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THE CRESSET

A review of literature, the arts, and public affairs

Trinity 2012

MOELLERING COLLECTION
VALPARAISO UNIVERSITY

Valparaiso University

Road to Revelation
The Art of Caravaggio
Lisa Deam

This Nothing This Heaven
Notes on W. S. Merwin
Jonathan Weinert

Why Christians Should Care About the Environment
Julien C. H. Smith

None Too Small in Marilynne Robinson's America
Agnes Howard

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On the cover: Bagong Kussudiardja (1928–2004), Jesus Calling Disciples to Catch People, 1999. Acrylic on canvas. Gift of Crossings Community and of the Reverend Dr. Edward H. and Mrs. Marie (née Hoyer) Schroeder. Brauer Museum of Art, 2011.21.008.

Bagong Kussudiardja was raised in an artistic family in Yogyakarta, renowned as a center of classical Javanese dance and painting on the island of Java, the most densely populated island in the world. He soon excelled in dance and choreography. At nineteen, he started painting in oil; later, he pioneered batik painting. In 1956, he received a Rockefeller Foundation scholarship to study dance with Martha Graham in New York City. He was a descendent of a Sultan and Islamic in cultural heritage, but became a devout Christian by the influence of his Roman Catholic wife. In 1973, he received a gold medal from Pope Paul VI for a painting of the crucifixion. In 1978, he founded an Institute of Fine Arts Training at his home. That year he also helped found the Asian Christian Art Association. Collector Edward Schroeder met Bagong in 1979 in Geneva, Switzerland at a conference sponsored by the World Council of Churches on "Christian Art and Worship in Asia and Africa." Bagong was there with both his art and his dance troupe. (Written by founding museum director Richard Brauer)

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I am not a Republican Party stalwart, but I sympathize with friends who are. We have to go back to the middle of the nineteenth century to find presidential candidates as incompetent as the current crop of Republicans. In "Two Concepts of Liberty (in the Republican Party)" (Lent 2012), Professor Peter Meilaender arguably accords some of them a dignity they do not deserve by applying Isaiah Berlin's "Two Concepts of Liberty" to them.

One of the few agreements I have with Prof. Meilaender is his characterization of libertarian Ron Paul's "theme of freedom, conceived as a sphere of personal privacy." Since the 1920s at least, Republicans have been hospitable to libertarians, and there were even libertarian elements in Barry Goldwater's (but not Reagan's) political style. This quasi-libertarianism lasted until September 11, 2011, which may have provoked the political style of Bush the Younger: a strong-State conservatism, which put paid to many civil liberties under a mischaracterized "War" on Terror. (To be fair, Obama has marched to this same tune.) But Ron Paul has been different and consistent, which may be why he is running last while attracting the most enthusiastic supporters. The problem with Paul is that his desire for consistency tempts him into silly ideas: e.g., eliminate the Federal Reserve.

The contrast between Paul and (now-former candidate) Rick Santorum is sharp: Santorum is a typical Bush-ian strong-State conservative, with *nothing* of Berlin's negative ("freedoms from") liberties about him. Since so many citizens have seen through the "War" on Terror—most want to leave Afghanistan immediately, for example—Santorum had to find other things to be strong-state about. It took women fifty years to gain control over their bodies, careers, and family values; as a candidate, Santorum would have them fight these battles all over again. His claim that *his* values about faith and the family are widely shared is even more serious, if that is possible. This *may* pass muster among *The Cresset's* readers, but it alienates the large and growing numbers of secularists and people willing at least to tolerate gay marriages.

If I understand Sir Isaiah Berlin's distinction between negative and positive liberty, it represents the difference between a liberal democracy like the United States and a social democracy—as in the Nordic countries, but *not* in fools' descriptions of Obama as a "socialist." This means that Prof. Meilaender should not put "Santorum" and "positive liberties" in the same sentence, unless he (implausibly) believes that a Rousseau-ian self-determination can be achieved by repression of women, dissident sexual preferences, liberal religion, secularism and the "safety net" of programs that help keep poor people, programs that are rapidly disappearing anyway.

Paul H. Brietzke
Valparaiso University
School of Law

Many thanks to Prof. Brietzke for his interest in my essay, and I am glad that he found at least something in it with which he could agree. I also find something I can agree with in his reply, namely, that Rick Santorum is not a defender of Rousseauian self-determination—perhaps the greatest compliment one could pay a politician. As for Prof. Brietzke's disagreements, first, he appears to object to the suggestion that Santorum might be a defender of negative liberty, but he then immediately objects that Santorum is not a defender of positive liberty, either. I am left simply with the impression that Prof. Brietzke does not like Santorum. In any case, he does not engage the point I was actually making when I described Santorum as offering a defense of negative liberty that is very different—and in my view more compelling—than Ron Paul's libertarian defense of it. Santorum has rightly argued that one can neither understand nor sustain negative liberty without attending to its cultural prerequisites in social institutions such as the family. By drawing attention to that connection, Santorum has done a service to his party, to his country, and to the cause of liberty.

Peter Meilaender
Houghton College

In Luce Tua
In Thy Light

Finding the Time

Early summer can be a hectic time on college campuses. The academic year ends with a flurry of exams, papers, grades, and—of course—commencement ceremonies. This year, for some of us at Valpo, it was more chaotic than usual. As students were packing up and moving out of dorm rooms and apartments, many faculty and staff members here were packing for a move of our own. Huegli Hall, for years home to several academic departments in the College of Arts and Sciences as well as to *The Cresset*, is slated for demolition. Over the past two weeks, offices have been moving across the quad to the brand new Arts and Sciences building, and *The Cresset* soon will be moving next door to them, into Mueller Hall, home of Christ College. As we try to put this issue to bed before the move, everything that used to make up *The Cresset* office is packed into boxes stacked nearly to the ceiling, fixtures are coming off the walls, and I'm doing my best to keep the movers at bay. ("Just give me a couple more days guys, and then you can get us out of here.")

Aren't summer days supposed to be lazy and slow? Every year, as the snow melts and the days get longer, I start to dream about all the leisure time I will have in the summer—puttering around my garden, hiking in the woods, and reading stacks of books. The reality never seems to match the dream. The frantic pace of life today won't slow down for us just because the sun is shining and flowers are in bloom. My expectation that life should slow down during the summer may be a naïve reflection of the fact that I have the privilege of working in one of the few professions where the work schedule really does slow down somewhat in the summer.

But it is more than work that makes our lives busy. My summer schedule sometimes is more crowded than the rest of the year with weekend after weekend reserved for weddings, graduations, family reunions, and the like. These are happy events that I wouldn't miss, but they can fill up your summer one-by-one. A sad reality of this age is that we are not always close geographically to the ones we love. As it has gotten easier to move from place to place, the more we have found ourselves on the move. The further apart we are from family and friends, the more effort it takes to stay in touch. And as we find better ways to stay in touch, the more time we spend on our phones and computers.

In the summer (no less the rest of the year), we need to find time to escape the commotion of the modern world. The world today makes endless demands on our time and attention; it will use up all the time we have and leave none for the kinds of activities that, while not producing much or satisfying the consumeristic desires we are trained to have, meet our more important human needs. We must find the time to plant gardens, to take long, quiet hikes, to read some books. If nothing else, find the time to just be with your family and friends.

And if you find the time, I hope you will spend some of it reading this issue, which leads with three beautiful pieces of writing. In "Road to Revelation," Lisa Deam explores how the characters in Salley Vickers's novel *The Other Side of You* are able to discover themselves in the paintings of the Italian artist Caravaggio. In "This Nothing This Heaven," Jonathan Weinert considers language and lyricism in the recent poetry of W. S. Merwin. And in "Stewarding Creation," an essay first presented as a lecture to the Christ College Symposium, Julien C. H. Smith studies biblical texts to find an answer to the question of why Christians should care about the environment.

This brave new world is a fast, busy, hurried world. Since it won't slow down for us, we'll have to figure out how to slow things down on our own. We can't really *make* time for anything; finding the time is really about *protecting* the time we are given. So however you choose to spend your summer, protect your time and spend it the way you really would choose. Don't let the world make that choice for you. ✠

—JPO

Road to Revelation

The Art of Caravaggio in Salley Vickers's *The Other Side of You*

Lisa Deam

It has been several years since I stood before Caravaggio's *Supper at Emmaus* in London's National Gallery, but I remember the experience well. I was with my husband. Having recently completed our own journey overseas, we both were struck by Caravaggio's portrayal of a journey, or at least the end of one. The painting shows the two disciples in the Gospel of Luke who, after the resurrection of Jesus, travel from Jerusalem to Emmaus, where they encounter the risen Lord (Luke 24:13–35). Theirs was a journey of sorrow, since they believed their friend and teacher to be dead. It was also a journey of mystery. On the way, a stranger joined the disciples and burned their hearts with talk of the prophecies concerning Jesus. Upon being invited to dine with the disciples, the mysterious traveler revealed himself to be the resurrected Lord when he broke and blessed the bread.

Caravaggio revels in the moment of revelation. In his painting, Jesus holds out his hand in blessing while the two disciples react violently to his presence. The disciple on the right spreads his arms wide in surprise (a gesture of crucifixion come to life), while the one on the left seems about to rise from his chair. Strong light rakes the scene, creating deep shadows and plunging the face of an uncomprehending servant into darkness. With characteristic drama, Caravaggio interprets this scene of revelation as a cathartic event, one that releases the pent-up emotion the disciples must have been feeling. He shows us the shocking and gratifying outcome of a journey, physical and emotional, in which all was believed to be lost.

This painting, as I mentioned, caught our eye—and burned our hearts. In the near silence of the gallery, I turned to my companion and whispered, "Look." We reveled for a moment in Caravaggio's revelation. This is what the *Supper at Emmaus* makes viewers want to do, so palpable is one's relief in discovering, with the disciples, that Jesus is not dead.

The cathartic experience of encountering Caravaggio lies at the heart of *The Other Side of You*, the fourth novel by British author Salley Vickers (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006). In this book, two people discover Caravaggio and forever are changed. The *Supper at Emmaus* itself forms the centerpiece of a journey on which they embark together, one that, like the story Saint Luke tells, begins in loss and ends in hope. Vickers leans heavily on Caravaggio to tell this tale. The Italian master lends his trademark drama to her more subdued style, and the prominent role played by his Emmaus painting makes the novel not only a good story, but also a powerful reflection on art as revelation.

The story ends, in fact, with a revelation about the role of art in our lives. Through the experiences of her characters, Vickers suggests that Caravaggio's paintings, if we take the time to engage with them—to see them, revel in them, and retell their stories—might send us on a journey of our own; a journey not just to the museum, but one in which we can recover, with the Emmaus disciples, all that has been lost in our lives.

In *The Other Side of You*, we meet Elizabeth Cruikshank and David McBride, the survivor of a failed suicide and her psychoanalyst. Both have suffered losses in their life. Elizabeth, through a combination of her own mistrust and more than her share of "foul luck," lost the person she loved, an

art historian named Thomas. David, the narrator of the story, ostensibly is there to help Elizabeth in the aftermath of her suicide attempt. He does, but in the process reveals his own brokenness; we learn early on that he lives in the shadow of his brother's death in a childhood accident. Patient and analyst both seek healing from the losses that haunt their lives.

delighted to find that the plot of *The Other Side of You* hinges on something as simple, and as profound, as an encounter with a painting. Only when the novel's characters begin discussing Caravaggio, only when David goes to see the *Supper at Emmaus*, do they begin their journey. The book's premise may seem unusual: how many psychoanalytic sessions depend, for their success, on a work of art? It is even more unusual, these days, for a novel about art to forego a premise involving conspiracy and intrigue. There are no stolen paintings in *The Other Side of You*; there are no works of art that harbor secret codes. Instead, art does the job it was made to do. It engages people. It burns their hearts. When David recalls the *Supper at Emmaus*, he acknowledges its powerful effect on him:

Supper at Emmaus. Caravaggio, 1601.

A painting gets them started. When Elizabeth first meets with David, she cannot—or will not—reveal the events that led to her attempt on her life. One day David notices her looking at a painting on the wall of his office and asks if she likes art. When Elizabeth grudgingly admits that she used to like Caravaggio, David goes to see the artist's *Supper at Emmaus* in London's National Gallery and falls in love with the painting. Elizabeth and David's mutual admiration for Caravaggio creates a space in which Elizabeth is able to tell her story. In the course of a seven-hour session, during which they drink "tankerloads" of coffee, the two begin a journey of healing. As they talk, the *Supper at Emmaus* informs their conversation and becomes a road that they travel together.

As an art historian—more accurately, as someone who loves art—I was both surprised and

> [I]n the gap of my precisely not seeing the painting but hearing Elizabeth Cruikshank's account of it, it had acquired a new dimension, and now its diffuse brilliancy radiated something which, even as I contemplated it—anticipating the taste of the freshly drawing coffee—was searching out a moribund corner of my own heart. (191)

This is what art is supposed to do. Great paintings prey on us; they weigh on us; they will not let us go. Even when made in other times for other patrons, it sometimes seems as though they were made with us in mind.

This is certainly true of Caravaggio's art, as is indicated by my own experience in the National Gallery. His paintings stay with us. They reach out

Death of the Virgin. Caravaggio, 1606.

and make us part of a story whose message touches our lives. In the *Supper at Emmaus*, the disciples cannot help but react to the revelation of Christ. Neither can the viewer. The painting's setting is minimized and the action pushed to the front of the picture plane, almost into our space. We have to get out of the way of the two disciples lest we get struck by a hand flung out or a chair pushed back. We may be called upon to catch the basket of fruit that is about to fall off the table. Finally, amidst all this action, we recognize the force that is causing it. Discovering the presence of Christ, we share in the astonishment of the disciples and forever are changed.

The *Supper at Emmaus* effects profound change on Vickers's characters. The painting pulls them in, its theme of revelation paving the way for their own self-disclosures. After David admits his newfound love for the painting, Elizabeth begins to talk about the person she loved: Thomas, who was a Caravaggio specialist. She speaks about meeting Thomas, loving him, mistrusting him, and, finally, losing him. Her story, in turn, prompts David to reflect on the death of his brother. As the two characters delve into their past, their stories are interwoven with their impressions of Caravaggio and their memories of seeing his paintings—not just the *Supper at Emmaus*, but others as well. They take an intensely personal journey through Caravaggio's *oeuvre*.

Vickers sets the tone for the intertwining of art and life on the first page of the novel, when David looks back on his initial encounter with Elizabeth:

> When we met she must have been in her forties, but in a certain light she could have been fourteen or four hundred—though when I say "light" I perhaps mean that subtle light of the mind, which casts as many shadows as it illuminates but in the right conditions can reveal a person's being more accurately than the most powerful beam. (3)

David's "light of the mind" is like a Caravaggio painting—full of cast shadows. This passage recalls works like the *Supper at Emmaus*, in which we see a textbook example of Caravaggio's *chiaroscuro*, the play of light and dark. In the Emmaus painting, the shadows that at first seem to hide parts of the scene perform a revelatory function: they invite viewers to peer closely at the painting, perhaps discovering something they otherwise might have missed. If David's mind is like the *Supper at Emmaus*, we might identify Elizabeth with the figure of the servant, whose face is in darkness and who does not yet understand the revelation taking place before him.

A second allusion to Caravaggio's *chiaroscuro* appears later in the book, when Elizabeth, sitting in David's office, first reveals her admiration for the Italian master. As Elizabeth begins to speak, David notes that "the light was partly obscuring her face—I should really have had blinds but I hate to keep out the sun" (32). In this scene, immediately before

Caravaggio makes his appearance in the story, Elizabeth moves into the light. Although it partly obscures her, it also hints at clarification. With Caravaggio's help, Elizabeth soon will tell her story. Her journey of healing is underway.

The two passages that evoke Caravaggio's famed *chiaroscuro* occur early in the book, before any of the artist's paintings are mentioned. They are bits of foreshadowing that announce the novel's theme of revelation: as shafts of light pierce the darkness in Caravaggio's paintings, so Vickers's characters slowly are illuminated. As the plot advances, and Caravaggio becomes important to the story, these characters begin consciously to identify with his paintings. They each are likened to a key Caravaggesque figure that defines them and travels with them on their journey.

Perhaps the most poignant identification concerns, again, Elizabeth. After she relates her tale of love and loss, which ends with the death of Thomas, Elizabeth bows her head. At this point she reminds David of the grieving Mary Magdalene in Caravaggio's *Death of the Virgin.* In this painting, the Magdalene sits beside the Virgin's body and bends over, her face obscured. Her hair, bound atop her head, resembles a crown of thorns. Once a shadowy image in David's mind, Elizabeth now assumes a place in a specific Caravaggio painting—one that was rejected by the clergy for whose church it was painted because of its brutal portrayal of death and grief. Elizabeth herself tells David that when she saw this painting in the Louvre, she looked at the Magdalene and thought, "Yes, I know how you feel" (144).

Toward the end of the book, David becomes, in his own eyes, part of Caravaggio's *oeuvre.* He travels to Rome and contemplates Caravaggio's *David with the Head of Goliath* in the Borghese Gallery. The biblical David gazes at the severed head of his enemy with something like remorse. Viewers of this painting often take gruesome delight in the fact that Caravaggio apparently gave the head of Goliath his own features. But the character of David is drawn to the face of his biblical namesake. In the course of his session with Elizabeth, David has come to believe that he played an unwitting role in his brother's childhood death, and he sees himself in the brooding image of a boy who has killed.

This disturbing identification ends with a glimmer of hope. Recalling the rest of the story, David acknowledges that Caravaggio's troubled boy went on to become a great and powerful king. Hearing this reflection, the reader believes that the character of David also will go on. More than anything David states directly, his thoughts on the painting tell us that he is on the road to healing. This narrative technique appears repeatedly in *The Other Side of You.* Caravaggio's paintings, placed at key points in the story, mark stages in the characters' journeys and reveal their emotions. The paintings are revelations. They accompany David and Elizabeth on their own road to Emmaus, where they forever will be changed.

David with the Head of Goliath. Caravaggio, 1610.

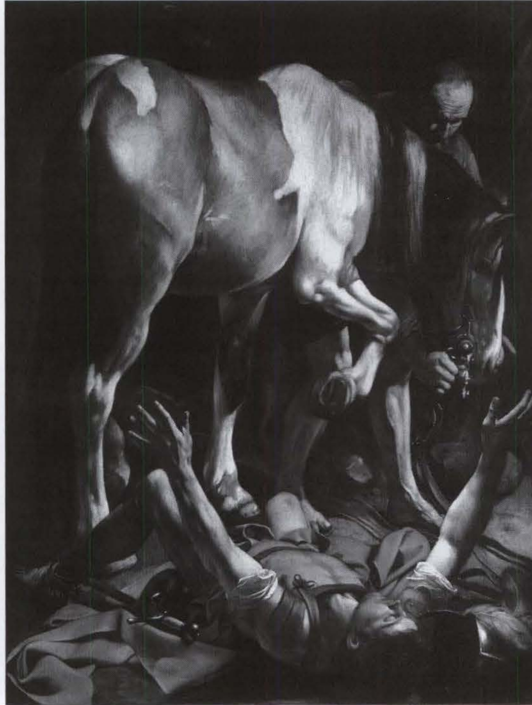
The Other Side of You also takes readers on a journey. As the novel's plot advances, we encounter a series of Caravaggio paintings—from the *Supper at Emmaus* to the *Death of the Virgin* and *David with the Head of Goliath*—as if we were strolling through a carefully organized gallery or exhibition (three more Caravaggios—a second *Supper at Emmaus*, the *Calling of Saint Matthew*, and the *Conversion of Saint Paul*—also make an appearance in the novel). We walk through this

gallery with Vickers's characters. As they discuss Caravaggio, they bring his paintings to life and give us insight into the Italian master's art.

Sometimes, their comments seem directed at us. When David reflects on the *David with the Head of Goliath*, for example, he not only identifies with his painted namesake. He also believes that the biblical David, as painted by Caravaggio, speaks more generally to the human condition:

> In the act of taking life he had moved into manhood and all that this entails—the comprehension that all our acts have consequences, which we must bear, and with which we must live consciously, if life is not to become a desperate flight from ourselves. (254)

With this passage, the mirror of Caravaggio's paintings is turned onto the reader. David's mention of "all our acts" invites us—all of us—to identify what we might have in common with the Italian master's scenes. Our journey through a Caravaggio gallery becomes a journey in which we see our own life reflected.



Conversion on the Way to Damascus. Caravaggio c. 1600–01

As mentioned above, Caravaggio employs an arsenal of techniques to involve viewers in his painted scenes. He hides figures in shadow and makes us peer closely to find them; he makes his figures break the picture plane separating painting and viewer; he makes objects nearly fall into the space at our feet. Caravaggio also gets personal. He paints ordinary people and makes us wonder, as David and Elizabeth do, if he really is painting you or me.

In his own day, Caravaggio had a reputation—not necessarily a good one—for using people off the street as models for his paintings. The painter Giovan Pietro Bellori, who wrote a biography of seventeenth-century artists, thought that Caravaggio's figures were too true-to-life; they lacked decorum. He complains that in the *Supper at Emmaus*, the disciples are rustic, Jesus is too young, and the servant deigns to serve the Lord with his cap still on his head. Bellori concludes, rather crabbily:

> Thus when [Caravaggio] was shown the most famous statues of Phidias and Glycon so that he might base his studies on them, his only response was to gesture toward a crowd of people, indicating that nature had provided him with masters enough... Thus in the course of finding and composing figures, when he happened to see one about the city that pleased him, he would stop at that invention of nature, without otherwise exercising his creative powers. (Bellori 180)

I suspect that Bellori's censure of Caravaggio hides a fear of what the artist's naturalism might reveal. He is worried that viewers might see in Caravaggio's paintings an unidealized version of themselves. They might encounter their "other side."

Bellori's concern has some validity. Caravaggio refuses to cast his figures, even the biblical giants, as heroes. He uses people off the street—perhaps people like you and me—as models, and he captures them in moments of grief and helplessness. His David is not triumphant but troubled. His Virgin Mary will not rise from her deathbed, nor his Magdalene raise her grieving head anytime soon. Likewise, when Caravaggio painted the *Conversion on the Way to Damascus*, he did not portray a saint who saw a glorious vision; instead, he depicted a man who falls off a horse and sprawls awkwardly on the ground like an overturned turtle that cannot right itself.

This can make for difficult viewing because most of us would rather play the hero—or at least play the role of someone who has her act mostly

together. To see ourselves in a boy who has killed his first enemy or a haggard woman bent over with grief can wreak havoc on our sense of self. It simply is not comfortable to see the truth of who we are or painful consequences we must bear.

Yet this moment of recognition makes Caravaggio's art compelling. It makes us look—and look again. When we do, we find not only unflinching observation; we also find empathy. We find an artist who meets us where we are. Perhaps this is not surprising since Caravaggio himself led a troubled life. As Elizabeth tells David in the course of their session, at the end of his life Caravaggio faced a murder charge, exile, and imprisonment. He died of a fever before realizing that he had obtained a pardon. Elizabeth's lover, Thomas, summarizes Caravaggio's life and work when he describes an artist as "someone who knows he is failing in living and feeds his remorse by creating something fair" (149).

In making something fair, Caravaggio makes an uncompromising but not unhopeful observation of the human condition. His figures acknowledge that we need healing—we are David and Mary Magdalene and Paul, troubled and grieving and blind. We need the Christ who revealed himself at Emmaus. Our greatest journey is to go from the sorrowful Magdalene to the astonished disciples who encounter the risen Lord: we raise our head, recognize the truth, and we can go on.

David and Elizabeth go on. They raise their heads and encounter truth—the truth of what happened in the past, the truth of who they are today. The novel takes them to their own Emmaus; in this way, it is a retelling of the story in the Gospel of Luke, as is the Caravaggio painting that propels the novel's plot. In Luke's story of resurrection and revelation, Vickers finds symbolic meaning for her own characters' journey.

The final section of *The Other Side of You* takes David and Elizabeth past Emmaus and lets them reflect on the outcome of their journey. David goes to Rome, where he delivers an address at an international psychiatry conference. He decides to forego a more traditional talk in favor of recounting his session with Elizabeth, including the role that Caravaggio played. In his talk, he notes that, of the four Gospels, only Luke tells the story of Emmaus. Luke is traditionally known as a physician. As a doctor himself, David feels kinship with Luke and intimates that the Emmaus story is a kind of case study—an account of a healing.

David does not mention that Luke is also the patron saint of artists. (Historically, painters in Italy belonged to the guild of physicians and pharmacists, perhaps because both doctors and artists ground their own materials.) Vickers's novel implicitly shows the connection between the two sides of Saint Luke: art and healing. As her characters find, art shows us who we are—we are travelers on the road, lost, grieving, in need of aid. It shows us who we can become—witnesses to truth, a truth that, as someone whose heart is burned by the Emmaus story, I cannot help but identify as the resurrected Christ. When we find him—when we become like the disciples in Caravaggio's Emmaus painting—we find ourselves. This surely is a form of healing.

There is a final resurrection in *The Other Side of You*. Just before he died, Thomas was on the verge of discovering what he hoped was a lost painting by Caravaggio—a *Road to Emmaus*. (This fictional incident mirrors the real-world announcement in 2006 that a third *Supper at Emmaus* by Caravaggio was discovered in France.) On the heels of death, a resurrected Emmaus painting speaks of hope. It avows that the road to healing continues. Elizabeth and David have new journeys to make, new revelations to undergo. As readers who travel our own roads, so do we. As we make our pilgrimage to Emmaus, we are reminded that art—the paintings of masters like Caravaggio and stories like *The Other Side of You*—goes with us on our way.

Lisa Deam is a writer and art historian.

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This Nothing This Heaven

Notes on W. S. Merwin's The Shadow of Sirius

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I

There is nothing more alien in tone to the poems in W. S. Merwin's 2008 collection *The Shadow of Sirius* than the prophetic works of William Blake. Where Blake is strident, public, overtly political, epic, symbolic, dense, muscular, and resistant to interpretation, Merwin is subtle, private, intimate, obliquely political, lyric, non-metaphorical, relaxed, airy, and, at least on the surface, remarkably transparent to sense. If Blake is a full-sized orchestra complete with brass and timpani, Merwin is a modest chamber ensemble, or a wind harp. Blake is Rintrah roaring and shaking his fires in the burdened air (Blake 1993, 143). Merwin is "the stillness after the rain ends" where "nothing is to be heard but the drops falling / one at a time from the tips of the leaves / into the night" ("Nocturne II," 2008: 93).

Despite the obvious differences, I read some essential similarities that link the two poets across the centuries. Like Blake, Merwin considers the imagination to be among the highest of human faculties. Blake saw the imagination as an emanation of the divine, a means by which to transcend "the world of generation" in order to apprehend "the world of eternity":

> The world of imagination is the world of eternity. It is the divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the vegetated body. This world of imagination is infinite and eternal, whereas the world of generation is finite and temporal. There exist in that eternal world the eternal realities of everything which we see reflected in this vegetable glass of nature. (Blake 1982, 555).

In my reading of Merwin, in contrast, the imagination represents the means by which the human individual can *arrive at* the world of nature or generation, and apprehend an intimate interconnection both with the natural world and with other human beings. "There is an individual relationship between the human imagination and all of life," Merwin remarked before a reading in May 2011, "and that relationship is the basis of human compassion" ("A Reading...").

That relationship is enacted, and the imagination is made effective, by language. To know Merwin as the great poet of silence is to attend to exactly one half of his sensibility and to overlook the crucial role that singing and speech play in his work. Indeed, *The Shadow of Sirius* begins with human song—the ancient Han Dynasty poems of Cai Wenji, whom "The Nomad Flute" apostrophizes—and ends, in "The Laughing Thrush," with birdsong "tumbling upward note by note out of the night" ("The Laughing Thrush," 2008: 113). The poems engage with language and speech as much as they engage with its absence; there are at least a dozen poems in which figure books (a dictionary, an old favorite volume from childhood, a codex) or writings (letters, poems, notes).

Three poems in *The Shadow of Sirius* deal explicitly with words and their derivations. The first of these, "Raiment," begins as a medita-

tion on clothings and coverings, then opens out, through a consideration of the origins of the words "habit," "custom," "costume," and "decency," onto surmises about what lies beyond both words and appearances:

> apparently we believe
> in the words
> and through them
> but we long beyond them
> for what is unseen
> what remains out of reach
> what is kept covered
> with colors and sizes
> we hunger
> for what is undoubted yet dubious
> ("Raiment," 2008, 26)

This passage echoes persistent concerns about language that have appeared in Merwin's poems throughout his career. But Merwin's doubts regarding the efficacy of language to express "what is unseen / what remains out of reach" have never taken the form of fashionable postmodernist hand-wringing about the disconnection of signifier and signified. In fact, rather than criticizing language for failing to satisfy its most fundamental claims, Merwin criticizes the *users* of language for failing to apprehend its deepest implications. For Merwin, the fault is not in the language, but in ourselves.

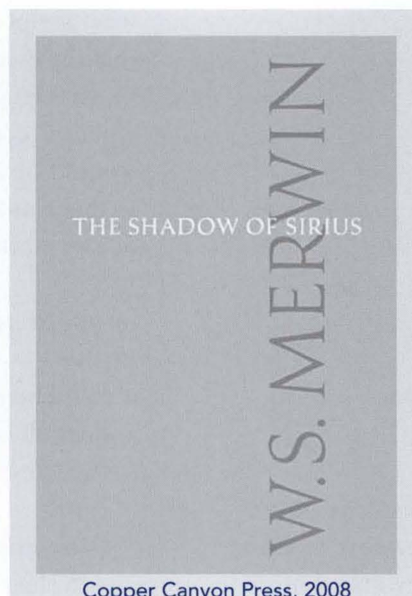
Merwin has been pointing to the possibility of a higher order of language, one whose words have the power to enact a deep and resonant sense of interconnectedness, at least as far back as *Writings to an Unfinished Accompaniment* (1983). In that book, the poem "The Unwritten" speculates that ordinary pencils contain an essential text composed of words that would grant its readers the ability to "make out the real names / of everything." They may be hidden away, but the words that compose that text really are there. What is in doubt, it turns out, is the ability of the human imagination to access and interpret them:

> even when the dark has worn away
> they'll still be there
> hiding in the air
> multitudes in days to come may walk
>   through them
> breathe them
> be none the wiser
>
> what script can it be
> that they won't unroll
> in what language
> would I recognize it
> would I be able to follow it
> to make out the real names
> of everything
>
> maybe there aren't
> many
> it could be that there's only one word
> and it's all we need
> ("The Unwritten," 1983, 40–41)

A similarly crucial but inaccessible text appears in the poem "History," in *The Rain in the Trees* (1988). In that poem, a note is written on a page of "a book full of words to remember." The book is then closed, taken into a foreign country where no one can read the language, and lost—that is, it is hidden from its potential readers by at least three removes. But the book and the words it contains really are there. The implication, however unlikely and paradoxical it may seem, is that an extraordinary act of memory or imagination can recover them—or if not recover them, at least invent a way in which it is possible to "manage without them" ("History," 1988: 37). I cannot think of a better, or more practical, account of where poetry may begin.

Authentic language, and its loss, is one of Merwin's great themes. In a 2010 interview in *The New York Times*, Merwin said that he wanted to use his tenure as US Poet Laureate, to which he had just been appointed, "to emphasize his 'great sympathy with native people and the languages and literature of native peoples'" (Cohen 2010). Merwin often locates authenticity in indigenous languages, fundamentally figurative and metaphorical languages which have not been degraded by the imperatives of commerce and logical analysis. The type of authentic language in *The Rain in the Trees* is native Hawaiian,

which is in the process of being rendered extinct through the predations of American English and contemporary business culture. In "Losing a Language," the native language, the language of the elders, is capable of expressing subtle and resonant apprehensions not available in a language that disparages metaphor and figuration. But "the young," who have been persuaded through a program of total assimilation "that it is better to say everything differently," have lost not only the words that can describe such experiences, but also the very ability to believe in and therefore have such experiences:



Copper Canyon Press, 2008

> many of the things the
> words were about
> no longer exist
>
> the noun for standing in mist by a
> haunted tree
> the verb for I
> ("Losing a Language," 1988: 49).

The diminishment of language is one effect of the shrinking of consciousness to a narrow purview that sees everything as a business opportunity, an entertainment, or a distraction, and it forecloses the possibility of imaginatively sensing one's connection to "the universe and everything living" (Cohen 2010). As a result, the young confront a dead world from which they are exiled, a world that is owned and used rather than felt and understood: "everywhere instead of a name there is a lie." Jan Zwicky defines the imagination as the capacity to sense resonant connections in the world, to pay attention to the *thisness* of the world as an act of love. "Lyric thought is a kind of seismic ontological exploration," Zwicky writes in *Wisdom & Metaphor*. "Ontological attention is... the antithesis of the attitude that regards things as 'resources,' mere means to human ends" (Zwicky 2008, sections 44, 52). This is the sort of attention that Merwin's poems attempt to pay.

II

Blake considered oppositions such as "the world of generation" and "the world of eternity" crucial and creative, and called them "Contrarieties." "Without Contrarieties is no progression," writes Blake in the opening argument of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*—a book whose very title encodes the fruitful interrelationship of an essential binary (Blake 1993, 143). The world that Merwin's poems imagine is also composed of oppositions and contraries, although Merwin tends to collapse such oppositions without abolishing them. In *The Shadow of Sirius*, for instance—a book whose title invokes a binary system like *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*—the world of generation *is* the eternal world. Eternity is not a separate realm; rather, it is *this* realm apprehended in its totality, as in the poem "Just This," in which all of time stands together in an endless *now* which embraces all motion but does not itself move:

> When I think of the patience I have had
> back in the dark before I remember
> or knew it was night until the light came
> all at once at the speed it was born to
> with all the time in the world to fly through
> not concerned about ever arriving
> and then the gathering of the first stars
> unhurried in their flowering spaces
> and far into the story the planets
> cooling slowly and the ages of rain
> then the seas starting to bear memory
> the gaze of the first cell at its waking
> how did this haste begin this little time
> at any time this reading by lightning
> scarcely a word this nothing this heaven
> ("Just This," 2008: 112)

Merwin's title here typically cuts in several directions at once. There is "just this" one world and

no other, the entire history of the world amounts to "just this" little time, all the labor of poetry comes to "just this" little understanding, which is "scarcely a word."

"Collapsed opposition" is a perfectly good definition of paradox, and paradox is the means by which Merwin often reaches beyond apparent contradictions to describe experiences and apprehensions that cannot be reduced to conventional categories of thought. "Just This" does not attempt to resolve the paradox on which it lands—"this nothing this heaven." The phrase "this heaven" neither revises nor replaces "this nothing": both stand together, both are given equal weight, both are simultaneously true. We begin to approach the nature of things, the poem seems to be saying, when we can see the truth of both statements at the same time without losing the sense of their contradiction.

When awareness of paradox gives rise to situational irony, as it often does, Merwin tends to respond with bemusement or an understated wry humor. Here, the speaker's sense of his own patience seems first astonishing in relation to his own long lifetime, then absurd in relation to the vastly incommensurate lifetime of the universe. In a neat reversal, the lifetime of the universe first seems astonishing for its inconceivable length, then astonishing for its inconceivable brevity. The light that emerges from darkness and flies throughout all eternity is, at the same time, a flash of lighting; the lifetime that is nothing more than a flash of lightning extends, through its participation in the lifetime of the universe, to the beginning of time.

III

In a 2009 interview with Terry Gross on the National Public Radio program *Fresh Air*, Merwin talked about an important legacy left to him by his parents, who died within a few months of each other:

> [O]ne of their great gifts to me was that neither of them turned out to be afraid of dying at all. And in quite different ways, they died without any expression of anxiety or of dread or of clutching at anything else. And that's a great gift to be given, that feeling of no fear, and I think I inherited it from them very early. (Merwin 2009)

Shadow and its analogues, absence and silence, have figured prominently in Merwin's poems

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since *The Moving Target* (1963) and earlier. Where they were once predatory, encroaching, and annihilating—see the insatiable swallowing shadow of "The Last One" (1967: 10–12), for example—they have become, in the recent work, embracing, refreshing, intimate, and full of potential. In *The Shadow of Sirius*, Merwin confronts shadow and absence more personally than he ever has before. He addresses his own mortality, his own inevitable absence, and the silence into which his voice must fall, with the acceptance that was his parents' gift to him.

Rather than seeking for some amelioration or compromise, Merwin refuses to retreat from the full purport of his vision, and he begins to imagine the journey into silence and shadow as a sort of adventure. "When the moon has gone I fly on alone / into this night where I have never been," he writes in "The Curlew"; and later, in "Nocturne II," "I lie in the dark / listening to what I remember / while the night flies on with us into itself" (2008: 59, 93). The journey into shadow is also a kind of homecoming:

> night is a dream you know
> an old love in the dark
> around you as you go

without end you know
("Good Night," 2008: 46)

These lines, so quiet and so apparently casual, accord with the cosmography that Merwin's enterprise inscribes. By collapsing the worlds of generation and eternity, by affirming that there is "just this" world, the only direction in which Merwin can go is straight on ahead, into that portion of time in which he no longer appears as a living individual. His beloved chows, elegies for whom comprise the brief second section of *The Shadow of Sirius*, having gone on before him, show him the way, which is headlong into the darkness: "When it is time I follow the black dog / into the darkness that is the mind of day" ("By Dark," 2008, 43), and again, "o closest to my breath / if you are able to / please wait a while longer / on that side of the cloud" ("Into the Cloud," 2008, 48).

This is not Merwin raging against the passing of the light; rather, this is Merwin affirming that the light and the darkness come and go together.

As in the Tao, the Kabbalah, and other religious philosophies, Merwin's vision identifies shadow and silence as both origin and endpoint. "Eye of Shadow" figures shadow as an originary presence, a guardian of the wellsprings of being, a prince in a beggar's dark rags, a guide and seer and herald:

Sentry of the other side
it may have watched the beginning
without being noticed in all
that blossoming radiance
the beggar in dark rags
down on the threshold
a shadow waiting

in its own fair time
all in its rags it rises
revealing its prime claim
upon the latter day
that fades around it
while the sky is turning
with the whole prophecy
o lengthening dark vision
reaching across the faces
across colors and mountains
and all that is known
or appears to be known
herald without a sound
leave-taking without a word
guide beyond time and knowledge
o patience
beyond patience

I touch the day
I taste the light
I remember
("Eye of Shadow," 2008, 66)

The closing declarations of "I"—"I touch the day / I taste the light / I remember"—repeated three times as in a fairy tale, or like the tolling of a bell, assert the persistence of the personal self (both the I and the eye) in the face of the shadow which must swallow it, counter night with day, balance darkness with light, and match obliteration with memory. But this is not Merwin raging against the passing of the light; rather, this is Merwin affirming that the light and the darkness come and go together, that the self and the self's absence are equally part of what is, like the visible star Sirius A and its unseen companion, Sirius B.

IV

Ever since Walt Whitman opened his most famous poem with the line "I celebrate myself and I sing myself," American lyric poetry has tended to foreground the personal ego and its desires. Even a poet as apparently self-effacing and opposite in sensibility as Emily Dickinson worries the subject of selfhood, its ambiguities and uncertainties: "I felt my life with both my hands / To see if it was there—" writes Dickinson in poem 351. In the 1960s and 1970s, Merwin

appeared to be the poet *par excellence* of the terror of personal annihilation, and his poems the site not of the personal ego and its passions, but of disembodied voices who could not satisfy their legitimate desires.

The project of Merwin's poetry up to *The Shadow of Sirius* reads like an attempt to establish and inhabit the self in a specifically named and imagined place. Merwin's discovery of such a place in his poems coincides with his arrival in Hawaii, which has been his primary home since the mid-1970s. By *The Rain in the Trees* (1988), Merwin had transitioned from a spare and oracular style to a relaxed and colloquial style, and he had started to import his personal history directly into his poems as subject matter. Concurrently, Merwin opened his poems up to larger historical subjects and began experimenting with longer narrative forms not previously attempted in his work.

Across all of these periods, Merwin continued to write short lyric poems, sometimes in meter, sometimes in syllabics, sometimes with subtle rhyme schemes or repeating end words or end sounds. Although it has gone through many changes over the years, Merwin's voice is unmistakable, and the strength of that voice has led many casual readers to imagine that Merwin has been writing the same sort of poem over and over again for decades. The fact is that Merwin has a sort of horror of repeating himself. Despite evident similarities in tone and diction, the poems of, say, *The Vixen* (1996), with their alternating indented lines, lengthy enjambed sentences, and complexly layered meditations on the passage of time over certain landscapes in the southwest of France, could not be more different from the poems of *Present Company* (2005), apostrophes to the things and notions and imaginations of ordinary life, mostly in short lines and often in syllabics, with a surprising number of Italian sonnets, each exhibiting a variant rhyme scheme, as if Merwin were trying to exhaust the possibilities of the form.

The short lyrics of *The Shadow of Sirius* are something new again. These poems are not highly orchestrated nor are they especially dramatic. They are not rigged to detonate, they are not metaphorical except in the most expansive definition of the term, and they do not necessarily leap or turn or try to dazzle. Rather, they are cast in the intimate and unadorned voice of a close companion who speaks softly and urgently, as it were, into one's very ear. Their directness and simplicity is neither accidental nor easy, but rather results from a vigorous program of distilling and paring back speech.

In *The Shadow of Sirius*, Merwin does not reverse his project of situating, rooting, and satisfying the desires of the personal self. Instead, he attempts to move beyond it, to contact the place where the self can register and recognize energies and forces that originate outside itself while remaining embodied. Here is the poem "Falling":

> Long before daybreak
> none of the birds yet awake
> rain comes down with the sound
> of a huge wind rushing
> through the valley trees
> it comes down around us
> all at the same time
> and beyond it there is nothing
> it falls without hearing itself
> without knowing
> there is anyone here
> without seeing where it is
> or where it is going
> like a moment of great
> happiness of our own
> that we cannot remember
> coasting with the lights off
> ("Falling," 2008, 104)

The situation and disposition of the hearing self is suppressed in favor of what the self hears: the rain falling loudly and blindly through the trees, within an enveloping silence and darkness. By implication, and by the accumulation of similar situations in other poems in the book, one can envision the speaker and his companion in bed in the middle of the night, listening. The simile that begins in the poem's fourth-to-last line connects the sensual experience of the rainfall, and the more abstract thoughts about its unselfconsciousness, with the personal experience of "a moment

of great / happiness of our own." Even here, the personal ego gives way to an experience that can only exist in an exchange between two people. Furthermore, that experience persists only in the speaker's recognition that it must have happened, since it cannot be remembered. The speaker's consciousness, then, becomes the site of various forms of unconsciousness, and he discovers his connections to the world and to his companion precisely to the degree that his personal ego is emptied out.

Can there be a lyric poetry that enacts the emptying out of the self, the relinquishing of desire? The poems in *The Shadow of Sirius* pose, and begin to answer, this question. ✟

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Stewarding Creation

Why Christians Should Care About the Environment

Julien C. H. Smith

THE TITLE OF THIS ESSAY LIKELY CREATES the expectation that it will suggest why people, in particular Christians, should care about the environment. It also, no doubt, creates the further expectation that it will suggest that we should express this care by seeing ourselves as stewards of God's creation. Both of these expectations are correct. Both are, however, problematic. To begin with, when we use the word "environment" we refer to the physical surroundings in which we human beings live. To say that we should care about the environment is thus plain common sense. We don't *need* to be told to care about the environment any more than we need to be told to care about the cleanliness of our room (although I suspect that some of us might need to hear that message from time to time). In the present day, we face an unprecedented ecological crisis, and the task of this essay is not to persuade the reader of that fact. Rather, the hope is to help us think differently about this crisis, and perhaps the first step in thinking differently is not to think of it as an environmental crisis but as an ecological one. When we speak of the environment, we are speaking in anthropocentric terms. Much of the rhetoric surrounding this crisis, and the anxiety it generates, has to do with the effects of environmental degradation upon *us*. When we speak of ecology, we are referring to the relationships between living organisms and between those organisms and the environment in which they live. Reframing our concern in terms of ecology helps us to remember that we human beings live in a complex web of interdependence with other living beings. As Christians, we should care about the environment not simply because it is our home, but because it is the *shared* home of all God's creation.

With that last sentence, a further problem is introduced: Why should Christians care about the environment any more or less than anyone else on the planet? What is gained by framing this discussion in religious terms and in the religious vocabulary of one particular tradition at that? The complex ecological crisis we face is surely not the fault of Christians alone. Nevertheless, Christians have, at various times and places throughout our history, held a worldview that is both anthropocentric and dualistic. That is, Christians have greatly valued the human and spiritual, while devaluing the nonhuman and material. Such a worldview can, and has, resulted in a legacy of disastrous ecological impact. Christians, therefore, should critically examine the narrative we are living out to see how it has influenced our relationship with the rest of Creation.

Furthermore, the very idea that we should conceive of ourselves as stewarding God's creation is itself problematic. The notion of stewardship is inescapably anthropocentric, and some have argued that it is precisely this anthropocentrism within the Christian tradition that is the root cause of the present ecological crisis. The story of human beings is a story rooted in the Christian scriptures. While some might equate this narrative with the Bible itself, properly speaking this is a *meta*narrative, a plot constructed by readers and superimposed over the Bible to give it meaning. In turn, the story gives

meaning—or at least has the potential to do so—to the lives of its readers. It is a story that seeks to answer such profound questions as: Who am I? Where am I? What is wrong with the world? And how can things be set to rights? (The questions come from Bartholomew and Goheen 2004). The power within such a story to shape individuals and societies can hardly be overstated. Perhaps not as obvious, however, is the constructed quality of such a narrative. The fact that it is constructed by readers implies that different readers will construct it differently. There are, in fact, two competing versions of this story: one which sees the story itself as the root problem of the ecological crisis, the other which sees within the story the hope for a solution to the crisis.

The Christian Worldview: Source of the Ecological Crisis?

Lynn White Jr. (1907–87), a medieval historian who taught at Princeton, Stanford, and the University of California, Los Angeles, presented a lecture at the 1966 meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science entitled "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" (White 1967). In this eloquent address, White asserted that the exploitative relationship of humankind over nature that is endemic to all Western societies finds its genesis in the Judeo-Christian account of creation. White summarized this account with these words:

> By gradual stages a loving and all-powerful God had created light and darkness, the heavenly bodies, the earth and all its plants, animals, and birds, and fishes. Finally, God had created Adam and, as an afterthought, Eve to keep man from being lonely. Man named all the animals, thus establishing his dominance over them. God planned all of this explicitly for man's benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes. And, although man's body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature: he is made in God's image. (White 1967, 37)

Such an account implies, in White's view, that "Man and nature are two things, and man is master" (37). Such mastery is, moreover, not benevolent, but tyrannical, leading White, a self-confessed churchman himself, to the inescapable conclusion that "Christianity... the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen... not only established a dualism of man and nature, but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends" (38).

Although White clearly has in view both of the creation accounts in Genesis, the text that figures centrally in White's critique is, of course, Genesis 1:26–28:

> Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."
>
> So God created humankind in his image,
> in the image of God he created them;
> male and female he created them.
>
> God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." (Gen 1:26–28 NRSV)

White's claim that this divine command perpetuates an attitude of violence toward the earth does find some measure of philological support. The Hebrew verb *radah* means "to rule, govern, have dominion" and is used to denote conquering an enemy by force (Isa 41:2). Likewise, the Hebrew verb *kavash* means "to make subservient, subjugate." It too frequently has violent overtones and can be used to denote violent rape (as in Esther 7:8). At first glance, it does seem that humans are commanded, or at least given license, to subdue violently the natural environment and use it for our own ends.

Since both Christianity and Judaism share this account of creation, one might suppose that White would level the same withering accusation at Judaism. He does not. Although he never explicitly explains this silence, the reason is there, if one reads between the lines. To do so we must make a brief excursus into the history of the early church. White observes that ancient Western intellectuals, Greeks and Romans for example, possessed a cyclical notion of time. Christians, by contrast, understood time in linear fashion. History begins with the creation of a personal, relational God and is heading toward consummation. Christianity, of course, inherited this concept from Judaism. Indeed, the first Christians were messianist Jews who believed that Yahweh would usher in the blessed age to come through his anointed vicegerent. Between the first and fourth centuries of the common era, these messianist Jews parted ways with their fellow Jewish co-religionists. After the First Jewish War, which resulted in the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE, messianism began to lose currency among non-Christian Jews. In the Second Jewish War (ending in 135 CE), the Jews were led in revolt against Rome by Simon Bar Kochba who was hailed by many as a messianic restorer of Judaism. After the revolt was put down, the Jews were banished from Jerusalem and with this tragedy henceforward any teleology associated with messianism would be dead on arrival for most Jews. While Judaism abandoned its apocalyptic eschatology and looked instead to the interpretation of Torah, Christianity turned its eyes toward the anticipated return of the Messiah. Why is this important?

Western culture has been dominated by what White refers to as "an implicit faith in perpetual progress" (37). This claim by itself needs little argument. One does not need to look far to see evidence that we are a people not only marked by expectations of progress but further by the indefatigable hope that we will *always* be a people of progress. Cell phone subscription is projected to soon reach five billion people world-wide (International Telecommunication Union, 2010). That will be more people than actually lived on the planet in 1986, according to the online almanac Infoplease. Although our faith in progress is not newsworthy, perhaps its genesis is. White insists that the Western dream of progress is "rooted in, and is indefensible apart from, Judeo-Christian teleology" (White 1967, 37). Jews gave up such teleology round about the second century, so they are off the hook in White's book. Christians, however, continue to look forward to the return of the Messiah, and for this reason, according to White, are still culpable.

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Since White does not elaborate on precisely how Christian teleology inevitably leads to ecological disaster, one presumes that he is thinking of what has been referred to in the Christian tradition as the rapture. Put simply, the notion of the rapture is that when the Lord returns, he will gather up the faithful and whisk them off to heaven. Those left behind will endure an increasingly miserable experience in a world that is becoming increasingly miserable. This is the premise of the wildly popular series, *Left Behind*, which now has a collector's edition series, a children's series, a military series, a nonfiction series, and an underground zealot series. This apocalyptic juggernaut has sold over sixty-three million copies and counting (www.leftbehind.com). The authors, Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, did not come up with the idea out of whole cloth, of course. Nevertheless, their fans might be surprised to learn that the biblical evidence for the rapture is rather slender.

While much of the *Left Behind* series draws on the apocalyptic symbolism of Revelation, the rapture itself is clearly mentioned in the New

Testament in only one place, Paul's first letter to the believers in Thessalonica. There he seeks to encourage recent converts who are distressed that members of the community have died before the return of the Messiah. They are not to worry, Paul ensures them, because those who have died in Christ will be the first to rise at the resurrection of the dead. Paul concludes with these well-known words:

> For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. (1 Thess 4:16–17)

Whether this passage means what it is frequently taken to mean—that Christians will be evacuated from the earth when Christ returns—is not an easy question. The idea of the rapture is often taken to imply that Christians should—or perhaps do—have little concern for the well-being of the planet, since their ultimate fate is divorced from that of the earth. Perhaps the most well-known of those accused of such an unfortunate position is James Watt, Secretary of the Interior from 1981–83 under the Reagan administration.[1] Lynn White, at least, believes it is this teleology that inspires and enables the particular marriage of science and technology which has perhaps irreparably degraded the environment. Thus, White concludes, "Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt" (White 1967, 40). Here ends the first story.

The Christian Metanarrative: Source of Hope for the Present Crisis

As we have already observed, the creation account in Genesis 1 can be read as giving humankind the license—if not the command—to exploit the natural environment for our personal use. Such a reading violates the very logic of Genesis 1:26–28. Although the verbs of command used in this passage frequently connote violence, the immediate context suggests that they should be interpreted otherwise here. The first creation account presents God as having created the earth in six days, culminating in a day of rest. God's pleasure in what he has created is marked by the refrain, "And God saw that it was good." A superlative ("it was very good") conveys God's satisfaction with the sum total of his creation. On the sixth day, God also creates humankind, which is distinguished from the rest of creation by its having been created in the image and likeness of God. But how should we understand what is meant by the *imago Dei*?

The underdetermined nature of the text has led to a plethora of interpretive possibilities, although the consensus among biblical scholars is that the passage should be read in light of ancient Near Eastern royal ideology (see: von Rad 1972, 59–60; Sarna 1989, 12; Middleton 2005, 121; Arnold 2009, 44–45). Seen from this perspective, God's creative activity in Genesis 1 may be seen as his building of a cosmic temple from which he reigns. This is analogous to the building of temples and other monumental structures, which was commonly understood to be a function of ruling in the ancient Near East (Ahlström 2000, 2.5: 591–92). The *imago Dei* would thus denote the ruling function of humankind over creation. This interpretation dates back to the early church fathers; for example it is found in Gregory of Nyssa's *On the Creation of Man* (in Schaff and Wace 1978–80, 390–91). When God delegates dominion over creation to humankind, it is clear that human rule should imitate divine rule. As God has created for himself a cosmic temple (the earth and the cosmos), so human beings must preserve that temple.

The assertion that the imago Dei entails license to exploit Creation reminds me of a story my father once told me. Shortly after the close of World War II, my grandfather set out to repair the greenhouse in his garden, the windows of which had been shattered during the German bombing raids on Southampton. My father, a young boy at the time, had been helping him. After many long hours of painstaking labor and considerable expense, my grandfather stood back to admire

his work. My father turned to him and asked, "What should I do with this bucket?" My grandfather responded with words he would soon regret, "Oh, Paul, why don't you throw it through the window?" With what I can only imagine was great chagrin, he watched as his young son gleefully complied. The story is charming—or at least became so after the fact—because we recognize the *incongruity* of a skilled craftsman accidentally giving permission to his son to destroy what he had lovingly made. To believe that God *intentionally* commanded humankind to abuse what he had lovingly created (remember the refrain, "and God saw that it was good") is puzzling to say the least. The improbability of such a reading only mounts when we try to reconcile such destructive behavior with the fact that humankind is created *in God's image.*

If the creation account in Genesis portrays God as a king who builds a cosmic temple from which he rules, then humankind stands in relation to the created order as the ancient Near Eastern monarch stood in relation to his subjects (Middleton 2005, 81–88). While every age has known its fair share of tyrants, the kingly ideal in the ancient world envisioned benevolent solicitude. Xenophon, for example, in characterizing the Persian king Cyrus as a benefactor, called him a "shepherd" and a "father to his people" (*Cyropaedia* 8.1.2; 8.2.9). Creation, then, is a divine gift which does not belong to us, but which we hold in trust for its Creator. To reflect God's image we must steward, or care for, this gift in a way that imitates God's own care for creation.

Seeing the human vocation as one of stewardship rather than exploitation is doubtless more likely to lead to a harmonious relationship with the environment. Nevertheless, as hinted earlier, the concept of stewardship as a model for relating to the environment is still problematic. A steward, although she does not own the item held in trust, is still given full responsibility for its care. To see ourselves as stewards of God's creation implies that we know best what the creation needs to flourish. This is simply not the case. Even when we are acting from the most altruistic motives, our well-meaning efforts to preserve the environment can result in unintended and damaging consequences for other parts of the ecosystem. Moreover, as stewards we run the risk of hubris, of thinking that preserving means improving. This of course raises the question: improving for whose benefit? The temptation as a steward is to see our role as that of gardener; a manicured garden is a lovely thing, but it is not the same as a wild forest.

If the creation account in Genesis suggests that we properly fulfill our human vocation through stewardship of creation, then the rest of Scripture is at pains to qualify what this vocation entails. We are not to see ourselves in a vertical and hierarchical relationship, between God and the non-human creation. Rather, we are part *of* the community of creation (Bauckham 2010, 10–11, 64–102). Implicit in White's telling of the story is the understanding that humankind is fundamentally different than the rest of creation. Indeed, he goes so far as to say that "Man shares, in great measure, God's *transcendence* of nature" (White 1967, 38, emphasis added). One easily sees the potential for such a reading, given that the text explicitly indicates that humankind alone is made in God's image. Yet note that it is not the creation of humankind but rather the sum total of *all* creation that earns God's final praise: "God saw *everything that he had made*, and indeed, it was very good" (Gen 1:30). In fact, if one wishes to speak of a *pinnacle* of God's creation, it would rather be the seventh day, which God makes holy because on it he rested from creation. The seventh day occupies a much more central place in Israel's theology, becoming the warrant for the fourth commandment, the observance of the Sabbath, a cornerstone of Israel's religious self-identity.

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Part of the problem with White's re-telling of the story is that he does not seem much interested in reading the Bible beyond Gen 1:28. Other parts of the Scriptures present a nuanced portrayal of humankind's place within creation. Consider, for example, the book of Job. The life of Job is like the quintessential country-music record: a thoroughly righteous man loses his sheep, his cattle, his camels, his servants, his children, and his health; his wife and friends turn against him. If Job had a dog, I suspect it would have left him as well. The story aims to deconstruct a type of theology that reflexively believes the righteous person is *owed* a good life from God. The final scene is a cosmic showdown between Job and his Creator. Yahweh demands that Job give him a satisfactory account of the origins of the cosmos:

> Where were you when I laid the
> foundation of the earth?
> Tell me, if you have understanding.
> Who determined its measurements—
> surely you know!
> Or who stretched the line upon it?
> On what were its bases sunk,
> or who laid its cornerstone
> when the morning stars sang together
> and all the heavenly beings shouted
> for joy? (Job 38:4–7)

For thirty-one more verses, God continues to quiz Job relentlessly on questions pertaining to meteorology, astronomy, solar radiation, oceanography, geography, and the rotation of the earth. As Richard Bauckham points out, the effect of this torrent of questions is to fill Job with "cosmic humility." Job perceives that there is a marvelous order to the cosmos, which moreover functions quite independently of him. We readers learn that the cosmos is not as anthropocentric as we had imagined (Bauckham 2010, 44–45. My discussion of Job is indebted to Bauckham's insightful reading of this text).

God is not finished yet. While Job listens in muted awe, Yahweh moves from the order of the cosmos to the order of Job's fellow creatures. He demands,

> Who has let the wild ass go free?
> Who has loosed the bonds of the swift
> ass,
> to which I have given the steppe for its
> home,
> the salt land for its dwelling place?
> It scorns the tumult of the city;
> it does not hear the shouts of the
> driver.
> It ranges the mountains as its pasture,
> and it searches after every green thing.
> (Job 39:5–8)

Like the other animals mentioned here—the lion, raven, ibex, deer, buffalo, sand grouse, hawk and vulture—the wild ass exists independently of humans. God provides for these creatures. The war horse is the only animal that humans have anything to do with, and from its fierce description, Yahweh makes clear to Job that humans do not control this creature any more than they do the wild ass. The point seems to be that Job is merely a creature among others. It is also clear from the descriptions of these animals that God delights in his creation. Thus God informs Job that the fledgling ravens cry to God (38:41), the wings of the sand grouse rejoice (39:12), and the war horse laughs at fear (39:22). This mild anthropomorphism is intended to evoke the pride of a craftsman in what he has made (Bauckham 2010, 50–54).

Although God is not yet finished with Job, we must move on. While we have barely scratched the surface of the Old Testament's vision of humankind in its relation to the non-human creation, this consideration of Genesis and Job has been sufficient to show that the human vocation should be not one of exploitation but rather humble stewardship, a task carried out in the knowledge that we do not stand above creation but rather in community with it. As we now turn to the New Testament for the second half of the story, we see a movement from creation to new creation.

Christian Hope as the Restoration of Creation

To answer the question of whether Christian eschatology—our hope for the ultimate con-

summation of history—fosters an attitude of neglect toward the natural environment, we must grapple with the Apostle Paul. One might also insist that we deal with the Revelation to John. Although we do not have space to do both, it is worth mentioning in passing that when we read Revelation, we must take care to seek to understand it within the context of first-century Jewish apocalyptic eschatology. When we do so, we will discover that a good number of contemporary texts use similarly vivid, symbolic imagery to speak of the eschaton. The symbolism is quite graphic and often envisions violent destruction. Such imagery was used to evoke both a cognitive and behavioral response in its audience; it was not intended to forecast specific events in a detailed, literal way. Reading Revelation in this manner will caution us from prematurely concluding that the biblical metanarrative ends in a manner incongruous with its beginning, with the violent destruction of earth. The ending is indeed in harmony with the beginning, as is signaled in the ultimate vision of the New Jerusalem by the evocation of the tree of life from the Garden of Eden. The leaves of this tree of life, which occupies a central place in the city, are "for the healing of the nations" (Rev 22:2).

But even if my reading of Revelation is correct, we still have the problem of Paul's eschatological vision. If the authors of the *Left Behind* series have understood Paul correctly, the ultimate fate of the earth should not be the primary concern of Christians, since in the end we will be evacuated from the earth to enjoy fellowship with God in heaven. As noted earlier, the textual evidence for the so-called rapture is slender, and it is far from certain that it has been interpreted in the way Paul intended. The Thessalonian believers were concerned that those who had died would miss out on the *parousia*—the presence of Christ, referring properly to the *return* of Christ's presence—and hence on the blessed age to come. Paul assures them that, on the contrary, those who have died will be at the head of the line to meet the Lord. Then he describes what that day will be like: "Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever" (1 Thess 4:17). The details of the passage require some comment.

To begin with, most first-century Christians did not believe that the Lord physically resided somewhere in the stratosphere, or perhaps a bit higher in the troposphere. The "heavens" were both the word for sky and also for the transcendent domain of God. Witness how Matthew frequently substitutes "kingdom of heaven" for "kingdom of God": both expressions denote the extent of God's effective reign. Neither speak of a cloudy realm populated by harpists. Jesus, of course, ascended upward into a cloud according to Luke (Acts 1:9), but here again, one must

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consider his options. If one is going to depart for the transcendent domain of God, going "down" would send precisely the wrong message to the disciples. Similarly, had Jesus swiftly vanished to the north, south, east, or west, the disciples most likely would have sent search parties into the desert for him. Clearly, "up" was the only way to go.

Paul therefore believes that when the Lord returns, we will meet him in the clouds, not that we will remain with him in the clouds. We will ascend to the clouds for a *meeting* with the Lord (in Greek, *eis apantēsin tou kuriou*). This word *apantēsis* was often used to describe the way in which a Hellenistic king or dignitary was greeted when coming to visit a city. The elders would travel some distance away from the city to await the king's arrival. They then would escort him back to the city in a regal manner. The point of such a meeting was always to *return* with the king. Thus Polybius in *The Histories* describes the entrance of Apelles into the city of Corinth (5.26.8–9). One remembers that Paul believes

these words will encourage the believers in Thessalonica, and the accent of this encouragement seems to lie on the fact that we will *be with the Lord forever*, not that we will remain in the clouds forever.

But if Paul's eschatology does not involve the evacuation of the faithful from planet earth, where does that leave us? A Christian teleology that concludes with the rapture understands the basic human plight to be alienation from God as a result of sin. The solution therefore is for God to effect reconciliation with humankind through Christ's death. Since this is essentially an individual transaction, it is a fitting—or at least workable—solution to evacuate all those now reconciled to God to heaven. The fate of their temporary home is of no consequence. There are indications, however, that Paul does not view human alienation from God as the *sole* characteristic of what has gone wrong in the world. For Paul, human sin affects not just ourselves, but has marred *all* creation. It follows that he does not regard the solution to be *simply* reconciliation between God and humankind. Thus, at a climactic point in his letter to the church in Rome, he writes:

> I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. (Rom 8:18–23)

The problem here is not just human in scope. Rather, all creation is in bondage to decay, having been subjected to futility presumably as the result of human sin. This unfinished narrative looks forward in hope for the redemption of all creation. This future consummation is focused on the revealing of God's adopted new family (which Paul understands to be his fellow Christians), but extends to all creation (see further Horrell, Hunt, and Southgate 2010, 63–85).

This same theme, the reconciliation of all creation, figures heavily in Paul's letter to the church in Colossae. Here Paul (or perhaps a later disciple) writes concerning Christ:

> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (Col 1:15–20)

As the last sentence indicates, Paul is telling the story of all things and doing it in such a way as to put Christ at the center of it. We may be tempted to assume that "all things" is simply shorthand for "all humankind," but notice how such an interpretive move is at odds with the movement of the entire hymn. Through Christ all things were created, are sustained, and will be reconciled. No doubt humans figure importantly in this scheme, but Paul's point seems to be to show his readers that they are involved in a rescue operation that is far greater than themselves (Horrell, Hunt, and Southgate 2010, 87–115).

Indeed, the redemption God has in mind is cosmic in scope. Paul (or again, perhaps a later disciple), writing to the churches in Asia Minor,

characterizes the redemption of believers as part of a mystery, once hidden but now revealed in Christ:

> With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Eph 1:8–10)

The verb here translated as "to gather up" (*anakephalaiōsasthai*) was used by ancient Greeks to refer to the summing up of an argument. In the argument of Ephesians, it is a far-reaching metaphor that connotes the restoration of a fractured cosmos through the reign of God's anointed king, the Christ. This restoration certainly has implications for human communities—the reconciliation of Jews and gentiles within the church most prominently—but again its scope is wider than simply human concerns.

Space does not allow me to argue my claim properly, to show that the restoration of creation, and indeed the cosmos, is a fitting description of Pauline eschatology. Here little more can be done than point to the passages where this thrust of Paul's thinking surfaces most clearly. To the extent that this reading of Paul is satisfying, it shows him to be one of the earliest constructors of a Christian metanarrative of Scripture. If I may take the liberty of speaking for Paul, he might succinctly tell this story in this fashion:

In the beginning, God lovingly created the heavens and the earth, filling them with all manner of plants and animals. To humankind, God gave the unique task of stewarding this wondrous creation. Although in this vocation of sharing in God's rule and creation, humankind is distinct from plants and other animals, God nevertheless created us as *part of* the community of creation. Sadly, we sought autonomy from God's providential care, and the entirety of the created order has suffered as a consequence. Because God so loved *all* the world, *all* that he had made, he established a covenant relationship with Israel to set things to rights. Since Israel was not faithful to the covenant, God sent his own son, the Messiah, to fulfill the covenant, to be faithful where Israel had failed. God has thus set in motion a plan to restore creation. Through faith in the Messiah we too are welcomed into this new creation.

Here ends the second story.

Implications for the Christian Life

By way of conclusion, I offer several thoughts on how such a metanarrative might affect how we live. First, and perhaps it goes without saying, we must do our utmost to care for the earth. There are numerous ways, big and small, one might do this, and most of us ought to be making a greater effort than we currently are making. Rather than spell out these ways or to induce feelings of guilt for our shortcomings, here is offered just one suggestion, admittedly an all-encompassing one, along with the two reasons that this suggestion is an appropriate response to a re-ordered Christian metanarrative. Within a capitalist economy, what is about to be suggested is tantamount to arch-heresy. Nevertheless, the suggestion is simply this: We must consume less.

My first reason for this suggestion is that a lifestyle of curbed consumption is necessary—although perhaps not sufficient—to create a more just and peaceful world. The present levels of consumption in the Western world are simply not sustainable—neither for humankind nor for the rest of the non-human Creation. Because this consumerist and consumptive lifestyle is unsustainable, it is bound at some point to fail. If it fails abruptly, we will not be around to lament its passing. But if it fails slowly, we can hope that something better will evolve to take its place (see further Berry 2002). There is a powerful myth in Western capitalist society that equates the implosion of the economy with the end of the world. As we see economies failing around the world, we perhaps are filled with dread, supposing the end is nigh. At such moments, we are apt to hear the siren call to consume more. If we can simply find a way to get the engine turning again, the ship will cruise to safety and the story will end happily. Precisely at such moments we need to remind ourselves that we are a people shaped

by a different story. We live in the story of God's creation as we eagerly await the revealing of the new creation.

This leads to the second and final reason: a lifestyle of curbed consumption will help us live in anticipation of this new creation. When we were children we earnestly asked our parents whether there would be pets or stuffed animals in heaven. As adults, do we secretly hope that we can take our iPads with us? The consumerist lifestyle has the potential to bend our souls toward a vision of ultimate fulfillment through ever-increasing consumption. Yet, as the words of the Westminster Shorter Catechism declare, the chief end of humankind is "to glorify God and enjoy him forever" (http://www.reformed.org/documents/WSC.html). We do well, therefore, to ponder what enjoying God might be like and whether our daily lives are habituating us to that end. ✦

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Endnote

1. Watt has been widely quoted as having responded to a question asked during his Senate confirmation hearing regarding the need to preserve the environment for future generations with these words: "I do not know how many future generations we can count on before the Lord returns. . ." The implication appears to be that preserving the environment for the future ought to be a fairly low priority. In the interest of fairness, we should also note the words—far less frequently quoted to be sure—that completed his sentence: "whatever it is we have to manage with a skill to leave the resources needed for future generations" (Watt 2005). I do not intend to defend Secretary Watt's record on the environment; I'm not sure I would like to defend my own record, for that matter. I merely wish to point out that it is often *assumed* that biblically-inspired Christian teleology necessarily implies an attitude toward the environment of, at best, neglect, and at worst, exploitation.

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"Never Again"

The Responsibility to Protect as An Emerging Ethical Norm

Tobias Winright

Brian Steidle, a former US Marine captain who served in Kosovo and now a human rights activist, journalist, and photographer, shared the following two experiences from the time he served as a monitor for the African Union in the Darfur region of western Sudan:

> Ahmed and I headed toward a large nim tree on the outskirts of Wash al tool, where 250 homeless women and children had stopped earlier in the day to share in the small piece of shade. They had escaped the initial conflict in Alliet, a town of 15,000 we had just visited. The village was the most recent to fall prey to Government of Sudan troops in what was now described by Western diplomats—publicly, if belatedly—as genocide....
>
> Expressionless, a woman slowly raised a one-year-old girl for me to examine...
>
> The baby's breathing was labored, and she was wheezing noticeably. Upon closer inspection, I realized that this tiny human being had been shot in the back—the child had gaping entry and exit wounds that accentuated her struggle to breathe. Her guardian looked up at me with a blank gaze.
>
> "What's her name?" I stammered, my sense of disbelief audible in my tone.
>
> "Mihad Hamid," she said after a quick translation of my question. (xi)

> ...In Baraka, 10 villagers had been tortured and brutally murdered by the Janjaweed.... Several bloody corpses filled a shallow grave. They were lined up in a row and covered with grass mats. Images from the Holocaust and Rwanda filled my mind. I looked closer. Every single man in this countless row of African civilians had had his eyes plucked out and his ears cut off. (88)

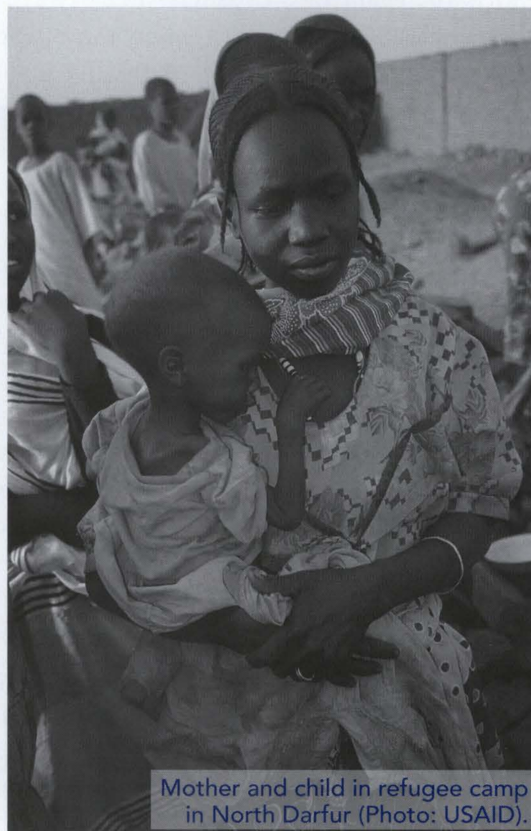
The title of Steidle's book, *The Devil Came on Horseback*, refers to the Janjaweed, a paramilitary faction in Darfur that has been accused of alleged genocidal acts in recent years. As the father of two very young daughters, I hope others share my indignation about such horrific acts committed against civilians anywhere, including babies like Mihad Hamid.

In the wake of the Holocaust, the international community pledged "Never again," and a new international norm, "the responsibility to protect" (R2P), has emerged as the latest expression of this vow. R2P was endorsed by President George W. Bush, who said, "I want to fix Sudan and stop the slaughter" (quoted in Woodward 2010, 53). President Barack Obama appealed to it last year in connection with Libya, and R2P is explicitly mentioned and endorsed in his National Security Strategy published a year earlier in a section on "Peacekeeping and Armed Conflict" (National Security Strategy 2010, especially at 48). The United Nations invoked R2P in Resolution 1973 concerning Libya, and today R2P is the moral norm framing the debate about what to do about Syria. Still, most Americans seem unfamiliar with R2P. What is it? How did it emerge? Moreover, how does it cohere, if at all, with the traditional approaches—pacifism and just war—that Christians have used to think about the morality of war?

During the 1990s, although the international community at times felt *morally* compelled

to intervene in nations where crimes against humanity, such as genocide, were underway, the *legality* of such humanitarian interventions was in question. Ever since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, national sovereignty has been regarded as sacrosanct, and the normative principle of non-interference prohibited nations from meddling in the internal affairs of other nations. The jurisprudential question about humanitarian intervention became especially apparent when NATO forces intervened in Kosovo—an action that seemed at the time morally, if not legally, justified.

In 2000, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan asked member states: "If humanitarian intervention is indeed an unacceptable assault on sovereignty, how should we respond to a Rwanda, to a Srebrenica—to gross and systematic violations of human rights that offend every precept of our common humanity?" (Annan 2000, 48). In response, to find a way to protect innocents such as baby Mihad Hamid, the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, an initiative of the Canadian government, issued a report titled "The Responsibility to Protect" in 2001. The UN subsequently studied this proposal, and at the 2005 World Summit, over 150 heads of state unanimously adopted R2P. A report in January 2009 from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on "Implementing the Responsibility to Protect" led to further debate, and a General Assembly resolution in July 2009 (A/RES/63/308) committed the body to more discussion of R2P. Although debate in the international public square continues, R2P is undeniably gaining acceptance as we journey into this second decade of the twenty-first century.


Mother and child in refugee camp in North Darfur (Photo: USAID).

Gareth Evans, a former foreign minister of Australia, believes that R2P provides a "new way of talking about the whole issue of humanitarian intervention" (2005, 5). It nuances and qualifies the concept of national sovereignty so that it entails not only a right to non-interference from other nations but also *responsibilities* on a nation's part to its own citizens. If a state fails to fulfill its primary duty to protect its own citizens, this responsibility then transfers to the international community. The focus, as German Evangelical Church theologian and former World Council of Churches (WCC) General Secretary Konrad Raiser puts it, is less on national security and more on "the human security of all people everywhere," and especially of those most at risk (Raiser 2005, 11; see also Axworthy 2012, 3, 8–11).

R2P consists of three pillars: 1) the responsibility of the state to protect its population from four crimes—genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing; 2) the responsibility of the international community to assist states in meeting their protective responsibility; and 3) the responsibility of member states to respond in a timely and decisive manner when a state fails to provide such protection. The international assistance and response in the second and third pillars involve, moreover, three primary responsibilities: *the responsibility to prevent* (addressing the root and direct causes of conflict putting populations at risk); *the responsibility to react* (responding to egregious threats to human security through appropriate measures, including coercive measures such as sanctions and, in extreme cases, forceful military intervention); and *the responsibility to rebuild* (assisting with recovery, reconstruction, and reconciliation, as

well as addressing the causes of the threat that the intervention averted or stopped).

While R2P is gaining traction in the international community, it is not without its critics. There are, of course, those in the realist school of international relations who still uphold the absolute inviolability of national sovereignty. Others, especially those from former European colonies in the southern hemisphere, worry that R2P is a Trojan horse for Western efforts to regain or maintain global hegemony. Nevertheless, overall support for R2P seems to be increasing in the international community.

For the international community, R2P may be an altruistic implementation of the vow "never again." For the Christian community, it is an expression of neighbor love.

What about the churches? What has their response been so far to R2P? The WCC, which is comprised of 349 Christian churches and denominations, has affirmed and reaffirmed R2P in a number of resolutions since 2003. Furthermore, Pope Benedict XVI mentioned R2P in his address to the General Assembly of the UN on 18 April 2008 and called for its implementation in his social encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, issued on 29 June 2009.

This moral advocacy of R2P by Christian churches, however, has not come without debate. Christians who emphasize nonviolence remain reluctant to express their support for the use of force even to protect the vulnerable. According to the WCC's 2006 statement that affirmed R2P: "The use of force for humanitarian purposes is a controversial issue.... While some believe that the resort to force must not be avoided when it can alleviate or stop large-scale human rights violations, others can only support intervention by creative, non-violent means."

Some—including members of the historic peace churches—have suggested that viewing R2P as a form of policing rather than a military action might offer an avenue beyond this impasse. For example, Mennonite Ernie Regehr writes, "Just as individuals and communities in stable and affluent societies are able in emergencies to call on armed police to come to their aid when they experience unusual or extraordinary threats of violence or attack, churches recognize that people in much more perilous circumstances should have access to protectors" (2005, 105).

In fact, few Christian ethicists have thought or written about the ethics of law enforcement. Therefore, before drawing parallels between R2P and policing, careful consideration must first be given to the ethics of policing. Simply invoking an analogy with the police is insufficient, for surely not all policing is ethical. No Christian ethicist or church would defend the morality of totalitarian oppression by a police state or the excessive force and police brutality associated, for instance, with the famous Rodney King beating by Los Angeles police officers in 1991. Some in the historic peace churches object that policing is still about violence and thus no more moral than war-fighting (for example, Alexis-Baker 2007 and 2008). In fact, several models of policing exist, with some (e.g., the crime fighter or military model) that see the use of force as central and others (e.g., just policing or community policing) that see the use of force as more limited and governed by strict criteria. If R2P resembles just policing, then most Christian churches should support this emerging norm as a way to "serve and protect" innocent neighbors like baby Mihad Hamid. For the international community, R2P may be an altruistic implementation of the vow "never again." For the Christian community, it is an expression of neighbor love.

The Methodist ethicist Paul Ramsey used to argue that "the *logic*, the heart and soul, of... protective love" is the basis for the Christian just-war tradition (1988, 72). Referring to the parable of the Good Samaritan who showed love for the man earlier victimized by bandits, Ramsey asked

what Jesus would have suggested the Samaritan do "if he had come upon the scene while the robbers were still at their fell work?" (1968, 142–43). For Ramsey, whenever a choice must be made between the unjust perpetrator and the innocent victim, circumstances dictate that the latter is to be preferred, so that armed force may be justifiably used against the former.

Not all pacifist Christians will accept R2P's provision for forceful intervention. They argue that more emphasis should be placed on the responsibility to prevent; however, nonviolent preventive measures often come too late or fail. Hugo Slim shares the story of the Liberian village of Bakedo, a mostly Muslim community of Mandingo people of traders and farmers in West Africa. In June 1990, a massacre happened in the mosque nestled in the town's center:

> After launching their successful insurgency from Côte d'Ivoire further to the east, Charles Taylor's NPFL (National Patriotic Front of Liberia) forces burst into Lofa County. On that June day, people were farming and going about their business as usual when news came that armed fighters were on their way to the village. The town's elders met quickly and agreed to meet the soldiers in a spirit of peace with an offering of two cows and some money as a token of their hospitality. Sure enough, a little later that day, two pick-up trucks full of armed NPFL men drove fast into town, led by a woman commander. Most of the soldiers quickly fanned out to surround the town and block routes out of it. Others pushed the villagers' reception committee into the "palava hut" near the mosque and forced them to lie on the floor. The minds of the soldiers were made up and their orders were clear. After taking some drugs and dancing around, they got serious. The commander shouted at the cowering people in the "palava hut" and said: "You, together with your belongings, belong to us. We will kill you because you are Mandingo people, strangers and not citizens. So we will kill all of you on this land." The soldiers then opened fire on everyone in the hut, immediately killing 36 people—men, women and children—at point blank range. (Slim, 9–10)

As people fled for their lives, the soldiers continued shooting. Surviving villagers estimated that 350 people were killed during that half-hour massacre. What should Christians who are called to be like the Good Samaritan do when a crime such as this is happening? While much can be done to prevent such dreadful scenarios from happening in the first place, limited force is sometimes necessary to put a stop to horrific crimes that are already underway against the innocent. Although there are, admittedly, many problems still to be worked out with R2P, this emerging norm is a step in the right direction.

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A Dose of Techno-Pessimism

The Problem(s) with Smartphones

Joshua Banner

The *New York Times Sunday Book Review* recently published a cartoon by Grant Snider proposing an innovation: "The Book of the Future." The inventor highlights all of the ways that our current reading experience can be improved. The problem, thinks the inventor, is that "We are tired of reading on screens. They hurt our eyes and require special glasses... we always break them when riding moving sidewalks." To solve these problems, he suggests that books should be more interactive, with pages that can be grasped and turned, that the size of a book should be in proportion to the amount of information inside. He proposes, "We'll use non-glowing type encased in a protective layer of wood pulp... no need for special glasses... less eye strain... biodegradable." The only problem with these new reading devices, the cartoon depicts in its closing frame, is that it will be difficult to carry them while operating a jetpack.

Media and technology critic Neil Postman argued that new innovation should always solve a real problem and, further, that we should consider what new problems might arise with the use of a new device (1988). As a bibliophile, the ebook reader strikes me as small potatoes. I personally have no temptation to read books on anything other than paper. However, the innovations in mobile technology that have created the "smart" phone might be creating problems much more serious than any they have solved. I wish I could buy one, but I just can't.

Last year, a startling experience in a concert venue filled with college students left me puzzling over the ubiquity of the smartphone. The lights had gone down; any moment the band would appear and begin their set. From the balcony, I could see the glow of phone screens, qwerty keyboards, and touch pads. It was a sea of hand-held lights. The glimmer of hundreds of lit screens was beautiful; however, this sight left me jealous and agitated at the same time. There was something stunning here, but there was also something troubling. We were on the verge of entering into a musical journey with a fantastic band, and what were these "kids" doing? Snapping photos, finishing a conversation, texting a friend, tweeting followers, or just playing Angry Birds?

These devices are sleek. They are shiny. They are pocket-sized and fashionable—even sexy—but I wonder what, beyond the flashy and trendy appeal of our mobile technologies, what good they are. Does this technology solve a real problem? Could it create a new and potentially dangerous set of problems?

If where our treasure lies, our hearts will be also, consider that for the last year Apple Inc. has been trading places with Exxon Mobile as the most valuable company in the world. Named the world's most *admired* company each year since 2008, Apple's annual revenue rose to $108 billion, largely due to an 81 percent increase in iPhone sales. The Pew Internet and American Life Project has found that in 2011 almost half (46 percent) of American adults use smartphones, an increase of 11 percent in the last year; among 18–24 year olds, that number rises to 67 percent. In the darkness of a post 9/11 society that is slogging through the Great Recession, we find ourselves drawn to mobile technology as to a great light. Yet, says author Andy Crouch, the gospel of Apple "is, in the end, a set of beautifully polished empty promises" (Crouch 2011). Much has been written about Steve Jobs since his death, and certainly I want to be generous in critiquing his legacy. The iPhone, however, is not sacrosanct. What, indeed, is the nature of the

"empty promises" of our newest wave of mobile technology?

Many Christian thinkers have voiced concerns about technology, but Jacques Ellul's broad-sweeping techno pessimism most clearly reveals the illusion that technology offers. Ellul's concern was not just with specific technologies but with *technique*, the elevation of rational efficiency as the highest human value. Ellul argued that constantly striving for the efficiency of *technique* leaves human life fragmented as *technique* imposes itself on every field of human activity (1970). Technology is not benign or innocent. Each innovation and device has embedded within it a set of values, its own promises of something better, something more useful and effective—a kind of "gospel."

Mobile technology promises us the ability to be everywhere and seemingly to be in control of everything. In truth, these devices cause us to be nowhere and in control of very little.

Henry David Thoreau's early observation in the wake of coal and the steam engine that powered factories in New England should ring loudly and clearly in our ears today: "But lo! Men have become tools of their tools!" We naïvely assume that we are in control of our technology, using it to shape, form, and manipulate objects outside of ourselves. The irony is that a tool can instead control us, reforming us in its image and redefining our values and even our sense of reality. Which, for example, has had a more formative effect on young people today: absorbing the fact that ours is a world where the tragedy of 9/11 is possible, or growing accustomed to having instant access to the Internet through a device they carry in their pockets? The gospel of the latter allows diversion from the horror of the former. These devices are filled with powers to shape reality and, even more frighteningly, powers to shape our identities. Jaron Lanier, known as the father of virtual reality, explains this phenomena in his book *You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto.* "Technologies are extensions of ourselves... our identities can be shifted by the quirks of gadgets" (2010, 129–130). Smartphones might help us connect to each other, but they also help us to hide from each other, to lie *about* ourselves and lie *to* ourselves about the world we live in.

The smartphone offers us something not unlike the identity shape-shifting of a celebrity persona like Lady Gaga. As the first artist to sell over twenty million digital downloads, Lady Gaga is not coy about the method of her entrepreneurial madness. All of her waking life is a stage of performance art. To retain the attention of her fans, she must constantly re-package and sell herself: "I am a master of the art of fame," she boasts (Cooper 2011). We might not chose Lady Gaga's macabre, freak, and sado-masochistic tropes, like the coat made completely of raw meats or brassier and underpants that shoot sparkler-like flames, but with our pocket-sized access to the Web 2.0 and all its social media applications, we too can make our lives a kind of performance art. Like Lady Gaga, we can create and recreate ourselves by publishing carefully selected images, videos, and information, various kinds of masks and costumes onto a virtual yet global stage. The smartphone, if not used properly, is a horrifying device, an invitation to a global masquerade party, a circus of social interaction.

While these technologies seem to have the capacity to free and reveal the self, unfortunately they do more to hide and conceal, to fragment and alienate us. Mobile technology promises us the ability to be everywhere and seemingly to be in control of everything. In truth, these devices cause us to be nowhere and in control of very little. We have become what sociologist Dalton Conley has defined as "the elsewhere self." Mobile technology, by definition, allows us to remain in constant motion. Conley says this "constant motion is a balm to a culture in which the very

notion of authenticity—a lodestone of earlier epochs—has been shattered into a thousand emails" (2009, 8). Or a thousand instant messages, or a thousand texts, or tweets, or hashtags.

What *were* those college students doing in the few remaining moments before the concert began? They were in motion, moving *elsewhere.* Yes, our mobile technology enables a frantic pace of existence, always on the move, operating on the fly... *gotta do more, gotta be more...* as we text while walking, while eating, while maneuvering through traffic. The more significant danger, which I witnessed that night surrounded by a sea of cell phone lights, is not merely a question of physical motion and external busyness. The deeper poverty of our age results from the *internal* motion of our attention, the motion of our sense of self from dissipation to conflagration, giving way to identity confusion. Do we use a smartphone throughout the day to express ourselves, or is the Internet expressing itself upon us through the smartphone?

To be optimistic about a life of wholeness necessitates a discerning pessimism—a healthy suspicion of anything that might distract and fragment. Our sophisticated society is layered with such obstacles, and each of us will find different points at which we must draw a line. Is it possible to use a smartphone with care? Perhaps it is. But as I already struggle with so many distractions, with fragmentation, I cannot trust myself with one: the problems it would create for me would overwhelm any problems it might solve.

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Getting out of the Rut
Alexander Payne's *The Descendants*

Tyler Beane

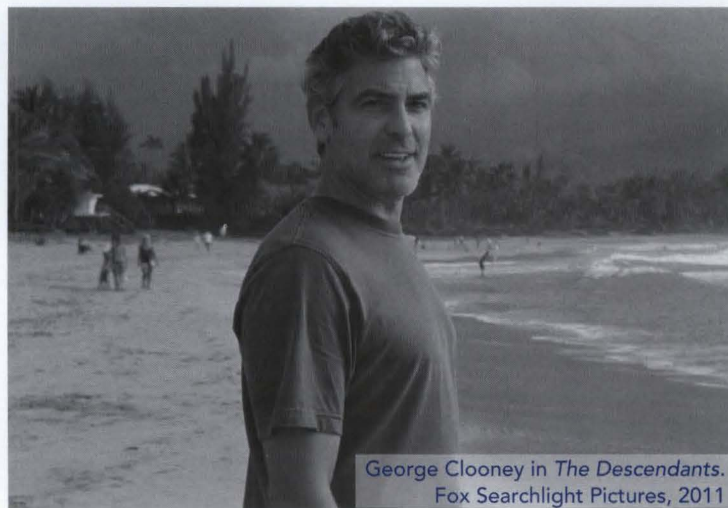
ALEXANDER PAYNE IS A MASTER OF THE American dramedy. In films noted for their acerbic dialogue and grounded sense of place, Payne's acutely observed characters struggle to make sense of the commitments in their lives. In *Citizen Ruth* (1996), Payne explored the challenges of parenting; in *Election* (1999), of civic responsibility; in *About Schmidt* (2002), of familial responsibility; and in *Sideways* (2004), of friendship. His latest (2011) film *The Descendants*, adapted from a novel of the same name by the Hawaiian writer Kaui Hart Hemmings, won Payne his second best-adapted-screenplay Oscar. What sets this film apart from his previous work is how Payne has heightened the stakes of his protagonist's actions. In *The Descendants*, Matt King has responsibilities as husband, parent, son-in-law, friend, neighbor, citizen of Hawaii, descendant, and even as a member of creation. Never before has Payne drawn such a complex, interconnected, moral landscape.

Matt (played by George Clooney) has a lot on his plate. His wife Elizabeth (Patricia Hastie) has been in a boating accident, leaving her in a coma from which she will never recover. Matt is left to care for their two daughters, ten-year-old Scottie (Amara Miller) and seventeen-year-old Alex (Shailene Woodley)—a real challenge since Matt confesses via narration that he has always been "the back-up parent, the understudy." Matt also needs to share the news about Elizabeth's imminent passing with the family and friends who love her. One of these persons, Matt discovers, is Elizabeth's lover. On top of all of this, Matt is the trustee of his family's 25,000 acres of untouched, pristine Hawaiian land, and while the family needs to make a decision about selling the land, Matt has the final say.

This would be a lot of responsibility for anyone to handle, but it is even harder for Matt because he has isolated himself emotionally, leading an imbalanced, self-centered, workaholic life. Matt admits to this when he pleads with his comatose wife, "If you're doing this to get my attention Liz, it's working. I'm ready now. I'm ready to talk. I'm ready to change. I'm ready to be a real husband and a real father. Just wake up." Matt has been in denial about his commitments to spouse and children, but the denial bleeds into other commitments—to extended family, neighbor, country, and natural world. Throughout the film, Matt struggles to reconcile the differences between his identity and his actions. As Charles Taylor suggests, modern identity "is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand" (1989, 27). *The Descendants* is the story of a man moving out of an isolated, autonomous existence to embrace life as interconnected and relational. Matt broadens first to understand how his identity is shared with his family, then with his wider circle of acquaintances, and eventually with the entirety of creation.

It is clear from the beginning that Matt is disconnected from his wife Elizabeth. Matt explains via narration at his wife's bedside, "When I heard about the accident and about the coma, I wasn't even in town. I was on Maui on business and we hadn't spoken in three days. In a way, we hadn't spoken in months." Matt does not get a second chance to be a husband to Elizabeth, but he does get another chance with his daughters. At first, he flounders in the role of parent. When Scottie exhibits inappropriate behavior in school, the school counselor asks Matt, "Have you been engaging Scottie in really talking about everything that is going on? Encouraging her to express her feel-

ings?" He nods, half listening, and then, walking out of the school with Scottie, instead of trying to learn something about her feelings, he barks at her, "What's the matter with you?" No moment is more telling than when Matt asks Alex what to do with Scottie. She responds insightfully—spend more time with her, go camping with her—but Matt cuts her off. Instead of listening to Alex's good advice, he decides now is the time to tell Alex about her mom's condition. Matt's road with his daughters is not an easy one. Throughout the film, he struggles to communicate openly with them. Although he does not seem to make much progress in this regard, he is at least trying. The final image of the film, of Matt and his daughters covered with their mother's blanket, suggests that Matt's loving presence is the most important gift he can give them.



George Clooney in *The Descendants.* Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2011

Beyond the challenge of reconnecting with his daughters, Matt also struggles to deal kindly with the type of people that many of us would rather not have in our lives at all: those who challenge and frustrate us. His stepfather Scott (Robert Forster) belittles and guilts him; his daughter's friend Sid (Nick Krause) is insensitive and annoying. It would be easy for Matt to dismiss these people, to put them in boxes: to label Scott, as Sid calls him, "a prick," or to label Sid "an idiot" or "a stoner." Matt agrees with Sid's labeling of Scott behind Scott's back and shows contempt for Sid to Sid's face; however, Payne never lets Matt off the hook. Peering through the open door of Elizabeth's hospital room, Matt sees Scott grieve over his daughter, affectionately caring for her, kissing her. We see Scott mouth the words, "I love you" to her. Scott is not just "a prick"; he is a loving father. During a late night conversation with Sid, Matt finds out that Sid has just lost his father a few months ago. Though Sid wears a weak smile as he shares the news, Sid's pain lingers underneath the expression. Sid is not "an insensitive idiot"; he is a grieving son. Drawn as emotionally complex human beings with their own feelings and needs, Scott and Sid show Matt that they deserve his respect and care.

Perhaps the most challenging person that comes into Matt's life is Brian Speer (Matthew Lillard), the man with whom his wife was having an affair. Late in the film, Matt finds himself face to face with Brian. He has enlisted Alex to help him with the confrontation. They have discovered that Brian has a family, a wife and two boys. While the rest of Brian's family is occupied, Matt and Alex trap Brian. First they speak to each other about their first impressions right in front of him. With venom in her voice, Alex asks Matt, "This is him? Why would she go for him?" As the two lay it on, we naturally side with Matt and Alex against Brian; however, Payne complicates this situation too. Brian seems like a sincere guy when he apologizes. There is no soundtrack to direct our interpretation of what is happening. When Brian looks back at his wife in the kitchen, we realize the effect this confrontation might have on his family. It becomes clear that Brian loves his wife and family. Matthew Lillard, usually known for his comedic roles, effectively draws a picture of this complicated family man—honest, sensitive, devoted to wife and children, yet confused, conflicted in his actions in keeping a secret life.

What to do with Brian Speer? What is a proper moral response? Matt doesn't react well to him; in fact, on the way out he kisses Brian's wife, Julie (Judy Greer). While we want to give Matt the benefit of the doubt, it is hard not to see this action as childish and unwarranted, especially considering that Julie is also a victim of Brian's secret life. Do we want Matt to forgive Brian at this point? Perhaps it is too much to expect such a selfless act. Yet our growing sympathy toward Brian poses the question: How can I honor and care for my neighbor when my neighbor

has hurt me? Matt could tear this family apart. Further, Alex and Sid are looking on as Matt makes decisions about what to do with Brian. Alex and Sid are learning how to act in such confusing situations. Are they learning from their father that revenge is an appropriate response to being hurt?

Matt's sense of responsibility toward the natural world is tested by the decision he must make about his family's land. As the trustee, Matt holds the final say. In one scene, Matt, Alex, Scottie, Sid, and one of Matt's cousins survey the family's land from a lookout point on Kauai. They discuss the potential sale and wax nostalgic about time spent camping on the land. Matt drops a comment about giving the land up: "Everything has its time." The comment has a ring of wisdom to it until one thinks about how it depends on one's perspective. What does Matt know about time? What does any human know about time as it plays out in nature? Cutting to a long shot above the group, Payne leaves their conversation; he slowly swings the camera away from their vantage point and out over the land—a valley framed by rugged hills, verdant trees, and the ocean. The sounds of the wind and of birds singing swallow up any further conversation that the family might be having. This land knows about time better than any human does. This change of perspective leads us to ask a question: What right do the Kings have to give up this land to people who would exploit it?

Payne does his best to slow the pace of his human drama by inserting a number of transitional shots of nature between emotionally charged scenes. Take, for example, the two shots placed after the emotional hospital scene where Scott shows affection for his daughter. One is of the sun peeking through the clouds to shine on a forested hillside. The other is of green plants reaching up to the sky as stormy clouds are on the move above. It is a reflective time allowing viewers to take in the full weight of the narrative, or perhaps briefly to forget narrative altogether. These transitional shots are reminiscent of a type of shot used by the Japanese filmmaker Yasujiro Ozu called "pillow shots." These are shots that, like their corollary "pillow words" in Zen Buddhist poetry, do not lead out of or into the whole of the film but give a place of rest, a pause. Human figures and human stories are dislocated from the center of the universe for a brief moment. In their stead, oceans, trees, clouds, and rivers move into the fore. This is nature for nature's sake; God's creation having worth on its own terms, not in terms of what it *does* for us. Given this de-centering, we are invited to take a broader perspective on our place within the natural world. We are not above creation; we are part of it.

Payne's *The Descendants* is a needed corrective to our American culture. As Carolyn T. Brown suggests in her essay on reimagining the American Dream, there is this rut, this gap "so many of us experience between who we are and what we do," which testifies to "conditions embedded broadly in the contemporary experience" (2005, 54). Many forces in our society—political, economic, religious—pit us against one another and turn us inward. Americans prize economic autonomy and emotional independence; however, as Americans, and as family members, friends, neighbors, and as created beings made in the image of God, we are caught in a network of commitments and identifications in which we are called to take a stand. Perhaps the most helpful thing Payne can do is to offer up Matt's life as a mirror to our own. As Matt's many moral dilemmas unfold, we begin to see how his actions have consequences, first on an intimate familial level, then moving outward to acquaintances and the natural world. The first step is awareness. Though Matt does not always do the right thing, Payne does not let us judge him. Instead, we are called to examine our own lives. We are not alone.

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PRESENT

How could she refuse it
on the very verge of spring

when in another hour fury, grief
might ease off enough, allow

quick passage through, climbing down
in say, a cactus garden, angling into light

around adobes where she could
have rented them a room—but

the lost are like this: foster mothers, night
nurses for the lives of others, not their own—

she tore her page out, like the woman who
jumped from the Mayflower before her party

went ashore—the white oak soaked and
fallen, failed in the same place I now look.

She gave her son a wonderful childhood,
as he wrote himself on the last page

of the sympathy book. How can we know
the number who have loved us, or how

few—*you shall not kill* applies
also to the self, though everywhere I meet

discouragements to an inquiring further,
drowsing deep in brief explosive red-flesh

woodlet days—*you shall not kill the apples*
up from the ground and tasting so good.

Leslie Williams

A Process of Revision

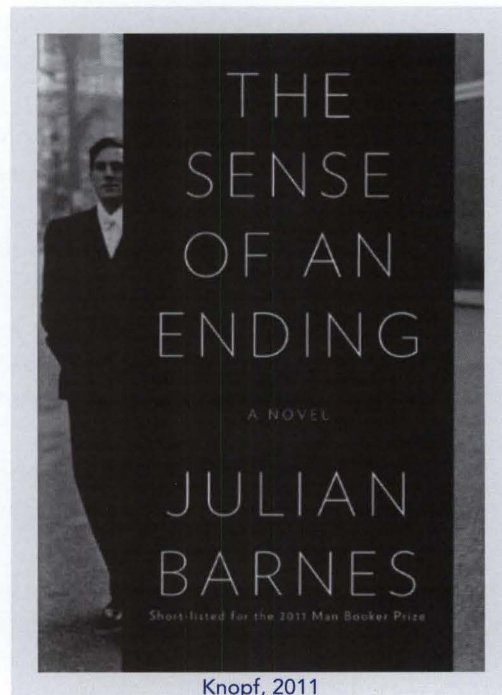
Julien Barnes's *The Sense of an Ending*

Edward Upton

Julian Barnes's wonderful book, *The Sense of an Ending*, is a relentless and complex meditation on the operations of memory: what it reveals, and what it conceals; how it is the foundation of our identities as human beings; how our memories can deceive, or be manipulated; how it can reveal the truth about ourselves, and how it can provoke us to maddening feats of self-deception. Ultimately, this book's major accomplishment is to show how identity is completely in the service of memory, and that, as a result, identity is no stable thing, but a complex process of remembering and revising—we revise our very selves in light of our memories. The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur has written, "time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode" (*Time and Narrative*, 52). If our identity is a process of placing ourselves in a continuing story about ourselves, then what happens when we find out that the events out of which we have been crafting that story are illusory, are deceptive? What happens when we have to re-write our life stories based on new memories?

Barnes's novel is told from the perspective of Tony Webster, an aging middle-class man in England trying to come to terms with the life he has led and the relationships he has forged or abandoned. The novel shows us Tony's *process* of telling his life story, remembering events and drawing them together into an overall understanding of his current life. Nearing the end of his life, he wants to look back, reflect on what he's done, what he hasn't done, and how he's come to his current position in life.

The story begins in Tony's high school years. He describes his young self and most of his friends as concerned with adolescent rebellion, books, and their emerging sex lives. His friend Adrian Finn, however, was different. Tony represents Adrian as more philosophically serious, as someone who merged thought with action in a more disciplined



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way than the others. In many ways, Adrian becomes the foil to Tony throughout this story: where Tony follows along with what has been determined for him, Adrian demands that life be shaped by philosophical and moral principles.

The narrative then shifts to an account of Tony's relationship with his first girlfriend, Veronica Ford, who becomes the third major character in the novel. Tony sees Veronica as arrogant, manipulative, and prudish, but extremely attractive. From the outset, Tony views the depth of their relationship solely in terms of whether or not Veronica will sleep with him. As you can probably guess, this relationship does not last, though the two do sleep with each other: after they've

broken up. Tony is very matter-of-fact about the break-up. He presents their sexual encounter as a moment of victory for himself, and with that, the relationship was over. Veronica does not leave Adrian's story, however. After college, and after he had become casually estranged from his old friends, Tony receives a letter from Adrian, who asks permission to date Veronica.

Tony is not necessarily happy about this, and he seems to harbor ill feelings toward Veronica and toward Adrian for dating her. Nevertheless, he sends a postcard to Adrian, stating the following: "Being in receipt of your epistle of the 21st, the undersigned begs to present his compliments and wishes to record that everything is jolly fine by me, old bean" (45). Later, however, Tony sends a longer letter to Adrian. At this point in the narrative, he describes the letter as such:

> As far as I remember, I told him pretty much what I thought of their joint moral scruples. I also advised him to be prudent, because in my opinion Veronica had suffered damage a long way back. Then I wished him good luck, burnt his letter in an empty grate (melodramatic, I agree, but I plead youth as a mitigating circumstance), and decided that the two of them were now out of my life forever. (46)

There is a note of finality to this, marking a moment for Tony when one narrative ends and another begins. One gets a sense of understated resentment, and perhaps regret, but also a sense that this is just one of those moments of frustration we all must deal with. However, the reader is also left to wonder what Tony could mean by his disturbing reference to "damage" here. He himself indicates, "When I wrote to Adrian, I wasn't at all clear myself what I meant by 'damage.' And most of a lifetime later, I am only slightly clearer" (47).

At this point, events become increasingly strange and provocative. Immediately after the story of Adrian and Veronica, we learn that Adrian commits suicide. He cuts his wrists while sitting in a warm tub and leaves a message on the door to call the police. When Tony accounts for all this, he writes,

> In the letter he left for the coroner he explained his reasoning: that life is a gift bestowed without anyone asking for it; that the thinking person has a philosophical duty to examine both the nature of life and the conditions it comes with; and that if this person decides to renounce the gift no one asks for, it is a moral and human duty to act on the consequences of that decision. There was practically a QED at the end. Adrian had asked the coroner to make his argument public, and the official had obliged. (53)

Tony views Adrian's suicide as an extension of Adrian's philosophical seriousness, though the philosophical principle at stake here is not at all clear. It seems that Adrian has come to reject the potential for meaning in life, that he sees life's promise of meaning as illusory.

In Part Two of the book, Tony receives an unusual letter informing him that he has received a bequest from the estate of Mrs. Sarah Ford, Veronica's mother. Mrs. Ford has left Tony five hundred pounds, and two documents: a note from herself and Adrian Finn's diary. The note is included in the package he receives, but he discovers that Veronica is still in possession of the diary. In an attempt to recover Adrian's diary, Tony contacts Veronica again after all these years. Though their email correspondence is chilly, and she refuses to surrender the diary, she does send him a tantalizing, ambiguous page of it, a page that contains attempts to consider human relationships in terms of formulae and logic. Adrian writes,

> To what extent might human relationships be expressed in a mathematical or logical formula?... Or is it the wrong way to put the question and express the accumulation? Is the application of logic to the human condition in and of itself self-defeating? What becomes of a chain of argument when the links are made of different metals, each with a separate frangibility? 5.8 Or is "link" a false metaphor? 5.9 But allowing that it is not, if a link breaks, wherein lies the responsibility

> for such breaking? On the links immediately on either side, or on the whole chain? But what do we mean by "the whole chain"? How far do the limits of responsibility extend? 6.0 Or we might try to draw the responsibility more narrowly and apportion it more exactly. And not use equations and integers but instead express matters in traditional narrative terminology. So, for instance, if Tony. (95)

Veronica sends no more, and, in fact, there may be no more. We learn later that she might have burned the diary. We know that Adrian is looking

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to trace a train of responsibility for something, and that he might not be able to do so in logical terms. And further, he claims at the end of the passage to be drawing responsibility in a more narrow and exact sense: and this means beginning with Tony.

Responsibility for what though? Tony is, of course, stunned, and wants to know now more than ever what lies in Adrian's diary. He finally pressures Veronica into meeting him, and they meet on London's "Wobbly Bridge." After she claims to have burned the diary, she gives him an envelope and walks off. Enclosed is an earth-shaking document: a copy of the letter he had sent to Adrian earlier. It is, to put it mildly, not as he remembers it.

Up to this point, the reader has reason to believe that Tony is not the most reliable narrator; he even tells us so in several places. Now, however, the narrative opens up and reveals depths that have gone unexplored. Nothing has prepared the reader for the depth of hatred and vehemence of this letter, and Tony is taken aback by it as well. He writes, "I could scarcely deny its authorship or its ugliness. All I could plead was that I had been its author then, but was not its author now. Indeed, I didn't recognize that part of myself from which the letter came. But perhaps this was simply further self-deception." Tony suddenly comes to think that the carefully crafted story of his past life has been merely a self-deception. Now his memories are shown to be illusory, and he begins to seek, if possible, a more accurate depiction of his life. What's more, the emergence of this letter in fact drives a series of new memories that had been repressed or concealed and suggest that Tony's responsibility for past events is more significant than either he or we were aware.

Tony's resurrected memories, along with the interventions of Veronica, lead to some shocking revelations about Adrian and Tony. Given the unreliability of Tony's first-person narration, and the series of revisions to his story that he makes, the reader is not sure by the end of the book whether Tony has finally reached a more accurate recollection of what happened all those years ago. Is his final understanding of his past the truth? Or is it merely another provisional understanding, until the next memory emerges to disrupt his sense of self? Barnes provides us with enough hints in the narrative to suggest that there is much more. "There is accumulation. There is responsibility. And beyond these, there is unrest. There is great unrest" (163). The reader experiences this; the novel only gives us the "sense of an ending." While Tony's character still lives, and still remembers, and still revises, any ending will only provide the "sense" of an ending. And any resolution we as readers discern is likewise open-ended.

Tony Webster claims that, when he was younger, he and his friends imagined their lives to be like those found in novels. The disappointment he feels later in life comes from life's inability to reflect the ideals of that literature. He writes,

> I remember a period in late adolescence when my mind would make itself drunk with images of adventurousness. This

> is how it will be when I grow up. I shall go there, do this, discover that, love her, and then her and her and her. I shall live as people in novels live and have lived. Which ones I was not sure, only that passion and danger, ecstasy and despair (but then more ecstasy) would be in attendance. However... who said that thing about "the littleness of life that art exaggerates"? There was a moment in my late twenties when I admitted that my adventurousness had long since petered out. I would never do those things adolescence had dreamt about. Instead, I mowed my lawn, I took holidays, I had my life.
>
> But time... how time first grounds us and then confounds us. We thought we were being mature when we were only being safe. We imagined we were being responsible but were only being cowardly. What we called realism turned out to be a way of avoiding things rather than facing them. Time... give us enough time and our best-supported decisions will seem wobbly, our certainties whimsical. (102)

This is a stunning passage; one that reveals the heart of this novel. The story that Tony would like to tell himself about himself is that he was living life through novels, like Cervantes's Don Quixote willfully projecting adventure, romance, and ecstasy into his future. But then, the demands of maturity forced him into being realistic. He would like to think that his demands for an extraordinary life, a life heightened by images of adventure, or the high seriousness of ideas, was a phase of immaturity, giving way to the only way in which life can be lived.

However, now he sees that this story of maturity and realism is just another story and a more despairing one at that. The idea that one could move from being Don Quixote to being a sober realist is itself a story that we tell ourselves. And with this comes the fear that perhaps, in our march toward maturity, we have abandoned alternate identities that might have served us better, that might have been more true, that may have led to a more flourishing life. Tony Webster's maturity is a story he tells himself in order to deceive himself. Indeed, much of his identity is a fiction more illusory than any novel could possibly be. And when new memories arise and new facts emerge, the story must be revised and re-told.

Although Tony Webster reaches a resolution of his story in the last few pages of the book, the reader is not at all sure that this resolution is satisfactory. At the novel's end, there is reason to believe that there is more that Tony will discover later. He will most likely have to revise again. Likewise the reader him or herself is also left with a series of revisions. Our understanding of the events of the book are constantly being revised as we go along. The author cannot fully interpret his life, and we cannot fully interpret the novel. Nor can we tell what Tony will go on to discover next about himself, after this novel is over.

And yet, Barnes seems to think that this process of telling stories about oneself is inescapable. You cannot not have a narrative identity. When we think of identity, we think of that overarching story we tell about ourselves. But Barnes would caution us to never think of that identity as stable. We continue to try to unify the fragments of memory, however we can. This sounds very dreary, but one could view Barnes's novel as optimistic, in this sense: when we become locked in our own solipsism, our own stories, our own self-deceptions, we can also be jarred out of them, through the agency of others, through our own texts, and by the eruptions of our own memories. For as miserable as it is to discover the errors of our past, it is perhaps more miserable to continue to deceive ourselves about them. With such discovery lies at least the potential of transcendence. ✟

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AMERICAN SUMMER

Kneeling on an oak chair at the kitchen table
Kat pours maple syrup over blueberry pancakes
syrup the color and consistency of motor oil.

In warm morning light, she uses the liquid's
thickness to spell out his name, then writes
the word freedom. *Freedom*—the very first real

breath of it, the very first smell of it—squirms
in her slight frame, a three-ring festival to savor:
as a brown bear balancing on a giant ball roams

the breadth of her stomach, a frantic traveling
flea circus almost escapes her mouth, tightrope
walkers navigate the length of her spine. Shivers.

She thinks about yesterday, a summer day spent
in a wild, idyllic grassy field behind her grandmother's
house, how she had tasted gasoline in his sweat.

With him she drank beer that tasted more like lemonade
and recited a David Baker poem about the fourth
of July she had to memorize for junior English.

After he had left, she sank into her childhood tree
swing and leaned all the way back, feeling soft
and smooth from the alcohol—and from him. With eyes

closed, the sun made the inside of her eyelids cherry red
as it had many times before. She now knew not to open
them yet, waiting first for a cloud to pass over instead.

Jennifer Hurley

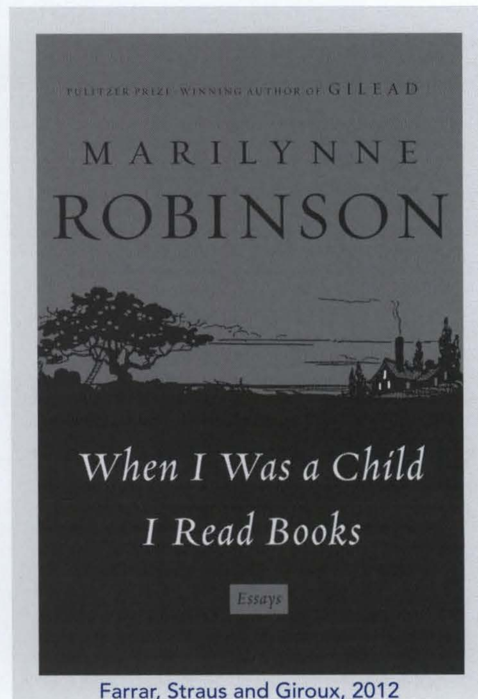
None Too Small

Agnes Howard

THE TITLE ASIDE, MARILYNNE ROBINSON does not show much of her youth beyond a few glimpses: as a child feeling out the solitary and spacious West, doing poorly in chemistry class, deciding to be a writer, and, best, browsing in the library. As a girl in an Idaho library, she chose books that were "old and thick and hard." Now when she surveys her own library she discovers community. She loves the writers of those books, esteeming even the ones who in her estimation "have struggled with words and thoughts... and lost the struggle."

In her new collection of essays, Robinson stakes out some judgments about the way things should be. Christianity obliges us to treat each other with respect. The United States should use public means to take care of things that matter, from education to care of the helpless and feckless. It is more consistent with Christianity and American habit to do so, despite what conservatives—who claim "austerity as ideology"—say. The Calvinist roots of America are not to be rued as haunting and oppressive, but kept as a source for conscientious generosity. That was the aim of John Winthrop's plea that Massachusetts be as a city on a hill. John Calvin should not pass as shorthand for the doctrine of election, but is better received as a thinker impressed by God and creation, who charges us to behave with liberality toward one another. Moses did that too. Against religious critics of the Old Testament as inferior to the New, she presents the humaneness and realism of Moses and the prophets. Against New Atheist critics of religion, she upholds the complexity and brilliance of the cosmos, which remains big and wondrous enough to accommodate God.

It seems customary in reviews of Robinson's nonfiction to introduce her as the author of the prize-winning novels *Housekeeping*, *Gilead*, and *Home*, as if it were those books, or the acclaim that came to those books, that gave her the right to hold forth on theology, politics, science, and so on. But that is not the source of her authority. She speaks from the priesthood of all believers, from her American and even specifically Western habits of thought, from the power vested by that childhood library card. While inherited, fixed ideas about what is worthy or forbidden can provide good grounding, Robinson is pleased that her region afforded her the opposite. Growing up



Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012

in the West imposed few bonds to particular tradition or specialization, so she can meet all with wondering, serious attention. Bracingly, her work gives "free appreciation of whatever comes under one's eye." Not new here but central to these essays is the premise that each person is of immense importance, no one too small for consideration. Her tenacity on this point is by itself a reason to read her fiction and nonfiction. She thinks we are all incalculably precious and interesting. She uses the tools of her craft to help us think this about ourselves and about all the people we might scant when we forget it.

Robinson nicely links a writer's insights on the high value of the individual soul with a correction of materialist cosmology. Claims that material or physical explanations account for all we are

reduce the person, flatten one's perception of self and neighbor. Here her language echoes the warning of C. S. Lewis to regard no one as an ordinary person, his reminder that "the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare." The human being is not just a bundle of appetites and self-interest and rational calculation. Robinson mourns when she sees this error leak out in writing workshops, when smart students invent boring, unrealistic characters, that fail to reflect the irreducible complexity of actual human beings. Robinson's fictional characters, in their intricacy, model something better. Her characters—and I think first of Jack Boughton and John Ames—are thoroughly layered, by turns perceptive, reflective, self-aware, and self-deceiving. The name that she finds most suitable for this complexity is "soul."

Human beings—even apparently insignificant ones, even small-towners from farm states in the middle West who hardly register on the scales of haughty easterners—are never simple or boring.

Believing in the human soul is fully compatible with accepting the decrees of science, Robinson insists, in no small part because the human brain is the most complex object known to exist in the universe, as she has read many times. The vastness of the universe does not make human beings simple in comparison. Instead, cosmic exploration might make us more interested in the puzzle of ourselves, somewhat in the style of Walker Percy's curious self-help book, *Lost in the Cosmos*, which asks why it is possible to "learn more in ten minutes about the Crab Nebula in Taurus, which is 6,000 miles away, than you presently know about yourself, even though you've been stuck with yourself all your life."

Human beings—even apparently insignificant ones, even small-towners from farm states in the middle West who hardly register on the scales of haughty easterners—are never simple or boring. I wonder that easterners (and I am born and raised one myself) still need to be told that the middle and further West of this country do not constitute a flat, placid backwater. That land was settled with a noble idea: that it should be claimed by those who worked it, and that the sweat of one's brow could yield one's own bread. The measures that "opened the West were sophisticated, considered, and benign," Robinson posits, colored by "optimism about what people were and what they might become." Her praise of the Homestead Act is appropriate, although she would do well to quote the document since she lauds it as the most lyrical legislation since Deuteronomy. While compliment is paid to far-flung towns and farms in lovely language—places to find "light, warmth, supper, familiarity" that "stanch every opening where cold and dark might pour through"—her assessment of the West prioritizes individualism. Robinson's own sympathies tip toward those who light out for the territories. Lonesome "is a word with strongly positive connotations" for the Westerner, she explains.

Robinson insists that the singularity of the individual does not necessarily conflict with the common good. Yet the tension between those priorities also animated our westward settlement. Recall the conflict running through Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House* books, between Pa, always ready to go further west where land was surely better, and Ma, prizing schools, churches, and neighbors when outposts of civilization could afford them. Robinson esteems community, though the ones she praises are often of the elective type. A large part of her definition of community is an "imaginative love for people we do not know or whom we know very slightly," at its best when broadest and generous, lacking sharp lines between those in and those out. We have seen enough bloody strife between "us" and "them" in ethnic and religious groups to make us wary of

drawing lines. But some kinds of lines are essential to community, what distinguish strong ones from casual conglomerations of people with no commitment to each other. And the sort of community that comes in John Winthrop's vision, the kind Robinson praises for its liberality, depends at least as much on plodding diligence and attention to others' needs. The hero who departs into great lonesome space leaves others behind who must fill in or lose out because of that absence. We might say it is better for us that he goes, because of the spirit that comes to all in a country where lighting out is still a real option. Western historians of the last few decades also have been keen to point out that the fabled emptiness of the West was a matter of perspective, as Robinson herself recognized as a child, feeling like the odd guest in the landscape sufficient unto itself.

A triumph of common purposes in the Midwest was the founding of Oberlin College, which Robinson praises in another essay. She first recollects John Friedrich Oberlin, eighteenth-century pastor assigned among the poor in Alsace, who built roads, bridges, libraries, and schools among his flock to improve their material and spiritual condition. Honoring that memory, Oberlin College in Ohio was founded in the 1830s by an anti-slavery cohort from Lyman Beecher's Cincinnati seminary and was governed by the era's foremost revivalist, Charles Grandison Finney. This college—not Harvard! Not even Berlin!—seems to me the most interesting institution of higher education in the early nineteenth century. It opened its doors as racially mixed and coeducational. It was unique in some respects, but in others was representative of evangelical Christian colleges founded in that period, fueled by piety and reform. Robinson uses the social uplift of figures like Oberlin and Finney to criticize a portion of our political left and right. The former suspects Christians of conspiring to theocracy; the latter frowns on use of public resources. Nineteenth-century reformers were indeed willing to use public monies for public purposes, but Robinson is unfair to conclude that conservatives now reluctant to cede common goals to the state have no alternate means to seek them. Like nineteenth-century reformers, public-minded men and women feed the hungry, house the poor, educate children, and beautify space through church and civic association as well. Robinson prizes Oberlin College finally in terms of equality. That may be less its hallmark—as certainly it seemed to Lucy Stone who, invited to write the commencement address in 1847, declined since she would not be permitted to speak in front of men—than a high confidence in the power of education to transform, cultivate, and elevate.

With characteristic eloquence and cheerful controversy, Robinson's book ranges with free appreciation over many things that come under our eyes. In addressing topics great and small, her arguments sometimes blur the distinction between the two, sometimes reverse it. Or it may be more accurate to say that nothing necessarily remains small in her estimation. As one of her famous fictional characters observes, "This is an interesting planet. It deserves all the attention you can give it." ✦

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We Need to Talk About Money

Katie Koch

With some wonderful and exciting exceptions, the Lutheran church, in all its multiple denominations and forms, is a bit of a sinking ship when it comes to finances. The parishioners at cathedral-style urban churches watch their buildings get older and crumble. As their neighborhoods and ministry styles change, the flow of offerings can't always keep up. The urban and suburban neighborhood churches are hurting too. Once they had two fulltime pastors and a robust roster of staff; now two pastors has become one, and church staff often work a small fraction of the week. Offerings still come in when folks are around, but when sports, vacations, long hours of work, and old age keep folks from church, the plate looks leaner.

Of course, the rural churches have their own stories to tell. Often, their entire communities have emptied out, along with the funds needed to keep the doors open. Most rural churches seek out first-call pastors, those lower on the pay scale. Hands and love keep the church going when the money doesn't stretch as far.

With this reality in many congregations, all the other, non-congregational outfits are hurting as well. Synods, national church bodies, para-church organizations, and general missions are all looking, hoping, and praying for more money to materialize. But what is a church to do when finances are already so tight? And how does one loosen up the flow without offending those sitting in the pew?

The current trend in church stewardship practices is to have a wide-ranging "this is not about money" conversation. Instead of about money, this conversation is about what one likes about church and faith in general. At multiple pastoral and synodical gatherings, we are encouraged to think abundantly, look on the bright side, and to wonder about and discover the call to live fully the life God seeks to give us. There are also longstanding practices of letters sent home, phone calls encouraging attendance at a celebration meal, and, at the center of it all, the mighty commitment card on which you estimate how much you think you'll be giving to church this year. All of this is dressed up as a gift to you, the gracious and benevolent donor, though the heart of it all is the need for money.

In my experiences with rural churches over the last six years, I have seen something very different. Instead of the fanfare of something that "isn't really about money," I've seen a difficult conversation unfold in multiple congregations. In each instance, the gist of it is that the council president, or another leader of the congregation, stands up and says, "We need to talk about money."

There is usually no personal sharing of experiences, at least not from the one up front; there is usually no party, meal, or celebration. In our parish, it most often has been one farmer standing in front of a room full of other farmers and families and saying, "See, this is how it is: we need more money. If you want the church to keep going, we've all got to give more and keep pitching in together." Sometimes there is a bit more conversation, sometimes a letter too, but the idea remains the same: there is a problem folks, and we've got to fix it. God gave us those fields out there and the weather to grow our crops; we need to be doing *his* work too.

Whatever form our stewardship takes, the broader issue we must confront is how we think about stewardship in general. In addition to talking about money, we might also need to have an honest conversation about the nature of sin, greed, and ourselves.

Let's be honest about stewardship. We assume that everything we have—money, possessions, etc.—is ours to hoard and ours to make decisions about. And so our stewardship, how we use what we have, becomes an outgrowth of our sinfulness. We want to hang on to our goods. When we don't truly know and trust in God's forgiveness, when we aren't hearing this word of forgiveness preached to us, then we've got to cling to something else instead, so why not grab on to a large house, a new car, or a flush bank account. If you haven't got God's word holding you afloat, you better grab the nicest thing you can find because this world can be a rough place.

We need to be telling the truth about greed and our own behavior. Jesus often did his best truth telling in parables and actions. In Luke 20 (and the matching texts in Matthew 21 and Mark 12), Jesus tells the Parable of the Wicked Tenants as he is teaching in the temple. His audience then is a mixture of disciples, average folks in the temple, and the chief priests, scribes, and elders who have taken notice of his presence and are now gathered as well.

> "A man planted a vineyard, and leased it to tenants, and went to another country for a long time. When the season came, he sent a slave to the tenants in order that they might give him his share of the produce of the vineyard; but the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Next he sent another slave; that one also they beat and insulted and sent away empty-handed. And he sent still a third; this one also they wounded and threw out. Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.' But when the tenants saw him, they discussed it among themselves and said, 'This is the heir; let us kill him so that the inheritance may be ours.' So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When they heard this, they said, "Heaven forbid!" But he looked at them and said, "What then does this text mean: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone'?" (Luke 20:9–17)

Included in this bit of scripture is some important truth telling that lends itself to thinking about stewardship. The tenants have everything given to them. The owner, God himself, plants a vineyard, sets the whole thing up, readies it to prosper and thrive, and then he hands it over to tenants,

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the temporary occupiers. They have to care for the land, but they also get to enjoy it. The owner returns for his share, but the tenants have become greedy and assumed ownership over that which is not truly theirs. They have claimed the vineyard as their own, are unwilling to give back or share, and beat up and kill the messengers in the process.

God has given us so much that is good and wonderful: his creation to consume and enjoy, intellect and resources from which we can explore the world and create, and the many items we call daily bread like food, clothing, home, family, money. But for most of us, our gut reaction is not a desire to turn it all back over to God, but a desire to claim it as our own: ours to make decisions about, ours to hoard, ours to use however we deem fit. And we are just as quick to close our ears to the messengers who come pointing back to God.

For all of our greed, true generosity will rear its head when and where we least expect it. At

my installation some years ago, we designated the offering to go to a ministry run by our synod that distributes grants to first-call pastors, paid directly to their student loans. As is much talked about these days, seminary graduates are coming out of school with more and more debt (another difficult conversation we are afraid to have), and many serve in rural congregations in which only the most basic of payment guidelines are met.

My husband and I had both benefited from such grants; so had many of our fellow pastors. It seemed only natural to take this opportunity to give toward this fund at my installation. During announcements, I shared a few words about this ministry, how it always needs more funds, how it supports the spread of God's word through preaching, and how these congregations themselves end up benefiting from it.

One of my husband's parishioners, a rather gruff and rustic older man, a manual-labor kind of guy, was apparently inspired by this ministry and promptly wrote a good-sized check to the fund. The offering was sent to the synod, which sent back a thank-you note, an information slip for tax purposes, and some further information about the purpose of this special fund.

The gruff and rustic giver decided to keep giving more and more, each time receiving in return the token thank you, tax slip, and information pamphlet. Meanwhile, back at the synod, concern grew. Why was this man giving so frequently to this ministry? Was there something wrong with him? Did he think he was being billed and he had to send in more checks? His generosity alarmed the synod-office staff to the point that the treasurer called my husband, the giver's pastor, just to check things out.

No, there was no problem, this man just saw a need and was enjoying giving. This man loved his own church, appreciated the sermons he was hearing, and upon realizing that a fund like this was actually supporting the ministry he received, he decided to give and keep giving. This man is rough around the edges; when we invited him to join us for Thanksgiving Dinner one year, he arrived with a loaded gun in his jacket pocket, because "you never know when you might need it." He's got no time for fluff, no interest in commitment cards and sitting around talking about what he loves in the world. But he's acutely aware of his own sins, of which he's got plenty, and even more aware of God's grace. He's not afraid to give back to God what was God's all along.

In the more recent conversations and trends around stewardship, we have tended to spend so much time praising ourselves and our own work in the world. We are losing sight of the vineyard owner and of our own greed in trying to run the place how we wish. We're losing sight of the truth of our hoarding, the truth of God's greatness and his offensively shocking generosity, and are instead hiding in our few acts of public service as an attempt to justify our private feelings of self-reliance and self-sustenance.

In our churches, we need to have some honest conversations about money; what it takes to run a church and to spread God's word in the various ways we seek to. We need to talk honestly about the responsibilities of Christians to step forward and make that happen by opening their wallets and their whole lives for God to use.

We also need to have some honest conversations about ourselves; that what we enjoy in this world was never ours to start with, but rather comes as a gift from God. Our churches are dwindling, and even more importantly, God's word is not being spread with the urgency it deserves, because we aren't having an honest conversation about to whom the vineyard really belongs.

Katie Koch is pastor of United and Our Savior's Lutheran Churches in rural northwestern Minnesota.

What Makes Good Friday Good

Telling the Whole Story

George C. Heider

One of the highlights of the year at Valparaiso University is the Institute for Liturgical Studies, offered from Monday through Wednesday during the week following the Second Sunday of Easter. Three years ago, in April 2009, the theme was "The Three Days." The reference was, at least in the first place, not to the duration of the conference, but to the "Triduum" that lies at the heart of Christian faith and worship: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil. For three days we gathered in worship and workshop. In song and sacrament, we were "really present" at the events of our salvation, centered on the crucifixion of Jesus, once memorably called by Dorothy Sayers "the only thing that has ever really happened" (*The Man Born to be King* [NY: Harper, 1943] 289).

Since both the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod had published hymnals only a couple of years earlier (in 2006), the Institute's leaders (not a few of whom had had a hand in one hymnal or the other) took a perspective on the celebration of The Three Days that largely reflected that of the still-new works. This was most clear to me in a panel discussion about worship on Good Friday.

Ever since the adoption of the three-year lectionary in the 1970s, the recommended emphasis for Good Friday has been on Jesus' triumph on the cross, as seen above all in the Holy Gospel for the day, the passion narrative from John. Unlike the portrait in the other three canonical gospels, the "Synoptics," John's Jesus is in command of the situation throughout. His crucifixion is portrayed as a coronation, complete with a formal presentation of the new king (Pilate's famous "*Ecce homo*" in 19:5), his being "lifted up" (cf. 12:32), and a victorious, albeit brief, inaugural address, "*Tetelestai*" ("It is finished"; 19:30). John's Jesus dies—that's for certain—but it's no "Passion of the Christ" (*contra* Mel Gibson's 2004 effort to tell the story on film, ostensibly based chiefly on John's Gospel).

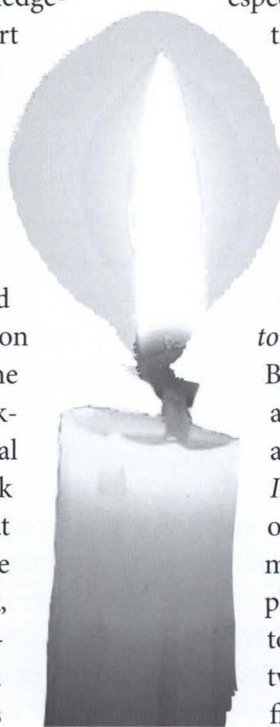
As the panel members reiterated repeatedly, an emphasis on a Johannine Good Friday is a healthy corrective to the traditional emphasis among both Roman Catholics and Protestants on Jesus' suffering and death *per se*. Just as John's Gospel is obsessed with explaining what Jesus and his story *mean*, so we do well to take care not to get buried (so to speak) in the horrific means of our salvation to the neglect of its significance.

Well and good. But it was clear that many in the audience of the panel discussion hadn't gotten the memo. Question after question asked the panel members in one way or another why their churches couldn't continue their beloved tradition of a *Tenebre* (or "shadows") service on Good Friday, in which a succession of candles are extinguished one-by-one following solemn hymns, readings, and prayers, all focused on our part in necessitating Jesus' suffering and death and the extraordinary lengths to which God went to bring humanity back to himself. The panel's responses said, in essence, that it was time to move beyond such medieval, maudlin displays to a proper focus on what makes Good Friday good.

I confess that the expressed concerns of the audience members struck a chord with me. As a youth who early on discerned a call to pastoral ministry, the *Tenebre* services of my home church had made a profound impression on me, particularly when I served as an acolyte. It was a multisensory worship-learning experience nearly on the order of a Jewish Passover Seder. On no other day of the year was the atmosphere of the worship space so palpable, particularly as the darkness overcame all but one last candle, which was taken out of the sanctuary briefly and then,

following the slamming shut of a book that communicated to our bones the full sense of how finished it was, returned still alight to foreshadow the Ressurrection. "Oh, sorrow dread, our God is dead" (to quote an old German hymn)—but not for long.

Of course, current liturgical practice (as reflected in the three-year lectionary and the "new" hymnals of the ELCA and LCMS) has by no means eliminated overt acknowledgement of Jesus' suffering and of our part in it. Ash Wednesday has risen in prominence as a day of repentance—in many ways taking on the role of the Good Friday of my youth—complete with black as a liturgical option (at least until the ELCA's *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* regrettably returned to purple as the sole choice). Passion Sunday has subsumed within itself the traditional Palm Sunday as the "kick-off" to Holy Week, providing a natural segue from "Hosanna" to "Go to Dark Gethsemane." The Holy Gospel for that Sunday is the passion narrative from the Gospel according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke in Years A, B, and C, respectively. In these accounts, the triumph is real, but hidden. In them, there is no lack of darkness. But this dark side is not much in evidence during the modern Great Three Days. (To be sure, the Altar Book of the LCMS's Lutheran Service Book contains "Tenebre Vespers" as an option, but only by contrast with the "Chief Service" prescribed for Good Friday and with John's passion as the default reading even for Tenebre.)



What has kept this panel discussion about Good Friday worship alive in my mind is that one of the hottest topics in Christian theology today is the doctrine of the atonement. The gauntlet was cast down in 1931 by Gustaf Aulén, a Swedish Lutheran bishop, who argued that the church fathers (and later Luther) had uniformly emphasized an understanding of Jesus' saving work that Aulén summed up as *Christus victor*. Only in medieval Europe, he argued, did two additional models arise: Anselm of Canterbury's "objective" understanding, stressing the death of Jesus as a sacrifice by the God-man needed to restore the sin-besmirched honor of God; and his younger contemporary Abélard's "subjective" understanding, in which the life and death of Jesus are the ultimate expression of God's love and the ultimate model for "love one another, as I have loved you." Aulén worried especially that Anselm's model had come to dominate Western Christian theological thinking and practice. Since then, but especially in the last ten years, a veritable multitude of scholars have entered the fray to debate Aulén and to take the discussion in new directions.

Contemporary Lutheran liturgics (both ELCA and LCMS) have essentially accepted and applied Aulén's argument: the Great Three Days now center on the affirmation of *Christus victor*, as powerfully expressed in John's Gospel. But a more nuanced practice is both possible and preferable (see my article: "Atonement and the Gospels," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 2/2 [2008] 259–273). Each of the four gospels emphasizes a different model of the atonement, yielding a complex, rich depth perception comparable to the optical parallax produced by our two eyes. Thus in Matthew we can see the first hints of what would become Anselm's objective model, in Luke we can see *in nuce* Abélard's subjective model, and in Mark (the odd man out, so far as Aulén's taxonomy is concerned) we see Paul's baptism-as-death-and-resurrection in the very life of Jesus. The New Testament itself understands the events of Good Friday in different and, to my mind, ultimately complementary ways. Thus, with all due respect to Aulén, there is no "classic" model of the atonement that predates the rest. Indeed, as a colleague recently reminded me, even John's Gospel is an appeal to faith, not sight (20:29, 31): the triumph is *through* the suffering and dying, not *despite* it (or else, as Ernst Käsemann worried, John's Jesus dissolves into a docetic Christ). Perhaps we would do well to allow and even encourage a corresponding breadth in our worship practices. Because by them we teach.

While the contributions of recent scholars of liturgy to the restoration of the *Christus victor*

model to our Good Friday observance must be acknowledged, I have been around long enough to know that there are fashions also in liturgy. It would neither surprise nor disappoint me, if at some future gathering of the Liturgical Institute around the subject of the Great Three Days, a learned panelist were to call for a renewed appreciation of our Western Christian heritage as it appropriates the meaning of Good Friday. An appreciation of the Eastern emphasis on John's Gospel and the triumph of the cross is good and proper, this future scholar might opine. But let's not ignore the historically Western emphasis on the cost at which that victory was won, as explicated in the Synoptics: the agony and bloody sweat; the betrayals, denials, and desertions; the public shaming; the darkness; and, above all, the literally God-forsaken loneliness that is the only word from the cross in Matthew and Mark. And, for that matter, let us not be so works-phobic that we race past the call of Luke's Jesus to take up our cross *daily* and follow him (9:23), nor miss his example of ultimate love and concern toward the women on the *via dolorosa* (23:28–31), his executioners, direct and indirect (23:34), and the repentant thief (23:43). *All* of these things are an integral part of what makes Good Friday good.

My final, gentle words of counsel to those who miss *Tenebre* are these: put away those candle stands, but remember where you put them. Their time will come again. ✥

George C. Heider is Department Chair and Associate Professor of Theology at Valparaiso University.

FORGET THE MOON

on the floors
    of warm houses, the hours

that sweep
    against our windows
    like rainwater.

Forget
    this too will pass, sun-
    tart morning

come. For now
    cicadas thrum, dark

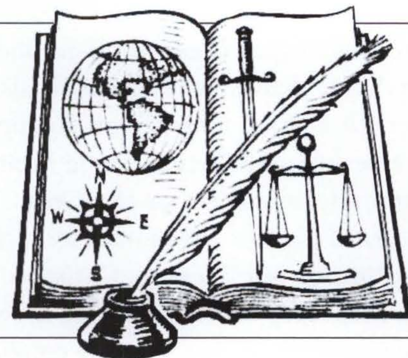
planets, indifferent
    to your shoulder's white.

Martin Cockroft

Reviewed in this issue...

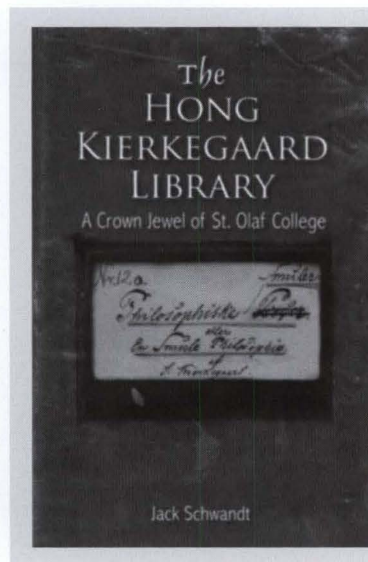
Jack Schwandt's

The Hong Kierkegaard Library



LIBRARIES, ALMOST BY DEFINITION, ARE physical spaces inhabited by books and other readable things. All these things are meant to be used by people, of course. But libraries themselves seem inanimate, not less themselves in the absence of patrons and staff. Not so the Hong Kierkegaard Library in Jack Schwandt's telling of its story.

In this highly readable account of the library's origin and growth, Schwandt does inform us of its physical contents: works by and pertaining to the prolific Dane, Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855); and he locates it on the campus of St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota.



THE HONG KIERKEGAARD LIBRARY: A CROWN JEWEL OF ST. OLAF COLLEGE
Jack Schwandt
Friends of the Kierkegaard Library, 2011
232 pages
$19.95

Reviewed by
Richard Ylvisaker
Luther College

He also narrates in engrossing detail the movement of the library's collection from one space to another in the search for a permanent home. Schwandt's focus, however—writing from the inside as a retired member of the St. Olaf faculty—is on the people for whom the Hong library has mattered: those who gave it birth and worked to cultivate and sustain it, those whose lives have been shaped by it. His story is about the way the library has, from its beginning, been the commons for this unique community, unimaginable apart from it.

The pivotal figures in the story are the late Howard and Edna Hong, she an accomplished author and speaker, he a legendary philosophy professor at St. Olaf, the two of them together creators of lauded translations of Kierkegaard's collected works, a project which won them a National Book Award in 1968. Having discovered Kierkegaard via an interest in Ibsen and been stimulated further by philosopher David Swenson at the University of Minnesota, they devoted themselves to passing on their passion for Kierkegaard: teaching, crafting authoritative translations, and working tirelessly to establish a place where Kierkegaard materials—starting with the Hongs' sprawling personal collection—could be gathered and made available and, crucially, where Kierkegaard scholars could work and come together. From its formal establishment in 1976 after sixteen years of campaigning and negotiating, and then along a winding twenty-year path to its current home on a floor of St. Olaf's main library, the Hong Kierkegaard Library has become a leading center of Kierkegaard research, hosting dozens of visiting scholars from around the world each year and regularly holding international Kierkegaard conferences. Along the

way, it developed into a site of intellectual ferment for St. Olaf students, faculty, alumni, and others from beyond the campus.

One of the marvels in the story is that this renowned library, unlike other major research libraries, is housed on the campus of an undergraduate liberal arts college in the small-town Midwest. That it could happen there is initially surprising: doesn't this "crown jewel," as Schwandt calls it, belong in an urban center or at a major university? That it isn't in such a place helps to explain the local pride which colors Schwandt's account. On reflection, however, it is hard to imagine this particular library being anywhere else. The influence of a charismatic teacher at a place where teaching matters deeply, the position of Kierkegaard himself in the history of Scandinavian and Lutheran thought, the intensely collegial nature of the library's life: where else but at a place like St. Olaf College? Even the continuing struggle to build an endowment that will make the library self-sustaining—Schwandt tells this part of the story not just as an interested observer but as a self-confessed partisan—is hard to conceive elsewhere, at least for those familiar with the ethos of church-related liberal arts colleges, where the story of competing priorities in annual budgets and recurring fund drives is an oft-told tale.

The heart of Schwandt's narrative is his enacting of the roles played by a host of individuals in the library's life story. The Hongs themselves, of course, and also college presidents, development officers, deans, board members, lawyers, faculty, students, scholars from near and far, dedicated and overworked staff, oversight committee members, and financial supporters. Their varied roles are told in rich detail, with an emphasis mostly on dedication and support but with due recognition to the foot-dragging that had to be overcome.

Among the most important figures in the story are the Kierkegaard scholars who have served as the Hong Library curators. Their work is described as multi-faceted: organizing, administering, hosting, promoting, teaching. All of this work is essential but none more so than the teaching. In its importance lies an intriguing question, for philosophically minded readers especially. One which Schwandt's account points to but does not address.

An essential feature of the agreement which established the Hong Kierkegaard Library was the stipulation that the library's curator, in addition to being a prominent Kierkegaard scholar, have an appointment in the philosophy faculty and regularly teach courses on Kierkegaard. One would like to know more about how this arrangement is working out. With the passing of Howard Hong and his era, how valuable has the Kierkegaard Library and its curator continued to be from the perspective of the philosophy department? Has the Kierkegaard influence in the department remained substantial or become peripheral? Here the library's history and that of recent philosophy come together.

Kierkegaard's importance in the development of continental European philosophy is indisputable. But in the context of Anglo-American philosophy over the past seventy-five years, he has commonly been located at the edge of philosophy proper, on the borderline with literature or theology rather than in the philosophical heartland. It would be interesting to know how these intellectual currents have been running in St. Olaf's philosophy department and its library. Even Howard Hong came to his love of Kierkegaard out of his love of literature. He went from St. Olaf to the University of Minnesota to do graduate work in English and, after returning to St. Olaf, achieved much of his fame as an inspiring teacher in a course on "Philosophical Ideas in Literature." The tensions in the library's history are intellectual as well as financial.

Another question is posed by Schwandt's mention of the library's electronic communication with scholars and his description of the work of creating an online catalogue for its collection. What will be the fate of the Hong Kierkegaard Library in the headlong rush of the Internet age? Google's ambition to digitize the world's books and place them in a universal electronic library is the antithesis to this unique scholarly community at home on the St. Olaf campus. However accessible via the Internet the library's collection might become, the thought of it being absorbed into Google Books produces a cognitive shudder.

The speed of the Google express and its global allure are likely to provide a stern test for the Hong Kierkegaard project as it moves ahead.

The final, stirring chapter brings to a climax a celebration of the library's impact on particular St. Olaf students. In this chapter, one of Kierkegaard's hallmark conceptual moves is given flesh in an extended story about a student whose sadly abbreviated life had been drawn into the world of Kierkegaard's thought and the project of the Hong Kierkegaard Library during his St. Olaf career. Awakened by Kierkegaard's limning of the tension between the pursuit of objective knowledge and the call to a deepened subjectivity—dispassionate reflection with its impersonal standards versus the existential imperative of choosing a way of life—this young man and his wife, living under the shadow of terminal illness from the inception of their marriage, were inspired to follow a path of moral and spiritual discipline that is movingly recounted by Schwandt.

In the end, the book's focus on the stories of Kierkegaard devotees turns out to be about Kierkegaard's thought as well, fittingly mediated by narrating its transformative impact on an individual reader, the audience for whom Kierkegaard professed to write. This provides a striking parallel to Schwandt's characterizaton of the Hongs' storied hospitality, from years of aiding World War II refugees to opening their home to all and sundry, hospitality that served as a counterpoint to the claims of the intellect throughout their lives and became a notable trait of the library which bears their name.

A book about the history of a library could be an arid bibliographical exercise. Schwandt's story is anything but. ✠

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Bass, Dorothy, ed. *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997.

Wright, Basil. "Filming in Ceylon." *Cinema Quarterly* 2/4 (1943): 231–32.

_____. *The Long View*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1974.

On The Poets

Martin Cockroft's writing appears in recent or forthcoming issues of *Anon*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Birdfeast*, *Connotation Press*, and *Prairie Schooner*. A recipient of a fellowship from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, he currently teaches at Waynesburg University in Western Pennsylvania, where he lives with his wife, the writer Kimberly Long Cockroft, and their three daughters.

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Jennifer Hurley received her MA in Liberal Studies from Valparaiso University and currently teaches high school English at Valparaiso High School. Her poetry, fiction, and essays have appeared in various literary publications, including *Etchings*, *Plath Profiles*, *Stickman Review*, and *Valparaiso Poetry Review*.

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