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The Cresset (Vol. LX, No. 5, Easter)

Valparaiso University

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As I write this, Easter has not happened yet. Pastel bunnies of course have begun to appear on doorways, and the very bare trees in my neighborhood have colored plastic eggs on them. Fannie Maes wrapped in purple foil are in the market, and ads have shown up in the local paper for Easter buffets and Easter ham and even Easter haircuts. The world seems as clueless as ever about the festival, which is the way it must be.

The faithful are hunkered down in the Alleluia-less gloom of Lenten services. Our observances focus on our distance from God, and the weakness of our ability even to desire God. But the world around us, even that part of it that intends to notice Easter, is gearing up for talking about ‘renewal’ and ‘hope.’ Sermons are being written about life returning, about spring, about the promises of new life all around, and the media will no doubt treat us to a couple of such stories as their tribute to the ‘season.’ But I feel closer and closer to Thomas. If Easter isn’t about more than new grass, what good is it? Unless I put my hands . . .

I have myself long been a lover of Easter’s festivity. With the exception of the dreaded sunrise service (a hollow mockery in Indiana, I can tell you), there isn’t an Easter tradition I don’t indulge. Ours is a house filled with hot cross buns for Good Friday, the St. Matthew Passion during Saturday, new clothes (or handkerchiefs and shined shoes at the very least), bowls of jelly beans, pots of lilies, coffeecake in fragrant towers of butter and almond, garlic-studded rack of lamb, Ukrainian painted eggs—all of it punctuated with hours of church-going. Handel’s “I Know that my Redeemer Liveth” remains as piercingly beautiful a witness as ever. But all these signs and evidences and symbols and pointers and re-creations require that we keep them anchored in a reality so that they can to be continue to be signs; without the reality, they will simply slide off into being decorations.

I have become able to shrug off the secular takeover of Christmas without much anxiety. A camel, a star, an angel more or less—somehow the doctrine of the Incarnation does not get reduced to something less than itself because a careless world blurs it with too much stuff. But the world doesn’t want to add extraneous stuff to Easter; it just wants Easter without death, and Easter without death is irrelevant. Though the world would like to control death, as it ever has, by trivializing, ignoring, politicizing or glorifying it, death just waits there, at the horizon, for each human soul. Threatening and terrifying in its inevitability, cancelling out everything we think we can make or build, Death frightens us by the strength of its confidence in itself. The medieval imagination, picturing Death as skeletal joker, showed this wisdom about our encounter with our end: it is absolute, and knows our tentative finitude better than we do. Only if Easter means our vicarious victory over that absolute power do we have any reason to celebrate. Mere cautious optimism, mere generic cyclic renewal is so much straw. Facing the Grim Reaper, who would be left with a pastel bunny?

So let us keep the festival, to which the Lord invites us;
Christ is himself the joy of all, the sun that warms and lights us.
Now his grace to us imparts, Eternal sunshine to our hearts;
The night of sin is ended. Hallelujah!
MY STUDENTS WRITE IN THE CAMPUS CHAPEL

"Use all five senses. Find a metaphor..."

It's bigger than you'd think
from the title, this vaulted church
of freshly waxed pews, brass
inlaid aisles and a back-lit
twenty-foot cross resplendent
above the altar.

It's raining outside; not much
light getting through.
The windows bleed dark red, mustard yellow,
blotter-blue.

The paper doll Bible tells its story
around the chancel arch, beginning
with Adam and Eve naked and pale
before The Fall. Joseph, Lazarus, all
are painted to silence.

And they, bent over their journals,
are silent too; for once almost reverent
having to find words for The Word,
having to make themselves comfortable,
at home in pews splinterless
as the saved—

finding that pews are hard,
and words are hard, thorny even,
before the hour is up
and they get their papers back,
and stumble mumbling
into the rain.

Imogene Bolls
I am a Christian theologian who teaches ethics. I could alternatively say I am a Christian ethicist, with the hope that most people would concentrate on the noun and not the qualifier, but that probably wouldn’t help matters much. In fact many people have become and still do become Christian ethicists because they do not like theology. They think justice is something worth thinking about or even advocating or doing, but they do not like or they see little point in thinking about matters as obscure and seemingly as irrelevant as the Trinity. Such a deliberately non-confessional view of ethics, moreover, appears more acceptable in the modern university where it is generally thought to be a “good thing” to study ethics, but it is not a good thing to be a theologian or to do theology. These days, theology just doesn’t sound like a discipline appropriate to the university.

Yet I prefer to be a theologian. Or better, I simply cannot think of myself as anything but a theologian despite the fact that a theologian is not a good thing to be if you also want to be a respected academic. Yet being a theologian has become a habit for me that I cannot nor do I wish to break. I am also an ethicist, but I do not make much of that claim precisely because “ethicist” is such an ugly word. Of course, there are also intellectual reasons why I do not desire to claim the title “ethicist.” Quite simply, ethics too often names what many take to be the useful remains of past Christian practices and beliefs. Such a view of ethics serves liberal social orders well, but it distorts the character of Christian convictions. Accordingly, I have tried—through my teaching and my writing—to show that “ethics” cannot and should not be abstracted from “theology.”

Yet, even given such an understanding of theology and ethics, it would be reasonable to assume that I might have some useful insights to offer about theology’s contributions to the renewal of moral inquiry in the contemporary university. After all, moral inquiry surely must be at the heart of what anyone does who teaches Christian ethics. That, however, is not the case. Why that is not the case involves a complex history of an equally complex interrelation of theology and the modern university. While I cannot fully develop that history here, I can offer the following thoughts on the way to an explanation.

At least part of that history is suggested by the phrase “moral inquiry.” Of course, one should not read too much into a phrase, but then again, grammar is not innocent. The use of the phrase “moral inquiry” without any further qualification can misleadingly suggest that moral inquiry exists in and of itself and that it is, moreover, a “good thing.” I do not believe, however, that moral inquiry qua moral inquiry (or its close kin, critical intelligence), exists or even if they do exist—which they do not—that they are good things. Yet it is just such grandiose abstractions that are produced by the knowledges that constitute the legitimating discourses of the modern university. Moreover, the presumption that the goal of the university is to sponsor such an unqualified account of moral inquiry is at least part of the reason why theology is no longer considered a legitimate university discipline.

First, two stories to set the stage for the other stories I have to tell. One day, out of the blue, I received a call for which academics live. It was from a senior editor of one of America’s most prominent middle brow magazines. He had just read my recent book, *After Christendom?: How the Church Is to Behave If Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas* (Nashville: Abingdon
Press, 1991), and he said he liked it. Not only did he like it, he thought it was time I wrote for his magazine. I could not believe it. No American theologian since Reinhold Niebuhr had written for such magazines. I thought I was about to become famous.

I recovered from my excitement just enough to ask how he had ever heard of me. It seems that he had attended one of the very good small schools in the eastern US. In an introductory course in modern theology he had read one of my books, been intrigued, and, even though he was not religious, he had made it a point to read my books ever since. Of course I was flattered and gratified. I had finally been discovered—and by the secular world no less. Indeed, he was interested in me because I was so unapologetically Christian.

How could I resist the invitation to write for his magazine under those conditions? I told him, however, I did not want to write an article that made me appear as a good Christian for the secularist—namely, the kind that criticizes Christianity in a way which only reinforces secular prejudices. Some Catholics have made careers for themselves by doing precisely that. Because they cannot say enough bad about the church, they are considered “good Catholics” by The New York Times. While I have plenty of criticisms of my own regarding the church, particularly liberal Protestantism, I was not about to write an article that was just another bashing of Christianity, even liberal Christianity. So I asked the editor to give me some time to think through the kind of article I might write and he readily agreed.

A few weeks later I called him to try out my initial idea. I said, “I think I have a terrific title—‘Christians in the Hands of Flaccid Secularists.’” There was a long silence on the other end of the phone. I waited. Finally, “That’s interesting.” I said, “You do not get it, do you?” “Get what?” “That the title is a play on Jonathan Edwards’ famous sermon, ‘Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” “I’m afraid I didn’t read much nineteenth century stuff.” At that point, I knew that this was not going to work. I told the editor, “I do not know how to write even half-serious theology for people who no longer have sufficient knowledge to tell which God it is that they no longer believe in.”

That is the problem with modern atheism: it is just so uninteresting. Of course, we can hardly blame atheists for that, since Christians have for some time been offering atheists less and less to disbelieve. Believers and atheists too often come across as equally flaccid. The problem is, how do you teach theology in universities to students who have been taught to think, like this bright young editor, that, in the name of being educated, all positions are “interesting?” Theology for such people cannot help but be more “information.”

Second story. In response to appointments in the English and Literature departments at Duke, some of the Duke faculty founded a chapter of the National Association of Scholars. They were concerned with what they understood to be the lack of scholarly objectivity among their ranks, not to mention the moral nihilism they alleged was intrinsic to this new breed of scholar. Matters got rather heated, with the usual mix of personality conflict becoming confused with intellectual issues. The Provost of the University thought it wise for some of us involved in the dispute to spend a day in a retreat getting to know one another. I should say that I was identified as one of the supporters, if not a representative, of the nihilistic barbarians the NAS meant to challenge. (For my critique of the NAS statement of purpose, see my After Christendom, pp. 133-152.)

The day started with the Provost suggesting that we go around the table introducing ourselves and saying a bit about our field and our peculiar interests. As is usually the case, this proved to be extremely interesting, as you cannot help but be fascinated with the work of highly intelligent people—e.g. the botanist who spends her life trying to understand why markings on butterfly wings differ. She may be a member of the NAS, but what finally matters is her work. It happened that I was one of the very last of the group of about fifteen to speak. I thought to myself, “How can I explain to someone who studies butterfly wings that I spend most of my time thinking about God?” Butterfly wings not only seem more interesting, but you also seem to know what you are doing when you are studying butterfly wings. I suspect, however, that this sense of “knowing what you are doing” is found more among those who are external to such kinds of study than those
who are actually engaged in the activity.

I thought that all I could do was be honest. So I began by remarking that it was not clear that I should be among this group of academics, because I am not an intellectual. I am a theologian. Theology names an office of a community called the church and is in service to that community. So as one who occupies that office I am not free to think about anything I want to think about. Rather I am charged, for example, with the task of thinking about the Trinity and why Christians think their lives make no sense if God is not Triune. I observed that it was, therefore, clear who I serve, but I would like to know who each of my colleagues around the table served.

That question, I believe, is the hardest question facing those of us who find ourselves in the university. Moreover, our inability to answer that question is the reason we are equally uncomfortable with the question of the moral significance of what we do. We know that what we do is shot through with moral presuppositions that cannot help but shape us and those we teach, but to acknowledge this faith invites conflicts between competing moralities, conflicts we fear are not subject to resolution. The recent modern university managed to avoid such conflicts by maintaining, in one form or another, the ideology of “knowledge for knowledge’s sake.” But intellectual developments and changing demographics have shown us that this ideology is no longer a workable “solution.” Yet we continue to take shelter in modernist notions of “objectivity” in order to avoid questions of who we serve or what the university is meant to do.

That is why the one question you cannot ask around the modern university is, “whom do we serve?” or “what is the university for?” The easy answer, of course, is that the university has many purposes and serves many constituencies. So the university is simply one further example of American pluralist politics which is assumed to need no justification. You can probably get away with that answer as long as you have enough resources to spread the wealth. But as resources become scarce we begin to see that “pluralism” hides the fact that some are more equal than others. Pluralist ideology tries to hide these inequalities because, given the presumptions of liberalism, they lack both moral and intellectual justification.

I should like to think that theologians are particularly well positioned to join our colleagues in the university in thinking through these matters. I do not assume, of course, that even if we were able to “think them through,” we would have resolved the fundamental challenge facing the university in this culture. For the decisive problem is the gulf between what we do in the modern university and why people support us in those activities. To set aside some people who do nothing with their lives but think about the Trinity requires that you first have to have a people who think the Trinity is important. In fact, the word “important” is too tame. They must believe that their lives hinge on Trinity. There may be some disjunction between a community and those who are set aside to think about matters that matter for that community, as there certainly has been and is today a tension between the church and her theologians. But our problem today is not simply with “disjunction.” Our problem, rather, is that “disjunction” cannot even be named.

how theology managed to become a “curiosity” in the university

In his article, “On the Intellectual Marginality of American Theology,” Van Harvey observes that many American intellectuals regard theology as something “akin to astrology.” (172). Even worse, Harvey observes that theology is thought to be not only obscurantist but divisive because it constitutes a threat to the common discourse on which our democracy rests. Yet he notes that even secularists might think theology something worth having around, if only to remind us of the contribution that Christian theology has had in the past, not to mention giving us a more sophisticated presentation of those who persist in being Christian. Without theology, Christians will only say what they believe crudely and dogmatically and thus be even less likely to make any significant contributions to the public discussion.

The burden of Harvey’s argument, then, is that the marginality of theology in the modern university is largely due to theology itself. By its willingness to underwrite every new theological
movement, Protestant theology has been virtually destroyed as an intellectually respectable discipline. As a result, theology has no recognizable center that would enable one to discern the good from the bad. Theologians, like most Christians in a democratic culture, have an inordinate fear of being distinctive, because people may otherwise think that we really do believe something is at stake in our being Christian. So theologians, in a vain attempt for acceptance, try as much as possible to make theology look like history, or sociology, or psychology, or some other acceptable university discipline. This seldom works, since theology often imitates those disciplines in their weakest forms.

Harvey, I think rightly, suggests that the shovels theologians used to dig their own graves can be located in the “professionalization” of divinity schools and the changing definition of the theologian’s role. Drawing on Stephen Toulmin’s account of a discipline as the intellectual side of a profession, as well as Burton Bledstein’s, The Culture of Professionalism—a book that maps the growth of, as well as the professionalization of, the university in the late nineteenth century—Harvey observes,

Given this picture of the professionalization of the university in America and the scientific ethos that came to dominate it, a hypothesis regarding the causes of the marginality of theology immediately suggests itself: because the university became the institutional matrix for intellectual life in America, and because the ethos of the university was scientific and hostile to everything that did not lend itself to rational adjudication, theology was necessarily pushed to the margins of intellectual life. Because the universities provided the basis of cognitive authority and served the function of containing divisiveness, theology, resting as it does on religious faith and giving rise to controversy, was simply excluded from the university (181).

The only problem with this hypothesis, according to Harvey, is that it fails to account for the fact that since the early nineteenth century most of the theologians in this country have been located in divinity schools. As a result, the above description of how theology became marginal fails to account for the way in which developments in theological disciplines themselves played an important role in theology’s loss of credibility. In particular, the sickness of theology can be attributed to theology’s becoming almost totally oriented to the training of people for the ministry and the specializations that were assumed to be appropriate to that task. Such specialization resulted in theology’s losing its a claim to be a knowledge that should matter outside seminary cultures.

In the late nineteenth century, seminaries, under the influence of Schleiermacher, divided their curriculum into four main parts: biblical studies, church history, dogmatics or Christian doctrine, and practical theology (183). Harvey refers to Edward Farley’s analysis of the argument that the study of theology was justified in Europe because it served the needs of the public who were understood to have religious needs. Harvey notes the fatal flaw in this argument when it was brought to the United States, since the same argument that was used to justify theology in Germany could be used to exclude theology from the university in America. Such divisions only reinforced the assumption that theology was a subject matter, like law and medicine, for professional training. Theology was no longer considered a subject having to do with the clarification of the faith of the ordinary believer. It was no longer something essential for, and in that sense integral to, our culture or our politics.

Yet the “retreat” of theology into the seminary by no means meant that theology was made safe but irrelevant. Rather, theology passed through a great intellectual crisis, precipitated, according to Harvey, by two autonomous but closely interrelated movements: “the rise of biblical criticism, especially of the New Testament, and the criticism of speculative metaphysics and theology proposed by Kant” (186). In the immortal words of Ernst Troeltsch, “give the historical method an inch and it will take a mile. From a strictly orthodox standpoint, therefore, it seems to bear a certain similarity to the devil” (16).

That was not, however, the way the matter was first seen. Rather, many thought history was the way theology was to regain intellectual and moral force, not only in the university but in America as a whole. No one better exemplified this attitude than Walter Rauschenbusch, the great represen-
Rauschenbusch begins his article by observing that the dominance of historical studies in the theological curriculum is only very recent. In the Middle Ages systematic theology dominated, but, since the Reformation, Rauschenbusch mistakenly argued, theology became the study of the Bible. History entered with exegesis, yet, according to Rauschenbusch, it would be a mistake to limit the significance of history to the study of the Bible. For history has an essential place in all theological sciences, since it "irrigates and fertilizes all other departments." Rauschenbusch observes that just as a biblical book gets its significance "only in connection with its historical environment, so any interpretation will be more penetrating and fruitful the more the interpreter knows of contemporary history" (115).

Of course, Rauschenbusch's use of the phrase "contemporary history" is ambiguous. It can mean either the history that we are currently experiencing or the way we now do history. Rauschenbusch probably conflated both meanings since he believed that the development of "scientific history" was an advance peculiar to our living in a "modern time." He asserts that "human life is continuous, and a subsequent period of history is always the most valuable interpreter of an earlier period" (115). That is why history is a moral science for Rauschenbusch, since it allows us to recover the "real" intent of the prophets and Jesus without the qualifications of later developments. Lyrical he exclaims,

> When we have been in contact with the ethical legalism and the sacramental superstitions of the Fathers, we feel the glorious freedom and the pure spirituality of Paul like a mighty rushing wind in a forest of pines. When we have walked among the dogmatic abstractions of the Nicene age, the Synoptic Gospels welcome us back to Galilee with a new charm, and we feel that their daylight simplicity is far more majestic and divine than the calcium light of the creeds." (115).

Obviously, Rauschenbusch used history as a critique of Catholicism with what he thought of as its "magical" assumptions about sacraments and its hierarchical church government. According to him, the sense of continuity and development characteristic of historical studies is essential for all theological sciences. Indeed "it is interesting to imagine how the course of Christian history would have been changed if the leaders of the early church had only had a modern training in history" (117). In effect, that was the great insight of the Reformers as they appealed to original historical sources against the falsifications and legends produced by the church. The scientific study of history is the necessary means for training the scientific temper and critical faculty of theologians. Ancient and medieval civilizations had no "real" natural science or training in historical criticism and, consequently, theology was dogmatic and credulous. Fortunately, we are obviously not so limited, benefiting as we do from the development of modern history over the last century. For, as Rauschenbusch reminds us, "modern history is only about a hundred years old; its mission is only begun" (126).

I have taken the time to summarize Rauschenbusch's article because it remains so relevant. Most people in theology or the academic study of religion would find Rauschenbusch's progressivist assumptions embarrassing, but they continue to assume accounts of the importance of history not unlike his. These habits that constitute the working assumptions of theologians are not easily left behind. Just to the extent that theology can become history, it has a chance of being a respectable discipline within the university. To question the importance of history for theology would be equivalent to questioning Rauschenbusch's presumption that Protestantism is superior to Catholicism. Of course, most religious thinkers or academics who think about religion no longer have any good reason to believe in the superiority of Protestantism, so history is simply privileged as a challenge to what they take to be a Catholic understanding of truth. History was—and for many still is—the way Protestants displaced Catholicism while no longer believing what the Reformers believed.

Yet Troeltsch was right that history could not be put to such service without changing the very subject matter of theology. According to Troeltsch, history requires three essential aspects: "the habituation on principle to historical criticism; the importance of analogy; and the mutual interre-
lation of all historical developments” (13). The first of these requires that all judgments in the realm of history are at best judgments of probability: “It is obvious that the application of historical criticism to religious tradition must result in a profound change in one’s inward attitude to it and in one’s understanding of it” (13). Analogous occurrences are the key to historical criticism, since analogical comparisons require the presumption that history is generally both consistent and repeatable. Troeltsch rightly saw no reason to exclude Jesus or Jesus’ resurrection from this principle.

Accordingly, all you have left is to try to make Christianity intelligible within the confines of the historical developments we now call Western civilization. No longer can or does the theologian try to make a case for God, since the metaphysics necessary for such a venture is allegedly defunct and no claims about revelation can be considered given the epistemological constraints that form the modern university. So all that is left for theology is to become, as Harvey puts it, “a phenomenology of the collective consciousness of a determinative religious community” (189). Theologians, particularly as New Testament scholars and church historians, can no longer study the Resurrection as if Jesus might have actually been raised, but now they study the beliefs and behaviors of people who believed in the Resurrection. Though there are actually some good reasons why this way of working is not necessarily antithetical to a Christian understanding of truth, given that our faith depends on the testimony of reliable witnesses, that does not mean that Christians believe any less in the miracles that those witnesses report. It is my hope that this analysis of the marginalization of theology in the modern university illumines why theologians are hesitant about drawing any moral implications from their work. This is particularly true of those who find themselves in university departments of religious studies. Such departments are often comprised of people who are willing to study a religion on the condition either that it is dead or that they can teach it in such way as to kill it. The last thing they would want to acknowledge is that they might actually practice what they teach, because such an acknowledgment might suggest that they are less than “objective.” Of course, that is why theology is not seen as an appropriate discipline in most departments of religion. To be sure, such departments may think it important to study the practice and faith of such figures as Thomas Aquinas, Maimonides, al-Farabi, or Karl Barth, but they would not think it appropriate to hire such people to teach in a department of religious studies.

Yet ironically many of these departments continue to think it important to teach “ethics.” That they do so is partly the result of a tradition begun by Walter Rauschenbusch and carried on by Reinhold and H. Richard Niebuhr, Paul Ramsey, James Gustafson and a host of others. Rauschenbusch, of course, wrote unembarrassedly of Christianizing the social order, but such a sentiment would be thought outrageous by most currently working in the “field” of Christian ethics. Under the influence of Reinhold Niebuhr, Christian ethicists began to talk more of love and justice as the building of social ethics. Matters more strictly theological could be left in the background.

James Gustafson has observed that many people who are now writing in the area generally known as “applied ethics,” e.g. medical ethics, business ethics, environmental ethics, are often people with theological training. Yet he notes that whether theology has anything to contribute to these areas is less than clear. For a few, such as Paul Ramsey, the theological authorization for the ethical principles theologians use is explicit, but “for others, writing as ‘ethicists,’ the relation of their moral discourse to any specific theological principles, or even to a definable religious outlook is opaque. Indeed, in response to a query from a friend (who is a distinguished philosopher) about how the term ‘ethicist’ has come about, I responded in a pejorative way, ‘An ethicist is a former theologian who does not have the professional credentials of a moral philosopher.’” (Gustafson no doubt feels some ambiguity in making this criticism, since, in doing so, he is criticizing many of his own students. That a good number of Gustafson’s students are ambivalent about theology’s relation to ethics should not be surprising, given the fact that Gustafson has authored a volume entitled, Can Ethics Be Christian?, a title that certainly gives something less than a resounding affirmative answer to the nature of that relation. I should also say that Gustafson is my teacher as well, one to whom I owe everything, including our considerable theological differences.
In fact, many who were once Christian ethicists now describe themselves as "religious ethicists" though it is by no means clear to what the adjective "religious" refers. My own view is that the term "religious" works primarily as a distinguishing disciplinary marker for those who work within the university; i.e., those who do "religious ethics" may be able to get a job in a religious studies department, but they certainly will not find a place within a philosophy department. "Religious" also is necessary as a generic term, since many of the issues addressed in these areas involve the development of policy that makes any particularistic identifications a matter of embarrassment. If Christian ethicists are to be players within the constraints of a liberal social order for the formulation of public policy, then the "Christian" qualifier must be suppressed. Christian ethics, a discipline one would assume to be committed to moral inquiry, turns out to be quite deceptive. Just to the extent that most people in the field are willing to make normative recommendations, they do so not as Christian theologians, but as "ethicists." As a result, courses in Christian ethics, if they are taught at all, increasingly appear like philosophy courses helping students to distinguish between meta-ethics and normative ethics for the purpose of helping students decide whether they should be primarily utilitarians or deontologists. So ethics becomes a further clarification of the students' "values" under the assumption that the clearer they are about their values the better chance they have to be morally good—an assumption, of course, that cannot stand much philosophical interrogation. Of course, if all other justification for teaching ethics fails, the "ethicist" can always claim to teach the history of Christian ethics. In doing so, they can introduce students to important subjects such as just-war theory or past understandings of the Christian's relation to the state. The clever students, if they are so inclined, might use such courses as aids in forming their own moral judgments, but that is the student's own business and should not be the object of the course. So ends the story of how teaching theology in the modern university has come to an end.

the difference god makes

Given the character of the modern university, the subsequent nature and "place" of theology and/or religious studies, the kind of students that come to the university, and the practices that produce those students, I think there is nothing I can do that is more morally important than to be what I was trained to be—a theologian. My task is very simple: to show the difference that God makes about matters that matter. Fortunately, this is not a self-generative project, for as a Christian theologian I am not required to be creative. Theologians are to be faithful, believing as we do that our faith has been handed on to us by our mothers and fathers through the ages. So my first task as a theologian is to direct my students to those witnesses whose lives shine more brightly than mine ever could.

I am aware that such an understanding of "moral inquiry" will seem quite offensive to many who want to recommend a return to "moral inquiry" in the university. When I taught at the University of Notre Dame, one of my best friends was a biologist who was Jewish. His family was Reform and fairly observant. Walking across campus one day, I observed that it must be about time for his oldest son's bar mitzvah. He said he was not going to have a bar mitzvah, preferring to let his son "make up his own mind" when he was older. I exploded, asking how in the hell could he want to let his son make up his own mind in the face of the thousands of Jewish martyrs who died at the hands of Christians' persecution. "At least raise your son as an atheist," I said, "as that would suggest you have some convictions." He had his son's bar mitzvah.

In like manner, I cannot conceive of what it would mean to teach theology as if God did not matter. Of course, there are pedagogical issues that should not be avoided. I teach primarily in a Divinity School that is part of a university. Undergraduates take my divinity school courses, but I do not change my courses to accommodate their presence. I assume that most of them are Christians, though one Jewish student, as a result of one of my courses, decided to become a rabbi. If I were to teach an undergraduate course, I would not be less "theological," but I would not teach the course the same way I teach a course for those preparing for the ministry. Indeed, part of the course would
involve them in trying to understand why teaching a course in Christian theology is a problematic undertaking in the contemporary university.

Yet pedagogy should not determine what is taught. You cannot teach about God as if God does not matter anymore than you can raise a child as a Jew as if going through bar mitzvah does not matter. What is crucial is that the course be taught with the intellectual seriousness commensurate with its subject. Challenges, such as Troeltsch’s understanding of history, must be met. The displacement of religious practice into the realm of the private by the political arrangements of liberalism must be located and critiqued. The liberal production of “ethics” as an autonomous subject must be questioned and conceptual alternatives suggested.

Providing such alternatives has been the focus of much of my own work. To expose the moral practices intrinsic to theological convictions requires the display of conceptual resources that, at least until very recently, were largely ignored in ethical theory. Much of my work has involved the attempt to recover the importance of the virtues and the correlative account of practical rationality, the role of narratives and practices for the display of morally worthy lives, and what kinds of communities are necessary to sustain such lives. Much of this work, I would hope, can be and even should be of interest to many who do not share my theological convictions. Yet for me such work is finally to be judged by whether it serves to help me better understand the God Christians worship and the difference that such worship should have for our lives.

All of this requires hard intellectual work that I confess, given my own abilities, dwarfs me. Yet I think that not to try, even in the rather foreign territory theologians today must work, would be cowardly. Moreover, it is just so much fun to be a theologian for the simple reason that nothing could be more interesting than God. One of the great advantages for those of us who would teach theology in the current university is we are finally free. When universities were explicitly if vaguely Christian, theology taught in the candid manner I am advocating could not be free, since theology was to be done in a manner that underwrites the presumption that the way things are is the way things are supposed to be. But Christians are no longer in power, at least they are not in power as Christians, so we can now take the risk of teaching theology, if we are able, as edification. The problem, given recent intellectual developments, is not that theology is a problematic subject for the university, but that those of us who teach theology do so in such unimaginative ways. I suspect that the best theology being done in universities today is done in subjects that are not seen as theology. Which is perhaps the way it should be.

I am not suggesting that the classroom is the place to make Christians. The classroom is a far too coercive context for that. My reservations in this respect do not arise because I believe in academic freedom or even in the right of the students to “make up their own minds.” My concerns are theological, since I believe that non-violence is intrinsic to Christian convictions about Jesus’ cross and resurrection. The presentation of those convictions in a violent manner would thus belie the character of God and therefore be a theological mistake.

Christian theology, after all, is finally reflection on the stories of God found in the Christian scriptures and developed through the traditions of the Church. Christians do not have a “morality” per se, but rather our morality is embedded in the stories that require constant retellings. Telling a story, particularly stories like those Christians tell of God’s dealings with them, is a frightening business since, in the tellings, one frequently has the story retold in a manner that is surprising and challenging to the teller. That is why violence is antithetical to the telling since the very character of the story requires the Christian to be open to such retellings.

Therefore, when Christian theology is taught in the university, that teaching must include a presentation of the extraordinary diversity of the “tellings” that have been part of Christian history. Such a presentation is not simply “historical,” but rather the moral enterprise intrinsic to the story itself. For the story requires that the diversity of gifts that have been present throughout Christian history in order to appreciate that the nature of the God Christians worship is known only through those diverse witnesses. So, for example, as a Christian committed to non-violence, I must also tell of those Christian lives who thought that they were obligated to kill in order that injustice not be...
allowed to flourish.

So to teach Christian theology requires that the student be initiated into an ongoing conversation across the centuries to better know how to worship the God of Jesus Christ. Indeed, as Robert Orsi reminds me, ethics is a performance, a conversation, whose form cannot be separated from the material convictions that conversation embodies. The story theology seeks to tell requires an enactment commensurate with its content. So if the student is to be initiated into the practice of nonviolence, how that is done makes all the difference. Dr. Robert Orsi has earned my gratitude for pointing out to me that the two stories at the beginning of my paper, as well as the story involving my Jewish colleague at Notre Dame, were, though I did not intend it, conversation stoppers. Indeed, I think, on reflection, I did not respond as well as I might have to the young editor, in order to prolong the telling and countertelling. What is important to see, however, is that Orsi’s reactions help me understand the power of our narratives and the importance of telling them well.

But why would any university, particularly secular universities, want the discipline of theology represented in the curriculum? There can, in principle, be no answer to that question, since the question will be a different question given the differences between universities. Indeed, I take it to be one of the illusions of the current academy that some universal called “the university” exists “out there” and that it is the aim of each university to try, to a greater or lesser extent, to embody it. What I believe can be said, however, is that any university devoid of serious theological discourse will lack a resource that may make some contribution to lessening the moral impoverishment of all of our lives but, in particular, the lives of our students.

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I am indebted to Professor Owen Flanagan, Dr. Jim Fodor, and Mr. Scott Saye for their criticism and help with this essay.
The Great Concourse

Martin E. Marty

The psalm prescribed for the week in which we dedicated Valparaiso’s Center for the Arts included these lines:

Thy procession, O God, comes into view
the procession of my God and King into the sanctuary
at its head the singers, next come the minstrels, girls among them
playing on tambourines,
In the great concourse they praise God. Ps. 68:24

The word “concourse” near the end serendipitously matched the theme that came to mind when I first visited the Center. Weeks before the dedication my spouse and I undertook a reconnaissance mission and visited the Center, hoping to find it deserted so we could snoop unnoticed. Instead we happened to have hit a night when it seemed that all of Porter County was there; it almost all was. This was an occasion in which the university was demonstrating hospitality to leadership in its environs and showing how user-friendly to town and gown the building was. Several hundred people were criss-crossing the Guild Lobby-Commons, libating, conversing, and in some cases recognizing and welcoming us.

That first impression carried over on dedication day when thousands gathered, and on several occasions since when a meeting on campus provided a chance for me to make a house-call and see how the building was doing. Each time I took careful note of the structure, its arrangements, and the goings-on. What I have just described here is a version of the phenomenological method: one uses sophisticated naivete to notice what has not yet been described or charted. As one senior pastor told me, his curate, decades ago: “Write down everything you see in the congregation the first six weeks; you will never see so clearly again.” Certainly the architects, contractors and users in the Valparaiso community see and know things that these my first impressions could not grasp. But the first sizing up left notions that remain.

For instance, the bricollage: people bumped off each other as serendipitously as billiard balls might, or got juxtaposed as accidentally as the psalm text and my previously chosen theme at dedication time did. They bumped into each other, almost randomly. Marge Piercy: “Nothing moves in straight lines but in arcs, in epicycles, in spirals and gyres. We take a little here and give a little here and we change.” That is supposed to happen on a campus, and especially in the face of drama, music, and visual arts of the sort that find a home in this Center.

What made this epicycling possible? Naive sophistication said, at once: the great concourse of this building. The kind of humanist who reads city plans and building plans, choreographic charts and musical scores as readily as literary texts, for raw material, I asked to see the drawings for the Center. It was clear, this was designed to be as it was also practically called, the Guild Lobby-
Commons, but as it will ever be in my mind, a Great Concourse. Dimensionally great it is: What a waste! What a waste of space and Guild money—squandered in a practical world, as is art, or worship, or spikenard.

Not having matriculated at Valparaiso, but having courted there at mid-century and spoken and met there in many winters since, I join the company of those on the windward side of lake-effect snow in celebrating great enclosed space, especially space that has on its horizon the Resurrection Chapel that is to be the core and heart of the University. In warm climes where a campus looks and feels like summer camp the concourse can be out of doors. There space for arcs and epicycles, spirals and gyres and bumpings into, or melding of crowds for theatre, art, and music, is relatively inexpensive. One might as well make room for people as for more parking spaces. But in our bitter zones, where the weather is conducive to indoor life in libraries, laboratories, or other purposeful spaces, it is important to have a sheltered concourse, as this Center provides. At intermission of concerts and plays one can bump into people enjoying another art, or just hiding from the elements.

“In the great concourse they praise God.” And let us now praise famous men, and generous women: the Guild, who provided for the concourse, the luxurious necessity that gives life to the rest of the building and makes discourse possible. They paid for it, so they can name it, as in “Lobby-Commons.” But we are free to think of it as the Concourse.

Why this choice of terms for a single act of reflection? The space is, after all, a functional adjunct to a building that is what Le Corbusier would have called a machine for music, art, and theatre. In other buildings on other scales it would be called the mud room, the entrance hall, or, for the lofty, the anteroom or antechamber, the vestibule or the foyer. Perhaps insofar as and because the University has a Christian intention it could even have been called a narthex. But my visit to a dictionary discourages that:

Narthex: a vestibule or portico stretching across the western end of some early Christian churches or basilicas, divided from the nave by a wall, screen, or railing, and set apart for the use of women, catechumens, penitents, and other persons.

If those names would not do, neither would the word lobby, unexplained. My colleague Neil Harris has studied lobbies in movie palaces and hotels, places that, like the Center’s concourse, dazzle, but have dazzling as their main object. The lobby was to serve “to shelter, briefly, for purposes of convenience,” and thus to include toilets and, often, an “area of assignations.” Next, try porch? That connotes mosquitoes and noisy neighbors. So, we come back to a concourse, a hall that dazzles. One pictures people like me who come from other campuses to attend events and see the building, then comparing this concourse with others. We visitors from collegial colleges will feel a bit like the Queen of Sheba (I Kings 10):

When the Queen of Sheba... came to Jerusalem with a very large retinue, with camels bearing spices, and very much gold, and precious stones; and when she came to Solomon, she told him all that was on her mind... When the Queen of Sheba had observed all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built [with its great concourse?]—M.E.M., the food of his table, the seating of his officials, and the attendance of his servants, their clothing, his valets, and his burnt offerings that he offered at the house of the Lord, there was no more spirit in her. [NRSV] [REB: “She was overcome with amazement.” NAB: “She was breathless.” NJB: “It left her breathless.”]

So she said to the king, “The report was true that I had heard in my own land... but I did not believe the reports until I came and my own eyes had seen it. Not even half had been told me...”

Whereupon Sheba did what most visitors to the Valparaiso Center may not have done, but will not be discouraged from doing. She gave the king gold, spices, and precious stones. Seven dollars instead will get you a good ticket most nights.

The psalmist and we chose “concourse,” so it is in place for us to reflect on the choice of terms.
Why concourse? There are, first, linguistic and biblical reasons. Psalm 68:24’s usage is a *hapax legomenon*—look that up; it has to do with the fact that it appears only here in the Bible—*bemaghelot*, probably a “feminine singular of the Phoenician type” in “the most difficult and obscure of all psalms.” Probably it was used for a special assembly of the congregation in Israel.

Again, why concourse? The dictionary gives more reasons. A good architect plots buildings with people in them, unlike architectural photographers, most of whom prefer to picture the new buildings abandoned, sepulchral. A concourse, before it had come to mean a building, is a *bemaghelot* which means “the running or flocking together of people: the condition or state of being so gathered” “a crowd, throng” “the running or flowing together of things.” Not irrelevant here is definition 6b: “esp. in theology,” there is a reference to “the divine concurrence in human action.” Too bad that delightful use has to be marked “obs. rare.” Not at Valparaiso, one hopes. Concourse is also the “act of flocking, moving, or flowing together,” as in watercolors, chorus lines, and chords.

As time passed, the concept of people got concretized in concrete and stone and wood, as “church” and “synagogue” can refer to people and, by analogy, to the buildings they use. So, concourse is part of a building. Notes the *Oxford English Dictionary*, some usages suggest “an open space or central hall in a large building.” My etymological dictionary says that concourse offers the sense of an open space through which many people pass, as in a park, boulevard, or railroad station,” as this was first recorded in 1862 in American English. The word was used in railroad stations, as train-riding senior seniors among us may remember, and now one hears of concourse over airport public address systems. Go to the “C Concourse” may be the advice for United flyers at Chicago’s O’Hare. In concourses the assembly folk run across, bump into, pass by, pass among, encounter at random, others. So: “A place where crowds may gather, esp. by chance coming together.”

Why concourse? Add theological reasons: for the praising of God, which is what gallery- and theatre and recital hall- and element-ducking students and others can do in various ways. As Christians, they are aware of what happens to all creation and creativity because of “divine concurrence in human action” among Jesus Christ, the first-born of the New Creation, and all those of us who live in old and new creations alike.

Why concourse? There is some risk in featuring such a space, as it can be a distraction in a Center for the Arts. Because the arts are born not only in public encounter but in solitude, in the fire of the lonely soul, the madness of the at times introverted, almost frantic zealot called a composer, an artist, an actor. This building also includes studios and cells and carrels, since much creation requires distance for the one who creates. Thus, on writing, a line on my study door, from Franz Kafka:

> To be a writer means to open oneself up beyond all measure—far, far beyond the utmost sincerity and devotion, which people in ordinary life think of as self-abandonment and from which they therefore recoil as long as they are sane, since after all everyone wants to live his own life. Such sincerity and devotion are far from sufficient for being a writer.

Superficialities of this kind may enter into one’s writing when there is nothing better on hand, when the deeper founts are silent, but they mean nothing and they collapse the moment a true feeling causes this ground to give way underfoot. That is why a writer cannot be sufficiently alone, why silence is not silent enough for him, night is not night enough. . .

“A writer cannot be sufficiently alone.” Nor can a composer, an actress memorizing lines, a flutist in the studio next to a percussionist. A dancer rehearses dancing, alone, until there is blood in his toenails, for art. The last words we have from Michelangelo are a note to his assistant: “Draw, Antonio! Draw, draw, draw!” Alone. An actor rehearses a line of Shakespeare or David Mamet until impatience leads him to burst out with semi-Shakespearean, thoroughly Mametian, expletives.

Still, and again, concourse: Not all of the life of the humanist , the artist, the patron, or the visitor is or is to be lived alone. The dancers interact and interweave. Symphonies that demand many performers come forth from isolated composers. Actors interact. Artists “show” and eavesdrop on
gallery-goers. The concourse suggests the need for them to join and be in the communion of artists, the company of collegians, the audience of townspeople. Novelist Stendhal: "one can acquire everything in solitude except character." Not literally: you cannot, for example acquire choral perfection in solitude. But we know what he meant. We are dependent. We are social beings. We are part of a people before we are personalities. In concourse.

Why concourse?

"In the great concourse, they praise God." The Center symbolizes the global outreach, the bumpings-into-each-other that music and art often offer where speech cannot. The Center shows a consciousness of region and locale: northwest Indiana, for example. (I hope readers elsewhere are working all this out analogously, for their campuses and areas.)

For this campus, I did research before dedication day by reading in VIVARTS an interview with then-Dean Philip Gilbertson that captured this idea well:

We will be able to foster a greater community among students and faculty working in arts areas [in contrast to working in "six facilities, dislocated and all inadequate.] The alliances and conversations generated by this shared space will naturally encourage more integrated and innovative public events, combining various arts, and expanding our ideas about expression and creativity. And of course a new facility will play a role in community building for the campus at large and the city and surrounding areas.”

Or, from an interview with Loren Ahles:

From the very beginning, when we looked at three or four alternatives, I think all of them had the idea of a central public space as a fundamental ingredient. They all took on different morphologies, but that was the basic organizing principle. . . .I hope that place, not the lobby, per se, but I hope the building will have soul when you’re in it, and you will understand that you’re in an arts building on a university campus. . . . .The building, the arts building itself, pays some homage to the chapel in its siting, its public space relative to the chapel. . . .I think it gives prominence to at least the quasi-public or semi-public elements of the program: the museum, the audience spaces, the theatre, and the recital hall. Yet during the normal day to day life on a Wednesday afternoon it will still be an academic building, and you will sense that.

Dean Mark Schwehn and chair John Stephen Paul were quoted in the AACU’s Liberal Education: “The students have taught faculty members again and again that the pleasures of friendship and the pursuit of wisdom are bound up deeply with one another,” and they need space to develop the friendship ingredient in arts and learning. And the local Post-Tribune got it right, in anticipation: “The large lobby and commons area will likely be the place students will spend time talking, reading, and relaxing.”
Martin E. Marty, the media's favorite Lutheran, is Fairfax Cone Professor at the University of Chicago and good friend to VU.

This cloud of witnesses all had the concourse notion clear.

Why concourse? At Valparaiso or at any campus that values faith, especially Christian faith, there is the sense of responding to and counting on “divine concurrence in human action.” This is a catholic school: ‘catholic’ connotes not only something global, as in catholic=universalis, but also something deep and penetrating, as in catholic=kata-holos, going through “the whole.” The school has a Lutheran heritage, which accents the way the finite is capable of bearing the infinite, and in which the partial and broken and errant artist or audience member also becomes a co-creator and imaginer. “Divine concurrence in human action,” thanks to the incarnation of God who honors our human race by being one of us, licenses creativity. And there is to be awe, as in the sanctuary, under the Holy Spirit, before the bush that will not be consumed and, by analogy, in front of the canvas, the baton, the footlights.

One hopes that some of the creativity that inspired Sheban breathlessness for most who saw it the first time, and that also represented a very practical place for human concourses on all the days since, will reappear in all the usages of this space in years to come. And, one hopes, serves as an example for other campuses that set out to honor what Valparaiso does. In that case, there is one more reason to crowd the concourse for praise in the face of “divine concurrence in human actions,” like paying for and building and using places like the Great Concourse of the Center for the Arts.

IN MEMORIAM: GERTRUDE STEIN

And yet it was a rose to which you had to add
with emphasis another other rose to let us see
the rose and what a rose could be.

You stood aloof, you stepped aside to have the better better view
because you knew time would abide, would you not cling to any tide.
You are yourself, yourself and true, and true to no one else but you,
when others tried all masks to hide.
How wise a fool had said adieu and stepped aside!
We said she died.

How rare such roses are such roses where we share
a world of words—and do not care how much we err!
A rose rose to the fragrance of your prose.

Walter Sorell
I don’t always agree with the artistic judgments of the juries at the Cannes Film Festival. In 1991, for instance, they awarded their top prize to the Coen Brothers’ *Barton Fink*, a pretentious and ultimately lurid picture that should only be remembered as the Coens’ least successful work. In 1996, however, the Cannes juries were spectacular. The Palme d’Or went to Mike Leigh’s *Secrets and Lies* and the Grand Jury Prize went to Lars Von Trier’s *Breaking the Waves*, two of my favorite three films of the year (along with the Coen Brothers’ *Fargo*). Riding the crest of their successes at Cannes, the two pictures went on to garner Oscar attention. Brenda Blethyn and Marianne Jean-Baptiste both got acting nominations for *Secrets and Lies*, Mike Leigh got nominations for both directing and writing, and the film itself was nominated for Best Picture. Emily Watson, meanwhile, was nominated for her starring role in *Breaking the Waves*. Though these two movies are both about working-class Brits, they are entirely different in style. Leigh’s favors gritty realism while Von Trier’s is metaphorical and mystical. *Secrets and Lies* has won more unqualified acclaim, but *Breaking the Waves* is the more daring. Both are deeply satisfying.

**Family Matters**

Mike Leigh makes movies unlike anyone else. Leigh’s artistic process is astonishingly collaborative. First, he imagines characters and selects actors to portray them. Next, in individual discussions with his players, he creates a backstory for each character, demanding that his cast members participate in shaping the people they will play. And then he designs situations for these characters to meet one another. But when they meet, they do so, initially, without a script. Each actor in a given scene is asked to talk, in character, to the others in the scene. This interaction, rehearsed sometimes for weeks in the presence of the director, drives the creation of a screenplay. Only then is the camera finally turned on and the product of this collaborative endeavor filmed. And at that point, all questions about character motivation having long since been resolved, Leigh demands an absolute adherence to his script. No one else makes movies this way. And no one else makes movies that resemble those by Mike Leigh.

Leigh’s four theatrical features, *High Hopes* (1988), *Life Is Sweet* (1990), *Naked* (1992) and now *Secrets and Lies*, share with Henry David Thoreau the notion that “Most men live lives of quiet desperation.” Leigh’s films look at common people, a motorcycle courier in *High Hopes*, a lunch wagon proprietor in *Life Is Sweet*, a homeless man in *Naked* and a factory worker and her family in *Secrets and Lies*. Movie characters normally wrestle with huge problems (saving New England from a killer shark or saving the world from an alien invasion). The problems of Mike Leigh characters are those encountered by most of us: getting and keeping a job, finding love, raising a family. Leigh finds stirring drama in everyday living. And he infuses his characters with tremendous dignity. But he never romanticizes them for a second. He always displays them with their weaknesses and failings in plain view.

The narrative in *Secrets and Lies* is triggered by a young black optometrist named Hortense (Marianne Jean-Baptiste) whose adoptive parents die when she’s in her mid-to-late twenties. Sometime later, Hortense decides to search out her birth mother. To her considerable perplexity, her birth mother turns out to be a

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and on WYES-TV.
white woman, an emotionally fragile factory worker named Cynthia (Brenda Blethyn). Cynthia’s own mother died when she was a young girl, and she was charged with raising her younger brother Maurice (Timothy Spall). In her teens Cynthia turned promiscuous, twice giving birth out of wedlock, first to Hortense, later to Roxanne (Claire Rushbrook). Cynthia was only 16 when Hortense was born and she gave the baby up for adoption without ever seeing her. She was older when she had Roxanne and chose to keep her. Now Roxanne works as a council road sweeper and lives with her mother with whom she bickers constantly.

Among Cynthia’s many heartaches is the distance that has developed between her and Maurice (pronounced Morris). Maurice has done remarkably well for himself. He’s a portrait and wedding photographer, and he’s made enough money to locate himself and his wife, Monica (Phyllis Logan), in a nice suburban house with guest bedrooms and his and her bathrooms. Monica finds Cynthia trying (which Cynthia is), and as a result, Maurice doesn’t see his sister as often as he should. He feels guilty about this and feels it’s fair that Cynthia feels resentful. But these charged feelings just make things more difficult when they do get together. As the story develops, first Hortense contacts and introduces herself to Cynthia. Then Maurice invites Cynthia and Roxanne to his house for a barbecue to celebrate Roxanne’s birthday. And Cynthia, in a typically ill-considered impulse, invites Hortense to accompany them to the party.

Leigh’s work is so penetrating and searingly true, one hates to register complaints. At two hours and 22 minutes, however, he could have profitably trimmed things some in Secrets and Lies. He could have eliminated, for instance, an entire passage about an unhappy character named Stuart (Ron Cook) who sold Maurice his photography business and resents what a success Maurice has made of it. And he could have cut down the number of vignettes provided by various clients who hire Maurice to take their photographs. These vignettes are fabulously well observed and frequently quite funny, but fewer might well have been better. The picture makes several other small missteps as well. Though we find Hortense’s desire to know her birth mother convincing, we remain curious and unsatisfied about Hortense’s relations with her two adoptive brothers. Leigh simply fails to address why these two men are not providing Hortense greater emotional sustenance. Elsewhere, Leigh seems to make too much of Monica’s inability to have children. Of course, this is a heartache, but it’s hardly a dirty secret.

Such small failings, though, hardly minimize the power this film develops over the course of its 142 minutes. The astounding detail with which Leigh prepares his movies pays dividends in ways few films ever do. Even the seemingly inconsequential characters are fully realized. A social worker (Lesley Manville) who helps Hortense search for her birth mother at first seems just going through the motions, a little distant and a little false. But gradually we understand her as simply the victim of overwork and dull routine. Her ultimate display of genuine kindness, then, is the kind of heroism Leigh repeatedly discovers in his characters. Leigh is always surprising us. Roxanne’s boyfriend Paul (Lee Ross), for instance, is not at all the jerk we suspect him at first meeting. Nor is Monica the bitch she first appears. People are the product of their experiences, Leigh submits, and we need to forgive them their rough edges whenever we can.

At the center of this film resides the character of Cynthia, as dysfunctional a woman as cinema has ever tried to portray. Cynthia is a complete mess—neurotic, whiny, exasperating. And yet, as we get to know her, as we discover a boulder of genuine goodness at the core of her mountainous neediness, we spy the theme that permeates this and every Mike Leigh film. People are frequently dislikable, in small if not in large ways. But suffering is usually at the root of people’s inability to relate to others as well as they would like. So we need to give each other a break. We need to ferret out the decency Leigh feels is almost always present. And those of us whom life has blessed a bit need to view the world as Maurice does. We need always to remind ourselves that “There, but for the grace of God, go I.”
the tintinnabulation of faith, sacrifice and love

An early establishing shot in Von Trier’s *Breaking the Waves* focuses on a church, an austere white church in a small town on a desolate stretch of Scottish seacoast. There is a steeple over the church, and in the steeple there is a bell tower. But in the bell tower there are no bells. There are no bells to call the people to faithful worship, no bells to clang the joy of a union sealed in holy matrimony, no bells to toll the sorrow over a loved one surrendered to Christian burial. There are no bells in the bell tower because there is no love in the church, because the people who congregate there do so in the name of judgment, never in the name of mercy. The absence of these bells provides Von Trier his magnificent central metaphor.

Motion pictures seldom attempt to do so, but in the hands of an inspired director, the medium can deliver a powerful religious experience. Robert Benton’s *Places in the Heart* did so, as did Roland Joffe’s *The Mission*, John Duigan’s *Romero* and Tim Robbins’ *Dead Man Walking*. *Breaking the Waves* is another such picture. But religious pictures have ways of making certain viewers uneasy, and as a result, I believe, *Breaking the Waves* has elicited the entire spectrum of critical responses, contemptuous dismissal as well as lavish praise. Great work has often met with such diverse reaction. *Breaking the Waves* is not a film which strives to make its viewers comfortable. It’s a picture which dares to embrace the notion of an active divine presence in the lives of modern humanity. Some viewers may find its forthright mysticism puerile. But others will find this picture emotionally gripping and spiritually challenging. I found it absolutely brilliant.

Filmed with the hand-held cameras of cinema vérée and set in the early 1970s of flared collars, paisley shirts, bell-bottoms and hot pants, *Breaking the Waves* tells the story of Bess McNeil (Emily Watson), a small-town Scottish woman in her early twenties. Bess lives at home with her parents and her sister-in-law Dodo (Katrin Cartlidge) and does volunteer janitorial work at the strict Calvinist church that provides the focal point of her entire community. With the grudging permission but continuing disapproval of the church elders, Bess marries a man from outside the village. Her boisterous, faintly

*Jan* (Stellan Skarsgård) and *Bess* (Emily Watson) in a scene from *Breaking the Waves*, directed by Lars von Trier. An October Films release.

Photo © October Films.
immature husband Jan (Stellan Skarsgård) works on an offshore oil rig. He drinks and smokes marijuana and roughhouses with his mates. Bess, in contrast, knows practically nothing of the world. She’s a virgin when they marry, and her devout Christian faith is such that she believes God is intimately involved in the daily events of her life.

Bess and Jan’s honeymoon is rapturous, and Bess’s love for her husband is so much the center of her life that she’s emotionally destitute when Jan has to return to work. During his absence, she prays for his early return, finally confronting the Almighty with demands rather than requests. Thus, when Jan is severely injured in his work and returns home early but paralyzed, Bess blames herself. Jan, naturally, is distraught over his condition. And in a frustration of longing, he proposes that Bess take a lover. He says that if she describes her erotic encounters to him he might be able to live, whereas otherwise he will surely die.

Bess is reluctant, of course. But after several false starts, she succeeds in picking up men in buses and bars. And though she detests these encounters, she continues to seek them out because Jan’s condition improves whenever she has relations with another man. In the end, she consciously risks her life by venturing to a place even the most brazen prostitutes avoid. Her outraged small town banishes her for these acts, but she continues them because she is convinced that Jan can be cured in no other way.

Emily Watson couldn’t possibly deserve more the acclaim she has garnered for her performance. She is the embodiment of innocence and devotion. Looking like a young Sarah Miles, she has a beatific smile that is full of openness and wonder. She has huge, gorgeous eyes that express a vast array of emotions. At various times, without the crutch of spoken words, her plainly pretty face communicates yearning, anger, fear, frustration, rapture, uncertainty, determination, desperation and peace. In a movie year brimming with outstanding female performances, no one has been better than Emily Watson.

But Watson is hardly the only thing to admire in this picture. Von Trier’s screenplay is a masterpiece of complex character development. Dodo, for instance, is richly complicated. There is no question that she sincerely loves her sister-in-law. But though Dodo is herself an outsider, she has taken on some of the community’s grim suspiciousness. And at a critical juncture, she decides to interpret Jan’s actions in the worst possible light. Jan’s attending physician, Dr. Richardson (Adrian Rawlins) is developed in a comparable three-dimensional manner. When we first meet him, his palpable kindness makes us yearn for him to be Bess’s romantic savior. We are thus of two minds when she nakedly offers herself to him. On one hand, we want him to accept her overture so that the two of them can begin a relationship. On the other, we are glad that he is too professional and decent a person to take advantage of a woman in so much emotional distress. But just as we are about to fit Dr. Richardson with a halo to wear over his knight’s shining armor, he surrenders to his own emotions and pressures Bess unwisely by confessing his love for her. Moreover, when he decides to have Bess committed, his better and purer professional motives are presumably clouded by personal objectives. In his defensible scientific view, Bess needs to be removed from Jan’s unhealthy influence. But, of course, by removing her from Jan, he increases his own chances for a relationship with her after she’s “cured.”

Jan is comparably complex. When he first proposes that Bess take a lover, it seems that he is concerned about her and not about himself. She is so young and full of life, and he is acutely aware of the tragedy of saddling her with an invalid husband. Jan tells Dodo that he hopes Bess will find someone else and leave the area for another part of Great Britain. Later, however, Jan’s motives seem more selfish and, as Dodo deems them, sick. He chides Bess for the inadequacy of her sexual contacts and demands more of her in this regard. Perhaps, Jan’s actions are just the ravings of a man heavily sedated with pain medication. But perhaps they are consciously cruel and controlling. Or perhaps they are an honest way of trying to maintain a physical connection with his wife. Perhaps they are a mixture of all these motivations. Whatever, this we know for sure, and this redeems Jan, as Dodo and Dr. Richardson are comparably redeemed, his love for Bess is genuine.
Profoundly religious as *Breaking the Waves* finally is, it paints the bleakest picture of organized religion. The Protestantism practiced in the town church is cold and joyless. It is, in addition, completely dominated by men. Women aren’t allowed to speak in church; they aren’t even allowed to attend funerals where the men routinely declare the eternal fate of the deceased. The self-righteous men of this town seem never to have heard Jesus’ warnings: “Do not judge others, and God will not judge you; do not condemn others, and God will not condemn you,” and his imperative to “Forgive others, and God will forgive you.” The people of the church do not try to understand Bess. Even should they deem her to be deranged in grief over her husband’s paralysis, they do not reach out to her, do not try to help or support her. Instead, they cast her out. Several New Testament passages are called to mind in the way the church members treat Bess. Literally, they stone her, as the people in John 8 would the woman caught in adultery. And in doing so they ignore Jesus’ advice that “Whichever one of you has committed no sin may throw the first stone.” When Bess is beaten and stripped of her dignity, lying on the side of the road, the local pastor passes by without trying to help her, like the priest in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

In the end, Bess is transformed from the woman of ill repute that Jesus calls into his ensemble to a Christ figure in her own right. Her religious convictions seem crazy in a secular world, even to people who care about her. But Bess has the gift of faithfulness. She says “God gives everyone something to be good at. My talent is that I can believe.” She believes that by debasing herself, she can restore her husband’s health. In a rational world this is insane. But even in a rational world, miracles happen. Like Jesus, Bess suffers a period of doubt, a feeling of having lost God’s blessing in the same manner as Jesus’s cry from Calvary, “My God, why did you abandon me?” But she remains true to her personal calling, to her mission of sacrifice, for she knows as the Apostle Paul writes in I Corinthians 13 that of all the virtues man may achieve, “the greatest of these is love.” God embraced Jesus directly after his baptism, and in the end of *Breaking the Waves* Bess is immersed as well, and it is God himself who rings the bells for her. The bells ring, and in their tintinnabulation we can hear God’s voice saying, “This is my beloved daughter, in whom I am well pleased.”
Among those lines of his
which have inscribed themselves
upon my memory
a jagged coastline steeply ridged,

because I tramped through Cornwall once in May.
Whatever path, pink-jacketed,
I followed, words of his
formed underfoot.

John Betjeman died on the day of my mother’s funeral.

His dying streamed into my grief,
a sea convulsing with such tides
as labored with the Maker on the third
long day of Genesis.

How like that current (scribbled now
amid a sea ablaze with calm)
this range of cliffs
pen-scraped across time-buffed terrain

that keeps its dead. Why, you can’t tell
the harsh topography
from this old poet’s pioneering hand,
which mapped the place, an empty page

till autographed. . . . I’d have it be
that my grief named the place—
those tides, then heaving with creation, turned
that tributary’s flow,

drove it from right to left
across the blank. The image shakes the mind,
whose eye has glimpsed, as in a glass,
its own erasure, its dead calm—whips up

that after-grief’s sea-sheen,
steep cliffs of slate and quartz
like dust-thin pages, thumbed,
turned into breeze.
Dear Editor,

We ended class last semester noting one of the most exciting cultural developments in the US in the second half of the 19th century. Since then, a project occurred to me.

Background: Emerson in 1837 (his lecture “The American Scholar”) and Whitman in 1855 (preface to Leaves of Grass) were gurus calling for an indigenous literature that would save Americans from dying—death by submission to British/Continental culture, by imitation. Make all things new!

After the War Over Slavery there were great advances in factory production, invention, exploration, railroad-building, and missionary activity. But culture hardly moved. We had sentimental verse, steel engravings, piano lessons, mantel bric-a-brac, and missionaries on furlough with tales of the weird heathen. Though confident of the cultural future, Whitman in 1871 (his less-read Democratic Vistas) perceived stoically that the “all-devouring agency in US culture was business.” Still, there developed genuine excitement over the novel. It divided people—a reminder to later generations, by the way, that the American nation, or any nation so conceived, is unlikely to attain cultural unity.

On one side of the divide the novels of Henry James, such as The Portrait of a Lady, superbly distilled and eroticized recently by Jane Campion. The novel—the long story—was growing up. It became a nuanced and reliable report on both material and psychological life, no longer only romance or adventure, not just escape reading. Evidence for its growth comes from various sources. Lately, two distinguished Western historians, Alvin Josephy and Howard R. Lamar, confess that “the novelist and artist have a better sense of the western landscape and values than the historian” (Writing the History of the American West, 1991).

The divide: I gave students passages found while pursuing, for other reasons, the 19th-century craving for “the Great American Novel.” The North American Review in 1856:

The novel of the present day has a noble mission to perform. . . . Politics, metaphysics, theology, have all found utterance through the novel. It has ceased to be the plaything of an idle hour, and we look to it for greater depth of thought, a higher range of ideas, closer fidelity to abstract truth, . . .

Henry James, age 13, would not have read this anonymous exuberance, but by 1872, in a letter, he saw he could not be “a free-going and light-paced enough writer to please the multitude.” James’s novels—and those of his friend William Dean Howells—kept the aforementioned controversy very much alive. To restless middlebrow readers James was too subtle, too slow, too demanding. Howells was too quizzical, too tolerant, exploring divorce in A Modern Instance and creating a sympathetic socialist in A Hazard of New Fortunes. Richard Burton in The Dial, in 1895, spoke for the multitude:

[T]he clear-headed and sound-hearted folk, who (thank heaven) are the warp of our social fabric, do not care to fret and fume for any such thing. They go to the novel for rest, amusement, illusion; as the lovers of Thackeray and Dickens did, of Scott and Dumas. . . . They have a deep-seated prejudice against fiction with a bad ending. . . .

Charles Vandersee, at the University of Virginia, proposed John Dos Passos’ U.S.A. as the Great American Novel, at the Modern Language Association meeting in Washington last winter. What will he think of next?
Imagine some sport with two sets of rules. The professional players—a new era of serious and exuberant performers—want a game less flashy and more demanding. But most spectators crave for their idle hour big gestures and some gore.

Division over the novel in Europe and the US persists. You can visit one kind of novel for escape and illusion, or (and here is my project idea) you can plunge into another kind, securing depth of thought, range of ideas, and fidelity to truth. Call it *mimesis* and *verisimilitude*, or use the worn-out retro term “vicarious experience.”

The perduring critical lexicon of recent years is French: Saussure’s *langue*/parole, Derrida’s *différence*, Irigaray’s *écriture feminine*. Seeking a “happy Gallicism” for my project (the expression is Henry James’s, in *The American*), I asked a French colleague for her version of “vicarious.” Christine Zunz suggested *la peau des autres*—“the skin of the others.” This sounded good, since “skin talk” is close to the luring expression “skin flick,” and “the others” are of course the Other in current discourses of multiculturalism and diversity. Later I found *milieu intérieur*—a person’s “invironment,” as poet Muriel Rukeyser called it (borrowing from the French physiologist Claude Bernard).

My project idea uses two American novels, one set in James’s era and one in ours. I envision a workshop in getting under *la peau des autres*. Colleges and universities have wisely been using workshops and other sessions to inculcate virtues—tolerance and understanding—in students, since television, schools, parents, and churches have not entirely succeeded (it’s too soon to tell about the Bennetts-come-lately, with their big books). Videotapes, skits, and panels, followed by discussions, attempt to make some categories of human beings more real to students from the provinces: from white suburbia, towns without cable and Interstates, black and Asian enclaves. A student last fall mentioned to me some teachers in her province, Italian Staten Island, and their lurid tales of the weird South. Ignorance and suspicions among university students do not provide the right climate for book learning and lab learning.

In *Jasmine* (1989), by the India-American novelist Bharati Mukherjee, and in *O Pioneers!* (1913), by the Nebraska-American novelist Willa Cather, there are lots of different skins to get under. I think today’s students would relish encountering *les autres* in these short novels by sharp women, connecting them to their own experiences.

There are no African Americans and no Native Americans in either novel, except for two Caribbean daycare women in *Jasmine*, and one black beggar, not even cameo characters. A New York apartment in *Jasmine* has two wooden Indians and New Orleans slave-auction posters. Jasmine as narrator mentions the “dark-skinned mammies” who were the old caregivers in the South; now there are women “down from Harlem” who watch Columbia professors’ children. In *O Pioneers!* a French infant in Nebraska looks to a Swedish man “exactly like the Indian babies,” but that’s Cather’s only nod to the exiled natives. Her focus is a disunited immigrant family, prosperous farmers but spiritually and culturally vacuous.

Curiously, erasures may be a benefit, because the novels thus avoid “essentializing” and stereotyping two of the chief American marginal groups. In the American future there may be matters more important than group identities, racial and otherwise. Du Bois proposed “the color line” as the 20th-century issue for the United States—and for Africa and Asia and the Caribbean—but now it’s the 21st century. Instead of lines at all—black divided from white, margins from center, women from men, “the projects” from the suburbs, welfare addicts from white-collar alcoholics—what if we’re on a big field with no yard lines or base paths? One of those American eras of take-nothing-for-granted, such as Thorstein Veblen observed in 1923, when in *Absentee Ownership* he saw receding the old America of “country towns” based on “retail trade.”

Mukherjee gives us color as a contingency. Her protean protagonist, Jasmine (who has had several other names), is seen in Iowa as dark-complexioned, while in her native Punjab, she had a light “wheatish” complexion. Understanding that neither name nor hue is fixed, universal, we see also that this undocumented alien—flexible, mobile, opportunistic, twentyish—is a new Representative American. She’s kin to the young uncommitted rogue male prominent in American lore.
Jasmine transforms themselves, embarking on the town of Baden, Iowa. Notably Du Thien, age 17, a Vietnamese refugee, doing very well in school—"considering" as the town says. "Considering," Jasmine deliciously notes, that he "has seen his country, city, and family butchered, bargained with pirates and bureaucrats, eaten filth in order to stay alive." No wonder he can manage a "Simplified for Modern Students edition of A Tale of Two Cities." An electronics whiz, he "transforms the crude appliances that he touches," as he and Jasmine transform themselves, embarking on their American future. There are Hmong refugees, Lutherans, sewing quilts in the church basement in nearby Dalton.

Meanwhile, for the Iowa natives, the "whole town seems to be hurting." Darrel Lutz, inheritor of one of the old farms, will descend into tragedy because he does and doesn’t want to get out, and his hog operation is a failure. Widespread diaspora rather than race, color, class, or religion is the central issue—people in this microcosmic Midwest town are apt to be either sojourners uncertain of staying or old settlers being unsettled, by divorce or foreclosure or "fast-talking developers." Farms are turned into "non-ag use," or fled for the risky lure of franchises.

To most white American college students, whether from edge cities or bloated former country towns, experience in Mukherjee’s weird Baden will be valuable unsettling. To most black American students likewise. Small imploding Midwest towns are the Other. If the black/white divide is still central on campuses, as it is, maybe both sides ought to try to grasp a third milieu while warily touching each other. What’s more, Jasmine lives endangered in New York City and Punjab and Florida; Iowa is one troubled site among many on the globe.

What all this further says to young people in the US today is that determination, luck, cleverness, alertness, and flexibility are crucial 21st-century mainstays. Except for luck, these are skills and virtues. African Americans have a history of practicing them, as Ellison demonstrated in Invisible Man already in 1952. Likewise, know-how Anglos on various geographic and metaphysical frontiers. People in the US have got on with their lives by new habits of mind, not by roots and group identities (though Jasmine does have a subtext of women—a certain kind, a "tribe"—taking care of women).

Willa Cather had similarly privileged new habits of mind, depicting Nebraska prairie life in the 1880s and 1890s. The wretched of her earth are two stolid brothers, Lou and Oscar Bergson, inflexible souls haunted by an obsolete virtue: Labor by the sweat of your brow (oh, and pay off your mortgage). Their savvy sister, Alexandra, focus of O Pioneers!, knows better, lifting them from failure by borrowing money and buying more land, and planting what scientists at the land-grant college suggest.

Cather’s twist, however—and how prophetic she seems—is skepticism toward possession. Well before Jane Smiley depicted the curse of a thousand acres, Cather shows Alexandra needing to get away. Fortyish, she tells an old friend that she’s grown narrow and dull in her unremitting acquisitiveness. She would trade her holdings for the stimulation and freedom of his New York City.

So students would see still more things: First, whether black or white, Asian or Hispanic, your main personal question in the US concerns trade-offs. What thing of good would you give up, for a thing of good that suited you better—regardless of what your ancestors, caring parents, safe clan, class, or your side of the "line" said? Like Jasmine, Du, Darrel, and Alexandra, isn’t it time you moved? Isn’t it shrewd, while young, to get out from inside the Beltway, or the Corn Belt or the Bible Belt, or the Starbucks coffeeklatsch, or Lenox Avenue in Harlem, or Little Saigon or Chinatown?

Second, a surprisingly enduring question: Who are the genuine Americans? In O Pioneers! the settlers with English backgrounds, people in
Nebraska by apparent birthright, are ironically the diaspora. They can’t make it any longer. These “Americans” (as the immigrant Swedes call the English) are heading back to Chicago. The story repeats in jasmine, but now it’s the bankrupt German farmers who start a hegira.

And that’s it—my visionary workshop right now merely exposes to the sun of conversation la peau des autres: both the bewildered natives and the determined newcomers. Despite longtime acquaintance with icons and myths of the New World, I myself would expect to learn some things, listening to middlebrow undergraduates coping with Asians in Iowa and Czechs and Swedes in Nebraska. These can be exciting times in the more serious and forward of our universities—pricking the skins of major texts while pursuing two permanent virtues: attentiveness and cosmopolitanism.

This 21st-century excitement, like 19th-century excitement over the maturing novel, is not something everyone can relish. We in the university are always to some degree the Other. But the Other, any Other, needs attentiveness, not only by being deserving but because in the US it is apt to anticipate the Future.

From Dogwood, yours faithfully, 

C.V.

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on poets:

Imogene Bolls

is poet in residence at Wittenberg University. She has won Ohio Arts Council grants, and in 1996 the Ohioana Poetry Award from the Ohioana Library Association.

Walter Sorell,

who sent us this poem in December of 1996, was a long-time friend of this journal. He died in February, 1997, at the age of 91. For many years he wrote columns on theatre and dance and in 1993 had paintings on our covers. In 1995 he received an honorary degree from VU and visited the campus, where he charmed all who met him. A sensitive and delicate spirit nourished his sturdy love of the tradition of Western high culture, and he contributed to many friends a rich legacy of insight and reflection. May flights of angels sing him to his rest.

David Havird

has published in The New Yorker, Poetry, The Virginia Quarterly Review and an anthology of poems by James Dickey’s students. His work is forthcoming in Verse and The Louisiana English Journal. He teaches at Centenary College of Louisiana.

J.T. Ledbetter,

veteran of the Department of English at California Lutheran University, has enlightened us about the seasons often over the years. He is widely published as poet and essayist.

on reviewers:

Jon Pahl

is a member of the Department of Theology at VU, currently on sabbatical. Recently he has given papers on sport and music in the context of violence and religion in the youth culture in America.


Is sport in America the “moral equivalent of war,” in William James’ fine turn-of-phrase, or is sport vicarious violence that fuels nationalistic crusades and creates illusions of heroic saviors who invariably prove to be knights with tarnished armor? These two books take opposite approaches to this question, and provide a range of anecdotal and historical evidence for cultural critics, theologians, ethicists, and fans, to mull over.

Jackson’s book weaves together (apparently without concern for context) quotes from St. Paul, Lao Tzu, Thich Nhat Hanh, Black Elk, Augustine, Suzuki Roshi, and others, along with narration about his own life and work in basketball, to describe a “Zen Christian” theology of sport. Born of Fundamentalist preacher-parents, Jackson studied psychology, philosophy, and religion at the University of North Dakota. After a playing career in the NBA during the 1970s (when, he admits in his autobiography, *Maverick*, he was a bit of a head-case), Jackson has become the coach of arguably the best team in NBA history, the Chicago Bulls.

Jackson’s lay theology, which he claims is the foundation of his coaching philosophy, develops a paradox of the “peaceful warrior.” This image (of whom Jackson takes Michael Jordan—not himself—to be the epitome), encourages “selfless action,” “bare attention,” “skillful means,” “aggressiveness without anger,” “being brave and at the same time gentle.” Jackson argues that at root the peaceful warrior is marked by “compassion”: “Compassion is where Zen and Christianity intersect,” he writes. “Though I [now] have reservations about the more rigid aspects of Christianity,” he continues, “I have always been deeply moved by the fundamental insight that love is a conquering force. . . . More than anything else,” he claims, “what allowed the Bulls to sustain a high level of excellence was the players’ compassion for each other” (51-2).

In other words, Jackson’s is a theology of the cross, translated into psychological or experiential (certainly not economic) terms. Thus, he suggests, “what makes basketball so exhilarating is the joy of losing yourself completely in the dance, even if it’s just for one beautiful transcendent moment” (91). Jackson is clear that the beauty of this moment is not predicated on winning, and in fact *Sacred Hoops* is peppered with critiques of “the dark side of success,” “the sting of fame,” and the “uncontrolled anger and brutality and violence” of modern sports. “There has to be another way,” Jackson pleads, “an approach that honors the humanity of both sides while recognizing that only one victor can emerge” (136). More personally, “winning is important to me,” he writes, “but what brings me real joy is the experience of being fully engaged in whatever I’m doing. . . . [But] eventually, everybody loses, ages, changes. . . . By accepting death, you discover life” (202). Thus the “peaceful warrior” is one who recognizes basketball and all sport for what it is, “a game, a journey, a dance—not a fight to the death. It’s *life* just as it is” (203).

Robert Higgs—Professor Emeritus of English at East Tennessee State University—is concerned that Jackson might be right, and that sport does indeed replicate and reinforce “*life just as it is*” in violent, greedy, America. Higgs’ book is in the venerable
American tradition of the jeremiad. Its central argument is that “the ways in which modern sports have become entangled with religious practices constitute a (Christian) heresy” (1). Higgs names this heresy “Sportianity,” and recalling fondly the days of his youth when “our play came after our work,” weaves a narrative which argues that in America “the ideal of the Good Shepherd” has been debased into veneration of “the Christian Knight.” Somewhat more concretely, Higgs sees a basic shift in American religious history from “a social and nature gospel emphasizing play and festival” to “a gospel of wealth and worldly success emphasizing competition and conquest” (3).

Higgs’ jeremiad is thus more or less historical. The first introductory chapter outlines his thesis by tracing the change in American culture from Puritan “Sabbath bans” on sports to the current spectacle of “Super Sunday.” Higgs then develops his argument chronologically. Early chapters describe “Revolutionary Heroes and Fighting Parsons,” and explore links between sport and “manliness” on the revivalist frontier, at military academies, and at colleges. Moving into the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Higgs analyzes the sport-religion synthesis in the YMCA movement, depicts “Field Generals of the Crusade” (i.e., coaches), and concludes with a parting shot at “Power in the Tube.” Throughout, Higgs contrasts his ideal-types of “the Shepherd or the Knight.” At one point, the author offers the reader three pages divided into two columns, with each column devoted to a list of characteristics contrasting the two ways (for instance under “Shepherd” we find “grace,” “humanness,” and “flowering,” under “Knight,” “glory,” “manliness,” and “exploding,” and so forth).

Higgs is particularly critical of college athletics. Regarding Notre Dame, to take one example, he concludes that:

> The archetypal lady served by the present system is not Mary, soul of wisdom (Sophia), so that anyone who honored her would be a philosopher first (Philosophia) and an athlete merely for fun or relaxation or even health. It is one much lower on the anima scale, the bitch-goddess of the knightly tournament, known everywhere for her love of winners and money and the unexamined life (285).

Alrighty then. One can’t help but speculate whether this vitriolic tirade originated years ago when some unwitting cheerleader spurned Higgs’ offer of a date.

In any event, how can we evaluate these two drastically different perspectives on the sport-religion relationship in America? The question may be easier than it seems. Jackson’s is the insider’s view. He writes (and coaches) in an effort to preserve the intrinsic joy of sport as play and festival, and not to confuse sport with salvation. Each book thus offers a truth, if read for the particular wisdom it has to offer. Jackson’s spirituality seems as sound as any in this age of do-it-yourself religion, and he’s obviously a great coach. As a theologian, however, he blurs context and “colonizes” complex traditions in the interest of the NBA’s enterprise (the only community he seems to answer to) in a way that smacks more than a little smug. Higgs’ cultural critique is similarly sound (if occasionally hyperbolic), but as an historian he often fails to distinguish event from the nostalgic or polemical purpose he wants it to serve; an odd failing of intellectual rigor for one who seems so concerned about academic purity. Both authors are, in other words, somewhat blind to how their own social situation implicates them systemically in their critiques. Still, while the two play in different leagues, they end up on the same team, and as someone who is both an academic and a fan (alas, only occasionally a player anymore), I happily conclude that both books are, in their own ways, winners.

Jon Pahl
TOUCHED BY SPRING

Flowers wait, locked in snow, forever fresh in the earth below until Spring clouds bring the rain that wakes them from their sleep again.

All along the garden wall sudden color flames where Fall painted some in gold and rust or turned the blooms on vines to dust,

and in the woods where no one goes a restless sea of color flows down secret hills and through the trees trembling on a warmer breeze

that touches vine and flower and face with softest breath, like clouds or lace and bright song on sudden wing we feel and hear when touched by Spring.

There is only now, the gentle hour between the cold and warmer power of summer coming, yet we know enough of life to let it go

and not refuse the time, though brief because we understand the grief of seasons passing all too soon and April fast becoming June,

then summer, hot, and always long, and Autumn with its mournful song of Winter shadows on the way that makes us sigh and dream of May.

As seasons end, others start, ever blooming in the heart yearning for a song to sing and once again be touched by Spring.

J. T. Ledbetter