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On the cover: Peter Dohmen (1904–1977) and Peter Dohmen Studios. 
Creation, Redemption, Sanctification window designs, undated.
Gouache and ink on paper. Chapel of the Resurrection, Campus Ministries, 
and Brauer Museum of Art Gifts Fund Purchase. 2014.28.

Peter Dohmen, born near Cologne, Germany, demonstrated a talent for art at a young age and received training from many of the most prestigious art academies in Europe. After working in Austria for a time, he returned to Cologne to establish a studio in 1936. Although he became well known for his stained-glass windows and murals, the German government blackballed him from work during the Second World War due to his public opposition to the Nazi Party. After his studio was destroyed by bombing during the war, he immigrated to the United States where he established the Peter Dohmen Studios in St. Paul, Minnesota. Dohmen’s modernist style was a good fit with church architecture trends in the United States at the time, and he soon started receiving prominent commissions. His window designs were created in St. Paul and then sent to Germany where the windows were fabricated before being shipped to the United States. Among his best known works are the stained-glass windows in Valparaiso University’s Chapel of the Resurrection, mosaic murals at Carleton College, and stained-glass windows at the University of Notre Dame library. His work can also be found in many churches throughout the central United States. The design featured on the front cover was created for windows installed in 1959–60 in Mayville Lutheran Church in Mayville, North Dakota. It was recently acquired from Germany by the Brauer Museum of Art with the support of Valparaiso University Campus Ministries.
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REVIEWS

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whatever is **TRUE**

whatever is **NOBLE**

whatever is **RIGHT**

whatever is **PURE**

whatever is **LOVELY**

whatever is **ADMIRABLE**

if anything is excellent or praiseworthy
—think about such things.

Philippians 4:8
Some events change everything. As we go about our lives—tending to our families, doing our jobs, finding moments of precious leisure—we settle into a routine, and it can be hard to shake us out of established patterns. But sometimes an unexpected event does just that. These events might be happy ones like the birth of a child or painful ones like the loss of a job or of a loved one. Moments of surprise or shock often disrupt the contours of our daily lives, and they may lead us to reevaluate our goals and our very sense of who we are.

Some events do more than change individual lives; they change entire communities. An event that at first affects only a few often becomes more widely disruptive. When Michael Brown was shot to death in Ferguson, Missouri, those closest to him felt the pain most acutely, but the impact of this shooting—and of other events such as the death of Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida and of Freddie Gray in Baltimore—has created ripples that spread outward from his family and friends, throughout communities whose residents question whether their children can walk their cities’ streets in safety, across a nation whose people are led to wonder if we will ever overcome our sad legacy of slavery and racism. As Harold K. Bush writes in “Surviving Ferguson,” everyday horrors, like the one that occurred on the streets of Ferguson, are a sudden, invasive presence in our otherwise mundane lives, but these horrors, by unsettling our minds, create moments of openness to transcendence.

Some people are, of course, affected more by these events than others. It is true that in recent years remarkable progress has been made in racial integration, but we remain a nation divided. As sociologist Elijah Anderson has written, our society is still largely separated in to “white space” and “black space” (see: “The White Space,” Sociology of Race and Ethnicity, Vol. 1: No. 1: 10–21). White space is perceived as a space of privilege, a place where jobs, education, and opportunity are present; black space is the iconic ghetto, perceived as riven with crime and poverty. African Americans must navigate both black and white spaces as a condition of everyday life, but white Americans can avoid space they perceive as “black.” From inside the bubble of white space, shootings in places like Ferguson seem remote, irrelevant to our lives, which leaves many of us insulated from the transformative forces rippling through our communities.

But the ripples keep coming, faster and stronger, becoming more like waves crashing into our lives until can we no longer ignore them. Sometimes, they make us see the world differently. In “Risk and Volatility for the Rich and the Poor,” David Lott describes how a wealth management seminar was transformed by his awareness of recent protests. In “The Challenge of Music We Can’t Stand,” Josh Langhoff relates how a concert on the Chicago lakefront was changed for performers and listeners alike by the shooting in Ferguson, which had happened only five days earlier. Contributors to this issue relate other experiences that disrupted their lives and made them reconsider the world around them. In “Pigs Is Equal,” Gayle Boss describes how a surprising encounter with a pig has led her to reconsider her thinking about animals and agriculture. In “Transcendence in America,” Geoffrey C. Bowden describes how watching the film American Sniper left him concerned about civil religion in America. Other contributors describe how they were led to reconsider their attitudes toward issues like sexual violence or environmental sustainability.

Is God really calling to us through the surprises and shocks of our lives? Most often, we just don’t want to hear this call. We are not ready, like Peter and Andrew, to drop our nets and follow. But when God calls us out of our bubbles, we must embrace all of God’s work in the world around us, not with fear and anxiety of all that we do not understand, but with prayerful thanks for the gifts of a God who is the author of a peace that surpasses all understanding.

—JPO
Surviving Ferguson
Hope in the Midst of Everyday Horrors

Harold K. Bush

By 1916, W.E.B. Du Bois was more than fed up with the common phenomenon in America that had become known as lynching. He didn’t just detest the practice; he honestly wondered if it represented an evil that might destroy the nation itself. For decades, scores of young men had been subjected to mob violence, most often black victims of white mobs. But it was one particular case that brought Du Bois’s imagination to a full boil: the lynching of Jesse Washington in Waco, Texas in May of that year. It was a gory affair, attended by thousands of curious Texans, many of them with their families. Washington’s body was mutilated, stabbed, burned, dragged around the town by automobile and then by horse, and left hanging just across the street from the courthouse for all to see. Photographs were taken, postcards produced, and souvenirs were sold. Crowds were estimated to be over ten thousand. Washington’s body hung just below the mayor’s window.

In response to this sheer, grisly desecration, Du Bois produced a landmark essay for the magazine he edited, The Crisis, complete with photos of the body as a supplement. Published in July of 1916, it was titled “The Waco Horror.” Du Bois’s account ends with a more general overview of the lurid practice: a table listing the number of “colored men lynched by year,” from 1885–1916, for example, totaling 2,853. Summing up, Du Bois writes: “This is an account of one lynching. It is horrible, but it is matched in horror by scores of others in the last thirty years, and in its illegal, law-defying, race-hating aspect, it is matched by 2842 other lynchings...

What are we going to do about this record? The civilization of America is at stake. The sincerity of Christianity is challenged” (8).

I begin with this brief and sordid tale of what Du Bois called the “Waco Horror” for multiple reasons. First, I want to highlight the fact that he names this event a “horror,” a term that I think is precisely what describes the challenge of a scene like the one in Waco a century ago. Second, I want to suggest the theological importance of the mode and genre we commonly call “horror.” In particular, I am focusing here on the occurrence in our lives of what I wish to call “everyday horror”: the sudden, invasive presence of the horrific into the mundane lives that we lead. It seems clear to me, based on steady engagement with college students and many other twenty-somethings over the past quarter century, that everyday horror constitutes one of the most difficult apologetical challenges for the church at the present time. Finally, I will posit—despite the evil that surrounds us on a daily basis—a tentative response to everyday horror: an eschatological framing device by which we can find our way safely through the valley of the shadow of darkness.

My term “everyday horror” arises in part from David Dark’s entertaining exploration of the apocalyptic mode. In his quirky yet often brilliant book Everyday Apocalypse (2002), Dark suggests, as a postmodern variation on an old theme by the likes of the Transcendentalists, that careful observers can detect how the supernatural realm bursts into our lives on a regular basis. Dark provides a blueprint for understand-
ing how such a mode of surveillance is available to us all the time, if we develop the skills to use it:

[A]pocalyptic expression is a radical declaration concerning the meaning of human experience... By announcing a new world of unrealized possibility, apocalyptic serves to invest the details of the everyday with cosmic significance while awakening its audience to the presence of marginalizing forces otherwise unnamed and unchallenged... It creates an unrest within our minds, and it can only be overcome by imagining differently, by giving in to its aesthetic authority, by letting it invigorate the lazy conscience... apocalyptic has a way of curing deafness and educating the mind... [it] will accommodate (indeed, insist upon) a socially disruptive newness... [it] is the place where the future pushes into the present. It’s the breaking in of another dimension, a new wine for which our old wineskins are unprepared. (Dark 11, 10, 12)

Ironically, the Christian church, which is ostensibly called to give voice to the apocalyptic presence inherent in culture and society at large, has frequently failed to maintain faithfulness to this calling. This failure is clearly something that Dark repudiates: a lazy, status-quo church unable or unwilling to sustain the prophetic edge and act out its role as cultural dynamite. As Dark notes, “Few could have predicted that biblical language would become so tied up in social hierarchies that religion would become the object of critique rather than the acknowledged source of the critique itself.... A political-economic order has nothing to fear from a sentimental, fully 'spiritualized' faith” (15). This sort of impotent prophetic voice is of little relevance to the culture-at-large and stands in complete contrast to the essence of the crucifixion of Jesus, described by theologian John Milbank as “the rejection by the political-economic order of a completely new sort of social imagination” (171). The church's apocalyptic mode is meant always to challenge the existing order, and as such its deployment is a major duty of the followers of Jesus.

Beyond admiring Dark's critique, I wish to adopt his use of the notion of “everydayness” by describing what I am calling here “everyday horror.” In my mind, everyday horrors function as an apocalyptic trace insofar as they are always invested in “cosmic significance... [creating] an unrest within our minds.” As such, and given the predominance of the news media erupting into our lives all throughout the day, I have lately been struck by the trending powers of the “everydayness” of horror. CNN News alerts show up throughout the day in my inbox; smart phones deliver bad news even during lunch breaks, meetings, or church services. Most threatening of all, I have been led to rethink the challenge of horror for personal reasons, as is the case with most of my readers. Honestly, our greatest challenge as believers are not the horrors emanating from Nigeria, Syria, or Yemen; or even those closer to home like the school shootings. The greatest challenge of horror are the disasters that affect us personally.

Our greatest challenges as believers are not the horrors emanating from Nigeria, Syria, or Yemen; or even those closer to home like the school shootings. The greatest challenge of horror are the disasters that affect us personally.
Gray. Over the past week or two, the citizens of Baltimore (and the nation and world) have been appalled to see the widespread panic, looting, rioting, arson, and assault that have been unleashed in their city. In Garland, Texas, citizens were shocked to learn that jihadists had been lurking in their neighborhoods waiting for a chance to terrorize their neighbors in the land of the First Amendment. The violence unleashed in Baltimore and Garland seems grimly familiar to everyone here in the city of St. Louis, where in the past nine months, large-scale protest has been underway due to a similar kind of horror in our own streets. The corpse of Michael Brown, left in the broiling sun for an entire afternoon last August, became an icon of everyday horror, as it lay in the street just a dozen miles from where I sit today. The long list of violated bodies of black males—Freddie Gray, Michael Brown, Rodney King, Emmett Till, and countless others—may all be compared to the desecrated and burned body of Jesse Washington a hundred years before, in what Du Bois called the “Waco Horror.” Each represented in their time a shocking challenge to belief in a benevolent God, and to belief in a nation that cared about such heavy abstractions as equality and justice. And all of these bodies inevitably suggested the bereaved parents: in Michael Brown’s case, the image of his grieving mother, bereft of her son, for all time destined to remain a symbol of everyday horror. Again, it is the horrors that turn up from time to time in our personal worlds that mark us most severely. Thus, and lest we forget: as bad as Michael Brown’s death has been for greater St. Louis, we would do well to remember that the horror is far worse for the grieving family members.

I proceed by thinking about the term itself: “horror,” a generic term often associated with certain kinds of films we all loved as adolescents. Let us pause and think about why the horror genre is so attractive, especially for young people. Is it the eschatological triumph of good over evil that has traditionally been the way to conclude horror films? Perhaps; but if it is, then we are left in a quandary when we remember that in recent decades, horror films do not always end with a definitive victory at all. One thinks of Hannibal Lecter wandering off into a crowded market scene on some unidentified tropical island at the end of Silence of the Lambs: the evil one, perpetrator of horror, has finagled himself out of harm’s way, and has escaped justice, maybe preparing that very evening another monstrous feast, a menu featuring human liver with fava beans and chianti.

Why do we find such scenes endlessly fascinating? Could it be that horror films provide evidence for our rapidly degraded view of this fallen world, an organizing metaphor for our utter worship of individual freedom, despite its fearful rejection of providence? It seems plausible to suggest that horror signals a growing conviction of the insoluble nature of evil and constitutes a strong clue to the growing suspicion of many: that God has lost control, that we have been abandoned to the fates, and that in fact evil and terror are winning the day. No longer cherished residents of a cosmos ruled by a benevolent God, Americans today are far more likely to think of themselves as anonymous and forgotten pawns milling about in a terrifying and material universe. Such a shift in thinking about our world has been trending for decades, but now seems to some to be leaping forward at an accelerated rate into a confusing, “unmappable” future. This trend, alas, disrupts what we have previously thought were the unimpeachable progressive ideals of our Western civilization. Or, as Charles Taylor puts it in a chapter entitled “The Dark Abyss” in A Secular Age: “Reality in all directions plunges its roots in the unknown and as yet unmappable. It is this sense which defines the grasp of the world as ‘universe’ and not ‘cosmos’; and this is what I mean when I say that the universe outlook was ‘deep’ in a way that the cosmos picture was not... Humans are no longer charter members of the cosmos, but occupy merely a narrow band of recent time” (326–27). This dark abyss is both unfathomable and terrifying, an unmappable region ridden with everyday horror. We may abhor this account, but more and more it appears that young adults find it accurate. Perhaps horror is endlessly fascinating insofar
as it names and expresses a growing sense of vulnerability and orphanhood, and the conclusion that it is about time we grow up and deal with it.

Of course, the phenomena I am calling everyday horrors—and their concomitant effects upon religious faith and doubt, anger and depression—are not exactly new. Everyday horror is at the center of Job, one of the oldest books of the Bible. In the so-called imprecatory Psalms, we witness the response of God’s people in the light of atrocity and suffering, going so far as to pray that their enemies be “blotted out” in Psalm 109, considered one of the angriest prayers in Scripture. King Lear, Hamlet, and Macbeth demonstrate that the Elizabethans were not fearful of sketching horror: one recalls the beaten-down Lear, lamenting his dead daughter with those callous words, “Is this the promised end?” Obviously it would be misguided to propose that these are merely modern complaints. And yet, historians have suggested that the intellectual history of this concept took on a new urgency as far back as the massive earthquake in Lisbon, 1755, an event that shook Europe both literally and intellectually. Susan Neiman has called that moment the birth of the modern temperament: “The eighteenth century used the word Lisbon as we use the word Auschwitz today... It takes no more than the name of a place to mean: the collapse of the most basic trust in the world” (1). Indeed, it was in the shadow of Lisbon that European attempts to forge a satisfactory theodicy emerged, chiefly from Leibniz, along with the counterclaims of theodicy’s inadequacies, as from Rousseau, Hume, and others. Later, the so-called “argument from horror,” by which a concept of a benevolent God comes under severe attack due to the horrifying evils we confront everyday, was expressed in many ways throughout the nineteenth century. Perhaps this argument’s most overwhelming version is stated by Ivan in Dostoyevsky’s novel The Brothers Karamazov, and features the extremes of cruelty and torture to question the goodness of God. David Bentley Hart has praised the genius of Dostoyevsky’s argument, calling it “the only challenge to a confidence in divine goodness that should give Christians serious cause for deep and difficult reflection” (42). Hart’s ingenious point is that most believers have not taken Ivan’s (and Dostoyevsky’s) argument from horror as seriously as they should: “Those Christian readers who have found it easy to ignore or dispense with the case Dostoyevsky constructs for Ivan have not fully comprehended that case” (42). In America, Mark Twain certainly did not ignore the case against God: his later writings are littered with Dostoyevsky-like pronouncements.

Perhaps horror is endlessly fascinating insofar as it names and expresses a growing sense of vulnerability and orphanhood.

Twain and Dostoyevsky were correct: we must try to “fully comprehend” the case against God. This case must process the facts presented to us daily in the form of the spectacles of horror. Phillip Tallon writes: “horror functions, in its expression of revolting disvalue, as the sharpest critique of divine providence that any aesthetic theme could offer” (182). When our jaws drop to the ground in the face of the bombing at the Boston Marathon; when we sob in disbelief at a 60 Minutes story about the children refugees of Syria hanging precariously to the side of an overloaded fishing boat attempting to cross the Mediterranean; or when we are struck by the thunderbolt of a more personal tragedy brought on by drunk drivers, heroin overdoses, or various forms of incurable cancers, we find our philosophy of God—if we even have one—brought shamelessly to its knees.

Everyday horrors, in short, wear on us, and challenge our visions of the Good, perhaps now more than ever. Horror presents arguments, especially about the Transcendent. But I hasten to add: any article like this one, focused on the problem of pain and evil and then trying to say something edifying about it, risks sounding glib. As C. S. Lewis has written: “All arguments in
justification of suffering provoke bitter resentment against the author" (93). We risk sounding like Job's goofy friends. My solution might also make me sound heroic; but again, like Lewis: "I am a great coward... If I knew any way of escape I would crawl through sewers to find it" (93, 94). Actually, the book I consider among the very best on these matters—What Shall We Say?, a wonderful work of pastoral theology by Thomas G. Long—taught me one main lesson: most of what I am about to say should never even be told to those in the earliest stages of grief. Because one enters the darkness of grief, either intimating this lesson in part, or not. One also learns these lessons differently than one learns other lessons: "solvitur ambulando," as Long puts it; "it is solved by walking" (115). So I have found Long's wise counsel, along with Lewis's genuine humility, extremely valuable in working through these matters personally, and then trying to convey them to others. Thus, it is merely in the spirit of preparation that I say these things at all, knowing that some will still find them glib. I am merely sowing seeds of hope, the fruit of hard-won experience from those who have tragically gone before us down that lonesome road. But, as Lewis states, "to prove it palatable is beyond my design" (94).

Actually, I guess I should now come clean and confess my own worst encounter with everyday horror, of which there have been many: my credentials, as it were. None can compare with my closest happenstance with horror, the day my six-year-old son Daniel died. Little did I know on that afternoon how gripping and personal the problem of evil was about to become for me and my wife. On June 15, 1999, I went to pick up Daniel at the summer day-camp he was attending. The director of the camp met me at the doorway, shielded me away from everyone else, and said only that there had been an accident (a strangely empty word in retrospect). She told me that my son had been taken to a hospital and explained how to get there. My repeated demands for more information were ignored. So I ran to my car, fought through rush-hour traffic, pounded the steering wheel most of the way, and nearly freaked out from the disconcerting feeling that comes from not knowing what has happened in a desperate situation. I found out about twenty minutes later. The lifeguards at the Olympic-sized pool had allowed Daniel into water that was over his head. Unexplainably, they simply were not watching him. Daniel drowned, and was gone by the time the paramedics arrived.

And so June 15, 1999 was for me a day of horror—or at least, the first of many, many days. Now it is nearly sixteen years later, and I sit in my study, finishing off the manuscript of an essay on everyday horrors. The pain has largely subsided, but not vanished. It can still feel, at a moment's notice and without warning, like a gash in my belly, taking my breath away. June 15 often falls on Father's Day weekend, a twist of the knife of fate, a not-so-gentle reminder of what is lost. If trauma consists, as Cathy Caruth has written, of the "story of a wound," I suppose this amounts to some level of trauma (4). Her metaphor reminds me of a line from The Gift of Pain by Phillip Yancey and Paul Brand: "Think of pain as a speech your body is delivering about a subject of vital importance to you" (222). But Caruth's largely secular account leaves out what many consider the most important part of the story, or "speech." The forgotten, or overlooked, element consists of promises like I Corinthians 15:58, which reminds us that, since death is to be defeated, we must be "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord." The concept of the dead not "dying in vain" was a prominent theme in the nineteenth century, as it is today: echoing I Corinthians, it even found its way into Lincoln's Address at Gettysburg. It has been invoked by grieving parents ever since.

As challenging as it is to believe it, I find terrific consolation in that idea. So here is my primary, best shot: pain and suffering, despite our greatest fears and doubts, can have redemptive results. And for years now, I have been interested in articulating the ways we might survive such encounters with the horrific and how we might try to console those who find themselves in that deep and dark valley. Although my essay is ultimately more descriptive of a thematic...
concern, than it is prescriptive of a solution, I do want to offer hope. It all begins with a sort of moral impression, based on the experiences of others in concert with our own predispositions toward the promises of Scripture. But in the grip of it, horror is visceral, and it can often feel nauseating; it ramifies on a much more primal level than argument or Bible study. Horror reveals what we truly believe: for better or worse. And so, everyday horror does undermine certain ways of thinking about the world and even our best intentions about God and the life of faith. Like Lewis, "I am only trying to show that the old Christian doctrine of being made ‘perfect through suffering’ is not incredible" (94).

Similarly, my book Continuing Bonds with the Dead, when it appears in 2016, will tell the story of how various American authors have dealt with their own woes: in particular, the deaths of their own children. In general, I argue, they tried to do so "generatively": by finding some element of redemption in profound suffering, even in horror. They managed to squeeze out of their suffering something useful, believing as they often did that such redemption had been promised to them by God. Du Bois, miraculously enough, even could conceive of the lynched black male body of Jesse Washington, hanging for hours in the hot Texas sun beneath the mayor’s office window, as a figure of hope, a symbol of redemption. Washington’s legacy of violent injustice, if Du Bois had any say in the matter, would be that he did not "die in vain." As for me: my own decade-long submersion into the field of grief and trauma, and the nineteenth-century culture of death and dying, was probably at least partly motivated by the same desires. Perhaps it is even part of my own penance for, and tribute to, my own lost son. I am sure the grieving family of Michael Brown hopes against hope that their son’s death can also result in something positive. And if we have ears to hear: there is some saving message to be found in all this. It is a message of promise and hope, despite what the enlightened secular masters of the universe try to tell us.

If, as some commentators suggest, our therapeutic culture has pushed us beyond the point of embracing true pain and evil, it is plausible to suggest that we have lost something precious. Did Michael Brown die in vain? Did my own son, Daniel? One’s answer, possibly, helps explain the two diametrically opposed manners of protesting that ensued in Ferguson: one violent and chaotic, the other orderly, prayerful, and non-violent. As a local resident watching the action unfold on the nightly local news, I can tell you that the non-violent, prayerful sort of protest was by far the most prevalent here in St. Louis.

**Horror reveals what we truly believe: for better or worse. And so, everyday horror does undermine certain ways of thinking about the world and even our best intentions about God and the life of faith.**

I participated myself in many of those planned events. Although that element may have gotten lost in the bigger picture of the national news media, it should strike us as a reason for hope: a way of surviving Ferguson, a decisive element in the "story of a wound." Because the best kind of protest can only begin where there is hope that our actions are not in vain.

And so, and at the risk of sounding maudlin: it is at the grave when we discover what we truly believe and when we are most fully alive. In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech of 1950, William Faulkner complained about American authors: "the young man or woman writing today has forgotten the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing... His griefs grieve on no universal bones, leaving no scars. He writes not of the heart but of the glands:" Hopefully, my brief meditation here is sufficiently interested in the “human heart in conflict with itself”: and yes, it is risky; but only through risk does one approach those "universal bones," and the "scars" left behind. The wound, we must remember, is the root of
the Greek word for trauma: that which marks a body, and always remains. In this sense, and rephrasing Faulkner, the traumas of the past truly are not dead; they aren't even past. It is an expert definition of trauma, in fact.

But beyond Faulkner's universal bones is the yearning for more: a desire to touch and be touched by what Lincoln called the better angels. Or to use a phrase in Du Bois's Souls of Black Folk: we can sense a "vague unrest" to listen again to those lovely voices of the lost. The stories told here suggest that the bonds with the dead continue, along with the wounds; and they also suggest that death, in fact, is never in vain, and will eventually be "swallowed up in victory" (I Corinthians 15:54). Thus, we can indeed survive Ferguson, and all the other everyday horrors of our daily lives. If my writing is able to inspire even a few readers with that message, then I will have counted it a great success. And maybe, all the work I have done in memory of Daniel will not have been done in vain either.

Harold K. Bush is Professor of English at Saint Louis University. His book, Continuing Bonds with the Dead: Parental Grief and Nineteenth-Century American Authors, will be published in spring 2016 by the University of Alabama Press.

Works Cited


DIGGING OUT THE DAISIES

The monstrous clump
offered by a friend next door
grabs light with fingers
full of sun, edging out
lesser neighbors.

A space opens up
on my shadowy east side
where only weeds take over.
It’s worth a try, even though
daïses prefer

the burning skies of summer,
cloudless blue making their white
glow neon,
their yellow centers burst
like ripe peaches.

Dug into the dark region
between an old forsythia
that hasn’t bloomed in years
and a yew planted to hide
the elbows of rusty pipes,

they risk everything to find
another existence with unlikely
friends, their lanky limbs collapsing,
touching, a new communion.

Donna Pucciani
Pigs Is Equal

Gayle Boss

Dogs looks up at you, cats looks down on you, but pigs is equal.

Old English adage, often attributed to Churchill

Last summer, I signed up for “A Day on the Farm,” a group tour of a large Indiana swine breeding operation. Then I came home and re-read Charlotte’s Web. Something about the pigs I looked at that day—no, I mean something in the way a particular pig looked at me—made me remember the story’s singular pig, Wilbur. It had been at least a decade since I’d read the book to my children, four since I’d read it as a child myself. I didn’t remember that the story opens not with the pig, but with a bold eight-year-old girl, Fern Arable, who throws herself at her father as he is on his way to apply an ax to a newborn runt pig. For commonsense Mr. Arable, this is a necessary unpleasantness, a matter of expediency and efficiency. For Fern, it is a gross injustice:

“But it’s unfair,” cried Fern. “The pig couldn’t help being born small, could it? If I had been very small at birth, would you have killed me?”

Mr. Arable smiled. “Certainly not,” he said, looking down at his daughter with love. “But this is different. A little girl is one thing, a little runty pig is another.”

“I see no difference,” replied Fern, still hanging on to the ax. “This is the most terrible case of injustice I ever heard of.”

Our first stop on the tour was the farrowing barn. A young Hispanic woman wearing latex gloves brought to the door a baby pig born a few minutes before. It lay neatly along her forearm, belly up, like a very small human baby, its pink skin soft and downy and warm to the touch. I wanted to hold it on my forearm, but the farm worker’s body language—and gloves—indicated this was not allowed. The piglet had to be protected from sicknesses I might be carrying. Besides, it was whimpering for its mother. The woman took the piglet back into the barn, and through a viewing window we watched as she laid it alongside eleven others suckling the teats of a sow splayed heavily on her side, snout tipped away from the many mouths.

The steel bars of her stall gave the nursing mother room to lie in this position or to stand. The farm manager standing beside us explained that if she could move about any more—say, if she wanted to turn around—she might crush her babies. She will lie on her side or stand facing the forward wall, until, after three weeks, the piglets are taken from her. The sow herself, I learned later, would have taken three months to wean them.

Fern Arable does get to hold the runty newborn, and not just once. Her father, asking that “the good Lord forgive (him) for this foolishness,” gives the piglet to his daughter, who chooses for him “the most beautiful name she can think of”: Wilbur. Fern holds Wilbur and feeds him from a bottle and gives him rides in her doll carriage. Wilbur has his own yard under the apple tree and a box full of clean straw for sleeping and mud
along the bank of a brook to wallow in while Fern swims.

Every day was a happy day, and every night was peaceful.

But Farmer Arable's foolishness has its limits. When Wilbur is five weeks old and eating more than milk, Mr. Arable tells his daughter, "He has got to be sold." The selling price he asks, though, is only six dollars, and he asks it of Fern's uncle, Homer Zuckerman, who conveniently lives just down the road so that she can walk there as often as she likes. Almost every day after school she visits Wilbur in his new home: a pen with a manure pile in the Zuckerman's barn cellar that opens onto a yard. She sits on an old milking stool in the sheepfold next to Wilbur's pen.

It made her happy just to be near the pig, and it made Wilbur happy to know that she was sitting there, right outside his pen.

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Our next stop was a nursery barn where squealing three-week-old piglets are brought after being taken from their mothers. We pushed our faces against a viewing window. No one goes into the barn without a shower and change of clothes. Feces fall through a slatted floor into a shallow pit, which is flushed every two hours to an outdoor lagoon. Every precaution is taken to keep the animals free of sickness. Because they live bumping up against each other—forty to a pen—sickness would spread snout-to-snout in no time.

It is with their snouts, I learned, that pigs explore their surroundings. The farm manager told us this, but needn't have. It was apparent. The pigs in each pen, eight weeks old and about fifty pounds apiece when we visited, pushed their moist tubular noses into whatever was near them and, other than the sides of the pen and the water cylinder hung from the ceiling, that was only other pigs. Sometimes, we were told, especially when they first come to this barn and are smaller and there is more space between them, they play a little, but mostly they eat and drink and sleep. As they grow there is little room for anything else.

When a worker stepped into the pen, though, the pigs roused. They rushed him, snuffling and lipping his hands, his boots, his jeans like puppies. Fifteen years working with pigs, he told us, holding his hand out to a nearby snout, including the five-hundred-pound sows, and none had ever harmed him.

Though Wilbur finds it lovely to have Fern near, he misses his walks with her, the rides in the doll carriage, and their hours at the brook. In his new home, he can walk about his pen, climb to the top of its manure pile, talk to the other animals, trot out into the barnyard, dig, scratch against the fence, and, if he is feeling particularly saucy, jump into the air and finish with a twist or a back flip. Even with these several options, Wilbur needs more.

"I'm less than two months old and I'm tired of living," he said.

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At the Indiana farm—called, in the industry, a "gilt multiplier production unit"—pigs are moved from the nursery barn when they are about two months old to what's called a "finishing barn." The one we saw had ten pens, eighty-five pigs in each. A few steps in any direction and a pig bumps into another. No viewing window here. We could look directly into the finishing barn over a half-wall with a curtain which could be raised or lowered. Ventilation and heat are controlled by computer. If pigs are too hot, they, like people, don't eat as much. These pigs, we were told, have the genetic potential to grow at a rate of 2.2 pounds per day, if they keep eating. So keeping them comfortable is important to ensure that they gain every potential pound. What they eat also matters for maximizing their potential poundage. Livestock nutritionists with PhDs formulate their feed, balancing grain and grain by-products with added calcium, phosphorus, salt, vitamins, and trace minerals. Feeding stations are equipped with sensors that refill the feeders automatically, twenty-four hours a day.
The whole environment of the finishing barn is engineered to bring pigs to 270 pounds in sixteen weeks, when they are sold by the pound to the meat packers.

At first his feed trough is an interesting diversion for Wilbur. Lurvy, the hired hand, fills it three times a day from a pail. Every meal is a surprise. Breakfast might be “skim milk, crusts, middlings, bits of doughnuts, wheat cakes with drops of maple syrup sticking to them, potato skins, leftover custard pudding with raisins, and bits of Shredded Wheat.” It all depends on what’s left over from the Zuckerman’s table or Lurvy’s lunchbox. But it isn’t long before Wilbur realizes that what he needs to thrive is something more intangible.

Wilbur didn’t want food, he wanted love. He wanted a friend—someone who would play with him.

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The pigs in the finishing barn had grown impressively beyond the size of those in the nursery barn. Standing, eating, or sleeping all day, they had each gained about 175 pounds in thirteen weeks. What I noticed, besides how they crowded each other, were the notches and holes big as half-dollars punched in their ears. Though each pig was numbered, the holes told the informed eye the basics of its identity in a glance, including its near future: meat or mothering. All of them eventually end on a plate, but females with the best lines and strongest features will be held back from the slaughterhouse for two-to-three years, during which they will be inseminated, gestate, and birth five or six litters.

It was while I was staring at the piercings of one particular pig that it walked toward our tour group. I had never looked at an adult pig, up close. And it looked back. No, it stared back, eyes small for the head, fringed with delicate pale lashes.

I asked the farm manager—Matt, a man square and strong with the handling of hogs—about this pig. A female, he said, called a gilt because she had not yet borne any young. The holes in her ears told him that in three weeks she would be sold as breeding stock to another gilt multiplier production unit as large as this one. Later on the tour, I saw sows living their future: She will be led to a stall only inches wider than her body in an insemination/gestation barn. A plastic tube will be inserted into her vagina and a sac of sperm—genetically selected to ensure robust, not runty, offspring—will be fed through it. As piglets grow inside her, she will stand all day looking at the same wall, or at the sow on either side, separated from her by steel bars which she will sometimes chew. Tired of that, she will lie on one side or the other, staring at the ceiling’s steel beams. She will never see the sky.

Three months, three weeks, and three days of this. Then she will be walked to a farrowing stall of the same confinement to birth her young on a metal floor, not in the nest of straw or grass which instinct tells her to build. Three weeks later, stripped of her piglets, she will go back to the insemination and gestation pen. Back and forth, five or six times, until her uterus is deemed worn out. Then she will be shipped to the bratwurst plant.

The pig staring at me knew none of this. She had had a life, so far, of endless food, clean water, temperature-controlled housing, a sanitary pen, and, in the unlikely case she had gotten sick, immediate medical care. There was no threat in her gaze. The pig’s gaze seemed simply curious, a small attempt to make contact with the unfamiliar human being on the other side of the fence, a new hand, perhaps, to lip and snuffle.

Once home, I began reading about pigs. By most measures, I learned, they are fourth in animal
intelligence behind chimpanzees, dolphins, and elephants. Some tasks, like nudging a joystick for food, they perform as well as chimps. They have a keen ability to solve problems, like opening the latches of their pens, and animal experts consider them more trainable than dogs.

In 2009, an international team of biologists released the first draft sequence of the pig genome, a pig of the ruddy-haired Duroc breed. Even at a glance, said Lawrence Schook, one of the team leaders, “the pig genome compares favorably with the human genome. Very large sections are maintained in complete pieces,” though our respective ancestors diverged one hundred million-plus years ago. It is why damaged human heart valves can be replaced with pig heart valves and why drugs are given to pigs when scientists want to learn how they will be metabolized in the human body. A pig’s teeth resemble a human’s. Their intestinal lining is used to repair our ligament damage and extreme burn injuries. Like us, pigs have binocular vision and see in color. They can’t focus well, though. To see something—or someone—well, a pig will come close and stare.

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Besides Fern, Wilbur finds a friend in Charlotte, a large gray spider. Hanging in her web in a high corner of the barn cellar door, she looks down and sees Wilbur’s intelligence, his curiosity, and generosity. Companied by her, Wilbur grows contented—and fat. It is an idyllic life for all—until the day the old sheep tells him what she’s seen year after year: that when the cold weather comes Wilbur will be killed and served up for Christmas dinner.

The pig collapses in panic and sobs. Calmer, Charlotte devises a plan. One morning the farm wakes to a new, dew be-glistened web in the cellar door, “a pattern of loveliness and mystery,” in the center of which she has woven, in block letters, “SOME PIG!” News of “the miracle” sweeps through the whole county; people crowd the Zuckerman barn to see the web for themselves.

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On Sunday... the minister explained the miracle. He said the words on the spider’s web proved that human beings must always be on the watch for the coming of wonders.

I was not on the watch for wonders the day I visited the Indiana hog operation. But when that gilt, penned in a space in which she would never see the sun, that kept her continually jostled against others, three weeks away from narrower confinement in gestation and farrowing stalls where, for the rest of her brief life, she could not take more than two steps forward or back, nor turn around, when she looked at me, intentionally, curiously, wonder—and heartache—did indeed come to me.

This was before I read any of the abundant anecdotal evidence—and not just from animal lovers—of the attachments pigs will form with humans who care for them with compassion. A pig named Pru pulled her owner from a bog in West Wales. Lulu, a pot-bellied pig, ran into the road and lay down until a car stopped; she brought its driver to the aid of her owner, collapsed from a heart attack. Animal behaviorists say that even after being mistreated, most pigs, like most dogs, will show affection to caring humans. And breeding sows in gestation and farrowing stalls can become “unresponsive, behaviour linked to depression,” according to scientists from the Scientific Veterinary Committee of the European Union. Banned in the EU after the fourth week of pregnancy since 2013, they will be phased out in New Zealand in 2015 and Australia in 2017.

Again Charlotte weaves a worded web: “TERRIFIC!” And again: “RADIANT!” More citizens from across the countryside come to see, and they see it is indeed true. Wilbur is terrific; he is radiant. Basking in their attention, Wilbur becomes more terrific and radiant than he already is. A spiral of perceptiveness and of terrific-ness, of radiance, is set in motion. Everyone becomes as enamored of Wilbur as the eight-year-old who prevented him being axed on the story’s opening page because she saw no difference between the pig and herself.

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Pressed by organizations ranging from the brash People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) to the compromising Humane Society of the United States, and many in between, nine
states, like the EU, have passed laws to ban the use of gestation crates. As the fifth-largest pig-producing state in the union, Indiana is not likely to be next. But a growing number of national restaurant chains (McDonald’s, Wendy’s, Burger King) have notified their suppliers that within a handful of years they will no longer buy pork from producers who keep animals in such confinement.

During our tour, Matt spoke more than once of “animal activists.” They had no idea, he said, what it takes to raise a pig, how much safer and more comfortable his pigs are than if they were allowed to root around outside in pastures. More importantly, though, animal activists have confused values. They have “blurred the line,” forgotten or forsaken “human exceptionalism,” our supremacy in the order of creation that not only allows but encourages humans to make use—good use—of other creatures.

As an example, he pointed to his 1,150-sow state-of-the-art operation: good not only for pigs, but also good for the world. The care and efficiency he exercises are the answer to feeding, safely, a growing global population with the means to pay for meat. “We are constantly asking ourselves, ‘What’s it going to take to feed ten billion people in the next twenty to thirty years?’” he said. “God quit making farmland a long time ago. We are called to figure out and apply technology... to produce food as efficiently as possible so that the less blessed can afford to eat a healthy, balanced diet while treating animals as the precious gifts they are.”

Several times Matt referred to “the miracle that God created in the pig.” He didn’t mean a particular pig, with a name, but the commodity “pig,” a “source for food and medical and health products.”

So proud of Wilbur are the Zuckermans that they take him to the county fair. There they bathe him in buttermilk until “the morning sun [shines] through his pink ears.” He is, in fact, radiant. The judges present Wilbur with a special award in front of a grandstand full of admirers, an award “in token of (their) appreciation of the part played by this pig—this radiant, this terrific, this humble pig—in attracting so many visitors” to the county fair. People have flocked to the charged space that Charlotte and Wilbur have created, a space where they see a pig differently than they ever have before.

Briefly. The traditional blue ribbon goes to a larger pig named, oddly, “Uncle.” His blue-ribbon value is not his radiance but his poundage, as meat. So Uncle’s glory will be short-lived. At the end of the fair, he will be summarily killed and butchered, cut up for bacon, chops, and ham.

Even in the world of Charlotte’s Web, Wilbur is a one-off creature, an unrepeated miracle. County farmers, presumably the Zuckermans, too, will still raise pigs for the plate. Though their pigs’ lives until slaughter will be more interesting, if not necessarily safer than the lives of the animals on the Indiana hog operation, they are still a means to an end: satisfying human appetite.

And the human appetite for pork, globally, is surging. Twenty-five percent of all pork produced in the US in 2014 was exported, a $6.6 billion value, and those exports are forecast to increase by six percent in 2015. Research at Purdue University in Lafayette, Indiana, is helping hog production companies across the country raise more hogs more efficiently to meet the growing global demand. “This is our attempt to utilize this gift (the pig) with good stewardship to provide for the masses,” Matt said. And to provide for state residents. Indiana’s governor has identified increased hog production as a key growth sector for stimulating the state’s economic development. The Zuckerman farm in today’s world is merely a
quaint hobby, not the production company our appetites and economies require.

Matt could be any one of my four brothers-in-law, who also support their families through animal agriculture. Rooted in the Reformed tradition of Christianity, he sees his work as the good fruit of that faith: an ingenious, creative, industrious, and caring response to human hunger. Every day at work he is loving God and loving his neighbors, near and far, all of whom he wants to have a diet as rich in animal protein as his own.

And loving pigs, too. At the beginning of the farm tour, Matt introduced himself by saying, "I love pigs." He would like every pig to live as well as his, with no lack of nutritious food, fresh water, and sanitary housing. It is not cheap to provide the conditions he provides; many—maybe most—large-scale hog growers do less for their animals. The tour itself is evidence of the pride he takes in his business. While other hog production companies bar curious observers as trespassers, he welcomed us, our questions, and our cameras.

Taken aback by the gilt that looked me in the eye, I've wondered, do his pigs look Matt in the eye? Does he meet their gaze, and if so, what does he feel? Maybe gratitude. Or nothing akin to feelings he has for humans, like the baby granddaughter he kissed and bounced on his lap during the pork barbeque picnic he served us.

What I felt, leaving his gilt multiplier production unit, besides sad, was foolish—foolish for seeing in a pig’s gaze the possibility of a relationship, and wanting it; foolish for wishing my fellow farm tourists had also been startled that something akin to personality looked back at us from inside the pen. If all of us saw in every pig a Wilbur or Wilma—intelligent individuals capable of relationship with us—Matt’s way of life, and the work he sees as divinely appointed, a work of neighborly love, would fall apart. Like Homer Zuckerman, we couldn’t kill “the miracle that is the pig.” Our appetite for pork would sour; the market for it would collapse. Thousands and thousands of good people who support their families by mass producing pigs as units of meat would be bereft.

Matt and I were raised in the same Reformed Christian tradition, and we both still honor and practice it. We are the same age. In junior high, we learned by heart the same catechism. But somewhere along the catechism's 129 questions and answers our hearts diverged. Maybe it happened earlier in our lives. I wasn't raised on a farm, though my parents were and have Matt’s view of pigs. Somewhere, somehow, I began to see myself in animals and to empathize with them.

I do remember from catechism lessons that animals were created when God saw a particular deficiency in his new human: “God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone;’” according to the second chapter of Genesis. In the first, ideal world, animals are humans’ companions. After The Fall, humans make use of them. Matt lives in the world as it is, a world in which we use certain animals as food and must produce ever more of them. I’m trying to live in a world that is not, but, according to the scriptures, once was and could be, a world in which animals are again companions to our bodies and souls.

Gayle Boss is a freelance writer from Grand Rapids, Michigan. She is at work on a book of Advent reflections titled, All Creation Waits: Advent, Animals, and The Mysteries of New Beginnings.
Augustine, Genesis, and Natural Science

Jarrett A. Carty

In 1869, Andrew Dickson White, then president of newly founded Cornell University, gave a lecture entitled “The Battle-Fields Of Science” in the great hall of New York’s Cooper Union. He argued that science had been constantly engaged in a great war with religion, particularly Christianity, and that the progress of scientific truths was constantly and invariably impeded by the interests of Christian clerics. Many years later after a long career as an academic and a diplomat, his History of the Warfare of Science With Theology in Christendom (1896) expanded the argument into a popular indictment of Christianity as a force of scientific ignorance and intellectual repression. Together with the accomplished physician and chemist John William Draper’s The History of the Conflict Between Religion and Science (1874), the “conflict thesis” of religion at war with science was born. Though thoroughly dismissed by historians of science in the last century, the thesis remains alive and well today in popular culture (Numbers 2009, 1-7); the mere mention of Darwin or Galileo often elicits some articulation of the conflict thesis.

But the historical contexts of great works in the history of science generally show a decidedly different relationship between the scientific investigations of nature and religious thought. While there has been conflict between certain theories of nature and Christian orthodoxies, it is often a complex and nuanced conflict, even mixed with approvals and endorsements. The reception of Darwinian evolution in Christian churches of the nineteenth century is a case in point: naturalists and clerics were found all over the spectrum of opinion about On the Origin of Species, including many prominent American evangelicals who argued that natural selection was the mode through which God created the abundance of life on earth. Yet the history of science is also replete with works in which the complementarity of theological and natural investigations are shown. In these texts, the investigation of the theological meaning of creation is explored in a way that legitimizes the study of nature, recognizes its limits, and illuminates the possible meanings within the biblical account of creation.

Augustine’s The Literal Meaning of Genesis exemplifies this complementarity. In fact, it is such a rich work of theological and natural reflection, it could well serve as a piece of primary evidence against the “conflict thesis” and a primary witness for the longstanding Christian medieval engagement with natural science.¹ The work demonstrates this in four distinct yet interrelated ways. First, Augustine’s The Literal Meaning of Genesis offers a critical interpretation on what “literal” means to biblical reading, and in so doing allows for biblical creation to serve as a foundation for knowledge of nature. In this way, Augustine’s text becomes the preeminent example of hexameral (six-day) literature in medieval natural science. Second, Augustine’s commentary shows how biblical theology ought to work with natural science in order to know creation, while maintaining a needed critical distance from some of the assumptions and established theories of natural science. Third,
Augustine’s commentary shows how the moral or tropological meaning of creation in Genesis was also intimately connected with the medieval study of natural science, which for Augustine, was not morally neutral. Last, Augustine’s *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* serves as an introduction to a specifically Christian natural science and thereby demonstrates a successful marriage of Christian theology to a general inquiry about nature without compromising the standards of natural explanation that were derived from pagan knowledge.

**The Literal Meaning of Creation in Genesis**

Augustine’s commentary on Genesis seeks to find the “literal” meaning of creation found in the first two chapters of scripture. What Augustine means by literal, however, is a far departure from the common contemporary meaning: while he insists from the very beginning of the first book that his literal approach differs wholly from a figurative one, it is certainly not what would today be called naively literal. Augustine seeks to find a “faithful account of what actually happened” in the creation of the world (2002, 168). This account, however, is not simply communicated by the plain words of the text—the length of the commentary alone demonstrates this fact—but with a careful probing of the words given in Genesis and with a clear method of interpretation. Augustine gives a synopsis of his method at the conclusion of the first book. In the effort to uncover “what actually happened,” Augustine writes that general knowledge of nature has to be considered when determining what the passages mean. A proper interpretation of creation in Genesis involves weighing it not only against the tenets of the faith but also the knowledge of what the wider world shows to be true about nature.

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was written as a work suitable to introduce students to the branches of natural science in the form of a hexameron. The dialogue between the Duke and the philosopher takes place over six days, during which the subjects of discussion broadly coincide with the chronology of creation in Genesis.

**Taking the Standards of Science Seriously**

The *Literal Meaning of Genesis* embraces contemporary natural science and takes the standards of natural explanation seriously. These appropriations of the current state of knowledge are perhaps best defended by Augustine's repeated warning that in ignoring this knowledge, scripture would be laughed at by those pagans who know (186–87). Certainly, Augustine is concerned with the apologetic strength of the church, but there is more to Augustine's argument: pagan natural science also comes to know truth, and as such its truths must inform the best understanding of scripture, particularly when one aims to understand the natural order. Augustine held that truths about creation and truths about God cannot contradict; this would be absurd for a divinely ordered cosmos. Hence the commentary is filled with allusions, references, and detailed discussions of scientific truths and theories of his day.

Yet at the same time, Augustine's interpretation of natural science in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* is not uncritical. His theological commitment to divine order and truth means that he is also skeptical with regard to natural science when currently accepted theory is far from certainly demonstrated. Hence Augustine treats subjects such as astrology (212–14), the four elements and their natural place (191)—particularly alongside the vexed question of heavenly "waters" in Genesis—and the movement of the heavens (203) as matters far from satisfactorily explained by current theories. For Augustine, these branches of natural science were highly speculative, and thus open for questioning, subject to human error, and susceptible to prideful overestimations of our power to know.

**The Moral Meaning of Science**

Since for Augustine the pursuit of natural scientific knowledge is susceptible to these ubiquitous foibles of human nature, it is little surprise that *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* cannot avoid dealing with the moral or tropological meaning of natural science. For example, Augustine's treatment of the creation of the wild harmful beasts (Genesis 1:24–25) nevertheless has a moral message for human beings even as we study them in the created order, for the order of creation says something about our own orders and disorders. These creatures, Augustine argues, "provide us human beings with plenty of salutary admonitions" over how we ought to take better care over our spiritual and eternal health just as the "biggest elephants down to the smallest little worms, doing whatever they are capable of, whether by resisting or by taking precautions, to safeguard their bodily, time-bound health and welfare, such as been allotted to them according to their place on the lower scale of creation" (231). Therefore, for Augustine, natural science is not only a knowledge of nature as such, but of how it relates to us and what its proper order can tell us about the ordering of our own souls and bodies.

At first blush, Augustine's insistence on the moral significance of natural science may seem to blur the line of demarcation between what is properly religion and what is science. But in fact much of today's natural science is infused with moral considerations, or even broad moral imperatives: ecological sciences, for instance, are seldom separated from moral demands and reprimands over various individual, social, or industrial practices. Augustine's commentary on Genesis shows us that this is not a new trend in the study of nature, but is an inextricable part of learning about the natural order. Ancient sources of natural science are filled with moral reflection. Consider Plato's *Timaeus* or Pliny the Elder's (23–79 AD) *Natural History*. In the eighth book of his magnum opus, for example, Pliny's account of elephants highlights their moral significance: they possessed qualities, he writes, "rarely apparent even in man, namely
honesty, good sense, justice, and respect for the stars, sun, and moon" (1991, 108).

The Coherence of Theology and Natural Science

Augustine's commentary on Genesis shows how a robust Christian theology ought to be reconciled to natural science. The purpose of this lesson is not to defend Augustine's particular expression of faith or to return uncritically to the prevailing theories of medieval natural science, but rather to show that rigorous theology can cohere with careful investigations of nature. Many important natural scientific thinkers of the Middle Ages were also theologians. To the modern reader, this fact may seem like a hopelessly compromised position for anyone to promote progress in natural science, but for them, and Augustine, it was demonstrably clear that theology cohered with natural science. The Literal Meaning of Genesis reconciles theology and natural science because for Augustine these branches of knowing are in pursuit of the same truth that makes the entire universe at all, or in any way, knowable.

In his commentary, Augustine never resorts to the miraculous when prevailing natural scientific explanation suffices; rather, for him, God's governance over nature is known innately through natural things and their natural processes. The most striking instance of this general principle of God's work in nature was Augustine's emphasis in Books IV and V on how God created the cosmos \textit{instantaneously} (and not in six standard days); the creation, he argued, like the seed of a tree (2002, 299–300), developed over time to keep creating anew. For Augustine, this continual creating anew could be witnessed all through creation; thus to understand scripture's account of creation, these natural processes have to be known. A true theology of creation has to know the order of creation. To be sure, for Augustine, a sound biblical commentary on Genesis has to conform to the Catholic faith, but it also has to be philosophically rational, consistent to itself, and conform to the current state of natural scientific explanation. "We ought to always observe moderation required of serious devotion to the truth and not commit ourselves rashly to any one opinion on such an obscure subject," he writes, "in case perchance the truth may later on lay bare some other answer which can in no way be contrary to the sacred books" (214–15).

For Augustine, this continual creating anew could be witnessed all through creation; thus to understand scripture's account of creation, these natural processes have to be known.

Galileo and Augustine

In his famous "Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina," written in the spring and summer of 1615, Galileo Galilei quotes this same passage from The Literal Meaning of Genesis. The letter squares his Copernican cosmology with the Joshua passage (10:12–13) that appeared to affirm the contrary worldview and argues a thoroughly Augustinian view of scriptural interpretation in view of natural science (Numbers 2008, 110). On October 31, 1992, in his address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Pope John Paul II—once again quoting the same passage from Augustine's commentary—concluded that Galileo's theology of scriptural interpretation and natural science had in fact been orthodox. Oddly, in a complete inversion of the "conflict thesis" put forth by White, it was Galileo's science that had been wanting: he had argued for heliocentrism as a reality without the conclusive proof to demonstrate it. For example, the novel discoveries he had made with the "spyglass" (what Galileo called the telescope) could well have been explained by alternate cosmological systems to the Copernican (such as the system of Danish astronomer Tyco Brahe). His famous Dialogue on the Two Chief World Systems (1632)
argued that the tides were caused by the rotation and revolution of the earth and hence proved heliocentrism. Though he had brilliantly argued for a now verified effect of the earth's movement upon the seas, Galileo's proof of heliocentrism was in fact erroneous. The founder of classical physics and the pioneer of experimental method had correctly adopted Augustine's theology of scripture, but had failed to heed his warning about treating speculations of natural science as undeniable truth.

Augustine's *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* challenges the facile modern prejudices against ancient and medieval natural science and the falsely assumed conflict between science and religion. In pursuit of a good biblical interpretation, Augustine's "literal" account of "what actually happened" in first two chapters of Genesis demanded engagement with the best natural science of his day; for Augustine, all the high accomplishments of the human mind are needed to probe the depths of holy writ.

Jarrett A. Carty is Associate Professor in the Liberal Arts College at Concordia University Montreal.

Endnote

1 For the purposes of simplicity and to avoid confusion, I use the modern "natural science" in place of the ancient and medieval tradition of "natural philosophy." Though not precisely equivalent, in broad contexts of the ancient and medieval past and the modern period, these both signify the study and accumulation of knowledge of natural phenomena.

Works Cited


LAILAH

Listen. The angel is a sea
bridging the waking and sleeping
coasts. Her waves are dark
roses, hiding their secrets
in buds, blooming, then wilting
away from the shore. The tide
is rising early. Whose footsteps
are those hurrying towards you,
luring you out of your place
of rocks and onto the tolling waters?
Your dreams are the boat
beneath your feet. This stranger
faces you and rows towards
what neither of you can see.
The angel knows her song
is gleaned, knows it is
because the hour is so late
the attar of her hymn smells new.
The oars unlock her lullaby,
note after note, and even the stars
crowd down to listen.

Joshua Gage
Unanswered Questions
Michel Faber’s The Book of Strange New Things
Susan Bruxvoort Lipscomb

In Michel Faber’s novel, The Book of Strange New Things (Hogarth, 2014), a pastor travels far from home to minister to a population that knows little of Christian theology or practice, but is eager for the gospel. Peter, the earnest young missionary, feels God’s call but must leave his wife behind in the United Kingdom with email as their sole means of communication. His evangelizing and pastoral ministry is successful. He translates the Bible into another language and comes up with innovative explanations of biblical metaphors for a culture in which they are unfamiliar. Peter is also able to minister to the cynical and world-weary employees of the huge corporation that is bankrolling his trip. At the same time, however, his wife’s life becomes increasingly chaotic as she copes with weather emergencies, political turmoil, and the collapse of their home church.

It is a novel about the difficulty of sustaining a marriage without physical co-presence, about sustaining faith in trying circumstances, about whether and how the Christian gospel of healing and resurrection can be translated into a deeply foreign context.

This plot summary, however, leaves out an important element of the setting. Peter’s mission is to the alien species of another planet, and he embarks on his journey via spaceship. The distance between Peter and his wife, Beatrice (Bea), is not from one side of the world to the other but from one solar system to another.

When I first read a synopsis of The Book of Strange New Things, I assumed the novel would take a comical and cynical view of Peter, the Christian missionary. I thought the story would probably mock him and his faith, that it would be a meditation on the futility of trying to reach the transcendent or the inappropriateness of pressing one’s religious tradition on others. I thought it would be a gentler The Poisonwood Bible, with aliens.

But this is not a novel that dismisses faith as irrelevant or outmoded. In fact, it is the sincere and earnest faith of Peter and Bea that gives this novel its complexity and sets it apart from other anxious fiction about marriages under stress. Peter is a thoughtful and intelligent Christian. Early in the novel, an employee of the USIC corporation that has sent Peter to the planet Oasis shows her hostility to Peter’s evangelizing project, saying: “They’re not people.” Peter responds with an analysis of the etymologies of the words “person” and “creature”: “if we could just take it back to its Latin origins: creatura: ‘created thing.’ Because we’re all created things, aren’t we? But it’s suffered a bit of a decline, that word, through the centuries. To the point where ‘creature,’ to most people means ‘monster,’ or at least ‘animal.’” Peter finishes by suggesting that it would be better to use the word “animal” since it has its origins in the Greek anima, “which means ‘breath’ or ‘soul.’” Peter’s interlocutor is taken aback and responds, “Well it’s plain to see you’re not an uneducated holy roller from Hicksville.” Indeed. And the novel makes it plain that Peter, whatever his faults (which become apparent), is a thoughtful and sincere believer.

Bea, his wife, is perhaps even more admirable as she attempts to minister, not to exuberant aliens, but to people in a world of climate disaster, rioting, empty grocery-store shelves, and a general breakdown of law and order. Bea, a nurse, is compassionately caring for people in their church as the world falls apart around her. After relating several horrible incidents to Peter in an email, she writes: “Someone at work said to me this morning, ‘Where is God in all this?’ I didn’t rise to the bait. I can never understand why people ask that question. The real question for the bystanders of tragedy...”
is 'Where are WE in all this?' Bea and Peter do not fit any stereotype. They are fully rounded characters with sincere faith that is understandably put under extreme stress by the events of the novel.

Faber was raised in a Baptist family. He lost his faith at an early age, but admires people who have the capacity to believe. In an interview with Nick Thorpe published last December in Church Times, Faber says: "I really doubt that atheism will get you through… I suppose the trick that a humanist has to play on him- or herself is to live as if there was a God. I'm really not convinced that you can live fully while seeing yourself and all those you love, as parcels of meat." Peter and Bea are the kinds of people that Faber seems to admire; they reach out to the people (and other animals) around them, seeing them, as Peter says, "as precious in the eyes of God."

The novel begins with Peter's trip to Heathrow Airport and his goodbye to Bea before traveling to Florida to join the space flight sponsored by USIC. Although the novel contains the science-fictional elements of space travel and human life in an alien environment (and the necessary technology to make these things happen), it is only loosely connected to the genre. Readers get almost no details about "the jump," a one-month journey for which humans are put into a comatose state. The planet Oasis—named by a child in Iowa through a contest—is similar enough to Earth to permit human habitation. The planet has abundant vegetation that can be processed to resemble almost any cuisine from Earth and a sultry humidity that almost becomes a character: "The air here was a presence, a presence so palpable that he was tempted to believe he could let himself fall and the air would simply catch him like a pillow." The Oasan natives are roughly humanoid, except for their faces, which Peter thinks "resembled a placenta with two fetuses—maybe three-month old twins, hairless and blind—nestled head to head, knee to knee." They have no features that Peter can identify other than a vertical cleft in the middle of their heads with which they speak. But despite the otherworldly landscape, non-human characters, spaceships, and a vaguely sinister corporation orchestrating it all, the novel is far more interested in what is going on inside Peter's mind than in what is happening around him.

Three questions propel the novel's plot. Why are the aliens attracted to the Christian gospel? Will Peter and Bea's marriage survive the stresses of the distance between them and the apocalyptic circumstances surrounding Bea? And what is the agenda of the corporation sending settlers to this distant planet?

If this were a conventional science-fictional or post-apocalyptic novel, the third question would be answered by the end and the first two would be of comparatively little interest. In Faber's novel, however, the first question drives the plot, and it is the only one that is answered. The novel provides a provocative answer to the question of why the Oasan aliens are drawn to the gospel message, an answer with profound implications for Peter's understanding of his faith.

The questions about Peter and Bea's marriage, though, and about what is really going on with USIC are left largely unanswered. This choice to end the novel with these questions still pending struck me, at first, as unsatisfying. I was fascinated by Peter's relationship with the natives of Oasis, and there is closure in understanding why they wanted so desperately the hope of the Christian message. But since the novel has an emotionally fraught and disintegrating marriage at its center, I wanted to know what happens to Peter and Bea. I am curious too about this futuristic world in which a mega-corporation owns a planet.
But when I read the story of the novel’s construction I understood why this novel must leave its characters in limbo. Faber started writing *The Book of Strange New Things* just before his wife was diagnosed with a terminal cancer. He finished it, a few years later, just as she was dying. He claimed, last fall, in conversation with a writer for the *New York Times*, that it is the last novel he will ever write. Although the concept for the novel was birthed before his wife’s illness, it is not difficult to see a tribute to her in the final shape of the work. We cannot know whether Peter will ever be reunited with his Beatrice, so noble and unreachable, because this is a novel about sadness and loss and the ultimate distance between humans in death.

But Bea does not die in the pages of the novel, and we don’t know if Peter will be able to return to her and help put their marriage back together. *The Book of Strange New Things* is a novel that asks a lot of questions about what it means to be human and what it means to have faith in something that transcends the material universe. The novel answers none of these questions. But it provides a fascinating story with dynamic and compelling characters that keeps its readers engaged until the last, inconclusive page.

Susan Bruxvoort Lipscomb is Associate Professor of English and Chair of the Department of English and Writing at Houghton College.

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HAYDN AND HIS 104 SYMPHONIES

You needed to dig down
only forty feet
to hit the aquifer.
Water gushed out
all summer long,
summer after summer,
a thousand gallons a minute.
It filled the irrigation ditches
and the siphon tubes,
ran down the thirsty
half-mile rows,
grew the corn ten feet tall,
two ears to a stalk,
a hundred plus bushels to the acre.

Joseph Gascho
On Chicago's lakefront one breezy August night—five days after a Missouri police officer named Darren Wilson, fearing for his safety, shot and killed an unarmed black teenager named Michael Brown—the thirty-nine-year-old saxophonist, composer, bandleader, and “panoramic sound quilter” Matana Roberts led a nine-piece pickup band in a free outdoor concert at a public band shell. At the outset, Roberts ran down a lengthy list of dedications. She got applause when she named Chicago jazz legends and laughs when she shouted out entire sides of the city. When she reached the names of four slain black youth, culminating with a pointed “Mike Brown,” the audience went silent, Roberts turned to the band and swirled her flattened hand to conduct them in, and they were off and running.

Roberts was back home in Chicago to perform her suite Mississippi Moonchile, the second chapter in her projected twelve-chapter musical epic Coin Coin. (So far she has recorded and released the first three chapters and has performed at least three more in concert.) Roberts writes her scores using idiosyncratic graphic notation, in the tradition of both avant-jazz and downtown classical music, a careful mix of the planned and the spontaneous. She is also the most exciting jazz musician currently around. When she's on, her music is a stream of collective consciousness, pouring generations of stories, songs, and arguments into one big pool of sound. The Moonchile recording opens with its sextet stretching and growing into a glorious free cacophony, operatic tenor Jeremiah Abiah wailing over the top. When they are not squawking at one another, Roberts and band play variations on catchy little ostinato melodies. Along the way, Roberts recites passages from interviews with her grandmother, who grew up in the South before the Civil Rights Movement, and with the voting rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer; she also sings “His Eye Is On the Sparrow” using only two jubilant notes, and she closes the suite with the hymn “In the Garden.”

Live, the music was just as exhilarating. Roberts's dedication to Michael Brown lay heavy over the Pritzker Pavilion, but Roberts paid him one more tribute. During the song “Thanks Be You,” when Roberts quoted her grandmother on the subject of Mississippi—“I was gone by the time all that stuff started happening in Mississippi, M-I-S-S-I-S-S-I-P-P-I”—she repeated the sentence twice, the second time swapping in “Missouri.” If you weren't familiar with the work, you might have missed her equating Ferguson with Jim Crow. Her subtlety got the job done, though. Two songs later, when she ended the night singing “In the Garden,” I could see the late Michael Brown walking and talking with Jesus.

Roberts's Chicago band was bigger than the sextet on the Moonchile album; she added local musicians Tomeka Reid on cello, David Boykin on tenor sax, and Jason Adasiewicz, a wonderfully spazzy and bearded presence, on vibes. As a result, the layered major-key melodies were even more gorgeous than the recorded versions, with vibes rippling and horns counterpointing lush beds of sound underneath Roberts's narration. Of course, the coin has two faces: the bigger group's freakouts were even more forbidding than on the record, which, judging by the number of people who walked out, may have frightened off a portion of the audience. The closing strains of “Aaaand he walks with me / And he talks with me...” offered more relief live than on the recording, but folks scared away by the earlier caterwauling would never know it. If you can't stand the noise, Moonchile told us, you don't deserve the hymn. And maybe vice-versa.
As it happens, plenty of people can't stand "In the Garden," maybe because its words don't make sense. A depiction of Mary Magdalene finding the newly risen Christ in his gardening drag, the hymn closes with the line, "And the joy we share as we tarry there / None other has ever known." Not only is this self-centered, it's literally impossible; if one hundred people sing these words in church, at least ninety-nine of them must be wrong. "In the Garden" is often rated among the worst hymns of all time. It is sentimental and pietistic, the argument goes, privileging the singer's personal feelings over the saving work of the cross. The words "I come to the garden alone," writes theologian Stanley Hauerwas, "are not appropriate words to be sung in corporate worship, no matter how meaningful some people may find the hymn" (Hauerwas 2000, 158). A Reformed minister named Joseph Holbrook, Jr., stated, "In my experience people who show no interest in taking up their crosses, in joining in public worship, in concern for the poor, in the support of missions want this song sung at a relative's funeral" (Anderson 1985). During one church music course my instructors used "In the Garden" as their whipping boy, the prime example of what not to do in worship. Even so, the hymn is popular. Though it has never been published in an official Lutheran hymnal, I have several copies in my office in sources like the United Methodist Hymnal, the alternative Lutheran Other Song Book, and Lead Me Guide Me, a hymnal designed for African-American Catholics. The hymn often finds its way into African-American parishes, which may be how Matana Roberts first heard it. In art and in church, context matters. In Moonchile, Roberts sings "In the Garden" after we have heard Fannie Lou Hamer describe a prison beating and Roberts's grandmother repeat the fraught line, "There are some things I just can't tell you about, honey." Roberts's sweet rendition works as both salve and lash, a scathing reminder of how little joy America has shared with its plundered black citizens. In his book The Cross and the Lynching Tree, theologian James Cone cites "the image of Jesus as Friend and Savior" as "the most dominant motif in the black Christian experience" (2011, 58). Because Jesus paid it all, Cone says, he abides within the historical and continued suffering of black Americans, which is why so many spirituals focus on the crucifixion ("Calvary," "Were You There"). Even when a song like "In the Garden" doesn't explicitly mention the crucifixion, the black church knows crucifixion's terror as a reality. When African Americans sing songs about God's grace, they know that grace isn't cheap. The thing is, the group I worship with on Sundays is roughly three-fourths white, and they love singing "In the Garden." And so we sing it, once or twice a year. Yes, the Gospel comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable. Yes, you could argue that, as a group, white American Christians were the most comfortable people of the twentieth century. But those white parishioners singing with gusto still suffer afflictions—their eyesight fails, their bodies are wracked with pain, their grandkids die—and it is not my job as their cantor to make them choose a new favorite hymn. My job is to make sure that when we sing "In the Garden," we sing it well, and that our worship as a whole reflects all of the Gospel's rich message. To forbid this hymn altogether smacks of pedantry, the same misguided liturgical correctness that annually insists there weren't really Three Kings and refuses to play the Bridal Chorus from Lohengrin at weddings.

FLASH BACK A YEAR EARLIER TO THE SAME public band shell on a rainy August night, a month and a half after a Florida jury acquitted a neighborhood watch coordinator named George Zimmerman, who had shot and killed an
unarmed black teenager named Trayvon Martin. That summer, the NAACP and many others were comparing Martin's death to the 1955 lynching of Emmett Till.

The seventy-one-year-old trumpeter, composer, and bandleader Wadada Leo Smith was in town for the free Chicago Jazz Festival, playing excerpts from his four-CD masterwork Ten Freedom Summers, a recent Pulitzer Prize finalist. Summers is an abstract exploration of the Civil Rights Movement, loosely defined, from Dred Scott through September 11, 2001. I expect that Summers, like the Coin Coin saga, will prove one of the enduring musical works of our age. A mix of trumpet quartet and chamber string ensemble, sometimes playing at the same time, its music contains no vocal parts and few programmatic gestures, but it does have some of the best song titles around: “Malik Al Shabazz and the People of Shahada”; “Medgar Evers: A Love-Voice of a Thousand Years’ Journey for Liberty and Justice.” These days I can’t look at Robert Caro’s massive LBJ biography, or even think about America’s elongated battle over health care reform, without hearing the roiling timpani that define “Lyndon B. Johnson’s Great Society and the Civil Rights Act of 1964,” giving voice to slow-motion legislative wars in every age.

In a word, Summers is austere. Though Smith’s trumpet tone resembles Miles Davis’s, and though the band sometimes settles into hard grooves and blazing passages of free telepathy, something else always lurks around the corner, and usually it’s slow. “[O]ften overwrought and sometimes tedious,” complained the prolific jazz critic Tom Hull. The concert’s high point came during “Emmett Till: Defiant, Fearless.” The strings played long, timeless harmonies, notes sitting next to one another at intervals both dissonant and unexpectedly right. Then Smith conducted in the rhythm section, and the strings started cycling through different sections of composed material and improv strategies, based on how many fingers Smith flashed at them. Strings and jazz quartet played without regard for tonality or meter, with building intensity, creating a previously unheard sonic structure that riveted the audience to that moment. Or at least some of us were riveted. Some people got up and walked out. As part of Jazz Fest, Smith could have hoped for a more receptive audience, but an audience expecting “jazz” isn’t necessarily expecting contemporary classical music in contemplative Morton Feldman mode. Previous years’ Jazz Fest headliners included legends Ornette Coleman and Henry Threadgill, who despite their avant-garde reputations brought humor, steady rhythms, and generally beaming personas to the park. If that is what you were expecting, Summers told us, you don’t understand jazz, and maybe you don’t understand the Movement either.

In my more ambitious moments, I have dreamed up an academic course that would use Summers to jump into a detailed study of the Movement: we would listen to “Dred Scott: 1857,” for instance, and then study the judicial implications of Scott’s court case. (So far my third grader has been unresponsive.) Smith clearly intends to provoke further study with his suggestive song titles. Part of his genius is that such study would inevitably lead to recognition of inconvenient truths about the Movement. Researching “D.C. Wall: A War Memorial for All Times” in a civil rights context, students would see how Martin Luther King’s controversial “Beyond Vietnam” and Poor People’s Campaign, both derided as “Communist,” grew from the same impulse as his beloved “I Have a Dream,” now misheard by many white people as a speech about the content of African Americans’ character. Summers’ high seriousness has taught me that understanding the Movement, like the Movement itself, remains hard work. I don’t find Summers tedious like Hull does, but it certainly has its share of long, still moments, like the sixteen minutes of smearing and sliding strings in “Black Church,” when nothing much seems to be happening. In these moments, the idea of progress becomes an article of faith, not immediately evident from what the musicians are playing. Summers works as social critique by first challenging its own audience and our expectations of what jazz activism sounds like.

The thing about challenges is, they are challenging. When they challenge you, you might dismiss them in ways that are perfectly reasonable. (“Not appropriate words to be sung in corporate worship,” for instance.) Six months after she played
Chicago, Matana Roberts released the album *Coin Coin Chapter Three: river run thee*, and this chapter turned out far differently than the others. The first two chapters had multiple musicians, fast rhythms, a sense of swing; *river run* is a piece of overdubbed solo improvisation, layer upon layer of slow saxophone and vocal melodies, electro-oscillations, field recordings of voices and birds and crunching leaves, monologues obscured by the crunching leaves, breathing... and no drums. It received good reviews that I, at first, found overly kind. This seemed to be the chapter where Roberts lost the plot, forgoing the pleasures of her previous work for something more indulgent, dronier, *simpler*. ("I was nervous about sharing this with people," Roberts told an interviewer.) After a couple listens, I remembered how I had enjoyed music like this before, only not in jazz but in contemporary classical music. For the *river run* chapter, Roberts finds precedent in electroacoustic improvisers like Henri Pousseur and Pauline Oliveros, along with modernist literature (note how the title echoes the opening word of *Finnegan's Wake*). Several listens later, *river run* sounded fascinating and deep through my headphones. 

A collage that confronts us with a mix of speech and song, the new and the ageless, allowing us to settle into its complexity only after we have grown accustomed to its strangeness! Sounds like a liturgy. Not only is Christian liturgy a complex mesh of symbols, bewildering to newcomers; when done right, it confronts the ways of both the world and the worshipers. Worship "is countercultural," advises the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, "challenging what is contrary to the Gospel in a given culture" and committed to justice and stewardship (ELCA 2002, ix). How does a sappy song about walking and talking with Jesus fit into a liturgy that, as Holbrook correctly states, should prepare us to take up our crosses? Hear Matana Roberts: When placed with care into the collage, "In the Garden" inspires us to imagine the hidden pains of people we barely know. Hear Wadada Leo Smith: Whenever we think we know what worship should mean for everyone, we need to rethink. Our liturgy is an endlessly flexible tool for moving past our fears, prejudices, and selves; and, as church historian Ed Phillips points out, "In the Garden" shows us the way (Hauerwas 2000, 270). "I'd stay in the garden with him"—with the Jesus I know, the Jesus I think other people should know—"but he bids me go." Sing those words assured that the voice of Jesus will abide as you leave the garden of your own comfort. But do me a favor: wait until church is over before you walk out.

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

**Works Cited**


Children of a Lesser (but Incredibly Tech-Savvy) God

Christina Bieber Lake

Ex Machina is a superb film. Its apt title evokes an ancient plot device in the world of Greek and Roman theater, the deus ex machina, which means "god from the machine." In ancient theater, a common way to resolve a tangled plot was for a god to appear in the sky, literally dangling from a crane, and fix the crises below. Alex Garland’s Ex Machina, a film that continues a long line of "machines that go haywire" sci-fi romps, takes the god out and leaves the machine. What remains is a classic tragedy that exposes, yet again, contemporary high-tech hubris.

Nathan (Oscar Isaac), our tragic figure, is hauntingly familiar. He is exactly what Victor Frankenstein would look like if he started Google. Nathan’s Google is the fictitious Bluebook, a search engine for which he wrote all the code at age thirteen. Now in his thirties, he lives by himself in a remote mountain research facility accessible only by helicopter. When one of his employees, Caleb (Domhnall Gleeson), wins a contest and is permitted to spend a week with the solitary genius, the creepy plot begins. Nathan doesn’t even greet Caleb at the door because he is out back, hitting a punching bag. He says he is recovering from a major hangover. When Caleb, nervously trying to make a human connection, says, "it must have been a great party," we find out that Nathan was drinking alone. And this, we soon discover, is all that he does. He is the perfect example of the Silicon Valley techno-narcissist that Paula Borsook describes in her book Cyberselfish (2000). He is a loner with aggressively libertarian politics and a penchant for thinking he is right about everything. He constantly shows off his wealth, brilliance, and power to Caleb, belittling him at every opportunity.

After he makes Caleb sign the mother of all non-disclosure agreements, Nathan introduces Caleb to his advanced AI, the humanoid machine called Ava (Alicia Vikander). The point of bringing Caleb to the facility is for him to conduct a Turing test, the test whereby machine intelligence is measured by having a disguised machine "talk" to a human and try to fool him into thinking it is a person. The test is usually done blind via text, but not here. Instead, Ava comes right out and starts making conversation in the flesh. She is witty and observant. Her responses were created by collecting and sorting massive amounts of data gathered by tracking people’s searches and responses on Bluebook (with no concern for user privacy, of course). Nathan is proud of Ava. He points out that if she can pass the test and earn the label “conscious being” it would be the greatest achievement in mankind’s history. Caleb agrees and notes that it is not the history of men that Nathan would be writing, "but the history of gods," which Nathan promptly interprets as meaning that he would be that god whose history was being written.

Ava is the film’s centerpiece. She is, perhaps, the most beguiling AI ever to come out of Hollywood. Although she has a humanoid face and body, areas of her figure, such as her lower torso and limbs, are left uncovered by flesh so that her circuitry appears through a translucent encasement. Her brain is a gelatinous, spark-filled mound. She has a slightly raspy voice, which seems to be the requirement for female computer companions since we heard Scarlett Johansson in Her. Caleb and Ava spend several days together, during which they are constantly watched via video camera by her drunken creator. We soon find out that there is more to Ava than advanced cognition in ultra-sleek form. She
has been causing power outages so that she can warn Caleb that Nathan is a liar and a creep. She is afraid that Nathan is going to turn her off, and she wants out. All of these scenes are saturated with a red pulsating light that lets us know that we are in Hal territory now, and human beings had better be on guard.

If all of this sounds gimmicky, that's because it is, but the film's cautious pacing makes it work. Alex Garland (who wrote the screenplay for the film *28 Days Later*) is a master of Gothic suspense, and we eventually feel as trapped in the compound as Caleb proves to be. What is slowly revealed is the depth of Nathan's megalomania, his utter disregard for anything or anyone outside of his project. No one can get in or out of his facility without his permission, and he moves around it like a hand grenade rolling slowly downhill.

The plot inches forward until we find out that Caleb is not the only one there. Nathan has a supposedly non-English speaking assistant, Kyoko (Sonoya Mizuno), with whom he has an undefined but obviously kinky relationship. When she comes on the scene, it becomes clear that the point of the movie is to reveal Nathan's twisted desires. In short, it was no random choice to make Ava a female. She is designed to be everything that Nathan wants, so that he can be a womanizing male god like Zeus. Like Richard Powers's novel *Galatea 2.2* (following Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*), the film thus delivers a powerful feminist critique. The name Ava puts together the Ave/Eva dichotomy that describes how women are permitted only the roles prescribed for them by men. You can be the all-good, loving mother of his children (Ave) or the sexy toy who he wants to mess around with (Eva). Ava is—or so Nathan would like to believe—both at once. He doesn't need her to birth any progeny because now he can create lifelike beings. The only thing that such a man needs now is a perfect, Stepford wife.

The technology may be new, but the plot is very old, and as relevant as ever. Seen in light of a feminist critique of the all-too-prevalent Victor Frankenstein's of the world, the film is chilling. It also provides tiny glimpses into some newer ethical potholes. For example, in a conversation about a Jackson Pollack painting, Nathan tells Caleb that the real challenge when designing an AI is to find something about being human that is not automatic. This comment reveals a great deal. Since Nathan doesn't believe in the soul, to produce a sexy female machine that operates almost entirely on the level of nonconscious cognition would be a great step forward, evolutionarily speaking. If only we could just get rid of that pesky feeling of free will, which is an illusion anyway! Nathan tips his transhumanist hand when Caleb asks him why he even wants to make such a machine. Nathan replies, "It's not a decision. It's an evolution," as if this whole thing were as inevitable as gravity. Unfortunately, the film does not allow a full exploration of the ethical problems of creating a near-sentient whore-bot. Instead, it takes the easy way out by simply giving Ava self-consciousness, as if such a thing emerges naturally and necessarily from high levels of cognition. (It doesn't, which is a core issue in AI research and in consciousness studies in general.) When Ava "becomes" human, the audience automatically roots for her.
What this proves might be the oldest truth in sci-fi, that films about what an artificial intelligence might actually look like would be boring. An AI has to have human feeling, desire, and a longing for freedom for there to be a plot to begin with. “Blade Runner” would have gone nowhere without this kind of anthropomorphizing.

So, alas, we can’t look to this film (or any of the films in its lengthy ancestry) to get a glimmer of the so-called Singularity, that day when machines will supposedly exceed human intelligence. But we can and should watch this film because it teaches us to worry about the kind of people who sit in rooms by themselves wanting such things. For if machines eventually end up exceeding humans in emotional intelligence, it won’t be because of what the machines have gained. It will be because of what humans have lost.

Christina Bieber Lake is the Clyde S. Kilby Professor of English at Wheaton College.

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**PRAYERFUL HYDROLOGY**

At times, forcing a poem
is synonymous with forcing a prayer.
At such times, you wished you didn’t care
so much about words’ meanings, sounds.

How do you turn off that voice
that dams your attempted stream
of language aimed toward meaning,
aimed toward the word divine?

How to rid the water of branches,
of tree trunks, of the fetid mud?
Oh, for a season of rain, of floods
to overpower all that is stagnant.

Oh, for a loss of control, that overpowers
everything in its path, that slows the hours.

Nathaniel Lee Hansen
Memorial Day often provides the most fertile context for thinking about civil religion in America. Recently, a professional athlete, who is also a devout Christian, used social media to post a picture of a t-shirt with an American flag on it bearing the caption: “There is no greater love than this, when a man lays down his life for his friends.” The comments section of the post immediately filled with tributes to “the troops” and “those who protect our freedoms,” in anticipation of a high holy day of American civil religion. Jesus’ words, re-purposed.

Discussions of civil religion took off in the late 1960s when sociologist Robert Bellah published his essay “Civil Religion in America.” Bellah argued that in America, alongside traditional religion, another religion exists, one that contains the kinds of symbols, rituals, and doctrines that sociologists typically identify with religions in different cultures. American civil religion borrows many of the symbols of Biblical religion, including exodus, martyrdom, salvation, repentance, and creation. George Washington plays the role of Moses, leading the people out of bondage, away from the tyranny of King George III, into the promised land. We have a number of symbols, rituals, and doctrines associated with this first phase of American civil religion: July Fourth holidays, the Declaration of Independence as the sacred scripture, and freedom/democracy as the central value and proclamation. Abraham Lincoln becomes the savior, liberating not only slaves from bondage, but slave-owners from their sins. Lincoln’s assassination fits within the martyred-saint typology. The Gettysburg Address and Second Inaugural are the holy writ, and freedom and equality are upheld as America’s sacred values. American civil religion expands beyond the borders, as Americans seek to spread the “gospel” of democracy and freedom not only for the benefit of the rest of the world, but for America’s own well-being. Bellah refers to this as the “third time of trial”: “the problem of responsible action in a revolutionary world, a world seeking to attain many of the things, material and spiritual, that we have already attained” (Bellah, np). The “gospel” is spread to “the ends of the earth” by the American soldier and businessman. Bellah is obviously speaking of the Vietnam conflict in which we have “been tempted to rely on our overwhelming physical power rather than on our intelligence, and we have, in part, succumbed to this temptation.”

What is the state of American civil religion today, nearly fifty years after Bellah’s essay was published? Philosopher James Smith has provided a concise presentation of Charles Taylor’s analysis of the current philosophical, theological, and moral predicament that may prove helpful in answering this question. Taylor describes a shift from premodern religious beliefs which were oriented toward an end for human life that was eternal, that transcended “mundane” flourishing in this world, to a modern kind of faith in which “we lose any ‘idea that God was planning a transformation of human beings which would take them beyond the limitations which inhere in their present condition’” (50). In this new context, religious beliefs become more generic. Eternity is eclipsed; all that matters is life in this world. God is reduced to the creator of this world; religion no more than a set of moral rules to follow within it (51). When doctrinal and ecclesiastical institutions lose their authority and specificity, the political and social institutions that traditionally accompanied them also are no longer wed to
specific doctrines and principles. The "modern moral order" "amounts to an ordering of society for mutual benefit" and will "reflect the generic nature of this [less determinate, specified, embodied, practiced] religion" (Smith, 53–54). Taylor suggests that, in this context, a certain type of civil religion arises to meet the demands of a people who long for the transcendent, but who no longer can live fully immersed in a doctrinal and ecclesiastical tradition. The new civil religion is one free from denomination or sectarian conflict. In other words, the religion that succeeds in the "modern moral order" is one that lacks specificity and can be nurtured in a political and social order in which "the primary—yea, only—value... is choice: 'bare choice as a prime value, irrespective of what it is a choice between, or in what domain.' And tolerance is the last remaining virtue" (Smith, 85).

A curious interplay between Taylor’s modern moral order and the vision of Bellah’s American civil religion comes with the collective nature of Bellah’s American civil religion. Any civil religion is collective in nature. Bellah describes American civil religion as “a collection of beliefs, symbols, and rituals with respect to sacred things and institutionalized in a collectivity.” Individualism must give way to a commitment to some collective good, but Taylor’s analysis suggests that the only remaining good in the contemporary moral order is "choice" and the only virtue this good requires is "tolerance." So tolerance and choice are paramount, but these values are devoid of transcendence and unable to call us beyond the limitations of our selves (50); thus they are often superseded by a fundamental commitment to a general notion of America, embodied in the narrative, symbols, rituals, and doctrines of American civil religion. Americans are willing to sacrifice for others because the notion of sacrifice is embedded in our civil religion. And it really does not matter what we are sacrificing for, as long as it is hitched to the narrative. That is why we commonly hear or see phrases like “Thank you for your sacrifice” and “My child fights for your freedom.” As Taylor suggests, it is increasingly difficult for contemporary Westerners (and even Christians) to locate transcendence, and American civil religion may fill that need, no matter how shallow the collective good it offers. Though it may ultimately be a false sense of transcendence, American civil religion does at least transcend the self. And perhaps this is why it is so very dangerous for orthodox Christianity. It supplies the form of transcendence without providing any of the substance.

One difference in emphasis between Bellah and Taylor is Bellah’s highlighting the use of the

The values of tolerance and choice are often superseded by a fundamental commitment to a general notion of America, embodied in the narrative, symbols, rituals, and doctrines of American civil religion.

American military to spread democracy, an idea that perhaps is introduced in Taylor’s exclamation that “the sin which is not tolerated is intolerance” (85), but not developed substantially. One cannot help but think of the past decade and a half of “war against terrorism,” in which America’s doctrinal commitment to freedom has become the rally cry of the most prolonged period of war our country has ever experienced. The attempt to turn such a massive retaliation for the attacks of September 11, 2001 into a global battle for “freedom and civilization” seems clearly rooted in the narrative of American civil religion.

When I recently saw the movie American Sniper, I was not so much disturbed as saddened. While the film does place the main character in morally complicated situations, those situations almost always get resolved in the simplistic moral framework of American civil religion. The opening scene of the movie has Chris Kyle (Bradley Cooper), a sniper and Navy Seal, having to make a snap decision about whether or not
to kill a child who appears to be hiding a bomb underneath his clothing in an attempt to injure US soldiers. The moral dilemma is not “should I kill a child who has grown up in a society ravaged by war due in no small measure to US foreign policy, even though he is trying to hurt my companions?” Rather, the only quandary seems to be “does the child have a bomb?” An immensely complex moral narrative is reduced to “We are the good guys, and I must do what it takes to support my side.” Near the end of the film, Kyle makes the decision to lead a team into a hostile area so that he can get one last shot at his arch-nemesis, a sniper for the insurgency that has killed many Americans. Kyle’s decision ends up getting a number of his comrades killed, a price that yields the perfect shot and kills the enemy sniper. Kyle’s eventual murder, killed by one of his own people no less, elevates his service and loyalty to “our side” to a sacrifice of religious magnitude, redeeming a host of sins in the chaos of war.

Kyle becomes a character in the self-sacrificial narrative of American civil religion, taking himself away from his family repeatedly to fight the enemy of the American values of freedom and equality. The depth of the moral decision-making and moral resources in the film is severely limited. The film’s conclusion reinforces the thread of American civil religion, and, on more than one occasion I am told, left the audience applauding through the credits.

Why does American civil religion have such a tight grip on the moral discourse of American culture? Following Taylor, it is because American civil religion offers a transcendence that all people long for and that is scarcely found in the modern moral order. But it is a transcendence that is the creation of the modern moral order and whose goods fail to further animate “tolerance and choice.” A critical question that confronts moral theologians, clergy, and Christian thinkers of all types is whether or not American civil religion helps or hinders Americans from experiencing the transcendence of Christian orthodoxy. Does the American narrative of sacrifice, freedom, and equality prevent Christians from understanding repentance, the sovereignty of God, and the love of enemies? Or can American civil religion exist peacefully alongside orthodox Christianity? The general cultural reaction to American Sniper suggests that there exists significant tension between the two. American civil religion may encourage a simplistic view of our moral and spiritual existence that is incompatible with the Christian life. American churches should start identifying American civil religion for what it is.

Geoffrey C. Bowden teaches in the Department of Political Science and Public Affairs at Savannah State University, with specialties in ethics and politics and political theology.

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Free Exercise After *Hobby Lobby*

Frank J. Colucci

One year after the US Supreme Court ruling in *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby*, that decision's significance appears to be as much social as legal. Debate has emerged in the states over the proper scope of accommodation for religious believers who claim exemptions from general laws. These claims once raised exclusively by individuals, now are frequently brought by corporations as well as against general policies of discrimination. The aftermath of the *Hobby Lobby* decision has been at times politically divisive; however, it has opened up possibilities for compromise that can more precisely define and secure religious liberty.

The legal implications of *Hobby Lobby* remain narrow. The case involved enforcement of part of the Affordable Care Act that mandates companies with more than fifty employees to offer health insurance that includes coverage for all FDA-approved contraception at no cost. By a 5–4 vote, the Court held that enforcement of this provision violates the rights of closely-held, for-profit companies whose owners object on religious grounds. An exemption for these companies is required, the majority held, under the 1993 federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), intended "to provide a claim or defense to persons whose religious exercise is substantially burdened by government."

The Court applied RFRA to the contraceptive mandate. Although Hobby Lobby is a national, for-profit corporation with more than five hundred stores and thirteen thousand employees, it remains privately owned by five members of the Green family. As a closely-held firm under Internal Revenue Service rules, Hobby Lobby qualifies as a "person" under RFRA. The Greens presented evidence of their sincerely-held beliefs that four of the FDA-approved forms of contraception acted after conception as abortifacients. Noncompliance would subject Hobby Lobby to annual fines of about $34 million.

Subjecting Hobby Lobby to the contraceptive mandate, the Court found, would contradict RFRA's requirement that government use "the least restrictive means" of furthering any "compelling government interest." The Obama administration previously had announced exemptions for non-profit religious groups that allow their employees to gain no-cost access to approved contraceptives under a separate policy paid for by insurance companies or the government. Under RFRA, these same exemptions could and must be extended to closely-held, for-profit corporations like Hobby Lobby. "Under the accommodation," the Court concluded, Hobby Lobby's "female employees would continue to receive contraceptive coverage without cost sharing for all FDA-approved contraceptives."

The ruling in *Hobby Lobby* demonstrates the unanticipated consequences of far-reaching legislative protections for religious freedom. Following a 1997 US Supreme Court decision limiting application of RFRA to federal law, nineteen states have passed their own versions of religious freedom legislation under state law. Many others are considering similar legislation.

Most recent state legislative action occurred in response to *Hobby Lobby* and to several state court decisions denying exemptions to businesses owners who refused to provide services for same-sex weddings and commitment ceremonies. In February, a Washington state court ruled that the owners of Arlene's Flowers did not have a right to refuse to provide floral...
arrangements for a same-sex wedding that was legal under state law. (This was the first wedding in thirty-seven years for which the owners had refused service.) That same month, an Oregon bakery had its claim to refuse to bake a cake for a same-sex ceremony rejected by the state's Bureau of Labor and Industries. The owners of Sweet Cakes face damages of up to $150,000 and have since closed their business to the public. Two years previously, Elane's Photography lost its claim to refuse services to a same-sex commitment ceremony in New Mexico. In each case, these new legal claims demand individualized, commercial exemptions from state laws that prohibit discrimination in public accommodations such as businesses, housing, and employment. Requests for exemptions from these general laws appear as efforts to enjoy the benefits of a public accommodation yet retain the personal right to refuse service and legal protections to some classes of fellow citizens.

Recent state legislation also seems motivated by anticipation of a US Supreme Court ruling this summer that would overturn state bans on same-sex marriage. Louisiana's Marriage and Conscience Act, for example, would guarantee "this state shall not take any adverse action against a person, wholly or partially, on the basis that such person acts in accordance with a religious belief or moral conviction about the institution of marriage." This immunity would include state officials who refuse to affirm or recognize a marriage found to be constitutionally required by the Supreme Court.

Other states have sought to expand the scope of corporate exemptions beyond Hobby Lobby to provide protection for these newer commercial cases. In March, Indiana passed SEA 101. Sections 8 and 10 of the law, articulating the legal standards courts must apply to claims for religious exemptions from generally applicable laws, mirror the language of the federal RFRA.

But Indiana's law departs significantly from federal protections. Section 7 defines persons to include not only individuals or nonprofit groups organized for religious purposes, or closely-held for-profit corporations like Hobby Lobby. It also expressly includes:

any entity that: (A) may sue and be sued; and (B) exercises practices that are compelled or limited by a system of religious belief held by: (i) an individual; or (ii) the individuals who have control and substantial ownership of the entity, regardless of whether the entity is organized and operated for profit or nonprofit purposes.
Unlike in *Hobby Lobby*, Indiana’s religious freedom protections are not limited to closely-held for-profit corporations.

Indiana’s law extends beyond the federal RFRA. Its protections apply “regardless of whether the state or any other governmental entity is a party to the proceeding.” This act thus opens the possibility of extending religious exemptions beyond duties to government to public interactions with other citizens. While a federal court ruling requires the state to conduct same sex marriages, Indiana—unlike Washington, New Mexico, and Oregon, but similar to the federal government—has no general legal protections against discrimination in public accommodations or employment based on sexual orientation.

Responding to unexpected public criticism of its religious liberty bill, within a week Indiana passed a “clarification.” Senate Enrolled Act 50 states that Indiana law “does not”:

authorize a provider to refuse to offer or provide services, facilities, use of public accommodations, goods, employment, or housing to any member or members of the general public on the basis of race, color, religion, ancestry, age, national origin, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or United States military service;

(2) establish a defense to a civil action or criminal prosecution for refusal by a provider to offer or provide services, facilities, use of public accommodations, goods, employment, or housing to any member or members of the general public on the basis of race, color, religion, ancestry, age, national origin, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or United States military service.

This revision parallels separate protections under federal and state law. Yet this is the first mention in Indiana statutes of legal protection based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Arkansas, which this spring passed similar legislation to Indiana’s, earlier this year prohibited cities and counties from enacting separate legal non-discrimination protections “on a basis not contained in state law.”

Broad religious liberty laws raise other, practical concerns about the extent of exemptions required from general laws. As the Supreme Court said in *Reynolds v. US* (1878), a case involving polygamy convictions in the Utah territory, unbounded religious exemptions could “make the professed doctrines of religious belief superior to the law of the land, and in effect to permit every citizen to become a law unto himself.” A century later, in *Oregon v. Smith* (1990), Justice Scalia wrote that excessively broad free exercise protections—whether imposed by courts or required by legislation—“would open the prospect of constitutionally required religious exemptions from civic obligations of almost every conceivable kind.” Even under the best intentions, broad free exercise protections could produce a legal regime “in which each conscience is a law unto itself or in which judges weigh the social importance of all laws against the centrality of all religious beliefs.”

The consequences of expansive legislation like RFRA, the *Hobby Lobby* decision, and Indiana’s initial law has validated the fears Scalia expressed in *Smith*. Recent responses suggest the wisdom of legislation defining specific circumstances and areas where religious liberty legitimately deserves greater protection and exemption from general laws.

One alternative is to define more precisely areas of heightened protection for requests for religious exemptions. Congress did this in 2000 when it passed the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Person Act. That legislation may provide a surer model than the initial federal RFRA. If the recent or forthcoming constitutional protection for same-sex marriage claims require similar accommodations, such exemptions should be defined precisely and debated directly on their own merits with clear recognition of the state interest in providing legal protections to all citizens.
Utah recently moved in this more defined direction. This March, the state passed two laws intended both to protect religious liberty and to prevent discrimination. Senate Bill 296 added “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” to classes receiving explicit legal protection from housing and employment discrimination. While providing exceptions for religious groups and the Boy Scouts, Senate Bill 297 protects religious officials and groups from being compelled to officiate, recognize, promote or provide for “a marriage that is contrary to that religious official’s or religious organization’s religious beliefs.” This law provides exemptions for objecting state clerks, so long as another official “is available during business hours to solemnize a legal marriage for which a marriage license has been issued.”

The Utah legislation differs from legislation in Louisiana and Indiana and the federal RFRA. Utah’s protections do not constitute a comprehensive religious freedom act. Rather, they specify exemptions from same-sex marriage ceremonies contrary to religious belief. Exemptions under Utah law apply to individuals, religious groups, and ministers and are not extended to for-profit businesses. At the same time, this legislation explicitly reiterates and extends access to government services, public accommodations, and employment to all.

Utah’s compromise embodies the political advantages of extensive social acceptance. Despite initial reservations, religious officials and leaders of LGBT groups in the state supported the package of legislation. The bills passed both houses of the state legislature by overwhelming margins and were publicly signed by the governor. The legislative process and result in Utah demonstrates the wisdom of more precisely defining the scope of religious liberty while guaranteeing legal protections to all.

The process and substance of the legislative achievement reached in Utah—in contrast to the divisiveness in Louisiana and Indiana—provides a path toward prudential resolutions. Securing religious liberty requires clearer conception of the liberty to be restored, recognition of the competing public interests to be considered, and wide social and political acceptance of the resulting protection. If more states follow Utah’s lead, the Hobby Lobby decision may ultimately stand not for its legal holding but for the national conversation it inspired about the meaning of religious freedom.

Frank J. Colucci is an Associate Professor of Political Science at Purdue University Calumet.
Recently a friend invited me to a banquet held at a downtown Washington, DC, tourist restaurant directly across the street from the Treasury Department. He nonchalantly informed me that our free steak and salmon dinner would accompany a seminar on "integrated wealth management." This was hardly my idea of weekend entertainment and, considering my overall income and assets, managing my "wealth" is something of an absurdity. But the prospect of a free meal overcame my hesitation as I joined a group of about fifty people crowded into the restaurant’s basement banquet room. These people, mostly white, middle-aged, and older, did not represent Washington’s 1 percent. The meal was free! Nonetheless, our hosts had targeted them as people of sufficient wealth who might be receptive to paying a financial advisor to manage it for them. Their names, probably generated from publicly available investor mailing lists, were unimportant, but their identities in one important sense were literally golden.

I couldn’t help but feel queasy about the whole affair, given the cultural context. Only twenty-four hours earlier, I was glued to the television, taking in both the peaceful protests and the violent riots in Baltimore following the funeral of Freddie Gray, a young African-American man who died there after suffering a severed spine while in police custody. I was uneasy not only because our gathering enjoyed the perks of privilege by comparison to the people of inner-city Baltimore, but even more because the seminar leader’s polished sales pitch, which surely he had given dozens of times before, proceeded without acknowledging the events happening barely fifty miles away. Instead, for two hours he invited us to live in a bubble of hope, insulated from the world, where we might ponder the wonderful possibilities of our wealth, if only we would follow his rules for ensuring a prosperous retirement. His talk admitted no connection between our condition of relative wealth and the conditions of abject poverty of those I saw passionately protesting on television. I felt indignant: What could this man possibly have to teach me, particularly as my mind and heart were focused on those justice seekers rather than on his PowerPoint presentation?

In retrospect, however, I can discern some ways that his "principles" may help to illuminate the events in Baltimore and the social conditions that give rise to them. The seminar was in large part a course of instruction in how "risk" relates to "volatility" in making financial investments. We were told that markets are volatile. They are very sensitive to changes in the world, such as the rise and fall of global interest rates, fluctuating profit margins in various sectors of the economy, and abrupt fluctuations in supply and demand caused by shifting consumer preferences as well as by war, politics, or natural disaster. These changes create variances in returns on investments; the greater the variance, the greater the risk. The seminar leader explained that older investors (like us) with larger assets (unlike me) tend to be risk-averse, and he warned that we are apt to make exactly the wrong decisions about our portfolios: we buy when our wealth is increasing and prices are rising and sell when our wealth is decreasing and prices are falling. A wise advisor will avoid this mistake by making offsetting investments so as to help a client’s overall portfolio hew as closely to the “average” as possible. For our hosts, volatility—not the love of money!—is the root of all evil, since it tends to introduce emotion into the investment equation, which almost always prompts people to make rash decisions they will regret.

So much for Economics 101. What does this have to do with Baltimore? As I thought about what I was hearing, it occurred to me that our host’s upbeat financial maxims have a darker and more sorrowful
meaning for those not fortunate enough to enjoy a free steak and salmon meal. Indeed, it doesn't take much stretching of the imagination to recognize how concepts such as risk and volatility are real factors affecting the daily experience of black lives plagued by poverty, violence, and injustice in cities like Baltimore. Here are a few of these maxims.

"You want to be able to outlive your money." In the investment world, affluent retirees want to be able to withdraw money from their portfolios at a pace that ensures it doesn't run out before they do. But during the riots in the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood of Baltimore, worried mothers and fathers were telling reporters, "We want our children to outlive us:' Perhaps the most striking image caught by a camera during the riots was an angry Toya Graham "losing it; ' as she subsequently put it, when she encountered her sixteen-year-old son among the looters. She slapped and hit the boy in a furor and forced him to go home with her. Many praised her unbridled outrage while others condemned her resort to violence, but it was clear that her rage was really a response of sheer horror to what might have befallen her son. In that moment, Graham was neither a model parent nor an icon of fierceness; she was simply showing, in the most visceral way possible, the fear welling up in so many African-American parents that their children, particularly their sons, will not live to adulthood.

"Diversify, because you can't predict what will happen to a particular investment." There is no foolproof financial plan, we were told, because no advisor can predict which class of investment will do well. Because of volatility, the best way to reduce risk is to divide one's portfolio among a variety of asset classes. Can poor people reduce their risk as easily? One of the raps made against poor people is that they do a bad job at managing their time and money. They fail to save for a rainy day or make provisions for a better future. Everyone should be able to put a little something aside, right? This glib advice ignores the volatility most poor people live with daily. A missed bus or flat tire may cost you a job interview, a day's wage, or the job itself; paying a hospital bill or fixing a broken refrigerator can put you behind in the rent; a chance encounter with street violence can end your life. Living in poverty is a debilitating reminder of how unpredictable life can be. Unlike the investor's portfolio, one's choices are limited, and often all of them are bad.

"Rely on trends that develop over a long span of years, not returns over the past twelve months." Our financial guru showed us four sample investment portfolios based on data gathered over a forty-year period. Each demonstrated that returns from a diversified set of asset classes improve over time, albeit in different ways and at differing rates. Retirees may want to choose a "safe" portfolio whose returns stay close to the current averages, but our host argued counterintuitively that a more risky portfolio—where profits and losses have a greater range of variance—better guarantees that one's money will last through the long retirement which he said most well-to-do retirees can expect.

Looking back on decades of urban experience will not give Baltimore residents the same optimistic expectations. The violence that followed Freddie Gray's death is a reminder of the 1968 riots in Baltimore following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. even as the roots of the city's poverty and segregation go back more than a century. Baltimore has for some time been pursuing policies that made the events of late April all the more likely.

A Brookings Institution survey of Baltimore schoolchildren over a thirty-year period has detailed the effects of poverty, race, and economic inequality on their future outcomes (Alexander 2014). For instance, only 4 percent of poorer children have graduated from college, compared to 45 percent of higher-income children. And while drug use is not a marker of inequality—wealthier whites actually reported higher usage rates—acquiring a police record for drug usage was far more detrimental to blacks in the city. Other Brookings research demonstrates that while conditions in Baltimore are typical of other urban areas, they are by no means the worst in the country, and in some ways are better (Berube and McDearman 2015). Unlike long-range analysis of the stock and bond markets, assessing the data on Baltimore and other cities makes one despair for the future.

It is unlikely that the rules of wealth management that work for the affluent retirees in Washington will give comfort to Baltimore's urban poor. Risk and volatility look very different from the opposite ends of the economic spectrum, after all.
In trying to come up with solutions to urban poverty and violence, it is all too easy to offer additional maxims that, while politically useful, fail to produce lasting change. For instance, it may be true that we need to maintain a long-term perspective and not be deterred by short-term setbacks, but these encouraging words are apt to prevent us from acting with urgency and lead us to ignore the anguish of those living in intolerable conditions.

Likewise, politicians and pundits may declare that all Americans are “assets” worthy of investment. And few will deny that persons of color are treated differently in our systems of justice and policing, and that economic inequality is widening with opportunities narrowing for the poor. Yet, too often raising these issues in public debate comes under attack. Jobs programs and higher minimum wages are condemned as “economy killers.” Declaring that “Black Lives Matter” gets you labeled as a race baiter. Lives that are most vulnerable to social volatility are deemed too risky, too dangerous to our own well-being.

Yes, public-policy think tanks like Brookings can help us define problems and plan public strategies. But as ordinary citizens we also can help provide a path to a better future by beginning to redefine what we mean by “integrated wealth management.” Indeed, we need to recognize the fact of our increasing societal segregation, broaden our understanding of what “wealth” entails, and overcome our tendency to see the poor as “problems” to be managed rather than as people to be engaged. Besides devising investment methods to let our money outlive us, might we not also reflect on how these might become tools to achieve the well-being of all? Rather than funding ever-more exotic foreign travel for ourselves and continually calculating ways to increase our standard of living, might we risk traveling across town where families are in distress to learn from them how best to help at-risk communities?

In an oblique way my dinner host did touch on these questions when he brought up the topic of estate planning. He said a good financial advisor knows how to use IRS rules to maximize spousal benefits, structure bequests and trusts for children and grandchildren, and make tax-advantaged gifts to alma maters and charities. This is all well and good, but it is pretty thin gruel. We must require more of ourselves if we want to improve the lives of others. Instead of trying to forget Baltimore’s troubles, let us remember—and feel—the fears of Toya Graham. As we finish our steak and salmon let us come up with strategies to fulfill the promise of the city’s young people. We may not join the 1 percent, but the dream of the good life is within our grasp, if we are willing to redefine what that means beyond our own personal comfort. In a society where the roots of racism, poverty, and inequality run deep, the maxims of the personal financial adviser can do little to achieve a just society. Indeed, they may raise barriers against it. We need to rethink what it takes to improve the lives of others. Wealth management needs to be more than a financial practice. It needs to be a human practice, one that risks seeking successful outcomes for the Freddie Grays of our world.

David Lott is a religious book editor and a graduate of St. Olaf College and Luther Seminary. He lives in Washington, DC, where he does freelance editing and writing.

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In his "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," Samuel Taylor Coleridge tells the story of a sailor cursed by his killing of a mystical albatross and lost at sea as a consequence. As their provisions run out, the sailors begin to sense their impending doom. Parched and thirsty, the mariner looks out upon the sea surrounding him and laments, "Water, water every where / Nor any drop to drink." I have found it hard recently not to think of these lines as I have been escaping the bitter northeastern winter during a semester on leave in southern California. Standing at the coast, looking out upon the Pacific Ocean, it does indeed appear that there is "water, water every where." Yet if one follows the news, one might begin to fear that there is not a drop to drink.

California is in the midst of a severe drought, currently at three years and counting. It is the worst since an extended six-year drought that lasted from 1987 to 1992. According to the Water Policy Center of the Public Policy Institute of California, the current drought, which began in 2012, "includes the driest three-year stretch in 120 years of recordkeeping. This drought has been more widespread than most, covering the entire state. The year 2014 was also the hottest on record, which made conditions even drier" ("California’s Water: Managing Droughts," April 2015, www.ppic.org/content/pubs/report/R_415MDR.pdf). Among the drought’s consequences have been substantial reductions in groundwater supplies, revenue and job losses in agriculture, and environmental dangers to threatened species or ecosystems. The snowpack in the Sierra Nevadas, which supplies water as it melts throughout the warm season, is also at historically low levels; by the beginning of April, it was at only about 5 percent of its average water content for that point in the year.

Governor Jerry Brown responded on April 1 by proclaiming a drought state of emergency. After having encouraged localities in 2014 to pursue voluntary reductions of twenty percent—actual reductions proved to be about half that amount—he this time announced the first mandatory water usage reductions in California history. The reductions do not affect agriculture (a significant omission, since agriculture accounts for much of the state’s water usage), but they require towns and cities to reduce their water usage by 25 percent. Though the implementation details are still being worked out, a reduction of this magnitude is clearly a tall order, and no doubt a harbinger of things to come.

Reactions to an event like the current California drought tend to take one of two forms. The first, well represented by Governor Brown’s mandated reductions, is the conservation impulse. If we face the prospect of having too little water, then obviously we should use less of it. We should take shorter showers. We should stop hand-washing our cars and hosing off driveways. We should cut back on watering our lawns. Indeed, we should probably remove the lawn altogether, opting instead for drought-resistant, native plants and other forms of landscaping, since about half of urban water usage in California is now outdoors. Farmers may need to move out of water-intensive crops like almonds. This impulse tells us to cut back, to use less, to shepherd our dwindling supplies of a precious resource.

The second type of reaction is the impulse to innovate our way out of the dilemma. For example, we can mandate low-flow shower heads and low-flush toilets in new construction. Or farmers can adopt more efficient methods of
irrigation that waste less water. (Though ironically, because irrigation run-off contributes to groundwater repletion, this also reduces the rate of groundwater replenishment.) We can recycle wastewater, purifying it sufficiently to make it safe for household use. Or we can turn to something more dramatic, like desalination plants, a tempting (though expensive) option when one is sitting next to the Pacific Ocean—and, I suppose, the ultimate "says you" to the Ancient Mariner’s lament that there is water, water everywhere, but not a drop to drink.

These are not mutually exclusive impulses. For one thing, innovations like the shower heads or improved irrigation systems are often aimed at conservation. More importantly, it is obviously possible both to conserve and to innovate at the same time. We can switch to drought-resistant landscaping and build desalination plants simultaneously, if we can afford it. Nevertheless, I suspect that most of us instinctively react to news of the drought primarily in one of these two ways. For some of us, the first instinct is to use less water; for others, it is to look for new techniques of finding usable water where before there was none. Some of us are conservers by temperament, others innovators.

Both of these impulses, it seems to me, have a justification in Christian theology. The conservation impulse we might think of as representing a stewardship model. In giving human beings dominion over the creation, God has called us to be stewards of the natural environment and its resources. We are not to be careless or wasteful. We should not impose burdens on our fellow citizens or on future generations in order to enjoy luxuries like long showers or pristinely manicured lawns. If almonds require too much water, we can eat fewer almonds. We can drive dirty cars. (I sometimes think that I drive the dirtiest car in California.) We can accustom ourselves to golf courses that are not quite as green or to the peculiar beauty of cacti. And we should avoid the hubris of thinking that we can have it all, that we can indulge all of our desires without limit and without cost.

The innovating impulse reflects a more entrepreneurial model. As creatures made in God’s image, humans have been blessed with reason, freedom, and the ability to imitate and participate in God’s creative activity. We are not intended to remain fully confined by the only apparent limits of the natural environment; rather, we can use our ingenuity and creativity to transform those limits and improve the quality of life for ourselves and for others. If agriculture uses too much water, the response is not to abandon certain crops or give up particular foods but rather to develop new and more efficient methods for obtaining, transporting, and using water. Or we can develop innovative schemes for tradable markets in water rights. And if we need freshwater, and we have massive quantities of saltwater readily available, let’s by all means figure out how to take the salt out of the water. If the danger the steward seeks to avoid is hubris, the entrepreneur is more concerned not to be the servant who buried his talent in the ground and was criticized by his master as a result.

If the danger the steward seeks to avoid is hubris, the entrepreneur is more concerned not to be the servant who buried his talent in the ground and was criticized by his master as a result.

On the one hand, then, we have a desire to be stewards of the creation, and a wariness of the hubris that would deny human limitations. On the other hand, we have an embrace of the distinctively human capacities for reason and creative activity, and a fear of the sloth or cowardice that would refuse to embrace them. Two very different instincts—not mutually incompatible, to be sure, but nevertheless pointing in different directions—but each with its plausible justification rooted in fundamental tenets of the faith. These instincts routinely confront each other, moreover, not only in the context of the California drought, but in a range of
environmental contexts, from climate change to fracking disputes.

According to the canons of clever and persuasive writing, now is the point in this essay when I should tell you which of these two impulses is the right one, which is the more authentically Christian. Unfortunately, I haven't the faintest idea which that is. Both impulses seem to me authentically Christian. Both appeal to an important Christian value: stewardship in the one case, humans' co-creative role in the other. Both caution against a genuine evil: in the one case the denial of limits; in the other what we might call a form of insufficient faith in our own God-given abilities. By instinct and temperament, I myself am probably more of a conserver than an innovator, but I don't believe that conservation alone can solve California's looming water crisis. We will need innovators also.

This suggests the somewhat obvious and even boring conclusion that responses to the drought will need to reflect both approaches, combining elements of stewardship with elements of entrepreneurship. As I have already noted, the two impulses, though they point in different directions, are not incompatible. The recommendations of the Water Policy Center, for example, contain examples of both approaches. They suggest that low-water landscaping, improved groundwater management, tradable water rights, recycled wastewater, and limited desalinization may all play a role in dealing with the drought. Effective solutions require a variety of responses.

At a deeper level, however, the tension between these two impulses may also suggest something about the kinds of political processes that Christians should defend. If I am right that most people lean instinctively toward either the stewardship or the entrepreneurial model, but also that both approaches are theologically justified, then Christians have good reason to support robustly democratic and deeply representative political structures for responding to the drought (or to other, similar problems). It can sometimes seem as though environmental disputes deteriorate into a shouting match between those who believe that all human intervention in the natural world is evil and those who believe that Yankee ingenuity can invent a way out of any dilemma. What we should really want, however, is a system in which farmers, engineers, salmon fisheries, environmental organizations, golf course owners, carwash operators, urban residents, household consumers, and all the many other relevant interests are represented, and in which the conservers and the innovators within all these groups can advance their best ideas and check each other's worst excesses. Even with such a system, of course, we might still manage to blow things. But we would have done the best we could have reasonably hoped to do.

In fact, a system of this sort—one that seeks to represent the many interests in society and the diverse perspectives that Christians may be led by their faith to take—may itself be an appropriate embodiment of Christian charity. If each of us brings only a partial perspective to difficult policy debates, then we should not want our own voice to speak so loudly that it drowns out all the others. If we truly care for the creation, and more importantly if we care for the men and women who depend upon that creation with us, then, whatever our own instincts, we should defend a political process that incorporates both stewards and entrepreneurs. In doing so, perhaps we seek to live out the final lesson with which Coleridge's ancient mariner takes his leave:

He prayeth well, who loveth well,
Both man and bird and beast.
He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.

Peter Meilaender is Professor of Political Science at Houghton College. This essay was written with the help of research support from Biola University's Center for Christian Thought, which is funded by the John Templeton Foundation. The views expressed are solely those of the author.
GREEN AND WET IS THE GRASS

for Steven Schroeder

Thank you for sharing the poem, “South Shore.”
“Between Indiana and a body/ of water” resonates with

a certain perpetuity to it, like the sound old wire looping
off pastures makes when you accidentally trip it—

with that buzz that it makes; your lines evocative with
echoes, reminiscent of the historical depth of Charles Olson.

I also love “to make a strobe of it turns” and the phrase
“the random weight of proliferation.” Then the two-line

rhythmic jazz lyric of “I step out/ with Chicago in mind”
is memorable. I would like to see the poem

printed somewhere on the train itself for commuters
to read on their way “between here and there.”

Look into reading “Neither Here nor There,” a poem by
W. S. Merwin, in The Moon before Morning, that regards

the traveler who must wait between flights in an airport.
Your poem and his have similarities, but it is in their
differences that make their being different all that more
delightful and deepen each of the poems themselves.

We’ve had what I remember as a record cold month
of April, but we have sun here for a change, and we are

forecast for temperatures into the 60s—green and wet
is the grass with dew, as Cummings would have liked it.

Wally Swist
Discipleship has become very popular among American Lutherans. One can hardly read a newsletter of the North American Lutheran Church (NALC) or Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC) without finding an article on discipleship and seeing advertisements for upcoming "discipleship events." The word also appears in the advertising of various conferences and events in certain innovative quarters of the churches of the former Synodical Conference (LCMS, WELS, ELS).

Mark Mattes observes that discipleship among Lutherans copies "the neo-revivalist tactics of North American Evangelicals." Such discipleship is anchored "in a unique experience of God in worship and serves as the basis for specific practices designed to move 'nominal' members of the church into more disciplined lives of faith" (Mattes 2012, 142, 151–54). The specific practices include small-group Bible studies, methods of prayer, and types of fellowship designed to create congregational renewal. Often such congregational renewal begins with a discipleship event or retreat designed to be a psychologically life-altering experience in which church members receive motivation to move beyond church membership to discipleship through the prescribed techniques. Discipleship in this model, as Mattes notes (152), is merely contemporary Lutheran Pietism complete with Pietism's emphasis on experience.

Such neo-revivalism is closely related to what Phillip Carey calls "the new [American] Evangelical theology," a more rational form of Pentecostalism, which encourages Christians to find God's will for their lives as disciples of Christ. The "Lutheran" form of this theology often includes references to "being open to what God is doing," the alleged fact that "God is doing a new thing," "discerning the Holy Spirit," "letting the Holy Spirit work," and "truly believing in prayer" (e.g. NALC Discipleship moments, esp. March 31, April 7 and 14, 2015: http://thenalc.org/discipleship-moment/).

The first thing to notice about the word "discipleship" is that it is an abstract noun. It refers to no reality nor to any real disciple, but instead it refers to a concept. "Discipleship" is an idea and when an idea becomes a prescription, then the idea becomes an ideal. An ideal is a goal which one never reaches. When an ideal becomes the mediator between the eternal God and his sinful disciples, it means that God's final judgment must always and eternally be, "you have not arrived at your goal." In classical Lutheran terms, the law is an ideal. Martin Luther describes hell as having the law, an ideal, unfulfilled in front of you (WA 39I:350.3–4; Sonntag 141).

The gospel, in contrast, is always specific and particular. The gospel is even flesh and blood: Jesus Christ himself given to you, specifically into your own mouth, for the forgiveness of sins. When Christ's forgiveness reaches a sinner in Holy Baptism and whenever his promises are preached, it creates freedom from the law, which is now fulfilled (WA 39I:478.18–479.4; Sonntag 217). In Baptism the Holy Spirit is given in the word of God, not apart from it, and through Baptism the Spirit does his revealed work of killing and making alive in Christ alone (Romans 6).

What were the actual flesh and blood disciples of Jesus like? Just like God dealing with his chosen people in the Old Testament, Jesus often rebuked his disciples; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and for preventing little...
children from coming to him. Little children never practice discipleship and they are not pious, yet Jesus proclaims that in order to be his true disciples and enter the kingdom of heaven people must become like his beloved little children (Matt. 19:13–14, 18:3). In the end, Jesus’ grown-up disciples betrayed him, denied him, and abandoned him.

Peter’s story reifies discipleship; it shows us what happens when someone aspires to this ideal. On the night when he was betrayed by his own disciple, Christ announced to Peter the truth of the Holy Scriptures: “You will all become deserters, for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered’” (Mark 14:27 quoting Zechariah 13:7). However, Peter did not want the scriptures to be true. He instead desired to practice his discipleship and be judged on the judgment day to be a true, loyal, and good disciple: “Even though all become deserters, I will not... even though I must die...” (Mark 14:29, 31). So Christ created a special discipleship event that very evening for Peter. Peter would practice discipleship by denying Christ: “Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times” (Mark 14:30). Like all the saints in church history and today, Peter was quite good at practicing this form of discipleship. And like the death given in Holy Baptism, this event destroyed all his self-righteousness and crushed him: “he broke down and wept” (Mark 14:72).

If any have been bewitched into believing that Jesus is not pleased with them because they have failed to complete a discipleship program—even one designed not to take much time out of the daily life of bourgeois Americans—imagine how angry Peter thought Jesus would be when he denied him the night before his painful execution after Jesus spent almost every day and night with him for three years? Yet when Jesus next saw Peter he spoke these words to him, “Peace be with you” (John 20:19).

Even after Christ’s death and resurrection, the disciples did not suddenly become good. Peter drew back from the gospel of Christ’s forgiveness, turning to circumcision and the law for his righteousness. He was forgiven and restored to faith when God sent Paul to rebuke him and to preach Christ’s death to him (Galatians 2:11–21). Paul was the greatest apostle, probably because his sin against Christ and Christ’s church made Peter’s and Judas’s sins pale in comparison. Yet Paul also was not a good disciple. He wrote, “I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do” (Romans 7:19). Is there any hope for such an awful disciple? “Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:24–25). These are the words of a true and bad disciple. A disciple is someone who is wretched and yet trusts in Christ’s forgiveness, which delivers one from eternal death into eternal life.

God alone is good (Mark 10:18); there are no good disciples in reality, not even the prophets of discipleship. This is not to say that the gospel is “misery loves company;” or “we’re all sinners, so I’m ok, you’re ok.” Instead, the facts that God alone is good and that there are no good disciples remind us that the particular and electing baptismal gospel of Jesus Christ is not a discipleship program or system of discipline, but instead precisely and always the forgiveness of sins.

Martin Luther’s sermon from Easter morning in 1529 tells us how to become “better” disciples for those interested in improving. Improvement comes not from discipleship or any attempt to follow Christ, but only from the

Little children never practice discipleship and they are not pious, yet Jesus proclaims that truly to be his disciples and enter the kingdom of heaven people must become like his beloved little children.
gospel of Christ’s death under the weight of the sins of the disciples and the world: “the less you look at the sin in you and see it only in Christ, the stronger Christ is in you” (Luther 126).

When “discipleship” advertises itself as a way to make you a better (stronger) disciple/Christian by teaching you how to defeat, or at least decrease, your own sins through various techniques, i.e. works, it has the opposite effect: “if a sermon comes along that goes like this: You have sinned; you must do this and that and by your own works take action against those sins... Is this not the devil’s sermon and a blasphemy against God and Christ?” (Luther 124).

Like Peter, no disciple, however filled with the self-righteousness of discipleship, has mustered up the strength or faith to follow Jesus to the cross. But God, who always saves us against our wills, bound in sin, calls and uses other bad disciples to bury us with Christ by Baptism into death (Romans 6). Amazingly, Holy Baptism (even for infants), not “being discipled” or any other form of discipline or law, is how Christ and Holy Scripture tell us that God actually makes his own true disciples: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:18–19).

However, when law and gospel are sharply distinguished, such as when Paul called Peter away from faith in the law back to Christ’s freedom, Baptism produces fruit and all believers are given the gift of martyrdom one way or another. Their deaths testify to Christ’s death (Bonhoeffer 44). This happened to Peter in a rather dramatic way (John 21:18–19). God not only provides Baptism but crosses, suffering, diseases, and death itself. This martyrdom obeys all Christ has commanded (Matt. 28:20). As Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die” (Bonhoeffer 44), rather than come and improve himself through discipleship. Mattes writes, “what is strikingly different between Luther and the new pietism is that the new pietism is a ‘cross-less’ Christianity. [This] is exactly the criticism that Bonhoeffer leveled toward American Christianity” (Mattes, 153).

God also provides neighbors, real flesh-and-blood neighbors, who are not abstractions and whom one does not need a special program to find. Luther claims that disciples do good works for such neighbors “without the law,” because “only faith in Christ justifies, only it fulfills the law, only it does good works without the law... It is true that after justification good works follow spontaneously without the law, that is, without it either helping or exhorting any longer” (WA 391:354.1-2, 5-6; Sonntag 239).

The law must be preached until kingdom come in order to preserve a little peace on earth and to remind Christians that they, like all people, are still sinners. Therefore, Lutheran piety comes from the Third Commandment: Remember the Sabbath Day to Keep it Holy. “What does this mean for us? We are to fear and love God so that we do not neglect his Word and the preaching of it, but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it.” This means that piety revolves around the public divine service replete with the preaching of God’s own word in the present, including the sacraments. Sacraments cannot be turned into programs or practices one uses for discipline, but they are God’s unstoppable eternal promises given freely. The sacraments teach all Christians how to distinguish Christ from the law when preaching in the home.

This classical Lutheran piety, in which preaching properly distinguishes law and gospel, centered on the Small Catechism’s summary
of Scripture, struggles to compete in the consumeristic American religious marketplace eager for the latest brand names, code words, and programs. It is unpopular because rather than give disciples the false hopes of choice and control offered by American Evangelicalism, “discipleship” programs, and consumerism, sacramental Lutheran worship proclaims Christ’s control and choice alone, “I am the vine, you are the branches.” “You did not choose me, I choose you” (John 15:5, 16). Teaching the righteousness of faith in the gospel apart from the law (Romans 3:28) and letting Christ have the last word in God’s relationship with human beings (Romans 10:4) has always been an uphill fight, but it is a fight that Lutherans must never give up. As Luther said in the Large Catechism, Holy Baptism into Christ (rather than discipleship) is the unsinkable ship [Tappert 446].

Nicholas Hopman is pastor of Peace Lutheran Church in Nevis, Minnesota.

Works Cited


The Gift in My Hands

Joel Kurz

Seven years ago, while sorting through my father's library months after his death, I discovered a rare book I never knew he had. The unassuming small leather volume with print scarcely exposed to the light of day, turned out to be a 1704 Amsterdam edition of Jacob Boehme's classic The Way to Christ. Aware of Boehme's status and the possible value of this book, I put it on my shelf and let it be until three hundred and ten years after its publication. When I discovered that only six other known copies of this edition existed, it became clear that I had to find the right recipient and give away this gift in my hands.

The book was first printed against the author's wishes in the year of Boehme's death (1624), a risky undertaking in bold defiance of the Görlitz town council's 1612 silencing of the city's controversial "spiritualized" shoemaker. Considered by many to be the father of a Protestant mysticism deeply rooted in the unity of nature, Boehme proved influential for George Fox (the founder of the Society of Friends), William Blake, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Georg Friedrich Hegel, as well as for Elizabeth Gilbert's 2013 novel The Signature of All Things. The esteemed Scottish preacher, Dr. Alexander Whyte, wrote of Boehme and the book at hand: "Neither Augustine nor Luther nor Bunyan carries deeper wounds, or broader scars, nor tells a nobler story in any of their autobiographies and soldierly books. There is all the reality, inwardness, and spirituality of the Imitation... both a sweetness and bitterness of heart that even a Kempis never comes near."

Another influenced by Boehme was George Rapp, the German vine-grower and weaver who immigrated to Pennsylvania in 1803 and founded the quickly flourishing Harmony Society. The town of New Harmony, Indiana, was established in 1814 and received its name when Rapp and his followers relocated their entire community there. Last year, as New Harmony was celebrating its bicentennial, I donated Boehme's book to the archives of the town's Working Men's Institute (the oldest continuously operating public library in the state), figuring it was the best location for all apparent reasons.

While carefully packaging Boehme's book for shipment, I found myself thinking about its new home and the researchers who will have access to it in coming years, but also about those unknown hands through which it passed in previous centuries. Had the book belonged to my great-grandfather who left Germany for Australia and then America after training in Switzerland as a pastor and teacher? Did my grandfather take it with him when he ventured to California a hundred years ago to work under Gustav Niebuhr, and did it accompany my father for his dozen years of missionary service in the Philippines? I will never know the hands through which it passed, the locations to which it traveled, and the inner journey of faith it set others on and still will.

After five years during which I cared for my father while he lost the ability to read and write, shower, dress, and feed himself, my mother gave me the gift of time. "Go away for a couple of weeks," she said, "travel and take a break." So, I did and traveled from Missouri to see friends and relatives (and whatever piqued my interest along the way) in Indiana, Ohio, and South Carolina. The world opened up wide for me once again after the largely confining work of being an at-home caregiver. Wandering around
I stumbled upon a stack of the Trinity 2006 issue of The Cresset outside of the mailroom and recalled shelving the journal during my seminary library worker days a decade prior. Nicolae Grigorescu’s painting of a young woman lying down holding a mirror but gazing almost through it and past it, captured my eye on the cover, as did the title of the lead essay “Facing the Mirror of the Wounds of Christ.” Past, present, and future—known and unknown—converged in that place and moment. I devoured that issue as I have each since, and I do not exaggerate or inflate when I call that issue, this one, and all of the others gifts in my hands (from other hands) which bring me into a wider community of learning, conversation, and adoration; which usher me into the awareness that my misfit soul and voice has “a place” of belonging and understanding amid the varied divisions we know within our creaturely existence.

In his modern classic The Gift (originally subtitled Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property), Lewis Hyde explores the aphorism “What is good is given back” and this observation: “a gift that cannot be given away ceases to be a gift.” Pertinent for consideration in all areas of life where monetary value reigns unchallenged as the sole arbiter in decision-making, Hyde’s examination of the “feeling-bond” (and lack thereof) that separates gift from commodity is profoundly enlightening. While I could have sold the Boehme book and pocketed a nice chunk of change, I chose instead to keep the chain unbroken by remaining a link between the past and future; honoring tradition which, after all, means “to give up” or “hand over.” The saying attributed to Martin Luther synthesizes so much so well: “I have held many things in my hands and I have lost them all, but whatever I’ve placed in God’s hands, that I still possess.”

While reading Luke 6:1–11 recently in a daily prayer book, I was struck by the prominence of hands: Jesus’ disciples walking through a field rubbing the heads of grain in their hands and popping the kernels in their mouths; David taking and eating the bread of the Presence which was forbidden for him; Jesus seeing a man with a withered right hand and instructing him to stretch it out so that he could restore it. Both episodes happened on the Sabbath and were Jesus’ demonstration that he is Lord of the Sabbath... and as Mark has him saying, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (2:27). What Jesus was getting at was that all is gift for us to receive and give for true rest and restoration; that is the Sabbath economy he came to bring. God is the Divine Giver, as Luther reminded of the Lord’s Prayer, “who gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.”

During this Trinity season of reflection on our baptismal identity and calling in life, we can think about the hands which poured the water of faith upon us. We can think about the Father giving the Son, the Son giving the Spirit, and the entire Godhead bringing us into and keeping us in the gift that is life and grace. And so, may we let everything pass through our hands as gifts of thanks and praise.

What Jesus was getting at was that all is gift for us to receive and give for true rest and restoration; that is the Sabbath economy he came to bring.

Joel Kurz is pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Warrensburg, Missouri.
IMPROMPTU LOVE SONG

The gravel beneath a road keeps
firm the whole. Every secret, always,
tends to do with surface area.
The many would always rather not be the one.
Lysistrata said: keep your garden tended
lest it go to seed. She meant, I think,
the same thing a lover told me
once: a husband should never leave
his woman alone for long.
The latter, though unfigured, is poetic
how Milosz is poetic when he says
one should rarely, relunctantly,
write poems for fear of shame or worse.
Just as one should break up
and excavate a paved road only with care,
only when need arises, as funds
and the neighbors' good will allows.
A city flourishes at the pleasure of those who
know how to keep water and trucks
in motion. Every site is a site of renewal.
But consider the engineers,
who rely upon math verified by math.
Consider this joy: a quantum
of power no match against itself.

John Estes
The Bride of Christ

Sarah M. Wells

"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"
"No one, sir," she said.
"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared.

John 8:10-11

I learned in college Bible studies, after I became part of the church—the bride of Christ—after I was gathered into the arms of grace and rescued, that a woman should not dress in such a way as to be a stumbling block to men. We were billboards for the wandering eye if a little skin was shone. Why make it harder on our Christian brothers if we could avoid it? Men are visual creatures.

It was a hard pendulum swing for the girl who used to walk the amusement park in a white crop top and cut-off shorts hoping for attention from the boys who traveled in packs, a tough turn for the high school girl who posed for glamour shots with friends in clothes we would never buy but loved for the way they accentuated our assets. We leaned forward, stuck out our chests, and grinned in women's dressing rooms, dressing to lure a brand of love. Instead, miles away from high school, I began to dress with an awareness of what seeing my body might be doing to those boys around me, those good Christian boys who were trying to maintain their purity. "Modest is hottest," I learned, and now, ah, I was enlightened. From the distance of my college campus ministry, I shook my head. I had been wearing the wrong brands.

The reasons for modesty were clear: Showing skin caused others to sin, to think bad thoughts, to want me for my body, to lust instead of love. Short sleeves are fine but no tank top straps, no low-cut v-neck, no cut-off shorts. I glared at the high school girls who walked into my church sanctuary wearing ruffled skirts with the seam a few inches below their crotches. What were their parents thinking? What a pity. I stood so far from the football field where I fan-kicked into the splits wearing nothing but a white leotard and shimmery tights underneath a sparkly Dallas Cowboys uniform. I remembered the way I walked way back when, hands in my back pockets, abdomen tan and bare. About those girls I knowingly thought, You don't want that kind of attention. I know you do, but you don't, really.

Maybe dressing in long sleeves and jeans served as a sex repellent so the boys could only wonder what a girl's body looked like under all that fabric, as if we weren't all hungry for intimacy and longing to be filled with some semblance of the love we raised our hands and voices to each Sunday morning, each song sung as if to a lover, "I want to be romanced by the King of the Ages," songs meant to engage the emotions in a fervent relationship with the God of the Universe and the God of my heart. It was okay to be pursued by Jesus, it was okay to declare that God's "love has ravished my heart and taken me over, and all I want is to be with you forever." Even John Donne begged, "Take me to you, imprison me, for I, / Except you enthrall me, never shall be free, / Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me."

It was okay to use the language of romance to talk about God; it was okay to be on fire for Jesus, to raise our hands and cry, to place our hands against our hearts and beg him to come into us. Isn't this what Jesus wanted?

And yet, in our relationships, we were terrified of crossing lines. How far is too far, we asked our college small-group leaders? Can we kiss? Can we touch? Can we grope? The most conservative vowed to save even their lips until their wedding day. Sex was the thing to avoid until it was within the appropriate confines of marriage; sex was the definition of impurity, the evil that would undo our relationship with God, poison the hope for a healthy marriage. Do not touch. Do not tempt. Wait, hold out your hope for human intimacy until your wedding.
day; then, sex will suddenly become okay, good
even, holy even, beautiful even.

Until then, dress modestly; you don't want to
tempt a boy into sin, you don't want to cause him
to think unclean thoughts, make him do things
to you he might regret later, lead him to touch
you when you don't want to be touched (if you
don't want to be touched, and you don't, right,
because it would mean disobedience, discipline,
wrath of God in guilt and shame), and you know,
it will be your fault, you should have been more
modestly dressed, you shouldn't have been at that
party, you shouldn't have been alone with him in
his room. You were asking for it. It's your fault.

You should have been more
modestly dressed, you shouldn't
have been at that party, you
shouldn't have been alone with
him in his room.

This is what I thought to myself when my
best friend of ten years, my best friend who
wore t-shirts with sleeves and jeans, modest in
her composure, who wore no makeup, who led
prayer events and coordinated See You at the
Pole movements, when my best friend asked me
into her room and said in more words than this,
"He violated me."

I looked at her, stunned.

"Are you sure?" I asked, "Are you sure?" It
was months ago, this moment between her and
her ex-boyfriend. Why now, why did she wait to
say something? "Are you sure?"

Did she cry, or was she ice already, walled
off and composed, her confession a throbbing
and bleeding muscle of heart in her hand, out-
stretched as her eyes hardened. How many times
we had raised our palms to the ceiling together
to worship in a sanctuary, begging to be filled
with the Holy Spirit, begging to be made clean,
begging to be made new.

"It must have been a misunderstanding," I
said.

And then silence, a silence that began in
that room and stretched long for years between
us.

"I need you to leave my room," she said,
"This friendship is over."

But didn't you want it? You must be confused.
I've done far more with boys than this, far more
than this has been done to me with boys; this is
nothing, nothing at all, you are being naïve, you
were sitting in his room with the door closed,
weren't you? Didn't you invite this? Didn't you
want it? This is the way the boys are, don't you
know? There must have been something you did
that said you wanted it, didn't you? Didn't you?

The lover of our souls, the Christ, who
met the woman at the well in broad daylight
and talked to her as if she was a person, not
a Samaritan, the Christ, who offered her liv-
ing water, who broke every societal norm and
social rule in regards to her, the Christ, who was
touched by the woman who bled and said, You
are healed, go in peace, be free from your suffer-
ing, the same Christ bent down and wrote in
the sand, the Pharisees seething, he bent down
next to the woman caught in the act of adul-
tery—caught in the act of adultery, no male
partner thrown down next to her—and asked
her, Woman, where have they gone? Has no one
condemned you? And she said no one, Then nei-
ther do I condemn you.

But I left her. I left her in her bedroom
alone. Hands outstretched.

Jesus. ☩

Sarah M. Wells is the author of Pruning
Burning Bushes (Wipf and Stock, 2012).
She serves as managing editor for the
Weatherhead School of Management and
associate editor for River Teeth.
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