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Cyrus Running was an acclaimed regionalist artist and educator who studied under Grant Wood at the University of Iowa. He was accomplished in a wide variety of media and artistic formats, from murals and architectural projects to book illustrations and fine prints of various kinds. Running was the head of the art department at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota for more than thirty years. He exhibited widely during his lifetime, and his work is in many public and private collections, including Concordia College and Luther College in Decorah, Iowa.

This drawing by Running was a gift to the Brauer Museum from Sara Danger, Running’s granddaughter and Associate Professor of English at Valparaiso University.

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Announcing the Sixth Biennial

Lilly Fellows Program
Book Award

The Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts invites nominations for the Lilly Fellows Program Book Award.

The biennial Lilly Fellows Program Book Award honors an original and imaginative work from any academic discipline that best exemplifies the central ideas and principles animating the Lilly Fellows Program. These include faith and learning in the Christian intellectual tradition, the vocation of teaching and scholarship, and the history, theory or practice of the university as the site of religious inquiry and culture.

Works under consideration should address the historical or contemporary relation of Christian intellectual life and scholarship to the practice of teaching as a Christian vocation or to the past, present, and future of higher education.

Single authored books or edited collections in any discipline, published in 2011 to 2014, are eligible.

A Prize of $3000 will be awarded at the Lilly Fellows Program national Conference at the Belmont University, October 9-11, 2015.

The committee will receive nominations of academic faculty, clergy, and others. Authors or editors cannot nominate their own works.

Nomination deadline is March 1, 2015

For nomination procedures and further information, please visit:
http://lillyfellows.org/GrantsPrizes/LFPBookAward.aspx

The Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts

The Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts, established in 1991, seeks to strengthen the quality and shape the character of church-related institutions of higher.

First, it offers graduate and residential postdoctoral teaching fellowships for young scholars who wish to renew their sense of vocation within a Christian community of learning in order to prepare themselves for positions of educational leadership within church-related institutions.

Second, it maintains a collaborative National Network of Church-Related Colleges and Universities that sponsors a variety of activities and publications designed to explore the Christian character of the academic vocation and to strengthen the religious nature of church-related institutions. The National Network represents a diversity of denominational traditions, institutional types, and geographical locations.

The Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts is based in Christ College, the interdisciplinary honors college of Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, Indiana.

For more information, please consult the Lilly Fellows Program website at
www.lillyfellows.org
IN LUCE TUA

In Thy Light

Making Time for Advent

There are two seasons that occur at the same time, the liturgical season called Advent and the secular season called the Holidays. Advent falls during the darkest days of the year, when the earth is barren and we await the birth of a child who will bring eternal light to the world. It is a time to prepare for what is coming, to purify ourselves through fasting and meditation. The Holidays arrive at the same time of year, in the same darkness and cold. In this season, we are also preparing ourselves, but it is a frantic, anxious kind of preparation for feasts and indulgence. In Advent, we wait for the coming light in quiet contemplation; during the Holidays, we string up our own lights and fill the air with noise and song.

Every year I am troubled by this tension. We can’t—and shouldn’t—ignore the Holiday season; there is much good in it. During the Holidays, we come together with family and friends; it is a time of great joy and love. But in the midst of the festivities, Advent so often gets lost. It is too easy to forget about it, to fail to take the measure of our own lives, to find moments of silence when we can be open to God’s presence.

Recently, I’ve been reading about the lectio divina, a Benedictine method of scripture reading. It is very different from how we usually read or hear biblical texts, or any texts for that matter. In the lectio, you don’t read to learn a story or to analyze a text; you read slowly, focusing on one short passage at a time. In Amazing Grace (Riverbend, 1998), poet and Benedictine oblate Kathleen Norris describes lectio divina as “a type of free-form, serious play” (277–78). In the lectio, we read and re-read as we meditate, allowing the words to speak to us in surprising ways; we pray and contemplate as God speaks and becomes present to us through his living word. This is a wonderful practice to take up during Advent. The lectio asks us to be quiet and still, to be patient with God’s word, allowing its meaning to come to us. If even in the midst of all the Holiday frenzy, we set aside a small part of every day for these kinds of devotions, we can prepare ourselves for the coming of a light that will shine into the darkness of the world.

In this issue, Nathaniel Lee Hansen recommends a source of material for this kind of reading, Sarah Arthur’s Light upon Light, a collection of poems, fiction, and suggested scripture readings selected especially for Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany. And in “Wide-Eyed and Wilde,” Joel Kurz suggests reading the fairytales of Oscar Wilde as a way to be reminded of basic Christian ideals of humility, selflessness, and sacrificial love.

Reading need not always be a solitary practice. Norris describes the silence of lectio divina as “a good, healthy, open silence, a freeing silence that might lead a person anywhere” (282). The silence of lectio is a leading silence that frees us from our expectations about what the Scriptures should mean; it leads us to see ourselves and those around us—those we love—in a new light. In “Campus Conversations about Sexuality and the Church,” Martha Greene Eads describes another approach to reading, one that has helped a community engage in respectful discussion about painful, divisive issues. After controversy emerged over a Christian university’s employment practices toward gay and lesbian persons, members of the university community began a semester-long initiative to read and discuss accounts of gay Christians who have struggled to find their places in the Church. They could not know where this project might lead them, whether it would help resolve the matter or exacerbate divisions, but they agreed to read and talk and learn together.

So in this busy season take time to read, to learn, to be surprised. When the Holiday season makes us anxious and busy, like Martha distracted by her many tasks, we must remember, like Mary who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened, to let our restless hearts be led to the rest that is found only in the God of peace, whose Advent we await.

—JPO
As the percentage of US jurisdictions that legally recognize same-sex relationships passes the halfway mark, many Christian congregations and ministries are launching or renewing conversations about whether and how to include partnered gays and lesbians (Capeheart, 2014). Administrators at church-related colleges and universities attend closely to such conversations. Among the signers of the June 25, 2014, letter appealing to President Obama for religious exemptions to the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) were the president emeritus and interim president of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) and key administrators at many church-related institutions, including Bethel, Biola, Calvin, Dordt, Eastern, Geneva, Gordon, Houghton, John Brown, Northwest Nazarene, Nyack, and Tabor. According to The Advocate, the letter’s signers want their organizations to be able to “ignore the LGBT nondiscrimination order” and seek assurance that “it [would be] impossible for those LGBT people employed by religious organizations who believe they have experienced discrimination in the workplace on account of their sexual orientation or gender identity to file a formal complaint or seek damages” (Brydum, 2014). Within days of the letter’s being made public, at least one college president who signed it issued a statement responding to criticism from members of his campus community. “My sole intention in signing the letter,” wrote D. Michael Lindsay of Gordon in a July 2014 news release, “was to affirm the College’s support of the underlying issue of religious liberty, including the right of faith-based institutions to set and adhere to standards which derive from our shared framework of faith, and which we have all chosen to embrace as members of the Gordon community.” Lindsay’s decisions to sign and then to explain signaled that people on his campus hold varying opinions in the debate about LGBT inclusion.

A range of opinion on the issue certainly exists at Eastern Mennonite University, where I teach English. Just four days before the group letter went to President Obama, EMU’s board of trustees issued its own statement emerging from a semester-long listening process regarding university employment practices. In response, at least in part, to student demands for a hiring policy change, the trustees had charged the president’s cabinet in November 2013 with initiating a six-month period of discussion about whether to hire gay and lesbian job applicants in covenant ed same-sex relationships, defined in a public statement on the university’s web site as “monogamous relationships pledged for life and recognized by civil and/or religious authorities” (www.emu.edu/listen). The statement also acknowledged that “[t]he Mennonite Church USA, and virtually all denominations, has [sic] been struggling with these questions for many years. We are sharply divided in our opinions. While we are entering a more formal process to gather feedback from EMU stakeholders, the fact is that we have been listening for many years. We acknowledge that we will not come to consensus internally or externally at the end of a six month listening process... The president has frequently said, ‘As a church college we will debate every issue the church is, or should be, debating.’” During the listening process, university leaders suspended
the hiring policy that barred employing partnered gays and lesbians.

Few EMU stakeholders objected to having a debate about the issue, but a number objected to having a debate that appeared to be based on stakeholder feedback. Some questioned the usefulness of gathering electronic survey results and notes from the spring semester’s listening process-facilitated discussions. Why, they asked, is the debate not focusing primarily on biblical teaching? After all, the EMU community lifestyle commitment states that “[w]e are committed to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and believe that the scriptures establish the basic principles that should guide our life together.” Authors of the listening process document anticipated this question, explaining, “Scriptural and theological study are ongoing disciplines at EMU. During this listening process, it is not our desire to enter into theological debate when some of the most respected theologians and church leaders do not agree on interpretation. Rather, it is our desire to focus on relationships and prayer in a way that reflects the life and love of Christ in the midst of deeply held beliefs and values.” This focus was evident in a series of facilitated discussions in which individuals briefly summarized their own and listened to others’ perspectives, as well as in formal and informal prayer meetings, several of which students initiated and led.

Now that our formal listening process is over, some on campus wonder if we have missed an opportunity to demonstrate for our students a model of engagement in respectful yet rigorous intellectual debate. Before the listening process began, our campus chaplains had scheduled a visit by a theologian who writes about embodiment, but illness forced her to postpone her visit. (She rescheduled to speak at four campus and community events in September 2014.) A brave pair of faculty members who held opposing views about the proposed hiring policy change did tackle the topic in an interdisciplinary senior seminar on identity, but two of our university theologians, Ted Grimsrud and Mark Thiessen Nation, who in 2006 proved their ability to disagree civilly in a series of campus presentations and an ensuing book, Reasoning Together: A Conversation on Homosexuality (2008), reported having had no invitations to share their work in the listening process. Clearly, some listening process organizers worried that extended, campus-wide discussion of biblical texts about the subject would lead to irreparable breaches of relationship, and perhaps it would have. Nevertheless, student requests for academic dialogue finally prompted a presentation to be held two weeks before classes ended in April by a Bible and religion professor on L. R. Holben’s What Christians Think About Homosexuality: Six Representative Viewpoints (1999).

In this new academic year, however, several EMU faculty and staff members hope to cultivate a deeper and more comprehensive academic engagement than we have had thus far, while still providing participants with a measure of emotional distance. To that end, we have planned a semester-long series of interdisciplinary conversations about books by Christian insiders to the LGBT-inclusion debate. Reflecting together on the perspectives of people from beyond our campus might enable us to engage our critical faculties in a way that we would not dare to if our conversations were based on our own personal accounts, and the writers’ various approaches and authorial stances will provide fresh content for several lines of inquiry within a set of academic disciplines.

While a university community would need more than a semester to read all the recent publications on homosexuality and the Church, Jeff Chu’s Does Jesus Really Love Me?: A Gay Christian’s Pilgrimage in Search of God in America, Wesley Hill’s Washed and Waiting, and Matthew Vines’s God and the Gay Christian offer a fascinating range of perspectives on LGBT inclusion in the Church. Many college students, regardless of their sexual orientation, will relate to the books’ authors, each of whom is a bright, young (or young-ish), gay Christian. Seeing that three young men who grew up in fairly similar Christian circles can come to such different conclusions may help the EMU community understand better how our own convictions vary so widely, and each of these writers is likely to help readers who don’t share his conclusions understand better why others might. A fourth book we have deemed worthy of inclusion in our book study series is Rosaria Champagne Butterfield’s The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor’s Journey into
Christian Faith. Faculty and staff members may identify more easily than students will with this middle-aged writer, but her life journey as a lesbian atheist drawn into the Church (rather than wondering, like Chu, Hill, and Vines, how the churches in which they had grown up could be capacious enough to include gay people) helps to illustrate the diversity of desire and experience among Christians who experience same-sex attraction.

Faculty members in sociology and US history will find rich material to explore with students in Does Jesus Really Love Me?, in which Jeff Chu offers plenty of evidence that no Christian campus or denomination is unique in trying to juggle the apparently competing commitments that Scripture and individual stories invite. In his discussion of the Evangelical Covenant Church, North Park University’s sponsoring denomination, Chu quotes Rebekah Eklund, a former member of the denomination’s executive board: “[The two sides] ‘are almost having different conversations. The conservative side wants to talk about the Bible. The other side is sharing stories. You can tell stories all day long, and they’re wonderful and they’re valuable, but for people who think the Bible says no to this issue, it’s not going to change anything’” (195). Like EMU’s listening process, Chu’s discussion of the ECC focuses on personal stories, including those of the gay ECC missionary who established a blog entitled “Coming Out Covenant,” a lesbian who legally married her partner of thirty-eight years in 2005, and a gay teen whose pastor-mom feared for some time that his coming out would result in her being fired. In a denomination that requires its homosexual clergy to remain celibate, ECC leaders (according to Chu) have worked to sustain conversation about the issue. Even those he inter-viewed who hold conservative views of marriage remain open to dialogue.

Although he grants considerably more space to presenting the perspectives of gay marriage advocates than of those who challenge gay Christians to pursue celibacy, Chu nevertheless presents the latter as fair-minded and even likable. This charitable approach is one of Does Jesus Really Love Me?’s strengths and maximizes its appeal to a wide range of Christian readers from very different kinds of communities. For example, as a Princeton-, London School of Economics-, and Harvard-educated contributor to such publications as Conde Nast Portfolio, the Wall Street Journal, and Fast Company, Chu is a partnered gay Brooklynite who might be expected to have little interest in, much less appreciation for, small-town religious life. Impressively, though, whether he is writing about administrators at the Church of Christ’s Harding University in Searcy, Arizona; proponents of Exodus International and similar reorientation ministries in Orlando, Florida, Irvine, California, and Kirkland, Washington; or even members of Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas, Chu communicates respect. I concluded his chapter on Westboro feeling as if I finally had some sense of how that group landed where they are. Expressing surprise that no one during his four-day visit to their community rebuked him about his non-membership in their church, much less his sexuality, Chu recounts that one of his hosts simply asked, “You’re searching for something, aren’t you?... Well, I really hope you find what you’re looking for.” Chu continues, “Steve says this so sweetly that, for as many seconds as it takes for the words to form in my mind, I think, What if they’re right? Maybe they’re right! Damn! But just as quickly, I know this in my heart: Their god
is not my god, and their faith is not my faith, and there can be no middle ground” (71).

As this excerpt illustrates, Chu’s writing is intensely personal. Such emotional immediacy in a sociological, investigative work makes the book a page-turner. Somehow, writing as confessionally as he does, Chu also manages to avoid the prurient. He describes his year-long journey across the United States as a pilgrimage, opening the book as well as each of its sections with an epigraph from Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress. Introducing himself as “no theologian, no crusader, just a regular guy trying to hang on to something resembling the faith I grew up with;” Chu goes on to weave brief first-person accounts by and email exchanges with his interview subjects into the story of his travels (7).

The great-grandson of a missionary to Hong Kong, Chu grew up in a Southern Baptist family, which has equipped him especially well to write his book’s first chapter, focusing on an employment controversy at Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee, headquarters of the Southern Baptist Convention. Calling Nashville “the capital of Christian America,” Chu describes interviews with five of its residents, ranging from Lisa Howe, the soccer coach dismissed from Belmont after announcing that her partner was pregnant, to Richard Land, the former head of the SEC’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission. In addition to interrogating his own point of view, Chu perceptively identifies the central irony in the approach of Baptists such as Land: their high level of engagement in secular politics seems incongruent with the historical insistence upon the separation of Church and state.

Chu’s generosity of spirit flags slightly when he writes about his own family and the people associated with his Reformed high school in Miami, Florida. Sounding at least slightly derisive, he reports that his “Bible-teacher grandma stirred up some old-fashioned Baptist revival in her warbly soprano and hailstorm of hallelujahs” and that his “taciturn father” could only explain Chu’s mother’s grief over Chu’s homosexuality by saying “[w]e’re not just Christian. We’re Baptist” (1, 16). He recounts that decision-makers at Miami’s Westminster Christian School not only fired Chu’s married Bible teacher for having a gay relationship but also assigned students such artistically questionable novels as This Present Darkness and signaled consistently that “a Westminster Warrior’s chief means of glorifying God was winning baseball games” (3). Recounting the assembly at which his “perpetually ill-at-ease principal” announced the teacher’s dismissal, Chu writes, “At the mention of the word homosexual, I knew the truth. Even if I didn’t have the words to define it then, I knew I had feelings like Mr. Byers’s. And this was the lesson that I learned: Nobody could ever, ever find out, because if they did, I would be damned and cast out, just as he was” (4).

Although he does not state explicitly that he blames his parents and school leaders for creating the conditions for his own psychological suffering, Chu makes clear that they were the ones without “words to define” homosexual desire and its implications. Their inability to articulate a vision of the life a gay Christian might hope to live left him painfully ill-equipped as an adolescent to make sense of his experience in the context of a Christian community. As an adult, Chu obviously has familiarized himself with all sides of the issue, but he has done so as a relative outsider to the Church. That disjunction—between his profession of faith and his low level of investment in a congregation—left me wanting more from his otherwise satisfying book. His decision to spend a year interviewing folks across the country makes for fascinating reading, but a strategy of planting himself in one congregation for fifty-two Sundays—as well as for mid-week Bible studies, potlucks, weddings, and funerals—would yield at least as fascinating a sequel. Confessing in his introduction that “it’s a good Sunday when I manage to get myself into a church pew,” Chu says he longs to “go off into my own little corner of the world and figure it out on my own and with my God” (6).

Three hundred and thirty-nine pages later, he concludes that his year-long pilgrimage has shown him the importance of “distinguishing between the church and the God that it purports to represent” (345). While he acknowledges that one individual’s view of God is limited and he expresses a commitment to the Christian community (apart, somehow, from the
“bureaucratic, extra-biblical bullshit that we sometimes mistake for church”), he nevertheless holds to a highly personal understanding of God: “My God isn’t simply the God I believe in but the God I want to believe in and need to believe in. A God of unimaginable grace, a God of patience, a God of justice, a God of unconditional love, a God whose wisdom and mercy are incomprehensible to our feeble minds” (347). Pledging to continue his quest to know this God better, Chu declares (defiantly or poignantly?), “[I]f therefore I am one day damned to hell, all I can say is that have tried my best” (348). In “try[ing] his best” to work out his salvation in relative isolation, Chu risks placing his trust in and subsequently advancing a Gospel emerging more from his own longings than from the collective witness of a discerning, Spirit-led community. Discussing his book with college students could pave the way for subsequent conversations about applied ecclesiology.

While they probably will appreciate Chu’s book, faculty in theology departments will surely find Wesley Hill’s Washed and Waiting, a slightly older book, an even better candidate for inclusion on their course reading lists. A thinner volume at 160 pages, including notes, Washed and Waiting nevertheless plumbs the ecclesiological and pneumatological depths Does Jesus Really Love Me? skirts. Making no effort to offer the kind of sociological overview Chu’s book provides as a context for his personal reflections, Washed and Waiting is a more conventional memoir. Its mood is different, too; while Chu’s blend of confessionalism and journalistic breeziness takes readers on an emotional roller coaster ride, Hill, writing as a New Testament doctoral candidate at England’s Durham University, maintains a more sober tone as he points to the hope he has found through suffering. The two writers’ discussions of anxiety around their same-sex desire illustrate this point. Chu writes:

Land and, to a lesser degree, [Pete] Shelley, discuss homosexuality—and homosexuals—in a cold, clinical, almost dehumanizing way. They tell me that human identity is about more than sexuality. Ideally, they say, it should be found entirely in Christ. But from there they reduce gays and lesbians to godless, sexualized objects, as if because of homosexuality, full personhood is forfeited. What’s left are just vessels of depravity.

This is what I hear them say, and I know this is as much about my ears as it is about their lips. This is what I hear them say. And it’s complicated, because I have my own context for hearing their words. To hear them is to hear my parents’ disapproval. To hear them is to hear the disdain of friends and relatives who are too timid to say what they really think about my sexuality, except when I’m not around. To hear them is to hear the echoes of my own fears of damnation. (23–24)

Hill also writes about the “depravity” associated with homosexuality:

For me and other gay people, even when we’re not willfully cultivating desire, we know that when attraction does come…. It will be attraction to someone of the same sex. And in those moments, it feels as if there is no desire that isn’t lust, no attraction that isn’t illicit…. For many homosexual Christians, this kind of shame is part of our daily lives. Theologian Robert Jenson calls homoerotic attraction a “grievous affliction” for those who experience it, and part of the grief is in the feeling that we are perpetually, hopelessly unsatisfying to God. (136–7)

Each excerpt is a downer, no doubt, but not in the same way. Chu moves from his perceptions of others’ disapproval and his own fear to situate his hope for life as a partnered gay Christian in the understanding of a God tailored to his want and his need. Hill finds solace and even inspiration as a celibate gay Christian in the God he glimpses through accountability relationships within his congregation and in the writings of other Christians who uphold what he calls “the truth of the position the Christian church has held with almost
total unanimity through the centuries—namely, that homosexuality was not God's original creative intention for humanity" (14). Drawing from the writings and biographies of Roman Catholic role models Henri Nouwen and Gerard Manley Hopkins, he also looks for wisdom to the Apostle Paul; Thomas Hopko, an Orthodox priest; and the scholar-novelists J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, a Roman Catholic and an Anglican, respectively.

An Anglican himself, Hill offers an account of the ways in which his participation in the fellowship of the saints awakened and deepened his understanding of the Holy Spirit's capacity to work in him. A wise and loving friend directed him to Lewis's essay "The Weight of Glory," which helped him recognize the New Testament's promises of God's delight in those who yield to the Spirit's transforming power. Having written movingly about his fear of his same-sex desire's preventing him from ever pleasing God, he then describes his shift toward profound hope:

My homosexuality, my exclusive attraction to other men, my grief over it and my repentance, my halting effort to live fittingly in the grace of Christ and the power of the Spirit—gradually I am learning not to view all of these things as confirmations of my rank corruption and hypocrisy. I am instead, slowly but surely, learning to view that journey—of struggle, failure, repentance, restoration, renewal in joy, and persevering, agonized obedience—as what it looks like for the Holy Spirit to be transforming me on the basis of Christ's cross and his Easter morning triumph over death.... I am learning to see that my flawed, imperfect, yet never-giving-up faithfulness is precisely the spiritual fruit that God will praise me for on the last day, to the ultimate honor of Jesus Christ.... I can still endure—I can keep on fighting to live faithfully as a believer bearing my broken sexuality—so long as I have the assurance that my life matters to God, that, wonder of all wonders, my faith pleases him, that somehow it makes him smile. (145–147)

In so writing, Hill offers both challenge and encouragement to all Christians who want to live faithfully, regardless of sexual orientation. Although he indicates in his introduction that his intended readers are gay Christians pursuing celibacy and those who care about them, he reveals his hope that other readers will benefit from "overhear[ing]" his discussion, especially those who have "struggle[d] long and hard with persistent, unwanted desires... chemical dependencies, eating disorders, mental and emotional disturbances of various kinds.... The Christian's struggle with homosexuality is unique in many ways but not completely so. The dynamics of human sinfulness and divine mercy and grace are the same for all of us, regardless of the temptations we face" (19). As I read his book, I found myself first wanting to recommend it to single gay friends, then to single heterosexual friends, and finally to married friends too. Struggles with loneliness, compromised integrity, disappointment, and unfulfilled purpose are universal, and Hill's honest treatment of these elements of his biography thus far would likely resonate with nearly every Christian reader. Even those who disagree with his conclusions will surely sympathize with him in his struggle and admire his eloquence.

Chu does. In one of Does Jesus Really Love Me?'s most poignant chapters, he praises Washed and Waiting as a "personal and detailed story from a Christian man, ... [an] articulate expositor of an
argument [most evangelicals] will find attractive" (149). In the same way that I want to read the sequel Chu might write after spending a year involved in a church, however, Chu wants to read a book by Hill called Washed and Still Waiting [emphasis mine] thirty years from now. Wondering if a gay person can really remain celibate for decades as Hill aspires to, Chu traveled to Minnesota for a three-day interview with Kevin Olson, a fifty-seven year-old celibate gay Christian. Upon his return home, Chu pulled out his copy of Washed and Waiting to reflect on a key passage: "In the solitude of our celibacy, God's desiring us, God's wanting us, is enough. The love of God is more valuable than any human relationship. And still we ache. The desire of God is sufficient to heal the ache, but still we pine, and wonder" (quoted in Chu 161). Chu describes his response upon re-reading the passage: "Maybe my desire for God is too small. Maybe I chose the easier road. But that first night back at home, I said a prayer for Kevin, I gave my boyfriend an extra kiss, and I said a prayer for him, too" (161). Clearly, Hill's perspective resonates with Chu in some significant way, and Chu's willingness to take Washed and Waiting seriously would provide participants in a campus book study series with a remarkable model of appreciative inquiry.

Matthew Vines, another young gay Christian writing out of personal experience, has also read Washed and Waiting. In one of the copious endnotes to his God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Marriage, Vines briefly describes Hill's book as "helpful for understanding same-sex orientation (although I disagree with the author's theological stance)" (186). Unlike Hill and Chu, who respectfully acknowledge the perspectives of both partnered gay Christians and formerly-gay Christians who report having had their homosexual desires reversed, Vines writes primarily to convince readers that both hopes for sexual reorientation and the expectation of celibacy for gays and lesbians are destructive. His clear sense of purpose makes his book a fascinating case study for writing and rhetoric courses, and a faculty member with expertise in rhetorical analysis will find much to discuss in it.

Vines begins by announcing that he is writing for Evangelical Christian readers, stating on page two that he holds "a 'high view' of the Bible. That means I believe all of Scripture is inspired by God and authoritative for my life" (2). He devotes much of the rest of the book, however, to explaining how the biblical writers—as well the writers of other influential pre-twentieth-century Christian texts—could not address the topic of gay marriage because they were simply incapable of conceiving of the kind of committed same-sex partnership to which Vines himself aspires. "In societies that viewed women as inferior," he explains, "sexual relationships between equal-status partners could not be acceptable. Same-sex unions in particular disrupted a social order that required a strict hierarchy between the sexes" (109). In other words, Vines explains, the "passive" male in an ancient-world same-sex relationship would have suffered humiliation in carrying out a function suited for females. Examining Judeo-Christian proscriptions against gay and lesbian sexual practices, Vines explains that a misogynistic outlook subsequently trumped by Christ's teachings was to blame (93). Moreover, he argues, even those in the Greco-Roman world who tolerated such practices often viewed them as overindulgence by people who were unwilling to limit their sexual experience to opposite-sex partners. "In Paul's day," Vines writes, "same-sex relations were a potent symbol of sexual excess... The context in which Paul discussed same-sex relations differs so much from our own that it can't reasonably be called the same issue. Same-sex behavior condemned as excess doesn't translate to homosexuality condemned as orientation—or as a loving expression of that orientation" (106). Only in the past century, he asserts, have people come to recognize that "same-sex orientation is both fixed and unchosen" (134).

Such claims need significantly more support. Thomas K. Hubbard argues persuasively in Homosexuality in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook of Basic Documents (2003) that same-sex relationships did not necessarily involve the kind of active-passive dynamic that Vine says would have been humiliating to one partner in ancient cultures. He challenges the widely held perception that sex between Greek males
conformed to an age-differential model with the older partner as active wooer and the younger as the passive object, [making] boys, as passive ‘victims’ of penetration (considered isomorphic to exploitation)... parallel to women, slaves, and foreigners as instrumental foils to the adult citizen males who wielded the political franchise and thereby the right to phallic supremacy. However, one finds little support for this interpretation in the textual evidence.... Even in master-slave relations, the dynamic was not necessarily one of unchecked power to dominate. (10, 13)

Moreover, Hubbard argues that “[c]lose examination of a range of ancient texts suggests... that some forms of sexual preference were, in fact, considered a distinguishing characteristic of individuals. Many texts even see such preferences as inborn qualities and thus ‘essential’ aspects of human identity” (2). While Vines does draw from several of the texts Hubbard has studied, he does so in a highly selective fashion.

Similarly, Vines cites Bernadette J. Brooten's Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism (1996) to make his case without mentioning her challenge to Michel Foucault's well-known assertion about homosexuality's only having been a concept for roughly the past one hundred years. Brooten writes, “I present [ancient] non-Christian material... for a category of persons viewed in antiquity as having a long-term or even lifelong homoerotic orientation. A number of ancient sources that mention female and male homoeroticism together provide further evidence that people in the Roman Empire worked with a concept of homoeroticism that encompassed both women and men.” Citing Clement of Alexandria, Brooten suggests that early Christians “probably played a crucial role in the development of the concept of homosexuality” (9).

A close look at Brooten’s and Hubbard’s scholarly work next to Vines’s suggests that he has cherry-picked from among sources that they consider with far more complexity.

Furthermore, Vines’s engagement with the Christian objection to homosexual practice based in arguments about male and female physical complementarity is superficial. He does quote from the work of Robert A. J. Gagnon, perhaps the most influential Christian scholar to argue against gay marriage on the basis of complementarity, but he does not engage with Gagnon’s work on Romans at a deep level, dismissing it by concluding, “Gagnon contends that the core problem is the violation of anatomical complementarity, but his argument is highly speculative” (111). He draws support for this dismissal from James Brownson, whose Bible, Gender, Sexuality (2013) appears to have inspired Vines to write his own book. At times, God and the Gay Christian comes across primarily as re-packaging for lay readers of Brownson’s somewhat more academic writings.

Vines’s book, in short, gives (most notably in the form of thirty-three pages of endnotes) the impression of having summarized thoroughly serious biblical, cultural, and theological scholarship for earnest Christians who seek wisdom on this subject but lack the training, confidence, and/or time to engage in academic research for themselves. His book’s tone is invitational, even chatty, as he asks, “Whoever you are, and whatever experiences or doubts you bring to this discussion, will you walk with me as I share the evidence that changed my dad’s mind?” (20). A few pages later, he writes, “In this chapter, we ask a different question: Does new information we have about homosexuality also warrant a reinterpretation of Scripture? As a starting
point, let's review the traditional interpretation of the Bible's verses about same sex behavior... First, I want to define the terms I'll be using throughout this book” (24). Still later, after quoting a passage from Ephesians, Vines asks, “Do you see what this passage is saying? It's taking the marriage language of 'one flesh' from Genesis 2:24 and pointing us beyond our original understanding of it” (135). In a campus-wide conversation about this book, a writing teacher would likely relish the opportunity to help students understand why some readers will find Vines's conversational approach winsome, even comforting, while others will find it patronizing.

Equally rich material for rhetorical analysis are Vines's frequent use of emotionally charged anecdotes. Interspersed with his interpretations of various biblical and theological texts are Vines's accounts of gay people who have suffered as a result of traditional Christian teachings on homosexuality. Arguing for the fixity of same-sex attraction, he quotes from his friend Stephen Long's blog and asks, “[H]ow... could God want that degree of emotional torment for anyone?” (30). Forty pages later, he writes about the man Stephen loved, whose “struggle had become so intense, so dark, so futile, and so dangerous that he had finally given up” (50). Further on, he writes, “Let me share the story of Rob and Linda Robertson, a Christian couple from Seattle I've come to know. Their story is heart wrenching [sic], but their actions and attitudes as parents demonstrated deep, unconditional love” (157). Their gay son Ryan, he recounts, sought relief from sexual guilt in illegal drugs and eventually died of an overdose. “[T]heir non-affirming understanding of homosexuality ultimate led Ryan to a place of despair and tragic self-harm,” he charges. Acknowledging that many Christian teachings are difficult to follow, Vines nevertheless concludes that “no other teaching that Christians widely continue to embrace has caused anything like the torment, destruction, and alienation from God that the church's rejection of same-sex relationships has caused.” In denying marriage to gay Christians who have not experienced a clear call to the celibate life, he continues, “we separate them from our covenantal God, and we tarnish their ability to bear his image” (158). He reiterates and expands on this claim:

By branding same-sex orientation broken, we are wrongly rejecting a good part of God's creation. And with awful consequences, we are tarnishing the image of God in Ryan Robertson and so many others like him.

Instead of making gay Christians more like God, as turning from genuine sin would do, embracing a non-affirming position makes them less like God. So it isn't gay Christians who are sinning against God by entering into monogamous, loving relationships. It is the church that is sinning against them by rejecting their intimate relationships.

But if the church were to bless committed same-sex unions for gay Christians, we would advance God's sanctifying purposes for their lives. Until then, we are distorting the image of God, not only in the lives of gay Christians, but in the church as a whole. (162)

Undoubtedly, as Chu and Hill have demonstrated in less melodramatic accounts, the institutional Church and many individual Christians have created hostile situations in which people who experience same-sex attraction have suffered. Vines's rhetorical approach, though, is so obviously manipulative that his *pathos* hamstrings his *logos*.

Wrapping up his book, Vines announces in its final chapter that he considers himself to be planting “seeds of a modern reformation” (162). Having left his undergraduate studies at Harvard to research the Bible and homosexuality, he established an organization called The Reformation Project in 2013 to “identify and empower Christians who are committed to making their churches affirming places for LGBT people” (172). He invites readers to embrace his mission, summarizing the stories of three others who share his commitment and issuing a multi-pronged challenge to share progressive views publicly, advocate among pastors and church leaders, and establish congregational support groups. He urges LGBT readers to come out and urges all to “take some risks... That kind of sacrifice isn't easy or convenient. But God's image will be tarnished until LGBT believers are welcomed as
a full, thriving part of the body of Christ. As you seek to follow in Jesus’s footsteps, I hope you will ask yourself: What am I willing to sacrifice for my LGBT friends?” (177).

Vines’s sudden shift in the book’s last chapter from supporting same-sex marriage to affirming comprehensively a full range of LGBT identities and practices seems abrupt. Earlier, he argues for the fixity of same-sex attraction, suggesting that ancient thinkers’ incapacity to conceive of such a thing prevented early Christian leaders from developing constructive teaching on same-sex marriage. (Again, he has overlooked one of Bernadette J. Brooten’s points; she argues, “Whereas we often dualistically define sexual orientation as either homosexual or heterosexual, [ancient Greeks and Romans] saw a plethora of orientations. (When we in the late twentieth century think about it, we also recognize bisexuals and transsexuals, leading us to speak of a spectrum rather than a bifurcation” [3]).

Moving from bifurcation to spectrum himself, Vines has made no attempt to present a theological framework for evaluating bisexual practices or for responding in a distinctively Christian way to those who identify as transsexual. Pulling up two more chairs to the table of “inclusion” just seems the hospitable thing to do, so Vines does it.

Although God and the Gay Christian’s highly selective treatment of sources and manipulative rhetorical strategies make it a less artistically admirable book than either Does Jesus Really Love Me? or Washed and Waiting, Vines’s contribution to a campus book study series is sure to be as valuable as Chu’s or Hill’s. As the closest in age of these writers to most college students, Vines will strike many as being someone they could know and like. His sense of purpose is compelling, as is his broad mission to extend hospitality to all people, especially sexual minorities. Vines is heading where the wider culture is going; even before my university’s listening process ended, at least one staff member and a number of students were advocating not only a policy change for partnered gays and lesbians but also a comprehensive affirmation of practices across the LGBT spectrum. A discussion of the way in which Vines urges such hospitality might prompt subsequent campus conversation about the physical body’s significance within Christian thought, including the ways in which Gnosticism continues to influence Western views of embodiment.

Rosaria Champagne Butterfield does not address this subject in The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert, but she takes on plenty else. As a Syracuse University faculty member in the 1990s, she taught literature and women’s studies, and faculty in either of those fields will likely find her book worth discussing with students. Perhaps even more interesting would be consideration by a social work professor, since by its conclusion, Secret Thoughts becomes more an indictment of our country’s broken foster care system than a discussion of homosexuality in the Church. Surprisingly, Butterfield makes little effort to explain why she concluded after her Christian conversion that she should abandon her lesbian partnership and her work as a LGBT educator-activist; instead, she focuses on describing her conversion itself, the difficulty of making the life changes she deemed necessary, and the joy-filled rigors of her subsequent and continuing journey as a home-schooling parent and pastor’s wife.

While Chu, Hill, and Vines each offer convincing accounts of having experienced exclusive same-sex attraction since their youth, Butterfield’s experience aligns with the view that human sexuality and identity can be fluid. She recounts having thought of herself before her conversion as “an ‘informed’ lesbian—someone who had had relationships with men and found them wanting and dissatisfying” and who “[found herself] bonding with women over shared hobbies and interest and feminist and leftist political values” (33). Her eventual and apparently happy heterosexual marriage suggests that she has had more viable choices than Chu, Hill, and Vines, but she recounts that breaking up with her partner and abandoning her academic field still caused her considerable anguish:

The Bible told me to repent, but I didn’t feel like repenting. Do you have to feel like repenting in order to repent? Was I a sinner, or was I, in my drag queen friend’s words, sick? How do you repent for a sin that doesn’t feel like a sin? How could the
thing that I had studied and become be
sinful? How could I be tenured in a field
that is sin? How could I and everyone that
I knew and loved be in sin?...

Conversion put me in a complicated
and comprehensive chaos.... Often, peo-
ple asked me to describe the "lessons" I
learned from this experience. I can't. It
was too traumatic. Sometimes in crisis,
we don't really learn lessons. Sometimes
the result is simpler and more profound:
sometimes our
character is sim-
ply transformed.

(21, 27)

The life transfor-
mation Butterfie-
describes in Secret
Thoughts carries her
almost beyond rec-
ognition.

She spills lit-
tle ink, however,
describing the details
of her sexual desire's
transformation, a
remarkable authorial
decision within a social context that increasingly
regards sexual desire and practice as central to
human identity. Critics of Secret Thoughts might
argue that Butterfield was never "truly" lesbian to
begin with, but readers who identify as bisexu-
lar will be better equipped to read her account sympa-
theetically. Ultimately, Butterfield seems to regard
sexual expression as peripheral rather than central
to identity, and she wastes no time in her book crit-
icizing homosexual practice. She simply indicates
that as she studied the Bible and listened to the
preaching of Ken Smith, the Reformed Presbyterian
pastor-friend who led her to faith over a period of
two years, she concluded that her "sexuality
was sinful not because it was lesbian per se but because
it wasn't Christ-controlled. My heterosexual past
was no more sanctified than my homosexual pres-
ent" (33). In a chapter entitled "Repentance
and the Sin of Sodom," she describes reading Ezekiel
16:48–50 and concluding that the sins with which
she needed (and still needs) to contend are "pride,
wealth, entertainment-driven focus, lack of mercy,
lack of modesty" (31). Pointing out that "there is
nothing inherently sexual about any of these sins,"
she goes on to note that "we don't see God making
fun of homosexuality or regarding it as a different,
unusual, or exotic sin. What we see instead is God's
warning: if you indulge the sins of pride, wealth,
entertainment-lust, lack of mercy, and lack of dis-
cretion, you will find yourself deep in sin—and the
type of sin may surprise you" (31).

Undoubtedly,
Butterfield does
ultimately regard
homosexual prac-
tice as a type of sin,
which will offend
many readers who
affirm gay mar-
rriage and even more
extensive inclusion
of sexual minorities
in the Church. She
writes protectively
about her LGBT
friends, however,
while demonstrat-
ing willingness (even
eagerness) to denounce forms of sin that many
Christian congregations appear reluctant to
address. Regarding premarital sex, masturba-
tion, and pornography use, she observes, "What
good Christians don't realize is that sexual sin is
not recreational sin gone overboard. Sexual sin is
predatory. It won't be 'healed' by redeeming the
context or the genders. Sexual sin must simply be
killed. What is left after this annihilation is up to
God" (83). Butterfield argues for a total overhaul
of human identity through conversion, which
includes but is in no way limited to sexual practices.

The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert,
then, more than Washed and Waiting and dramati-
cally more than Does Jesus Really Love Me? and God
and the Gay Christian, is a Christian perspective
on life in general rather than on sexuality in par-
ticular. Butterfield's concerns are broadly social as
well as personal; her final expression of gratitude
in the book's opening acknowledgments is for the
Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America's "historical and bold stand for abolition and for the example of Christ-commanded racial advocacy that this sets for us today," and her final two chapters focus on the mission she and her husband, who have adopted four children of different races and fostered others, have embraced: recovering "the lost art of simply being able to care for children lost in emergencies, from snow days that strand children at home and send parents to work, to domestic abuse or worse. We see this as an investment in community" (xii, 126). Writing at length about Reformed Presbyterian doctrine, Butterfield vividly illustrates in chapters four and five, "The Home Front: Marriage, Ministry, and Adoption" and "Homeschooling and Middle Age," not only our country's urgent need for an improved foster-care system but also adoption's theological significance.

These chapters are the book's best. As an English professor at a church-related institution embroiled in conversations about LGBT inclusion, I found myself disappointed in the obliqueness with which Butterfield discusses the Christian call she perceived to stop living and teaching literature from a lesbian perspective. More discussion of her decision to embrace an extremely traditional gender role as a home-schooling mother would have been welcome, too. (The book's copy-editing oversights annoyed me, as well, but I recognize that Crown and Covenant, Secret Thoughts' publishing house, probably has a smaller staff than many other presses do.) I was surprised and more than satisfied, however, by Butterfield's powerful discussion of the call she believes all Christians should heed to address the systemic injustices that many children face. And although she does not affirm diversity of sexual practices for Christians, her vision of God's Kingdom is nevertheless one in which humans of diverse backgrounds will flourish together. Believing that the Church is where the Kingdom begins, she rebukes Christians who want to worship only with others who resemble them in appearance and outlook, who choose to join congregations

...made up of people who are just like they are, who raise their children using the same childrearing methods, who take the same stance on birth control, schooling, voting, breastfeeding, dress codes, white flour, white sugar, gluten, childhood immunizations, the observance of secular and religious holidays.... We in the church tend to be more fearful of the (perceived) sin in the world than of the sin in our own heart. Why is that?

Here is what I think. I believe that there is no greater enemy to vital life-breathing faith than insisting on cultural sameness. When fear rules your theology, God is nowhere to be found in your paradigm, no matter how many Bible verses you tack on to it. (115)

The root of Butterfield's conviction is easy to trace; if Ken and Floy Smith had feared her presence in their home and subsequently in their congregation, she might have never come to Christian faith.

In writing about Ken Smith, Butterfield marvels at the openness with which he invited her into conversation, an openness that Christian university campuses would do well to cultivate. In response to an opinion piece she published in a local paper, Smith sent Butterfield a two-page letter that "invited me to think in ways I hadn't before" (9). Although many other readers responded—some appreciatively, some angrily—to her article, only Smith invited her to his home for dinner and conversation she describes as "lively and fun" (10). Over the two years of dinners and conversation that followed (in her home as well as in the Smiths'), Butterfield came to recognize "[o]ne thing that made Ken safe as well as dangerous was a point of commonality between us. We are both good teachers. Good teachers make it possible for people to change their positions without shame" (14). Through their willingness to open their lives to one another—and to converse for two years over shared readings—the Smiths and Butterfield risked and experienced real change.

Much of their shared reading, Butterfield recounts, was in the Bible. EMU's listening process documents make clear that we are unlikely to engage in formal, campus-wide Bible study about homosexuality in the Church. The board of trustees' June 21 announcement, though, also indicates

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that conversation around the subject will continue: "Out of respect for EMU's relationship with Mennonite Church USA and its ongoing discernment of human sexuality, we defer action on formally changing EMU's policy on hiring employees in covenanted same-sex relationships. The November 2013 board decision to suspend personnel actions related to the current hiring policy will remain in effect as the discernment process continues" (Cloos, 2014). Although some in the university community wish that a more conclusive, theologically grounded decision could have emerged from the time- and energy-consuming process we underwent last spring, we recognize that the outcome gives us a chance to approach the issue again. Perhaps by reading together these four books by Jeff Chu, Wesley Hill, Matthew Vines, and Rosaria

**Works Cited**


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Champagne Butterfield, we will help “make it possible for people to change their positions without shame” (14). As we assess each book’s contribution to a particular academic discipline, we plan also to ask how each author has used Scripture to make a case. Perhaps other Christian college and university communities will benefit from engaging in similar conversations. Surely, intellectual, interdisciplinary interrogation of texts on a campus is an enterprise worth undertaking. ❖
POSTCARD FROM BONAIRE

Matthew 5

Here lies a coast
with postcard slaves
harvesting postcard
salt in wheelbarrows,
piles of it like mashed
potatoes please
pass the salt.

Rows of slave huts
painted orange to match
the obelisk that
told merchant
ships far off what grade
of salt was here.
You rare and precious

salary,
you centrepiece
unseen in the broth,
in the body oh
the ways of you
in the clearing
where the deer come

to lick. Here
are afternoons
too hot for anything
but on my knees
inside a hut so small and plain
it could be for a dog;
here lies a coast of tears.

Barbara Nickel
Distinguish, Not Divorce
One Christian Exegete’s Take on His Task

George C. Heider

To the honored memory of my parents, George C. Heider, Jr., and Doris H. Heider.

The most famous as well as the most influential professorial lecture in the history of biblical studies was delivered 227 years ago, on March 30, 1787, by Johann Philipp Gabler as his inaugural address for a chair of theology at the University of Altdorf in Germany. He spoke in academic Latin, as befit the times and occasion, under the title “De justo discrimine theologiae biblicae et dogmaticae regundisque recte utriusque finibus,” that is, “An Oration on the Proper Distinction between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology and the Specific Objectives of Each.” As one twentieth-century scholar put it: “If philosophy is a series of footnotes to Plato, then Old Testament theology is a series of very expansive footnotes to Gabler” (Ollenberger, 489).

In a nutshell, Gabler argued that one must draw a clear distinction between the historical study of what the biblical text meant in its day—what he termed biblical theology—and theology as it may be applied and taught in diverse times and places by given theologians—that is, dogmatic theology. Understanding why he sought such a distinction is not hard. Only a century earlier, armies representing differing Christian persuasions had so devastated northern and central Europe in the Thirty Years’ War that many thought the apocalypse truly was now. During the subsequent century, continental biblical scholarship had been driven by dogmatic agendas, attempting to lay the axe once and for all to the root of opponents’ positions. Gabler’s proposal sought to clear a space for a more objective and dispassionate exegesis, or biblical interpretation.

The irony is that it was, in fact, the title of Gabler’s lecture, more than what he actually said, that has secured the place of his address in the history of biblical scholarship. The specifics of Gabler’s proposal were deeply influenced by the German idealism of his era and by his own Protestant (specifically, Lutheran) faith commitments, as, for example, in his focus on the individual theologian at work to the near-exclusion of any corporate voice or tradition of the church. But the idea of a “scientific” biblical scholarship, focused above all on the original meaning of the text, swept the field of biblical studies over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and it continues to enjoy status as the default approach in the preponderance of the academy. For many, Gabler’s perspective achieved what I will call, with deliberate irony, “canonical” expression in Krister Stendahl’s article on biblical theology in the Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible (1962), where he insisted on the necessity of maintaining a clear distinction between “what a text meant” and “what a text means” (1:419–20).

The continuing attraction of Gabler’s distinction is both evident and understandable. It is evident in the very division of scholars of theology into two large guilds, the Society of Biblical Literature for biblical scholars and the American Academy of Religion for everybody else. The distinction’s continuing attractiveness is understandable for a number of reasons, among them:

It has allowed scholars holding a wide variety of religious convictions—or none at all, for that
matter—to communicate civilly and contribute fruitfully to the academic study of the biblical text with their authority as scholars weighed solely by the quality of their insight into the text and their mastery of fields that they bring to the study of the text.

It has also tied the biblical text indissolubly into the real world of time and space, rather than into a timeless realm of myth or an omnipresent "now" of the reader, who- and whenever that may be. This is in keeping with the Bible's own claims regarding the interaction of the divine and human in real time and space. Depending on the scholar, precisely which world a given text is teaching us about may be the world described in the text (that is, "the world of the text") or the world that produced the text (that is, "the world behind the text"), but it is a span in the history of our world, all the same.

Similarly, Gabler may be credited with having delegitimized once and for all the methodology of "proof-texting," whereby individual passages were cited apart from their historical and literary contexts in an attempt to establish points of doctrine or ethics. This is not to say that all such efforts have ceased, only that their appeal is now limited to those who are already persuaded of the point under debate on other grounds.

To the extent that Gabler's understanding of biblical theology can be identified with an effort to discern what a text's original author intended in his (or perhaps her) own time and place—that is, with what we may refer to in shorthand as the "historical-critical method"—his proposals may fairly be said to have entered the air that we breathe and the water that we drink. As one of my own teachers put it, one can seek on dogmatic grounds to be anti-critical, as is true of some especially traditionalist theologians, but it is simply impossible for us to be pre-critical in the manner of Origen, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, or Calvin. To give but one obvious example, none of us can read Psalm 113:3 ("From the rising of the sun to its setting the name of the LORD is to be praised") and think of the sun's motion from east to west as anything but metaphorical. Between us and what I'll call a "natural" reading stand Copernicus and Galileo; more broadly, between us and pre-critical interpretation stand Spinoza, Kant, and all the giants of modernity.

Still, in recent decades numerous non-traditionalist voices have been raised in objection or at least qualification of Gabler's approach. Quite a number of these concerns have arisen from the epistemology of post-modernism, viz., those who argue that the objectivity by which Gabler and others sought to overcome sectarian strife was false, representing nothing more than the hegemony of a white, male, Eurocentric set of background assumptions concerning historical and literary method.¹

Gabler sought the proper distinction between biblical and dogmatic theology, but the fruits of his labors have been all-too-often an unholy divorce.

For my part, I give voice to a different concern. Gabler sought, as he said in his lecture's title, the proper distinction between biblical and dogmatic theology, but the fruits of his labors have been all-too-often an unholy divorce. At the core of my concern is that the Bible purports explicitly to be not merely a work of history—however understood—or of literature, but of theology. That is, it claims to speak both about God and for God. In arguing that we must take account of these claims, in no way do I seek a return to the days of either intellectual or physical violence in the name of God, and I understand that the burden is mine to show how a fully and fairly theological reading of the Bible can be accomplished without a concomitant return of these side-effects, particularly in a world where "by this sign conquer" remains a mantra for all too many (employing a variety of signs, to be sure). Nor will I propose some facile cutting of the Gordian knot through a common-sense, universal reading of the text.

¹ Advent-Christmas 2014
Fundamentalisms of the left and of the right have each, by turns, wreaked unspeakable havoc well beyond the walls of church and classroom. Yet at the nub of my concern is this: that to seek some kind of absolute and clean distinction between ancient meaning and modern application of the biblical text cuts against the grain and the express intent of the very text that we purport to study and interpret. Otherwise put, we may well end up with a text that has been analyzed to philological, historical, and literary perfection, but what then lies before us on the dissection table can still be dead, rather than what it claimed to be at the outset, the *viva vox Dei*, the living voice of God.  

To seek some kind of absolute and clean distinction between ancient meaning and modern application of the biblical text cuts against the grain and the express intent of the very text that we purport to study and interpret.

Because this is such an important point in my argument, please permit me an extended quotation of another scholar, using a somewhat less-grisly metaphor. I quote from the final words of R. W. L. Moberly’s recent work, *Old Testament Theology: Reading the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture*:

> A recurrent note that has been sounded in recent hermeneutical discussions is that the interpretation of the biblical text can be in significant ways analogous to the interpretation of a play or a musical score. Numerous kinds of scholarly activities can usefully be carried out on such texts and scores. For many a scholar the establishment of, say, a good critical edition of a dramatic text, or an illuminating contextualization of a musical score within the oeuvre of its composer, can be a satisfying end in itself. However, the more the text or score is classic and resonant and loved, the more there is a widespread sense that the crowning achievement of extensive scholarly activity is when it takes on a kind of behind-the-scenes role whereby actors and musicians, that is, practitioners, are enabled to put on a fresh performance—a performance that brings the drama or the music to life and communicates its content in a fresh way, such that eyes and ears, even if already familiar with the content, are newly opened.

> So too I would argue that the crowning achievement of a theological interpretation of Scripture should be performance, that is ways of living, on the part of believers and those sympathetically interested, who are enabled to realize more fully that wholeness of life to which God calls. I hope that the content has intellectual interest and coherence for those who may have no desire to perform it. Nonetheless, performance is the ultimate goal of this study of the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture. (287–288)

In sum, it may seem the height of arrogance for a newly-designated professor at a smallish university in Indiana to devote his own inaugural lecture to substantive, critical engagement with Johann Philipp Gabler’s epochal address. Yet such is what I mean to do.

First, let me list briefly several reasons that do not animate my concern with Gabler and the work of those who have followed in his train.

- I do not resist Gabler’s program on the grounds that it is inappropriate to bring to the ancient, sacred literature that we call the Bible the tools of literary, historical, and social-scientific criticism. To borrow the categories of Aristotle and Aquinas, biblical theology à la Gabler is necessary but not sufficient to the object of its examination.
I recognize the force of the argument of those who would foreground what they call "the world in front of the text," that is, what a given reader brings to the text as a given, either genetically or culturally or by some combination of the two. This is, in a nutshell, the great contribution of post-modernism. Still, I would largely side with Gabler in granting to the original sense of the text a hermeneutical priority, even as I readily learn from the perspectives of those who differ from me by way of conviction or social location and readily concede that I need always to test what I may consider the "assured results" of my interpretive work against what others hear with differently situated ears.

At no point do I discern in Gabler, or in any who have followed in his path, intent to steer the conversation down unproductive rabbit trails or away from what, in good faith, they believe to be fresh and fruitful avenues of inquiry. In fact, I would go further and volunteer that, for at least the past two hundred years, some of the most dramatic insights in biblical interpretation have been offered by those who attained expertise both in the Bible and in some other field of inquiry and then brought the latter to bear on the former (e.g., the work of my colleague in New Testament studies, Richard DeMaris, with ritual studies).

What I am proposing, in a nutshell, is an application to biblical studies of the wisdom of Jaroslav Pelikan, writing of the development of the Western university: "In that two-front battle, the distinction between knowledge and faith was fundamental. It was a distinction, not an identity, but it was also a distinction, not a separation" (39).3

A carefully distinguished critical and theological reading of a specific text can bear rich interpretive fruit, and the remainder of this essay is intended to illustrate how. In taking this tack, I acknowledge the profound influence on me of the inductive approach taken by Moberly in his recent work, Old Testament Theology, from whose epilogue I quoted at some length a moment ago. Moreover, by dealing with a specific text, rather than with more general issues of interpretive theory, I would hope to contribute in some small way to what I see as my life's work for the time remaining to me as a teacher/scholar, namely, to reinvigorate the intergenerational—indeed, cross-millennial—conversation over the actual biblical text between biblical scholars and the church.

The selection of that sample text was easy, but neither easily nor facilely undertaken. Some connection with Valparaiso University seems à propos. Moreover, it seems only fair, if I am to claim some contribution as the result of my labors, to select a passage that has occasioned debate or even perplexity among prior interpreters. Upon reflection, one passage leapt out as apt on both counts, Psalm 36, especially verse 9b:

בְּצַנְעָה נַרְאָה אָנוּ: In luce tua videmus lucem

("In thy light we see light"), our university motto.

Let us begin, in the manner of many a film, with a broad shot and then narrow in on the specific focus of our interest. On the whole, there is little question that the most fruitful scholarly angle on the psalms has been provided by the modern scholarly approach known as form criticism, that is, a consideration of where the psalm might reasonably have fit into life in ancient Israel. (A corresponding example from our own lives might be a story that begins, "Once upon a time": the culturally-literate hearer knows that a fairy tale is beginning.) In the case of Psalm 36, we appear to have a combination of cultural speech forms. On the one hand, the strong contrast drawn between the ways of wickedness and righteousness calls to mind what are often called "Wisdom Psalms." In fact, Psalm 36
PSALM 36. (NRSV)

To the leader.
Of David, the servant of the LORD.

1 Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in their hearts; there is no fear of God before their eyes.

2 For they flatter themselves in their own eyes that their iniquity cannot be found out and hated.

3 The words of their mouths are mischief and deceit; they have ceased to act wisely and do good.

4 They plot mischief while on their beds; they are set on a way that is not good; they do not reject evil.

5 Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds.

6 Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your judgments are like the great deep; you save humans and animals alike, O LORD.

7 How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

8 They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights.

9 For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.

10 O continue your steadfast love to those who know you, and your salvation to the upright of heart!

11 Do not let the foot of the arrogant tread on me, or the hand of the wicked drive me away.

12 There the evildoers lie prostrate; they are thrust down, unable to rise.

reads something like a photographic negative of Psalm 1, which begins with a description of the way of life of the righteous, then briefly speaks of the contrasting lifestyle of the wicked, and then juxtaposes by contrast their respective, anticipated fates in its final line: "For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish." Psalm 36, by contrast, starts with wickedness and then proceeds to righteousness, but with another significant difference from Psalm 1. The description of righteousness begins not with human righteousness but with God's righteousness, which provides life and abundance to its beneficiaries, both human and animal (v. 6).

Yet there does seem to be some mixture of genres here, as at the very end of the psalm there is a plea for God's deliverance of one who is at very least in some danger from the wicked (v. 11). In this respect, Psalm 36 takes a turn toward what form critics label an "individual lament." Think of Psalm 22, for example, beginning with the unforgettable line "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Other analysts categorize various elements of the psalm in still other ways, leading to widespread quotation of Mitchell Dahood in his commentary on Psalms: "The coexistence of three literary types within a poem of thirteen verses points up the limitations of the form-critical approach to the Psalter" (218).

For my part, I see no great problem in the creative combination of the wisdom and lament forms, although this may argue for a relatively late date for Psalm 36 (if one assumes that complexity implies development over time, which is not necessarily so). What I take away as more significant from these form-critical observations is that the author of Psalm 36 is of the same mindset as the author of the second creation story back in Genesis 2–3, wherein it is the knowledge of good that is both life-giving and the gift of God, while the knowledge of evil leads to alienation from God (v. 1) and from life (v. 12). The choice of the latter—of evil—evidently has some attraction, according to the psalm's opening verses (vv. 1–4), and the wicked have some potential to do real harm to others (v. 11), but the final verse (v. 12) makes clear that there is no future in that path. By contrast, the psalm argues, God
actively intervenes on behalf of those termed in v. 10 "those who know you" and "the upright of heart."

It is at this point that I call attention to the potential value of a large body of interpreters whose work has largely gone into eclipse in scholarly circles for the past two centuries, namely, the rabbis who first molded and then read the text within the Jewish tradition and the fathers of the early, medieval, and Reformation eras of Christianity, who for their part first defined orthodox Christianity and then mined the two testaments for what they taught of God. These writers come from that pre-Copernican world from which we are forever cut off, and much of what they saw in the Bible seems ludicrous to our eyes. But it is worth recalling two things: first, that the Bible, too, is from a pre-Copernican world—that is, their world, not ours; and second, that the God whom they sought is, according to both Jewish and Christian confession, the same God then and now.

Thus, if I may introduce a fairly innocuous example, we read in v. 6: "you save humans and animals alike, O LORD." The sense seems plain enough, even attractive to our ecological sensitivities, as we seek to resist what some have termed "speciesism," the notion that any use of the world or its inhabitants is fair game, so long as humans benefit. Yet Martin Luther sees here a reference to Jews as humans, "because they had the knowledge of God and the words of God were committed to them," and to the Gentiles as "beasts," because they were only concerned with the burdens of this life and expected nothing from the future (171-172). I provide this example, not to hold up Luther either as paragon or for ridicule, but to illustrate the thoughtful creativity with which pre-critical interpreters often approached the task, as well as to show that not every comment on an Old Testament text by an earlier Christian interpreter saw a reference to Christ there.

The word for "delights" is the plural of יהָנָא or "Eden," the very name of the primeval garden watered by a river, according to Gen 2:10. Moreover, in the alternative, preceding narration of the creation in Genesis, God's very first act of creation is light (Gen 1:3). "In thy light we see light"? Well, light is all there is to see, until God creates more on the second day. Maybe such light is enough, or at least the very best that can be seen by the human eye, even aided by the divine. Such, at least, is the suggestion of Dante, who concludes his Paradiso (in Canto XXXIII) with a vision of God that rings a series of changes on "Light Supreme," "Light Eternal," and "High Light."

Here it is worth noting what still earlier readers made of this talk. The rabbis saw Light and Darkness (or Righteousness and Wickedness) as personified forces, which spoke with authority to their respective followers (Berlin and Brettler, 1321). As for the church fathers, their witness is both united and divided: united, in holding that both "thy light" and the light seen thereby are a vision of and enabled by God; yet divided, in that some hold that we see God by the light of Christ (so, for example, Origen and Jerome), while others hold that it is the Spirit that enables us to see both God and Christ (so Theodoret of Cyr). Unsurprisingly, perhaps, Athanasius even manages to find in the verse a cudgel with which to smite Arius. However, the patristic view that most caught my eye was offered by Sahdona, a seventh-century Syrian monk who, it seems, had trouble making up his mind about exactly how to understand the two natures in Christ and so bounced back and forth between the East and West Syrian Church. His remarks on this passage are distinctive:

Without the light of the Scriptures we are unable to see God, who is Light, or his justice, which is filled with light. The effort involved in reading the Scriptures is thus greatly beneficial to us, all the more so since it causes us to become illumined in prayer. For anyone whose soul, after having labored in reading and been purified...
by spiritual meditation, is fervent with love for God will pray in a luminous manner when he turns to prayer... (Blaising and Hardin, *ad loc.*).

Sahdona's interpretation strikes me as worthy of reflection for several reasons. First, unlike most of his patristic peers, he does not leap to the New Testament in one bound for a referent to God's light. While I shall argue in a moment that it is not illegitimate for the Christian interpreter to bring the New Testament into the conversation about the verse, Sahdona shows that it is not necessarily a modern move to decline to start there. Secondly, Sahdona refuses to intellectualize the seeing of light that is enabled by God's light, which he identifies with the light of the Scriptures. Seeing light "cashes out," as we might put it crassly these days, in an enriched life of prayer. This insight, it seems to me, is very much in keeping with the character of the book of Psalms, which was first and most of all ancient Israel's prayer book, as shown by its very title in Hebrew, *Tehillim* or "Praises." By Sahdona's reading, the center of life becomes something like the medieval *lectio divina*, a back-and-forth dialectic of reading and prayer centered on Scripture and bordering on its tactile consumption.

Indeed, at the risk of overpressing the point, the affirmation of the centrality of an element of the created order—light—to the life of the faithful speaker of this psalm is reminiscent of the numerous ways in which God makes use of the created order to convey God's gifts. In the Old Testament there is the clothing provided on the way out of the Garden, then Noah's rainbow, circumcision, the tabernacle and temple and their accoutrements—to name but a few. For the Christian this affirmation reaches its climax in the Incarnation and redounds from there in the sacraments and for the Eastern Orthodox in icons, in all of which God uses visible means to convey an invisible grace, visible thanks only to God's prior gift of light, of course. Otherwise put, there is no question that God warned his people in both Old Testament and New regularly against the misuse of the physical—idolatry, in a word—but, if anything, it is Gnosticism, with its deprecation of the role of the created order in God's dealings with the world, that has proved the more serious problem over the ages. We dare never forget that we do not control God magically or otherwise in or with physical things. God works, as the Lutheran *Augsburg Confession* (Article 5) says, *ubi et quando visum est Deo* (where and when it pleases God), or, to quote C. S. Lewis with regard to his Christ-figure, Aslan, "He is not a tame lion." But we ought to be able to manage a little mystery when it comes to the ways of God and the physical world: if nothing else, particularly in view of the text at hand, consider the scientific paradox of light's simultaneous existence as waves and particles. Meanwhile, these words stand as promise and claim: "In thy light we see light."

And so, then, can the Christian reader appropriate this passage as part of a Bible that includes a New Testament, particularly given Jesus' claim, according to John's Gospel: "I am the light of the world" (8:12)? As we have already seen, this and similar passages are all that some of the church fathers required to read "In thy light we see light" as directly Christological, with the only issue to be settled being which Trinitarian person to identify with which mention of light. I am enough of a modern to doubt that the psalmist had Jesus Christ in mind when first he uttered...
these words, but I am enough of a Christian theologian to insist that the interpretive matter does not end there. In fact, if anything, I would challenge the church fathers for not having gone far enough. All too often, it appears, those who would read the two testaments of the Christian Bible have a single directional arrow in mind: the Old Testament points forward to some form of fulfillment in the New. Using such a trajectory, in this case, as in the fathers, what the psalmist meant by “thy light” and “we see light” becomes apparent once we have deciphered the identity of “light” using John and other New Testament passages.

But I have become persuaded that a fully adequate reading of the Old and New Testaments requires the interpretive arrow to go in both directions. In the case at hand, let us not forget that, for the Jew named Jesus of Nazareth, the Psalms were his prayer book. As my colleagues Fred Niedner and Walt Wangerin have reminded us, it was with a child’s night-night prayer on his lips that Jesus died in Luke’s Gospel: “Into your hands I commit my spirit” (Ps 31:5a). Just maybe, when he said (or, if you insist, when John said that he said) “I am the light of the world,” the content of what he meant by that was at least in part informed by the passage “In thy light we see light.” That is, whether Jesus saw himself as God’s gift of illumination (i.e., “in thy light”) or as what God wanted people to see (i.e., “we see light”), we may gain insight into his intended meaning by juxtaposing that light with the surrounding images from the psalm: “the abundance of your house”; the Edenic “river of your delights”; and “the fountain of life.” Certainly the fourth evangelist seems to have gotten the connection, as in his prologue: “What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people” (John 1:3b–4). Certainly we may gain understanding of John’s persistent use of the light/dark dichotomy, as in Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus in chapter 3, if we understand it as related to or even inspired by the contrasts drawn between righteousness and wickedness in wisdom psalms, including Psalm 36. No New Testament passage—not Romans, not Galatians—could be clearer than Psalm 36 that all that is good comes from God. So much for Marcion and his Old Testament God of Wrath and the notion of works-righteousness that have haunted Christian theology and Jewish-Christian relations since the second century of our era.

Yet one thing more, as I have sought to avail myself of the wisdom of the Mishnaic (i.e., early Jewish) fathers regarding text study: “Turn it and turn it again, for everything is in it” (Pirque Avot 5:25). The very earliest commentary on this psalm (predating even the insertion of written vowels in the text) is a superscription that appears in the Hebrew as v. 1: “To the leader. Of [or to] David, the servant of the LORD.” Presumably, “To the leader” is some kind of rubric or stage direction aimed at the choir director. “Of [or to] David” could conceivably be a dedication, or a claim that the psalm somehow related to David’s life (as some other psalms cite a specific incident), or it might be an ascription of authorship, as traditionally held. The phrase of interest to me is “the servant of the LORD,” presumably a descriptor of David. Interestingly enough, this descriptor occurs only one other time in a psalm superscription, in Psalm 18, where the first verse goes on to claim that David sang it when God delivered him from all his enemies, and specifically from Saul.

Now there is nothing terribly remarkable about calling David “the servant of the LORD.” The phrase occurs several times in the narrative books that deal with David, with particular concentration in 2 Samuel 7, the so-called Dynastic Oracle, where God promises David an eternal dynasty on the throne in Jerusalem. In that chapter, David as God’s “servant” occurs three times (vv. 5, 8, 26). I take that in the first place as a sign of great comfort: given all we know about David’s feet of clay (and if all you know about is the Bathsheba affair, you don’t know the half of it), that David can still be called “the servant of the LORD” by anyone with a straight face is incredibly reassuring, given what I see in a mirror.

In fact, however, such generous inclusivity in the ranks of his servants on God’s part is by no means limited to David. His only rival in terms of frequency of the title is Moses, whose response to God’s call to service was something other than “Here am I: send me!” To provide but a brief and admittedly selective list of other sketchy characters who bear the title, there are...
Jacob (Ezek 28:25), Job (1:8), and Jonah (2 Kgs 14:25), to name but three. For the Christian reader, however, a reference to “the servant of the LORD” cannot fail to call to mind the enigmatic figure who is featured in four poems in the exilic portion of Isaiah. That servant is explicitly identified as Israel (Isa 49:3), and the servant’s function is to take God’s salvation beyond the bounds of the chosen people to all the world: God says, “I will give you as a light to the nations” (Isa 49:6). In God’s light, in Israel—we might paraphrase—all people will see light.

Those who are familiar with this portion of Isaiah (what scholars call “Second Isaiah”) are well aware that what follows bids fair to be the most complex and controversial issue in the Christian reading of the Old Testament. As the prophet continues to describe just how it is that the servant brings God’s light to the world, the portrait of the servant himself becomes darker, both in form and in content. The servant will suffer terribly and finally die in the execution, as it were, of his mission. And the question of the identity of the servant will grow exponentially more complex, as by the fourth and final “servant poem” the description seems clearly to be of an individual, not a nation, whose death is only retrospectively appreciated as having been for the speakers’ sakes:

Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases;
yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. (Isa 53:4–5)

Yet in the end the servant knows vindication: “Out of his anguish he shall see,” reads the standard Hebrew text (Isa 53:11). Or, as both the Greek Septuagint and the Great Isaiah Scroll (in Hebrew) from the Dead Sea caves add: “Out of his anguish he shall see light” [emphasis added].

Historically speaking, it was a division of opinion over the identification of this suffering servant that proved one of the flash points in the division of Jesus-Judaism from rabbinic-Judaism in the late first and early second centuries of our era. But what has any of this discussion of the servant of the LORD in Isaiah to do with Psalm 36? Simply this: whether the phrase “of (or to) David, the servant of the LORD” was intended as an ascription, dedication, or something else, very, very early in the interpretive history of this psalm a servant of the LORD was heard calling, in the words of this psalm, for God’s aid in extending salvation—described as food and drink and life and light—to all the world, human and animals (whether we understand the latter literally or, with Luther, as a reference to us Gentiles). Taken together with the Isaiah poems, the servant understands both that this task is his to do, whatever the cost, and beyond his capacity to undertake alone. God’s servant is a light to the nations, but only in God’s light can the servant or the nations see light.

This, in fine, is what I see as the reward of keeping what Gabler termed “biblical” and “dogmatic” theology properly distinguished, but nevertheless in conversation with one another: the one God who stands as both subject and object of the biblical witness provides a “red thread” to the canon that yields both depth and nuance to our understanding of a given passage in the light of both other passages and the witness of the generations who have both worshipped with and wrestled with these words in subsequent centuries. It is the Reformation principle of Scriptura sacra sui ipsius interpres (“holy Scripture interprets itself”), but sung in a different key than in the sixteenth century. It is now not a weapon to employ on those who argue for an authoritative role for tradition in theology; rather, it is an invitation to enliven (yea, enlighten) our interpretation by broadening our understanding of what constitutes the proper context for the interpretation of Scripture, beginning with Scripture itself.

Human speech—and especially human speech set to music—can be marvelously evocative, as it enables and even compels our minds to think on more than one track at a time. I confess that such has been the case with me, as I have reflected at length on how I, as a Christian student of the Old Testament, have brought within the heart of such a poem the suffering servant of Isaiah and the salvation that he brings to all people in God’s light.
Testament, can most fruitfully read our university motto. All along, another motto has been insistently there, playing in the back of my mind, the motto of both my own college alma mater and my seminary, taken not from Scripture, but indubitably drawn from it: Ἀνωθεν τὸ φῶς, “the light from above.” A particularly gifted professor at that seminary named Martin Franzmann, whom I was privileged to meet only once before his death in 1976, wrote a hymn based on that motto. For six stanzas he rings numerous changes on the theme of God’s light in ways that came constantly to mind as I prepared these remarks. His penultimate stanza strikes me as a near-paraphrase of parts of Psalm 36. Note in particular its repeated usage of the one Hebrew word that everyone in the room surely knows, chiefly from its usage in other psalms, namely, Hallelujah, “Praise the LORD.” Let Prof. Franzmann, then, have the last word today:

Give us lips to sing thy glory,
Tongues thy mercy to proclaim,
Throats that shout the hope that fills us,
Mouths to speak thy holy name.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
May the light which thou dost send
Fill our songs with alleluias,
Alleluias without end!

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Works Cited


End Notes

1. Thus were born feminist, womanist, black, Latino, Asian, liberationist, post-colonialist, queer, and numerous other ideological approaches to biblical interpretation (or “hermeneutics,” to use the fifty-cent term). The response of the scholarly establishment has, by and large, been to provide these perspectives with a place at the table by way of distinct sections within the structure of the Society of Biblical Literature, if not—at least yet—to grant them much representation on the tenure-track.

2. To be sure this is no new concern: Brevard S. Childs cites John Calvin as having affirmed the “living voice” (221) of God to the current discomfiture of both historical-critics and post-modern interpreters.

3. Those who are aware both of my own intellectual background and of the debate that I have been describing will be well aware of the degree to which much of what I have argued to this point grows out of the work of my revered and now sainted teacher, Brevard Springs Childs, formerly of Yale, and my classmate and fellow-student of Childs, Christopher Seitz, now of Wycliffe College at the University of Toronto. Even where further study and reflection have led me in different directions from theirs, I remain in their debt for the very frame within which I work. Yet it would serve little purpose beyond providing a possibly more digestible form of their sometimes frankly abstruse arguments were I to pursue simply a critical summary of their views, perhaps combined with parrying the learned and yet, I believe, often misdirected criticisms of opposing scholars such as James Barr (on which see Driver, ch. 7).

4. New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

5. In passing, I might also confess that I threw in a reference to Luther at this point because, so far as I can tell, he did not address himself explicitly to our university motto in v. 9b. Much the pity.

Moreover, while I am digressing from the explicit task of interpreting Psalm 36, Luther’s reference to Jews and Gentiles provides a convenient point at which to address another sticky issue from which Gabler’s “proper distinction” sought to deliver us, namely, the inevitable differences that will enter the conversation when committed Jewish and Christian scholars approach a text that both affirm as authoritative Scripture, but in very different ways. Gabler sought to avoid conflict by bracketing out the theological, in something of a “least common denominator” approach (although he surely had varieties of Christians, not Christians and Jews, in mind). One specific outcome of this move is that it has become commonplace in my field of study to speak of the “Hebrew Bible” as the object of examination. The problem is that neither Judaism nor Christianity recognizes an entity by that name as its Scripture. Judaism—at least in its normative, rabbinic form—is above all the Torah, supplemented by the Prophets and the Writings, and read through the Oral Law recorded in the Mishnah and Talmud. Its authoritative form developed concurrently and somewhat dialectically with early Christianity, which first saw itself as a rival for the title of “authentic Judaism” and then, having lost that struggle, went its own way, centered in a Bible consisting of an Old Testament and a New Testament. I want to wrap up this digression quickly, so let me conclude it by opining that scholarly conversation between people of different convictions need not choose between the bracketing of all differences and the Thirty Years’ War. Rather, we would do well to make our cases honestly, irenically, and with humility, as has been recommended winsomely and repeatedly by Harvard’s extraordinary Professor of Jewish Studies, Jon D. Levenson (in both 2001 and, specifically on exegetical issues, 2012). Or, to return at last to the text before us, we may well see in God’s light, but we most emphatically do not see with God’s eyes.

6. Some rabbis saw two competing forces (or “yāḥānān”) at war within the human, based on the extra yodh in wayyāhēn, “and he formed,” in Gen 2:7.

7. See recently Baden. While there are points at which Baden is excessively harsh or skeptical, in my judgment, the overall portrait of David seems both accurate and damning.

8. See Sommer (890–891) for a concise and fair summary of the debate from a Jewish perspective.

9. These are Concordia Senior College in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, respectively.
Forty-four years ago, in late June, I drove to New Jersey to be the best man in my former college roommate’s wedding. On the news, as I drove across the state, a commentator declared that summer the worst ever for tent caterpillars. Gypsy moths, he said, but nobody I heard talking at the gas station where I stopped cared about the parents. It was their offspring that repulsed them and threatened their forests. And certainly in Highland Lakes, where the wedding was going to take place, the trees were feeling the relentless advance of impersonal feeding.

The swelling tents were everywhere. They looked like they were constructed of mosquito netting for worms, and close up, they forced the standard revulsion for places too heavily populated. Most of them, by the time of the wedding, were as empty as the streets of a post-nuclear war movie, the caterpillars traveling the highways of branches to temporary plenty. After I topped off my tank, I was following a gravel road into the resort area where the ceremony was to be held when the sun started breaking through the trees as if it were winter. I glanced up and saw the foliage disappearing—a tree here and there, three or four together. I thought it was blight, something like Dutch Elm disease, two plagues at once, because so many full-grown trees appeared to be dead. And then, as I reached the lake, there was an astonishing sweep of naked branches for a quarter mile, and I noticed the caterpillars clinging to the windshield wipers, writhing on the hot hood of my blue Volkswagen fastback, and I recognized the landscape featured in every army ant movie I’d ever seen.

I found the Wilson’s lake house a hundred yards past the slaughtered woods. I flicked the caterpillars off my windshield and rolled the windows up tight before I climbed the stairs and knocked.

“We’re thinking of installing a moat,” Jack’s father said, not laughing.

I thought about Charlton Heston fighting off the advancing ants in The Naked Jungle, a movie with scenes that made me close my eyes in the Etna Theater when I was eight years old. I suddenly wanted to know how fast these caterpillars traveled.

“It’s not bad here,” Jack said. “We’re lucky not to be on Shore Line back where you came through.”

I agreed with half of what my old roommate said. I could see hairy bodies dangling from the open shutters, patches of bare branches quilting the woods behind the cabin. “Nature’s Agent Orange,” I said. “These guys ought to work for the government.”

Bill Bremley, who’d lived across the hall from us, gave me a short-arm wave. “Protest boy,” he said. “You got out of Ohio alive.”

It had been seven weeks since the National Guard had killed four students and paralyzed another at Kent State University, where I had just begun graduate school. I looked away from Bremley as if it had become important to find the right place for my overnight bag. I thought I deserved to be angry about anything that displeased me. Somebody’s haircut. A woman’s
makeup. A song on the radio. An old fraternity
brother, here to be an usher, greeting me with
prejudice.

"I'd just as soon see Vietnam defoliated as
have Jack or you or Bill end up there," Mr. Wilson
offered.

"Somebody ought to defoliate Nixon's rose
garden," I said, encouraged. "Somebody ought to
wait until Nixon's among the flowers and drop a
poisonous cloud all over him."

A month earlier, an uncle of mine
had wished me in front of the
guns as well when I'd
told him I thought the Guard
were murderers.

Mr. Wilson handed me a beer, and I ripped
the pull tab off. "I'm in the Guard," Bill said,
standing now, walking toward me. "How does
that strike you?"

He was a year older than Jack and I. I knew
he'd joined the National Guard right out of col­
lege to make sure he didn't end up in Vietnam.
"The Pennsylvania Guard," I said. "It's okay."

Bill nodded, but he didn't extend his hand.
"Do you know what gypsy moths look like?" he
said.

"No idea."

"If there were three kinds of moths flutter­
ing around a light bulb, could you pick out the
gypsies?"

"No."

"So you kill those worms while you know
what they are." He stared at me until I imagined
his eyes looking my way from inside a gas mask.
I pictured him kneeling in the ready position and
lifting a rifle, the now-famous Kent State pagoda
silhouetted behind him. When I didn't volun­
teer another "no," he walked to a window and
peered out as if he were deciding when to call in
a napalm drop.

Mr. Wilson went to the refrigerator and came
back with four fresh beers. "Don't open these just
yet," he said.

"What's the deal?" Jack said.

"Turkish chug."

None of us said anything, but Bill stepped
back in among us, and Mr. Wilson looked pleased.
"All of you college graduates and nobody's done a
Turkish chug?"

We held out our beers while he punched a
hole in each with his opener. "Ok," he said, "put
them to your mouths, pull the tab, and then swal­
low. Slap the empty down and we'll see who's a
real drinker. Go."

I pulled, and the Iron City that Mr. Wilson
had brought by the case from Pittsburgh shot
out the hole, gagging me until I started chugging
like crazy. Just as my can was going empty, I saw
Mr. Wilson toss his down. I tilted my head back a
little and slapped my can down just after Bill.
When Jack tossed his, both holes foamed. Bill
snorted. "It felt empty," Jack said.

"Again?" Mr. Wilson said. "You have the
hang of it now?"

"I'm out," Jack said.

Bill laughed. "How about you, Kent State
boy?" he said.

I took a fresh can, punched it, and pulled.
Mr. Wilson tossed down before I was half way,
choking this time and giving up. "Jack," Bill said.
"Your father ought to be the one getting married."

"All this proving ourselves," Mr. Wilson said.
"It brings us to our knees."

I put my finger over the hole in my can, took
a sip of beer and waited. Everything I had to say
needed to wait until Bill Bremley wasn't close
enough to hear. "This war's not over, you know," Mr. Wilson said. "Not by a long shot. Nobody's
out of these woods yet."

Bill reached over and tugged at my beer, heft­
ing it, measuring it to see how much was left in
it. "I wish I was in the Ohio Guard," he said. "I
would have aimed at you."

Nobody said anything. A month earlier, an
uncle of mine had wished me in front of the guns
as well when I'd told him I thought the Guard
were murderers. "They should have shot you, too,
while they had the chance," that uncle had said.
“Well,” Mr. Wilson said. “We have a rehearsal to get through.”

Hours later, in the dark, I listened to the soft thuds of caterpillar commandos dropping onto the roof of the cabin. They should be falling more softly, I thought, but sleeplessness was making me hear more acutely, my brain translating every sensory pulse into the skewed language of panic. It would take them months they did not have to eat through the roof, but I watched the ceiling above me for the first pinhole of moonlight. I knew what happened to the deep sleepers in the world of natural predators.

I started associating the sounds of darkness in a silent game of Password. Defenselessness—pain. Naivety—slaughter. Vulnerability—massacre. I sat up, shook my shoes out before I slipped them on to keep my bare feet from the floor. I pulled a beer from the Wilsons’ refrigerator and held it to my lips like a magic potion. As soon as I swallowed, my stomach started the small convulsions of protest. I thought I might vomit. And then I began considering whether or not I had the nerve to rush outside to throw up unheard by the Wilsons and Bill Bremley.

Things went slack inside me. I took small sips, concentrated on the foolishness of irrational fear, and felt myself settling into the relaxation of standing. I was all right as long as my feet were under me, I decided, and then Mr. Wilson lurched into the kitchen, wrapping a robe around himself.

“You hear them, too?” he said, lifting a beer and taking a long pull.

“Yeah.”

“Hell of a thing. It makes you appreciate the power of numbers and single-mindedness.”

“Natural selection,” I agreed. “The insects hold all the cards.”

“The smaller the better, it seems to me,” he said. “What an irony. You don’t get a brain, but you get the gift of adaptability.”

“We get a brain and can’t adapt to anything. We shoot anybody who doesn’t look like us.”

“Kent State isn’t your affair, Gary,” Mr. Wilson said. “It missed you.”

“No, it didn’t. Somebody screwed up big time,” I said. “Somebody needs to get screwed in return.”

I thought I’d earned privilege through the accident of history stumbling over me. I was a Kent State student and that meant I could say whatever I wanted to anybody even if I didn’t know any of the students who’d been killed or wounded, any of their friends or members of their families. All I needed to know was my own anger and the helplessness that settled over me as I acquired a sort of perverse pride in my proximity to a terrible event.

“Gary,” he said. “You’re the one who needs to adapt. You don’t want to become a bitter son-of-a-bitch.” Mr. Wilson gave me a sort of half-smile. “I’ve been thinking of change myself,” he said. “I’ve already seen half the changes I’m entitled to. I’ve seen what Jack’s become, and now I get one more shot—his children—and then fwoop.” He glanced up and down, ambiguous.

“And that second chance is a gift,” I said. “We can thank science for reeling out the years.”

“Not hardly,” he said. “We’ve always had that chance. We just used to be grandparents at thirty. What kind of gift is old age? What kind of gift is DDT?”

If I had known about them at the time, I would have told Jack’s father about the glow-worms that live in New Zealand. The caves where the mature gnats lay their eggs have planetariums for ceilings, their stars systemized by the fixed positions each of the ravenous glow-worms has for feeding.

Each of those brilliant larvae claims a uniform space and spins curtains of threads to fish for food. Always, in that ordered galaxy, those worms shine, their beacons drawing insects. And sometimes, those larvae, transformed, eventually, to clouds of gnats, are trapped by the sticky filaments spun by their children, held, and eaten.

Forty-four years ago I didn’t know anything about New Zealand except its distance from where we were standing among the caterpillars. I finished my beer, Mr. Wilson finished three, and the next afternoon I flicked two caterpillars off my rented tuxedo while I stood between Jack and Bill Bremley and watched my old roommate’s bride approach wearing a veil that looked, for one horrible moment, as if it had been laced by worms.
The reception was at a ski resort. The lifts hung suspended and still over the differently angled slopes sweeping up on all sides from the lodge at the base. Because all the trees for a quarter mile in every direction had been cut and removed, there were no signs of the caterpillars. I had to strain to make out the lace of bare branches in a patch of trees five hundred yards away.

Inside, near a microphone, I waited for Mr. Wilson, his champagne glass in hand, to work his way around the bride's family table before I offered my toast. Bill Bremley, from where he sat three feet from me, looked up and said, "You're almost a long-term survivor."

"What?"

"You know, like cancer. After a while you protestors go long-term, think the odds are on your side again." He grinned like a dead man. Mr. Wilson was nearly finished at the bride's table, stopping, finally, to speak to the minister.

"What happened to all those brotherhood vows we made when we were pledging?" I said, turning away from the microphone.

"That was guys playing house."

The minister for the wedding was one of those men who could smile and shake hands and initiate fragmentary conversations without appearing to be distracted by thoughts of personal illness, family difficulties, or religious doubt. He was a diplomat, a politician. He could have been an FBI agent in deep cover, keeping his eyes on the wedding party to determine which of us was a threat to national security.

Besides being a student on May 4, 1970, I was also nearing the end of my first year of college teaching. Twenty-four years old, I was less than half the age of the Dean of Faculty, who approached me, the day after, to ask about the student snipers who'd started everything by firing at the Guard, the student mob that threatened to overrun the soldiers. "They asked for it," he said with conviction.

I clenched and unclenched my fists. "Those are lies," I said, and then I walked away to keep from losing my job by spewing a string of obscenities.

I stepped toward the microphone. Jack's father, when the minister shook his hand, appeared confused. He clung to the minister's hand as if listening through his fingertips, the vibrations a language he could understand. He leaned forward, sensing a list in the lodge, and then I saw him pop upright, laugh, and hear him say, "The fodder of sermons, Pastor, the allegory of the worm."

The minister smiled and turned back to the bride's parents. "Wow," Jack's father said to me as he passed. "I thought he was the minister from our church back home, and I didn't recognize the son-of-a-bitch. I was feeling the old earth opening to swallow me, the old down slope to hell growing steeper while he told me another caterpillar story."

I smiled, and we touched champagne glasses for a moment, a private toast that didn't work out. No sooner did he see two granddaughters born just over a year apart than he turned jaundiced and died less than a month later, far gone into pancreatic cancer that took his liver for good measure. He missed one more metamorphosis story he would have loved, how there were frogs, once, in Australia, who raised their young in their stomachs in order to protect them from outside harm.

Those frogs laid their eggs and then ate them. They waited out the hatching and the transformational nursery weeks, until one by one, fully formed, their children leapt from the mother's tongue.

Such evolution toward the safety of a species. Such protection and insurance. And yet those frogs are now extinct. ❧

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CONSUBSTANTIATION

Consider the weight of “with.”
God with bread, God with wine.
Importance of the preposition? Examples:

*I’m with friends, Mom. I can’t talk right now.* Meaning: you aren’t alone, whether or not you want to be.

*Are you with him? Yes, yes I am.*
And then there’s *with child.*
“With” alerting to another presence.

Even when saying,* I’m upset with X, in love with Y, can’t deal with Z,*
“with” precedes a mind, heart accompanied.

“With,” one syllable opposing singularity.
No hint of removing, only sitting together, remaining alongside what else is,

despite how preferable it may feel to throw away matter, mundane and heavy, for showiness of unfettered Spirit.

Megan McDermott
Reconsidering the Work/Life Balance—For Kids

Agnes R. Howard

The North Shore area above Boston, Massachusetts, is a fine place to survey the transition from industrial to post-industrial economy. Bypassed by the high-tech boom that prospered the corridor west of the city, Lawrence and Lowell and other factory centers house old stalwarts of American industrialization, the textile mills. Before railroads and steel mills, textile production was American industry. Beyond their worth as monuments of economic history, the mills encourage lessons on immigration, urban growth, and child labor. Therefore they are popular field-trip destinations, where children examine weaving machines, envisioning the roar and sweat of fiber-saturated rooms in full production. Properly horrified, young visitors draw the conclusion that only bad people would make children work. Then they retreat to their own world of school and play.

Too often American childhood is conceived as a span split between school and play. We construe education as the “work” expected of children, to give them skills needed later for rewarding jobs in adulthood. After school, it is time to play. But work needs fresh consideration as part of normal, healthy childhood. For some, this might mean help with a family farm or restaurant. For most American kids, though, it means at least the work nearest to their own good, the work that otherwise falls to their parents. Not homework. Housework.

Right now kids do not do much of it: current studies estimate that most American children do less than a half hour a day. Their parents, meanwhile, work feverishly to keep jobs, keep house, and keep kids involved and entertained. Why should children play all day when adults are presumed to work all day? Why should adults, in fact, work harder in order to enable child’s play?

Too Much Play

Even though we commonly assume that play is what children should be doing, we complain a lot about that leisure: that children spend too much time in front of screens, consuming trashy content and becoming unsociable, smutty, violent, and flabby in the process; that children are overweight, so they should be outside and active more; that children spend too much play time in organized sports and not enough amused by their own lights and building their own social sphere; that children in organized sports get concussions and suffer long. Some of these fears are well founded. Most often the remedy offered to problems with play is more play. Actual rather than virtual, outdoor rather than indoor, independent rather than adult-supervised. But still, keep them playing. Preferably with helmets and sunscreen on.

Most children have oodles of time to play, overflowing buckets of it. Professor Sandra Hofferth, who directs population research at the University of Maryland, discovered from time-use diaries that children aged 6–12 had between 5.5 and 5.7 hours of leisure time on school days and between ten and eleven hours on weekend days. And electronic play absorbs increasing measures of time, kids keeping screens on—television, computer, tablet, music player, smartphone—
usually several going at once. Much of children's remaining time is packaged into organized activities, a fact of childhood life for any who can afford it.

Some play is a cherished element of young life, but enough is enough. There is plenty more work to do, and someone has to do it. Perhaps egalitarian assumptions are wrong; perhaps some people actually are more suited to a life of leisure and so should be excused from household labor. But who? One of the difficulties of democratic order is in rejecting old means of sorting servile from leisured folk without the substitution of a truer sorting mechanism. We do not claim blood or lineage or wealth—or of late, at least without embarrassment, race, gender, class, or skin tone—as appropriate markers between those who labor and those who play. We should not make age the great divider either.

Mothers and fathers do a great deal of work not included in paid employment. The maintenance of a home requires significant time and labor. If the vast library of scholarship and contention over contemporary work and gender roles centers on positions of power at the top, at bottom, much boils down to housework. How much do men do? How much do women do? What change in each figure have we seen in recent years when women’s employment has risen? Usually absent from total hours devoted to sweeping floors or folding laundry are the contributions of minors. Men and women are left alone to divide those hours between them. Children hardly figure into assessments of housework except as another category of labor that man and woman may share or shirk. This is one key reason the way forward lies in making the idle hands of boys and girls busy.

A Short History of Housework

Before electricity, housework was a colossal labor. American women, their daughters, and sometimes servants pushed their way through the cooking of a meal or the cleaning of a home. These burdens have been reduced by appliances and the piecing out of tasks to industrial provision. Washers and dryers eliminate need for two days spent processing laundry. Canned, frozen, and chemically preserved foods make cooking quicker. Restaurants and cheap fast food cut the need to cook at all. The advent of labor-saving appliances, in some respects, saved a woman a lot of time at home. It lessened her imperative to delegate or teach the work to her children, either for immediate benefit in having their collaboration or for their later use when they had to do these things themselves.

We do not claim blood or lineage or wealth as appropriate markers between those who labor and those who play. We should not make age the great divider either.

The new efficiency of electric appliances helped birth the storied 1950s housewife: prosperous, vigilant in battling ring-around-the-collar or residue on linoleum, but also elegant. We might be tempted to say that this housewife had too much time on her hands, time she was condemned to idle in since so many worthy works were closed to her: what Betty Friedan called The Feminine Mystique. This was never the lot of working-class women, in any case, and is not the lot of most women today. Now, the majority of American mothers with young children are employed. Today’s middle-class American mother is the opposite of that leisurely, smiling, crisp-crinolined housewife. She is put upon, busy rushing from job to child-servicing to housework.

What happened to that shrinking load of housework, lightened by a flip of the switch? Some of the many fine books on the American history of housekeeping explain the change succinctly through their winsome titles, like Never Done or More Work for Mother. Machines did not make housework go away. They raised the bar for the satisfactory doing of it. Hand-laundering took a lot of elbow grease, but people have more clothes now, and with children at soccer practice from
one afternoon to the next, laundry hampers are always full. Household furnishings need to be updated and redecorated frequently. A rising standard of living means that for every household task simplified, some new garnish or nicety has become de rigeur.

Consider the way family eating has changed. Family dinner is complicated by pangs of conscience over mass-produced chicken breasts, recognition of the value of sitting down together at table, and the marking of status by how many vegetables one’s offspring voluntarily ingest. Clever menus are partially an effort to pique flagging appetites, that is, to induce us to cook at all. Cookbook authors tout cooking as therapy: not as a drag you do every day, but as an artistic outlet when you have leisure to enjoy it. Children are not much involved in the process. Perhaps they may stand in the kitchen occasionally, as a treat of the parent’s time or to be given a token task to raise awareness about the source of their food. Theirs are not usually the hands that cook family dinner. Why not? It is easier for the parents just to get food on the table by themselves, or expect children to play until they are called to dinner. Parents’ effort at feeding children decent food has a remedial thrust. Trying to persuade kids to eat that poached fish and broccoli instead of a burger and chips is hard enough, so that asking a kid to help make his own medicine would be asking too much.

With this combination of high expectations for household goods and foodstuffs, plus a schedule that has parents busy and children’s daytimes stuffed full of playdates and soccer practice, how does the house get clean, dinner get cooked? You could pay someone to do it. But this is not the single solution to the disordered balance of work and benefit in American families. Hiring someone else to do laundry or cook or clean boils down to this: father and mother work more to pay someone else to do housework so that children can play more.

What Is There to Be Done?

In decades’ worth of “mommy wars,” of women comparing the relative worth of employment and at-home parenting, weighing day care and nannies and shared responsibilities, trying to figure out whether it was possible to do all, some consensus has been reached over the issue of housework. Women cannot do it all, and if time is to be divided between work and children, housework is the safest thing to let slip.

It is possible to do less and make the doing more efficient. There is no reason to romanticize mopping a floor. Yet we do wish to enjoy our homes, find things easily, discover pleasant touches—fresh flowers, clean towels, no thatch of dog hair in the corner of the stairs—that make home a retreat from the bustling workaday world outside. It takes work to make the house so. The way to improve domestic environments and give children a more balanced use of time than alternating school and play is to devolve to them a share of maintaining that comfortable space.

Like adults, children not only may prefer play to work but may prefer some jobs over others. Nevertheless some jobs must be done even if they are unpleasant. And some jobs might even be peculiarly suited to children, as nineteenth-century utopian theorist Charles Fourier imagined when casting them as natural garbage collectors since they love to frolic in filth.

A dear friend gave me Cheryl Mendelson’s Home Comforts: The Art & Science of Keeping House some years ago. It is a serious, literate housekeeping manual, not a coffee-table display, just hundreds of pages on making your life better by cleanliness and order. A beautiful world emerges from these pages, with no dust on the blinds or scum in the tub, with a sheen on the silver and ripe fruit in the bowl. Neither men nor women may wish to do this cleaning, or have time to do it, but surely many of us would rather live in elegance and comfort than in disarray. The triumph of Martha Stewart at her peak was to make us admire and aspire to skills of housekeeping, even if we compartmentalized the ordinary stuff as someone else’s task while we schooled ourselves to conjure up profiteroles, handmade wrapping paper, a cornucopia centerpiece.

Who has time to do all this stuff? Your children.
Making an All-Play Childhood Unfashionable

Start with the basics. It might be hard to fix an exact age to particular skills, but an ordinary child of ten should count these among his skill set: load and unload the dishwasher or wash dishes by hand; dust; sweep or vacuum floors; clean bathrooms; put away groceries; set the table; cook a meal; clean up after a meal; take out trash; fold and put away laundry; change linens and make beds; water plants. However much a child might affect a Cinderella pose—Woe! My parents used to love me but now they make me scrub the floor!—a quick comparison with pre-industrial childhood would remind her how modest her work requirements are. Even young children can manage a fair amount. Indeed, when children are young they are most inclined to help, glad to be mimicking parents or garnering their praise. Our kids may look pretty incompetent, but Christine Gross-Loh’s 2013 book, Parenting Without Borders, calls this bluff with exhibits in competence from around the world, like five-year-olds preparing dinner for the family. Young children understand keenly the reward of being trusted to contribute. Not assuming that competence of children is like making them bat from a tee because you do not believe they could ever hit a pitch.

Some parents might think domestic skills beneath their children’s worth, a waste of their precious time. But children usually have ample time to expend, and necessary household tasks actually do not eat into that stock very far. Of course, children should take their schoolwork seriously, not skip geometry proofs or verb declensions to match socks, but I think the trade-off very seldom works that way. Work at home does not have to be a punishment but a positive aspect of growing up, a recognition of self-care and respect for the things a family holds in common.

A more practical objection is that teaching kids how to do household tasks takes much more time than it does for parents simply to do it themselves. That recognition should underscore the importance of the time devoted to instruction. Parents’ hours given to showing a child how to wash dishes or mow the lawn is an investment akin to time spent showing a child how to read or how to balance a checkbook. Parents might balk at taking on yet another task in teaching children how to do things, but these are too important to let slide.

Getting kids to do housework could require a lot of effort on the part of parents to cajole,

Work at home does not have to be a punishment but a positive aspect of growing up, a recognition of self-care and respect for the things a family holds in common.

Instruct, insist, and model. It is understandable that busy parents decide it is easier not even to try. The other reason all that effort seems vain is the kids’ habitat. It is not an American cultural expectation that children contribute meaningfully to the household. If your kids complain that none of their friends has to take out trash/fix beds/empty the dishwasher, they probably are telling the truth. One parent cannot make another require chores of their children, but it seems to me that there are some sources of influence, some ways to adjust culture.

Children’s literature is a rich source. Many books show children in other times and places contributing to family weal. A few popular ones, like Katherine Patterson’s Lyddie or Elizabeth Winthrop’s Counting on Grace, show the struggles of textile-mill life. But among the best are the Little House books by Laura Ingalls Wilder, providing matchless models of helpful children. Not that they should be read just for this purpose. Laura, Mary, and Carrie often are busy, sewing and washing as Ma commands, making festive decorations to mask want at holidays. But Laura’s husband-to-be Almanzo Wilder beats all. The eponymous Farmer Boy is the son of prosperous upstate New York landowner James Wilder. James expects a lot of his children.
livestock and clean stalls at crack of dawn and end of day, in bone cold and beating heat. He helps plant and tend fields of crops. Some of the work he likes, some he hates, but he does it because the work is there and it has to be done. All that farm work does not make him a dull boy. When we meet the handsome Mr. Wilder later as the worthy object of the author's romantic interest in The Long Winter, he is a master horseman with the finest steeds in town. He lays claim to land though he is underage and by law not exactly eligible for it because he counts himself as skilled as any grown man in the duties required of homesteaders: “the Government wanted this land settled; Uncle Sam would give a farm to any man who had the nerve and muscle to come out here and break the sod and stick to the job till it was done... Almanzo considered that he was as good, any day, as any man twenty-one years old.” On top of all this, he cooks! Author-wife Laura takes care to note that “not even [his] Mother could beat Almanzo at making pancakes.” That is a large measure of what we hope the long stretch of training given to kids equips them to do: flourish as responsible adults as soon as they can.

The caricatured 1950s housewife is a personage now broadly disparaged. Little girls do not want to grow up to be her. Even if we ourselves pine for a shiny floor we know we could never get clean enough because time is short, we still do not want to be that person. If we have gotten past that model of motherhood, why do we still have a soft spot for Dick and Jane? A soft spot for that model of childhood spent in whole days of play, updated by the addition of more complicated and expensive electronic amusements on top of ordinary leisure?

It is time to make that all-play childhood passé. Doing so does not require an act of Congress, or even a federally funded slogan—Let’s Move! Five a Day!—as much as different parental behavior. Children should do some regular work, not as a punishment or privation but because embodied life requires it. We should imagine children’s lives once again as blending work, school, and play.

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HOW TO STOKE A FIRE

Holden Village, February 2013

Tell your friends you’re leaving. Let them believe it’s a hard life you’ll lean toward, work-wrought and spare. Send postcards that take three days longer to arrive, ink smeared, barely legible across the back of an impassable peak: *It’s unlike anything you can imagine.* Say how quiet fills the cradle of a mountain basin. How snow swallows your boots. Then stop writing. Sign your name in a snowfield and let new snow erase it. Count the trees along the ridgeline.

Count the logs you carry, the splinters decorating your palms. Tell your life story between loads of wood. Tell it again and change the ending. Laugh. Grieve. Laugh harder. Let a room swell so full of song it presses you out.

Spend an hour watching smoke, how wind carries it down the valley. How it lifts us up.

Kathryn Smith
OW MANY GUIDES TO PRAYER HAVE BEEN published? How many have been published this year alone? For those individuals searching for books containing plans (and principles) for prayer, there is no lack of resources. For all our abundance of books on prayer, when conversations about prayer begin, people grumble familiar refrains: "My prayer life isn't what I want it to be," or "I'm just not motivated." I'll admit to my share of uttering the former, and I confess that sometimes prayer (or even the thought of it) does anything but interest me. Rather than be still and listen for God's voice, much less offer supplications, I would rather read a work of literature.

As we approach Advent, and thereafter Christmastide and Epiphany, here enters Light Upon Light (Paraclete Press), which author/editor Sarah Arthur describes as "a literary guide to prayer. Words of meaning, crafted to evoke a vision, or a truth, or both." Imagine my delight at discovering this volume when these weeks that begin in darkness and move to light present complications: "the one time of year that we are given to pause and seek the One who seeks us becomes the one time of year that drives us nearly to self-extinction." Just as the tension of self-extinction exists, there exists our perception that "The things of this world do not seem to be going according to plan," so writes Marci Johnson in the first stanza of "O That With Yonder Sacred Throng." However, the narrative of Scripture, of incarnation, acts as a corrective, and this volume of well-selected poetry and fiction pushes us further toward that beautiful mystery.

Arthur's introductory essay articulately traces the history of the seasons of Advent, Christmastide, and Epiphany, while also offering various ways one might "use" the book during these thirteen-odd weeks. (There is flexibility in the pilgrim's journey.) She also offers the structure of lectio divina as a way into the literature she has selected, but she is careful to clarify that the poetry and fiction do not supplant Scripture: "these literary readings are not the words of Scripture." Still, literature is a vehicle, a conduit, narrative and lyric as ways to draw us closer to God, to usher us into prayer. In fact, each chapter includes beautiful opening and closing prayers (taken from poetry), followed by four scripture passages, the first of which is always a Psalm. Three other readings follow, one from another Old Testament book, and then two New Testament books, at least one of which is a Gospel text. Part of the joy of Light Upon Light, just from a reading perspective (and apart from using it as intended) is discovering the texts Arthur has chosen to be in
conversation with one another, and with scripture readings.

Here is one chapter as an example: Week 3 of Advent, “Sojourners in the Land,” contains an opening and closing prayer from John Henry, Cardinal Newman. Scripture readings consist of Psalm 137 (which is a psalm of lament, where the psalmist asks, “How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?”), and then Jeremiah 31 in which the Lord declares his everlasting love, promising that he will rebuild Israel. In the first New Testament reading, Paul reminds the Ephesian church of how they have been bought by the blood of Christ, and how Christ himself preached peace. Lastly, there is the second chapter of Luke wherein we read of the census to be taken as well as of the Holy Family and the birth of the Christ. We are blessed with poems by G. K. Chesterton and Sir John Suckling, poems by contemporary poets Susanna Childress and Li-Young Lee, and conclude with an excerpt from Gary D. Schmidt’s The Wednesday Wars. The speaker of Chesterton’s “The House of Christmas” observes that “This world is wild as an old wives’ tale, / And strange the plain things are,” while Susanna Childress’s “Bethlehem, Indiana” reimagines the Nativity occurring in the Midwest, the Holy Family at a Motel 6.

Another characteristic that makes Light Upon Light so compelling is the arrangement of voices in particular sections, with particular foci; some pieces are more overtly “religious” than others, but all of them, nevertheless, offer beauty and truth. Within this gathering of voices are the contemporary and “classic,” from across various cultures and literary approaches. Readers will encounter works by “classic” names such as John Donne, William Shakespeare, John Milton, and George Herbert, but also works by contemporary names such as John Irving, Jeanne Murray Walker, and Paul Willis, among others. Just as there are “new” texts for readers to savor, there are more familiar texts, such as Christina Rosetti’s “A Christmas Carol,” known to some by the first half of the poem’s first line, “In the bleak midwinter,” as well as an excerpt from the Dickens classic of the same title. One potential challenge of the book is that, with one exception, all fictional works are excerpts. Arthur does provide lucid summaries and contextualization of these excerpts which derive from works by Fyodor Dostoevsky, George Eliot, John Bunyan, and Frederick Buechner, among others. Nonetheless, the excerpts wet this reader’s appetite, demanding that I read (or reread) those stories and novels in their entirety, wondering what I will encounter once I experience the complete narratives.

Sometimes readings confront contemporary misunderstandings, misreadings, and glosses. Luci Shaw’s “It is as if infancy were the whole of the incarnation,” for instance, confronts the ubiquitous image of the Christ child: “But Jesus the Man is not to be seen. / We are too wary, these days, / of beards and sandalled feet.” This prevalence of the infant Jesus, the poem suggests, permits individuals to dodge the idea of Jesus as Lord, the poem’s last lines exhorting us, “Oh come, let us adore Him— / Christ—the Lord.” Li-Young Lee, in the Advent Week 4 section (“The Strange Guest”) finds the end of the poem also exhorting us that “each must make a safe place of his heart, / before so strange and wild a guest / as God approaches.” That is at the core of the incarnation, a strange and wild guest coming to earth in the form of Jesus of Nazareth, God in the flesh, Emmanuel.

Because these seasons focus on the Holy Family, Arthur includes pieces that explore these family dynamics. Tania Runyan’s “Joseph at the Nativity,” places readers into his world, as we watch him struggle with the distance he feels:

Do I touch him, this child who is mine and not mine? Do I enter the kingdom of blood and stars?

The reference to blood is, of course, a harbinger of future events, and the language of the epiphany takes a somewhatarker turn, admitting the challenges of this life, the challenges of living in a fallen, broken world. Appropriately, the weeks of Epiphany are titled with somber phrases like “The Holy Innocents” (referring
to Herod’s edict), “The Soul in Suffering,” and “Among the Fallen.” Yet of all the amazing works in this collection (and there are many), I was most confounded in Epiphany Week 3 (“Costly Gifts”) by Chad Walsh’s poem, “A quintina of crosses.” In a line that addresses the dual nature of Christ, he writes,

He was a mutant on an obscene cross
Outraging decency with naked love.
He stripped the last rags from a proper
God.

The life of God must blood this cross for
love.

The noun form of “blood,” used here as a verb, is shocking. The poem reminds us of the gravity of the crucifixion, the horror of it, the shock that God, in the flesh, would willingly self-sacrifice, “outraging decency.” For in the first advent is present the purpose for His arrival: the redemption of humanity.

Finally, woven together with the first advent (and the corresponding hope breaking through) is the anticipation of the second advent when all will be made right, at last. Poet Scott Cairns poignantly describes that moment of brightness:

His light, our light, caught at last together / as a single brilliance, extravagant, / compounding awful glories as we burn.” So this Advent, Christmastide, and Epiphany, I’m going to try the approach Sarah Arthur offers in Light Upon Light, the beauty and truth of literature serving as an impetus, nudging or sometimes even shoving me toward prayer. I’m anticipating more meaningful movement toward the Divine. In this season when earthly light decreases but Divine light increases, may we remember that, in the words of John Keble, “in one blaze of charity / care and remorse are lost, like motes in light divine.”

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One Sunday morning while the offering was being collected, I stood facing the altar cross thinking of a parishioner's disapproval at my use of an Oscar Wilde fairy tale in a previous sermon. What had bothered her was not the story I had used but its author. She had challenged me about whether something he had written could be used for Christian edification, given that he was gay.

Over the years, I have found that the mere mention of Oscar Wilde's name often makes pupils dilate and eyebrows rise. In truth, I know only the basic outline of his life; I have never read any of the biographies or seen any of the biopics, nor do I feel the need to do so anytime soon. But I do plan to keep reading his works and returning to the deeply human and profoundly Christian truths contained in them, especially in his fairytales.

Published in 1888 as The Happy Prince and Other Stories, the tales are connected by themes of selfish blindness, transformative sight, and sacrificial love; in short, they depict the desperate human need to be more wide-eyed and generous. Wilde's tales grant vision through (and to) his windows of the soul which cannot help but affect the perception of the serious and childlike reader. If Christ, the Servant-Savior of us all could say, "Blessed is the one who is not scandalized by me" (Matthew 11:6) and Paul (that greatest of sinners), in writing about the "mercies of God," could discourage pride and encourage "associating with the lowly" (Romans 12: 1, 3 and 16), then maybe even Wilde could have something to teach us about seeing anew and living with greater self-abandon as followers of Christ.

Perhaps most worthy for consideration during Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany are The Star-Child and The Happy Prince, tales that present images of Christ within the context of a wounded world longing for redemption and restoration. Here are bold reminders of what Isaac Watts proclaimed in Joy to the World: "Let earth receive her King; / Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room / And heav'n and nature sing... No more let sins and sorrows grow / Nor thorns infest the ground; / He comes to make his blessings flow / Far as the curse is found."

The Star-Child tells of two poor woodcutters heading home on a winter night so bitterly cold that the snow-covered ground seemed like the earth's burial shroud to the linnets but like a bridal dress to the turtledoves. The woodcutters are dazzled by the earth's wonder yet downcast by the callousness of its many inhabitants. Just then, a bright star falls from the sky and lands in a stand of trees. Hoping to find a pot of gold, the men instead find a child wrapped in a golden cloth covered with stars. While the one man instantly sours and says the last thing he needs is another mouth to feed, the other can't bear the evil of letting the child die and knows that he and his wife will find a way to care for the boy.

So the Star-Child grows in the same meager surroundings as the woodcutter's children, yet with each passing year he becomes more stunning to behold and is adored with awe by all in the village. But his beauty becomes his undoing, and he grows "proud, and cruel, and selfish." He has no pity for the poor, afflicted, or injured but is enamored by his own appearance. He gains a following of other boys who laugh as he tortures animals in defiance of the priest's searing indictment: "Who art thou to bring pain into God's world? Even the cattle of the field praise him?"

After leading the other boys in mocking and throwing stones at a beggar-woman one day, he recoils in horror on learning that she is his mother who has been wandering the world looking for him. On seeking solace from his friends, he instead hears words of insult and disgust for he now looks like a toad! He then begins a three-year search to find his mother and receive her forgiveness; a time in which "there was neither love nor loving-kindness nor charity for him," for it is the world as he has made it by his great pride. At the end of that sojourn, he encounters a form of redemption and forgiveness so restorative that I will not deprive the reader of such an exquisite discovery.

The Happy Prince begins high above a city where the statue of a young royal stands towering over all, covered with gold leaf, possessing eyes of
bright sapphire, and holding a sword crowned with a ruby on the hilt. Parents often ask their children why they can't be like the Happy Prince who "never dreams of crying for anything," and the charity children thought he looked just like an angel.

One night a heartbroken swallow six weeks behind on his way to Egypt decides to rest for the night at the feet of the Happy Prince. Just as he is falling asleep, drops of water start falling on him, tears running down the cheeks of the stately prince. The tired and lovelorn bird inquires and learns that when the prince was alive and had a human heart he never knew what tears were because his life was pleasure and delight, but dead and with a leaden heart he can do nothing but weep as he surveys all of the ugliness and misery of his city. While the swallow wants nothing more than to fly away and escape the encroaching winter, the prince convinces him to stay and carry out his requests: take the ruby from his sword to an impoverished embroiderer with a sick son, pluck out his sapphire eyes and deliver them to a struggling playwright and a match girl who lived with an abusive father.

Seeing that the prince is now blind, the bird decides to stay forever and be his eyes. The swallow tells the prince about his travels in distant lands and all that he has seen from above, only to hear the request that he fly over the city and report what he saw. So he flies and sees "the rich making merry in their beautiful houses, while the beggars were sitting at the gates... the white faces of starving children looking out listlessly at the black streets." On reporting back, the prince instructs him to take off his gold "leaf by leaf, and give it to my poor." After it is done, the prince looks a shabby gray but the children's cheeks are rosy and their lives are filled with cheer. The swallow flaps his wings to stay warm but eventually succumbs to the cold of death. The prince's leaden heart cracks when the faithful bird dies. The next morning, the mayor sees how disgraceful the statue now looks, has it pulled down and melted so that a statue of himself can take the prince's place. Seeing all of this, God sends his angels to bring him the two most precious things in the city. They bring the leaden heart (which would not melt) and the dead bird, and God says they chose rightly for the prince could praise him in the city of gold and the swallow sing forever in Paradise.

St. John declares the profound mystery and devastating reality of the Word made flesh: he showed forth the glory, grace, and truth of the Father but was rejected by those among whom he came to dwell; those who received him became children of God (cf. 1:10–14). Christ came into this suffering world as one from whom others hid their faces, acquainted with grief and despised for his sorrows (Isaiah 53:3). Yet he is the one we anticipate anew in this time of light in darkness, "the one who walks righteously and despises oppression, the one our eyes see as the king in his beauty... in a land that stretches far" (cf. Isaiah 33:14–17). Wilde's The Nightingale and the Rose, The Selfish Giant, and The Young King lead forth from there and connect to the ensuing observances of Lent and Easter.

Oscar Wilde died in Paris on the day which determines the beginning of Advent, St. Andrew's Day, November 30, 1900. At forty-six, he was destitute and broken by personal betrayal, public disgrace, and the ravages of hard-labor imprisonment, yet on his deathbed came his conversion to Roman Catholicism. Roughly thirteen years earlier, at the peak of his life, he had written the fairytales that are a lasting treasure for us all. Even then, he wrote these words (at the start of The Sphinx without a Secret) that let us see through his eyes as much as the Star-Child and the Happy Prince: "One afternoon I was sitting outside the Café de la Paix, watching the splendor and shabbiness of Parisian life, and wondering over my vermouth at the strange panorama of pride and poverty that was passing before me..."

May our eyes be wide open in humility and grace to Christ the Incarnate Word, this broken world, and its inhabitants he came to redeem! ↑


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STEPHEN HAWKING

You awaken to find your wife gone from bed. She's always been hot. So hot, once, she made the image of a body on your inflatable camping mattress. But now that she's vanished, her heat is missing, her imprint fading fast. You wonder where she's gone, what she's left, and discover the urge to go outside, to stand, unnatural, under the stars. You bring, to your surprise, two beers. In the yard, Stephen Hawking waits. You find him there between the wrought-iron and crabapple. You hand him his beer and, not ungenerously, he neglects to mention your nakedness. His own clothes hang from his frame like his face hangs from his bones, his eyes more volatile than you ever imagined. His voice comes slowly, like a broken fax. Stephen Hawking tells you there is a hole in space. It is a billion light-years across. It is cold. The hole he describes lies ten billion light-years away. It holds no matter, no dark matter, but, he says, it is filled with what makes us expand.

Bryan Dietrich
Son of My Strength

Chris Matthis

Ever since Adam and Eve's fall into sin, pain has been an unavoidable part of childbirth. Even with epidurals and Lamaze breathing techniques, God's curse remains: "I will surely multiply your pain in childbirth; in pain shall you bring forth children..." (Gen. 3:16, ESV). I always believed these words pertained strictly to the pains of labor and delivery. Yet since my ordination, my understanding of "pain in childbearing" has enlarged to include all the years of childhood even beyond birth. I hear the pain of childbearing in a mother's quivering voice when she speaks of her child's battle with autism or an incurable digestive disorder. I see the pain of bringing forth children in a father's face after he bails his teenage son out of jail or discovers that his daughter has been raped. And from what I can tell, the pain does not end just because a child turns eighteen and becomes an adult.

It is never painless to bring a child into the world, neither for the mother nor the father. It is among life's most difficult experiences, and yet, as I am beginning to discover, nothing else comes close to the fulfillment and pleasure of parenting.

My wife Lisa and I first experienced this strange mixture of pain and pleasure during the first week of our son Benjamin's life. He had a rocky start in this world and almost didn't make it, but the Lord was faithful and preserved his life. Lisa was induced for labor the day after her due date. In the baking, mid-August Colorado heat, she was ready to push him into the world and get her "bun" out of the oven. Of course, even after the Pitocin, there would still be several hours before the pushing phase. So in the meantime, we tried to fill the wait by holding hands and praying together. My father and siblings dropped by to offer encouragement and support. We finished out the wait by reading several scriptures that speak about the blessing of children: Psalms 127, 128, and 131, Mary's Magnificat, and Zechariah's Benedictus. Through this entire time, all the natal monitors indicated that our unborn son was healthy and doing fine. His heart rate was good, and there were no indications of fetal stress.

Then shortly after midnight on August 15, Lisa was ready to push. She squeezed my hand and tightened her face through each contraction. So concentrated were her efforts that she barely screamed or moaned. All her energy was exerted for the pushing.

About thirty minutes into the labor, the doctor exclaimed that she could see hair on our baby's head. Lisa got excited and smiled through the tears. She too was born with a full head of hair! Sensing the end was near, she really started pushing. Then just after one o'clock in the morning our son was born. Tremendous joy and relief swept over Lisa's face, and I broke into hysterical laughter.

I recall Jesus' words: "When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world" (John 16:21). If the overwhelming joy did not replace the anguish, how could a mother even want to go through labor again for other children?

Benjamin came out with a full head of dark brown hair (nearly black) and his right fist pressed against his cheek. Already he was living up to the meaning of his name, "son of my right hand" (Hebrew idiom for "son of my strength").

But almost at once, something was wrong. The doctor's smile tightened into a grimace, and her eyebrows furrowed in concentration. Benjamin did not come into the world kicking and screaming like most newborns. His arms and legs were inert, and instead of a hearty cry, only a low gurgle came from his throat. He could barely breathe on his own, and he was turning a purplish color.

The doctor quickly clamped off Benjamin's umbilical cord and cut it before handing him off to a nurse. There was no time for me to fulfill that paternal rite of passage. The nurse applied suction...
to his mouth and nose, but Benjamin still would not breathe.

The nurse placed the baby into Lisa’s arms for about fifteen seconds for that crucial first encounter between mother and child. But almost immediately she took him back and whisked him to the Plexiglas cradle across the room where he was surrounded at once by six or seven nurses who seemed to appear out of nowhere. Like guardian angels, they hovered over him with various instruments of healing. His skin, still wet with afterbirth, had darkened to a terrible blue. My heart filled with horror, fearing the worst. In my ministry experience, a blue baby meant a dead baby. I feared God was taking my son away before I could even hold him.

Two summers earlier I preached the funeral for a baby who died in the neo-natal intensive care unit. When we arrived at the NICU, the girl’s teenage mother clutched her dead baby, cold and blue, to her chest. She kept crying and kissing her, unable to let go.

The child’s grandmother said to me, “Pastor, don’t you want to hold her and bless her?” No, thank you, I did not. The tragedy of the situation and the otherworldly appearance of a blue baby horrified me. But I didn’t want to disappoint the family or let them down. So I placed my hand on the child’s forehead. I almost recoiled from the touch of her cold, blue skin, but somehow I kept my hand there and mumbled out a prayer.

Skylar was cremated, and I preached her funeral less than a week later. For two weeks after that terrible hospital visit, my dreams were dark and cold, full of blue babies and other dead children.

So two years later, when I saw my own son turning blue in front of me, I completely fell apart. I couldn’t believe I was losing him.

“Breathe, Benjamin!” I commanded him from across the room, where I held Lisa’s hand. “Breathe!”

“We’re at two minutes!” I heard a nurse say, and I looked at the clock on the wall.

Two minutes? What did she mean? The nurses continued to work on Benjamin’s little body, trying to push life into him.

“Three minutes!”

Then I understood. They were counting the time elapsed from his birth, how long he had been without oxygen! I squeezed Lisa’s hand, hoping she was unaware of how terribly wrong everything was.

In fierce silence, I prayed, “Lord, you brought him into this world. Don’t you dare take him out of it! You can’t take him away from me!”

During Lisa’s pregnancy, the reality of Benjamin’s growth and development was an abstraction for me. I never could feel him kick in utero because of the placement of Lisa’s anterior placenta. Despite the ultrasounds and “4D” imaging, it was difficult for me to sense a connection to the person growing in Lisa’s belly.

Instantly overcome by an incredible love for this boy I had just met, I could not imagine life without him. I loved my son.

But now that Benjamin was out in the world, I seized on my new calling as father with a fierce and desperate love. From some unknown place, a power, force, or feeling took hold of me and awoke my paternal instinct and duty. Instantly overcome by an incredible love for this boy I had just met, I could not imagine life without him. I loved my son.

“Five minutes!”

And suddenly the nurses were wiping their foreheads in relief. “Okay,” one of them said, “let’s get him into the NICU.”

“Can I come?” I asked, and the delivery nurse nodded yes.

Lisa still hadn’t delivered the placenta, and the doctor was waiting for her to finish labor. I gave Lisa another hand squeeze and kissed her on the cheek.

“Good job, honey!” I said and hurried after the nurses to the NICU. As they put oxygen tubing into my baby’s nostrils and inserted an IV port in his arm, I felt so hopeless and useless, so completely out of place. As a pastor, I had
spent plenty of time in hospital waiting rooms and patient rooms, including the ER and ICU. But never before had I been there as a patient's despairing loved one.

"Can I touch him?" I asked one of the nurses.

"Yes, just don't pick him up."

A single light burned hot and yellow over Benjamin. His color was returning, and his skin wasn't blue anymore. By this time, his head was inside a plastic humidifier puffing out a foggy mist, and his vitals beeped away on a monitor beside him. I stood at the foot of his little cradle and held his tiny feet. I didn't know what else to do, so I gently rolled his pea-sized toes between my thumb and fingers and slowly massaged the arches of his feet. I was afraid to touch his fragile head and torso, nervous of the wires and tubing. So I just held his feet and prayed for him.

"Help me, Lord! Save him! Heal my son! Help him live."

When the nurse came to check on Benjamin a few minutes later, I asked her if he was going to be okay.

"Can I say with 100 percent certainty that he's going to be okay?" she said. "No, of course, I can't guarantee that. But I think he's going to live. His pulse and blood pressure are good. He has a good temp. He just needs a little help breathing with the oxygen right now."

"What happened?" I asked. "How did things go wrong?"

"I don't know," she said honestly. "Sometimes when babies are born, it's just a complete shock to their system." It is a strange world outside the womb.

I stayed with Benjamin for a long while, clinging to his feet. Yet without warning, a terrible feeling of hopelessness overcame me, and I rushed out of the NICU into the hallway, where I dry heaved and burst into throaty sobs. I leaned against the wall and sank down into a fetal position to cry, "Help me, Lord! Save him, please!"

It was at that point that I took out my cell phone and started dialing all my local area family and friends. My stepsister Kathy, who lives about thirty miles away, was the only one who answered at about two o'clock in the morning.

"Did the baby come?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Are you okay?"

"No. Something's wrong with Benjamin. He's in the NICU, and I'm scared."

"Don't worry, Chris. I'm on my way."

I resumed my prayerful, tearful vigil over my son and waited for my sister. The nurse notified me when Kathy arrived about half an hour later. I went out to her in the hallway, and she hugged me.

"This is the scariest night of my life," I said.

"It's going to be okay," she answered. "We're praying for you guys."

"Do you want to see him?" I asked. She nodded and followed me into the NICU. Once again I clutched Benjamin's feet. Was he my anchor, or was I his? I couldn't let him go. I wouldn't let God take him from me, not yet.

My sister stood a little behind me and rubbed my back. "He's a beautiful boy," she said. "He looks like you."

I held Benjamin's little feet in my hands again. Kathy stood and watched us both. After a while, Kathy suggested that we go back and check on Lisa. She'd been moved to a recovery room. Kathy and I both gave Lisa a hug and then sat on the futon in the hospital room. But all I could think about was Benjamin. I returned to the NICU until a nurse told me that I needed to get some rest.

"He's in good hands," she assured me. "And in a few hours he's going to be hungry, and your wife is going to need a lot of help. So you better get some sleep while you can."

I went back to Lisa's room and after exchanging a tearful and grateful farewell with my sister, I rolled out the futon, turned down the lights, and collapsed into a weary and restless sleep.

When I woke around seven o'clock in the morning, the nurses informed us that Benjamin was making an amazing recovery and seemed to be doing just fine. His oxygen levels were almost normal. Around ten o'clock, they took him off the ventilator. I wheeled Lisa down to the NICU, and she held him to her breast while trying to get him to latch for nursing. We took turns cradling our son and speaking his name to him over and over. "Benjamin! Benjamin, I love you! You're such a beautiful boy, Benjamin!"
Despite the IV tubing and my emotional exhaustion, I finally believed that Benjamin was going to be okay. The Lord had answered my prayers. Benjamin was going to make it!

**Genesis 35 Tells the Story of Another**

Benjamin’s birth. Jacob’s beloved bride, his favorite wife Rachel, labored in intense pains. And “she had hard labor.” What a terrible understatement! The pain was literally killing her, and Rachel died giving birth to her second son. So in her dying woes, she named him Benoni, which means “son of my sorrow” in Hebrew.

Many fathers might have blamed and resented their newborn for this loss. But not Jacob. No, he ransomed his son from the curse of his mother’s death and redeemed him by renaming him Benjamin, “the son of my right hand” or “the son of my strength.”

I am embarrassed to admit that when Lisa and I chose the name Benjamin for our firstborn, I had forgotten the narrative of the first child to bear that name. But my Benjamin also turned out to be a fighter. And when he couldn’t breathe on his own, the Spirit of God sustained him so that he could survive the night of his birth.

The next morning, the pediatrician said it was a “miracle” there were no lasting complications from Benjamin’s oxygen deprivation. Often a lack of oxygen at birth results in brain damage, cerebral palsy, seizures, or even death. Long-term effects can include epilepsy, memory problems, and lower intelligence. Benjamin suffered none of those side effects. Indeed, none of the doctors or nurses could explain his early breathing difficulties. Yes, his lungs were forty-percent full of fluid from the bag of waters, but so are many babies’ lungs when they are born. No one knows why it happened in the first place. And no one can say why Benjamin wasn’t burdened by any other problems. Now, in the doctor’s words, he was “perfect.”

Even if the medical community cannot explain my son’s miraculous recovery, I can and do. It is God’s answer to prayer, and not just to our prayers, but the prayers of all our friends and family who followed his recovery and hospitalization through social media. The New Testament says, “The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working” (Jas. 5:16). On the night of Benjamin’s birth, the Lord listened to the powerful prayers of his saints. “In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me” (Ps. 120:1). He gave me back my son, my Benjamin, the son of my strength.

As I write this, Benjamin is just over two years old. He is a healthy, energetic toddler, whose main activities are running, climbing, throwing, and breaking things. His personal motto is “Go, go, go!”, evidenced by the fact that his favorite toys are anything with wheels. Friends and neighbors often ask, “Does he always smile and laugh like that?” Benjamin’s first word, of course, was Dada. (He is the son of my right hand!) I never could have imagined the joy and wonder that my baby brings to my life. Becoming a father truly is the best thing that ever happened to me.

And yet I know that tough days lie ahead. Lisa’s pain in childbearing—and my own—are not at an end. As Benjamin grows, we will watch him fall and break bones, have his heart broken, and, Lord willing, grow into a godly man with a family of his own someday. This will not be easy, and the way will be full of dangers and temptations. “In pain shall you bring forth children.” Pain will always be a part of our children’s lives this side of heaven. Pain is more than an unavoidable part of life. It is the essence of life in a fallen world.

Even Mary the mother of our Lord, when she presented the baby Jesus in the Temple, was told by Simeon, “A sword will pierce your own soul too” (Luke 2:35, NIV). But His time has not yet come. Birthing pains were hard enough for us; we’ll worry about “swords” later, as I must put Benjamin to bed.

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Hugh Howey's *Wool* is an imaginative, post-apocalyptic story about an underground, futuristic society whose citizens reside in an upside-down, multi-level silo burrowed deep in the ground. No one knows exactly when or why the silo was built, but they do know that it protects them from the surface of the earth, which is inhospitable to humans, to put it mildly.

Outside the silo there were "dull slopes of these gray hills rising up toward grayer clouds, dappled sunlight straining to illuminate the land with little success. Across it all were the terrible winds, the frenzied gusts that whipped small clouds of soil into curls and whorls that cascaded one another across a landscape meant only for them" (125).

But Allison was not a criminal; she had chosen to go outside of her own accord, even knowing that all "cleaners" die. Why did she want out? Why would anyone want out? Given the toxicity of the outside world, the silo seems like a pretty decent place to live. Or is it? This is the first of many mysteries that unravel in *Wool*, the first book in Howey's fast-paced science fiction trilogy.

*Wool* was first released in July 2011 as a sixty-page e-book. Howey, an unknown author at the time, self-published *Wool* through Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing and priced it at 99 cents. In the Q&A section of his book, Howey encourages readers to write reviews: "I read every single review on Amazon, I promise. This is how the books are discovered, so if you want other readers to find the books you're enjoying, take a few moments and craft a review."

Through a new approach to book marketing, rave reader reviews, and perhaps a bit of luck, *Wool* rose to the top of the US bestseller list, and Howey, who interacted and still interacts regularly with his fans, began working on four additional novels that were also published in serial form and later as a set, the *Wool Omnibus* (January 2012). Two more books, *Shift* (January 2013) and *Dust* (August 2013), completed the *Silo Trilogy*.

*Wool* explores the complex social order that has developed in the silo. Each of its 144 floors holds a different yet integral component of soci-
ety: there are floors for lodging, farming and aquaponics, medical offices, IT, and more. On the bottom floor is the aging generator and the mechanics who work tirelessly (and thanklessly) to maintain it. The silo is governed by an elected mayor and sheriff who reside on the top floor. In order to maintain a community enclosed in such a tight space, there must be rules, and there are many rules in the silo: you have to win the "lottery" to have children, you must shadow and take on a practical profession, you only receive a limited ration of food, etc. But the one rule you must never break is that you must never say you want to go outside the silo. Even whispering or joking about your desire to go outside is considered treason, punishable by cleaning. The silo people don't talk about the outside. Ever.

Desperate times call for desperate measures, but the measures used to control the silo's population are severe—even cruel—and they come with no explanation other than that the air outside is deadly. This is just one of the many ways Howey raises the tension between the need for order and control in order to survive and the desire for freedom in order to live. "This is the story of mankind clawing for survival, of mankind on the edge," Howey explains on his website. "The world outside has grown unkind, the view of it limited, talk of it forbidden. But there are always those who hope, who dream. These are the dangerous people, the residents who infect others with their optimism. Their punishment is simple. They are given the very thing they profess to want: They are allowed outside."

Howey's characters, whose thoughts are conveyed through third-person narration, are likeable, intelligent, and, for the most part, believable. Although readers never actually meet Allison (she doesn't narrate a chapter), we do meet her husband Holston, who works as silo sheriff. Holston is hardworking, loyal, and deeply affected by the loss of his wife. He spends countless hours working to uncover the mystery of his wife's death until he resigns.

His successor, Juliette, takes over as the protagonist of the story. A mechanic with a strong will and sharp wit, Juliette has a tremendous work ethic and a similarly sound sense of ethics. Though she is small, she is not afraid to search for the truth or speak her mind, even when doing so gets her into trouble. And the thing about the silo is that there are a lot of un-truths buried there, just waiting to be uncovered.

Like many other characters in the book, Juliette is not without her flaws. Yet her passion for fixing things—and pursuing justice—makes her so incredibly likeable and successful. Howey's writing allows readers to take a journey with Juliette and walk in her shoes. And Juliette's journey, as you might have imagined, gets very interesting as the book continues.

Perhaps the most compelling thing about Howey raises the tension between the need for order and control in order to survive and the desire for freedom in order to live. the strange society Howey builds in Wool is how plausible so much of it seems. Do we, as a human society, care that we are poisoning the earth with cars, fertilizer runoff, and our own waste? With no concerted effort being made to avoid the environmental damage that many argue is irreversible, it is chilling to think that our actions today could bring about a future similar to what Howey imagines.

Even more unsettling is that the forms of social stratification and control in the silo, evidenced by divisions among floors, also reflect developments in our own society. How much power must we give our government so that it will be able to protect us from a frightening world? How much information should we let our leaders keep from us?

In the silo, several years' worth of public historical records were said to have been "wiped out" by the rebels during the previous uprising, but Allison, and later Juliette, discover that the records weren't lost but purposely hidden. In fact, there have been multiple uprisings. Teachers
read from books depicting days of lush green grass, cloudless blue skies and animals, but silo
children and adults alike are led to believe these stories are simply fiction.

Howey's *Wool* delivers an incredible world, sympathetic characters, and great suspense, but it also offers a cautionary message: There is a fine line between protection for the good of citizens and protection for the good of those in power. When the balance tips too far to one side, there will be conflict. In the case of *Wool*, uprisings begin when individuals finally get fed up with the lies, and they end with devastating destruction.

*Wool* reminds that the earth will change; in fact, it is changing now. Can we counterbalance the poison we are creating in our environment? Can we overcome the very acts that poison society and threaten our liberty?

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**WITNESS ROCK**

Once, long ago, a small donkey,
kicked this stone loose.
It slipped down a mountainside
then sailed—bouncing once
off a rotting log, inventing
the low note. Next, the miracle:

Flying up, quartz chips reflected
a boy on wood on top of stones.
An old man raised a knife.

It struck another rock, skipped
into a mirror-still lake.
The splash dropped slowly.

Mark J. Mitchell

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Erin Strybis is a Marketing Manager at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. She lives and works in Chicago.
"I AM A BUG OF A MAN," proclaimed Neal. Earlier that week, a spider had crawled across his car windshield while he waited at a red light. He turned the windshield wipers on hoping to gently brush the spider off; instead, the spider was caught between the wiper and the glass. Arachnid guts were smeared everywhere. Neal finished the story by saying: “I felt really bad about killing that poor spider. What makes the whole thing worse is this: I am like that spider; I am a bug of a man waiting to be squashed by the world.”

Neal lived in his car. Through the winter months, he slept in a wool cap and boots through nights of finger-numbing cold; through the summer months, he would wake up sweating with all the windows open. Poorly lit rest stops, gas stations, and church parking lots were his nightly abode. His diesel domicile also served as a dining room for his daily meal of beans and rice.

He graduated from Dartmouth in the computer science department. Silicon Valley treated him well until the dot-com bubble left him very poor. He had been working random contract programming jobs. Having no immediate family to support him financially, he bounced around from state to state—Missouri, Nevada, Florida, Michigan—chasing after short-term contracts. The money was good; the work was sparse. He allocated every paycheck the same way: student loans and medical bills were the first priority, and then a portion went to saving for the time between contracts, and finally the leftover money was used for necessities like gas for the car and more beans and rice for dinner.

Neal sat in my office for over an hour telling me his story. He had not come to the church looking for money. Rather, he was on the verge of despair and needed to talk to someone. He was hungry and thirsty. He was without any prospect of another programming job. We prayed. We cried. We hurt.

None of that story I just told you was true. It was all a lie. Neal did not live in his car. The stories about the dot-com bubble and studying at Dartmouth were fictitious. The contract work and paying off student loans were mere yarns. I am not even certain that he ever killed the spider on his windshield.

After we had talked, prayed, and cried, he left. I told him that we would put together a collection of food and gift cards that he could pick up the next day. I called a local human services agency to see if there was anything else that we could gather up for him. It turns out that they already knew of Neal. Earlier that day, he had been to a few other churches with the same story: Ivy League educated programmer living in his car to pay off student loans and medical bills. Neal had already received a few hundred dollars in food and gifts before he came to meet with me. He had been doing this for a handful of months. I declined to give Neal any more assistance.

After that day, the words of Jesus have haunted me: “Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me’” (Matthew 25:37–40).

Neal came to me as a hungry, thirsty, stranger. His hunger came with an extra
serving of deceit. His thirst was garnished with greed. This stranger came into my midst with a fabricated story. His deceit and greed, to a degree, make me feel better about withholding assistance. His hunger and thirst, however, make me very uncomfortable about withholding assistance. I can find no satisfactory caveat for my decision in the words of Jesus. He simply gives us an invitation to feed, clothe, and show hospitality without mentioning the recipient’s honesty or integrity.

Neal showed me deceit. Neal showed me scheming and greed. He sought to capitalize on mercy by concocting a well-crafted story. More importantly, however, Neal showed me how I all too often stand before God. Neal made me realize that we are not just beggars before God. We are often deceitful beggars. And he still shows us mercy.

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**AGE MARKS**

Read the palimpsest of the bark
as you would a poem, not for sense alone,
but for all the layers, hues and textures,
shapes and tones. Or see in it a map
intended less for guiding than for getting lost
in a landscape of little flaking canyons,
plains, plateaus etched by wind and ice and rain.
Or watch it shedding like a snake's skin
in lichenized, jigsaw patches. Or view it
as a Jackson Pollack of the bark,
whose archipelagos of resin clots,
and cleavage swaths and arcs are strokes
of time's relentless, unrelenting genius.
Or see it as a simulacrum for self, which speaks
of how—when clawed at, stretched and torn
for untold years of seasons—even the plainest,
stoop, most nondescript of trees
begins to glow from within.

Richard Schiffman
On Human Rights Abuse and the Abuse of Human Rights

H. David Baer

In a recent conversation about human rights law, I found myself defending a crucial distinction, that between a human rights abuse and an abuse of human rights. A human rights abuse, I said, violates human dignity in a fundamental way and, when committed on a large scale, offends the moral conscience of humankind. An abuse of human rights, on the other hand, offends common sense, and actually undermines respect for human rights. An abuse of human rights occurs when the idea of human rights is misappropriated and used for illegitimate ends.

Sometimes abuse of human rights is little more than cultural imperialism clothed in the garment of moral righteousness. Consider growing criticism of male circumcision in morally superior Western Europe. A couple of years ago, a court in Germany found that the rite of circumcision infringed upon a child’s right to bodily integrity. The startling decision caused the Germans some discomfort, since circumcision is a Jewish practice. Eventually, Germany’s Parliament passed a law permitting the circumcision of children when medically supervised, but even so, European outrage over this ancient practice, almost as barbaric as piercing the ears of small girls, continues to grow. A former Danish health minister declared not long ago that circumcision “goes against the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child,” and a recent poll revealed a majority of Danes would support banning the practice (JTA, October 22, 2014). Meanwhile, in Norway, concerned nurses have urged the government to outlaw circumcision, and Swedes have also taken up the issue.

Champions of progress always encounter resistance, and this time the children of light are being opposed by critics who claim the proposed circumcision bans are a discriminatory measure directed against Europe’s Muslim minorities, which, if implemented, would infringe upon religious freedom. In addition, the moral crusaders of Europe, by invoking human rights to oppose a cultural practice they don’t respect, are unintentionally undermining the stature human rights hold in establishing international norms. Circumcision, after all, is common throughout much of the world. It is practiced by Muslims and Jews, and also widely in the United States. Insofar as objections to circumcision rest on appeals to human rights law, the vanguard of European Enlightenment ought to consider the fact that very few nations outside Europe see things the way they do. The previously invoked Convention on the Rights of the Child addresses problems like child exploitation, capital punishment for minors, and separation of children from their parents. Those who want to add circumcision to this list of grave evils are pressing for a significant innovation in international law, one that goes well beyond the global consensus. And when human rights are expanded to the point that they no longer represent global consensus or international norms, they are no longer able to function to bring pressure to bear on oppressive political regimes.

But bringing pressure to bear on oppressive regimes is exactly what human rights are supposed to do. The human rights provisions of the Helsinki Final Act, for example, provided protection for political dissidents behind the Iron Curtain, a factor which contributed over time to the collapse of Communism in Europe. The effectiveness of the Helsinki process depended on the fact that everyone acknowledged (even if only hypocritically) fundamental rights such as the freedoms of speech, association, and religion. When, by contrast, human rights claims don’t reflect global consensus, their legitimacy becomes disputed. Human rights inflation reduces the value of this important currency, rendering human rights law ineffective.
The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted back in 1948, managed to set forth its provisions in only thirty articles. Today the number of human rights provisions to be found in various covenants, conventions, and charters exceeds well over six hundred. Indeed, just about anything and everything that can improve the human condition, from Internet access to extra bedrooms, has been declared a human right by somebody. (Pizano, February 26, 2014). This is hardly a positive development. As human rights proliferate, they become controversial and controverted. The result is a disputed, and hence ineffective, regime of international law.

Problems of this sort have already negatively impacted the law of armed conflict. The First Additional Protocol of 1977, for example, is an international treaty that extends the protections afforded by the Geneva Conventions to insurgents or revolutionaries “fighting against colonial domination and alien occupation and against racist regimes in the exercise of their right of self-determination.” It also loosens the requirements irregular combatants need to meet to be accorded POW status when captured. Consequently, the United States never ratified the treaty, a fact which has contributed to competing legal regimes for armed combat. Disputes over the content of international law diminish its effectiveness. Lack of clarity about the legal status of irregulars, for example, contributed to problems at Guantanamo Bay.

The International Criminal Court, established in 1988 by the Rome Statute, claims jurisdiction over “crimes of aggression.” To punish aggression, however, one must first identify an aggressor, that is, an “unjust” party who starts the war. Yet the laws of war are premised on the legal equality of belligerents. This is a crucial premise of the Geneva Conventions. After all, if soldiers on one side of a conflict are fighting to advance the crime of aggression, why should they be treated as lawful rather than unlawful combatants? As professor Yoram Dinstein has pointed out, “once war of aggression became proscribed and criminalized, voices were raised in support of a policy of applying the *jus in bello* in a discriminatory fashion, adversely affecting the aggressor state” (156). But a discriminatory application of *jus in bello* would completely undermine the laws of war. In order for soldiers to be treated equally, belligerents must also be legally equal, and they can be legally equal only if international law is murky about identifying the aggressor. Consequently, the United States, China, Russia, and India have, with good reason, all refused to ratify the Rome Statute.

Fortunately, the law of armed conflict is well enough established that it can, for the most part, withstand the stress placed on it in recent decades by the development of conflicting legal regimes. This is in good part because the laws of war have developed substantially over the last few centuries in a way that enjoys broad and deep assent. The same cannot be said about human rights law, a very modern development that in some respects has been controversial from the start. The proliferation of human rights claims thus poses a serious threat to the viability of human rights over the long run. Should, however, the concept of human rights become ineffective, we would lose an important tool in the battle against authoritarian regimes. Perhaps the enlightened leaders of Europe, instead of attacking ancient religious practices, should think more deeply about what human rights are really for.

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Works Cited


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