

Critique

Helping Christians Develop Skill in Discernment

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Editor's Note



Planning for maturity.

If you saw this headline in most magazines, you would probably assume that the article would raise questions about managing finances in order to prepare for retirement. I'm interested in raising a question,

but it isn't about reaching 65 or the solvency of Social Security.

My question is this: Have we prayerfully developed a plan which will provide nurture to bring us to spiritual maturity in Christ?

"Draw near to God," James writes, "and he will draw near to you" (4:8). "Be still," God says through the psalmist, "and know that I am God" (46:10). "Do not be children in your thinking," Paul tells the Corinthians in his first letter to them. "Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature" (14:20). In our busyness some things are simply taken for granted, and though God is gracious to us even when we don't deserve it, these Scriptures suggest that our maturity in Christ should not be simply assumed.

"The heart of Christianity revolves around relationships," Ronald Habermas reminds us, "with God, self, others, and creation." This means, he says, that Christian maturity can be seen as involving four components: Communion with God, Community with God's people, Character that increasingly reflects Christ, and Calling or Christian faithfulness. His simple list can be used as an outline to evaluate our pilgrimage and the course of action we might be wise to plan.

Such a plan needs to be flexible and periodically reevaluated, since our pilgrimage unfolds over time and new needs and issues will keep popping up. It needs to be balanced, so that individual study, solitude, and reading is linked

with learning with and from others, including mentors and spiritual directors. It will engage not only our minds, but our imaginations and hearts as well. It will include the biblical mandate for righteousness that applies to all believers, yet will be distinctly shaped by our own gifts, calling, and needs. It should be realistic, since moving from no time given to it to 10 minutes a week is far better than attempting a far grander plan that will soon be buried in disappointment. And it should be accountable, because if you are like me, I tend to keep drifting to what I like rather than to what I need.

Spiritual maturity involves bringing all our doing, feeling, thinking, and imagining, across all of our life and culture, intentionally under the Lordship of Christ. Which means maturity is directly related to growing in Christian discernment so we aren't simply reactionary in a fallen world or forced into the mold of the surrounding culture. Being discerning is not an isolated task we pursue when some challenge confronts us, but an engagingly attractive way of life that reflects an ever-deepening discipleship.

What all this boils down to is that we should never stop asking ourselves the question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" And though this might be difficult to believe in a consumerist culture, if we find we don't have time to plan for both retirement and spiritual maturity, it shouldn't require much thought to determine where to focus our efforts. ■

~Denis Haack

Source:

Teaching for Reconciliation: Foundations and Practice of Christian Educational Ministry by Ronald T. Habermas (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers; 2001) pp. 138-139.

Dialogue



Re: Casting lots and finding the will of God.

Send e-mail to:

letters@ransomfellowship.org

You are invited to take part in *Critique's* Dialogue. Address all correspondence to:

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letters@ransomfellowship.org

Unfortunately, we are unable to respond personally to all correspondence received, but each one is greatly appreciated. We reserve the right to edit letters for length.

Thank you for another excellent edition of *Critique* [#5 - 2004]. I enjoyed your review of Bruce Waltke's book, *Finding the Will of God*. However, I am not sure that his statement, "There is not a single incidence in the New Testament where God intervenes in response to seeking his will in a perplexing situation" is true. The end of Acts chapter 1 describes the selection of an apostle to replace Judas. Joseph and Matthias are proposed as candidates. The apostles prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs. Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias" (Acts 1:24-26). By casting lots the apostles were asking God to indicate his choice in a perplexing situation. The text infers that God did just that. There is no comment to suggest the practice was inappropriate. Indeed it was a common one in the Old Testament, a fact recognized in the proverb, "The lot is cast into the lap but its every decision is from the Lord" (Proverbs 16:33). Admittedly this is the last time casting lots is mentioned in the New Testament but at least it is a single incidence.

One could also make a case for the Magi who were given the star after asking, "Where is he who is born king of the Jews?" Or for Paul who was given the vision of a man from Macedonia after being confused as to where to go next in his missionary travels. Scripture seems to indicate that God has a multiplicity of ways of revealing his will to his people in perplexing situations. I suppose the moral of the story is that we have to be discerning when reading books on God's will from professors in reformed seminaries! Keep up the good work.

C. John Steer
Rochester, MN

Denis Haack responds:

You raise a good question, John. Let me allow Dr. Waltke to respond:

"There are no examples of explicitly seeking or finding God's will after Acts 1:24-26, in which the disciples drew lots to select Matthias as a replacement for Judas. There are dreams, visions, and revelations after this, but never in the context of explicitly seeking God's will. From this point onward it is not divination (seeking to probe the divine mind) but revelation given by God to His people...

"God's method of revealing His mind with regard to specific choices in a perplexing situation before Pentecost is not normative for the church... If there were even one verse after Pentecost that talked about divining God's will, then I would be in favor of all this divination business. But there is simply no statement in the New Testament that teaches me to find God's will in this sense, nor can I find any instances in Scripture of the early church practicing divination after the Holy Spirit has come... Therefore I contend that we need to redefine the idea of finding God's will. We need to drop entirely the concept of divination, which is not appropriate for Christians. We should reformulate our ideas and focus on what the Scriptures teach about the way our God guides His elect saints to do His pleasure."

Finding the Will of God is a thoughtful study, and even if you find that you disagree with Waltke, working through the book will provoke good reflection.

Can We Vote Christianly?

Unless you really like politics, it's rather hard, sometimes—let's be honest—to get very enthusiastic about most elections. The constant barrage of commercials, the phone calls at dinner time purporting to be surveys which obviously aren't, the endless polling and predictions—all of it can make the entire process seem rather tawdry. More importantly, some of us find that none of the candidates accurately mirror our concerns, values, and convictions. Wouldn't it be nice if ballots included a third option?:

- Candidate A.
- Candidate B.
- None of the above.

But since that option isn't open to us, some of us may consider abstaining—at least from some races—and hope that none of our political-activist friends asks whether we fulfilled our duty as citizens.

So, how should we vote when none of the candidates really represent our beliefs and positions? When we agree

with one candidate on several important matters and with their opponent on several others?

One solution to that dilemma (for Roman Catholics voters, anyway) is proposed by Catholic Answers. In their "Voters Guide" they



say that on most issues our political leaders are simply involved in "selecting the most effective strategy among several morally good options." The choice involved isn't between good and evil, but between which practical approach will best solve the issue being addressed. Good people will disagree over such things, and since good and evil are not at stake, political compromise is valid. On the other hand, they insist, there are five issues which are far more foundational, "non-negotiable

moral principles that do not admit of exception or compromise." Here the choice is between right and wrong. The five issues Catholic Answers lists are abortion, euthanasia, embryonic stem cell research, human cloning, and homosexual marriage. Voters, the Guide instructs,

"should avoid to the greatest extent possible voting for candidates who endorse or promote intrinsically evil policies. As far as possible, you should vote for those who promote policies in line with the moral law... Do not vote for candidates who are right on lesser issues but who will vote wrongly on key moral issues... Where ever a candidate endorses positions contrary to non-negotiable principles, choose the candidate likely to do the least harm. If several are equal, evaluate them based on their views on other, lesser issues."

All of which raises questions that discerning Christians would be wise to consider. ■

~Denis Haack

Source: Online Voters Guide (www.catholic.com/library/voters_guide.asp)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever used a Voters Guide prepared by an organization? Which one? How helpful did you find it?
2. What are the strengths of such Voters Guides? What are the weaknesses?
3. How do you tend to choose which candidate to vote for? How certain are you that your approach represents Christian faithfulness? If you do not vote, why don't you?
4. What is your response to Catholic Answers' distinction between "non-negotiable moral principles" and all other issues? Why?
5. To what extent do you agree with their list of "non-negotiable moral principles?"
6. If as Scripture says, "the earth is the Lord's" (Psalm 24:1), and if part of the reason for Israel's exile in the Old Testament was their failure to care for the land (2 Chronicles 36:21), is it not essential to include caring for the creation in our list of "non-negotiable moral principles" as Christians?

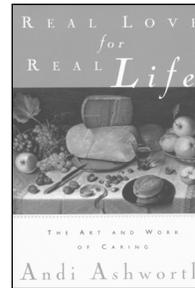
Caring for Beauty

QUESTIONS CONT...

7. Is it ever possible that during certain periods or for certain offices a candidate's view of such foundational moral principles is relatively unimportant because they will not face decisions based on them? In that case, might it be more faithful to vote for someone who is correct in other areas, even though they hold moral positions which are contrary to Christian righteousness?
8. To what extent does Christian faithfulness imply that believers will vote for the same candidates? Can equally discerning and godly Christians cast opposite votes? Why or why not?
9. Since we live in a post-Christian and increasingly pluralistic culture, is it possible that the day will arrive when the most Christian choice, the most radically faithful approach will be to refrain from voting? If not, why do you imagine that there will always be candidates which reflect biblical morality? If yes, how will we know that day has arrived?
10. Martin Luther is reported to have said, "Better be ruled by a smart Turk than a dumb Christian." (Note: Luther used "Turk" to mean "Moslem.") Do you agree? Why or why not? Under what circumstances would you vote for a non-Christian instead of their Christian opponent?
11. To what extent is the personal faith of a candidate crucial in choosing who you will vote for? Personal character and morality? In some Western European countries, sexual infidelity is not considered a factor in determining whether someone is fit for political office. If you think personal character or morality is important in choosing a candidate, how would you vote if both candidates engaged in sexual practices you believe immoral? Where would these considerations fit in your list of "non-negotiable moral principles?"
12. How do you educate yourself politically? Is it sufficient for faithfulness? What books have you read which explore political citizenship from the perspective of Christian faith? What news and political commentary do you expose yourself to: that with which you already agree, or thoughtful presentations of opposing positions? Why?

An Excerpt from *Real Love for Real Life*.

One of the ways God's image is reflected in us is through our need for beauty. We were created to love the beautiful. Beauty gives pleasure to the senses, lifts the mind and spirit, and brings us to a place of longing for the Creator of all beauty.



Caring often means bringing beautiful things into people's lives—cutting flowers for them, cleaning their house, taking them to see the ocean. Our desire for beauty is a reflection of a God who loves the beautiful. God has set us down in a crazy, amazing world full of breathtaking sights and sounds and scents and textures, most of which seem to exist only for his pleasure and ours. When beauty is offered as a gift of love, what is seen or heard or tasted goes past the surface and into the heart.

But with such a high value placed on speed and getting things done in the quickest way possible, the creation of beauty is not 'practical' in our culture today... The movement toward the ugly and even the grotesque can be seen and heard in music, film, and fashion, in ways we treat the body, and in attitudes and ideas about our humanity. In a multitude of ways, through cheap imitations and settling for substitutes, we become divorced from the way we're made.

In small and large ways, when we create beauty—in our environment, relationships, music, cooking, poetry, and celebrations—we push back the effects of the Fall and

express our hope for the new heaven and new earth that God promises. When we give artful attention to detail, we point people to a truer and better reality. We remind others of who they are and what they were made for. We bring hope and inspiration. This

is a way of caring.

A part of reflecting God's beauty is recognizing and celebrating the beauty of his character. We serve a God of creativity, sacrifice, and extravagance. We, too, are called to reflect these characteristics as we live out the truth of what it means to give care.

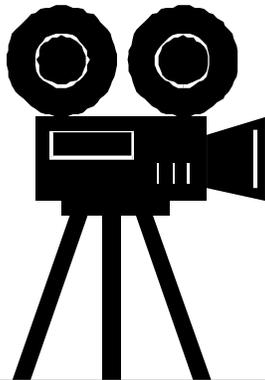
I lived for years around artistic types—musicians, painters, photographers—without ever realizing that I myself had creative abilities. I wasn't an artist in the classic sense; I couldn't paint a picture to save my life... Recognizing that God calls me to be creative because he is creative stirred my imagination and cultivated my creativity. Caring work is a creative and artistic expression of who we are in Christ. God calls us to care imaginatively, to ask, How can I go the extra mile in this situation? How can I more creatively love this person? How can I reflect my own artistic individuality in how I relate and act? ■

~excerpted, Andi Ashworth

Excerpted from: *Real Love for Real Life: The Art and Work of Caring* by Andi Ashworth (Colorado Springs, CO: Shaw Books, WaterBrook Press; 2002) pp. 13-15.

The Darkened Room

Large's Ark



A review of Garden State

by Denis Haack

You know that point in your life when you realize the house you grew up in isn't really your home anymore? The idea of home is gone. Maybe that's all family really is. A group of people who miss the same imaginary place.

~Large

Garden State

Credits:

Starring:
Zach Braff
(Andrew Largeman)
Natalie Portman
(Sam)
Ian Holm
(Gideon Largeman)
Peter Sarsgaard
(Mark)
Method Man
(Diego)
Jean Smart
(Carol)

Director:
Zach Braff

Screenwriter:
Zach Braff

Producers:
Michael Shamberg
Stacey Sher
and others

Original Music:
Nick Drake

Cinematographer:
Lawrence Sher

Costume Designer:
Michael Wilkinson

Runtime: 109 min.
Rated R for language,
drug use and a scene of
sexuality.

When Zach Braff wrote the script for this film, which he also directed, *Garden State* was not his first choice for the title. He wanted *Large's Ark*. If you haven't seen the film, that won't mean much, but if you have, it will bring to mind a scene that acts as a metaphor for the entire film. It is also a metaphor which tends to define the postmodern generation.

Andrew Largeman, played by Braff, is known as "Large" to his friends. Estranged from his father, he comes home from LA where he barely exists as a waiter and would-be actor to New Jersey for the funeral of his mother. He reconnects with Mark, a high school friend, and falls in love with Sam, played with delightful quirkiness by Natalie Portman. On the last day of his visit, Mark takes Large and Sam on a quixotic but purposeful journey which ends at what seems to be the end of the world. They're in an old rock quarry where there is a great crevasse, a seemingly bottomless crack dropping down into darkness. Perched on the very edge of the abyss is a boat. When they knock on the door, we feel a sense of dread wondering who would choose to live in such an unlikely place. The door is opened by a gentle man with a child securely held in his arms. He

invites them into the warmth of his home, out of the pouring rain, where his wife serves tea, and where the three friends catch a glimpse of their lovely commitment to one another in what is the healthiest relationship depicted in the movie. Hired to guard the place, each night the man goes over the edge on ropes, exploring the crevasse. When they leave, Large, Sam, and Mark stand in the rain at the edge and scream down into the bottomless hole. "Good luck exploring the infinite abyss," Large tells the man living in the ark. "Thanks," he replies. "Hey, you too."

As I watched *Garden State* it was hard not think of other films, each of which provides a brief glimpse into a generation. Just as *The Graduate* (1967), *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986), and *Reality Bites* (1994) captured something of the fears, hopes and values of a generation, so *Garden State* offers a window into the broken, yearning reality of the postmodern generation. Braff clearly wants us to think of *The Graduate*, since there are a number of allusions to the film, and the soundtrack includes Simon and Garfunkel singing a mournful "The Only Living Boy in New York." In fact, the soundtrack is impressive—enough to make you want to purchase the CD. When Braff sent his script to people before making the film, he included a copy of the songs, all of which he had chosen.

Garden State is not a flawless film, which probably isn't surprising since it represents Zach Braff's writing and directorial debut. There is one scene that seems utterly gratuitous. And though the story does a good job at letting us into Large's life, his growth as a character, which is central to the plot, has to be compressed into a time-frame that is unrealistic. Still, it's a fine film, worth watching—a movie which seems to cry out to be discussed.

We have often stated our conviction

that the postmodern generation, in its music and films, demonstrates a deep spiritual yearning. Whether that yearning is expressed as a search for meaning, or significance, or transcendence, it always seems to come down to questions about relationships: “In the end, will anyone be there, truly there, for me? Is there anyplace I can call home?” With poignancy and sly ironic wit, *Garden State* is about young adults asking those questions. Their yearning displays an uneasy sense of quiet desperation, since their search is framed by fragmented homes, alienated relationships, and lives made numb by the mediocrity of a culture in which no one can be sure whether hope isn’t simply a cosmic joke. The pain which Large feels deep within his soul is real, born of tragedy in the face of death. “This is life,” he says. “This is it.” “I know it hurts,” Sam replies. “But it’s life and it’s real. And

sometimes it f***ing hurts, but it’s life, and it’s pretty much all we got.” As love blossoms between Large and Sam, they feel the stirring of hope. “Safe,” Large tells her, “when I’m with you I feel safe...like I’m home.”

It should come as no surprise to Christians that the postmodern generation seeks to fulfill its yearning in relationships. It’s not good to be alone, and the love between a woman and man speaks of a greater relationship which we were created to enjoy forever. The gospel invites us into that relationship, and promises a Father who hurries out to welcome us into his arms.

It should also come as no surprise if the postmodern generation doubts our Story. “You have reason to doubt it,” we can say to them, “because all around you the most sig-



The postmodern generation seeks to fulfill its yearning in relationships.

nificant relationships in your life have fragmented. But the Story we are telling is real. And to show it’s real, even though we will never manage it perfectly, we will prove its reality by being there for you ourselves.”

The postmodern generation is asking the right questions, but not finding answers that are sufficient. How will we respond? ■

~Denis Haack

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What was your initial or immediate reaction to the film? Why did you react that way?
2. In what ways were the techniques of film-making (casting, direction, lighting, script, music, sets, action, cinematography, editing, etc.) used to get the film’s message(s) across, and to make the message plausible or compelling? In what ways were they ineffective or misused?
3. What role does drugs play in the story, and in the lives of the characters? What role does casual sex play?
4. With whom did you identify in the film? Why? With whom were we meant to identify? If you identified with none of the characters, why do you think that is? Discuss each main character and their significance to the story.
5. Compare *Garden State* with *The Graduate*, *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off*, and *Reality Bites*. How are they similar? Different?
6. What is the message(s) of the film? Consider how the film addresses themes such as: what’s wrong with the world, and the solution; the fragmentation of life in our busy, pluralistic world; the significance of being human; the meaning of life; and the significance of relationships and love.
7. What is attractive here? How is it made attractive? How effectively was humor used? Discuss the impact of the musical score. What can you as a Christian affirm? What would you challenge? Why? How can we talk about these things in a winsome and creative way in our pluralistic culture?
8. What insight does the film give into the way postmodern people see life, meaning, and reality? How can you use the film as a useful window of insight for Christians to better understand our non-Christian friends and neighbors? How can Christians develop true incarnational friendships with a postmodern generation who are caught in such a fragmented, numbed reality?

Need more questions? Find them at www.RansomFellowship.org/M_GardenState.html

Marriage in

Part one of two. Adapted from a lecture given by Mardi Keyes

Marriage is universal. As Christians, we know why. Genesis tells us that God created it at the very beginning of his creation of humanity. God's creation of the first man and woman is inseparable from his creation of marriage and the first societal institution—the family. Genesis tells us that marriage was created because God thought, “it was not good that the man should be alone.”¹ So God made a woman, to be a corresponding, suitable partner for the man. When Adam saw her, he was delighted, and burst forth with a spontaneous doxology. “Wow! Bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh! Finally, here is someone like me, one of my own kind!” Proverbs tells us “whoever finds a wife, finds a good thing.”

Then why is it that everywhere we look, we see evidence of the misery marriage can produce? Tolstoy described it as “hell.”² Even in the Bible there is plenty of evidence of marital misery, unfaithfulness, manipulation, deceit, cruelty, abuse and sorrow. If there ever was a marriage “made in heaven” or “made by God,” it was the marriage of Adam and Eve. Yet even before the birth of their first child (i.e., the “honeymoon” period), Adam was blaming God for giving him this troublesome woman.

What gives? Marriage is a good gift of God. And like all of God's gifts, it can function as an idol, or God substitute. Marriage can also function as a means of serving *other* idols like the State, or the reproduction of children, or socio-economic success, political advancement, romantic love, sexual fulfillment or individual happiness. When marriage does

function as an idol or as a means of achieving other idolatrous goals, it can only fail and bring disappointment, even cynicism. But when marriage is allowed to be what God created it to be, and to serve the purposes God created it for, it can be an enormous blessing to the married couple, their children, to everyone who interacts with them and to society as a whole.

Despite widespread cynicism about marriage in the United States today;

There are subtle and not so subtle ways in which our culture's ideas about marriage have changed over the years.

despite the dramatic rise in divorce, cohabitation and unwed parenthood, most Americans rank “a happy and lasting marriage” as extremely important on their list of life goals. But there are subtle and not so subtle ways in which our culture's ideas about marriage have changed over the years, and those changes have undermined the very thing we say we want.

The Ancient Greco-Roman World

The Ancient Greco-Roman World was the cultural, political and legal background to the New Testament and early Christian understandings of marriage. In that world, the purpose of marriage was procreation. In Classical Greece, a father would betroth his daughter to a bridegroom with the words: “I pledge (my daughter) for the purpose of producing legitimate children.”³

Since the official purpose of marriage was procreation, men were encouraged to divorce their wives for infertility, so they

could remarry and bear citizen children for Rome.⁴

Slaves were not citizens, so their procreation was irrelevant to the state and they could not be legally married. This had serious consequences for the Christian Church. Within the Greco-Roman upper classes, far more women than men were converted to Christianity, so the only available Christian men for them to marry were slaves. Second and

third century pagan attacks on the Christians refer to the problem of Christian women being forced to marry pagans or to cohabit with Christian slaves in a kind of common-law marriage. Roman civil law prohibited this, and it was acknowledged by the Church only by Bishop Callistus, who had himself been a slave before becoming bishop of Rome in the early third century.⁵

It is interesting that Priscilla is an upper class Roman name, and Aquila is a common slave name. It is likely that he was a freedman, and that this New Testament couple formed an inter-class marriage!

Under Roman Law, during the N.T. period, the oldest male in a Roman family had the power to make and break his children's marriages. This was usually done to improve the economic or political status of the family. Over time, however, the couple's consent gained legal and social weight, and it became more difficult for a father to force his children to marry or divorce against their will. While no one expected them to be “in love” at marriage, mutual affection was seen as desirable and it was expected that love would grow after marriage.

Western Culture

at a L'Abri Conference in Rochester, MN, February 2004.

The Middle Ages (1100 to 1500)

During the early middle ages, the Catholic Church gradually took over the jurisdiction of marriage. Catholic teaching carried on the tradition of the most ascetic of the fourth century church fathers, who had been strongly influenced by Greek dualism, which denigrated the body in contrast to the spirit. They taught that there was a radical disjunction between "spiritual" vocations, like teaching theology and "secular" vocations, including marriage and family life. They also taught that the only purpose of sexual relations was procreation, and that *enjoyment* of sex was sinful.

Pope Leo IX condemned clerical marriage in 1049. But in the early Middle Ages, a significant number of priests lived with concubines, and some were married, even though marriage disqualified men from rising in the church hierarchy.

The Church's teaching could not reconcile the mundaneness of marriage and family life with the work of a cleric and scholar. Denis de Rougemont dates what he calls "the rebirth of eros" to 1118 and the century in which love was first recognized as a passion worth cultivating.

Romantic love and attraction have existed in all times and places. What else could the writer of Proverbs be referring to when he marvels at the "way of a man with a maid (young woman)?"⁶ He says it is a mystery "too wonderful" for him. Romantic love is universal, but cultural conditioning plays an enormous part in its meaning and expression. A very particular form of romantic love began in Europe in the twelfth century French aristocratic courts and has profoundly impacted Western culture ever since. It was named "courtly love," and was made fashion-

able and spread by the songs and poems of the troubadours.

From its birth, this kind of romantic love was emphatically *not* considered a basis for marriage. As the twelfth century writer Andreas Capellanus wrote in *The Art of Courtly Love*, "Everybody knows that love can have no place between husband and wife."⁷ Rather, it could only occur between an unmarried man and another man's wife. Its model was the perfect knight and the inaccessible idealized lady, usually the wife of a king (i.e., Lancelot and Queen Guinevere,

Romantic love (eros) differs dramatically from Christian love (agape) which is active love of your neighbor as yourself. Marriages do not survive without large daily doses of agape love.

the wife of King Arthur.). It should either go sexually unconsummated or be adulterous.

In his book *Love in the Western World*, Denis de Rougemont writes that love defined by this tradition "feeds on obstacles, short excitations, and partings." It is "unstable" and "though it may overcome many obstacles, it almost always fails at one. That is the obstacle constituted by time."⁸ This is why it is incompatible with marriage, an institution set up to be lasting, no matter what time brings along, including all the regular unromantic chores like taking out the garbage and changing diapers, or dealing with a failed septic system that has backed up into your basement (this has happened to us four times in fifteen years!), and the challenges of aging, economic losses, accidents, serious illnesses and death.

De Rougemont argues that romantic love, as defined by this tradition, is also incompatible with happiness. It is more in love with love, with passion and with being in love, than with the beloved. It is intrinsically unfulfillable, because its fire is only kept burning by obstacles, and it often ends in death, as in the myth of Tristan and Iseult, Romeo and Juliet, Anna Karenina, Madame Bovary, Elvira Madigan, or Dr. Zhivago.

Romantic love, or *eros*, so defined, differs dramatically from Christian love, *agape*, which is active love of your neighbor as yourself. Marriages do not survive without large daily doses of agape love. If de Rougemont is correct, the cultivation of romantic love began in Europe as a reaction against Christianity, and in particular to its doctrine of marriage, which had become an object of contempt. These ideas came from people, who though nominally Christian, were still pagan in their spirits.⁹

The Reformation

What was the impact of the Protestant Reformers on love and marriage? They are our spiritual forbears, whose allegiance to Scripture before Church and Tradition transformed marriage and family life in ways we now take for granted.

Few people have influenced the institution of marriage more than Martin Luther.¹⁰ In letters and tracts, he directly challenged the Catholic Church's insistence on the celibacy of priests. He rejected the Greek dualism that idealized virginity. He argued from Scripture that those not gifted with chastity should marry. Otherwise, they would either be tormented by desire or commit sex-

continued on next page...

ual sin; and marriage was a purer state than either of those alternatives. He recommended marriage to everyone, both priest and layman, and taught that mutual love between husband and wife was a God-given mandate, and couples should study to be pleasing to each other.

In 1525, at age 42, Luther decided to practice what he preached, and he married 26-year-old Katherina von Bora, a runaway nun from the Cistercian convent. Convinced by the ideas of the Reformation, Katherina and eleven sister nuns had decided to renounce their vows. Luther arranged for them to escape, hidden in a wagon among herring barrels. After a dangerous journey, through German countryside divided by fierce religious factions, they were delivered to the monastery where Luther was a monk and professor of biblical theology.

Luther felt responsible to find husbands or suitable positions for them and all were provided for but Katherina. Katherina refused to accept Luther's choice for her and humbly sent word to Luther that she *would* be willing to marry his friend Dr. Amsdorf or Luther himself. After some thought, he decided that marriage would give a status to Katherina and a testimony to his faith. He summed up his reasons for marrying with three points: "to please his father (who wanted progeny), to spite the pope and the Devil, and to seal his witness before martyrdom."¹¹

Martin and Katherina's marriage did not begin as a "love match" but they came to love each other deeply. Luther wrote "I am not infatuated, but I cherish my wife," and "I would not exchange Katie for France or for Venice, because

God has given her to me, and other women have worse faults." Luther wrote that a Christian is bound to love his neighbor as himself. His wife is his nearest neighbor; therefore she should be his dearest friend. He wrote, "The first love is drunken. When the intoxication wears off, then comes the real marriage love... Union of flesh does nothing (by itself). There must also be union of manners and mind. Katie, you have a husband that loves you."¹²

To Katherina and Martin, there was

Few people have influenced the institution of marriage more than Martin Luther. He challenged the Catholic Church's insistence on the celibacy of priests and rejected the Greek dualism that idealized virginity.

nothing "unspiritual" about raising children that made it incompatible with teaching theology. Luther believed that due to the exacting nature of family life, it was a far better training ground for character (daily patience, charity, fortitude and humility) than a monastery ever could be. And he thoroughly enjoyed his home.

Here's one other story from the Reformation period. Widbrandis Rosenblatt (1504-1564) outlived four husbands (three of them reformers), giving birth, in total to eleven children and raising more children from her husbands' previous marriages.

While grieving over the death of her third husband, who died of the plague, Widbrandis was summoned to the deathbed of another reformer's wife, Elisabeth Butzer. The dying woman pleaded with Widbrandis to marry her

soon-to-be-widowed husband. Widbrandis married Butzer the following year and Butzer wrote of his appreciation for his second wife, while still grieving over the death of Elizabeth.

This story is not unusual. For most of history, marriage has been a practical necessity. Until industrialization, economic work has centered in the home and children were needed to share the work. When a husband or wife died (which happened frequently), the living spouse had to find a new spouse as soon as possible, to share the work and parenting.

The Sixteenth & Seventeenth Centuries

Despite their reputation, the Puritans¹³ were anything but squeamish about sex. The New England clergy, the most Puritanical of the Puritans, believed that sexual intercourse was a human necessity and marriage the only proper context for it. They taught that sexual love is good in itself, not only for procreation, and they discouraged abstinence. William Whateley's conduct book, written in 1623, encouraged "mutual dalliances¹⁴ for pleasure's sake" in bed, with wives having the same rights to initiate sex and experience sexual satisfaction as their husbands!

Being totally realistic about the power of sexual temptation, especially in the young, the Puritans encouraged early marriage. It was the parents' duty to find suitable husbands and wives for their children. "Suitability" must include spiritual compatibility, mutual attraction and affection. William Perkins wisely warned, "He or she who marries where they affect not, will affect where they marry not!" In other words, you'd better

marry someone you're attracted to, otherwise, you will surely be attracted to someone you're *not* married to. While economic concerns were normal in matchmaking, Puritan ministers forbade parents to arrange marriages purely for economic gain or against the will of their children.

There was only one limitation the Puritans placed on marital affection and sexual relations: they must not interfere with religion. The chief purpose of humanity is to glorify God, and all "earthly delights" and pleasures must serve that end, not compete with it. John Cotton wrote, "Husband and wife must not become so transported with affection that they look at no higher end than marriage itself."¹⁵ In other words, marital love is not to be treated as an idol.

The Protestant Reformation introduced two important characteristics of marriage that were continued by the Puritans.

First, the Reformation challenged the dualism between "sacred and secular" and "spirit and body" that placed theological study, the church, monasticism and celibacy above marriage, family, sexuality and child-bearing. It restored the biblical vision that *all* of life is spiritual, except for sin; and in the process, dramatically raised the status of marriage *and the wife*, and helped create a new model of family relations, which is still with us. Also, love (including sexual attraction) now belonged within marriage, rather than in romanticized adulterous affairs.

Second, the Reformers and Puritans also shared a vision of marriage which serves a higher purpose—the glory of God and his Kingdom. These Reformation couples understood themselves as companions and partners in nurturing their children's moral development and in creating a Christian community. Encouraged to read the Bible in Luther's vernacular translation, they began a tradition of mixed-gender Bible study that is still with us.

And their generous practice of Christian hospitality was formidable, welcoming orphans, extended family, traveling teachers, and religious refugees into their homes, often for long periods of time. These families took literally Jesus' teaching that as we welcome the needy and the stranger in his name, we welcome Jesus Himself.

The Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries

By the late eighteenth century, it was almost universally assumed that young people would decide for themselves who to marry, though parental consent was still important.

Mutual attraction was increasingly valued. Romantic love and the romantic novel

The Reformation challenged the dualism between "sacred and secular" and "spirit and body."

grew together after 1780. Initially, this was considered dangerous, but gradually, romantic love became a respectable motive for marriage among the propertied classes. By the 1850s, the vision of romantic love elaborated in books and magazines became the *only* acceptable basis for marriage, more important than family connection, financial prospects or religious affiliation.

While young people enjoyed their increased freedom to marry for love, this new ideal brought problems of its own. Successful courtship now depended on "falling in love" which could not always be arranged. A young minister told a friend in 1797, "I now must wait to be impelled by some (irresistible) impulse."¹⁶ Young people struggled to recognize what the feeling of love is so they might not mistake it for other feelings. Ellen Rothman writes, "Efforts to measure love involved a series of negative calculations: it must be 'more compelling than friendship,

more lasting than passion, more serious than romance."¹⁷

But where does that leave us today, with our high divorce rates on the one hand and our yearning for lasting relationships on the other? Is there a better option than cynicism or idolatry? In part two, we'll reflect on the confusion and contradictions regarding marriage in our society today, and explore a biblical perspective of marriage. ■

~Mardi Keyes

To be continued...

Mardi Keyes co-directs the Southborough, MA, branch of L'Abri Fellowship with her husband Dick. Copyright © Mardi Keyes 2004

Endnotes

¹Genesis 2:18

²Denis De Rougemont, *Love in the Western World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 300

³Marilyn Yalom, *The History of the Wife* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), quoted on p. xiii, p. 22

⁴Pomeroy, p. 159

⁵Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroad, 1987) p. 262

⁶Proverbs 30:18

⁷"The Emergence of the Modern American Family,"

Carl Degler, p. 70

⁸*Love in the Western World*, p. 292

⁹*Ibid*, p. 73-74

¹⁰Yalom, p. 98-105

¹¹Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (A Mentor Book, Abington Press, 1955) p. 223-225

¹²*Ibid*, p. 236

¹³*Ibid*, pp. 108-145

¹⁴playful flirtation

¹⁵Edmund S. Morgan, "The Puritans and Sex," in *The American Family in Social Historical Perspective*, p. 312

¹⁶Ellen K. Rothman, *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America* (Cambridge MA: Harvard U. Press, 1987), p. 31

¹⁷*Ibid*, p. 36

Creative, Caring

Being discerning Christians includes answering the question, “How can we talk about and live out the truth and reality of God’s word in a way that can be understood in our pluralistic world?” Our talking and our living are to demonstrate the creative, attractive, and radical vitality of the gospel. Neither is more important than the other; they are, rather, the two sides of biblical faithfulness.

We are called by God to live here, now, which means we must be eager to explore what faithfulness looks like in our world. Models of faithfulness which were developed in a much less pluralistic and a much more Judeo-Christian world were useful then, but this is now. Though the basic issues are unchanged, different questions are asked and different yearnings are expressed.

Living in Babylon rather than Jerusalem means that we must adopt the posture of a missionary. And that means we must determine to not merely repeat approaches developed in another time and place, but to faithfully listen, love, and engage the time and place to which we are called. Thankfully we are not alone, but are part of a company of exiles in Babylon. Not only does this provide the opportunity for meaningful community, we can learn from one another and lean on one another’s gifts. God is faithful to raise up creative voices within the community of his people who can share their lives and stories in a way which helps us see our own more clearly in light of the Story revealed in Scripture. These voices are worth attending to with care, because they help

us see the unchanging faith in new ways, and give permission to be creative about what it means to be faithful.

Two such voices for our time and place are Charlie Peacock and Andi Ashworth. This husband and wife team are more than just partners in life, work, and ministry—though they are that in

ways few couples get to enjoy in this fragmented world. For two decades they have worked side by side in their own recording studio and music production company. Together they remodeled an old clapboard church in Nashville, TN, turning it into



Charlie and Andi share their lives and help us see more clearly what Christian faithfulness can look like in this time and place.

The Art House—a refreshingly creative center for hospitality, art, and biblical study—which is also their home. It is there—and in their books—that they share their lives and help us see more clearly what Christian faithfulness can look like in this time and place.

A New Way

In *New Way to Be Human*, Charlie Peacock goes back to square one—to the gospel Story itself—and takes us through a creative and biblical exploration of what that Story means for the story of our lives. His thesis is so simple (and provocative) that it can be easily stated in a single question:

Since the Story of Jesus is the most creative, attractive, and life-transforming one that’s ever been imagined, shouldn’t our lives and witness reflect that reality? His answer is Yes. As he lets us see his own life, in good times and bad, we catch glimpsers of grace and the hope that we too can escape the weary clichés of a ghettoized Christianity.

Charlie begins by listening to a young Christian who is torn by the disconnect that exists between the claims of Christ and the reality of modern Christianity. He then poses a question that most evangelicals would be hesitant to consider. He points out that a non-Christian could expect to hear something similar to this if a Christian witnessed to them:

All people are sinners who have fallen short of the glory of God. In order to get to heaven and enjoy eternal life, your sins must be forgiven. You can only be forgiven if you confess to God that you are a sinner and receive his free gift of salvation by accepting Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior. Jesus died on the cross for you and took upon himself the just punishment for your sins. He was buried and rose again on the third day. The grave could not hold him. Having conquered sin and death, he ascended to the right hand of the Father where he is now ever ready to intercede for you if you will accept him and receive him as your Lord and Savior.

Those precise words may not always be used, but it would probably be the heart of the message.

We are used to critiquing such presentations by asking whether they are

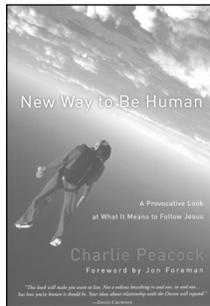
Faithfulness

true, but Charlie realizes that this is only part of what is at stake. After all, witnessing is not just presenting a set of ideas but introducing someone to a Person. It is not just listing some propositions to which they should give assent, but telling a Story which will provide meaning and shape to the story of their life. So, Charlie asks, is this presentation “a truthful, comprehensive enough controlling story to define the life of someone who professes to be a student-follower of Jesus? The question isn’t whether it is true, but is it the whole truth and nothing but the truth? I don’t think it is.”

I assure you that Charlie is not wandering from the gospel, but calling us to embrace it with greater seriousness. He is not compromising the truth, but insisting that our view of truth is far narrower than that which is revealed in the Scriptures and in Christ. By standing against the modernist tendency to reduce the gospel to a formula,

he reminds us that we have an attractive Story to tell. A Story of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation. A Story of freedom and grace which captures the imagination, renews the mind, and brings redemption to every part of life and culture.

In *New Way to be Human* Charlie Peacock helps us to step back and relish anew the amazing Story



This is a book by an artist who has both read the Scriptures and listened to our postmodern world with imaginative care.

which we have stepped into by grace. He shows how that Story shapes our own stories, brings healing into our relationships, and as we are faithful, can be demonstrated before a watching world. This is a book by an artist who has both read the Scriptures and listened to our postmodern world with imaginative care.

Real Love

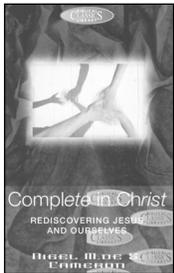
My only visit to The Art House began, actually, in orderly chaos, since I arrived from the airport in Nashville just in time for an advance showing of *The Passion of the Christ*. A crowd of artists and musicians were milling around, talking with Mel Gibson and each other, and finding seats in the main room, which had been transformed into a theater. Still, even then I noticed the beauty and restfulness of the place. Art is honored here, discussion is encouraged, and rest is seen as a good gift of God. Later when everyone had left and I was privileged to spend time with

Andi and Charlie, my impression was confirmed. Not just their lives and ministry, but their home is a place where the beauty of ideas and community are nurtured, and grace is demonstrated. The hospitality was marked by loving care.

In *Real Love for Real Life* Andi Ashworth weaves the story of her own life into an exploration of the art and work of caring.

Briefly Noted: Classic on Incarnation, reissued

by Denis Haack



In 1998, Nigel Cameron published *Are Christians Human: An Exploration of True Spirituality*, which sadly went out of print. The book was a brief, accessible, intensely practical study of the incarnation, the mysterious doctrine that claims that in Christ, God became a man and entered human history. Dr. Cameron outlined the biblical teaching on the humanity of Christ, and then unpacked its meaning for the life of the mind, guidance and choices, our emotional life, everyday life as physical beings in a physical world, and the implications of the fact that Jesus’ humanity was not temporary, given up when he ascended into heaven, but instead eternal.

It is easy, in our desire to honor Christ as God, to so emphasize his divinity that we lose sight of the equally important truth that he is fully human. Understanding that revolutionizes our view of what it means to be human, the significance of ordinary life, and its implications for shaping Christian faithfulness.

Cameron’s book has been republished as *Complete in Christ: Rediscovering Jesus and Ourselves* in a special, inexpensive printing for Christian leaders in the underdeveloped world. A limited number of copies are available from Hearts and Minds Books (717.246.3333).

I urge you get a copy of *Complete in Christ*. ■

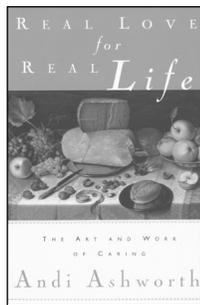
Book reviewed: *Complete in Christ: Rediscovering Jesus and Ourselves* by Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Cumbria, CA: Paternoster Press; 1989) 113 pp.

Resources cont.

Care-giving is much needed, because so many are so profoundly broken in this sad world. At the same time, it is seldom sought, since caring for others involves sacrifices that few are willing to embrace in a society which trumpets self-fulfillment as the essence of life. It takes courage to write on caring, because “care-giver” is a term that can be easily maligned, especially if it is pursued as an unpaid calling.

“The art of care-giving, as a lifestyle and a distinct vocation,” Andi says, “is nothing less than the art of God. As our minds are renewed through the Scriptures and the work of the Spirit to treasure what God treasures, we will, by design, show forth the heart of God. God loves what he has created. He loves beauty and has given us a world brimming over with creative details—the sweet face of a pansy, the stripes on a zebra, the delicate patterns of a butterfly wing. He loves the people he’s created, and he has shown us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the extravagant, costly ways of love.

“To recover the art of care-giving, we must set our hearts to love what God loves. With our feet planted firmly on the ground and our love rooted in the physical acts of care and nurture, we bear in mind the eternal value of our work. We are caring for people who have an eternal destination. Even the simplest gesture of giving a glass of water to a thirsty person has eternal meaning. When the tedium of care-giving weighs us down, this perspective brings refreshment and the strength to persevere. As we serve one person at a time in life-giving ways, beginning at home and moving out from there, we are simul-



taneously offering a personal service to Christ. This is an incomprehensible mystery, but it is true. Caring in this way is what it means to offer real love in the midst of real life.”

This is a creative, redemptive view of the ordinary things of life, and it is

“The art of care-giving, as a lifestyle and a distinct vocation is nothing less than the art of God.”

extraordinarily refreshing. *Real Love for Real Life* is made all the more real because Andi’s story tells how she hasn’t always embraced being a care-giver with eager passion. Nor is this a book “for women.” All followers of Christ are called to be care-givers, some as a primary calling and the rest of us as an essential part of faithfulness.

Real faithfulness

I have not reviewed these books together simply because Andi and Charlie are married, but because they fit together. *Real Love for Real Life* and *New Way to be Human* have a common narrative because they both share the story of their lives, but that doesn’t make them repetitive. Instead, it allows us a fuller understanding of how they have struggled over time to bring all their knowing and doing intentionally under Christ’s Lordship.



Andi and Charlie

We recommend both books to you. (*New Way to be Human* includes discussion questions for each chapter.) None of us are called to reproduce their lives or ministry, but like them, we are called to live out and talk about the gospel in a way our postmodern, pluralistic, post-Christian world might be able to understand. ■

~Denis Haack

Books reviewed:

New Way to be Human: A Provocative Look at What it Means to Follow Jesus by Charlie Peacock (Colorado Springs, CO: Shaw Books, WaterBrook Press; 2004) 213 pp. + discussion questions + notes.

Real Love for Real Life: The Art and Work of Caring by Andi Ashworth (Colorado Springs, CO: Shaw Books, WaterBrook Press; 2002) 157 pp. + notes.

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Movie Discussion Guides



This book is meant to help Christians find God in the movies,” Robert Johnston and Catherine Barsotti say, “to use reel faith to encourage and strengthen real faith.” For almost a decade

this husband and wife team have been enjoying good movies, writing film reviews for their church magazine, and teaching on faith and culture (Dr. Johnston is a professor at Fuller Seminary). Now, in *Finding God in the Movies*, they have written a resource for Christians who take faith and film seriously. This book will deepen your appreciation and understanding of the cinema while providing practical help in leading film discussions.

Finding God in the Movies opens with an introduction in which the authors outline the role film plays in our postmodern culture, and how Christians can engage this art form. Barsotti and Johnston explain how to unpack the story of a film and lead a movie discussion. The rest of the book—from page 35 to the end—consists of 33 movie reviews. Each review follows a similar format: a brief list of the major themes the film explores, the basic credits, a summary of the film written from the perspective of Christian faith, a set of texts of Scriptures which address similar themes, discussion questions, and some background material on the film which can deepen our understanding about its production and reception. Finally, the 33 films Barsotti and Johnston address are divided into basic topics, such as affirming our humanity (including *Life is Beautiful* and *Amistad*), forgiveness (*Smoke Signals*), faith and doubt (*Signs*), and images of the Savior (*The Spitfire Grill*).

“The task of thinking as a Christian,” Johnston and Barsotti say, “is always a conversation between our faith and our culture, a dialogue between our stories and God’s Story.” Movies are the central story-telling medium for the postmodern generation; they are not just entertaining but the cultural space where matters of the heart are explored and discussed. That exploration and discussion, of course, can be for blessing or for curse in this fallen world.

Please understand: this does not mean we should turn movie discussions into the

The task of thinking like a Christian is always a conversation between our faith and our culture, a dialogue between our stories and God’s Story.

latest evangelistic technique. The best films are carefully constructed works of art by creative people made in the image of God. Those films should be experienced and appreciated for the art they are. “The first demand any work of art makes upon us is surrender,” C. S. Lewis insists in *An Experiment in Criticism*. “Look. Listen. Receive. Get yourself out of the way. (There is no good asking first whether the work before you deserves such a surrender, for until you have surrendered you cannot possibly find out.)” That is very sound advice. We can enter the story and for the length of the movie, without for a minute setting aside our own convictions and values, see something of the world from someone else’s perspective. Then we can discuss it, listen to what others saw which we might have missed, identify what might be attractive to so many, and reflect on its themes in light of the revelation of God in Scripture. And if we take the time to learn to listen and see, we will discover that all

around us people are involved in similar discussions, from a myriad world views, talking about what they have seen and believe, doubt and wonder, fear and hope. It is a lively and ongoing conversation, and one which the people of God need to join.

Finding God in the Movies is a good resource, and we recommend it to you. As in all such books, you may not always agree with everything the authors write, but engaging their ideas thoughtfully will only increase the value of the book. And if you find they express some things differently than you do—like “finding God in the movies” instead of “seeing spiritual themes expressed in the movies”—discern what difference the difference makes.

Families and small groups would be wise to read and discuss William Romanowski’s *Eyes Wide Open* (Brazos), and then watch and discuss the films covered in *Finding God in the Movies*. It will not only be stimulating, but will stimulate growth in cultural discernment. ■

~Denis Haack

Book reviewed:

Finding God in the Movies: 33 Films of Reel Faith by Catherine M. Barsotti and Robert K. Johnston (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books; 2004) 306 pp. + appendices.

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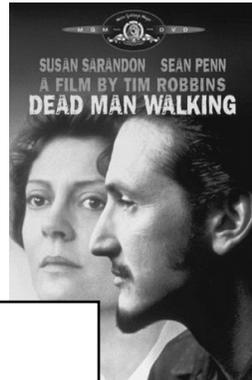


The Station Agent

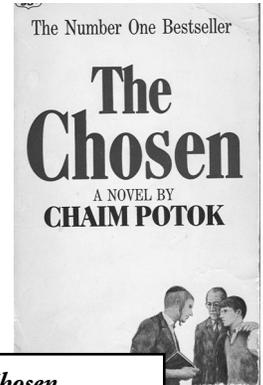
The Station Agent In-depth Discussion Questions

www.ransomfellowship.org/M_StationAgent.html

Beginning the Conversation Part 11 in the Babylon Series by Denis Haack. www.ransomfellowship.org/R_Babylon11.html



Dead Man Walking Movie Discussion Guide www.ransomfellowship.org/M_DeadMan.html



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2. To model Christian discernment.
3. To stimulate believers to think biblically about all of life.

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