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The covers:

ECCLESIASTES
(c) 1989 by John August Swanson
Serigraph: 22" x 28"
John August Swanson, Los Angeles artist, is known for his fine
detailed, brilliantly colored Biblical pieces. Some of his works are to
be found in the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of
American History, Tate Gallery in London, Biblioteque Nationale
in Paris and the Collection of Modern Religious Art in the Vatican
Museum. The artist is represented by Bergsma Gallery, Grand
Rapids, Michigan (ph. 616-458-1776).

The Cresset thanks Mr. Swanson for his kind permission to reprint
this work. Other of his prints and paintings may be seen in the VU
Museum of Art Collection.
Earth Stood Hard as Iron

I wish I could transmit in this space the joy I experienced driving to the office this morning. I took what we call "the long way," through the country, though even our highway goes through a landscape most people would be glad to be able to see every day. It is the first day of Thanksgiving break, and so I was later than usual in my drive, and the sun made every vista curiously silvery and indistinct. We've had some real cold already, and the ground is chilly, so the air has about it that winter spell; it seems very still and quiet, and in the sunshine the fields, cleared of all but stubble, are a subdued gold in the distance, something almost unearthly. Now the beautiful shapes of woods are visible, and every view provides the deep satisfaction of the turn and curve and swoop and rise made by land and trees in a pattern that is familiar and new at once.

But editors must not rhapsodize over landscape. The turn and curve of events drives our words across the page, the swoop and rise of activity in human affairs compel us to the effort of making sense. Events and affairs push so deeply at the heart of meaning today that editors have outdone themselves in these past few weeks. The Simpson verdict, the Million Man March, Rabin's assassination, Colin Powell's decision not to run for the American presidency have inspired many words in our press.

Can one more word here make sense in view of this journal, this season? The meaning of race in America seems to me the dominant and defining problem of our time, but what we mean by it keeps increasing geometrically every day, so that understanding it slips further and further from possibility, even as our sense of the necessity of understanding it becomes more pressing. Elements of racial division spread more and more pervasively in our culture, with each day's events providing a kind of diagram of the division in our country that simply doesn't improve. Or, maybe it is just that as more and more becomes visible, white people see more and more clearly what black people have tended to know all along: race is the main matter in American life.

It could be the case that class is more implicated than we have been willing to admit. Some people have remarked that a Powell candidacy would have pointed very strongly to the involvement of class in the complex of issues we label "race relations." Is it black men who are so feared in our society? Or is it poor black men whose presence is so scary? Why is it that we generally view the categories of poor black men and potentially dangerous black men as the same category? And who is that "we"? Is a middle-aged, middle class black woman as frightened by a couple of loud, tough-talking young black men as I am? Is there a way to get that question answered? A black man as a major candidate in a political contest in this country might have made us talk about the issues in these terms, for all of us who vote would have had to confront at least the question of the extent to which a man's blackness makes him what he is. And after that, what is our response to those various components of his person?

For this reason, if no other, the Million Man March also claims attention. Events with so many meanings become not clarifying lenses, but something more like kaleidoscopes, an infinitely expanding series of images and reflections. Yet, difficult as it is to think about, American citizens, black and white, must concede that what was going on was an effort to confront questions about blackness, personhood and citizenship. More than confront them, probably. To experience them. And, though this is as good as impossible, to confront them without the confusing distraction of relations with white people.

Of course there are objections to this degree of separation. But there are some analogies with a certain stage in the women's movement. Lots of women found it helpful to get together in groups of women only to clear out a space to understand some things better. Those consciousness-raising groups now have a kind of out-dated ring to them; at the time, they helped women to find each other's strengths, to experience what they were like, what they desired, what they feared and hoped for. Undeniably, some marriages came undone, and there was bad feeling over the demand for an experience that excluded men. Yet most of these women didn't hate men, or despise marriage or scorn their obligations or desire destruction. Women's groups provided a necessary space, and a "time out" for concentration on sorting out real issues from non-issues in understanding one's identity and purpose.

The good that resulted from these groups was due in
part to the patience and good will of those who were excluded. For well-meaning white people this sense of exclusion is almost the hardest part to cope with. The hardest part, no doubt, is Louis Farakhan’s involvement, and his anti-semitism. No allowance can be made for this wholly wrong part of his own thinking, or for the element of anti-semitic rhetoric and action on the part of his disciples. What is anti-semitic is wrong, and there should be no question about that, or about saying so. And it is a major enough element that it should be confronted and criticized, straightforwardly, one would hope, without excuses.

What will not be helpful is the setting aside of the entire march as a project hopelessly compromised by the presence of Farakhan and a part of his program. As a society, we cannot be led into further and further divisions by the tactic insisting that “a friend of my enemy is my enemy.” If we need any examples of the bloody outcomes of such thinking, we have for evidence the Middle East’s history, and the mess we currently refer to as “Bosnia.” We simply must find ways to allow those who are friends of our enemies to remain our friends. Specifically, in this instance, one must be allowed to entertain the belief that the Million Man March accomplished something good, and even bears within it the possibility for good to come, without becoming the enemy of those whose primary response comes from their deep offense at Farakhan’s anti-semitic program. It must be possible to be a friend to both these enemies.

We are not without examples, some of them living. Jordan’s Hussein is such a person, and Mr. Mubarak. And there must be many others, not living so publicly. I regret that Mr. Powell is not ready to join them. The difficulty of standing as friend to two enemies has been the material of heroic song and story for centuries, though it has never been as popular as the simpler story of the hero who works on the old principle that his enemy’s friends are his enemies. It makes for great epics and lousy life. And unless it is reversed here, now, with real people, it won’t change at all.

Putting together this issue of The Cresset, with what was meant to have an emphasis on the Christmas and Epiphany season, I worried about whether to include the piece by Greg Jones about the men’s march, and to emphasize it further by adding the column by James Kingsland on affirmative action. So controversial, so un-Christmassy. But this morning, driving though the lightened fields shimmering with mist, I knew that it was all right. Christmas is about incarnation, and it is this world he came to, entered into.

Thus, this Cresset is not a Christmas annual, brimming with pretty happiness. Nor does it ignore the holiness of the season for Christians, merely skipping lightly to holiday wishes. From Wangerin’s nearly ecstatic devotional meditation, to Jais-Mick’s pungent critique, to Combs’ cyber-moan, to Sponberg’s theatrical rationale, we are thoroughly in the presence of the human world. The poetry is serious, and I confess to missing the Hillila wit in a Christmas poem. But few things could be more joyous than the Swanson pictures on the covers, a reproduction of the new Ecclesiastes work on which Sr. Joan Chittister has written so eloquent a trope. In our tradition of lifting up the arts at Christmas time, we print some early sketches for Dennis Friesen-Carper’s piece written for the dedication of VU’s new Center for the Arts. You will not gather round the parlor piano to sing it; it is here to give evidence in graphic form of that creative spirit which results in sound. And with another piece of Gary Fincke’s memoir, we are returned to that world which is the only one in which we get our revelation.

Christmas is not encompassed by the opulence and beauty of the department stores, our warm feelings toward others, or even the pious loveliness of the Christmas Mass. Observing Christmas reminds us that God undertook the amazing project of sending a friend to be a friend to His enemies. This earth, cold and beautiful on a November morning, is the one He sought to call back into friendship. Human creatures, whose capacity for warring enmity seems as much a part of their structure as arms and legs, only occasionally sense the call that incarnation makes upon us. This humanity, with its tendency to destroy, its desire to punish, its instinct to dictate to God what God’s will ought to be—it is this very humanity into which, we confess, God came. O magnum mysterium!

Peace,
GME
The scene is simple, the furniture rude, the people sweaty and few.

A plain photograph of the birth of Jesus would be altogether unremarkable—except that it showed a woman bearing her baby in a public place. That might cause a remark or two. Polite society could find the photo offensive ("Riffraff, as shameless of private bodily functions as the homeless in New York City"). Social activists could criticize polite society itself ("Don’t blame the victim! Poverty isn’t the fault of the poor, and bearing babies in stables is a sign of the country’s unkindness").

But no one would call the photo holy.

That which the camera could record of the Nativity of Jesus does not inspire awe. It is either too common or too impoverished. A cold modern scrutiny, a searching of the surface of things, reveals nothing much meaningful here.

Let me put it another way:
If, for us, reality is material only; if we gaze at the birth with that modern eye which acknowledges nothing spiritual, sees nothing divine, demands the hard facts only, data, documentation; if truth for us is merely empirical, then we’re left with a photograph of small significance: a derelict husband, an immodest mother, a baby cradled in a feed-trough in an outdoor shelter for pack-animals—a lean-to, likely, built behind a mud-brick house where travelers slept both on the floor within and on the roof without. Simple, rude, dusty, and bare.

Ah, but those for whom this is the only way to gaze at Christmas must themselves live lives bereft of meaning: nothing spiritual, nothing divine, no awe, never a gasp of adoration, never the sense of personal humility before glory nor the shock of personal exaltation when Glory chooses also to bow down and to love.

Walter Wangerin, Jr., known around the world for his writing and speaking, teaches at VU, where he holds the Jochum Chair of the University. He has recently completed a new telling of the Biblical history, to be published by HarperCollins-Zondervan

Such people have chosen a shell-existence, hollow at the core. Today, a fruitless rind; tomorrow, quintessential dust.

+ + +

Our seeing reveals our soul—whether we conceive of one or not. So how do we see Christmas?

If we do not recognize in the person of this infant an act of Almighty God who here initiates forgiveness for this rebellious world; if we do not see in Jesus the Word made baby flesh, nor honor him as the only premise for any Christmas celebration, then we see with that modern eye merely. Stale, flat, unprofitable.

If the “true meaning of Christmas” is for us some vague sentiment of fellowship and charity and little else, then we see with that modern eye merely. Human goodness is a poor alternative to Immanuel, the active, personal presence of God among us. Human goodness is unstable. God is not. Moreover, to celebrate human goodness is to celebrate ourselves—and there never was a self that could elevate itself by staring at the self alone. Mirrors are always experienced on exactly the same level as oneself, neither higher nor lower.

If the “spirit of the season” is for us a harried getting and spending, an exchanging of gifts, we see with that modern eye merely. Instead of the love of God to redeem us from dying (and so to cause in us his everliving love) we have that halting human love which might redeem a day from loneliness but which itself must, at the end of that day, die.

Or if we reduce the glory of the Incarnation to craven phrases like “Season’s Greetings” (for fear of offending some customer, some boss, some someone who finds no Christ in Christmas), then we offend God by bowing down before those who see with the modern eye merely. Likewise, “Peace!” is rendered an empty wish and “Joy!” is sourceless if ever we are ashamed of the Prince of Peace. For the world can make an illusion of joy, but illusions, when they shatter against experience, leave people worse than before. And this world has never, never by its own wisdom and strength, compacted a lasting peace.
No. I will not see the scene with that empirical, modern eye. I refuse to accept the narrow sophistications and dead-eyed adulthoods of a "realistic" world. I choose to stay a child. My picture shall not be undimensioned, therefore, neither as flat as a photograph nor as cold as news copy—no, never as cold as my scientist's case-study.

Rather, I will paint my picture with baby awe, wide-eyed, primitive, and faithful. More medieval than modern. More matter than material. And I will call it true: for it sees what is but is not seen. It makes the invisible obvious.

My painting is immense. Stand back to look at it. It is composed of seven concentric circles, each one lesser than the last, and all surrounding Jesus.

**ORBIS PRIMUS:** The widest circle is the whole world, dark and cold and winter-fast. The universe. All creation yearning for this birth and all of it mute until a word is put before, neither as flat as a photograph nor as cold as news. Dark and cold and winter-fast. The universe. All creation composed of seven concentric circles, each one lesser than the last, and all surrounding Jesus.

**ORBIS SECUNDUS:** Just inside the first sphere is another, scarcely smaller than the first because it touches that one everywhere and serves the whole of it. The second is a choir of angels countless as the stars, bright with white light and expectation, gazing inward, full of news—for Heaven itself attends his Advent here!

**ORBIS TERTIUS:** The third circle is trees, great ancient trees, the giants that stand in shadow outside civilization, northern forest, the jungle that ruins every human road, mountain escarpments covered with timber, the cedars of Lebanon—for it is from the simplest growing things that the beams and boards of the Lord's rude birthing-room is built. The third circle is poor and dark and huge with groaning. When you hear it, you might call that sound the groans of aching life, for God is about the business of redemption. The third circle is the stepfather who lends house and heart and lineage to his foster-child. The woman is Mary, his mother, regal and transcendingly beautiful, for heaven crossed all the circles to behold with their own eyes a Savior, their Savior, their dear One, their Lord.

Some of the shepherds hold hands. Two are giggling. One weeps. She can't help it. It's what she does when she encounters joy—she weeps.

And one near the back of the bunch is called Wally. That's me.

**ORBIS SEXTUS:** Circle six is a man and a woman, one standing, one reclined in weariness. The man is Joseph, the stepfather who lends house and heart and lineage to his foster-child. The woman is Mary, his mother, regal and transcendingly beautiful, for heaven crossed all the circles to choose her; and she, when heaven came near nine months ago, said, *Let it be.*

Immediately upon her faithful response it did indeed begin to be!

It happened! It happens still because it happened once historically. Ah, children, the sixth circle must be the circle composed of time: the year in the middle of all years, the first day of that year. For this woman’s riding on one daughter of the donkeys; for her lying down on straw, her straining forward to bear a King and crying out in dear pain her own verse of the universal hymn; for the crowning of her baby, the infant-skull pressing against the deeps of her most human womanhood—all this is the beginning of meaning in the history of humankind.

For it is this that keeps creation from the annihilations of absurdity, that on a particular day, in a particular place, within the womb of a particular woman, the fullness of God was pleased to rise through human flesh to be born as flesh himself into the world—

It happened! *She brought forth her firstborn son son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and—*
ORBIS SEPTIMUS: —and the smallest circle of seven, meaner than the others, is a manger made of wood.  

Wood, lumber from the forests: for Jesus is born material truly, bone and flesh and a red-running blood.

But wood, rough planks hewn by human hands: for one day wood will kill him.

Wood is the bracket of the earthly existence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Wood is the smallest compass around him, for it is our sinning and his loving—which, taken together, shape the very person of the Christ. This is his personal form both visible and invisible, a servant, a slave, a body obedient unto death.

For here, in a sphere which is the size of any human being, is the truth which cannot be seen but which my painting depicts in an outrageous round of wood as in a carving: his life, enclosed by a cradle and a cross, saves ours thereby. Oh, my dear, you are in the picture too! Do you see yourself? Kneeling next to Wally? And in your hand, a hammer.

In his tiny baby hand, a nail.

CENTRUM ORBIUM OMNIUM: But then here, in the perfect center of all my circles and of all the spheres of all the world; here, in the center of all galaxies; in the center of thought and love and human gesture, blazing with light more lovely than sunlight, light that makes of Mary a madonna, light that can kindle wood to burn a sacred flame, light that cancels in fire your hammer and that shows on your brow even now a crown of life, light that lightens the gentiles and the deepest pathways of all creatures and the forests once sunk in shadow—

—here, I say, in the center of everything, brightening all things even to the extremes of time and eternity—

—here, himself the center that holds all orbits in one grand and universal dance, is Jesus!

Here! Come and look! Do you see the tiny baby born? Do you see that Infant King? And do you recognize in him Immanuel?

Amen, child! O wide-eyed child all filled with awe, amen: for now you are seeing Christmas.

TO A GERANIUM

Red headed gypsy with ruffled green skirts
dancing barefoot on black soil,
snapdragons crowd and shadow you,
like an evil spell

so I'm slashing stems of dragon heads
(displacing a highly vocal bee)
giving you room to breathe and dance
in your innocent ecstasy.

It's hard to believe that a few months ago
(How you thrill to sprinkled water!)
.as a potted stick mottled with green
you were under the house for the winter.

I'll enjoy your dance through summertime
then again I'll put you away
to rest and rise and dance again,
dragon-free in your play.

Dorothea Kewley
Any Sunday morning, eight o’clock, from 1959 to 1963—my father sits in his Chevrolet station wagon with the engine running, my mother beside him, my sister in the backseat. I’m half-dressed in my room, slowly buttoning my white shirt and hoping this will be the week he backs out of the driveway and leaves without me.

Instead, my mother, every time, comes inside and says, “Hurry now, before trouble starts,” and I finish knotting my blue tie, pick up my gray blazer, and give her the time to close the car door before I follow, dropping into the seat behind her. I can watch my father for the fifteen minutes we spend on the nearly empty roads to Emmanuel Lutheran Church. He stares straight ahead as if he’s hauling the Bel Aire wagon for the first time. Nobody says a word, but trouble doesn’t materialize.

From the Sunday after I was confirmed to the Sunday before I went off to college, I was last in the car and had perfect attendance, arriving early for both Sunday School and church. One hundred and twenty-six Sundays—I’ve counted them to be sure of the repetitions, because to this day I can sing the lyrics of a hundred hymns, recite the litanies as well as the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds. And I can call out the answers to Bible questions before any Jeopardy contestant can push a button. Who is Zacharias? I say to “Father of John the Baptist.” Who is Joseph of Arimathea? I blurt to “Provider of tomb for Jesus.” Who are Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego? I recite to “Survivors of Nebuchadnezzar’s fire.” For a bonus, I can sing a Gospel song that uses the rhythmic names of those would-be martyrs for its chorus.

In another part of the world, during one initiation rite, a dozen small cones are arranged in a mystical pattern on the shaved scalp of a novice. While he prays, they’re lit and slowly burn down like candles until they scar into the flesh of the would-be priest.

Another group of monks demonstrates devotion by amputating their fingers, at designated intervals, in a prescribed sequence. They give up their ring finger; they eventually relinquish the thumb and show seniority by the severity of their stumps.

I sometimes shake my head and smile, but what I know best is that some disciples will flog themselves and carry a cross along the highways of America like this former priest who sleeps in a lost schoolbus shelter, who wears burlap and bears a cross of x-logs which looks so heavy I would say lunacy except we played tennis through college and he touch-volleyed with the soft hands of the expert, used slice and drop shot and lob as if he could win with the ascetic’s repertoire.

I say “George,” now, standing beside him a mile from my father’s house, although he’s abandoned his name like a pope, and since he’s no longer talking, I begin to babble like somebody who’s heard a beep, somebody who’s leaving his name and message on the tape, unspooling behind his eyes, waiting for him to return so he can get back to me.

His family built a clay court on the lot beside their house. When I visited, I’d help George lay down lines or, if I was early, roll and sweep the court to a sweet perfection which made our first footprints seem intrusion.

Gary Fincke teaches at Susquehanna University in Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania, in the Department of English, where he also directs the creative writing program. His new work is upcoming in The Paris Review, Black Warrior Review, Southern Humanities Review, and The Gettysburg Review.
That house, a year after we graduated, burned to the ground, one of those total-loss blazes that transforms a house into rubble. Bad wiring, I heard, but by then it was the hearsay of my mother’s letters to Oxford, Ohio, where I was busy reading a list of books for my master’s degree oral examination.

He’s Zydesh now. The spelling is mine. He refuses to write as well as speak since he explained to his brother, who had a hundred-mile-an-hour serve with a wooden racket in high school, how he was atoning for his sins by taking a name from the bottom of the alphabet.

George looks like the red herringsuspect in a B movie—long hair and beard and the prophet’s look of possession in his eyes. I keep myself from staring by examining the bus shelter, a place where, in three weeks, children will gather at 7:30, pushing back, in case of rain, to where he is sitting.

The cinder block walls are splotched with gray and blue and green paint. Periodically, someone slathers over the obscenities which appear on such walls. In a couple weeks, I imagine, somebody will roust George out of here, sweep and disinfect and repaint in bright schoolbus yellow, maybe repair the hole ripped out at the top of the back wall where a vent was built in to keep air circulating.

“I’m Gary,” I say. “From college. Tennis.” I’m not equipped for either banter or interview. I think, if he speaks, it will be to curse or bless me. I feel like a tourist in an AIDS ward or a leukemia hospice.

I want to say something right now that might cause George to smile or at least raise his eyes to mine. I run through old tennis matches and the new ones I’m coaching at a small college, mentioning that my son plays for me, that he hits two-handed from both sides, that I write stories and poems, occasionally about tennis, going on and on like a devotee of a new immortality scheme I’ve been reading.

Fat chance, I think. We might as well begin genetic engineering for the masses. We’ll end up with the expurgated and the overtly confessional. The insufferably perfect and the tediously grotesque.

An hour before I walked to the Middle Road to where I’d learned George lived, I watched the news about a racer who woke up with amnesia after crashing his car. As if the retaining wall were birth, I thought, considering his software angel, the discs with no past. And now I’m observing the split-life of flagellant George, who, if he spoke to a computer, would disregard, probably, everything except the trials of Zydesh.

In England, in 1752, the government decided, belatedly, to shift to the Gregorian calendar after years of lagging behind the developed world’s abandonment of the Julian it subscribed to. So many years had passed with the slightly slower calibration that England was now eleven days behind the rest of Europe. What else to do but decree the disappearance of those days, declaring September 3 changed to September 14?

Simple perhaps, though enough people believed those eleven lost days had shortened their lives that a riot began. The Calendar Riots claimed whole lives of its own, but the change, nevertheless, remained. And here is George shortening his life by abandoning his identity. And here I am confessing to thousands of games of Aardy the Aardvark and Tetris, weeks spent mastering the patterns for excelling in a reality more artificial than any George could be imagining.

In the first game, the aardvark’s tongue searches for ants; it extends and absorbs them through more and more complex anthills while feeding time is diminished until there is no possible way Aardy can succeed unless you have memorized the likely alternatives with which the computer will test you. Likewise, with Tetris, the varying geometric shapes drop so rapidly, you need nerve, anticipation, and hundreds of games played in order to recognize the perfect fits instantaneously.

Not to mention the mastery of tennis. Not to total the months of playing time, the initiation of lessons and defeats, fatigue and injury. It’s no surprise that players argue line calls made eighty feet from where they stand. Play long enough, repeating the strokes, and you recognize, to within an inch, whether or not a ball traveling the seventy-eight feet of court will strike its target.

Earlier, before the news of the racer’s amnesia, I’d driven the seven miles from my father’s house to where George had lived. I’d parked and crossed the road to examine the house someone had built on the site of the destroyed one. For all I knew, there had been two subsequent houses, five different owners, but the lot next door was eerie with familiarity.

The fence was gone. The net and the lines were gone. Yet there was no mistaking that a tennis court lay under the short, thick grass. I thought I could sense, as soon as I stepped onto the surface, where the baseline ran, where George would stand to receive my serve.

The ground, of course, was remarkably level, but what astonished me was the easy recognition of the constructed rectangle, how there were no weeds. The red clay might
account for the pattern, but what herbicide would allow grass but prevent weeds for two decades? It made me reconsider the technology of lawn care; it made me aware of the possible consequences of rolling on the perfect lawns of strangers.

Whether or not George had been a successful priest, I didn’t know, but I thought about herbicides and the human body, tennis and religion. And then I walked off that odd grass and scraped the soles of my shoes with each stride back across the highway to my car.

There have always been people who see the body as a hindrance: sinful, inefficient, obsolete. If only the soul were free; if only the mind were free. Religion and science are often siblings. On a simple scale, it’s like one of those horror movies from the 1950’s where the fanatics save Hitler’s brain in a jar for the resurrection of Germany or the scientist saves his wife’s brain while he searches for a beautiful body in which to transplant it.

The technology of paradise, we might say, knowing enough now to put the body aside and replace it with machinery. As long as the mind can be reduced to a set of mechanical ideas. As long as we are willing to say goodbye to our senses. As long as we don’t give a damn about the way we take things in, how each of us synthesizes those sensory details in a particular, distinctive way.

One study explains that the brightest among us have the earliest memories. At age three perhaps, or age two. Better, if something can be called up from the days before walking, a sort of MENSA by retrieval. Snow, I think, the beautiful body in which to transplant it.

On the radio, “Tennessee Waltz” and “Slow Boat to China.” After church, driving across Pittsburgh on Sundays, my father singing, “I’ve got a loverly bunch of coconuts.”

The high IQ of nostalgia. The reaching back for the complete file. If you want to talk with me in a hundred years, you’ll need a book of trivia, year by year, beginning in 1947, to verify whether or not I’m another liar or one of those rarities who record the truth.

Once, after a week of foul weather, George was busy, when I arrived, with small pegs and string. He was re-lining from scratch, remeasuring the distances, squaring the corners. Before he laid down one line, the court was outlined in twine. It looked like the floor plan for an agility drill, and when I started spinning out lime along the singles sideline, I grew nervous as if I’d somehow forget to stop, to turn, drawing lines where none belonged.

Just over the hill from the school bus shelter is a freshly seeded swath of grass. As little as a year ago, I know, there were two tennis asphalt courts there. When he was twelve years old, my son had happily hit forehands and backhands for hours on those courts. By the time he was fourteen, he refused to play there, making me drive another five miles when we visited my father, because someone, when the courts were built, had miscalculated the area, had laid down one court and then discovered there was room only for an additional singles court. Not so bad, but the sidelines of that court ran less than two feet from the fence. You had to play up to receive serve; you had to take balls on the rise and rush the net because otherwise you’d be beaten or injured. It wasn’t strategy which made him refuse to play. He was embarrassed to be seen on such a court.

“George,” I say again, “take care,” but he’s Quasimodo among the bells. When I retreat through the door and wave, Zyadesh doesn’t follow. His cross is propped against the back of the shelter. Before I can reason with myself I stoop, put my shoulder in the crook of the X, and heft it carefully like a novice.

I think of all the lies and silences I would record on my permanent record. I think of all the fictions I would enter through the keyboard. In all of these lamentations for the brain, there is a moment, finally, when it locks the fire-exits for intelligence, when memory is jammed, smoke-frenzied, against each inward-opening door. After the Coconut Grove for thinking, after the Happy Land for inference, each of us vows smoke alarm, sprinkler, fire escape, multiple doors—as if our chant could free us from the flaming high rise of impermanence and we could ascend the precarious air.

10
MAKING MUSIC

Preliminary sketches for a work by

Dennis Friesen-Carper

Christmas/Epiphany (December) 1995
In ritual, divine intervention is invoked through symbolic action (including incantation and artistic expression) and the recounting of God's acts in history. For this dedicatory event, I have selected a sequence of biblical psalms which present the gamut of human experience as the evidence of divine work in our lives, and invite that work to continue. Employing various translations suggests for me the psalms' enduring and universal nature, with the rhymed and metered Scottish Psalter serving as rhythmic relief from the often angular free verse. The sequence which suggested itself to me details an intense spiritual process in what turned out to be rather symmetrical fashion: Ps. 68, 29, 139, 69, 66, 30, 138, 67. Psalm 29 is part of Jewish Sabbath liturgy, while Psalm 30 was used for the dedication and rededication of the Second Temple.
Another dedicatory reference is the plainchant (L.U. 1250) for the text “Terrible (awesome) is this place: here is the dwelling of God, and the portal of heaven: here the voice of God is heard.” Violas quote the two-part, motet cantus firmus by Du Fay from the 1436 dedication of Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence.

The readings were chosen to connect the artist’s experience with the life of faith, and the mission of the VUCA [Valparaiso University Center for the Arts] with that of the whole campus community. Jewish-born feminist poet Marge Piercy imaged creativity as being used like a “Ram’s Horn Sounding,” and as ecstatic religious procession in “Saw Her Dancing.” I find in her vehement expression a literary complement to the musical grammar, which is based on the manipulation of the generating chord of Ps. 29 (“Kol Adonai”) through the increasing and decreasing chromaticism.

My thanks to the Inaugural Year Committee for this commission, and to the performers who have given it life. The work is dedicated to my esteemed colleagues, [recently retired] Eldon Balko and Frederick Telschow, with a promise to pursue their example of combining performance excellence with community-building in the new home.

Dennis Friesen-Carper

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Material from the dedicatory program
The Festival Psalm Sequence, by Dennis Friesen-Carper, was first performed on September 16, 1995, at the Dedication of the Valparaiso University Center for the Arts. Performers were Maurajanton Cock, soprano; Marcia Lewis, mezzo soprano; Christopher Cock, tenor; Ralph Klapis, baritone; Nora Frish, Lucy Ludkowski, Shelley Weiss, viola; Jeffrey Brown, Laura Nickerson, percussion; John Steven Paul, reader.
Affirmative Action: Should We Look Beyond It?

James Kingsland

For many African Americans there is an air of unreality in the debate over affirmative action. History has instilled a reflex of cynicism. Which of the following options are most African Americans likely to endorse: (A) The recent criticism of affirmative action is motivated by the perception of a declining economy and consequent job insecurity. In politics, perception trumps reality in the short run. The reality is that African Americans constitute only 4.3 percent of the students in the California university system. African American and white female unemployment rates are double the rate for white males, and by 1987, more than two decades after the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the total dollar income for all African American contractors seeking federal contracts was 1/10 of the revenue of the single largest white owned contracting firm for that same year. The point is that there just are not enough African Americans around to account for all the lost opportunities perceived to be the fault of racial preferences. Poor white males are more victimized by structural changes in the economy than they are by affirmative action. Still, the perception that affirmative action is a corrosive ill that cannot be ignored has generated an articulate philosophical rationale that strikes many African Americans as irrelevant. White Americans will do what they want to do and philosophy is an afterthought. The most dramatic illustration of this fear is found in Derrick Bell's allegory, "The Space Traders." Aliens suddenly arrive at Earth and offer America a bargain. The aliens will give America a seemingly magical technology which will clean the environment, revolutionize industry and usher in a utopian lifestyle. In return, America must surrender its entire African American population to an unknown fate with the aliens. For all the moral rhetoric, Americans cannot resist the bargain. At the conclusion of the story, army weapons trained on them, "...heads bowed, arms now linked by slender chains, black people left the New World as their forebears had arrived."

Still, it would be wrong to dismiss the critique of affirmative action as a racist ploy (the critique has been seconded by those within the African American community) or to dismiss the impact of affirmative action on particular individuals (minorities, and even more women, have made significant inroads in middle management). First, there is ambivalence about affirmative action within the African American community. A recent Newsweek poll showed 46% of African American respondents reacting negatively to racial preferences. In memoirs finished just before his death, Arthur Ashe identifies two obstacles to African American progress: racism outside the community and a corrosive sense of entitlement within it. He feels sympathetic toward the argument that "blacks should have been paid reparations for slavery and segregation." Japanese interned during the war have been paid "but no one has ever paid black Americans anything." But Ashe dislikes the mentality of "you owe me this" as a debilitating state of mind. Similarly, Shelby Steele concedes the "moral symmetry" of affirmative action where "the injustice of historical and even contemporary white advantage is offset with black advantage." But "blacks cannot be repaid for injustice done to the race," they can only be corrupted by society's "guilty gestures of repayment." For Steele racial preference continues to focus on race, so that the "old sin is reaffirmed in a new guise."

For African Americans like Ashe and Steele, affirmative action leads to demoralization of and greater self-doubt within blacks. Now there is always the stigma that those being hired and achieving promotion are achieving this only because of affirmative action. The sense of inferiority is intensified, for now even the most competent will always be perceived as unqualified. So affirmative action may even continue discrimination in a subtle form so that the blacks never reach the top and remain, always, below the glass ceiling because they are viewed as having achieved their current position not on merit but on affirmative action. Preferences benefit only the middle class who are in a position to take advantage of preferential hiring opportunity. Hence, Steele and Ashe prefer equal opportunity, and focus on development of African Americans so that they are in a position to take advantage of the opportunities. Ashe
writes, "What I and others want is an equal chance, under one set of rules, as on a tennis court. To be sure, while rules are different for different people, devices like affirmative action are needed to prevent explosions of anger. Practically, affirmative action is probably necessary. But I would not want to know that I received a job simply because I am black."

Ashe's concession that affirmative action is probably necessary is rooted in his recognition that the equal playing field is indeed not available. Certainly, economic equality and a society free of racism are the preferred goals, but until that is achieved affirmative action can be viewed as a reasonable means to a reasonable goal. As one of Ellis Cose's respondents says, "Affirmative action is a bridge to get us over racist attitudes. . . . It's a necessary mechanism." One of my friends had this to say: "If I can get a job, I will live with the 'stigma' of affirmative action." As she and others point out, the stigma of inferiority has always been there for African Americans; the stigma is rooted in perceptions of race and not in affirmative action or other forms of preferential hiring. Ellis Cose writes, 'to expect that abolishing affirmative action would make black intellectual capability easier to prove strikes me as more than a little naive.' Thus, when a Catholic institution gives preference to Catholics in hiring, definitely a form of preferential hiring, there are no immediate assumptions that the Catholics being hired are incompetent and unqualified. Nor will I assume this of my Lutheran colleagues, many of whom are here at Valparaiso University because they are Lutheran, and some of whom have been actively recruited because they are Lutheran. Very often the perceptions of inferior qualifications and abilities are rooted in American attitudes of race, and these would persist without affirmative action.

The anxiety among middle level executives in the private sector is real. Senior management in service sector businesses understand demographics. You cannot do business in the southwest without an Hispanic presence. As Allstate Insurance has recognized, if your target market is ethnic or feminine, your sales representatives must reflect that market. There is some good evidence of a positive correlation between corporate affirmative action hiring policies and profitability. This is another example of the affirmative action debate being swept aside by events. There are market forces encouraging diversity that will not be deterred by court decisions or philosophical distinctions between goals and quotas. This is good news if you are an MBA heading for a Fortune 500 firm. It is the smaller firms that need the push affirmative action provides.

Conservatives should endorse this development since it is the product of free market forces. And they will undoubtedly endorse the kind of voluntary program found in Birmingham, Alabama's construction industry. The Birmingham Construction Industry Authority promotes seminars for minority contractors, provides notice of when private sector work is available and it pairs minority contractors with established contractors for mentoring in financial management. Some lasting relationships have come from the mentoring program and there has been modest overall success (13 percent of private sector jobs have gone to minority contractors, representing a growth rate of 1-2 percent a year). Chattanooga, Tennessee is beginning a program following the Birmingham model. The obvious question is, are voluntarism and market forces enough to make government sponsored affirmative action unnecessary?

Critics of affirmative action offer laws against discrimination as a remedy. If you are victimized as an individual you can sue and, by implication, there is no need for a remedy targeted at your ethnic group (presumably composed of individuals who are not victims). Litigation is a good solution if you have a strong case and are not in a hurry. In June, 1995, the U.S. Civil Rights Commission acknowledged that some people virtually wait a decade for resolution of their complaints. The Commission's study of the Departments of Justice, Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, the Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and the Office of Contract Compliance Programs found that the minimum wait for resolution of a case is two to three years. Slow justice is no justice. The explanation is simple: fewer and fewer staff handling increasing caseloads. You can either have serious enforcement of anti-discrimination laws or you can have "less government:" you can't have both. The litigation option is also little comfort to those who know they have been discriminated against but lack the admissible evidence the litigation system demands from a plaintiff. One advantage of affirmative action is that it puts the onus on an employer to do something good rather than force a victim to prove something bad. This was undermined in the Supreme Court's decision in Adarand Construction v. Pena when the court said the Constitution protects persons (who can prove victimization) not groups. The Constitution may not protect groups, but the political system certainly does.

The truth is that we love group preferences. At a recent congressional hearing before the House Subcommittee on Employer Employee Relations, Theodore Shaw of the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund listed some of the groups eligible for scholarship preferences at selected universities: those of Huguenot ancestry, females who do not use tobacco,
men studying for the Episcopal ministry, lineal descendants of Confederate soldiers, and Baptists of good character. Do we dare question the group preference for veterans? How many non-combat veterans would be willing to subject their group preference to the strictures imposed on affirmative action by the Supreme Court? Since it is not fair to favor Veteran X over Civilian Y who worked in a defense industry making tanks, Veteran X will have to prove in a court of law that his individual contribution was truly worthy, and then wait while his or her attorney convinces an appellate court that there is a compelling government interest in dispensing the benefit. In practice, such benefits are not grounded on principles of equality, but on the fact that we like the group or because the group has clout. Farm subsidies are subject to many of the objections raised against affirmative action (e.g., they often benefit the already privileged). The defenders of farm subsidies do not invoke high moral principle. They invoke images of financial pain and irate voters. Defenders of affirmative action do not have the political muscle of cotton and peanut growers and are thus more vulnerable to philosophical attack. But these are narrow issues. We need to focus on the more profound issues the affirmative action debate has raised.

We need to ask, what is the problem we are trying to solve? We have placed too much of a burden on affirmative action. It was never intended to cure poverty or save the African American family. The debate over affirmative action masks a more complex debate over the sources of our national crisis. On one side are those who focus on African American pathology (we must do something about the culture of poverty) and those who see a national pathology that hits the African American community with special impact (a national culture that glorifies consumerism will produce Ivan Boesky and your neighborhood drug lord). Our debate should carry us beyond discussion of quotas and goals to ask, to what extent is racism a manifestation of a broader phenomenon: our declining sense of community? Was our former sense of community anything more than the hegemony of a particular class within a particular color? And what of color itself? We are about to recognize a new census category for individuals of mixed race. And what of class? This issue has crept into the affirmative action debate unannounced. The fashionable solution for the ills of affirmative action is class based preferences that benefit the poor regardless of race. We need to talk about this. Socio-economic status has never been a 'suspect class' in the constitutional sense and we have never committed the nation to the goal of a classless society. We are ambivalent about our wealthy elite on the assumption that some of its members got there the hard way. Class based programs are not tinkering with affirmative action: they are a radical departure. These issues lack the immediacy of what to do about federal contracts, but they color our priorities and should not go unexamined.

Critics of affirmative action have noted, rightly, that it does not address the major obstacles hampering minority communities. It does not address the slowing and restructuring of the economy or the collapse of urban school systems. It does not address drugs or violence. Unless we find a way to nurture and develop competitive capacity, distinctions between goals and quotas will fade into triviality. The fate of affirmative action is important symbolically and important to those directly impacted, but it must not be read as shorthand for issues of ethnicity, class and education. Those issues deserve a separate debate and separate solutions. Q

Works Cited


Chicago Tribune, Section 1, page 16, June 24, 1995.
For Those Who Wait
(Ps. 134; Luke 1:19; Hebrews 11)

Watchers, who wait, who stand
all night in the darkened temple,
lift your hands and bless the Lord from Zion,
making the cold stones echo the psalm of the king—
stand steadfast; Christ will come.

Prophets, who preach His word
strong-voiced at the city’s portals,
shout, “Thus saith the Lord” through jeers and stoning—
wilderness-wind-burned, sing of the highway of God
strong-visioned; Christ will come.

Shepherds, who shelter lambs
new-born from the cruel winter,
live your praise to God in simple labor—
type of the Lord Christ, wait for the angels’ hymn,
watch wondering; Christ will come.

Beggars, who brave the chill,
piecemeal in a rusty barrel
fire your zeal with scraps of stolen lumber—
heartened by cheap wine, bold in the flickering light,
hope fiercely; Christ will come.

Christian, who chose His way
some time in your tangled sinhood,
drag your cross exulting to Golgotha,
shoulder the bruised world, follow the stain of His steps—
be faithful: Christ will come.

Gabriel, God’s good page,
stand ready when He shall beckon,
you who wait forever in His presence—
listen, we plead, fail not when the Lord shall command,
“Go down, let Christ be born.”

William R. Mitchell
For years I've complained about the secularization of Christmas, glitzy creches in malls (next to Santa's throne), the three kings as marketing reps, and decorations that appear in October.

Just as I was warming up to sing my lament again this year, a disturbing thought intruded: The world is finished with Christmas. Public school choirs don't sing "Silent Night" without the gift of a lawsuit. Only a fool would erect a nativity scene in a public park.

Christmas has been retired and replaced by the "winter holidays," which encompass whatever folks choose to do from mid-December until early January. Some celebrate the winter solstice, Christmas, Hannukah, or Kwanzaa and some choose to ski in Vail or sun themselves in Aruba. Likewise, Easter has been swallowed up by "the spring holidays." Bottom line: If churches wish, they can have Christmas and Easter back. The world has moved on. Is this good news? Good but awkward—like discovering that your spouse didn't die in that jungle fever epidemic 15 years ago but was rescued by natives, nursed back to health, and has finally found his way home. It's grand that he's alive, but what about your new life, second husband, and the five-year-old twins? Are churches now going to focus on John the Baptist and turning lives around in preparation for the Messiah? Will we all worship on Christmas Day? Are we going to celebrate the Name of Jesus and really cut loose on Epiphany?

True, society never actually wanted the Incarnation. "Emmanuel, God with Us" does not sell computer games or cologne. Society wanted the cute stuff—rustic stable, adoring shepherds, fluffy sheep, cows, donkey, holy family, infant Jesus, gift-bearing kings, stars, angels, St. Nicholas, reindeer, fir trees, holly, and presents. The pagan stuff they will retain—even if they do dye the trees powder blue and decorate them with miniature hanging appliances and Disney ornaments. The world will also keep angels for awhile—they're a hot concept with lots of marketing potential—vaguely spiritual but not strictly religious. One of the catalogs sent regularly to me includes lots of angel stuff along with new age crystals and aroma therapy baskets.

The marketplace will also retain some of the traditional hymnody, but in upbeat arrangements that remove them from the realm of traditional worship. Ancient chants are popular, too. They sound religious and profound and—best of all—nobody understands Latin, so no shoppers are offended. The new secular winter holidays don't require theology. They need ambience and atmosphere. The motley group gathered at the nativity is not as useful as pictures of attractive people at parties where they rejoice in one another's company, consume beautiful food, and exchange gifts against a background of appropriate music.

As Lutherans, what music is more sacred than that of Christmas? Hymns, carols, and choruses from Messiah. So much a part of us, so basic, so . . . ? Just a minute. Do we actually remember the hymns and carols associated with Christmas? Let's test ourselves on three items: Angels We Have Heard on High, Hark the Herald Angels Sing, and O Little Town of Bethlehem (bonus points for the 15 stanzas of Luther's From Heaven Above to Earth I Come). Be honest. How far did you get without fumbling for words?

Our devotion to Christmas songs always reminds me of an old Saturday Night Live skit in which a Jewish Elliott Gould is kidnapped by white supremacists on their way to a Christmas party. They take him along, tie him up in the corner, and begin to celebrate. When the carol singing commences they discover that only Gould knows all the words.

I once heard a tale about a Russian Orthodox congregation whose members, upon entering the church, would kiss a wall in the rear of the church before entering to worship. Because the older members did this, the younger members did also. Time passed and no one could remember why the wall was kissed, but they continued to do so out of habit. Many years later, the combination of a heavy rain and a leak in the roof led to the discovery that an icon was hidden...
under the white paint. That's what the elders had been kissing. The others were just kissing a blank wall. Traditions can be strong but empty.

Linda Clark, in her multi-year study of congruence in worship and music, *Music in Churches: Nourishing Your Congregation's Musical Life* (The Alban Institute, 1994) says that hymns were just kissing a blank wall. One has only to observe the battles over inclusive language or tune alterations that accompany the publication of new hymnals to be convinced of this. There's something weird in the air, however, when folks fight about a text change in the sixth stanza of a hymn and later complain when they're expected to sing all six stanzas during worship. We want our traditions, but we don't want to work at keeping them alive.

Christmas is a time of traditions. The memories and expectations of leave people happy, disappointed, joyful, and depressed. Maybe grandma used to bear the brunt of Christmas dinner, but she joined Habitat for Humanity after grandpa died and will be flying in from Kenya at the last minute this year. Mom feels guilty about everything that isn't getting done, but her time is at a minimum. Besides, brother Ed has asked if he can ski with friends during college break instead of coming home. What happens to a tradition that nobody seems to want?


The immense traditional-style home twinkled with handmade Christmas lights she had purchased from native Vermont craftspeople, and the quarter-acre log-paneled family room was gaily festooned with pine boughs that she had gathered with a traditional bough-gathering group, singing solstice songs in Gaelic and drinking maple punch. How rich with traditions Vermont is! —the red Navajo Christmas streamers, the little angels with heads made of dried apples and corn silk hair, the French-Canadian wreath hung over the vast Shaker fireplace, where the imported English Yule log blazed away and the free-range chicken stock bubbled in the antique pot. In the dining room, the table was decked with green Irish linen, Swedish candlesticks, beautiful earthenware made by a blind lesbians' collective, and crystal goblets from Mexico. His mom always had the house professionally decorated at Christmas. Last year, Jervis had gone for a Georgia O'Keeffe look, with sand, cactuses, stones, bleached bones, and Christmas bulbs inside cow skulls, and the year before it was Finnish.

Instant traditions. Just write a check.

Last Advent I was contacted by an Episcopal church whose members were concerned that their children had few opportunities to learn the traditional music and stories associated with Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany. Their solution was to sponsor a weekly event for the children of their parish during Advent. Parents brought their kids to church for a few hours each Saturday, leaving the adults free for shopping and pre-holiday errands. At church, the kids would learn about the liturgical seasons, sing songs, act out stories, make banners, ornaments, and cookies and prepare to participate in the next day's liturgy. The parents recognized the loss of traditions that they valued in their children's lives and sought to recreate their community to keep them alive. Each family could have done something on its own, but they respected the power of community.

On the one hand, Americans see ourselves as independent creatures answerable to no one. On the other hand, there is no country in the world with more membership organizations and more folks who have voluntarily joined with others for charitable, business, or religious reasons. I recently viewed a documentary about American Jewish life that focused on three generations of one family. The great grandparents had emigrated to America, lived within very modest means, were rigorously observant in matters of faith, and went regularly to synagogue. Their children (the grandparents) were second generation Americans, upwardly middle class, attended synagogue occasionally, observed the major holy days, and made sure that their children were bar and bat mitzvahed. Their children (the parents) were professionals, hadn't attended synagogue much since their bar or bat mitzvahs, observed the major holydays with family, but didn't believe in forcing their own children to receive religious training. What was striking about this group was their belief that they were drifting and that the grandparents, though poor, lived a less fragmented life. No one connected the fragmentation to the loosening ties of the synagogue community. When all gathered for the holydays, the older folks saw these celebrations as part of the whole fabric of their lives, while the younger folks viewed them as pleasant interruptions. "Pleasant interruption" can be a useful description of Christmas. As a church musician, I've been fortunate to know Christmas and Easter as important parts of an entire year. I also know the frustration of not being able to share this wonderful rhythm with those who participate infrequently.

Time is short, days are short, resources are short, and patience is short. What would happen if we did less this Christmas instead of more? I find simplification a recurring theme in my life these days. I don't know if it's the social climate of the 1990s or age fifty looming on the horizon, but I'm determined to clean out my basement, closets, and bookshelves and give away unused items. I find myself increasingly interested in volunteer activities, recycling, and charitable con-
tributions in lieu of presents. ("Thanks for the new well in Africa" wrote one relative. "The kids have been demanding one for ages.")

As I watch Congress struggle to balance the national budget, I am reminded that it is very dark and that there is still no room in the inn. As Gertrud Mueller Nelson writes, "We have nothing to share. We want no moochers. Whether our fear makes us withdraw or lash out, it is our inhumanity to one another, personally, communally, globally, that is the continuation of this darkness." (To Dance With God: Family Ritual and Community

In That Spectral Light

In that spectral light of evening
I wait for you while my window
steams up and the world disappears
and the kettle's soft plume hovers
in the dim light. There is no sign,
no word, that I should get up
or call the neighbors or borrow
sugar or turn off the lights
and climb the stairs to bed,
only the insistent whine of the
kettle and the old dog behind
the stove who lifts her eyes
to me in the darkening room
as I think of you beside some
hidden pond where the moon floats
depth in the dark water beside
the trees where the hidden bird
winds his song among the wet
branches, the deer disappearing
in your shadow as you pass,
moving in light from bark and stone.

J.T. Ledbetter

Christmas/Epiphany (December) 1995
Greg Jones, who teaches in the Department of Theology at VU, is pastor of Union Community Church in Valparaiso, Indiana. This is his first piece for The Cresset.
WHICH MARCH DID YOU SEE?

Greg A. Jones

Lots of brothers were on flight 1832 to Washington D.C. The taxi station alive with people! Lots of brothers! an almost surreal image of black men, transforming the city that Sunday night into a sea of black manhood seeking and finding respect for a little while . . . how will be mood of this manly march be handled?

That morning, rode the public transportation from my family's house. Brought some cameras with me to get some shots of the "big shots" but changed my mind and took pictures of the brothers—cause we were all important that day! Brother had his son with him and wanted to take a picture; I gave him one of my disposables...hey, it was that kind of day!

My first impressions were the presence of the Holy Spirit—power, amazement, wonderment, grace, pride.... ABUNDANCE. And all this energy directed toward the good.

The young brothers were an angry group. Their chant: "No Justice? No Peace. No Justice? No Peace."

Awake my brothers, Awake for you have slept far too long!
The sleeping giant has risen from his slumber, now it's time to go back home, and home we shall come!
A beautiful fall day with the sun shining through blue skies, just a wonderful day to be among brothers and sisters. Guess what, people? Sisters were all over the march. I found that they helped to plan it, worked there, spoke there, came with the husbands and children to the march, enjoyed the day. Each treated with respect.

Security was brought to us by the fruit of Islam, and they did a good job this day! But they did not have much to do because the day was engulfed in a spirit of peace and blessing. Hey, the brothers hit a home run without the use of a single gun, and spent the day more than a million strong without a body count or a single death.

What did we want? Why were we there? To gather self-worth and dignity. Some won’t ever understand. Maybe it’s too much—or maybe it seems like too little—to account for this great crowd.
An Elder said to me: *That which you see could be end of some things and beginning of others. Our men coming home to dignity lost, but somehow regained through the presence of and the desire for respect—a good thing. Yet remember, little brother, that all gains in this world must be sought and many battles bravely must be fought to hold on to the black man's freedom to be. And that, my friend, for many of us, is the only reality!*
No one man can claim the power to use the magnet of the collective will toward peace and good. The energy that provides for the motion toward that which is good is seen by many of us as the Holy Spirit. It was the movement of the holy spirit that brought men together at that place in peace. It was and is the spirit of God that uses humankind for any collective or individual purpose toward the good. . . .

When the collective will of African American males was focused on unity, peace, atonement and accountability to our communities, that created the positive environment for God's spirit to be present.

As I write this brief reflection, there will be those who will not understand; my prayers go out so that your eyes might be opened.

However, if you are an African American and are conscious of God's presence in your life, then you know that positive motivation toward what is right, good, and just comes from God!

The God I serve wishes this world to be filled with peaceful, loving, caring human beings. When God wills it, man can come together in peace and for good purpose.

There will always be, around any collective growth or newness, a certain amount of disease. Around the new paradigm in the relationships between African American men and the communities they live and work in, there will be some anger and division. But we should remember that the place in the new paradigm for these men has been prepared for by generations of suffering and struggle.

The spiritual God-centered agenda is a product of generations of women and men of color who have overcome adversity through their spirituality and commitment to their families and communities.

Let all the people say, Amen!
AND NOW, WHICH MARCH DID YOU SEE?
Imagine

James Combs

The approaching millenium will be the occasion for much nostradamic oracularity, much of it rhetorical nonsense about the wonders or perils of the new century. Yet attempting to understand the direction and scope of change is irresistible. At the risk of adding to the deluge of idiotic propnositication, let me speculate on the import of a major change that occurred in our century, and what that change augurs for the future: the change in social orientation from the word to the image, and now the eclipse of the image by what writer William Gibson named "cyberspace," the virtual meta-world we can now connect to and experience. Although such innovations may seem obscure compared to the collapse of empires, the globalization of the economy, and the migration of peoples, in the long run such a subtle change may have more lasting impact. Understanding history as popular epistemology takes us to the root of how we know self and the world.

There is a well-known thesis among communications scholars about the role of the introduction of print and literacy in creating the modern world. Before Gutenberg, written words were largely the province of a few educated aristocrats and clerics, and books were a rarity. Among ordinary people, the powers of thought and expression were oriented toward speech and hearing. Troubadours would sing lengthy tales of palace gossip and faraway events, which illiterate peasants could remember at astonishing length. But books and writing and reading changed all sorts of things, not the least of which was how people thought. The eye replaced the ear as the organ of perception, and the world came to be conceived as a linear and sequential place characterized by printed language, logical progressions, lists and computations, narrative forms, and so on. Out of this came nationalism (Luther wrote pamphlets in vernacular German), the kind of organizational recordkeeping and division of labor which helped give rise to capitalist corporations and state bureaucracies, and literary forms such as the novel became feasible, with both a way to distribute affordable books and an audience that could read and understand them. Widespread literacy gave impetus to democratic reforms, to revolutionary ideologies, and to the rise of mass education, libraries, and newspapers. Since the act of reading encouraged critical reflection, notions about a rational public, an educable mass, and literary criticism arose. The impact of print was enormous. Whatever happened in The Beginning, for the period of modernity in the end was the word.

The "Gutenberg galaxy," then, was a social system rooted in the power and flexibility of words put on paper. I was so struck by this watching the recent TV series on the Watergate scandal. The Watergate miscreants were brought down by their penchant for recordkeeping, a perfectly natural habit on the part of modern functionaries. The investigation involved sifting through mountains of documents, many of them incriminating (some were lost in that ultimate machine of print culture, the paper-shredder). But the print-oriented mind is retentive; words on paper are important, the repository of truth and history, the medium through which we are rationally understood. Even Nixon's recorded conversations were retained, and transferred to paper to be studied by lawyers for evidence of wrongdoing. Words meant something, and to understand the world, one had to study words.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century...
century, something new began to happen: what Daniel Boorstin called "the graphic revolution." The ability of organizations to make and distribute images became feasible and profitable. Photography, newspaper and magazine graphics, the mechanical reproduction of prints of art works and the like gave people bright new images of the world. But perhaps the most important innovation in the image business was the development of the motion picture. The movies moved, or at least gave people the illusion of movement (through what is called "persistance of vision"). It is recorded that early movie audiences screamed, ran from the theater, and ducked when the images threatened (e.g., a gun shot at the audience, a train coming toward them); they did not know how to react to the new medium. They sensed that there was something overwhelming, surreal, and mesmerizing about this wonderful new magic act. In his book *The Magician and the Cinema*, Erik Barnouw argues that the movies had their true origin with magicians and magic shows, and as the medium developed, magic became media, to the extent now that "media images are no longer seen by the public as optical illusions offered by magicians, but as something real." As the movies became a popular art form, the visual magic and myth of the movies became central to our century's imaginative life.

The visual culture, then, originated in Hollywood but was complemented, and in some measure supplemented, by the instrument media pioneer John Grierson called a "domestic appliance," television. Together, these visual media extended and even enriched the popular imagination. The movies and TV created a vast new mythology, new gods, and new objects of adoration and worship. The Western is a media myth; celebrities are now our Olympian icons; and TV ads attribute magical properties to products. Media people are immersed in a culture of images, an iconic universe in which seeing, looking, watching, observing is primary. Once we lived life, groused the late French thinker Guy Debord, now we watch it. Perhaps this explains the astonishing disparity between what people do and what they watch: recent studies of sexual behavior indicate that Americans don't, uh, do it very much, and are in the main amazingly prudish; but one wouldn't believe that from what we watch, the vast congeries of visualized sexual passion simulated in everything from R-rated movies to TV soap operas to pornographic tapes (not to mention print vehicles such as romance novels and mainstream women's magazines). Do we find it more fun to imagine sex than to actually engage in it? Would women rather giggle watching Chippendales hunks, and men rather feast their eyes on air-brushed pictures of *Playboy* playmates, than make whoopie with their own mate? Has the visual culture made us into voyeurs rather than actors?

For most of us, the daily "surround" of available images is a clear sign of vicarious play, a visual invitation to the dance. If, as Charles Sanders Peirce maintained, all thought is in signs, then daily we are stimulated and diverted by imaginative signs that we see—billboards, magazines, TV, movies, videocams, photos. *USA Today* and tabloids make the newspaper over into a pictographic medium—colorful, lurid, pictorial, emotional rather than rational. The movies and TV involve us in a daily round of visual magic and rituals, a phantasmagoria of surrealities that makes dreams visible and enacts our shared psychic and social fantasies. We are image-rich to the point of being blasé feeling we have seen everything. And we have: an image-based culture exercises the right to see everything, breaking every taboo of privacy or propriety. TV news, for instance, keeps crossing thresholds, now showing us dead and mutilated bodies, people being killed, closeups of operations, air crashes, and so on in gory detail. When the anchor warns that the following pictures are "graphic" and that "sensitive" viewers should avoid them, we know that we are going to see some gore. Such images are compelling: we cannot not look.

From the point of view of the literate immersed in print culture, there is something primitive, childish, and simple-minded about an image culture. Or perhaps the irrepressible Camille Paglia has it right: image culture is pagan, and the camera has unbound the daemonic imagination that lurks in the preliterate and playful part of the brain. Such paganistic practices as celebrity worship and image politics repulse those of us who equate the word with rationality and the image with Dionysian emotions. The great myth of such a culture is that the camera is a human eye, seeking sensory gratifications. The worship of movie stars and politicians is not only stupid, it is idolatrous, elevating humans to the status of gods. The logic of words should smash the icons wrought by the illogic of images, and sometimes they do (as with Clinton) and sometimes not (as with Reagan). Yet the lure of the image dominates our culture and our politics: our focus is on the iconic power of the godlike we see and invest our hopes, fears, and fantasies. We can only imagine the unspeakable pleasure of sex with Brad Pitt or Nicole Kidman, and daydream of the sunlit uplands of the presidency of Colin Powell.

In the apocalyptic atmosphere of the millenium, book people are predicting dire consequences of the demise of reading and the verbal and reasoning skills that go with literacy. Barry Sanders, in his book *A Is For Ox*, links the fact that many children don't read or write well to the ubiquity of TV, which supercedes both reading and oral interaction. Kids become
“post-illiterates” without a clear sense of self, historical and social self-placement, or goal orientation. Sven Birkerts, in *The Gutenberg Elegies*, sees in the barrage of images the eclipse of the logical flow of prose, bringing language erosion, the loss of historical perspective, and even the waning of the private self. Media people nowadays don’t read, they scan or “graze” print in search of items that please, but have not the time or patience for what serious reading requires. Reading and writing, like everything else, are casual pursuits, engaged in to the extent they are easy and uninvolving, quick and painless, disposable and unmemorable. In any case, the tone of such observations is elegiac and melancholy: such writers seem to agree that the values and conventions of print culture have been displaced by entertainment from TV, spent much of their discretionary time with the tube, and if something extraordinary had happened, immediately turned on the the TV to find out what was happening.

But things are changing again. The visual culture of powerful imagery is now a century old, and is now being superseded by new media technology, namely the personal computer connected to cyberspace. New mediums have a way of absorbing the modes of expression associated with old mediums. Television took over from the movies the Western, the domestic comedy, and the police story. Now it may be the case that the P.C. will alter or redefine old media and create new mediated experience. The venerable paper book, the treasure of all bibliophiles, will soon be a thing of the past. Words will be read, or rather scanned, on screens; rather than buy a book, people will “call it up”; works like novels will become more interactive, with readers becoming participants, rewriting the story as they read; school textbooks will be on disc or the school computer, amenable to quick revision and updating. Paper books will become collector’s items, like vinyl records or movies on videotape, to be treasured by those who remember their joys. The viewer of television will become the experriencer of cyberspace who “lives” in the virtual realities being created daily. Both words and images are being used to connect us to a dazzling array of data bases, interactive groups, games, you name it. “Surfing the Net” is, unlike the movies or TV, a participatory exercise; one’s imagination can range over an endless spectrum of topics and relationships; and one can even descend into forbidden zones of demonic play without physical danger or actual encounter (I once stumbled across one group sharing information about bondage and submission, and another who share in common the many ways they would kill Barney). Whereas the movies and TV—not to mention books—rivet one’s attention on a single narrative, cyberspace allows you to drift, explore, fool around, create your own space, be a part of what and who you communicate with. Much more than any previous medium, cyberspace is mesmerizing to the point of obsession; it is as if one had gained entry to a gigantic and ephemeral mind, and you can skip around the gray matter (and the hypothalamus) at will, including uncomfortable glimpses of the Id. Perhaps when the novelty wears off, cyberspace will become as routinized and predictable as movies or TV, but for the moment cyberpeople live at their e-mail address.

The extravagant expectation of cyberspace is that it will create a vast new world of relationships and knowledge. There is a sense in which it does break down geographic barriers and brings together people of common interests. Small town libraries can get into the data base for the Louvre or the British Museum. Kids with a shared interest in, say, chess can “talk” to people around the world (English is the language of the Internet, the final act in becoming the world language), tap into extensive data bases on chess, even talk to chess masters. Yet, like all media, cyberspace has limiting features. If the book delimited our thought to the conventions of written narrative, and the movie drew us into a succession of related images, cyberspace locates us in a discernate and insubstantial hyperworld devoid of delimitation or succession. If the book made us into readers, and the movie into watchers, cyberspace makes us into nomads. Media nomads wander across the endless steppes of virtuality, hunting and gathering experience in the strange forests and wide plains of cyberspace. They are drifters in a boundless land of potential encounters, seeking not wisdom but “data,” not personal but mediated pseudo-relationships. (Clifford Stoll, author of *Silicon Snake Oil*, warns that when
you enter cyberspace "you are entering a nonexistent universe...a soluble tissue of nothing." In cyberspace, you are anonymous; there are no commitments, no human contact, no responsibility, no seriousness, no homeplace. If cyberspace is where we are going to locate, then the future will be homeless.

Like books and movies before them, cyberspace is becoming an art form. The virtual games (Cybergate, Battletech, ASI) are breathtaking, and now individual netsurfers can create their own virtual realities, many of them quite lurid. But the aesthetic possibilities of cyberspace—the creation of beautiful cyberforms, the development of cybermusic, the simulation of cyberstories—are astonishing. Yet we may wonder if such creativity is rooted in common human experience, something we can relate to how we live our lives. We previously learned life lessons from books (in my youth, everyone from J.D. Salinger to George Orwell to Mickey Spillaine), and movies and TV. Popular art forms helped us to locate ourselves in the world, and the make-believe of stories related us to what was happening and what we could do about it. Books and movies were "escape," yes, but the exercise of our imagination in reading Salinger or watching Cary Grant brought us insight into how things might be or what we might become. However, I fear that the art of cyberspace is going to be pure escape, a dead art for art's sake, without any enlightening remnant that brings us back to the common ground of human experience. Mediums of print or picture communicated to a shared audience or even a community, and the imaginative worlds they conjured related us to the pragm of human life—what it meant to be human, what kinds of things always happen, what should we do now. But cyberspace art is alienated experience, private and idiosyncratic universes of discourse devoid of linkage to any sharing group other than those who momentarily occupy a point of contact in the void of a nonexistent universe. There is no there there in cyberspace, only the soluble tissue of nothing out of which comes nothing of humane value. Perhaps when you can communicate everything, you wind up communicating nothing. Cyberspace could well become merely weird, a gnostic form of expression, without producing anything truly beautiful or instructive. In the chaos of the new century, cyberpeople might resemble the monks of the Dark Ages who sat silently in their cells illuminating scrolls while barbarians rampaged outside. But who will want to admire the postmodern scrolls?

Critics like Leslie Fiedler have announced the "death of the novel", suggesting that the forms of print culture have been exhausted. Perhaps the movies and TV are the same, having reached the exhaustion of the pictorial imagination. Cyberspace may then become the frontier of aesthetic imagination in the twenty-first century. Both print and moving pictures were feared when they first appeared, so perhaps we are being unduly alarmist, since these venerable media created the upsetting if fascinating virtual realities of their day. Cyberspace could be a forum for the vast expansion of the human imagination, but only if it can be shared and used by human beings who still occupy, and value, the quotidian space of earthly existence.

I suspect that the lure of cyberspace may wear off, and the potentialities soon be exhausted, as disappointment with its overhyped promise grows. Then maybe both life and art can return to our common humanistic and aesthetic tasks. After all, as Russell Baker asked, would you rather spend a month in Cyberspace or in Tuscany? The human imagination can explore the barren regions of virtual cyberspace where life is only simulated, or it can find pleasure in the wondrous sensual and intellectual expressions of vital existence—hearing the sound of children laughing, conjuring the memory of a long lost love, watching kittens play with string, reading Montaigne's essays, or seeing again great popular art like The Third Man or Rear Window. Archaic pleasures all, but closer to flesh and bone, the simple gifts of living space.

Imagine that. □
Our Own Distinctive Search

Arvid Sponberg

The selection of Brian Friel's play Dancing at Lughnasa as the inaugural theatrical production of the new University Center for the Arts caused some wondering hereabouts.

Why not Shakespeare? some people asked. It was a natural question in view of the resume of John Steven Paul, director of the theatre, chair of the department of theatre and television arts, chair of the arts division. JSP is nationally known for his work as director of the Young Actors' Shakespeare Workshop.

Why not Shaw? other people asked. Also a natural question, given the skill of Betty Ann Leeseberg-Lange, professor of acting and president of the Voice and Speech Trainers of America, who, with swiftness that would leave even Professor Higgins speechless, transforms talented, inexperienced students into expressive confident actors.

Why not Euripides? still others asked. Again a natural question, given the experience of Nicholas Ruddall, guest director, translator of Electra and The Bacchae, classics professor at the University of Chicago, founding director of that university's professional company, Court Theatre.

Who was this fellow Friel, anyway, and what spell did he weave around these three artists? What could he possibly have to say of interest to a Christian intellectual community? Let me sketch out here a few of these "possibles."

One of Friel's oldest friends is Seamus Heaney, who just became Ireland's second Nobel-winning poet. He calls Friel "Daddo" and praises his "subversive intelligence." Heaney says that Friel "... needs to unsettle pieties and question the stability of myth/memory/history." The "anti-rational or irrational impulse" usually figures somewhere in Friel's plays. In Dancing at Lughnasa, dance expresses intuitive, non-discursive truths. "Stagecraft and plot skills are all in the service of a kind of reverie," says Heaney. "I thought of Monet, late, watery Monet . . . because of the fluency and opulence of the mood painting." Friel is more direct: "It's about the necessity for paganism," and indeed, as remembered by the play's narrator, Michael Evans, the story shows that when, in alliance with Western pragmatism, Christian faith declines into mere morality, it is less able than Celtic and African paganism to lead persons, families, and communities to joyous, fulfilling lives.

Brian Friel was born January 9, 1929, in Omagh, County Tyrone, Northern Ireland. His father, Patrick, taught school, moving his wife, Christina, and son to Derry (or Londonderry, if you are British) when the boy was ten. In the late '40s, Friel tried studying for the priesthood at St. Patrick's College, Ireland's most prestigious Roman Catholic seminary. Of this experience he said, "It nearly drove me cracked. It is one thing I want to forget." He became a teacher, working with the Christian Brothers in primary and intermediate schools in Derry. He lasted for ten years and then "gave it up altogether." In 1955, he married Ann Morrison and they raised four daughters and a son.

While teaching, he began writing short stories and charmed the editors of The New Yorker who published most of those that Friel collected in two volumes, A Saucer of Larks (Doubleday,
1962) and The Gold in the Sea (Doubleday, 1966). Like his stories, Friel's plays concern characters isolated in small towns in Donegal in northwestern Ireland, where Friel himself has lived for forty years. His first three plays received productions in Belfast and Dublin in the early 1960s and pleased neither audiences nor himself. However, in 1963, an Irish Arts Council grant carried Friel to the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis. There he spent six months observing Tyrone Guthrie's work as a producer and director. From Guthrie he learned that theater should create something that will transport a few fellow travelers on our strange, amusing, perilous journey... have audiences enjoy themselves... move them emotionally... make them laugh and cry and gasp and hold their breath and sit on the edge of their seats.

The first of Friel's plays to achieve these aims was Philadelphia, Here I Come! which opened to general acclaim in 1969. Since then, Friel's plays have become standards in the repertoires of theaters around the world. The Freedom of the City (1972), The Faith Healer (1979), Aristocrats (1979), Translations (1980), and Dancing at Lughnasa (1990) have earned Friel a place among the most admired living dramatists. Dancing at Lughnasa alone has been produced at 35 different professional theaters in the U.S. since 1993, easily surpassing any other new play. Friel has advanced to the rich tradition of Irish playwrights that includes—but is hardly limited to—Congreve, Farqhar, Goldsmith, Sheridan, Shaw, Wilde, Synge, O'Casey and Beckett.

Thirteen years before Brian Friel was born, a novel called A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man appeared. The hero, Stephan Daedalus, says bitterly to a fellow student, "When the soul of a man is born in [Ireland] there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets." At the end of the novel Stephen is preparing to leave Ireland, as did his creator, James Joyce, never to return.

In contrast to Joyce, Brian Friel has rarely left County Donegal. His hero, Michael Evans, would agree with young Mr. Daedalus that growing up Irish tangles one's soul in the nets of family, language and faith. However, living outside Ireland may be harder than living in it. So much is clear from the tale of Dancing at Lughnasa On the wings of his memory, Michael flies us to the apparently sleepy and boring town of Ballybeg somewhere in Donegal in the summer of 1936 when Michael was seven. Here we meet his mother, his four aunts, his uncle, and somebody else—oh, yes—his father, who waltzes in for the odd visit now and then. An ordinary family, yet it is portrayed so vividly and compassionately by Friel that one can't help thinking of remarkable families in other plays: the Prozorovs in Chekhov's Three Sisters, for example, or the Tyrones in O'Neill's Long Day's Journey into Night, the Lomans in Miller's Death of a Salesman, or, perhaps nearest of all in portraiture and mood, the Wingfields in Williams' The Glass Menagerie.

The joys and sorrows of the Mundys may spring from uniquely Irish roots, but shaped by Friel's artisanship, the particulars lead us inevitably to questions of universal significance. And in that connection we find the aptness of this play as the inaugural theatrical production of the Valparaiso University Center for the Arts. As does each of us, the Mundy sisters confront the ineffable mysteries of life. At such moments, Friel says, words lose "their accuracy and precision. So I use dance in the play as a surrogate for language."

At the time of the harvest festival, a celebration rooted in pre-Christian rituals honoring the Celtic god, Lugh, a conjunction of spiritual, emotional, and economic crises threaten the Mundy family. The return of Father Jack from twenty-five years of missionary work in east Africa promises to renew the family's local prestige. It also threatens to expose the shame of Christine who has borne an illegitimate son, our Michael (whom we see played by one actor as both adult and child). The coming of electronic communication in the form of radio and the loss of jobs due to transformation of the knitwear industry complete the list of changes with which the sisters cope.

According to another friend and colleague, Seamus Deane, the politics of culture is never the focus of a Friel play, but it is "an ever-present force." Friel searches for some "consolatory or counter balancing agency which will offer an alternative" to the failures of political imagination. The search leads Friel "to the recognition of the peculiar role and function of art, especially the theatrical art, in a broken society."

In Dancing at Lughnasa, Father Jack provides the "counterbalance." As he endures the culture shock of re-entry to Irish society, his memories of the African community he served nearly overwhelm him:

Now at this time of year over there—at the Ugandan harvest time—we have two very wonderful ceremonies: the Festival of the New Yam and the Festival of the Sweet Casava; and they're both dedicated to our Great Goddess, Obi...

(Jack's sister, Kate, asks "But these aren't Christian ceremonies, Jack, are they?" Jack replies,)  
"Oh no. The Ryangans have always been faithful to their own beliefs...[the ceremonies] begin very formally, very solemnly with the ritual sacrifice of a fowl or goat or a calf down at the bank of the river. Then the ceremonial cutting and anointing of the first yam and the first casava; and we pass these round in huge wooden bowls. Then the incantation—a
chant, really—that expresses our gratitude and that also acts as a rhythm or percussion for the ritual dance. And then, when the thanksgiving is over, the dance continues. And the interesting thing is that it grows naturally into a secular celebration; so that almost imperceptibly the religious ceremony ends and community celebration takes over... And then we dance—and dance—children, men, women, most of them lepers, many of them with misshapen limbs, with missing limbs—dancing, believe it or not, for days on end!...

Oh yes, the Ryangans are a remarkable people: there is no distinction between the religious and the secular in their culture. And of course their capacity for fun, for laughing, for practical jokes—they've such open hearts.

In this play, Jack unsettles pieties and disturbs myths. Some things in his story appeal strongly to us: a culture where everyone is faithful to their beliefs, where all are fed from a common bowl, where "almost imperceptibly" religious ceremony ends and community celebration takes over where even the lepers dance. As our impulsive hearts yearn for Ryangan-like spiritual unity, our rational heads tether us to Enlightenment-shaped Christianity. We share Kate's skepticism.

A little later in the play, Michael reports that each new revelation of Jack's startled—shocked—and stunned poor Aunt Kate. Until finally she hit on a phrase that appeased her: 'his own distinctive spiritual search.'

'Leaping around a fire and offering a little hen to Uka or Ito or whoever is not religion as I was taught it and need to know it,' she would say with a defiant toss of her head. 'But then Jack must make his own distinctive search.' And when he died suddenly of a heart attack—within a year of his homecoming... for months Kate was inconsolable.

Joyce named his hero after the father of the flyer of Greek myth who perished when he flew so high that the sun melted the wax attaching the wings he had made to his body. Friel had made his hero, Michael, a builder of kites, a special kind of flying we all make toward the truth of our lives, past the nets flung at us by our yearnings, our fears and our circumstances. In that flight we seek the unity, coherence, and integrity promised by faith, memory, and art, the promise expressed by Ireland's first Nobel-winning poet, William Butler Yeats: "O body swayed to music, O brightening glance, how can we know the dancer from the dance?"

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PROFS’ KIDS CHOOSE BOOKS

Generally at Christmas time, when more people buy books than at any other, we ask some group connected with VU to recommend some of their favorite reading. This year, the group is several grown children of faculty. Their choices demonstrate the kind of group we expected: smart, serious, eclectic, and just a little off the beaten track. Incidentally, all of them said, “thanks for asking” which prompts us to remind you to ask.

The Editor

The book I’m currently reading is The Seven Mysteries of Life by Guy Murchie, published in 1978. It is an exploration of the abundance of life and its many facets, investigating the body, mind and soul of all aspects of our world. It thrills me to read such a book, humbling and educating me, providing perspective on why we’re here and at the same time, exciting me to be a part of it. Reading it gives me the same feelings I get when staring up at a very starry sky on those rare occasions—amazement, curiosity, joy.

Peter Rast, graduate student, Boulder, Colorado

A friend gave me A Woman’s Life, by Guy De Maupassant and I loved it. I’ve been recommending it to everyone I know. It has a great last line that relates to everything in life.

Jennifer Startt, violinist, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Nobody Nowhere (and its sequel Somebody Somewhere) by Donna Williams, would be my choice. A very gutsy woman tells the story of her painful struggle to overcome autism. An amazing book. What surprised me was how much I could identify with Ms. Williams’ experience, in kind if not in degree. I recommend this book to anyone whose inner life doesn’t always match the “self” they present to the world (could that be most of us?)

Kevin Ludwig, computers, Pacific Grove, California

I’d recommend the Palestine series by Joe Sacco. Now in its eighth issue, this comic book series follows Sacco’s travels through Israel and Lebanon and presents a tough-minded look at the region. While fairly critical of the state of Israel, this is not rote condemnation a la Chomsky, and Sacco shows how subtly (and not so) ethnic hatred can construct our world. All this would be only moderately interesting were it not for the brilliant artwork. Sacco’s style is somewhere between late period Crumb and Joe Matt, with extremely detailed renderings of hundreds of individuals throughout the story. This is a truly remarkable series, ranking with Spiegelman’s Maus, although it hasn’t received much notice from the mainstream press.

Fritz Eifrig, librarian, Chicago, Illinois

Definitely the hit of Italy’s book list last year, and published this summer in the US, Susanna Tamaro’s Follow Your Heart. Told from the perspective of a grandmother, explaining her life—its troubles, decisions, joys and heartbreak—to a granddaughter, it brings the perspective of everyday life to events of world significance. I know I was also drawn to it because of the death recently of my own dear grandmother, and I have been more than ever aware of the necessity of generations to talk to each other of their lives.

Laura Meyer, marketing executive, Poznan, Poland

I’ve been trying to think of a book I’ve been fascinated by this past year that isn’t about some obscure art history subject that one one is interested in but me. What comes most directly to mind is Gunter Grass’s The Tin Drum, a novel that follows a World War II Germany from a rather unusual perspective. I started out intending to read it in the original to practice my language skills, but quickly decided that the book was too good and my German too bad to risk losing all the wonderful subtleties.

Jeanne Nuechterlein, graduate student, Berkeley, California

I recommend Unfaithful Angels: How Social Work Has Abandoned Its Mission by Harry Specht and Mark Courtney, published in 1994. The authors of this book argue that social work no longer helps the poor and oppressed to strengthen their communities, but increasingly serves the middle class in psychotherapeutic private practice. It provides an historical analysis of the relationship of social work and psychology, suggesting why Americans value the individualistic focus of psychology over the communal perspective of social work. The authors present a vision of how social work might change to work at reinvigorating communities.

Kristin Meyer, care provider, Madison, Wisconsin
Books: The Editor’s Choices

The end of the year, the end of the decade, the end of the century, the end of the millenium. With these formal endings upon us, it is hardly surprising that humans look harder to the decade, the end of the century, the imminent conclusion. Some will turn their ordinary sources of wisdom and sustenance these days. My own reading tends, as ever, to fiction and to that never-failing category, Miscellaneous, for sustenance these days.

Though it will be no comfort to Martin Amis (who was snubbed for the Booker Prize short list) he does make the Eifrig List, for The Information, which I thought a perfectly good contender in the category of the English novel doing what it ought to do—making personal relations and individuals stand for large scale social movements and trends. This is a chilly tale of professional hatred between two writers, doubtless a roman a clef. Even outside the clef it is strong stuff about a very chilly Britain.

I was glad to buy the collected stories of Grace Paley, long a favorite, and now all properly collected and published by Farrar Straus Giroux. The author’s portrait alone is worth the price. I only wish that the same tribute of collection would happen for Lee Abbott, whose wonderful stories are nearly always out of print. If you look for and find them, you will be rewarded for the effort.

Further in the miscellaneous category are two books, Out of the Garden: Women Writers on the Bible, a collection of essays on Biblical characters by women; and very different but also challenging to one’s fundamental thinking, Sister Helen Prejean’s Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States.

The fiction shelves are the place I spend most of my time. This year my favorite’s were all by writers I have read before: Ann Tyler’s Ladder of Years, Richard Ford’s Independence Day, and Kaye Gibbons’ Sights Unseen.

Tyler’s detailed, almost prosaic world will be recognizable to her already-won readers. One or two sentences about the household of her main character and we are in familiar territory. Once again, she sets a character in a situation that becomes, for a split second, no longer familiar but extraordinary. In that split second of radical de-familiarization, the character undergoes a slippage that makes a Tyler plot happen. This book is not an exception, and seems not to break new ground. Is there some reason it should?

Independence Day was an unexpected pleasure, since I had only read Richard Ford in the short story form. Now, I realize, those fine, precise little boxes of his stories are the components of a beautiful novel, and read for a sustained period of time, he only improves. His protagonist explores independence in this book by way of loss and crisis and uncertainty and tedium and effort and frustration and love and joy. Nothing new. Everything that matters.

Kaye Gibbons adds another small piece to the gradually developing world of her fiction with this short novel about—well, loss and crisis and uncertainty and tedium and effort and frustration and love and joy. Like her others, (Ellen Foster, Charms for the Easy Life) Sights Unseen looks at those features of human life as they appear in women’s lives, though since women’s lives are so frequently centered on men, Gibbons’ work is populated with both genders. The narrative voice here longs for a relationship with what she imagines a “real mother” to be (her own exists in a manic-depressive state for most of her childhood). Such a longing, so ardently expressed, gives us ample space for considering the nature of mothering, and the peculiar way that mothering is tied to time. In some sense, if we aren’t mothered at the precise moment when it counts, we aren’t mothered. Yet, how we struggle to prevent this hard truth from having its full effect! Nine months of pregnancy gives most women who are going to be mothers an unyielding, specific and exact experience of this fact about motherhood. Gibbons makes us all aware of the subtleties of time and action impinging on experience, and all the time without the least sign of strain on the conventions of story telling.

But the pair of books that will not leave my mind this year are very different from any of these, an odd couple indeed, and yet, in my thinking, very much connected. Tim O’Brien’s In the Lake of the Woods, and Sr. Joan Chittister’s and John August Swanson’s There is a Season.

O’Brien, whose earlier works, Going After Cacciato and The Things They
Carried, have won him a great deal of acclaim, writes in this book an even stronger, sharper, and broadly meaningful novel. Though the protagonist is another Vietnam War veteran, and though the experience of the war provides this book with its scene, it is more and more clear that O'Brien, though deeply enmeshed in the war experience, refers to human experience in its broadest sense.

Some so-called ‘war fiction’ leaves me with the feeling that the author believes that only those people who have lived this experience can be said to have lived; only they can know the truths that live so powerfully for the author. But O'Brien catches the way to engage every reader in the meaning of war’s trauma. To live as a human person is to engage day after day on an agonizing battlefield: to know limits and yet to risk love, to grieve over loss without despair, to see what is true about oneself without fear, to accept the fact that one’s very existence may cause harm to others, to gauge again and again how much to hide without giving way to a life of utter deceit.

In this book, the protagonist is a veteran who is more recently a defeated political candidate. Is he also a murderer? or a con man? Why has his wife disappeared? Puzzles and clues and violence and secrets—but don’t expect this novel to become a mini-series. Its insights are too hard to live with; in fact, they probably can’t be lived with unless another set of truths accompanies the ugly realities of some human experience.

It is these other truths that shape There Is a Season. The rather cool wisdom of this section of Biblical texts can sometimes appear too remote and odd to be part of the same story of an involved, active, participatory God we know from our beloved stories and gospels. These well-known verses from Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 can seem almost fatalistic, a companion piece to a Stoic worldview that advises us to look at experience without expecting anything, the very opposite of a grace-filled knowledge of life.

Inspired by John August Swanson’s images, Sister Joan writes a thorough commentary on these verses and brings them well within the scope of a gracious world. Reading the book is an odd experience for a person who wants a text to get somewhere; these pages pass one after another and the same message repeats itself and is elaborated and re-iterated and refined and re-stated: God loves us and desires good from us and for us—in this time. The powerful insight moving throughout the text is one that Martin Marty recently noted in theologian David Tracy’s work, the linked themes of finitude, contingency and transience. Time is the uniquely human dimension in which our experience comes about; we are fundamentally creatures whose knowledge of God must be linked to our experience of our own finitude, contingency and transience. Though the text is highly inflected with the author’s activism in faith, and though one could wish that the multitude of quotations were more accurately attributed, my overall reaction to this book is one of gratitude. Through this book, one may learn to see the passage of time not simply with urgency and a conviction of guilt and loss, but in the light of its given-ness. The direct brilliance of the paintings convinces us that now—in this moment of seeing—we experience grace. Now we can recognize our tasks, now we can give thanks, now we can dance, feast, embrace. In each of these activities, its opposite lies waiting for our understanding of its place in the scheme of the time we have.

A rich book, for which one owes a publisher (Orbis) many thanks. A book that deserves many buyers. May it have all it deserves. GME
There are Festschriften that accomplish their goal of honoring a scholar, but are not likely to be read beyond the limited circle of specialists and friends of the scholar. Then there are Festschriften that bring possibly greater honor by appealing and being relevant to a much wider circle of readers. This reviewer places *The Future of Prophetic Christianity* clearly in the latter category. The length restrictions on this review preclude a full synopsis of the 18 chapters/articles written by a global Who's Who in the prophetic theological world today. But at least a sampling of the Festschrift-fare is in order in hopes that a whetted appetite will further enlarge the circle of its readers.

In both breadth of topics covered and variety of approaches to the topics, *Future* is vintage "Bob Brown." The context of each author shines through with clarity as each brings a significant contemporary issue into the spotlight of Biblical analysis. Allan Boesak leads off Part I: CHALLENGES with a ringing challenge to the churches to not allow themselves to be fooled into thinking that they should or can avoid the rough-and-tumble of the political scene "into the safe haven of neutrality. . . . There is not time for a cautious theology, because the theology of caution is poison to the church, and when that life in the church that gives it its voice to speak for God and for the people dies, the church may continue to live, but the people will die." Thomas Peterson brings the reader into the dark realities of the Native American experience in the USA and Canada by focusing attention on the way the art of Jimmie Durham clarifies "how our political, artistic, religious, scientific, and racial views have been effectively destroying the indigenous peoples of North America." Denise Lardner Carmody offers some unsettling challenges to those who may get so caught up in the right and good enterprise of inter-religious dialogue that they overlook the need to confront—openly, honestly— "the mistreatment of women that one finds in both the history and the doctrine of the leading interlocutors that Christians presently engage." Richard Cartwright Austin calls us to "a fresh moral vision of 'community' that reunites humanity with nature in mutual sustenance, a vision that might inspire the political will to liberate both land and people from oppression." John Carmody cautions against men's movements that become so therapeutically focused that they lose the prophetic passion for the widow and the orphan. William Sloane Coffin ends the CHALLENGE section by reminding us that Biblical faith calls us to be "Big Enough to Love the Whole Planet" (E.B. White).

In Part II, RESOURCES, Richard Shaull, John Coleman, and Elie Wiesel reach into their respective Reformed, Catholic, and Jewish heritages to highlight the prophetic power that resides therein. Wiesel's haunting and taunting treatment of the story of Lot's wife is itself worth the price of the book and, in true midrashic tradition, reveals new facets with each re-reading. Karen Lebacqz's probes into pain and compassion provide an appropriate companion for Wiesel. Gregory Baum's perspective on Christian socialism (through the Catholic bishops of Quebec's pastoral letter for Labor Day) is also appropriately paired with Janet Walton's treatment of liturgy as "prophetic," linking bread and wine with social justice.

Part III, VARIETIES OF PROPHETIC TEACHING, completes a Bob Brown circle, beginning with Mary Judith Dunbar's intertwining of the timeless Shakespeare and the timely Jon Sobrino. Jerry Irish picks up a variety of themes from Brown's publications and draws implications for the educational enterprise. Pia Moriarty weaves together his own experiences and themes from Paulo Freire to provide prophetic insights for adult education, a focus picked up by Bill Webber in the context of seminary education and by Leon Howell as he pulls no punches discussing American journalism. Carter Heyward's essay, "Is There a Prophetic Future for the Church," provides a Brownesque finale by raising even more questions.
As with any collection from such a variety of authors, the reader will find the going uneven. But I suspect that one reader’s “rough places” will be another’s “plain.” This is one of those books in which there is something for everyone, and thus a “safe buy” for yourself or for a friend. If for no other reason, you might buy it because “[r]oyalties from this volume go to the Robert McAfee Brown Scholarship Fund for Third World students at Pacific School of Religion.”

Robert Van Dale


Paul has been victimized. That is Neil Elliott’s theory in his provocatively entitled study, Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle. Many thoughtful people are perplexed that the Bible’s use in peace-making is ambiguous. While Scripture can be used to encourage acts of liberation from social and political evils, it is also used to support acts of oppression—and Paul’s writings are usually invoked. Elliot believes that Paul himself, who preached a gospel of liberation from evil, has been victimized and needs to be “liberated” from the injustice of misunderstanding and misapplication.

This volume, which is part of Orbis’ series, The Bible and Liberation—a series devoted to focusing on the Bible’s political and social relevance—is written for those who find Paul a stumbling block when addressing acts of injustice. Elliot wants to demonstrate that traditional assumptions about Paul are now being debated and questioned. In addition to this, he wants to present the new understanding of Paul that is now developing among scholars, one that is free from the political-social baggage usually associated with the apostle. In pursuing these goals, Elliot first critiques the exegetical and theological positions which are used to interpret Paul as either accepting or endorsing various forms of injustice. Secondly, Elliot then sketches what a ‘liberated’ Paul teaches. His depiction of Paul calls into question many traditional Pauline assumptions. What emerges is a Paul who is more radical than what was believed.

Elliot provides a three-fold critique of the exegetical and theological positions that are used to ‘enslave’ Paul. First, Elliot highlights the secondary nature of many of many Pauline passages that are used in support of traditional injustices. They are reckoned as either pseudonymous or interpolations, and as a result are completely lacking in authority. A second strategy is to critique the “social conservatism” that Pauline scholars have ascribed to Paul. Elliot argues that this “de-politicizing” of Paul is a grave misreading. Paul did not approve of the status quo of first century Roman life because the return of Christ was imminent. A passage like 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 is not an endorsement of prevailing social positions but a concession to Corinthian circumstances. Paul himself was not afraid of radical social change as this verse has often been interpreted, but actually encouraged. Thirdly, Elliot maintains that Pauline paradigms that make ‘Paul—against-Judaism’ their center distort the apostle’s true interests. By focusing on ‘freedom from the law and justification by faith’ these models impose a idiosyncratic doctrine of salvation on Paul that sacrifices his active social interests, his praxis, for his supposed thought-world.

After identifying the weakness of the exegetical and theological understandings used to enslave Paul, Elliot turns his sights on Paul the ‘the freedman’ and highlights what he truly teaches. Here Elliot asserts that Jesus’ crucifixion functions as an act of resistance to Roman terror and power in Paul’s thought. He did not downplay the cross’ political aspect but saw it as the beginning of the final war of liberation against those powers in opposition to God. As such, the cross should not be used to encourage submissiveness and resignation. Paul’s theology of the cross calls for political and social resistance to evil. Prior to his conversion, Elliot argues, Paul held to apocalyptic “realism” common to many Jews which counseled submissiveness to Roman might. However, Paul’s visions of a crucified and risen Christ powerfully convinced him that God was now challenging Rome and the promised kingdom was now in view. From that point on, Paul not only thought globally of God’s liberation of an oppressed creation, he went on to “act locally” in his daily contacts with the Christian communities under his charge. These actions were not mere token behaviors. Paul expected believers to assume a lifestyle and outlook that would fit the coming kingdom. This praxis called for communities that would discern imperial ideology, resist social and political coercion, and confront the empire’s reliance on power and its influence on believers. Paul was thus politically and socially subversive to the prevailing order.

Elliot’s book is well-worth reading. It is an interesting blend of astute theological reflection against the backdrop of sincerely voiced concerns about the engagement of biblical faith in a fallen world. His study is a carefully documented examination of Pauline theology and scholarship. He does a good job of illustrating the importance of his study by referring to many examples of contemporary ills that go unchallenged by an ‘enslaved’ Paul. It is obvious that Elliot did not write this text with an ivory tower mentality. He
is deeply committed to rehabilitating Paul as a model of political and social activism and employs his scholarly gifts to that end.

My chief concern when reflecting upon Liberating Paul has to do with methodology. Elliot's dismissal of troublesome Pauline texts as either pseudonymous or secondary due to interpolation needs to be considered more carefully. He regularly 'trumps' views of Paul, like that of his social conservatism, by citing their dependence on secondary Pauline texts. Are anonymous texts always suspect and without authority? Isn't it possible that the Pauline pseudepigrapha accurately mediate Paul's theology? Are these texts really a "betrayal" of Paul as Elliot insists? Perhaps Paul's thinking is more complex and less consistent than modern scholars would like. Elliot would have us re-think the canon and the authority of texts deemed to be pseudonymous. Is this type of radical surgery necessary or justifiable? Elliot does admit that identifying interpolations in Paul's genuine writings is trickier. Textual criticism is the first step in studying biblical literature, but as Elliot admits, some of his suggested interpolations lack textual support. He is on stronger ground when his arguments for liberating Paul are exegetically based.

This last comment should not discourage anyone who is interested in Pauline theology or Christian social ethics from this book. Elliot's exposition of the 'true' Paul is especially instructive, and the final chapter, "Apostolic Praxis: Living out the Dying Jesus", is worth the price alone.

Phillip Munoa


This volume should prove to be helpful as a handy and affordable reference tool, especially for students of literature, art, and Christian traditions for whom historical-critical investigation of New Testament figures is beside the point. On the teacher's shelf, it is a worthwhile supplement to standard Bible dictionaries.

Concise, engagingly written, and warmly confessional entries are arranged alphabetically and are intended to introduce general readers to every person named in the New Testament, as well as to some unnamed persons and important groups of people. The entries typically rehearse the biblical incident(s) in which that person (or group) appears and note pertinent early Christian (and sometimes Muslim) traditions and traditional sites. Historical background, archaeological evidence, and occasional critical insights are also adduced.

So, for instance, the entry on Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest from 18-37 C.E., begins with background on the priestly house of Annas into which Caiaphas married. It then rehearses Caiaphas's presumed role as head of the Sanhedrin, in the trial of Jesus, and in the book of Acts. The entry produces a "story-line" that actually exists nowhere in the New Testament (a weakness). A more

Furthermore, the treatment of the biblical material sometimes achieves mixed results. The entry on Caiaphas draws on John 11 to portray him as the principal player in entrapping both Jesus and Roman authorities in a web of false accusations that ultimately led to the former's demise and the latter's shame. It then moves to Jesus' attack on the money-changers ("Very shortly followed the incident..."), characterized as "a clear threat to the vested interest and authority of Caiaphas himself." Notably, however, there is no clue to the reader that the entry has abandoned John's sequence, since the Fourth Gospel transmits that incident already in chapter 2. It has turned instead to the sequence in the synoptic gospels, but without indicating that in them Caiaphas is named as a player in Jesus' entrapment only in Matthew, and then not as an instigator. Rehearsing the trial of Jesus, the entry employs Mark's gospel, which never mentions the name of Caiaphas! In other words, in its attempt to tell the "whole story" (a strength), the entry produces a "story-line" that actually exists nowhere in the New Testament (a weakness). A more

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sophisticated presentation could have offered the "whole story" without violating the literary integrity of the distinctive stories of the respective gospels.

Nevertheless, most general readers are sure to find this book to be full of helpful (albeit not always up-to-date) information. As more and more students begin their collegiate studies with less and less familiarity with the contents of the Bible, a volume such as this one commends itself as a supplementary text in a wide range of courses.

Jeffrey S. Rogers


Julius H. Rubin has attempted to document a causal relationship between "religious melancholy," and certain types of American Protestantism. He suggests that religious melancholy is "the crisis of spiritual passage and conversion on which each penitent felt forsaken by God's love." Furthermore, he claims that this crisis is "a distinctive psychopathology characteristic of evangelical Protestants" (5). Using insights from the field of ethnopsychology, Rubin claims that religious melancholy should not be understood as an underlying mental illness suffered by random American Protestants, who expressed their disease in religious terms. Rather, this Protestant ailment is a "culture-bound syndrome," which allows one "to reconstruct the mentalities, or life worlds, of Evangelical Protestants in past times, and to reconsider how the patterning of the soul's pilgrimage toward salvation, the ordo salutis, created a new form of obsessional pathology" (10). Drawing upon the works of Max Weber and William James, Rubin identifies what he believes is a fundamental pattern in Protestantism. Denied institutionally dispensed grace, like penance or absolution, believers were forced to seek the assurance of their salvation on their own. For some believers this introduced an ethic of hard work in society, for others the result was an intense self-scrutiny, which inevitably led to despair and obsessional behaviors.

In the lives of Martin Luther and John Calvin, Rubin identifies a pattern of self-scrutiny and a sense of God's absence, which provided the source of American Protestant despair and pathological behavior. Not surprisingly, the Luther presented is Erikson's and the Calvin is Bouwsma's. The reformers' lives exemplified the prevalence of anxiety over salvation and justified self-abasement as a means to make one's election sure. Rubin then traces this pattern from the Continental Reformers to the English Pietists, American Puritans, and finally American Evangelical Protestants, from the First Great Awakening to the neo-Evangelicalism of the 1950s. Using a variety of source material, including spiritual biographies, diaries, and case studies from an asylum, he depicts individuals, who were overwhelmed with the feeling of God's absence and obsessed with fasting, suicide, and beliefs that they had committed the unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit.

The lives that Rubin relates in his book are as gripping as they are tragic, and his variation on Weber's "Protestant Ethic" thesis is quite provocative. Nonetheless, the argument that he advances is fraught with difficulties. First, Rubin admits that during the period covered by his book the true occurrence of religious melancholy remains largely unknown. On the basis of anecdotal evidence, therefore, he is willing to make the generalization that Protestant belief is causally connected religious melancholy. This is not to mention that many of the melancholiacs he describes seem to have complex reasons for their pathological obsessions. Mary Fish and Hannah Allen, for example, suffered many difficulties, like economic distress and loss of loved-ones, before their protracted depressions. Rubin does not clearly delineate how their Evangelical Protestant beliefs engendered their melancholy in a way that their personal or social misfortune did not. Also, Rubin's definition of religious melancholy is stretched to the limit when he includes wildly different groups, who are supposed to suffer from the same pathology. He places Bronson Alcott's utopian experiment, demanding vegetarian dietary restrictions, side by side with inmates at the Hartford Retreat asylum, like Mrs. S., who believed she sinned by eating.

This raises the question whether one should not differentiate between melancholy, struggle, and behavior, which is culturally acceptable and that which is pathological? The fact that Robert Burton, a cultural participant of the time period studied, acknowledged a problem of religious melancholy lends credence to the notion that it could be perceived as pathological. However, this does not suggest that Burton himself considered all forms of self-scrutiny and mortification destructive. Also, it seems unlikely that the cultural milieu perpetuated by American Protestantism encouraged or found socially acceptable behavior like suicide or starvation to the point of death. The cultural toleration of behaviors like fasting had its limits as Charles Finney and the townsfolk of Oberlin showed by their rejection of perceived abuses of this practice by the Oberlin Perfectionists. Even if modern 20th century Americans find such self-scrutiny and fasting morbid or pathological, it seems that religious melancholy as a "culture-bound syndrome" ought to be defined in the
Finally, Rubin suggests that religious melancholy and its resulting obsession were distinctly Protestant in nature. Interestingly, he often employs the phrase "dark night of the soul" as a metaphor for Protestant religious melancholy. He seems unaware that this very metaphor was first coined by St. John of the Cross, a 16th century Roman Catholic mystic, to describe the Christian's sense of abandonment by God. Further, John made distinctions between proper feelings of abandonment, which leads to spiritual maturation, and melancholia, which he warned readers to avoid. This is comparable to the way Luther made distinctions between true conviction of sin, which properly caused a sense of spiritual aridity and distance from God, and the fear of damnation, resulting from a lack of faith in the sufficiency of the cross of Christ. Rubin claims that the self-scrutiny and self-loathing fostered by medieval monasticism, which created the likes of both John of the Cross and Martin Luther, is different than Protestant religious melancholy. However, his commitment to Weber's "Protestant Ethic" thesis seems to have forced him to minimize the role of suffering in Roman Catholicism, along with its potential for religious melancholy. For every Roman Catholic priest willing to dispense the sacrament of penance, there was a Protestant like Luther who reminded the believer that the cross of Christ fully covered the debt of any sin. This is not to say that Roman Catholicism and Protestantism do not have differences in this respect; however, both groups recognized the role of suffering in spiritual maturation, encouraged special acts of mortification, and distinguished these from religious melancholy and obsession.

Despite these criticisms, I am left with the intuition that Rubin is on to something. He provides interesting accounts of the religious face of melancholia and the expected role of self-scrutiny and mortification in the ordo salutis of Protestants. This book should raise considerable debate and refinement of his thesis and for this reason should be considered a welcome addition to the scholarship of American Evangelical Protestantism.

J. Michael Utzinger

Notes on Poets—

Dorothea Kewley has a B.A. in English from the University of Washington, where she was in the late Nelson Bentley's workshop for a number of years.

William R. Mitchell is Professor of English at Oklahoma Baptist University, where he has been a teacher and administrator for 37 years.

J. T. Ledbetter is a member of the faculty of California Lutheran University in Thousand Oaks. He publishes widely, and is a favorite of Cresset readers over many years.

Helen Frost is the author of Skin of a Fish, Bones of a Bird. Her poems have received several national awards, and have been published in The Antioch Review, Calyx, Calliope, Ms. and other magazines. This is her first appearance in The Cresset.

Deep Sturdy Bowl

Two-by-fours lean against wheelbarrow's deep sturdy bowl. Musty hay, leaves blown in. Moss, dirt, nesting mice. She: first weight of her young curled within. He: quivering, spreading sore on his back, eyes oozing. When he is blind, she curls her body around him, one night. Morning, she leaves, returns with moss, bits of cloth, paper. What she can carry, she brings, piece by piece, covers him, first as blanket, then shroud, then as a burial mound. It rises, falls, rises falls. Rises. Falls. When it rises no more she is gone.

Helen Frost
TO EVERYTHING TURN, TURN, THERE IS A SEASON
AND A TIME TO EVERY PURPOSE UNDER HEAVEN.

A TIME TO DANCE, A TIME TO HAVE PEACE
A TIME TO SPEAK OUT FROM ECCLESIASTES