Created for Creativity  
*Steven R. Guthrie*

Look at Your Fish  
*Jason Crawford*

Petroglyphs, Unpublished Poetry, and the Urge to Leave a Mark  
*Michael Kramer*

Searching for Jerusalem  
*Jennifer L. Miller*

VERSE

Luke 20:9–12  
*Meg Eden*

Forage  
*Brianna Flavin*

Post-Leper (Leviticus 14)  
*Ivy Grimes*
On the front cover: Architectural detail from the Main Sanctuary Tower, Brhadisvara Temple, located in the city of Thanjavur in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Constructed between 995 and 1010 CE. Photograph: iStock.com/a_lis.

Brhadisvara Temple, dedicated to Shiva, is regarded as the greatest masterpiece of the architecture of India’s Chola dynasty (300 BCE–1279 CE). The temple stands as an architectural marvel, built with migmatitic granite ranging in shade from beige to dark grey. The fifteen-story sanctuary tower rises to a height of sixty-one meters, and rests on a high square plinth. Each story has highly articulated outer walls covered with piers, attached columns, and pilasters placed in a rhythmic pattern, as well as delicately carved statues of Lord Shiva.

More photographs of sacred spaces in India are available on page fifty-eight through sixty of this issue, as well as in the exhibit “Sacred Space and Objects,” curated by George Pati and sponsored by the Surjit S. Patheja Chair in World Religions and Ethics, in the Brauer Museum of Art’s Gallery 1212, April 13–May 8, 2016.
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if anything is excellent or praiseworthy
—think about such things.

*Philippians 4:8*
When people read a Flannery O'Connor story for the first time, their initial reaction is often one of shock. Her stories are not happy ones, at least not obviously so. They are populated with an odd collection of misfits and misanthropes, characters who almost always meet with some form of sudden violence before the story ends. To those unprepared for what is coming, these painful moments seem terribly dark, even despairing. But O'Connor wants her readers to pay close enough attention to see how these life-shattering experiences offer an opening for grace.

O'Connor considered fiction to be an inherently hopeful art form, even once telling a class of creative writing student, “People without hope do not write novels... but what is more to the point, they don’t read them. They don’t take long looks at anything, because they lack the courage. The way to despair is to refuse to have any kind of experience, and the novel, of course, is a way to have experience” (quoting “The Nature and Aim of Fiction,” in Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose [Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970]).

To write or to read fiction is to take a long, patient look at the world. Fiction is not escapism, but, in O'Connor’s words, a “plunge into reality.” When O'Connor looked at the residents of her “Christ-haunted South,” she saw sinners in need of God’s grace: like proud Mrs. Turpin of “Revelation,” pretentious Asbury of “The Enduring Chill,” or the judgmental, grandmother of “A Good Man is Hard to Find.” She saw fallen creatures warped by pride, wrapped up in self-satisfaction. And when she looked more closely, she found in them the image of God and the possibility for redemption. O'Connor the artist saw past the superficial and grotesque, and she wanted her readers to do the same.

In this issue’s first essay, “Created for Creativity,” Steven R. Guthrie examines different conceptions of the process of artistic inspiration. Guthrie concludes that, from a Christian perspective, creativity begins with receptivity, with listening attentively to the voices of others and receiving them as gifts, but the process of inspiration continues when the artist’s own voice joins with those of others to create a new contribution in an ongoing ecology of giving. (The essay is based on Guthrie’s plenary lecture to the National Conference of the Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts, held at Belmont University on October 9–11, 2015.)

In “Look at Your Fish,” Jason Crawford explores what it means to be genuinely attentive toward a painting, or a poem, or another person. Like Guthrie, he describes a process that begins with practicing a patient openness to works of art, waiting for their secrets to be revealed, but it is a process that eventually generates a kind of community that includes artist, viewer, and all of their imaginative acts. And in “Petroglyphs, Unpublished Poetry, and the Urge to Leave a Mark,” Michael Kramer describes how on his many trips to revisit the Southwest, rock carvings of the Hopi tribe have inspired his own poetry. In both ancient petroglyphs and modern poetry, Kramer recognizes the effort to create stories that explain the mysteries of our lives, as well as the attempt to mark out our own roles within those stories.

As O'Connor reminded those creative writing students, fiction is an incarnational art, concerned not with abstract notions and ideals, but with the concrete details of life. The writer of fiction’s task, she told them, is to stare rudely and stupidly at those details. “The longer you look at one object, the more of the world you see in it.” It is an insight that explains the work of the poet, the painter, the songwriter, and other artists as well. It is often difficult to see God in others, to hear God in their voices. But because the world itself is a gift created by God, if we give it our patient and loving attention, we can discover, even in its sometimes shocking ugliness, the beauty of God’s presence and signs of hope of the redemption to come. ¶

—JPO

Easter 2016 5
Late last September, a week or so before the conference that gave rise to this essay, I was lying in bed, desperately wanting to sleep. Instead, I was wide awake with anxiety—thinking about the talk I was to give, how quickly it was coming up, and how very far it was from being written. As I lay there, I offered up a sleepy prayer that went something like: "Oh God, please give me words and ideas for this presentation!"

Those who heard the talk I ended up giving can judge whether or not God answered that prayer in particular! A much more interesting question, however, is how we should think about such prayers in general: whether God indeed answers them, and, if so, how. The theme of the conference at which I was speaking was: "Created for Creativity." This implies two creative agents and two sets of creative acts. It gestures toward God, who created us and the world in which we live, and it points toward us as well. Moreover, the statement suggests that we are not only the outcome of God's creative act: we are also intended as agents of further creative acts. How then should we think about the relationship between God's creative activity and our own?

One possibility might be that God answers such prayers in a very straightforward and direct way, by simply pouring creative products through us, fully formed. On this model we would become simple conduits, nothing but copper wires along which divine current could pass. The creative product would simply materialize before us complete, without any input or any effort on our part.

I. The Possessed Poet

Perhaps surprisingly, this is a description of creativity that one often hears from artists. Many creative artists speak about having just this sort of experience, in which the art work streams through them from another source and by another agency. Here are just a few examples that could easily be multiplied:

I believe that all we create is sent from somewhere. It is as if our ideas already exist, and pass through us in order to be seen. What is up in the air comes down and comes through you.

Ang Lee, film director

Sometimes I wake up in the morning and I can just hear melodies and little themes, and I know that it is directly from God because it is pure, it is good, it just came through me.

Wynton Marsalis, trumpeter and composer

It still seems at times as if the creation of the work just happens. Sometimes my hand is moving with the spirit of the project, and hopefully, God is moving my hand.

Faith Ringgold, painter, sculptor, and writer
I am just a medium, man. The shit is coming from somewhere. I don't sit down and really think! I just get in this mode and I do what I do. That's why I hate doing interviews, because people ask me, "How do you do what you do?" I don't know!

Eddie Van Halen, guitarist (Resnikoff 1991)

Of course, this isn't the only sort of thing that artists say about the creative process. But it is striking how closely these comments mirror a very ancient conception of artistry. On this account, the artist is literally possessed by a divine spirit, and what we encounter in human creativity is not human creativity at all, but rather the voice of the divine.

One of the clearest descriptions of this idea is found in Plato's dialogue Ion. As the dialogue begins, Socrates meets up with Ion, who is returning from the festival of Asclepius. Ion is a rhapsode, something halfway between an actor and a singer, whose business is giving public recitations of poetry. Ion is in good spirits because he has just won first prize for his performance. So Socrates congratulates him and, in typical Socratic fashion, begins to question Ion about his art. When a rhapsode does his job well and moves his audience, Socrates wonders, just what sort of skill and what kind of power is he displaying?

Plato's dialogue offers some surprising answers to these questions. Put in the most basic terms, Ion claims that creativity arises from receptivity. At the beginning of the creative act, there is an encounter with, and a surrender to, something outside oneself. Ion is the vehicle, but not the source of the poetry. The poem does not come from, but rather comes through him. Socrates arrives at the ironic conclusion that Ion—the professional speaker—never really speaks with his own voice.

In fact, the dialogue suggests that Homer (the poet whose works Ion has been performing) does not speak with his own voice either. The Odyssey begins, "Sing in me, Muse, and through me tell the story." If Homer's prayer is answered, then neither Homer nor Ion can claim ownership of their words. When Homer opens his mouth, the voice singing in him is that of the Muse. And in the same way, when Ion's listeners respond to his recitation, it is not his skill, but the power of the Muse that moves them. The whole process is like a magnetic current that runs through one bit of metal and then another and then another, says Socrates. The power passing through the pieces of metal is not their own, but that of the magnet.

Socrates tells Ion: "That's not a subject you've mastered—speaking well about Homer. It is a divine power that moves you, as a 'Magnetic'

If this is how artistry works, then a "creative contribution" from the human author or the human performer is not only unnecessary, it actually may place the work of art in jeopardy.

stone moves iron rings... and the power in all of them depends on this stone. In the same way, the Muse makes some people inspired herself, and then through those who are inspired a chain of other enthusiasts is suspended. You know, none of the epic poets, if they're good, are masters of their subject; they are inspired, possessed, and that is how they utter all of those beautiful poems" (533d–534a).

If this is how artistry works, the dialogue contends, then a "creative contribution" from the human author or the human performer is not only unnecessary, it actually may place the work of art in jeopardy. The power of an artistic work arises from the divine voice speaking through it. The most effective artist then will be one through whom this voice travels most directly and with the least interference. To be effective, in other words, the Muse's activity must be matched by the artist's passivity.

"That's why the god takes [the poets'] intellect away from them when he uses them as his servants, as he does prophets and godly diviners," Socrates explains. Why? "So that we who hear should know
that they are not the ones who speak those verses that are of such high value, for their intellect is not in them" (534d). The rhapsode speaks, but he does not speak. Homer's words are heard, but it is not Homer that we hear.

What we should notice as we reflect on Plato's dialogue is that in addition to advancing a description of artistic creativity, Ion also proposes a particular theology. Socrates' exchange with the poet suggests that this is what it looks like when a divine spirit acts on human beings; this is the relationship between divine and human activity. In particular, according to Ion, if the divine spirit is active, then we must be passive; if the divine voice is to be heard, then we must be silent; where there is divine wisdom, we remain ignorant. The Muse "takes possession" of the poet, Socrates says, and "robs him of his intellect." In this theological vision of creativity, there is indeed divine involvement in the creative arts, but not human creativity. The most we can attribute to the human creator is a kind of beautiful passivity.

We can imagine, no doubt, all sorts of reasons why this conception of creativity would be unattractive in a modern and secular age, but I would like to consider one particular line of objection that has developed.

II. The Passive Poet

One of the profound flaws identified in this way of thinking is that it overlooks the social and cultural dimension of creativity. Ion suggests that works of art do not arise from a culture, but instead descend upon it from the heavens. And this way of thinking is not only misleading; some critics have argued it is also dangerous. It encourages us to regard particular and contingent artistic norms as universal and absolute. The idea of "inspiration" in particular, takes one, very human way of looking at the world and in effect places a stamp of divine approval upon it.

The musicologist Susan McClary writes that "from very early times up to and including the present, there has been a strain of Western culture that accounts for music in non-social, implicitly metaphysical terms. But parallel with that strain... is another which regards music as essentially a human, socially grounded, socially alterable construct. Most polemical battles in the history of music theory and criticism involve the irreconcilable confrontation of these two positions" (McClary 1987, 15).

McClary is often grouped with a movement called "The New Musicology," which wants to argue strongly in favor of this later conception of music. Music is full of meaning, she argues, but "not, to be sure... transcendental meaning"(8). Rather, in music we encounter "human meanings, grounded in the historical contexts in which they performed—and in many cases, still perform—crucial social functions" (8–9). McClary draws particular attention to the music of Bach, since his music has often been praised, either for embodying some sort of transcendent mathematical order, or for giving voice to some transcendent theological truth. According to McClary, such suggestions are dangerous, because they disguise what the works of Bach (and all other musical works) are: "human constructs, created in particular social contexts and for particular ideological interests" (60).

The mention of ideological agendas helps explain why theorists like McClary so vehemently oppose even the casual mention of "divinely inspired" or "transcendent" art. McClary contends that the music of Bach and of other composers advances the values and mores of the composers' particular social location, subtly but powerfully reinforcing the power relationships, prejudices, and vested interests of the culture. Any intimation of "inspiration" serves to attach a divine or cosmic authorization to the assumptions about race, class, gender, and sexuality that are concealed in works of art. And indeed, the idea that such agendas are concealed is likewise an important part of
McClary's critique. McClary argues that the ideological elements of artworks are not immediately recognized by listener, or even by composer. In fact, they “succeed best when least apparent, least deliberate, [and] most automatic” (2000, 5). The artist, McClary believes, is not the creator, but the carrier of the political and ideological subtext of the work. In a very real sense, the artist is not the originator of the artwork.

This same idea appears in Roland Barthes's discussion of Balzac. Barthes considers a sentence composed by Balzac and concludes that “no one, no 'person', says it: its source, its voice is not the true place of the writing” (Barthes 1977, 147). Rather than originating from a single authorial voice, a text is a “multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture” (146). The author can do no more than “mix writings” (146). Indeed, however much the writer may wish to “express himself,” his sense of “self” is an illusion. The meaning the artist wishes to convey, Barthes says, is drawn from “a ready-formed dictionary” (146). He may choose to shift words around this way or that, but he is powerless to speak in his own voice.

Finally, one other example of this line of thinking appears in theorist Catherine Belsey's analysis of the George Eliot novel, Adam Bede. Belsey exposes the offensive and oppressive ideologies contained in the novel and then asks: "Does this mean that George Eliot should be roundly condemned for colluding with exploitation?" Belsey's answer is surprising. "Of course not," she writes. Eliot should not be condemned because "George Eliot is not the origin or the explanation of the cultural convictions her novel reproduces.... The text is an effect of the meanings and values in circulation at its own historical moment. Adam Bede (who does not exist), George Eliot (who is not Adam Bede's origin) and the unsuspecting reader... participate in a shared practice which reproduces the ruling ideology" (Belsey 2002, 37).

So—let's pause for a second and take stock. We have looked very briefly at two accounts of creativity; one ancient and one modern; one emphasizing the transcendent and supernatural, and the other the contingent and social. And yet, at a number of points they mirror one another in striking ways.

First, each in some way helps us account for the experience of Eddie Van Halen. That is to say, each offers us an account of creativity that includes Van Halen's reported experience of receptivity—in which he experiences himself as the vehicle of a creative agency outside himself.

But these two accounts are likewise similar in the fact that in each instance the artist, the creative individual, ends up losing her voice. Plato robs the artist of his voice by placing the artwork completely outside his social location. The critical theorists we have looked at briefly rob the artist of her voice by completely identifying the artwork with her social location.

Despite all the considerable differences between the two, in both instances what we encounter is an essentially competitive vision of creativity. In both instances, it is as if acknowledging the artist as a creative source means denying the involvement of any other agent or influence. And conversely in both instances, it is as if acknowledging the involvement of any other agency, whether divine or human, excludes the possibility that the artist's own voice sounds. Ion insists on the involvement of the divine in human creativity, and the contemporary thinkers we have considered deny it altogether. Both however would seem to be dubious about the possibility held out in this essay's title—that creativity is the proper inheritance of the human person.

Before addressing this problem, it is worth asking whether this competitive account of creativity actually merits a rebuttal. Perhaps the idea of the passive artist is only a harmless relic of ancient philosophical texts, or something that is tucked away in dense passages of esoteric academic journals.

But in fact, I think we bump into elements of this competitive vision of creativity in a number of more mundane and everyday settings. When I was in high school and college I played in a contemporary worship band. Before a worship service, it was not uncommon for one or more of the musicians to say a prayer that went something like this: "Lord Jesus, I pray that we would just be empty vessels for you, Lord; Lord, just move us out of the
way so that it's just you playing through us; I pray that it wouldn't be us up there, but that it would be you that people would see.” Now, there is something right about those sorts of prayers. And yet... They seem to me like prayers that carry some residue of Ion's theology. They are prayers that suggest that the relationship between God's activity and ours is a zero-sum game. If God is to speak, we must be silent; if God is to be visible, we must be invisible.

We likewise hear echoes of this competitive vision of creativity when creativity is understood as wholly synonymous with novelty or originality, as if the fundamental criterion of creativity is that it has been untouched by tradition. It is not unusual for great artists and works of art to be praised with terms like “groundbreaking,” “revolutionary,” “innovative,” or “unprecedented.” What do such terms suggest? They suggest an inverse relationship between the greatness of a work and its dependence on the voices and traditions preceding it, as if the truly creative artist is the one whose voice is untouched by the voices of others.

A quotation from the great twentieth century composer Arnold Schoenberg offers a striking example of this:

To understand the very nature of creation one must acknowledge that there was no light before the Lord said: “Let there be Light.” And since there was not yet light, the Lords' omniscience embraced a vision of it which only His omnipotence could call forth. We poor human beings, when we refer to one of the better minds among us as a creator, should never forget what a creator is in reality. A creator has a vision of something which has not existed before this vision. (Schoenberg 1975, 214–215)

Perhaps more speculatively, I wonder if I hear an analog to this competitive conception of creativity in my students, who believe that to find their own voice as adult people, they must throw off the influence of all the voices that have shaped them to this point, the voices of parents and family and church and childhood community. I think I may even hear faint echoes of this in the students who struggle with footnoting and acknowledging sources. “If my paper is filled with stuff I got from other people,” they worry, “then is it really my paper?” However faint, here are reverberations of the idea that if one voice is sounding, then another is silenced. If one party is active, then the other must be passive.

III. De-Ionized Inspiration

The Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit is not only other than this competitive vision of creativity, it is its remedy. The divine spirit in Ion takes possession of its human subjects, whereas the Holy Spirit of Christian belief is called the Giver. Ion's competitive theology of possession is healed by a biblical theology of gift.

In Christian theology, the Holy Spirit is described as the giver of gifts. The Nicene Creed refers to the Spirit as “the Lord, the giver of life,” and of course, many passages in both Old and New Testament speak of the gifts of the Spirit. One famous example is 1 Corinthians 12:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit... To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit. (I Cor. 12:4, 8-9)

Or we might point to the passage in Exodus 31, where God pours out the Spirit on two craftsmen named Bezalel and Oholiab:

The LORD spoke to Moses: See, I have called by name Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: and I have filled him with divine spirit, with ability, intelligence, and knowledge in every kind of craft, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, in every kind of craft. Moreover, I have appointed Oholiab son of Ahisamak, of the tribe of Dan, to help him. (Exodus 31:1–6)

These biblical texts imagine the divine-human relation in a very different way from Ion. Here
a human being comes to enjoy something that belongs to God (wisdom, knowledge, intelligence). In Ion, on the other hand, the Muse lays hold of something that belonged to the human being (mind, use of one's own voice, command of one's own responses). And where the activity of the Muse is that of emptying out, the work of the Holy Spirit is described in terms of “filling.”

Not only is the Holy Spirit the giver of gifts. Crucially, the Holy Spirit is gift. St. Augustine, in a famous passage, contends that "Gift" is a fitting name for the Holy Spirit.

So the love which is from God and is God is distinctively the Holy Spirit; through him the charity of God is poured out in our hearts, and through it the whole triad dwells in us. This is the reason why it is most apposite that the Holy Spirit, while being God, should also be called the gift of God. (The Trinity, 421)

By the Holy Spirit, the life of God is made to dwell in us. And what does that mean? What is the character of this God who indwells us? When we look at the life of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we discover that God's own life is one of gift and surrender. In a remarkably lyrical passage, the twentieth-century Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar writes:

Do you believe in God the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit?... These three phrases too, are an expression—and Jesus Christ provides the proof of this—of the fact that the one God is, in his essence, love and surrender.... Herein lies the most unfathomable aspect of the mystery of God: that what is absolutely primal is no statically self-contained and comprehensible reality, but one that exists solely in dispensing itself: a flowing wellspring with no holding trough beneath it.... In the pure act of self-pouring-forth, God the Father is self. (Balthasar 1990, 29, 30–31)

The work of the Holy Spirit is to reproduce God's own life in us; part of what that means is that the Holy Spirit is given to make us givers. By the gift of the Holy Spirit, God invites us into the ecology of gift that is at the center of God's own life. "We were created to be and to act like God," says Miroslav Volf, "and so the flow of God's gifts shouldn't stop as soon as it reaches us. The out-bound movement must continue" (2005, 49). God gives to make us givers. If we translate this into the language of artistry and creation, we are not far at all from the assertion in our title: we are created for creativity. God gives not to make us passive, but to make us active givers. We are created for creativity in this strong sense, that the telos of God's engagement with us by the Spirit, is not that we would lose our voices, but precisely that we would be given them.

Moreover, he adds, it is God's wish that the human person spends himself in the effort to place his own valuable stamp upon the gifts.... no one returns to God things he has received from him without his own work having been added to them. The grapes, the bread, the wine, the oil offered to God are more than just God's gift; human work has also left its stamp upon them. (Staniloae 2005, 25)
received and thereby makes of them human gifts as well. (Staniloae 2005, 25)

In fact, we might expand on Staniloae here. The wine that is offered to others as a human gift, emerges not only from the skill and labor of the winemaker, but also from the fruit of the vine, the character of the soil, the waters that flow from the chambers of the heavens, the wood of the cask, and the daily fluctuations of the weather. Each has added its note to the bouquet. God gives, not to preclude the giving of the created world, but gives in such a way that all of the created world might be drawn into the movement of gift. The material world is in one sense the gift of God, given to humanity—so in Genesis 1, “God said, ‘See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.’” (Gen. 1:29 NRSV). But the world that has been given is also enabled to be Giver, offering gifts of its own. The picture we are left with is that of a cosmos caught up in the movement of gift, in which all things are blessed and set in motion to bless others. It is a world in which all creatures receive from others and then extend themselves out toward others.

To claim that the artist is merely a passive receptacle of culture is to stop the chain of gift. It is to deny that the artist can be a giver as well as a receiver.

IV. How All of This Applies to the Experience of Eddie Van Halen

We can think of the artist, then, as one who first of all receives the gifts of a world gifted by God: gifts of sound, color, light, shape, and scent. The world offers itself to the artist. Because the world has been given by a Giver, because the world offers itself, for just this reason, the artist is right to associate creativity with receptivity, with encountering something outside of herself. Creativity involves receiving the gifts that are offered by stone and color, by resonating string and wood, and indeed by our own physical bodies. God’s Spirit stands at the head of this cascade of giving that flows through the material and nourishes the creativity of the artist. In this way, it is right to say that the artwork is given by God and given by the world. At the same time, because God gives to make us givers, it is right to expect that the artwork is given by the artist’s own labor and creativity. God does not give in order to preclude further giving, but to enable it. The world God has created is one in which each participant in the cascade of giving contributes its own voice and its own gifts to the onward movement.

In addition to the voice of God and the voice of the material world, the artist encounters another distinctive voice outside of herself: the voice of culture. Human artworks do not emerge fully formed from the earth, untouched by human hands or the marks of culture. This way of thinking about artistry would be markedly out of step with the theological vision we have been developing. God gives gifts, intending that the recipients will become givers as well and not just conduits or errand runners. Those who receive gifts shape and add to them (just as the soil and water contribute their distinctive flavoring to the wine). If this is how God has made humanity—not only to receive, but to give—then we should expect the emergence of culture, and the emergence of culture that does not merely reproduce nature but creatively extends and develops it. Humanity not only receives gifts but cultivates and “re-presents” these gifts to others. Culture itself and its products are made into a gift that is offered—offered to humanity generally, but also offered to the artist. For this reason as well, the artist is not mistaken when he experiences creativity as receptivity. Culture, society, its products, and its practices are among the gifts he receives. They are among the voices he hears as he sets out to create. In the case of culture, of course, not all gifts are benign. Some of what is offered up from the community may indeed be oppressive ideology. If the framework of creation is gift, however, this fact does not in itself rob the artist of his voice. A gift is offered rather than imposed. To claim that the artist is merely a
passive receptacle of culture is to stop the chain of gift. It is to deny that the artist can be a giver as well as a receiver.

If the artist receives gifts—from others, from God, from the created world—it makes sense that part of her artistic experience would be that of receptivity. At the same time, if God's intention is that we not only receive gifts but become givers ourselves, then it makes sense that not all of the artist's experience would be that of receptivity.

**V. Without Confusion, Without Separation**

The Spirit is the Gift who gives gifts, in order to make us givers. If this is so, then it makes sense that we would see this kind of non-competitive ecology of giving embodied in Jesus; the one who was "conceived... from the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 1:20) and who is called "Christ" (meaning "anointed one"—that is, the one anointed by the Spirit). In my Introduction to Christian Doctrine class, we spend a good bit of time talking about the early church's debates about the two natures of Christ. The church asserted that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully human, and inevitably, various teachers took it upon themselves to try to explain how such a puzzling thing could be. A fellow named Apollinaris, for instance, suggested a very simple solution: Jesus is a divine Spirit inside a human body. This is kind of like an "M&M Jesus"—a sweet chocolaty divine center wrapped in a crunchy human shell. But the church responded: No. Jesus isn't human on the outside and divine on the inside. He is fully God and fully human. And other rationalizing explanations arose: Perhaps Jesus' divinity and humanity sit alongside each other inside him, not really touching, but sort of in two hermetically sealed compartments. Or: Perhaps Jesus is a mixture of the human and divine, his humanity absorbed into his deity like a drop of wine mixed into the ocean.

But one after another the church resisted these explanations and instead steadfastly insisted that in Jesus the divine and the human come together:

the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons. ("The Definition of Chalcedon," quoted in Bettenson and Maunder 1999, 56)

More than a few scholars have dismissed this early creedal language as metaphysically incoherent, philosophically pretentious nonsense. But in fact, the truth expressed in these creeds is what grounds the claim that we are created for creativity—that God's agency and human agency can co-exist.

What we see in Jesus is precisely the kind of non-competitive ontology we have been describing. What the creeds say is that the reality of Jesus' deity is not compromised by the full presence of his humanity. Neither is the integrity of Jesus' humanity swallowed up by the fullness of his divinity. The two-natures doctrine tells us not only who Jesus is, but also, crucially, what it looks like when God and humanity are joined together. Ultimately it tells us that when God and humanity are united as they are perfectly in Jesus, this does not mean the silencing or the obliteration of the human.

If this is the kind of reality God is, and if this is the kind of world God has created, then we can suggest the following theses about the character of creativity.

First, in a world that has been given, we should expect to receive. Creativity begins with receptivity. In fact, this is one of the crucial insights from *Ion* and from critical theory, and of course, from Eddie Van Halen: creativity begins with receptivity. Artists (and creators generally) often sense that in creating they are met by a voice or by voices from outside of themselves. If we live in an ecology of gift, this is what we should expect. We should expect to receive. An article about Svetlana Alexievich, the 2015 winner of the Nobel Prize for literature, provides a powerful example of the receptivity of the artist.

In the modern world, [Alexievich said], it was impossible to write "the book" that
encompassed everything in the manner of nineteenth century novelists.

“We need to have a book where lots of people can make a contribution—one person may speak half a page, someone else may have a paragraph or five pages that they can contribute and that this is a way of conveying what’s going on today. And my genre, I refer to it as ‘the novel of voices’ and you might say that my work as just simply lying on the ground and I go and I gather it and I pick it up and I put it together. If Flaubert said ‘I am a man of the pen—or the plume; I could say of myself that I am a person of the ear.” (Melvin and Cullinane 2015)

Creativity begins with being “persons of the ear.” It begins with receptivity and hearing other voices. In a culture that places a premium on individuality and self-expression this is a particularly valuable insight. Jesus’ admonition: “the one who would save his life must lose it” applies to the creative life as well.

But then, secondly, God gives in such a way to make the recipients not receivers only, but givers as well. I have argued that we inhabit an ecology of gift. If we imagine the artist/creator as a mere receptacle of other voices—whether human or divine—then this stops the chain of gift. Because our world mirrors the non-competitive being of a Trinitarian God, we can welcome other voices, without fearing the loss of our own. The activity of one party—again whether human or divine—does not necessitate the passivity of other parties.

Finally, God invites us to become not only givers, but contributors to an ecology of giving. If our creativity truly mirrors God’s, then our giving will likewise move toward the goal of ongoing giving. For those of us who are scholars and educators this is a point worth reflecting on. Do I give to my students in a way that nurtures further giving? Do I speak to my students in a way that enables them not only to hear my voice, but to find their own? Likewise, is the goal of my research and writing simply to disseminate my own voice as widely as possible? Or do I look for ways of exciting and inviting the voices and contributions of others?

The experience of the creative artist seems to include two seemingly paradoxical dimensions. On the one hand, the artist often experiences her art as the zenith of self-expression, as an embodiment, distillation, and fulfillment of her own distinctive vision and voice. On the other hand, the artist (at least on some occasions) feels as if the creative act originated from some source outside of himself. “The poem,” poet Mark Doty says, “is more something we find than something we make” (Laufer and Lewis 1998, 105). As I mentioned earlier, Ion advances not only a theory of artistic creation, but a theology. Likewise, the artist’s experience we are describing here gestures toward a particular theological vision. It is one, I believe, that is deeply consonant with what Christians want to say about God and the world God has made. We are not the creators of the world. Rather, we live in a world created by a God who speaks; a world, moreover, that has its own voice. Humanity, however, is not commanded to listen silently, passively, to these sounding voices. Instead, the human in the Garden is invited to speak and name the beasts. Human beings are called, in other words, to contribute their own voices to the great chorus sounding around them. Such a harmony of voices is possible precisely because God’s own person is a kind of harmony, a unity which does not exclude plurality. It is this God—one whose voice animates rather than silences other voices—in whose image we are made. And it is because we have been made by and in the image of this God that we can say we have been created for creativity.

Steven R. Guthrie is Professor of Theology, Religion, and the Arts at Belmont University. This essay is based on a talk given at Belmont University on October 9, 2015 to the National Conference of the Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts.
Works Cited


Endnotes

Louis Agassiz (1807–1873) was a Swiss naturalist who made a career for many years at Harvard and whose name still pops up all over the place: on various structures and streets around Cambridge, MA; on natural formations in Arizona, California, outer space, and the deep geological past; in the given name of at least one eminent scientist, the American ornithologist Louis Agassiz Fuentes; and in the scientific classifications of various species, such as Gopherus agassizii, the desert tortoise. Agassiz was a pioneering investigator of the fossil record, the ice age, and the taxonomy of animal life. He wrote herculean works of scientific inquiry, such as Recherches sur les poissons fossiles. He founded and presided over Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology. And he inspired some strange and bodacious doggerel verse, including Longfellow's “The Fiftieth Birthday of Agassiz”—“It was fifty years ago / In the pleasant month of May, / In the beautiful Pays de Vaud, / A child in its cradle lay”—and these rousing measures from Oliver Wendell Holmes:

How will her realm be darkened, losing thee,
Her darling, whom we call our AGASSIZ!

One of Agassiz's most accomplished students, the paleontologist and geologist Nathaniel Shaler, writes about the first days of his apprenticeship in Agassiz's laboratory. On his arrival at the laboratory, Shaler was assigned to his post, a pine table with a rusty tin pan on it. When he had situated himself there, Agassiz brought a small fish, placed it in the pan, and gave Shaler his orders. They were: look at the specimen; do not damage the specimen; do not talk with anyone about the specimen; do not read anything about the specimen. “When I think that you have done the work,” Agassiz said, “I will question you.”

After about an hour, Shaler was done with the fish: weary of its alcohol smell, and satisfied that he had learned what there was to learn about it. But Agassiz, though he was never far off, said nothing at the end of that hour, and indeed nothing, aside from a daily “good morning!” until Shaler had been at the fish for seven long days. Shaler, in the course of those days, astonished himself with what he saw and learned: “a hundred times as much as seemed possible at the start,” he says, detail after detail about scales, teeth, order, structure. Finally, on the seventh day, Agassiz spoke—“well?”—and for an hour Shaler disgorged his findings as Agassiz sat on the edge of the table and puffed his cigar. At the end of the hour, Agassiz replied, “that's not right” and swooped away, and Shaler understood that his teacher was testing him. He spent another full week at the fish and astonished himself again with the results. This time Agassiz approved, and he expressed his approval by presenting Shaler with a new task, a pile of fish bones and an enigmatic “see what you can make of them.” Shaler set out—again with no help from Agassiz but the
occasional “that’s not right”—to reconstruct the bones into the different skeletons from which they had come. The task took two months of determined labor.

It is no surprise that Nathaniel Shaler dates his life as a scientist from these first encounters with the man who went on to become his close friend and mentor. Nor is he alone. The landscape of zoology and natural history at the turn of the twentieth century is thick with distinguished students of Louis Agassiz, several of whom wrote about their time under his tutelage. One of them, Samuel Hubbard Scudder, sums up the teaching of his master in a single, simple, indispensable injunction: “look, look, look.” When Scudder, in his account of his own first days at the laboratory, finally describes the first fish precisely enough to earn Agassiz’s approval, he counts the task done and asks what he should do next. The teacher responds, “Oh, look at your fish” (The narratives of Shaler and Scudder appear in Cooper 1917, 21–25, 40–46.)

II

I have my own “look at your fish” story, minus the eccentric naturalist and the fish. In a course I took my first year of graduate school, we were required to visit Harvard’s Fogg Art Museum and to spend an extended time looking at one painting, Nicolas Poussin’s The Birth of Bacchus. I looked at the painting in four sessions of about an hour each. After each session, I went home and recorded in as much detail as I could what I had seen and experienced. I brought no companions, no writing implements, and no other distractions into these sessions. I did not look at reproductions of the painting between sessions. I did not read anything about the painting or its artist. I allowed my perceptions only what they could gather from the canvas itself. I was sufficiently astonished and perplexed by this experiment that, after I had done with Poussin, I tried the experiment again, this time with a Jackson Pollock drip painting that hung on the Fogg’s second floor. Five hours in four sessions, again with nothing to guide my looking but the paint on the canvas.

I have recently dug up the notes I took in the course of these two experiments. These notes reflect the perplexity of a mind trying to find a place to land, trying to converse with an object that slowly, very slowly, unfolds itself even as it remains stubbornly and suggestively mute. Here I am in the second, the third, the fourth hour with Poussin, discovering details and designs I cannot believe I did not see before. Here I am in my first hour with Pollock, coming to recognize that I have brought to this painting the ways of looking I learned from Poussin. Here I am struggling for hours more to unlearn that foreign way of looking, to submit to Pollock’s own visual language. Here I am contending with the pictorial forms that implacably rise up from Pollock’s splotches and swirls: a long, thin, creaky man, a powerful swooping crawfish of beige, the looming hulk of a tree, a bottomless black congregation of nerves. Pictorial forms implacably rise up from Pollock’s splotches and swirls: a long, thin, creaky man, a powerful swooping crawfish of beige, the looming hulk of a tree, a bottomless black congregation of nerves.

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with assurance: seven paints, in ten applications over seven sessions, in such and such an order. I astonish myself, later, with the discovery of an eighth paint, a blue-gray drizzle that has eluded my notice for hours and that now seems crucial to the success of the whole painting. In my second session with Pollock, I find lodged in the paint a tiny pebble, which I often return to and which I come to regard as mine and Jackson Pollock's little secret. I long ardently for more Pollocks to look at, for visual conversation partners, anything to force his inarticulate swirls into a grammar, into a kind of differentiation or speaking. I find myself, in the midst of Pollock's beiges, grays, and blacks, craving vivid reds and greens. In a moment of weakness toward the end of my third hour with Poussin, I sneak a look at the descriptive placard on the museum wall, with the dispiriting result that the painting remains silent as ever. In both paintings, I fall in love with little details and passages that I visit again and again. Above all, I struggle to negotiate with these paintings, to coax them into conversation, to calm my own restlessness, to come to terms with the limitations of my critical vocabularies and efforts. I struggle, in other words, toward some truthful apprehension of the thing itself.

III

Since I have become a teacher (of literature, not painting), I have been surprised by how often I talk with my students about the importance of quotation. What I say to them is something like this: you will not write good critical prose unless you quote a lot—and I mean a lot—from the text about which you are writing. If you write a critical essay without packing it full of quotations and detailed observations, you will write badly. Perhaps coherently, perhaps even eloquently, but badly: badly because you will end up thinking not with and through the text at hand, but rather about the text at hand, or, more precisely, about a remembered summary of the text at hand. I find myself saying this not just to my literature students as they set out to write about places, people, and cultural trends, the stuff of the world in which they live. My word to them is: pack in the details! Look, look, look, and quote, quote, quote. "Load every rift with ore," as Keats said to Shelley. Or, as Wallace Stevens might say: "not ideas about the thing but the thing itself."2

The principle at work here is not that an argument needs to be supported by colorful illustrations and evidence. To speak of concrete observations as "illustration" or "evidence" or "support" is to suppose, rather unhelpfully, that an argument exists without or prior to those observations, that the observations are secondary. What if the principle at work here is rather that, unless an argument inheres in and emerges from observed details, it will be able to say nothing beyond what the writer already knows? I have seen plenty of essays about worthy topics—about, let's say, the father-daughter relationship, or the role of the supernatural, in King Lear—that do their work without quoting much from the play (or that sprinkle a few quotations across the essay's surface in service of a plot summary, another form of Not Quoting Much From The Play). Here is what these essays tend to have in common: they learn very little from King Lear. They are, ultimately, about what the student could have said about father-daughter relationships, or about the roles of the supernatural, without having read Shakespeare's play at all.

I have also seen quite a few essays about the uses of a particular word in King Lear—for instance, about "nature," a word I have sometimes assigned as an essay topic in my Shakespeare courses. Even leaving its many cognates aside, "nature" in its various grammatical forms appears in Shakespeare's play more than fifty times. It can, in Shakespeare's hands, have the senses most readily available to us: nature as the material world untouched by human cultivation, or nature as a set of laws governing that material world. But Shakespeare's play also charges the word with a host of other meanings. Nature in King Lear is a goddess of generation; is a principle of fate or justice; is the arrangement and influence of the stars; is the power that
binds children to fathers and sets kings on their thrones; is the source of creation, procreation, and kinship. In this sense nature is order: the kingdom is nature, the family is nature. But then nature, as revealed in the violence of the storm, is also the destroyer of order, even, paradoxically, the destroyer of nature (Lear rages to the storm, “crack nature’s moulds, all germens spill at once / That makes ingrateful man”). In the language of the revolted children, “nature” signifies the wild energy of copulation, the strumpet goddess of bastards, the bestial impulse to rend and devour, the stench of flesh in decay. Lear, in some ways the key representative of nature as order, comes in his desolation to see the heart of the natural in the naked filth of Mad Tom: “Is man no more than this?” he asks, with lunatic admiration. “Thou art the thing itself. Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings! Come, unbutton here.” As Lear progressively strips himself and the world around him falls into chaos, “nature” becomes hard to control, complexly charged with meaning and difficulty. How does one summarize what the word means in the moment when the two ruined fathers—the blinded Gloucester and the mad king—meet in the wilderness?

Gloucester: O, let me kiss that hand!  
Lear: Let me wipe it first; it smells of mortality.  
Gloucester: O ruined piece of nature!  
(quoted from Wells and Taylor 2005)

In my experience, the further my students and I dig into the language of King Lear, the more starkly we come to see that we cannot capture in any summarizing language what the play means to say about nature. Which brings me back to the difference of essays that devote their energies to the word itself. The essays I have read about “nature” often in fact become essays about, say, the father-daughter relationships in King Lear. But in these essays the energies and tensions of Lear’s relationships with his daughters—the undercurrents of fear, affection, authority, demand, and desire; the ghostly presence of the mother; the godlike aura of the father; the strong pull of misogyny; the language of imprecation and benediction; the gargantuan power of lust; the restorative surprise of love; the metaphors of blood and flesh, soil and race, kin and kingdom—take on peculiar contours that none of us could quite have imagined in the absence of Shakespeare’s play. The difference of these essays from the plot summary essays isn’t simply that the essays about “nature” have more decoration or “evidence.” The difference is rather that the 

The difference is rather that the “nature” essays have ventured beyond what the writer already knew, into whatever wild territory Shakespeare has himself set out to discover or explore. “nature” essays have ventured beyond what the writer already knew, into whatever wild territory Shakespeare has himself set out to discover or explore. The writer has, in other words, come into a kind of conversation with Shakespeare, has undertaken the difficult experiment of entering into someone else’s imaginative act. Her work of criticism is not just an argument but an encounter.

IV

Which brings me to a second thing that has sometimes, in my teaching, struck me as surprising. I have on occasion found it odd the amount of time I spend thinking and talking with my students about hospitality. My students find it a little odd, too. Many of the things we first think about when we think about “hospitality”—house guests, dinner guests, hotels, casseroles—don’t have much obviously to do with literature or with academic work. But at the root of hospitality is the discipline of acknowledging and attending
to others. I frequently encourage my students to think of our courses together as exercises in conversation, as a chance to welcome the voices both of the other readers in this room and of the writers whose work we have gathered to read. Such an approach arises from my hope that collegial conversation can be, for us, more than just a pleasure or a cultural refinement. To be collegial is to look upon the face of the other and see a person there. Real conversation is an ethical act, because in it I acknowledge that the person in front of me is worthy of my attention, that she has a mind as I have. I become patient with her, submit to her pace, enter into her questions and perceptions. I allow myself to be touched by her suffering, enlightened by her wisdom. I learn to attend to her voice, and not merely to my own synopsis or approximation of her voice. I learn that she cannot be reduced, used, or possessed. I learn, in other words, via the practice of humane conversation, something like the practice of attending to the thing itself.

V

Not ideas about the thing but the thing itself. This is the burden of my work in teaching poetry. Every work of poetry is, after all, singular. When Shakespeare writes in *King Lear* about “nature,” or in *Hamlet* about “seeming,” or in *The Merchant of Venice* about “bond,” he hasn’t set out to write about themes which we could have summarized and considered without the help of his plays. In a certain sense, he hasn’t set out to write *about* anything. By digging at “nature” and “seems” and “bond” in the way he does, Shakespeare means to penetrate to the bedrock of those words and of the beliefs, narratives, conventions, and metaphors those words imply. Those words, in his hands, become wild and swirling, self-contradictory, impossible to control. At certain moments they break down altogether, and Shakespeare’s poetry invites us into an apprehension of what Lear calls “the mystery of things,” the plenitude that language pretends, but always falls, to domesticate and contain. Language, like all human institutions, is always decaying, and is always being attenuated, emptied out, in the interests of political and material gain. Think about the extent to which words like “love,” “natural,” “belief,” “free,” “hope,” “good,” and “life” have become, for us, the language of commercial advertising and political propaganda, promises of fulfillment in an act of consumption or assent. Not easily, and not by any natural process, can these words be fitted out to express other, deeper currents of reality: God, creation, friendship, marriage, hatred, fear, earth, death, resurrection, reconciliation. We need poetry.

And we need criticism, because we need the discipline of attending to the thing itself. I wish I knew better how to invite (or harry) my students deeper into the text at hand, into hours of hard, silent, submissive, resistant, responsive contemplation. I sometimes feel tempted to bring our text into the classroom and simply read it. Does not Lear say Lear, and *Hamlet* Hamlet, better than we ourselves could? Is not the first task simply to attend? But this is difficult. Real attention seems, after all, to involve necessarily a kind of transformation or translation, as I learned in my hard exchanges with Jackson Pollock and Nicolas Poussin. It isn’t enough to look at the thing. I have to gain some purchase on it, write and rewrite it for myself, find a place to plant my feet. The same must have been true for Shakespeare himself. I imagine him puzzling over *Hamlet* for years after, trying to make sense of what the play has discovered. No doubt he wrote plays such as *Troilus and Cressida*, *Othello*, and *The Tempest*, not to mention *Lear* itself, partly for that reason. In a sense, those plays are our first pieces of *Hamlet* criticism. Their author would perhaps have been glad for the further help of many critics to come.

At the same time, he must also have known that an answer to the riddles of *Hamlet* is not satisfactorily possible beyond the language of the play itself. Why else would he have written it, especially as the unplayable and outrageous piece of work that it is? The thing is indelible, is simply *itself*, and we will never quite know how to close the distance between ourselves and the huge opulence of everything the play says and means. I think of Gerard Manley Hopkins, one
of the best poets of the thing itself and of the incarnate creator who, as Hopkins says in one of his sonnets, "plays in ten thousand places." Were Hopkins to offer his own summary of what *Hamlet* or *King Lear* says, he might find it enough to recall the declaration he hears, in that same sonnet, resounding out from every mortal thing:

Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves—goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,
Crying *What I do is me: for that I came.* 3

Here, then, is your summary: *myself* it speaks and spells. Which is to say, there is no summary. Just look at your fish. ¶

Jason Crawford is Assistant Professor of English at Union University in Jackson, Tennessee.

Works Cited


Endnotes

1. For the main outlines of Agassiz's life, see: Johnson 1928; Garraty and Carnes 1999. Agassiz was also a controversial figure, and his anti-Darwinism and unhappy theories about race have led, more recently, to the disappearance of his name from some public institutions. I quote Longfellow from *The Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* (1876), and Holmes's "At the Saturday Club" from *The Complete Poetical Works of Oliver Wendell Holmes* (1910).

2. This being the title of a poem in Stevens's collection *The Rock*. See: Stevens 1990.

3. I quote "As Kingfishers Catch Fire" from Gardner 1985. I have omitted Hopkins's accent marks from the final quoted line.
Petroglyphs, Unpublished Poetry, and the Urge to Leave a Mark

Michael Kramer

I had become just a little enraptured by petroglyphs, those scratchings etched into rock whether deeply or just scarring the varnish rock acquires when exposed to the elements over a period of time. I had seen them on walls and boulders on travels with my family. I had, of course, studied them in conjunction with archaeology and anthropology, two disciplines closely aligned to my stock in trade of history and literature.

But my first trip to Sedona with my wife began to intensify all that. We were staying in a lovely timeshare built to resemble the Hopi pueblos famous east and north of that Arizona destination. Native American ruins and remnants dot the landscape in the Verde Valley. The Southern Sinagua peoples dry farmed this land nine hundred years ago. During a great drought seven hundred years ago, the Sinagua moved closer to the Salt River. Later, they seem to have abandoned the region and thrown their lot in with the Hopi and the Hohokam peoples. These clans of dirt farmers left intriguing and puzzling designs and figures etched into the rock varnish—petroglyphs—and painted on the walls—pictographs. In a series of drives, hikes, and docent lectures throughout this area over four week-long trips, I learned some basics about this art.

First, no one really knows what any of these figures, squiggles, or designs really represent. The Hopi identify clan signs; the sign of the water clan, the horned toad, shows boldly over one of the buildings at Palatki, a small cliff dwelling that housed forty or fewer people. A spiral, usually circular, sometimes square and labyrinth-like, probably signifies a journey or perhaps the Hopi migration story. Vertical squiggles seem to represent rain. Other figures represent game animals and figures of legend. Archaeologists assume the art is religious in meaning and intent. The animal figures seem not to be sympathetic magic like the cave art in southern Europe ("If we paint them, they will come"). But the reality is, no one knows. All of this is truly prehistoric.

I had flirted with classical and biblical archaeology in college and graduate school, so I hold an appreciation for the disciplines which examine such pictographic work. I had seen other Native American petroglyphs in other parts of the country, and I had seen petroglyphs in Hawaii on the Big Island. At that site, native Hawaiians had deposited umbilical cords on rocks which apparently related some lore of regional families. And I had heard about and seen the designs of other native Hawaiian petroglyphs under the sand on a beach on Kauai. These only show when the tide is out during certain seasons. While some petroglyphs (many in the Mohave for instance) seem to be little more than graffiti by passing travelers, perhaps prayers or records for other travelers, most seem religious in intent. (Those beneath the tidal sands on Kauai only make sense as religious art if the peoples there invented performance or environmental art well before the twentieth century.) And I possess a writer's imagination which insists on giving story to the pictures often laboriously created (petroglyphs thirty feet up a rock cliff?).
So the second time my wife and I visited the petroglyphs at the V Bar V site, I viewed an assemblage of designs all in close proximity; they might be separate, or they might be related. After a short drive from our lodging, we hiked briefly through chaparral to a small dwelling and a wind cave. This had likely been the dwelling of only twenty or thirty people. The petroglyph group included a fine example of the Kokopelli humpbacked flute player figure, a walking man, an obvious female figure, a sign of rain and growing corn, and a wandering spiral. My thoughts flew back eight hundred years to life in the Verde Valley, long before tourists or even the Spanish had shown up. That Kokopelli, somewhat emblematic of the musical and the poetic arts, also held a reputation as something of a wandering male fertility figure; this did not fail to capture my male ego.

A poem came out of this. The initial draft fell rather quickly. Small changes ensued over the next year or so.

Petroglyphs

V Bar V Site, near Sedona, AZ

I. A Journey

The sun chased the stairsteps up the mesa.
Rising slightly, it casts light differently,
and the stairsteps disappear. Visible or not, the steps remain, migrations remain, whether to or from a destination, fleeing or embracing.

The spiral the journey spins from, crevice or city, wasteland or teeming womb, bless this travel, open the path, point to or from, and only on arrival looking back, we carve our way, chip at the varnish, mark our place.

II. Walking Man

I’ve been walking for sixty years, from or to. I rarely knew my place until arrival. Then, I worked, stated will or question, often left a mark and kept my place. Sometimes I knew the plantings, the good I did.

I still walk, The sun this morning marks a path, if only for an instant. I go forward. Looking back is only salt or Hades, bitterness or regret. The path climbs upward, always upward, the destination stars.

III. Kokopelli and His Mate

The humpbacked flute player has found his mate, a fertile valley for their plantings, shade along this tree-lined cliff base. Wherever she resides, he can rest, ply his cheerful music or that of others.

The beauty of his day he finds in her eyes. The fruit of their being lay inside her. And where the journey continues or ends, in rest or travel, in the heat of the trail or cool shade, a tree beside clear waters, he finds home.

The poem unfolds in three sections. Section I simply establishes setting. Sitting on my room’s balcony one morning, I watched the rising sun make its way up the staircase of the familiar red rock formation’s stratification. Morning’s normal sun advancement suggested travel, a lifelong travel perhaps, and the Hopi migration stories that remain so important in the ambiance of the Pacific Southwest. That continues into the section’s second stanza. The Hopi spiral begins with the original clans’ emergence into this fourth world from a portal to the third world, a water world. Hopi stories often place that portal in the Grand Canyon, a dominant geographical feature just hours north of Sedona. Others place emergence as coming from a crack or crevice, metaphorically the womb. Another often prominent Hopi petroglyph is a female figure, newly emerged into this fourth world, giving birth not just to humans, but to all the animals commonly occurring in the region. Many anthropologists and New Age culture mavens see this simply as another expression of the Great Mother, Mother Earth. The medieval Christian church could find in this the Trinity’s creative side expressed in nature through the Holy Spirit. That patron saint of modern poets William Wordsworth found his God expressed in the natural world around him.
Section II supplies a character for the story. In teaching the reading, comprehension, and subsequent analysis of poetry (I am a teacher of literature and writing), I show that all poems hold a story. The reader needs to grasp that story before he or she can find any other value. This character, while living in the Southwest setting nearly a thousand years ago, becomes metaphorical and autobiographical. At the writing of the poem, I was sixty years old. I recognized his effort at walking the course set forward and also reflect that looking back regretfully becomes a fool’s game, with results like Lot’s wife from the Old Testament or Orpheus from the Greek story. Both in essence lost their lives. Life’s destination, I believe, is onward and upward, upward toward something God willed and God pleasing and, ultimately, God homed.

The third section brings the piece even closer to the writer. The poem here also fulfills the explanation of the mythic elements of the Hopi stories and the petroglyphs in question. The wanderer has found home. In concrete terms, this means a small holding, a farm (farm remains, perhaps because of the roots of American traditions, such a beautiful metaphor). But in reality the wanderer realizes that his true home is with his mate. This works so powerfully in so many clichés, everything from “home is where the heart is” to the medieval lady who gives her token to the knight errant. In real and earthly terms, this is the peace attainable, emblematic of the Peace of God and the Heavenly Peace ultimately desired through the Christian walk. The wanderer stops his wandering when he can find a place to reside, work worth doing, and accomplishments worthy of reckoning.

And I felt good about my poem, something mythic and yet a memoir, something set in terms popular culture might value but in terms approaching the profound. And over the following few years, I sought publication for the piece.

I have had some small success in publishing poems, and so I included “Petroglyphs” in my annual submissions. I was generally happy if one or two poems gained acceptance out of the few dozen offered, and I fully expected “Petroglyphs” to be printed somewhere.

But then that didn’t happen the first year. Or the second.
I had the perspective and experience to be only mildly chagrined at this; editorial aesthetics and poetry remain incredibly diverse, random, and subjective. All art is like that. On more than one occasion, a piece I considered the weakest of the three in a set found acceptance over what I considered stronger work. And editors by nature tend to consider themselves right. So I consider whether "Petroglyphs" goes out again. Likely. But I have since visited and revisited a number of sites displaying petroglyphs, and I have new considerations.

For the existence of petroglyphs, religion, magic, and prayer remain attractive explanations. All of those help explain, access, and manipulate the unknown. But, I wonder, how many petroglyphs are simply graffiti or marks commemorating a journey or a passing by? At the Honanki site, one of the more prominent etchings—black soot likely mixed with grease, a medium used since pre-historic times—can be precisely dated. High above what may have been a common room or kiva, someone unknown, perhaps a shaman, etched a series depicting an indistinct clan shield, Masauwu (that being who, according to the Hopi, ushered humans into the fourth world from the third and then supplied advice and assistance), and then the Mother being birthing all of the animals common to the region. In other words, above what may have been a religious meeting place, a holy man may have drawn the clan's creation story, a sort of Sinaguan stained-glass window. That happened in a past specifically undatable. The specifically dateable pictograph lies near that. Not too far away, "M.L Black," apparently a ranch hand, wrote his name. We know he did this in 1925. He dated it. Looking at that and the nearby more ancient depictions of what may be elk, I thought any religious considerations on the part of Black unlikely. The ranch hand simply left his mark.

And the poetry, the short stories, the essays (even this one), the novels and plays by people as diverse as William Shakespeare (everyone knows who he is) and Lauren Lee (a remarkably gifted high school writer whose work has more than once graced her high school's literary magazine)—does not all of this represent individuals leaving their marks? Perhaps, I conclude, the writing I do, even the writing done by Jeffery Deaver, top-selling suspense thriller writer in these opening decades of the twenty-first century, is one culture's highly technological way of leaving a mark for others who pass by to wonder at. It is interesting to think that whoever depicted the Kokopelli at the V Bar V site, he (or she) has been creating wonder in other humans longer than has the Bard of Avon. ♦

Michael Kramer teaches English at Orange Lutheran High School in Orange, California. He advises the school's literary magazine, King Author, nationally recognized as one of the best in the nation for the past nine years. His work has appeared in numerous anthologies and literary magazines.
Searching for Jerusalem
Christian Scholarship in Theory and in Practice

Jennifer L. Miller

As an undergraduate at Valparaiso University, I was drawn to the ways in which the campus embraced academic scholarship and Christian faith together, as complementary elements in a person’s life, rather than as opposing forces. A hymn frequently sung at convocation and commencement refers to the campus as both “Athens and Jerusalem,” a center of both intellectual and spiritual wisdom. The university’s motto “In luce tua videmus lucem”—“In Thy Light, We See Light”—is a wonderful expression of how faith enhances scholarship. But Valpo does more than just talk about faith and scholarship. Many of my professors modeled how rigorous academic inquiry could be rooted in Christian belief with their own scholarship and their interactions with students. Both the overall ideology and mission of the university, as well as the everyday practices of those who worked there, played a large role in my own development as a Christian scholar.

These two aspects of Christian scholarship which are found both at Valparaiso University and many other Christian colleges and universities—the theoretical vision and the individual practice—ideally work hand in hand. The larger questions of vision provide students and faculty a framework in which they can situate specific moments in the classroom, lab, and rehearsal space, thus forging an understanding of Christian scholarship that draws from both theory and practice.

While the three finalists for the 2015 Lilly Fellows Program Book Award are, on the surface, quite different—engaging with topics ranging from sign theory to the history of Pietism in higher education—when taken together, they, too, provide a similar overall picture of a Christian scholar. As seen in these three texts, Christian scholars are not only equally comfortable with the intellectual debates of Athens and the spiritual devotion of Jerusalem, but they are also able to take what they know and believe and use it to engage the students in their classrooms.

Of the three finalists, the volume with the most theoretical approach is the late Roger Lundin’s *Beginning with the Word: Modern Literature and the Question of Belief*, which engages with the debate over “whether words somehow belong to reality and embody truths about God and the world or whether they are primarily signs employed by the
powerful to order the world according to their purpose" (15). Much of what Lundin does in his study is to examine the tension between structuralism (particularly as a school of linguistic and literary theory) and Christian belief, framing this tension with key points from theorists such as Ferdinand de Saussure and Hans-Georg Gadamer and then providing supporting examples from authors such as Emily Dickinson, Herman Melville, and William Faulkner. While a variety of social forces have led to the secularization of modernity, Lundin notes, to truly account for the "transforming potential of language" (58), we must return to the doctrine of the Incarnation as described in the first verses of the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being." Ultimately, Lundin argues, "we do best [with these complex questions of language] when we follow the arc of the very story of redemption that the Christian proclaims" (220).

Christopher Gehrz’s collection of essays, The Pietist Vision of Christian Higher Education: Forming Whole and Holy Persons, provides a bridge between theoretical discussions of Christian scholarship, as seen in Lundin’s work, and the more practical issues of Christian scholarship that appear in college classrooms. The overall question that frames this essay collection is whether or not the Pietist vision can provide a usable past for Christian colleges and universities, focusing in particular on Bethel University in St. Paul, Minnesota. But it is more than just the content of the collection that engages the Pietist tradition; as Gehrz describes in the introduction, the goal of the authors was “to present an approach to Christian higher education that is Pietist not just in content but in tone” (30), including a more pronounced use of the academic “I,” frequent meditation on Scripture, and a spirit of humility throughout the work, an approach that provides a refreshing blend of both theory and practice.

While many of the essays in the collection address key texts and ideas from the Pietist tradition and how those ideas might be manifested in the classroom, Christian Winn’s essay “Pietism and the Practice of Civil Discourse” stands out as particularly relevant, especially given the contentious nature of the 2016 election season and the increasing diversity seen on many college campuses. Winn makes a distinction between unity and uniformity, noting that this distinction “leaves us with the challenge of how to live together in such a way that we make space for real and legitimate differences, without severing the bond of faith that holds us together” (125). Winn then takes this question and highlights four Pietist virtues that he sees as “helpful as we consider what it means for us to be civil in our differences” (127), concluding his chapter with practical strategies for both faculty and universities in general to model “how to engage, think with and seek to understand those with whom one may disagree”—a goal that Winn sees “should be central to the practice of a Christian university” (131).

Though Katherine Nevins’s essay “Calling for Pietist Community” has a different overt focus than Winn’s, her examination of how Philip Jacob Spener’s seventeenth-century Pia Desideria can be used in the twenty-first century classroom similarly points to the need for both humility and openness to others’ ideas in “creating and sustaining a transformative learning community” (59). When discussing the goal of creating a classroom “where
all are needed and welcomed to participate, full members of the learning endeavor” (60), Nevins describes using the concept of the Cheyenne medicine wheel as a model for an exercise in which students have to write about an object they are viewing from a single perspective. As Nevins writes, the way the object physically appears varies depending on where the student sits, but even more significantly, “the way the person views the object differs” as well. Not only does this practice draw from traditions outside of Christianity, but it also provides a valuable pedagogical exercise “that validates different ways of seeing and emphasizes the inevitable limitations of one’s personal viewpoint” (61).

Essays such as Nevins’s and Winn’s point to an increasing need to consider how Christian scholarship can not only survive, but flourish in a landscape of higher education that is marked not only by financial pressures and increased competition, but also increasing spiritual diversity in faculty and students. While colleges and universities such as Valparaiso and Bethel remain key in considering the question of Christian scholarship, it is perhaps even more important to think about ways in which the idea of Jerusalem can be found and fostered outside of the walls of historically Christian colleges and universities. While broadening the idea of Christian scholarship might initially seem like a defensive reaction to changes in higher education, it can actually be a proactive way of reminding both students and faculty of the larger meaning that their lives possess, thus enabling them, in the words of Mark Schwehn and Dorothy Bass, to lead more deliberate “lives that matter” (Leading Lives That Matter [Eerdmans 2006]).

It is this shift toward a broader understanding of Christian scholarship that is seen in Becoming Beholders: Cultivating Sacramental Imagination and Actions in College Classrooms, edited by Karen E. Eifler and Thomas M. Landy, the winner of the 2015 Lilly Fellows Program Book Award. This collection explicitly focuses on the pedagogical practice of Christian scholarship in a wide variety of contexts, rather than addressing a particular theoretical approach. Several of the authors within this collection address this point directly; Joanna Ziegler, for instance, argues, “the pursuit of a meaningful spiritual life is not the result of amassing erudition and theory but of learning how to lead that life in a routine daily way” (42). The practical, day-to-day focus of many of these essays make this the essay collection that Christian higher education needs as it considers its place in the twenty-first century. The fact that this everyday focus is met in many of the essays with humor, pop-culture references, and a casual tone further underscores the ways in which Eifler and Landy’s volume will resonate with a wide variety of scholars, not just those of the Christian tradition.

While the essay collection has a general focus on Catholic colleges and universities, the diversity of the authors—both in terms of historically Christian colleges and universities, the diversity of the authors—both in terms of discipline and religious background—gives the collection a much more expansive overall feel, pushing the scope of the collection beyond the Catholic tradition to faith-based scholarship more broadly. Not only are there essays from those outside the Catholic faith—one author discusses teaching a class on Buddhism—but there are also authors from a wide variety of disciplinary backgrounds. One of the most fascinating essays in this regard was Stephanie Salomone’s essay “This I Believe” on the intersection of faith and geometry. In her course on modern geometry, Salomone presents her students with conflicting mathematical
axioms—Euclidian geometry and elliptic geometry—the former allowing for parallel lines, while the latter does not. Salomone uses this example to show students how their choice of initial assumptions “absolutely determines the way in which the resulting mathematical world is constructed” (296), enabling students to think about comparable assumptions that they make that structure their own lives and beliefs. Because of this diversity in both faith tradition and academic discipline, Becoming Beholders truly has the potential to spark conversations about faith and scholarship in all sorts of unexpected places—and the larger discussions about faith and higher education will be that much richer as a result.

In spite of this diversity, however, Becoming Beholders does not feel fragmented or disjointed due to the skillful way in which Eifler and Landy carry several key themes throughout the volume, in particular the theme of “the sacramental imagination.” As Eifler and Landy explain in the preface, “Sacramentality conceives of God as active in, and through, the material world” (ix). Many of the authors describe the ways in which they envision their classrooms as spaces that foster their students’ sacramental imaginations, that is, the ways in which they see “God manifest throughout the natural, created world” (ix).

Perhaps even more helpfully, the authors in Becoming Beholders provide “specific, straightforward practice[s]” (xii) that demonstrate ways in which they foster these sacramental imaginations in their students. In Eifler’s interview with Sister Angela Hoffman, for example, Hoffman describes how she requires that her students make their thought processes visible, explaining “why their model makes sense, given all the facts we have acquired from lectures and lab and reading.” The result, she explains, is that students “ask more questions and see more possibilities of ‘correct’ answers in the most unexpected places,” like the student who wondered “how many moles of air there are in a typical human breath” or the student who was curious about “how much sodium azide it would take to fill up [a 1994 Saturn’s] 4-liter airbag” (229). In her essay “Practice Makes Reception,” Joanna Ziegler describes how she required students to write a weekly five-page essay on a single work of art from the local art museum, an assignment I have actually adapted and used to great success in my own developmental writing courses at Normandale Community College. As Ziegler explains, this assignment of repetitive looking and contemplation comes close to practices “identified with the great spiritual and mystical traditions of Christianity and Eastern religions such as Zen Buddhism” (41). These specific examples enable faculty members to make the transition from a more general understanding of the sacramental imagination to particular assignments and lessons that they can implement in their own classrooms.

The vision of sacramental imagination found in Becoming Beholders is not just an abstract idea, but something rooted in day-to-day acts.

Jennifer L. Miller teaches English at Normandale Community College in Minneapolis, Minnesota.
LUKE 20:9–12

My father and I drive by a homeless man, who stands by the red light with his hands cupped out, fingers exposed—that January air—and my father rolls down the window to give him a five, telling me he's learned it's better to give money than nothing at all.

As we get on the exit ramp for 495, I tell him about the man I saw in Annapolis the other day, who was kicking a light post, screaming and weeping. When I saw him I locked my doors, the way my mother does whenever she sees a dark man walk by. It's one of those things I always chastised her for—that electric click, locking door—

What would've happened, if I opened my door, gave him money, or maybe some crackers from my purse? If I embraced him, or bought him some gloves? Would he have hit me? Grabbed my purse, and ran? Or would he have clung to me, his arms going limp as he continued to weep?

I am a woman and this is what I have been taught: there are some things that shouldn't be risked. I don't want to test the angels, I say.

My father says: you should be concerned, I'm glad we raised you right.

Our conversation goes silent, as if a solution has been found.

Out the window, it smells like snow and diesel. The sky, overcast like a ceiling. What a living room this median makes—

My father makes a business call, and right now, I can't stop thinking about the parable of the tenant: the owner knows there will be consequences for the message he gives his servants, yet who finally says:

I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.

Could he have known he would find his son dead at the hands of those workers? He must have, because we all know who was the father in the parable, and who was the son—and who am I, to worry about safety when that same Book says He will even feed sparrows?

Because if that Father were a man who valued safety, the hand of God would linger like a dark forever veil between us and our home.

Meg Eden
Giving It All Away
David Bowie’s Blackstar
Josh Langhoff

On January 10, 2016, two days after he turned sixty-nine, the English rock icon David Bowie died from cancer. With his notoriously insatiable intellect and a penchant for heavy themes, it was inevitable that Bowie would sing about mortality and the possibility of transcending it. And so he did: in 1970, at the ripe-old age of twenty-three, Bowie released his third album The Man Who Sold the World. Stuffed with ideas Bowie had found in Nietzsche and Lovecraft, the album’s nine hard rock songs take place in a world of myth and grandeur, a world populated by gods and the men—always men—who strive with those gods to fulfill hidden destinies. In Bowie’s imagination, men keep finding new and frankly exhausting ways to evade their humanity. They go mad (“All the Madmen”) or form weird collectives halfway between monasteries and fight clubs (“The Supermen”). In “The Width of a Circle,” the narrator worries he is “aging fast,” so he journeys to hell and has sex with the devil, as one does. “Man is an obstacle, sad as the clown,” sings the artist, trapped inside his two decades of flesh.

The album’s calling card remains its title track. In the song, Bowie first sounds bewildered to find anyone alive at all—“We must have died alone, a long, long time ago”—but then sings to us, his audience: “You’re face to face with the man who sold the world.” The song is a declaration of control—how much power must this man have if he sold the world?—but it also admits to helplessness, another case of being trapped inside flesh and a slave to the marketplace. A man holds the world in his hands, and all he can think to do is sell it? (This might explain why the song clicked with Nirvana’s late leader Kurt Cobain, whose qualms about playing “corporate rock” were legendary.) A last-minute lyric written in the recording studio while producer Tony Visconti waited, “tapping his fingers on the console” (O’Leary, 2015), the song was likely based on Robert Heinlein’s obscure novella The Man Who Sold the Moon. Its terse power has nevertheless resonated across the decades, right up to the release of Bowie’s final album, Blackstar, on his sixty-ninth birthday.

With Visconti once again at the console, Bowie recorded Blackstar’s seven songs last winter in a studio just a short walk from his Manhattan home. He was sick at the time, but few people knew it. He hired a new band, a young jazz quintet led by saxophonist Donny McCaslin, to flesh out his demos and, in the case of the ballad “Dollar Days,” to improvise an entirely new song with him in the studio. After three weeks recording with the band, Bowie and Visconti sifted through hours of music and digitally spliced it together into finished songs. Visconti also re-recorded most of Bowie’s vocals.
using digital effects developed by the producer himself. The two men had adopted similar working methods back in the 1970s, and they were skilled enough editors that Blackstar rarely sounds cut and pasted—and when it does, you can be sure that Bowie intended it that way.

"Blackstar," the ten-minute song that opens the album, depicts an execution in three parts. Bowie sets the scene with a long, mysterious melody in the Phrygian mode—it sounds vaguely "Middle Eastern"—while his unearthly vocals and Jason Lindner's synthesizer glide together in parallel fifths, and drummer Mark Guiliana taps out skittery drum and bass beats. McCaslin's saxophone responds with some tentative squawks, but instead of building to a climax, the band dissolves into an atonal jumble. Out of the jumble emerges part two, a sweet soul strut whose melody Bowie nicked from the Jackson Five's "Someday at Christmas." While Bowie sings about the executed man's soul leaving his body and transforming into a "blackstar," McCaslin finds himself multitacked into a horn section, playing cheerful call-and-response charts. The third part combines the soul strut with the Phrygian melody from part one, a well-worn structural device that unifies the song into an extended meditation on life after death. At least, I think it is about life after death. As for the precise meaning of "Blackstar," interpretations vary, as interpretations of Bowie's images always do. Is the star a celebrity? A political symbol? An astrophysical object on the wane? The song's video depicts three scarecrows writhing on crosses and a jittery alien dance ritual around a bejeweled astronaut skull; which is to say, it offers no help at all.

To say Blackstar ponders Bowie's mortality is like saying a Beach Boys album ponders summertime romance. Artists play with recurring themes, and Bowie spent much of his career considering the implications of dying. This is the singer who, in 1980, titled his second UK number one hit "Ashes to Ashes" and used it to kill off the beloved character Major Tom from his first chart topper, "Space Oddity." Had Bowie written "Ashes"—or "The Man Who Sold the World," or "The Motel," or "New Killer Star," or any number of others—for Blackstar, the choice would have seemed equally prescient. Better to say that, like the man who sold the world, Bowie never lost control. He shaped his career with the same deliberation he gave his music, so even ideas that began as larks would end up feeling like major personal statements. In the pinup days of rock 'n' roll, singers often cashed in on their biggest hits by releasing sequels (think Leslie Gore's "It's My Party" and "Judy's Turn to Cry"). Bowie not only scored a hit with his sequel song, he used it to punctuate the first decade of his public life.

Sure enough, death haunts these new songs too. Sometimes the death is all in good fun. "Sue (or In a Season of Crime)" is a noirish murder ballad, in which Bowie kills Sue over a bed of roiling drumming and wicked tri-tone guitar riffs. (In 2014, he released a version of the song with the Maria Schneider Orchestra. Schneider's big band arrangement craftily exploited those tri-tones and won her a Grammy.) The nearly incomprehensible "Girl Loves Me" alludes to the ultraviolent characters of Anthony Burgess's novel A Clockwork Orange, using their invented slang. The most rocking song, "'Tis a Pity She Was a Whore," draws its creative energy from John Ford's lurid 1633 incest tragedy of a similar name. Bowie's lyrics make no direct reference to the play aside from its title, but Bowie surely enjoyed Ford's stage direction, "Enter Giovanni with a heart upon his dagger."
When heard against the backdrop of Bowie's long career, the slower death songs take their subject more seriously and cast it in a new, specific light: a sense of death as release. You can hear the release in those unearthly "Blackstar" harmonies, floating like the "spirit [that] rose a metre and stepped aside," and in the synthesized string part that sweetens the song. You can also hear it in "Lazarus," the album's plodding second single. "I'll be free, just like that bluebird," sings Bowie, levitating above his deathbed in the music video. "Ain't that just like me?" Well, no. Bowie's music has always sounded focused and purposeful, even at its most jubilant ("Young Americans") or ragged ("Rebel Rebel"); flying free like the bluebird has never been his métier. Compounding the lyric's irony, "Lazarus" originated in Bowie's new off-Broadway jukebox musical Lazarus. The show is a sequel to the 1976 film The Man Who Fell to Earth, in which Bowie played an alcoholic alien trying to escape our planet. In the New York Times review of the musical, critic Ben Brantley wrote that the young actor portraying the alien sang "Lazarus" with "glazed desperation," a phrase not readily associated with either bluebirds or the Lazarus of John's Gospel.

Bowie abandons irony for the album's final two songs, both mid-tempo ballads about letting go of things. "If I never see the English evergreens I'm running to / It's nothing to me," he sings in "Dollar Days," a lovely song that segues into one of his best. "I Can't Give Everything Away" sounds lush and overflowing, as though the band tried to fill this one last song with as much music as they could: a harmonica sampled from Bowie's 1977 "A New Career In a New Town," a thick synthesizer riff, propulsive drums, guitar and sax solos... and Bowie's plaintive voice. He repeats the title like an incantation, over chords that shift from foreboding to sad to resolute. From a songwriter who delighted in ambiguity and who knew he was dying when he wrote the lyric, the title revels in its multiple meanings. Is Bowie trying to give away everything—his wisdom, his music—before his time runs out? Does he feel he has given away too much already? Maybe he is just teasing annoying listeners who keep asking what "Blackstar" means: "I can't give everything away!"

Something tells me Bowie meant to say all these things and more. Striving to overcome his humanity in 1970, he imagined he could sell the world. Now, looking back on a half-century-long career and preparing to leave his family, friends, and the world he loved, he struggled simply to give things away.

Josh Langhoff is a church musician living in the Chicago area.

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LINED UP JUST SO

If in the next world we will refuse to matter, we matter to ourselves in this one, like several species of migratory birds

sharing the same hierarchy of wires with evening falling if not exactly sooner then with greater delicacy

on the last oaks' proffered limbs, as we prefer. However soon the memories of cities leave us

isn't soon enough. Nomadic without religion, mosaic in all accepted senses of the word,

we share the darkness with a dozen unreal terrors that are worse. So much that's beautiful has been lost,

but then there are these shadows in the grass mimicking triumphal marbles that have fallen, rising to the level of beauty by virtue

only of their absence. Beauty's now an eye-high sort of style, a peering through an afterimage, lensless,

or it's notarized and standard, a contract nobody intends to honor, not these several kinds of songbirds cracking seeds of darkness in their beaks. Tending to the humors of our less immediate natures

blunts the passage of a recollected impulse to make too much sense of sensation while the swallows, swifts, and winged victories
inhabit an imperceptible air
like certain wall-drawings downtown
that no one can interpret.

Recognition places us in fields
of various colorings, characters
in separate plays where words no longer turn
to bits and pentacles.
So much that's beautiful has been lost,
as color's lost to the blind from birth,
an absence unfelt and so impossible to name.
Monadic without unity, fractured
in all accepted senses of the world,
we mass together, taken in the aggregate
like corn or bullets,
as though the storehouse of another's face
contained commodities one needs.

If in the next world stones are lives
then dead things still have eyes that see us
even if our names no longer signify,
even if we hurry into shelters out of range
of all pernicious influence.
We matter to ourselves as workers matter
to their factories, useless
in the darkened theater of the third-growth trees,
as if the world had shrugged
and turned away, having said
the perfect thing.

Jonathan Weinert
Master Narratives in the 2016 Election

David Lott

So far the story of the 2016 presidential election is far from what anyone expected. New York businessman Donald Trump, former host of the NBC reality television show *The Apprentice*, seems on course to win the GOP nomination, while Vermont senator and self-proclaimed democratic socialist Bernie Sanders is posing an unexpectedly strong challenge to Hillary Clinton on the Democratic side. Both candidates are telling stories about the weak and corrupt state of the nation that are resonating with millions. Some befuddled political observers can only conclude we have entered into a Dada-esque alternative universe, while others claim they saw the seeds for this state of events being planted long ago. But perhaps we can explain what was once unthinkable by examining the various ways candidates and their advisers in the modern era have learned to shape a narrative.

Journalist and historian Theodore H. White gained Pulitzer-Prize-winning renown from his *The Making of the President* series which began with the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon contest and continued until the 1984 Reagan-Mondale campaign. White’s insider accounts examined the nuts and bolts of presidential campaigns over three decades while also analyzing the diverse shifts within American culture. More recently, journalists John Heilemann and Mark Halperin have provided gossipy narratives of the 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns in their books *Game Change* and *Double Down*. One can bet that they are already at work chronicling the head-spinning 2016 presidential election.

These popular post-mortem accounts have helped readers understand how presidential campaigns evolve in response to rapidly changing events and how campaigns often affect the victor’s subsequent presidency. More importantly, however, they remind us of the stories that candidates tell about themselves. These self-narratives are intended to define the candidate to voters in a way that makes them seem worthy of the nation’s highest office. This year Hillary Clinton offers perhaps the most complex storyline, emphasizing her multiple roles and identities: woman, mother, grandmother, devout Methodist, former First Lady, US Senator, and Secretary of State, and lifelong proponent for liberal issues. Which strand of her storyline she emphasizes the most often depends on the particular issue she is addressing. Among the Republicans, both Senators Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz have played up their own life narratives: offspring of Cuban immigrants, family men, devout Christians, and lifelong champions of conservative principles and traditional values.

Such detailed self-narratives may prove dangerous to the candidates when they seem to clash with other realities and accounts. Clinton’s self-narrative of honesty and competence has been called into question when she has had to discuss her use of a personal email server while Secretary of State and her actions prior to the killing of US Ambassador Chris Stevens during the attack on the US consulate in Benghazi. Her efforts to present herself as a defender of women have been complicated by attention to her husband’s adulterous behavior during their time in the White House. Senators Cruz and Rubio have their own problems when they are asked to reconcile their positions on immigration with their own ethnic backgrounds. President Obama’s complex origin story, retold in his bestselling *Dreams of My Father*, helped get him elected twice, but also generated never-ending assertions that his birth certificate was falsified, that he is a socialist, a Muslim, and other absurd twists. Offering a compelling self-narrative in your campaign can easily come back to bite you.

A successful presidential candidate not only presents a compelling self-narrative, but also
constructs a narrative about America—its origins, its problems, and its promise—using mostly vague language about big ideas. President Ronald Reagan's 1984 “Morning in America” campaign theme is perhaps the most famous and successful American narrative in recent memory; it has become a surprisingly durable meme about emerging from darkness into a new era of prosperity and optimism. Both Presidents Clinton and Obama trafficked in the idea of “hope,” tying their personal narratives to a vision of American economic and racial progress. And recently, the phrase “American exceptionalism” has become shorthand for a narrative about an America set apart from the other nations of the earth—perhaps by a divine hand?—whose destiny is to lead the world into peace, democracy, freedom, and prosperity. These carefully crafted patriotic “mono-narratives” not only enable candidates to talk about their own vision for the nation, but also provide ways to draw a contrast with their opponent’s presumed pessimism, ignorance of America’s exceptionality, and alienation from its true values.

In 2016, it is Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders who have made the most powerful use of their respective mono-narratives about America’s problems and promise. Each has created what literary theorist John Stephens calls a “master narrative” or “metanarrative,” which he defines as “a global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience” (Stephens and McCallum 1998, 6). The narratives proffered by the Trump and Sanders campaigns seem to fit such a description, and are proving to be wildly, if improbably, popular with wide swaths of the voting public.

Trump’s master narrative is crude and vitriolic: America is crumbling in every way imaginable, a pathetic victim of the rest of the world, disarmed by weak and corrupt “establishment” politicians. Only Trump, the self-proclaimed phenomenally successful businessman, can “make America great again.” In Trump’s account, the causes of America’s demise have to do with one or another species of otherness that represents mortal danger to the nation: illegal Mexican immigrants, many of them rapists and murderers; Muslim refugees who may themselves be secret ISIS terrorists; cunning Asian businesspeople who threaten the well-being of innocent Americans. These presumed villains are abetted by corrupt and incompetent Washington politicians and insiders, personified by Barack Obama, who have no idea how to protect America and make deals to benefit its genuine citizens. Trump labels them as “losers,” “idiots,” “low-energy,” and with other epithets. His simplistic prose is laced with adjectives, most of them superlatives—“greatest,” “worst-ever,” “huge,” etc.

What is odd in Trump’s master narrative of American decline is the way in which his own self-narrative is inextricably woven into it. He himself becomes the sole counter-narrative to this relentlessly negative account—he embodies the “great America” he promises—and any other narrative, complementary or contrasting, is excluded, as if it were a distraction from the host of this political reality show writ large. Trump may say that he will be working for the American people, but we are relegated to being his apprentices in this scenario. Off-putting and easy to refute, Trump and his narrative have nevertheless captured the imaginations of those who sense he is speaking truthfully about the forces that are keeping them down. As Anne Applebaum writes in Slate, “Trump’s lies and his distortions of reality don’t stick to him because his followers are not interested in truth. They prefer satisfying stories” (Applebaum 2016). One might add that such stories are most satisfying when they have readily identifiable enemies, whom Trump names and promises to punish.

Bernie Sanders’s master narrative contains far less self-narrative and far more documentable...
fact than Trump's, but it presents a similarly dour account of contemporary America. As he asserted in his opening statement at a February 11 debate,

[W]e have today a campaign finance system which is corrupt, which is undermining American democracy, which allows Wall Street and billionaires to pour huge sums of money into the political process to elect the candidates of their choice. And aligned with a corrupt campaign finance system is a rigged economy. And that's an economy where ordinary Americans are working longer hours for low wages. They are worried to death about the future of their kids. And yet they are seeing almost all new income and all new wealth going to the top 1 percent. (Washington Post, February 16, 2016)

Dig into the details of this concise master narrative and you may find reasons to dispute some of his statistics or his account of the sources and historical roots of inequality, which elevates out-of-control campaign financing as the core problem. But the underlying assertion of income inequality that affects the vast majority of Americans is undeniably accurate. More important for Sanders's campaign, this message feels true to the experience of millennials who are having trouble finding a foothold in the contemporary economy and to older generations who have lost their foothold on the ladder of success or never found it in the first place.

But Sanders's master narrative is not without problems. When he tries to extend it to other dimensions of American life, such as problems of racial inequality or foreign policy, the narrative appears inadequate to the complexities of the issues, as if Sanders has not given enough thought to matters that do not connect directly to his narrative. That is not to say he is a one-issue candidate, as Clinton and some others have claimed. But, like Trump, his master narrative of American failure seems resistant to other counter, competing, or conflicting narratives from the outside. It depends on its own set of boogeymen: Wall Street bankers, mega-rich business tycoons, and politicians who are under their financial sway. Unlike Trump, however, he doesn't try to redeem that narrative by asserting his own egotistical counter-narrative—or any other, for that matter. As a result, his mono-narrative communicates a certain ignorance of the complex needs of the very multi-narrative world to which he is trying to appeal.

I state this not to reject Sanders's candidacy—certainly not in the way I do Trump's, which I find morally repugnant—but to raise questions about how such master narratives are functioning in this year's election. Some thirty years ago the French philosopher and theorist Jean-François Lyotard asserted that our postmodern era is characterized by a mistrust of the sorts of master narratives that modernity had championed. Rejecting these master narratives as too simplistic, undergirded by self-interested power structures, and dismissive of marginalized groups, postmodernists have interested themselves more with localized, incommensurable, and possibly irreconcilable narratives that more adequately mirror the fractured and tribalized nature of contemporary life.

Despite this professed rejection of master narratives, they nevertheless retain their power to capture our imaginations and deepest longings. Let's face it: It is hard being postmodern people living in a fractured, tribalized society. Even as postmodern theory may shape our academic and intellectual pursuits, as well as our social commitments, we have cordoned off the political arena as a space wherein we release the stress of postmodern existence. Politics becomes the site where master narratives thrive and ideological purity is accepted and even admired. These narratives satisfy a felt need that postmodern living denies.

Fifteen years ago, it appeared that the 9/11 terrorist attacks might become the new master narrative of American life, countering our fractured, tribalized condition that the contested 2000 election had exposed. But the ensuing Afghan and Iraqi Wars dashed these hopes, even as some politicians tried to use the attacks for partisan purposes. In electing our first African-American president, Barack Obama, many Americans thought, at least fleetingly, that perhaps he could heal the fractures and unite the tribes. But, as soon became clear, contemporary politics depends on fractures and tribalism, and thus reinforces and exacerbates them. Even a historic presidency such as Obama's appears inad-
equate: racial discord has increased; the Middle East is in ever-greater chaos; and the economic crisis that marked his presidency’s earliest years still resounds negatively in many people’s lives—except those who were most at fault for causing it in the first place.

The Trump and Sanders campaigns represent the latest efforts to create new master narratives for this country, one each candidate hopes will prevail where others have failed. But the success of either narrative is no less dependent on the powers of tribalism and cultural fracture. Both speak to grievances against illegitimate powers; they respond to fear and anger more than hope. Whatever hope the campaigns do appear to voice is largely an image projected upon the candidates by receptive voters. Both candidates fundamentally take a via negativa approach; they infer what our society might or should be through their description of what it lacks. Neither engages in what might be called an “apophatic politics,” a politics which admits that it does not know everything. Instead, both candidates traffic in the certainties of ideology—Sanders that of democratic socialism, Trump a shifting and personalized hybrid that can best be called “Trumpism”—and refuse to consider their insufficiencies (or what I have here called counter-narratives). The ideologies that both narratives represent are as prey to the lure of legitimizing power as any other ideology—including the very “establishment” approaches to power that both candidates denounce, as both depend in their own ways on a hierarchical, top-down understanding of the executive office. Both retain the capacity to marginalize not just those whom they hold up as strawmen and scapegoats, but those who resist or reject their narratives as well.

If either Trump or Sanders is successful in his presidential bid—and at this point that is a very big “if”—it will be interesting to see whether and how they can carry their master narratives into their presidencies. Will they be able to govern out of them, or will the realities of the office and of contemporary politics require something different? Regardless of the outcome, the political master narrative will surely survive. The increasing diversity in American society has not, to date, made tribalism less prevalent or our common life less fractured, and it seems unlikely that our contemporary politics, mired in this residue of modernity, has any sure solution to that condition or even a desire to change it, though more diverse candidates are stepping forward. And so, we find ourselves in a never-ending cycle: imagining that such narratives, cloaked in the “respectability” of ideology, actually represent forms of resistance, we may ignore their potential—or all-too-real—power to oppress, power that must itself eventually be resisted, through new narratives. Breaking this cycle seems unlikely, but naming these narratives for what they are may at least help to blunt their unseen negative power.

David Lott is a freelance book editor living in Washington, DC.

Works Cited


POST-LEPER (LEVITICUS 14)

Once you've lost your nose,
the sickness finally ends.

The sick camp is full of holy trees,
trunks with triple-heads
of cedar, cypress, olive.
The good city is figs and lips,
where your wife held her heart for ten years
before succumbing to a whole man.

Oh, the comeback isn't rapturous at first
but merely clinical, a recipe for cleanliness:
red thread, hyssop, cedar wood, innocent birds.

The priest leads you to the wilderness between
the sick and well, and your whole heart rolls
into the body of one bird.

The priest can carry two birds in his cloak
without worrying which to crack
over a pot on your behalf.

He ties the living bird to the herbs and wood,
submerges him in the other bird's blood
and shakes the creature at you seven times.

You've bathed in the merciful world.
The priest sets the red bird free
in a clear field. You are like the field,
or like the thread that bound the bird.

Ivy Grimes
Stumped by Trump
Armageddon and the GOP

H. David Baer

Let the reader beware: I am penning these lines before the outcome of the contest for the Republican nomination is known. Things change quickly in the course of an election cycle, especially a cycle as bizarre as this one, which means what I write today may prove outdated, silly, or prescient by the time this essay sees the light of day. Nevertheless, two things seem clear: first, Donald Trump is the “presumptive” Republican nominee, and, second, panicked fear has broken out among the Republican establishment. Just recently Mitt Romney, who only four years ago dismissed 47 percent of Americans as undiscerning voters, has led the charge against Trump, telling his party they must not let voters nominate the real-estate mogul under any circumstances. The editors of National Review have started debating the best strategies for forcing a contested convention; William Kristol of The Weekly Standard has suggested establishing a third-party candidate in the event Trump wins the nomination. Never in our lifetime has the GOP appeared so out of touch with its own electorate and so close to self-destructing. What in heaven’s name is going on?

There are many explanations on offer for Trump’s rise, and varied though they be, all share a deep disdain for Trump’s supporters. Trump, they say, appeals to a swath of American voters who are angry and racist. Trump is the GOP’s Frankenstein, the culmination of long-standing Republican obstructionism which has taught voters not to care about political institutions. Or, they say, Trump has gotten a free pass from the media, which has diluted the line between news and entertainment, enabling a charlatan like Trump to dupe unsophisticated voters who cannot tell the difference between reality television and a presidential debate. Sadly enough, each of these explanations may contain an element of truth, and yet all of them fall short. Even granting for the sake of argument that Trump is a demagogue (and he certainly employs many of the tactics of the demagogue), one must recognize that every demagogue exploits authentic grievances. What authentic grievances are motivating those who vote for Donald Trump?

Reconstructing the mindset of a bloc of voters inevitably involves speculation. That said, everyone recognizes in Trump’s rise a popular protest of some sort. For a while, conservative pundits explained it by saying that the Republican base was angry at a party which had failed to live up to its conservative principles, but that interpretation has more or less been trampled under the advance of the Trump Express. Trump, who emphatically expresses more respect for Planned Parenthood than George W. Bush, is hardly a principled conservative. His supporters just don’t care. What has stumped the GOP about Trump may be less his demagoguery and more the fact that they cannot appeal to his supporters. Trump’s voters self-identify as moderate and tend to be working class. Rather than angry cultural conservatives or ideological Republicans, they appear more closely to resemble a group once referred to as the “Reagan Democrats.” A lot of what has stumped the GOP about Trump, then, is the fact that he is upending the Reagan coalition. Indeed, Trump appears to be effecting a major realignment of the Republican Party.

Political coalitions in the United States, as many have noted, form prior to elections, within political parties. In parliamentary systems, by contrast, coalitions are formed after elections, when smaller parties representing more narrow constituencies agree to form a government. Thus coalitions in parliamentary systems tend to be more tentative and short-lived than in the United States. The US has a two-party system. The two parties vie with each other for access to power, and when in power, distribute privilege to their constituencies. This means
once a coalition has been formed, the members of that coalition have a strong incentive to stick with the party, even as they grow dissatisfied with it. Outside the party, there is no political patronage and no hope of influencing policy. Better, then, to stay in than to jump ship, even if the considerations which first made the coalition attractive no longer apply. The tenacity of American coalitions means

The tenacity of American coalitions means that the two parties also tend to stagnate and calcify over time, growing unresponsive to changes in society and the political environment. That the two parties also tend to stagnate and calcify over time, growing unresponsive to changes in society and the political environment. That unresponsiveness does, however, produce reactions, which eventually become the cause of party realignments within what remains a two-party system.

Nor are party realignments rare in American history. Many historians periodize US political history into distinct “party systems.” The first consisted of Federalists and Anti-Federalists, which gave way to the “second party system,” consisting of Democrats and Whigs, and so on throughout history. Each party system is characterized by a distinct alignment of issues and interests within what remains a two-party system. The transition from one alignment system to another can take place more or less smoothly; thus, for example, Goldwater and Reagan flipped the South to the Republican party without upending the political institutions of their day. But at other times, party realignments are attended by significant upheaval. The Whig Party, crippled by the challenge posed by slavery, collapsed in the 1850s and gave rise to the Republican Party. Later again, Teddy Roosevelt temporarily split the Republican Party, helping to usher in the Progressive Era.

Our current political alignment dates back, arguably, to Ronald Reagan. The Party of Reagan rests on a three-part coalition: business Republicans (who favor lower taxes, fewer regulations, and free market principles), cultural and movement conservatives (who are motivated by “value” issues and support muscular foreign policy), and the traditional working class (who tend to be non-ideological, supportive of Social Security and other entitlements, but skeptical of further government expansions). Over the years, the backbone of the Reagan coalition has become the cultural and movement conservatives, who are highly motivated, well organized, and overrepresented among pundits. The tag-along in the coalition has been the working class. This third coalition partner is politically unorganized and easy to overlook. Indeed, both parties have been overlooking them for at least a generation.

The Democrats haven’t been the party of labor within living memory. President Clinton supported NAFTA and enthusiastically pushed globalization, even though it meant outsourcing American jobs. Obama bailed out investment bankers but never got around to helping average mortgage holders. His signature legislative achievement, the Affordable Care Act, extended coverage by raising deductibles and out of pocket expenses to a point where many middle-class families worry that, even with health insurance, a major illness could bankrupt them. Meanwhile, on the Republican side, the GOP has been telling workers for decades that lower taxes on investment and business income will stimulate the economy, create new jobs, and lead to higher wages. They keep saying a rising tide lifts all boats, but working-class voters, struggling to balance their checkbooks year to year, have noticed that it doesn’t seem to be true. They also resent the push for immigration reform, understanding on the basis of experience that a steady flow of foreign labor keeps wages down and pushes them toward unemployment.

If these are Trump’s supporters, we can begin to see that the strength of his support draws on something more than hatred and bigotry. Trump’s core constituency may have concluded, reasonably enough, that its fortunes are not likely to improve with either a Republican or Democratic President. Insofar as working-class voters have
deliberated about the candidates within the horizon of their own self-interest (and which political constituency doesn't deliberate this way?), why wouldn't they vote for Trump? Whatever his flaws, he is not likely to make things any worse for them than the establishment candidates. He might even make things better. At the very least, by sticking with Trump in the face of desperate admonishments from the enlightened classes, those long suffering voters appear to be working a transformation of the American political landscape. Even if Trump should fail, others, seeing what he has done, are likely to follow and seek to reconstruct his coalition. Come to think of it, maybe Trump's supporters aren't so stupid after all. Right now, they seem to be driving the cart.

None of this, however, should be taken as an endorsement of Donald Trump. Without a doubt, he is the most terrifying figure to appear on the American political scene since Andrew Jackson. Had I lived in Jackson's day, I would have been a Whig. So too, today, I'll do what I can to keep Donald Trump from reaching the White House. Yet let us not forget the turmoil we face is neither historically unprecedented nor a sign of Armageddon. It is, rather, simply our misfortune to live in interesting times.

H. David Baer is Professor of Theology and Philosophy at Texas Lutheran University.

GENESIS

Back in Genesis when the Godhead spent his days in chaos going through proofs comparing this elm leaf to that leaf trying to make day seven agree with the first verse

and his introductory paragraph which says, "Let light... and there was light"
suggests only the bare outlines
of the inquisitions, the reflection on forced lines—

then the patterns of creation were revealed, the true germens of form not recollections of emotion in tranquility but the spontaneous overflowing of old terms

and the spirit over the waters floated past the face of the deep and the slipped pen of the Godhead found both inspiration and so many ways to sleep.

Atar Hadari
Building a Wall
On Immigration, Membership, and the American "We"

Peter Meilaender

Surely one of the most memorable campaign promises of the current presidential election cycle—perhaps one of the most memorable ever—is Donald Trump’s promise to combat illegal immigration by building a wall between the United States and Mexico, and making Mexico pay for it. Two factors working in combination make it memorable: it is both (1) absurd and (2) popular. We are of course accustomed to hearing politicians promise things we know they are unlikely to deliver. But it is rare to hear them promise things we know are impossible to deliver, things a president has no power to deliver. Trump’s is a through-the-looking-glass kind of promise, and it has been widely ridiculed for just this reason. Yet neither the ridicule nor the impossibility of the thing promised has prompted Trump to renounce his wall. To the contrary, he has repeated the promise multiple times, and he seems to lose nothing in popularity by doing so.

Clearly he has struck a chord. Something about the immigration issue resonates deeply with many citizens. In response to recent Gallup polling on the question, “What do you think is the most important problem facing this country today?” immigration has ranked as voters’ second-most important non-economic concern for the past several months (except for a brief spike in concern over “terrorism” in December 2015). It is outranked only by “dissatisfaction with government,” a complaint that may well reflect many of the same anxieties felt by those who name immigration as their chief concern. Immigration has often been a heated issue in American politics. At the turn of the twentieth century, those on the Left, especially labor unions, often condemned immigration for bringing in cheap labor to compete with American workers. In recent decades, at least since Peter Brimelow’s 1992 National Review cover story, “Time to Rethink Immigration,” opposition to immigration has been an important issue among many conservatives. But immigration has captured the public imagination and shaped public discourse during the 2016 presidential campaign to a surprising extent.

Why does the issue of immigration have such resonance with voters? (And perhaps we should add, resonance with voters who support immigration as well as ones who oppose it.) It is tempting to look toward economic factors for an explanation. Middle-class wages have stagnated. Globalization leaves many workers threatened, especially in traditional industrial occupations. Even as the US economy has slowly climbed out of a recession, unemployment has remained stubbornly persistent and many people have left the job market altogether. (It is no accident that Trump has also promised tariffs on foreign imports, playing to the same fears about jobs.) The litany is familiar.

I doubt, however, that economic factors alone can adequately explain immigration’s pull on the American political psyche. Trump’s unrealizable wall is not so much a real policy proposal as it is a symbol. Indeed, Americans are less concerned about the economy than they have been for most of the past decade. The net percentage of Americans in Gallup’s polls “mentioning economic issues as the nation’s most important problem” has declined from a high of 86 percent in early 2009 to only 39 percent at present, a drop of more than half. Economic anxiety surely explains some of the concern over immigration. But more is at stake.

Immigration is not like most other political issues that we debate. We can argue about whether it is a good idea to compel Apple to unlock a cell phone tied to the San Bernardino terrorist attacks. We can consider whether it would help lower healthcare costs if we permitted insurance com-
panies to compete across state lines. We can ask whether the cost of college should be subsidized, whether Common Core standards will improve educational outcomes, or whether we should supply Syrian rebels with training and arms. What kind of judge do we want appointed to fill Scalia’s seat on the Supreme Court? Will we balance the budget more successfully with this or that candidate’s tax plan? Should we raise the retirement age?

Such arguments are the bread and butter of partisan politics. Yet they all differ in one fundamental respect from debates over immigration. Lurking behind all of these disputes is the taken-for-granted little pronoun “we.” What should “we” do about terrorism, health care, taxes? In almost every political debate, the content of that “we” is simply assumed—we Americans, we voters, we citizens. But when we debate immigration, this is no longer the case. For unlike those other issues, immigration policy is about determining the nature of that “we” itself, about determining who we are in the first place.

The political philosopher Michael Walzer captured this point nicely in a book about distributive justice entitled *Spheres of Justice* (1983). The book’s central argument is that principles of distributive justice vary depending upon the particular good being distributed and the social purposes it is thought to serve. We distribute wealth for certain reasons, education for others, honor or political power for still others. Because these are different kinds of things, we treat them differently—the reasons I might deserve to hold political office are not the same as the reasons why I deserve an education, or medical care, or love and affection. Before discussing any of these various goods, however, Walzer begins with a chapter discussing a still more fundamental good: “membership,” under the heading of which he analyzes both immigration and naturalization. “The primary good that we distribute to one another,” he writes, “is membership in some human community. And what we do with regard to membership structures all our other distributive choices: it determines with whom we make those choices, from whom we require obedience and collect taxes, to whom we allocate goods and services.” The question of membership precedes all other decisions we make by identifying who “we” are to begin with; it is therefore “the first and most important distributive question.”

Immigration policy is about determining the nature of that “we” itself, about determining who we are in the first place.

Because membership is the primary good that we distribute to one another, immigration is linked to one of the most basic functions served by any government. The chief purpose of government, no doubt, is to ensure peace and security—in traditional Christian language, to punish the wicked and protect the innocent. But a second essential function of government is to represent the people (citizens, subjects) it governs. This is as true of a monarchy as it is of a democracy. Every government, at least in the modern world, claims to stand for, to re-present, the will of its people. Hobbes described this in vivid contractual language when he claimed that all subjects agree to regard themselves as the “authors” of their sovereign’s actions. Our government speaks for us; we are, all of us (re)present(ed) in its actions.

Immigration is thus a peculiar political issue, because in crafting immigration law and policy, our representative agent reconstitutes the very “we” from which its authority derives. Understanding this helps explain why immigration becomes such a symbolically charged issue for those who feel threatened by it. For if one of government’s essential functions is to represent “our” will, how does it justify granting the tremendously valuable benefit of membership to outsiders while we, or many of us, face hardship? And what are we to
think of those people—our own fellow citizens!—who support further immigration and thus also subordinate our interests to those of outsiders (or, perhaps, to their own self-interest)? This dynamic helps explain why the improbable Trumpean wall resonates so powerfully with so many voters, citizens who no longer believe that their government truly represents them, or their values, or their interests.

I should emphasize that I am not here attempting to argue that large numbers of American voters are in fact harmed, economically or otherwise, by immigration. Nor am I claiming that immigration is bad for the country. Nor am I forgetting that many Americans support immigration and want no part of a wall. My own views on the issue fall toward the middle of the political spectrum. I am simply trying to understand why the immigration issue seems to have so powerfully captured our political imagination. And for that purpose I believe we need to look deeper than mere economic unease, deeper than the question, for example, of whether immigration creates a net gain or loss in GNP or causes a net gain or loss in number of jobs created. Instead, we need to understand that immigration, because of its intrinsic links to membership and representation, is not like other political issues.

Grasping these connections is important not only in order to understand or empathize with opponents of immigration or voters who cheer proposals for a wall. It is also important for those who desire more immigration. For except in cases of refugee admissions—cases where we may genuinely be arguing almost entirely about the needs of others, with our interests well in the background—pro-immigration arguments no less than restrictionist ones presume and make claims about the “we” of our polity. If immigration brings economic benefits, it is “our” economy that receives those benefits. If it reunites families, they are “our” families, or at least families with a foothold among us and in our communities. If it enriches the culture, then “our” culture enjoys that enrichment. For better or for worse, immigration is always about who we are and who we will be in the future.

It is perhaps especially important to remember this in times of uncertainty and turmoil, or of what Gallup called general “dissatisfaction with government.” Generosity toward outsiders and a readiness to view them as potential fellow members whose participation in the political community would enrich our own lives almost surely requires as a prerequisite an underlying confidence among “us” that our representative is indeed attending to our best interests. In a book called *Irish Impressions*—having nothing to do with immigration—G. K. Chesterton makes this point very nicely. He speaks there of the “law of leisure needed for the awakening of wonder,” and he suggests that borders are important not simply as a defensive measure, but also because they make the true flourishing of human diversity, both within communities and among them, possible.

“The chief case for old enclosures and boundaries,” he writes, “is that they enclose a space in which new things can always be found later, like live fish within the four corners of a net. The chief charm of having a home that is secure is having leisure to feel it as strange.”

Neither Donald Trump nor any other successful presidential candidate is going to force Mexico to pay for a new border wall. But without attending to the true reasons why that impossible promise appeals to many voters, it will only become more difficult to resolve our disputes about immigration. To steal a line from Robert Frost: Something there may be that doesn't love a wall. But citizens who cease to feel that our government speaks for “us,” who increasingly feel their home only as strange and never as secure, will surely conclude that good fences make good neighbors.

Peter Meilaender is Professor of Political Science at Houghton College.
Waiting for the Call to Come

Mark D. Williamson

Not long ago, I went through the call process as an ELCA pastor for the second time. The first time, I recall, was a slow and demoralizing affair, but at least the possibilities were contained. Assigned to the Metropolitan Chicago Synod, I pestered the bishop’s staff to grant me interview opportunities and then waited until finally there was a congregation that wanted to give me a job, and that settled it. The second time through, when I had more say in the matter, I discovered how heavy the burden of decision is when the field of futures is wide open and God’s voice is not at all clear.

I had served for seven years as an associate pastor in an affluent Chicago suburb when I updated my Rostered Leader Profile, checking the “open to the possibility of a call” box and expanding my geographical preferences to five different Midwestern (Region 5) synods. It had been a good first call, but I was outgrowing my role, putting pressure on my relationship with my senior colleague and growing impatient with the backlog of ministry ideas I couldn’t take the lead on. My wife, pregnant with our second child, was wanting to quit her full-time job in order to stay-at-home parent for a season. Beyond a shared ambivalence about the prospect of raising little Christians in suburbia and a desire to stay within a manageable travel distance from grandparents, ours was a relatively “unrestricted” search.

Chicagoland interviews and Skype interviews were not difficult to schedule, but sneaking away to various places in Wisconsin or Iowa without my congregation getting suspicious was a taller order (clergy often liken such conversations, guiltily, to having an affair). It was hard to maintain focus and stay fully invested in the community I was pastoring, but the discernment itself—trying to tell which was the “right” path forward—was still harder.

As I groped for the proper criteria for just how to know, I was repeatedly presented with what I can now identify as three strands of wisdom, each possessing an element of truth, but none of which I was ever fully able to trust.

First was the seemingly worldly advice Figure out what you want (and go out and get it). Interestingly, it was another pastor who put this to me most succinctly. I was having an introductory lunch meeting with a close-to-retirement colleague, a forty-years-in-the-same-parish veteran who was looking for a successor to mentor for a couple years before handing over the reins. This was the only neighboring suburban call I agreed to look into; it was a large, vital, fairly traditional, typically homogenous church with immaculate facilities. The pastor and I had been getting to know each other over our thirteen-dollar lamb burgers until finally he looked me in the eye and said, “Mark, let me ask you this: What is it you want?” It felt in the moment like he had homed in on a very pivotal question, and yet one that might also be the devil’s question. When he followed up his comment by telling me how “marketable” I was, and I felt my ego swell, that was when the old enemy blew his cover.

On the one hand, Jesus himself sometimes asked a similar version of that question (“What do you want me to do for you?”) of individuals...
at a crossroads; James and John, who desired greatness, and Bartimaeus, who desired sight, are notable examples juxtaposed in Mark 10. In the former case, the question only exposed the disciples’ foolishness and showed that they didn’t know what they were asking. And, of course, Jesus’ own prayer to the Father in Gethsemane gave voice to his personal desire but ended with “Not what I want, but what you want.” The way Jesus asks the question shows that Christian discernment must have some sort of cruciform character. What we want for ourselves, though not irrelevant, is not the most important thing. Hopefully, we will not be asked to go and do the opposite of what we want, but I wondered if there was a middle place, where I might be called to give up some things I rather like for Jesus’ sake, without chasing down misery (as though a congregation could ever be much blessed by a pastor who views them as his next hairshirt)? A few weeks after an interview with the call committee in that place, I said no to that potential opportunity, and, in general, said no to the question of what I wanted being the only question.

A variant of this is: Trust your gut. Some of my most trusted confidants, including elder clergy, told me to listen to my gut. I found their counsel to be a good check on my relentless drawing up and revising of pro and con lists, but it still left me wondering why even seasoned Lutherans thought my gut was less tangled up in the simul justus et peccator than the rest of me. Since seminary, people had been telling me I belonged in or around academic communities, preaching if not teaching and writing among them. My own mother told me, upon learning of one call we were considering, that I need college-educated parishioners in the pews to understand what I am talking about.

But how is trusting one’s gut different than going where one is most comfortable? In a denomination where nearly all the clergy have master’s degrees, aren’t almost all of us more at home among educated, broad-minded folk: the enclave urban neighborhoods, the handful of high-culture suburbs, the mid-sized places anchored by a research university, or better yet, a Lutheran college? What are the implications for an ELCA where too many pastors are looking for where they feel they “fit”? (For starters, without discounting financial factors, it might look like the current 37 percent pastoral vacancy rate among rural and small-town congregations in an ELCA where 48 percent of the congregations are in those settings [Inskeep 2016]). Or, to use a different example, if my gut tells me to seek out a Reconciling in Christ congregation, like those I have served in the past, where the full inclusion of LGBTQ persons is public and unqualified, might I be snagging one of the handful of positions that are truly open to my LGBTQ colleagues? I am not sure it is my gut that tells me to account for these candidates in the bigger picture, but rather the challenge of an outside Word. That is not to say that our instincts are beyond God’s use or power to redeem; some of the brightest red flags in this search were first detected by my gut. And yet, conscious of how subtly sin clings, I was never quite confident that my gut should get the final say.

Third, even if not one soul advised me to, I still would have been striving to read the signs. Anyone faced with a significant life decision tries to. For nine exhausting months, I was in a state of hyper-attentiveness, determined not to miss a clue in speech or circumstance. Just prior to an interview with one call committee in an urban setting, I was struck with a cold that clouded my responses and made enthusiasm impossible to convey. Did it mean anything? What about the form letter from one synod that said, in short, we have nothing for you at all here? God closing the door on a whole quarter...
of a state? Or was it an accident when my iPod, set on shuffle, chose from among ten thousand songs “Pink Houses” just as I crossed the city limits into one unlikely small town prospect, John Mellencamp proclaiming confidently that a town like this was “good enough for [him]” (and could be for you too, hint, hint)?

A constant cause for doubt, however, in trying to spot God's hand like this—and this is especially the case in the ELCA call system—is that there are so many flawed human beings involved, all of us clumsily trying to get our ducks in a row. The “congregations-in-transition” have a lot of steps to follow before they are even ready to interview, and their call committees are full of volunteers that struggle mightily just to get their schedules aligned. Key decisions, like approving a Ministry Site Profile are sometimes not made until an annual congregational meeting rolls around in January, and then many of them spring into full throttle search mode just as pastors under call are in the thick of Lent and Holy Week. While God may hold all of our times, as the psalmist declares (31:15), the notion of neatly orchestrated timing seems far-fetched given all the variables.

There were some holy coincidences along the way, but I had to be reminded again and again that discernment is not divination, and faithfulness is different than fatefulness. When we make the mistake of assuming that there is only one right path to choose, the fear of getting on the wrong track—and the idea that such a mistake would be on you—becomes debilitating. Rather, comfort came to me in the promise that God was acting in ways beyond my sight, perhaps on multiple paths simultaneously but always for us and for the good—and not just teasing. Loosen your grip on the notion that there is a “right” path, said this voice, and trust that whatever “you” decide, I am with you.

What proved decisive in where my family and I landed was not my decisiveness at all. There was one call committee that just got seized by the conviction that I was the one for them, and they didn’t hedge much at all about it. I was moved by how they pulled out all the stops to welcome us and showcase their community. The parish is located in the seat of a rural county, full of rolling, unglaciated hills populated by dairy cows and sheep. In the town, there are two restaurants that meet our standards for a dinner out and too many bars. Many days, despite all the thoughtfulness and effort I put toward the process, I feel surprised that this is my home and bewildered by how I got here.

In the end, perhaps faithfulness lies in letting a place choose you, rather than believing we become capable of such a choice if only we are given enough information and the right advice. One answers a call, and, in the ministry, a call comes through the church. Whether we are achieving our dreams or finding “our kind of people” or deducing a match made in heaven, these are not particularly Christian habits of mind. In time, I found they all become oppressive. But, in discerning a path, we show up generously when invited, we die to ourselves, we pray in the face of the unknown, and when a call comes at last, we leap.

Mark D. Williamson is the new Pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in Dodgeville, Wisconsin.

Works Cited

FORAGE

Damp in the rain coming
over blue mountains,

so many apples passing
like ships between our teeth.

Our thanks for berry. Our thanks
for the grain in our skins.

For wild weeds
that feed the body,

what water we nip,
it's woody sweet.

Forests full of dripping
spruce, brewing a silence

peppery to taste, pouring it
over the moss. Then,

when I asked,
the furry lips of earth

puckered, O met
the soles of our feet,

ferns in our hands
unfurling—

Brianna Flavin
Libraries and Churches
Hospitality and the Church
Katie Koch

Being a pastor myself (albeit one who is on leave to chase children), and married to a pastor, I have long lost touch with what it feels like to go church shopping. But library shopping—now, that is something I understand. Think about it: libraries are fantastic. They are these places filled, often overflowing really, with books and magazines and DVDs and CDs. And the craziest part is they let you take their stuff home. For free. You can pick up a book that would cost you twenty to thirty dollars and just leave with it, as if you own it.

Now, yes, you have to bring these items back eventually, and yes, there is a general understanding that you will treat said books, etc., as nicely as possible. But the ridiculously generous fact remains, no matter who you are off the street, you can walk into the library and take their prized possessions right out the front door. Aside from providing some form of identification, there are no questions asked. You don't have to prove your literacy skills, your behavior, your employment; there is no background check, and your general "worthiness" is not in question.

My family and I recently moved to a different part of the state, a whole new community. We weren't settled in for but a day or two before I loaded up the littles into a stroller and marched all four of my kids down the street to our new local library. I was eager to settle in a bit, get the lay of the land at what I was sure would become one of my new favorite places. Surely since I adore libraries and enjoy taking my kids there, then surely I could find my way around a new one and come to call it home as well.

Much to my surprise, the entire experience was highly disorienting, and in the end I left feeling like more of a stranger than when I arrived. Filling out forms, especially with four little kids along, was clumsy and time-consuming; I wasn't familiar with the library layout and struggled to get my kids connected with their age-appropriate books, and the sole librarian present, bless her heart, was stretched a bit thin with heavy traffic that afternoon, and it felt like our chaotic presence just about ruined the whole day.

I had thought that comfort and belonging at one library would surely translate into comfort and belonging at another.

More recently, my kids and I have frequented a neighboring town's library and preschool story-time. Their story-time was advertised in our town, so we made the journey. It was a delightful experience, and so we went back, and quickly we have become regulars, greeted by name as we enter. We drive the extra miles to go to this library for a variety of reasons, but as you can imagine, there is a general sense of hospitality that draws us in. It is not just the librarian, but a mixture of things such as the layout, the policies, the preschool story-time that is allowed to take over the entire tiny library twice a week, the walls lined with messy art done by little hands.

To a large extent, it is about my kids. In the neighboring town's library, my kids are so very welcome, and frankly they are welcome to be kids. Libraries can occasionally be places where one must suddenly stop all childish behavior. One must use either no voice, which isn't going to happen with kids, or the quietest of whispers, which is an almost impossible challenge for my toddler. Libraries are full of things that look simply grand to touch. At this library my kids can be kids and the world of literacy is all around them and open for them to delight in.
Of course I will drive a little extra to go to the library where my children are treated like honored guests, where the librarian is helpful and extra friendly with a genuine kindness about her. And just like that, it hit me: libraries and churches have so many parallels, and maybe, just maybe, our libraries can teach us Christians a thing or two about hospitality and welcoming in the neighbors and strangers. We aren’t shocked to find the unkempt or the oddballs at the library; we expect everyone to show up. If you frequent your local library, you know exactly what I am talking about. I don’t care how homogenous your community is, somehow your local library manages to attract folks you’ve never seen before, folks looking for a warm place to sit and relax in the winter, a cool place to get a break from the summer heat, a free place to connect with the Internet. In these public buildings, the message is clear: We want you to use/utilize/take advantage of everything the library has to offer without necessarily giving back. We trust you with the treasures, the books; in fact, we beg you to take our treasures home.

But at church, although we desperately employ all manner of programs and professionals to help us be welcoming and hospitable, somehow we jumble all of this up. We talk and talk and talk about being welcoming, about reaching out, and inviting. But all too often it tends to end there: all talk. We are shocked when strangers show up, and if they seem unlike those gathered there, well then we just don’t know what to do with ourselves. And the good sweet treasures the church has to offer? We don’t seem to want to give anything away for free, let alone the best stuff.

For those of us who love libraries, the gift of literacy is mighty, and we want to spread this gift as far and wide as we can. But when our libraries feel standoffish, cold, unwelcoming, or inaccessible, this gift remains unused. So how about the Gospel? A gift greater even than literacy, God’s mighty forgiveness and new life in Jesus Christ ought to be proclaimed and handed out with reckless abandon. At church, we like to act like the stuffy libraries: come only at these hours and keep your voices down. No touching the books unless you plan to take. No running, no playing, no laughter, no fun. Keep your kids under control.

My family once visited a church that definitely had a thing for signs. There were signs posted on the doors of the fellowship hall: “No drinks outside this room!” Signs on the outside doors: “Doors must be locked and lights off before leaving!” Signs in the bathroom: “Wash your hands!” Every sign conveyed a suspicion that someone was trying to take their stuff: rob them of their clean floor, rob them of their electricity, rob them of their hygiene. My new favorite library also has signs: “Fiction;” “Children’s Story Time;” “Join us for...” Instead of warning people not to take their stuff, the signs proclaim that they are intent on giving it away.

Most of us want many of the same things for our churches. We want hearty sermons and well done music. We want Bible studies, fellowship and programs where we feel invited, welcomed, and a sense of belonging. We want more people to come to our churches, so that they can receive these same things. And so all too often, we spend piles of time fretting about welcome centers and greeters, and extolling the word hospitality, thinking that if we just have more of this, everything will be grand.

Whether you are one of the official greeters, or someone who just happens to be standing inside the door, let’s be excited the next time someone new shows up. Let’s greet the regular
member as well. Let's make space for the unpredictable, loud busyness of children. Let's assume that someone will spill coffee outside the fellowship hall. Let's release our goods right on out the door for the sake of the neighbor and the world. Let's believe in the Gospel.

Mark 10 arrives at a fortunate time in the lectionary, near the opening of Sunday school: “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.” There are many more scriptures, more moments, in which Jesus is welcoming all sorts of people with open arms. In Mark 2, we catch Jesus eating—lounging really—with sinners as he calls Matthew the (gasp) tax collector to discipleship. Jesus is unafraid to go near the man with demons who has been cast out to live in his wildness. He is unafraid of the woman caught in adultery and of the woman at the well who seems to have been with everyone. And he is unafraid of all the people he has healed, all of whom would have been unclean.

I love when scriptures like these come around. They are reminders of good truths we already know. They refocus our eyes and hearts. And yet there is something funny that happens when we hear these scriptures. There tends to be a general nodding of heads, a warm glow of self-righteousness. Certainly I know this, certainly I love having children around, I want sinners to know Jesus. I would welcome someone in need. But then we bristle when others want to push their way to Jesus, when others are drawn to him. Do we really want anyone, everyone, every broken, messy, life-falling-apart or making-bad-choices-like-crazy person to come through our church doors to hear the word of God? What happens when the drunk comes to church? The pedophile? The domestic abuser? The pregnant mom who also uses drugs? We panic; we don't know what to do. It gets embarrassing when we realize how many situations we just don't know what to do with.

No matter our high views of our own self-righteousness, God's word clearly tells us we too are sinners, just as in need of a savior as any of the outwardly messed up people we make judgements about. But just as surely as we count ourselves among the sinners in need of a savior, we must know too that we are also the beloved children of God that Jesus pulls close to his heart.

If you are passing through my town, or live on my street for that matter, join us at church. Don't worry about your appearance, your loud children, your general unworthiness. This is just the place for you. We will even let you take the Gospel home for free. It's just like a library! ✨

Pastor Katie Koch and her family recently relocated to a small town in central Minnesota where her husband serves as parish pastor and she raises their four children.
Reviewed in this issue...

Alice Roberts's The Incredible Unlikeliness of Being: Evolution and the Making of Us

Embracing Your Cousin Hagfish

"You aren't who you think you are," Flannery O'Connor's unlovely character Julian tells his mother after a tense bus ride in the short story, "Everything that Rises Must Converge." Who we think we are matters by itself and also shapes the way we treat other creatures. Humans tend to think of themselves more highly than they ought, argues Alice Roberts, Professor of Public Engagement in Science at the University of Birmingham in England. As a species, we have a history of thinking we are pretty special, the measure of all things, the pinnacle of creation. We arrive at this opinion in part from awareness of the amazing bodies we have. Roberts argues that instead, by understanding how we are related to other creatures, we should learn to delight in the body, even as we recognize we are not master of other animals. Roberts sketches out a tree of life that is not shaped like a pointy Christmas pine with Man at the top, but a luxuriously branching shrub, humans related to lancelets, agnathans, fish, frogs, mice, birds, and lizards on a twig of descent, the cousin rather than the superior of other animals.

Roberts, a winsome, television-savvy clinical anatomist, aims in this book as in her television programming to promote popular understanding of science, to make evolution relevant to ordinary readers. While the book has a lot to teach, it is not particularly dedicated to tracing the line of evolution from the fish to us. It skips around by body parts, sometimes dwelling in anecdote, comparison, or evolutionary theory, sometimes truncating interesting material too early, attentive mostly to the resonances between a particular human structure and its evolutionary origins. The book's array of curiosities is designed to inspire the reader's gladness about his new discovered relation to the sea squirt. This role, as bearer of good cheer, is very important to Roberts. Her task in the book is not merely to give us facts about embryology and evolution, but to disabuse and then to encourage.

It is significant to Roberts that she wrote this book after the birth of her daughter, because childbearing made her sensitive to the miracle of how a new human body comes to be: "Having my own children reawakened that sense of wonder in me: how astounding to have played host to that extraordinary act of creation." She is on target in this recognition that the way humans "play host" to offspring is among the most thrilling features of our embodied lives, and should be of universal interest, not just to pregnant women. Insofar as everyone is of woman born, everyone ought to share this fascination. A mother's collaboration in an embryo's growth strikes me as just about the greatest story ever told, excepting the story of salvation. Regrettably, though, Roberts leaves this story too quickly, revisiting the embryo's shaping but leaving off the account of the mother's hospitality until nearly the end in a section on humans' perplexing physiology of birth.

She uses our origins from an embryo to make a double argument. The amazement we properly feel imagining the growth of ourselves from single cells to complex adults can, by analogy, help us understand evolution. The journey from one cell to an adult man or woman may seem unbelievable but necessary to believe, in approximately the same way as the journey our species made from invertebrate water animal to human being. Roberts contends that explanations arising from a blend of anatomy, evolution, and embryology (short-handed Evo-Devo) do best to explain who we are,
telling where we came from, how we grow, and how we are shaped by environment. Roberts flirts with nineteenth-century German biologist Ernst Haeckel's discredited theory that ontogeny replicates phylogeny, that the embryo passes through the evolutionary stages of the species as it becomes recognizable human. She admits Haeckel's errors but upholds his insight. If we look at the adult forms of humans, dogs, or fish, we see vast differences among the species, but looking at embryos instead shows our resemblance to putatively "lower" animals and illustrates the resourcefulness of the evolutionary process.

Given the time and place we inhabit, arguments about the status of the embryo nearly inevitably have implications for abortion. Roberts here stays away from the topic. But her book echoes content common in guides for pregnant women, considering that tiny embryo, first a single cell, then multi-celled blackberry, then a layered disk, then a rolling frisky creature, as not only a person but a particular person: you. Lyrical, Roberts narrates the moments when "[y]our heart started to develop incredibly early in embryonic development.... when you were still a flat jam sandwich," and when "as a minute embryonic germ disk just a few millimetres in length, you rolled up to become a stack of nested cylinders, you were also making the beginnings of your guts." Observing that by the fifth week "all sorts of other interesting things are starting to happen to this tiny embryonic you," Roberts makes a point important to anti-abortion arguments. Though the embryonic "you" at that point does not look much like a human, this is a period of more dramatic development than in the later months, when the baby-looking baby is just putting on weight.

Her chapters follow a pattern. In describing the evolved us from head to toe, Roberts identifies a feature of the human body, looks at its embryonic development, then introduces another animal who seems remote from us. That gives her cause to describe how an attribute of our embryo resembles the other animal and reveals a relationship, usually a common ancestor. We are not only the relatives of apes but must admit fellowship with unglamorous ancestors, sea worms and snakes. For instance, because in embryo we have a notochord, which develops into spinal column and brain, we can see kinship with the fishlike lancelet. The lancelet may figure as Roberts's favorite distant relative, given the frequency of her reference to it to illustrate evolutionary links. Further, considering the human heart, Roberts notes that while the "heart and the aortic arches of a five-week-old human embryo look uncannily like those of an adult fish," our blood is not oxygenated in gills but in lungs. Interestingly,

**The Incredible Unlikeliness of Being**

Alice Roberts
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Reviewed by Agnes Howard
Gordon College

the "swim bladders," or air bags attached to the gut in carp, trout, herring, and eels, may function nearly like lungs and consequently illustrate the link between fish and us, as an essential tool "for air-breathing when our tetrapod forebears hauled themselves out onto land." Other body parts—skulls, ribcages, limbs, hands, and feet—also show marked resemblance to equivalent parts of other animals, especially when comparisons are made at embryo stage.

It is, as Nick Saban would say, all about the process. In animals, nothing is really "designed." The process, not an in-the-beginning plan or a ruling telos, is what makes us and everything else. Roberts stresses that nothing is made *ex nihilo*, that body structures are not devised for their function. Evolution works with what is made available, shifting joints around or nudging a part to fit more than one purpose or putting a leftover bit of tissue...
to some other use. If you want a human voice, you start with a gill slit. The tissues that make our larynx and ear, for example, grow from the branchial bars in embryos, what in fish embryos would make gills. “Bits of anatomy don’t generally appear out of nowhere, there has to be a precursor, something that can be modified, duplicated, or have a little extra added to it.” Roberts observes, “Evolution is very good at re-purposing or recycling structures.” Because reptiles did not need gills, they developed different kinds of jaws. And then unlike reptiles, who have only one tiny bone, or ossicle, connecting eardrum to cochlea to allow hearing, we have two additional ossicles. Evolution found fresh use for a bit of the leftover jaw joint because we have a new jaw, and hearing was improved given this “trick of stealing bits of jaw for bits of ear.” Evolution is virtually personified in Roberts’s pages, a resourceful, clever spirit, a discernable way of acting in history.

“What is the chief end of man?” asks the first question of the Westminster shorter catechism, to which an unnamed schoolboy famously gave the erroneous answer: “his head.” Confronting that important piece of our anatomy, Roberts makes clear how little she will indulge notions of human uniqueness, asking first why creatures have heads at all. For a lay reader who never considered headlessness, the very question prepares us to be impressed with the answer. The answer is intentionally unimpressive. She points us to the acorn worm, a distant relative that “learned to swim,” to answer the question. Heads allow speed and sense, since “the faster you move, the more head-like your front is likely to become. For a free-swimming animal, it helps to have your senses stacked up-front, in a head where you first encounter novelty in your environment. Of course, it also helps if you have a brain, to process all that information coming in from your head-mounted sense organs.” There must be more to say—even in speculation, which is the status of many other evolutionary observations—about why we have heads than that they make useful boxes for holding tools of self-defense and nourishment. Roberts seems insufficiently impressed at the singularity of the big-brained ape publishing books about the origin of species and reminding her fellows not to be overproud.

The body is trying to tell us something, Roberts maintains. This is a worthy topic to pursue, because the body is not self-interpreting. Some ancients thought the liver was the seat of the soul, and we still treat the heart as the source of affection. It would be wonderful to have a reflective, humane guide to the meaning of all our parts; for many of us, medicine provides the default interpretation of the body, but it falls short in telling meaning. Some writers have offered interpretation of parts of the body, often with an emphasis on its purpose. Leon Kass, in writings like *Toward a More Natural Science* (1985) and *The Hungry Soul* (1994) reads in the structure of the human body the conditions for our reason and sociability. In his “theology of the body,” Pope John Paul II discerns in the body a sign calling us to God, the body itself expressing a “pre-given language.” Observing the complexity and beauty of the body even can draw one to recognize the existence of God. In *Witness* (1952), former communist Whittaker Chambers traced the start of his conversion to a moment when, watching his young daughter in her high chair, he looked hard at her ear: “My eye came to rest on the delicate convolutions of her ear—those intricate, perfect ears. The thought passed through my mind; ‘No, those ears were not created by any chance coming together of atoms in nature. They could have been created only by immense design.’”

Roberts wants every bit as much ardent attention given to the ear, but for an entirely other end. She wants her readers to gaze at a child's gorgeous eyes or their own sturdy feet and not to mistake these for loving creation. No, Roberts wants read-
ers to see their makeshift, haphazard, good-enough physical form as evidence of the process of natural selection. Your conclusion should be hers: "At the end of this anatomical journey you can look at your hand and see not only something which developed out of a minute limb bud in your own developing embryo, but something which evolved from a fish's fin, over millions and millions of generations." You are not special. What makes human beings distinct boils down to habitual bipedalism and big brains, and even those, Roberts notes, distinguish us only by degrees. Nor were those attributes bestowed upon us as a package deal at some turning point in history, transforming us away from the other apes. She compares the uniqueness of our big brain to the tail of a peacock, a curious pleasant adaptation, but no dividing line from the beasts. Given Roberts's public opposition to creation science in Britain's Christian schools, it is reasonable to guess that she expects that evolutionary gaze to nudge you to the next logical leap. Your own body can serve for you as a kind of a proof of the nonexistence of God.

This book aims not only to inform readers about evolution but also to generate a particular attitude. We might wonder why she thinks ordinary people would take in three hundred-some pages of fairly rigorous science, and what she wants us to get in the process. Her expectation of readers is linked with her argument: if we properly understand who we are and where we come from, we will recognize evolution at work and learn to delight in both our relationship to other species and in the jerry-rigged-but-efficient construction of our body. She wants the news of evolution to make us glad. While glad is not my general reaction, there is at least one pleasant consequence to taking evolution personally. It fosters healthy disregard for the many prescriptions foisted upon us on (sketchy) evolutionary grounds. The "way we were made" or "what we are hardwired to do" often are employed to shame us into certain behaviors: exercise programs telling us to move like our spear-hunting ancestors, and run shoeless; paleo diets that prioritize meat, nuts, and plants as our natural nutriments; contrasting excuses permitting us salty, sweet, and fatty foods we are "hardwired" to prefer. Roberts's sense of us as evolved beings suggests we need not be adapted to caveman conditions, any more than we should feel obligated to climb trees and nosh on leaves.

But might not evolution indicate that our bodies don't mean anything? That they simply are, and are ours for staying alive and reproducing, case closed? Roberts tries to push readers past that disenchantment and resignation. Instead, she wants this knowledge, of the process and of the human body, to breed wonder and delight. Seeing ourselves as connected to everything else, indeed as blooming from the primordial stuff of the earth, should fuel our satisfaction in a way not unlike Carl Sagan's pronouncement that we are "star stuff."

Amplifying joyous amazement at our evolved selves is the title attribute, the "unlikeliness" of it all.Repeatedly she admits that the process of embryo development is so complex that things easily could go wrong, and sometimes do. But each of us matters so little in the evolutionary scheme of things that the clay can hardly talk back to the potter. Reckoning with our low origins, a hairless ape who is kin to a hagfish, we might be blown away with the sheer dumb luck that we exist at all. All those points in evolutionary history when things could have gone differently, plus all those other sperm that could have fertilized the egg and made somebody else, mean "the chances of your conception are vanishingly small." So we should be glad because we are "lucky to be alive." Further, our being lays on us the "heavy burden" of "weighty responsibility," to use our big brains to understand and communicate, to direct the global impact of our actions "informed by the investigative urge we call science."

That fails to satisfy. If it is unlikely that I exist, but I do, philosophy and theology help me find my place better than does that "investigative urge" alone. Scripture and experience teach that we come from dust and return, but also that the way we are made is fearful and wonderful. It may not be possible to tell what the human being is, even by looking microscopically at embryos or through the lens of evolution, but God is mindful of us.

Agnes R. Howard is Assistant Professor of History at Gordon College in Wenham, Massachusetts.
The sacred spaces of India provide a place for divine-human interaction. In Hindu traditions, sacred spaces include not only temples but also other settings for rituals and performances, as well as transformative spaces such as pilgrimage sites, known as tīrthasthāna, thresholds, fords for crossing over. "Crossing over" is an apt description of how the objects and rituals of these spaces connect the mundane to divine, the inner to the outer. We can also understand this as the place of connection between the inner self (ātman) and the outer, greater self (paramātman). In Hindu temples, the main shrine (vimāna) represents the form of God, the macrocosm, and the human in the temple precinct, the microcosm. When a devotee worships at the temple, union between the devotee and deity takes place. This union connects the inner and outer spaces of ātman and paramātman, respectively, which is extremely important in Hinduism and useful in looking at Buddhist and Sikh spaces as well.

Temples became prominent in the religious landscape of India with the emergence of the bhakti devotional tradition during the medieval period. The bhakti mārga, or bhakti yoga, emphasizes binding oneself to the path of devotion by surrendering at God's feet, ārāṇāgātī, and receiving God's grace. In these devotional traditions, the three main Hindu deities—Śiva, Viṣṇu, and Devī—each have many forms and names. For devotees of each deity, the respective deity remains supreme as they conceive of its transcendence and immanence. Such devotional attitude abounds in a devotee as one embarks on a pilgrimage trip to these spaces of worship in India and beyond.

"Sacred Spaces and Objects," captures these inner-outer connections and the sacredness of such spaces in photographs taken during fieldwork in January 2014 in Varanasi and Bodhgaya in North India where Buddha received his enlightenment, in February 2014 in Taṉjāvūr and Kāñci puram in South India where the devotional traditions of Hinduism emerged between the fourth and ninth centuries, and at a local temple in Crown Point, Indiana. The exhibit discusses both architecture and the objects used for pūjā, the act of worship in Hinduism. These photographs and objects provide viewers with a glimpse of the lived world of those functioning in these spaces and using these objects, and they connect the viewer with the photographs and the objects.

This exhibition highlights the expressive character of tangible sacred spaces and objects, illustrating how devotion is embodied in these traditions. This rich material culture is essential to the practice and heritage of South Asian religions. More importantly, it gives us a glimpse into the lived experiences of those practicing these traditions and encourages us to explore the world of meanings of the "other" represented by these spaces and objects of South Asian religious traditions, and to engage with the "other" with respect.
Page 58, top left: Brhadisvara Temple, Main Sanctuary Tower. The fifteen-story sanctuary tower rises to a height of sixty-one meters and rests on a high square plinth.

Page 59, right: Śrī Ekāmbaranāthar Temple with its nine-story high gopuram testifies to love with Śiva.

Page 59, below: Śrī Ekāmbaranāthar Temple, Āyiram Kāl Maṇḍapam, hallway with thousand pillars.

Back cover, upper left: Kailāsanātha Temple, inside courtyard wall with fifty-three small shrines.

Back cover, lower left: Kailāsanātha Temple, Śiva Natarājā, the cosmic dancer embodying and manifesting energy.

Back cover, upper right: Brhadēśvara Temple, Keralantaka Gopuram, or gateway that leads to the main shrine where Śiva resides.

Back cover, lower center: Brhadiśvara Temple, plate with Buddha’s image reflecting the presence of Buddhism in the South before Hindu devotional traditions became popular.

Back cover, lower right: Brhadiśvara Temple, Liṅgam and Yoni, representing Śiva as having both the masculine and feminine generative power.