stories, and the general incredulity that ensues when we think about stories simply as stories.

The issue of truth and story-telling has been with us at least since Aristotle, who claimed that poetry is more philosophical than history. He meant that fiction can tell us what does happen, might have happened, or should have happened, in some universally edifying or explanatory sense, while history reports what merely did happen in a particular case, its bearing on the present restricted as a matter of memory rather than of possibility. However problematic this distinction remains, what finally does happen in Clarke’s story? For starters, the narrator Sam Pulsifer accidentally burns Emily Dickinson’s house to the ground and, in the process, unwittingly kills two parents surreptitiously making love in her bed upstairs. The main impetus for Sam’s going to Emily Dickinson’s house in the first place is that his mother, a high-school English teacher, raised him on moving ghost stories about it. The allegedly accidental part is that as an eighteen-year old, Sam, who was simply looking into things for himself, got spooked by something—presumably the couple upstairs—dropped a lit cigarette, and fled. For this Sam spends ten years in a minimum-security prison with a number of white-collar criminals, mostly bond-traders. The judge who delivers Sam’s sentence provides a series of philosophical questions about stories in general. For instance, “if a good story leads you to do bad things, can it be a good story after all?” And, “can a story actually be blamed for arson and murder?” All in all, the story is, as we say, contrived to make a point about truth and fiction, their relative power and weakness, and the nature of human responsibility along the way.

Consider, for example, that the person out to investigate, and confirm, and thereby conclude something about ghost stories, is eighteen. On the one hand, we know eighteen-year-olds are, on average, bumbling idiots. On the other hand, do we know any eighteen-year olds who haven’t figured out that ghost stories are untrue, in the relevant sense? Secondly, we know from the initial set up that this story is about love and marriage. But it remains a mystery, because we never find out what the couple Sam involuntarily slaughtered were doing in Emily Dickinson’s bed. We know what they were doing, in the obvious sense, but why? The what and the why fold in on one another: given what they were doing, in order to know why, we’d have to know a different kind of what they were doing. What were they revisiting, or consummating, or simply enacting as a matter of course, and why in Emily Dickinson’s bed? For instance, did they think actually making
love was better than reading poetry, and did they seek to celebrate or prove it in this particular way? We never find out. Meanwhile, the questions raised by the judge loom large.

Sam’s story begins in the middle, with a backstory, and one to which it leads. Here too there are facts that point to a contrived message about truth, fiction, responsibility, and it turns out, personal love. Perhaps the message is not so much contrived as imagined and created, and aimed at truths we are called to embrace above and beyond the facts? One such fact: when Sam was growing up, his mom, before she got rid of her books and took up the bottle, wouldn’t allow him to read detective novels, presumably because they didn’t count as valid literature. For that you had to stick to Melville, Twain, or Edith Warton. Since Clarke’s own book poses as a detective story, we are left to wonder about that distinction as well.

Like good science fiction, which is never really about science, this detective story is about not so much who did what but what they did. And what they do, or did, is fail as human beings by telling the truth at the wrong time, or in the wrong way, or by lying when the truth is the one pertinent and necessary thing to tell, and above all, by not realizing the difference and the difference it makes. Why, for example, Sam’s mother banned detective novels but thought ghost stories about Emily Dickinson’s house were appropriate is part of the mystery Sam must solve. The answer to this mystery has something to do with why his father, who happens to be an editor, quit his marriage and family for three years purportedly to visit notable historical sites and pursue quirky occupational adventures, all carefully detailed in postcards to his son, when in fact, the whole time he was living twenty minutes away, shacked up with a star-crossed lover.

The story those postcards tell so thoroughly fascinates one of Sam’s fellow inmates that he writes it all down and claims it under his own name in the form of a memoir. Sam finds this out in a bookstore one day when he additionally discovers that the memoir section in general has dwarfed the fiction isle, each of which has been dwarfed by the fact that the bookstore is mostly a coffee shop. It turns out the postcards were originally written by mom to shelter Sam from the truth. And one shouldn’t fail to mention that what Brock Clarke provides is Sam’s memoir, although we are told that Sam plans on writing a novel one day that tells, as it were, a different story. Meanwhile, in this story, other writers’ homes in New England start getting torched, although the only thoroughly successful fire was at Robert Frost’s home. Mark Twain’s and Edward Bellamy’s survive. Lest one conclude that Clarke has something against poets, the person actually responsible for the fire is the bond trading plagiarist and his lackeys. Their motive is to do something with their lives other than trade bonds, in order to have something to write about.

Beyond the back-story about Sam’s father, and his mom’s ghost stories, this all leads to Sam’s own marriage and family, which is founded on a carefully guarded silence about his involuntary arson and manslaughter and a direct lie about his parents having died. Then the orphaned son of the couple who actually did die in Emily Dickinson’s home shows up, looking for an apology. All Sam can muster is an un-heartfelt exchange about it being an accident, so the son threatens to expose Sam to his beautiful wife and two wonderful children. This he does by lying about Sam having an affair, to which Sam confesses rather than admit the other facts, which metaphorically puts him in the doghouse, and literally, back in his parents’ house. This is around the time that other writers’ homes start getting torched, so Sam, having quit his job as a packaging designer—about as exciting as being a bond trader—decides to become a lay detective.
As a detective story, the *Arsonist's Guide* wrestles with the complex, even mysterious nature of motive, action, and moral character. Aristotle says that in assigning responsibility we must take into account the various, possible kinds of ignorance that were involved. One example he offers is when someone lets the catapult go when he merely meant to demonstrate it. What Aristotle concludes is that one ought to feel pain and regret at an unintentional result. If out of chivalry, for example, I move to open and then close your car door, and inadvertently slam your finger in it, only a very bad person wouldn't feel really awful and profusely apologize. If one said, “it wasn't *my* fault, I was actually being chivalrous,” this would quite plausibly end the relationship right there. The general point is that those who suppose the only actions for which we are responsible are those we commit with especially clear and knowledgeable intentions that match the result are people who are themselves morally corrupt.

In the end, Sam realizes this, and in a rather absurd effort to rectify this problem within his own moral character takes full responsibility for what he manifestly has not done. In fact, it lands him back in jail, from where he informs us that one day he'll write a novel about how he was *really* responsible, while what he currently offers is a memoir about how he is not. What Clarke asks is whether, on average, human beings are not monsters, but simply too cavalier about our unintentionally entangled lives, and that *this* is the real monstrosity.

What we get from Sam's *Arsonist's Guide* is that he's a hack writer, a bumbler, as he says, with no clear agenda other than to tell a story for its own sake. Except there is no real story to tell. Or there is, but he doesn't have the wherewithal to tell it, which is why I think we're supposed to embrace Sam, not only as a writer, but as a lover, neither of which he's very good at. And maybe that's the point. But if that is the point, whether we should laugh at the irony or cry over the contradiction is a question left in the lap of the reader like a mystery to solve. That which is brilliant is often cheap and worthy only to be burnt. Like human being itself. In Clarke’s phrase, “it’s an old story.” And evidently the story is that we’re all worthy enough, just enough, to visit while still in prison, and in prison for the second time, having grossly over-compensated for previous blunders. Which I suppose is something to write home about. So long as the house hasn't already burnt down.

As a reading experience, one gets the sense of two authors of the *Arsonists' Guide*: one, the narrator, Sam Pulsifer, and two, Clarke continuously winking at us from the blank margins. The fictional, plot-driven parts read like an unbelievable, though entertaining fabrication, while the philosophical, confessional parts read like memoir. Which raises the question, from which should we draw more insight? If you are in the market for a detective novel, this is the mystery you'll be asked to solve. Clarke doesn't actually do it for you, which is what makes his novel partly literature and partly a gimmick. It's almost as if he himself is looking for something to write about and has concluded that there are no intricately flawed but nevertheless noble characters left worth paying attention to, but only bumbling white-collar criminals to go along with the mega-stores and planned housing divisions in which no one reads books anymore, and has thus decided to write about that. I suppose one could conclude that this is an old story or an entirely new one, given the historical record. But is it one worth telling? Apparently all is not well, in New England, or literature, or us. I can sum all this up by quoting my favorite paragraph from the book, which I nevertheless hated:

As everyone knows, you can't go home again. That famous book told us so, even if it took way too many pages to do it. But what that book didn't tell us, and mine will, is that you can't go home again even to change your clothes and shower before meeting your mother at the Student Prince, because if you do, you'll find Detective Wilson sitting at your dining room table, waiting for you. He was baggy eyed and armed with another large coffee, the way I was baggy eyed and armed with another huge beer, which is just further proof that all men are but slight variations on the very same theme.

If you are going to torch Thomas Wolfe, you better have a really good pen. I read that book at the age when Sam was still immaturely haunted by ghost
stories, and it actually helped. Even so, although
Sam’s pen, in Clarke’s hand, does appear second
rate, and perhaps intentionally so, he nevertheless
manages to catch something in our throats. He tells
us, for example, having finally taken responsibil­
ity and landing himself in prison a second time for
something he himself has manifestly not done, that
his mom visits once a year on his birthday, that
they do not talk about his dad and his lover, and
that, surprisingly, she has taken up reading again.
But it doesn’t seem to have helped. Literature
evidently only has just enough power to docu­
ment our failure to say what we mean, mean what
we say, and act upon those truths—especially in
regard to truths about the fragile passions forged
in the furnace of a seemingly stable, middleclass
suburban home and all its exceptions. Love kills
us, and our families are a prison term. Our stories,
if they are true, should reflect these facts. History
tells us so. That’s his story. Who knows if he’s stick­
ing to it? It’s not a memoir; it’s a novel.

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College at Valparaiso University.

GARAGE PRAYERS

rest on a dusty shelf
a shopping bag labeled Thanksgiving
in my schoolgirl script
another marked Halloween in orange
boxes covered with Advent/Christmas scrawls

on an ordinary day
exhausted by another hospital stay
ready to start the car
and make the rounds

I see my days in that dust
all that’s bagged, boxed,
marked or not,
give thanks for all that’s hallowed
release the days, the praise
the dust.

Jan Bowman
Worship is not a performance. I hold a strong conviction that worship is literally "liturgy," that is "the work of the people." One way we at the First Presbyterian Church of Oshkosh, Wisconsin, express that reality is each week we have a lay reader who presides at specific parts of the service. The lay reader sits beside the preacher. While worship is not a performance, it is public. Just about every week something happens behind the scenes that only those leading worship are aware of. The show goes on. It is only church, but sometimes these gaffes are hilarious or poignant. I treasure these glimpses of humanity and frequently whisper observations to the lay reader.

Sometimes after the benediction someone will ask, "What was so funny up there?" Here's what:

One morning Bill, the tallest member of the congregation, was the lay reader. As he sat down on the upholstered lay reader chair he said, "I can’t be the only one who complains about these chairs!"

"You are Bill. It’s uncomfortable because you’re so tall."

"You know, the tall are the only group it’s acceptable to discriminate against anymore."

I look up at him and say, "I’ll take your word for it." Bill is close to a foot taller than I.

The prelude ends, and I walk forward to give the announcements.

Six months later, Bill is the lay reader again. As soon as we sit down, I whisper, in high dudgeon, "These chairs suck!"

We collapse in giggles.

Each Christmas Eve, Chuck, a local morning drive DJ, is the lay reader. Sometimes I put his skills to use in a special reading. Last year I found such a reading, and we rehearsed it a few times the week before worship. Then I decided to change "a wind from God" [Genesis 1:2, NRSV] to "a God-awful wind." I heard this rendering years ago and prefer it. I forgot to tell Chuck about the change.

Right before worship, when we were in the Green Room, Chuck asked, "Is there anything special I should know about tonight?" I told him "Yeah, the goat cheese I had at a party is making me a little gassy."

After the benediction he said, "God awful wind indeed, padre!"

I am grateful he did not ad lib that during the reading.

The last time Paul was the lay reader I learned he is also something of a hypochondriac. As we were singing the closing hymn, "How Great Thou Art," he whispered to me, "I am having a stroke!"

He looked fine to me; his speech was distinct. Then I realized he was singing the transliterated Korean lyrics, which appear above the English ones in the hymnal. When I pointed this out, he sighed with relief and sang along.

Once when I was preaching in an unfamiliar church, the service ground to a halt. I leaned to the lay reader and hissed, "New Testament lesson!"

She pointed to the bulletin. A hymn precedes the lesson at this church, and the preacher announces the hymns. It was only funny because the hymn I had to announce was "Open My Eyes That I May See."

The first time Karen was lay reader, she noticed that there is a small waste basket in the pulpit.

"Tom, why is there a wastebasket up here?"

"It’ll be obvious after today’s sermon."

My favorite "What’s so funny up there" incident took place during my first month at this
church. I have gotten into the habit of putting my sermon manuscript in the pulpit first thing when I arrive at church. Otherwise I get distracted, set it down, and lose it. This Sunday, Sharon was the lay reader. After the Old Testament lesson, she returned to her seat and found she had a lot of paper. She looked at what she had brought back from the pulpit and realized she had boosted my text by mistake. She handed it to me, and whispered an apology.

I looked at it and said, “What the hell is this?”

When you’re clergy, a well-timed vulgarity is hysterical. Honest. I could not make eye contact with her the rest of the morning without erupting into giggles.

The last time I preached at my home church it was something of a homecoming. I was in town for my grandmother’s ninetieth birthday party. My cousins, whom I had not seen for fifteen years, were in the congregation. Of course, I preached on the Prodigal Son. What preacher does not have a Luke 15 sermon he can pull out of the barrel?

It was a significant day for my brother; he was the morning’s lay reader, and he presided at the installation of new church officers. Al took me out to breakfast before the service because that was the only time all weekend we could have some time to talk.

Things went fine until he finished the second reading. As he was returning to his seat and I was walking into the pulpit I whispered, “Next time we go out to breakfast before I preach here... talk me out of the breakfast burrito!”

This one was a pay back. A few years before, he had been worshipping in the church I serve on New Year’s Day. The crew needed another elder to pass the plates for communion and he was deputized. As we concluded the sacrament, he was the last one to hand me his tray of juice cups. He pretended to drop it at the last minute. This is a funny thing to do on any occasion, but for him, my older brother, a guy who loves the order and regimentation of being a certified public accountant, to do this to his younger brother, who has spent his whole life using humor to keep harmony, this was hysterical! I giggled for the rest of the service.

He is scheduled to do another funny thing in 2012.

I cannot wait.

The Reverend Thomas C. Willadsen is pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Oshkosh, Wisconsin.
This past Lent, rostered ministers of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America received a message from Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson affirming what it means to be “evangelical in a Lutheran key” and encouraging the church’s leadership to promote the “number one priority” for this denomination—being an evangelizing church. This was a timely, edifying word on the basic gospel-orientation of Lutheran essentials; however, Hanson did not take up the question of how this Lutheran way of being evangelical relates to the dominant strand of evangelicalism in America. Speaking Lutheranese in-house, where evangelical traditionally means “of or pertaining to the gospel,” is well and good, but one has to wonder what the neighbors might think. What would it look like if American Lutherans actually started outing themselves as evangelicals? The confusion that would ensue, even among Lutherans, could be exhausting.

But it could also be incredibly fruitful. Lutherans might finally start learning how “to speak Lutheranism with an American accent,” as the evangelical historian Mark Noll put it some years back (1991, 27). American evangelicalism would gain what it has been sorely missing: a distinctively Lutheran expression. Since the great revival tent of American evangelicalism is presently both recommitting to its essentials and expanding in some healthy and intriguing ways, the time may be ripe for American Lutherans to start operating, even if with some discomfort, under the evangelical canopy.

Lutheranism, it must be admitted, is an unfortunate name. “[B]y any consideration of body or soul you should never say: I am Lutheran,” said Luther himself, echoing Paul in 1 Corinthians 1. “Christ alone died for you, he alone is your master, and you should confess yourself a Christian” (Luther 1522, 266). Yet, by that perennial accident of history in which a slur becomes a proudly-held name, Lutheran stuck, particularly on this side of the Atlantic.

At the same time, evangelical, the original name for the movement of gospel-centered Christians who pursued reform within the Roman church, still remains with many of our congregations. The “E” in ELCA generally baffles even those it is intended to describe. Insiders and outsiders both assume that it is a remnant from the group’s immigrant past, since everyone knows that Lutherans are not in the born-again camp. Occasionally, a clergyperson uses it to exhort the Lutheran corps to invite somebody to church, for heaven’s sake. We are evangelical, therefore, evangelize. Please.

The history of how evangelical moved to such a marginal place in North American Lutheran identity is complicated, but we may highlight a few key factors. Even before Lutherans emigrated from Northern Europe, they had put the term through a lot. First, they used it as a factional label over against “papists” and then against the Reformed. Later, they used it in an overly generic sense for all Protestants regardless of whether or not they endorsed the central principle of justification by faith alone. Once settled in the Anglo-American world, however, evangelicals of the Lutheran variety largely became victims of the steady monopolization of evangelical identity by the “righteous empire” of soft-Calvinist revivalism (see Marty 1970). As latecomers and linguistic outsiders, they never really had a chance at the word. Long before most immigrant Lutherans had even unpacked their catechisms, the Awakenings that swept through Britain and North America in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had created a new religious culture, one that became the prevailing way of being Christian in America.

This revivalist form of Protestantism never coalesced around a common name like evangelical...
That highly significant step toward cohesion took place as recently as the 1940s, when, in the unpleasant wake of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, inheritors of the revivalist legacy who championed learning and cultural engagement over anti-intellectualist separation organized around the name neo-evangelical. This is the movement represented by organizations like the National Association of Evangelicals; academic institutions like Wheaton College and Fuller Seminary; and figures such as Billy Graham, Harold J. Ockenga, and Christianity Today founding editor Carl F. H. Henry. Before long, in what was perhaps an unconsciously hegemonic move, the neo- was dropped, and historians from within the movement began applying the term evangelicalism retrospectively to the entire English-speaking revival tradition, which they dated back to the 1730s.

We have little evidence that Lutherans, as the original evangelicals, ever were consulted about any of this (though our exceptional and longstanding use of the word does often merit a footnote in modern evangelical historical scholarship). Holding grudges, however, will get us nowhere. If Lutherans who still cling stubbornly to their evangelical identity can look beyond the offense of their own marginalization, they will see that Anglo-American evangelicals increasingly consider their historical location in the revival tradition as secondary to their contemporary vocation as stewards of basic Christian orthodoxy. Consider, for instance, how C. S. Lewis, who never personally identified with the neo-evangelical movement, now receives more attention among evangelicals than Dwight Moody. Leading evangelical theologians like Alister McGrath and Donald Bloesch (in some tension with the historians) demonstrate a strong connection to the “classical evangelicalism” of the Reformation. Others like Thomas Oden speak passionately in the language of Christian confessionalism.

Concurrent with this centering trend, expansion into new evangelical frontiers is taking place in the form of the emerging church movement. Though “cohorts” of young emergent Christians can often be found in coffee shops and bars debating whether they should add post-evangelical to their well-loaded basket of post-words (Tomlinson 2003), the guiding metaphor for emergence, according to leading voice Brian McLaren, is the cross section of a tree, which embraces and integrates old rings even as it adds new ones (2004, 313–327). For the vast majority of emergents, those old rings represent their evangelical upbringing, a history that is reflected in the irenic tone, value on experience, charismatic leadership, and emphasis on mission that typify the movement. The newer, postmodern rings, which are often viewed with suspicion by evangelical elders, concern such matters as narrative interpretation of the Bible, a more creation-affirming eschatology, and the centrality and distinctiveness of Christian practices. Other new rings are in fact quite old—“ancient” in emergent lingo—like the reclaiming of liturgy, chanted music, and the Eucharist. (Few moments for an emergent Christian match the excitement of that glorious first encounter with the Nicene Creed.)

All this is to say that the great tent of evangelicalism is shifting and expanding, and doing so in such a way that Lutherans, though not historically associated with the Anglo-American revivalist tradition per se, now have an excellent opportunity to witness to a particularly Lutheran and heretofore curiously absent form of evangelicalism. Lutherans need to recognize that in the changing religious landscape it makes increasing sense to locate ourselves conceptually and practically as a particular confessional tribe within the much broader tent of evangelicalism. In effect, this would imply a reversal of our traditional ordering as evangelical Lutherans in favor of being Lutheran evangelicals.

The distinguishing marks of this wide-ranging evangelical canopy have been most satisfactorily identified by the British Baptist historian David Bebbington, whose definition, known as the “Bebbington Quadrilateral,” enjoys wide currency among evangelical scholars. The four characteristics are: “conversionism, the belief that lives need to be changed; activism, the expression of the gospel in effort; biblicism, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called crucicentrism, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross” (Bebbington 1989, 3). Those familiar with Bebbington’s Evangelicalism in Modern Britain may find the proposition of Lutherans self-consciously dwelling under this canopy odd, given that a central feature of Bebbington’s argument is that
evangelicalism is quintessentially a product of the Enlightenment. However, viewed less as a historical problem than as a contemporary issue of contextualization, the Quadrilateral gives us a good sense of the kind of company Lutherans would be keeping if they dared to identify themselves as evangelicals.

More importantly, we can begin to imagine how such Lutherans, once engaged in the evangelical conversation, might offer a genuinely fresh and enriching take on these hallmarks. As a church for which, as the ELCA Confession of Faith states, “the canonical Scriptures... are the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life” (ELCA), Lutherans could serve as trustworthy guides for those evangelicals longing to get out of the Enlightenment ghetto—with its hair-splitting debates over inerrancy and infallibility—while demonstrating a law-and-gospel, Christ-bearing, life-giving hermeneutic. The ELCA’s Book of Faith Initiative, inaugurated at the 2007 Assembly, is a fine example of an essentially evangelical endeavor with postliberal undercurrents. As “crucicentrists,” Lutherans, who share the evangelical conviction that salvation comes through Christ’s work on the cross, would sometimes proclaim this good news through a similar use of the language of sacrifice, but their special contribution would be through employment of the rich, “classical” motif of cross as victory.

Moreover, in contrast to the Calvinist emphases on divine sovereignty and providence, Lutherans are uniquely equipped to model what it means for “the cross alone [to be] our theology.” As those who give thanks for the Spirit’s work of conversion, Lutheran evangelicals would profess, amidst those who elevate the dramatic moment of surrender, the baptismal pattern of Christian existence as daily dying and rising. While our unwavering affirmation of baptism as a means of grace probably never will go over well in evangelical culture, the salvific power we locate exclusively in God’s promise often will—and this can serve as a blessed assurance for evangelicals fraught with doubt over the sincerity or ongoing validity of their “decision for Christ.”

Finally, as activists, Lutherans dwelling within the evangelical tent can offer an alternative to those elements that would view good works as a litmus test for regeneration—by simply celebrating them as the fruits of freedom. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s Ablaze! movement, which has committed to the goal of “reaching one hundred million unreached and uncommitted people with the Gospel by 2017” (the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation)—and has an online counter to keep track!—is one place where American Lutherans are mobilizing for evangelical outreach.

This list of potential Lutheran contributions to the greater evangelical community is by no means intended to overshadow what would, no doubt, be an excellent return benefit. Most Lutherans, for instance, need desperately to be challenged by the testimony of those who have experienced a very sudden and specific moment of spiritual transformation, lest they forget that that gospel does, in addition to nourishing lives, often change them quite radically. Also, while the Quadrilateral as a broad outline of evangelical parameters illustrates evangelicalism’s remarkable capacity for internal diversity, it should be evident as well that a closer association with the movement also implies a level of accountability to a basic Reformation orthodoxy. In other words, by being evangelical, Lutherans would be encouraged to maintain what at bottom are their own traditional strengths: scripture, cross, justification, vocation.

A few final words may be said regarding the character that an authentically Lutheran evangelical ministry is likely to take within the context of the larger fold. First, we can expect that, to whatever extent it registers on the radar of the evangelical mainstream, it almost certainly will exert what we might call a ministry of confusion. Lutheran evangelicals would be found rather subversively combining things that, in the view of the culture (both evangelical and secular), are not supposed to go together: “passionate” and “liturgical,” “sacramental” and “born-again,” “gay” and “biblical.” These odd evangelicals, if they are to have any success at all fostering such holy confusion, must be open and unambiguous in their welcome of those for whom evangelical has always meant a closed door.

Second, core to the role of Lutheran evangelicals will be a ministry of expansion. For those many already settled comfortably in the evangelical
tent, the sudden presence of Lutherans declaring themselves *simul iustus et peccator* will seem downright jarring. And yet, for an increasing number of evangelicals exiled from their own tradition for their curiosity, a Lutheran way of being evangelical may provide just the kind of depth, grace, and ambiguity they now seek—without having to abandon their home.

Third, Lutheran evangelicals will be well-equipped to extend a *ministry of catholicity* among a people who have known one too many new beginnings (read: schisms) and now long to discover their roots in the Great Tradition. Lutherans can provide a needed alternative to the iconoclastic instincts of Calvinistic evangelicalism while maintaining a Reformation vigilance against the temptation to make ceremonies and rituals into law.

Of course, not everyone who bears a Lutheran denominational badge will find the suggestion of self-identifying as evangelicals agreeable. American Lutherans are themselves a big—and tragically divided—tent, and this proposal is frankly not for all of them. Remember that evangelical—contrary to the popular notion of the “evangelical denomination”—is essentially a trans-denominational phenomenon. For Lutherans willing to entertain the notion that their own unique brand of evangelicalism might, in the days to come, be an American evangelicalism, a strange new picture begins to emerge. Taking in this landscape may feel a bit like arriving in a new country all over again.†

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**Bibliography**


Hanson, Mark S. “An email message to rostered leaders from Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson – Lent 2008.” <http://www.elca.org/bishop/messages/m_080228.html>.


Mother Teresa wanted the letters that make up most of this book destroyed, and it is easy to understand why. They contain an intimate picture of the heart and soul of one of the most remarkable people of the twentieth century, and it is a picture that contradicts her cheerful outward demeanor and shocked her closest friends. At times I felt uneasy while reading this book, wondering if I, too, had become privy to something that should never have been revealed to the public. But the inner portrait of Mother Teresa that emerges in the pages of this book offers several meaningful lessons to the reader who approaches it with an open mind and heart.

There were three things about Mother Teresa’s inner world that especially impressed me. The first was her great love for God and for lost and hurting people. Mother Teresa had a passionate love for God that motivated her throughout her life: “I want to love Him as He has never been loved before—with a tender, personal, intimate love” (263). Because of this great love, she promised God that she would never refuse him anything he asked of her. She also had a deep love for human souls. Taking Jesus’ words “I thirst!” on the cross as a statement of his thirst for the lost souls of the world, Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charities dedicated themselves to satiating this thirst of Jesus for the lost.

The second impressive fact about Mother Teresa’s inner world was the terrible darkness that engulfed her for most of her life. Ever since God called her to form her special Missionaries of Charity work, she was filled with an inner darkness that left her feeling totally alone and alienated from God. With the help of her confessing priests she gradually began to see this darkness as a dark night of the soul that enabled her to identify more completely with the darkness and alienation of the people to whom she ministered. It was a sharing in the sufferings of Christ, including the suffering he experienced in the awful plight of the unloved and unwanted sufferers Mother Teresa cared for. This darkness was the more intense and unbearable precisely because her love and her desire for fellowship with Jesus were so strong.

The third impressive part of Mother Teresa’s inner life revealed in this book is how she accepted the darkness and pain within her. There were indeed times when she thought the darkness was more than she could bear, times when she prayed desperately for healing and relief. But she learned to accept the darkness without allowing it to impede her work. Her determination is expressed beautifully in these words: “The greater the pain and darker the darkness the sweeter will be my smile at God” (222). Writing to a friend, she expresses her understanding of suffering in a dramatic way: “Sorrow, suffering, Eileen, is but a kiss of Jesus—a sign that you have come so close to Jesus that He can kiss you.—I think this is the most beautiful definition of suffering” (281). And at another point she confesses: “The joy of loving Jesus comes from the joy of sharing in His sufferings” (300). Mother Teresa thus came to accept her suffering as a necessary part of her mission and calling, a blessing and a sign of God’s favor to her. She finally experienced it as a necessary part of her mission to the poor, but her outward cheerfulness and energy concealed this inner darkness from even her closest friends.
Mother Teresa's inner life presents a powerful challenge to every Protestant American. Her passionate love for her Savior, a love that led her willingly to embrace a life of self-denial and sacrificial care to the dregs of society challenges us all to reexamine our lifestyles and our priorities. And her intense inner darkness crashes head-on with the cult of self-fulfillment that characterizes so much of our thinking. How often do we claim that obedience and service lead to satisfaction and happiness? What about a gospel that promises deliverance from suffering and healing of our minds and hearts? How can this gospel square with the experience of Mother Teresa? If anyone deserved a happy and fulfilled life, it was Mother Teresa. Yet she lived most of her life concealing a wretched emptiness and darkness that would have brought a lesser person to despair.

Even if Protestants cannot entirely embrace the Roman Catholic teachings about how Christians can and must share in the continuing suffering of Christ in this world, we cannot pretend that our traditional and popular Protestant theology has all the answers. We at least need to re-examine the nature of our experience in this world and the role that suffering has in obedient Christian living.

If the purpose of a good book is to inspire us and challenge the way we think and live, then this account of Mother Teresa's inner life is one of the best I have read in years.

Daniel Boerman
Hudsonville, Michigan

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THE COST OF FIRE

Speaking philosophically, the chemist calls it a wash—the transactions

oxygen's made recorded in a ledger of ashes.

Ask a farmer who's just lost his barn and livestock to flame, the old wiring gnawed by mice, the whole gutted hulk smoldering for weeks, rafters exposed like the black ribs of a sunken ship. He will purse his lips and say nothing.

Christian Knoeller
Vocation: Life, Not Career

A commencement address delivered to the Valparaiso University Class of 1978
(first published September 1978)

Picture me aged seventy-two, charitably described as balding, either "wiry" or "paunchy," depending upon the point of view, looking back many years on someone I knew at a nearby school in the Class of 1978. To protect identity, I'll give her the fictional name Magna C. Laude, but we'll call her "Mag" for short.

From the name you can tell she was an honor graduate but in absentia. Her firm needed her quickly and she got a head start by going to work at once. In her absence both of her friends back on campus sent greetings. Not having heard from her at Christmas, both dropped her. But the alumni office never lost track of her, for she advanced very rapidly in her career.

Belonging to the Class of '78 had certain advantages in the literature of her day. Among other things, as an undergraduate she had already read Passages and thus was able to have her mid-career crisis twenty-two years early. She read Power! How to Get It, How to Use It; Success! How Every Man and Woman Can Achieve It; Winning Through Intimidation; Looking Out for No. 1; and the other academic best sellers of her vintage. Having read The Woman's Dress for Success Book, she wore the proper three piece skirted suit, bag by Gucci, suit by Pucci, shoes by Tucci. She began immediately as the assistant associate executive expediter before her classmates had even unpacked.

By 1983, the fifth anniversary reunion of her class, she was unable to find time to get back, but she did read how the others were doing. She remembered from Kahlil Gibran about keeping space between herself and others, and from Fritz Peris to do it her own way.

Mag was having a little trouble, though, bereft of some of the therapies that got her started so well. Est and Scientology had failed her. She had forgotten her TM mantra and never had time to meditate anyway. TA was long past, since it involved groups. She dropped getting her master's because it took twenty minutes a day. She read books on all the latest therapies, including the perfect orgasm, but had no chance to use it. By then she was associate executive expediter.

In 1988—only twelve years ago—she became executive expediter and had her first breakdown. People were puzzled because they noted that her lip was always firm, her chin jutted as before. Her company helped out by giving her a trip to Norway to see the fjords. She came back ten days early with her report on expediting in Sweden. Her therapist prescribed leisure, so she compulsively bought season tickets to symphony, ballet, opera, and theatre, and then raffled them off at work because she got restless between the acts.

In 1990 she was aged thirty-three and her counselor advised her to marry so she could have a permanent relationship. She was told to prioritize her marriage and maximize her child-bearing potential. In those days the norm was 1.8 children; so she aimed for one, and had none. Four years later the marriage broke up, even though she tried contact lenses and her husband switched brands of scotch to match hers.

In 1996 she was named "The Indispensable Employee" and was promoted to vice president in charge of expediting. Honored as "Alumna of the Year," she sent a representative with a letter she dictated. It was signed, "Sincerely, Magna C. Laude."

The Short, Unhappy Life of Magna C. Laude

Two years ago Mag started losing her battle with her career. "Old M.C.L.," as they called her, noticed heart trouble, ulcers, endocrine disturbance, alcoholism, and other—what my
colleagues call—specifically Christian diseases. We lost her recently. Her former husband arranged for her cremation and, in lieu of flowers (Mag never did care much for flowers), gifts for the employees’ recreation fund.

Looking back, I followed the path of her career through these twenty-two years, and I am going to say something now that sounds very cruel, but I hope you will understand. I, too, have read John Donne and I know that anyone’s death diminishes all of us. But I have to confess:

I’m not sad because Mag died.

I’m sad because she never really lived.

What goes on here in this little biography?

Parents must think I’m being subversive. You are wondering why there is no pep talk about hurrying up and getting a job and paying off a little bit. You might have noticed that this apparently irresponsible speech is not being delivered at a commencement at which any of my own offspring is graduating.

Others may think that you are hearing—ten years late—the last fossil from a counter culture, a leftover hippie handing out petals to flower children.

There must be employers and executive employers here who know—as I know—that work is an important part of life and highly valued.

We are discussing here a problem that may not touch the lives of all of us. This is an age when many Americans are unemployed, underemployed, misemployed, and it would be insensitive to assume that careerism is the only problem before us.

Why choose Mag and her problem then? Why not concentrate on the majority of you who have life and career in proportion and in proper perspective? Most of the people I meet who graduate from schools like this do. The very fact that you have chosen a university where the sciences, arts, humanities, the liberal arts, chapel, graduate and professional schools all intermingle is in itself a commitment by you to life, and career, and education for career preparation. You do not want to follow lockstep, as W. H. Auden describes, where people “ply well-paid repetitive tasks in cozy crowds.” (“Dowdy they’ll die who have so dimly lived.”)

Is it a false alternative I’m posing here today, career vs. life? The historian in me answers by locating your years and what future historians will see as a central problem of academic living in these years. The mid-seventies, 1973–78, your campus years, have three marks in the eyes of observers and critics (and until a commencement speaker locates something to be unhappy about, he cannot be happy).

Vocationalism—the bane of those who want to educate and not train, who run universities and not technical institutes, who wish to help prepare people for life and not task alone. These are the years in which students, to idolize vocation(ism), made mass communicators happy, and the rest of the world sad, by tearing pages out of books so that their competitor students could not pass tests, and burned themselves out in joyless pursuit of an advantage when times got rough.

Professionalism—the bane of those who would delight in the professional preparation of graduate students. Faced with the need to acquire competence, we have often seen students lose qualities of living; watching them become experts, we have seen them become sterile specialists out of context. I serve on the board of a “general” scholarly journal of social work and each quarter have to watch the birth of another journal for a particular subdivision of the profession. Some day there will be journals just for social workers dedicated to the service of left-handed, alcoholic, Latino, homosexual, unemployed males. Then profession exhausts the space life used to take.

Careerism—toward this the others point. Like vocation and profession, career is not the problem. The ism is, the overall and even total organization of living toward one end, for “where your treasure is, there is your heart also.”

If we can in these minutes sort out how career relates to life, we will have served you well.

The text for what remains of our meditation comes from Jose Ortega y Gasset (who wrote back when “man” meant “person,” so please mentally translate): “Strictly, a man’s vocation must be his vocation for a perfectly concrete, individual, and integral life, not for the social schema of a career.”
Ortega was what he called a "partly faithful professor," because he never let his profession define and confine all that he was. No one made more of an impression on the modern Spanish university. His students knew him as a great teacher and influence. But he supplemented his place in the institution with other ideas than just the "big deal" of being an important professor, and his journalism, philosophy, and lived life in a world of action helped him fulfill his calling as a professor. He prescribed a three dimensional life:

Concrete, which my dictionary reminds me is "not general, but particular," unmistakably one's own.

Individual, which did not mean isolated, for Ortega was a social thinker, but distinct in the midst of community. I have often noted that when community was rich, in biblical days or colonial times, a chronicler in three lines could depict a life and we would know that person more than we do some who receive three volume biographies for their career achievements.

Integral, which means "whole," not fragmented, torn from within, but knowing something of "shalom."

The Partly-Faithful Professor and Impure Thinker

I think as well of another "partly faithful professor." (Pardon me for illustrating with my own vocation, a profession that can easily corrupt one into idolizing the social schema of a career.) This one is Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy. Burdened by a German doctorate in law, he fought in World War I, worked for Daimler-Benz, edited the first factory magazine in Germany, worked in adult education, eventually taught law at the University of Breslau, but, more preoccupied with the tenor of life than tenure in career, organized work service camps in Germany until Hitlerism forced him from Germany—he was Jew and Christian, truly marginal and misfit man!—whereupon he made pit stops at Harvard and the suburbs of Dartmouth. He is remembered for shaping Camp William James in the Civilian Conservation Corps and for a score of remarkably offbeat books that have influenced people who influenced others. The despair of the provincial precisionist because he was unconfined and his discipline was not "pure" liked to brag, "I am an impure thinker." Yet he purified the thoughts of others.

Ortega, Rosenstock-Huessy, the administrators and managers you are likely to remember in the firms of which you will be part, the concrete-individual-integral people who will not impose themselves as templates but will inspire because they do not try to, all of them will have something of an openness that violates the edges of career. I think of economist Peter Drucker, a man of fulfilling career who never found it necessary to wind down: "Here I am, fifty-eight years old, and I still do not know what I want to be when I grow up." These lives as I have described them might give the impression of fluttering, fluttering, frittering distraction. Just the opposite. The people who lived them were on a trajectory that gave direction and shape. Each one implies competence, mastery, discipline, faithfulness, and the hardest kind of work. Happy the nation, university, or firm that could put them to work. The concrete life is precisely not the life of the chattering generalist, the dilettante. Ortega criticized idolatry of the schema, the diagrammed outline of a career, not the vocation.

Grace Notes and Breathing Holes for the Human Spirit

So we should have a word about vocation.

Let me speak out of the context of my own, not as a "partly faithful professor" of history or as an "impure thinker" among the historians but from the sphere of theology. I should think that some of you must by now be urging, "Say something theological," for in this sphere it is hard to be prophetic without grounding oneself in Being, God, Spirit, Christ. My colleague Saul Bellow jars my kind: "Being a prophet is nice work if you can get it, but sooner or later you must talk about God." But this is not vespers or chapel, nor dare I presume to speak to or for all of you in this realm even on these premises. These cautions aside, it still seems to me that vocation takes shape best in the context of theology. If I were here to defend B-1 bombers, neutron bombs, the Republican Party, or a large corporation, your commencement
address would have to do with those spheres. Try this one:

A vocation is a calling, a gift, hard work tinged by great grace. One day it occurs to us, there is no “age of Aquarius” waiting out there, and if there were we would be bored to death with it the first rainy Sunday afternoon. Economist Kenneth Boulding reminds us that Aquarius trudging across the heavens with his water pots is the only sign of the zodiac doing work and embodies the Protestant ethic itself. But you do not trudge in true vocation, for each day is lived as a new one. Einar Billing in a great book on vocation sets it in context: In such a life “nothing is too small, too neutral, too heavy, too light, too routine, too transitory, but all have a place.... In these monotonous deeds of every day I am to put in from day to day not only my most eager interest, my strictest conscientiousness, but God’s power and God’s love. God is to continue to create, Christ to continue to redeem, through my daily work.” And the inner-life will grow.

If you are to have a concrete, individual, and integral life, we wish for you:

1) Moonlight—hobbies, voluntary activities, supplemental work, anything that keeps you from becoming a slave of your sunlight occupations.

2) Wonder—that quality you brought to life and that we hope your better teachers kept your worse teachers from killing off. (Nietzsche: You must still have some chaos in your soul to give birth to a dancing star. If you have wonder, surprise will find its way, and you cannot become drones and drudges.)

3) Space—E. M. Forster has spoken of the need for “breathing holes for the human spirit,” which we have seen some people find in cramped lofts and garrets and assembly lines, but which is also available for us under the sky, where the wonder of the starry night impinges as always before.

4) Other people—we hope you will find yourself webbed with other people, who make demands upon your self. Old and funny shaped, beguiling and alluring, beckoning and hoping people who care little for your career and all for your living.

5) Creative schedule interruptions—the fine art of knowing when to forget the calendar, the date book, and the clock because people have needs.

6) Positions—yes, we wish for you jobs, professions, vocations, callings, demanding enough that they provide attractive careers and thus challenges for lives.

7) Grace—a life of grace reminds you that all is a gift, and not that pushy sense of the self-made person who worships, his creator, the self.

A story that cinches this all elaborates on something the late Pope John is said to have said about the social schema of his career. Let us assume that running a 500 million member international organization is a demanding task, and that rising to lead it offers every temptation to idolize the current rung on the ladder of achievement, since hierarchy is a nuanced and competitive pattern.

In this version John tells of his own “breathing holes”:

“When I was a little boy and had a problem, I could always ask my parish priest. When I became a priest and had a project, I could consult the nearby monsignor. As I rose in the ranks, there was always the bishop on whom to lean. Then they made me a bishop, but I was secure since I could talk to the archbishop. Being an archbishop brought new duties and terrors, but in grave situations I could always consult the cardinal. But being cardinal was even worse, so it was necessary to take comfort from knowing I could talk to the pope. Now in all the terrible work of being the pope, I sometimes forget myself. The other night I had a problem and tried to reassure myself: ‘Let me see, I must talk this over with the pope.’ Then I remembered: ‘My God, I am the pope. So I talked to the Holy Spirit, rolled over, and slept peacefully.’”

And the whole world saw him refreshed the next day, ready for his vocation and life.

To be free from career for career, to lose your life so that you find it—this is your goal, your gift.
on the cover—

In February 2007, Valparaiso University professor Aimee Tomasek traveled to New Orleans, Louisiana to document the lasting effects of Hurricane Katrina and the city’s progress toward rebuilding. This photograph is from her photographic portfolio, “Crying with the Saints and Sinners: NOLA,” which depicts the condition of two of the city’s public high schools a year and a half after the storm. More photographs from this collection can be found in a photographic essay that begins on page thirty-one of this issue. The photograph on the cover was taken in the band room at G.W. Carver High School in the Upper Ninth Ward.

on reviewers—

Daniel Boerman

is a graduate of Calvin Theological Seminary. His articles have appeared in several Christian magazines including The Church Herald and Perspectives.

on poets—

Nancy G. Westerfield

was Nebraska’s first National Endowment for the Arts Fellow in Poetry. Her poetry and prose have appeared in Commonweal, America, Christian Century, and The Living Church. She lives in Kearney, Nebraska.

Steven Schroeder

teaches and writes in Chicago and Shenzhen, China. His most recent poetry collection, The Imperfection of the Eye, was published by Virtual Artists Collective in 2007. Six Stops South is forthcoming from Cherry Groves Collections in 2009.

J.T. Ledbetter

is a retired professor of English at California Lutheran University. He has published poetry, fiction, and essays.

Jan Bowman

is Emerita Professor of English at California Lutheran University where she has taught courses in English, Women’s Studies, and Religion since 1974. Her first collection of poetry, Carved Like Runes, was published by Lutheran University Press in 2005.

Christian Knoeller

works with undergraduate pre-service English teachers at Purdue University where he serves as Associate Professor of English. He is currently teaching a new graduate seminar, “Landscape and Literature: Reading and Teaching Texts of the American West,” and is this year’s recipient of the Jill Barnum Midwestern Heritage Prize from the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature. His second collection of poems, Another Indian Summer, is in the works.
Best In Class—Journal
Award of Merit

“This is not the same old approach to Christianity and culture.”

“The Work of Our Hands: Two Farmers’ Reflections”
Fred Bahnson and Richard Church
Devotional/Inspirational—Award of Excellence

“This is serious writing. The language is strong, unfussy, transparent. A deep appreciation for the human body and the work that it does leads the authors to an incarnational view of all creation and to an earthy Christology.”

Michaelmas 2007

“Why Cook Dinner?”
Agnes R. Howard
Critical Review—Award of Excellence

“A clever, comprehensive critique of three excellent books that grapple with the morality of fast food among Christians for whom feasting is a communal activity. The author is literate, learned, and witty, and the reader is left feeling both enlightened and stunned by how morally complex the act of eating is in the modern world.”

Lent 2007

STEPHANIE UMBACH
CHRISTOPHER CENTER
VALPARAISO UNIVERSITY