

# critique

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# CRITIQUE



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**ABOUT CRITIQUE:** Critique is part of the work of Ransom Fellowship founded by Denis and Margie Haack in 1982. Together, they have created a ministry that includes lecturing, mentoring, writing, teaching, hospitality, feeding, and encouraging those who want to know more about what it means to be a Christian in the everyday life of the twenty-first century.

Except where noted, all articles are by Denis Haack.

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# Echoes of Eden



WED BUSTARD

A few days ago when the staff of Ransom met for prayer, the liturgy in *Common Prayer* included a line that caught my attention. “Come now and join the feast,” we read aloud, “right here in the belly of the beast.” My imagination drifted to images of exiles in a dark land, their path wandering through desolate wastes, always on the alert for danger or attack. What if they paused along the way to celebrate the sovereignty, majesty, and goodness of their king—the rightful king—with a feast, complete with dancing, music and lovely tales related by storytellers who repeat the ancient stories with conviction? It’s hard to imagine a more subversive act.

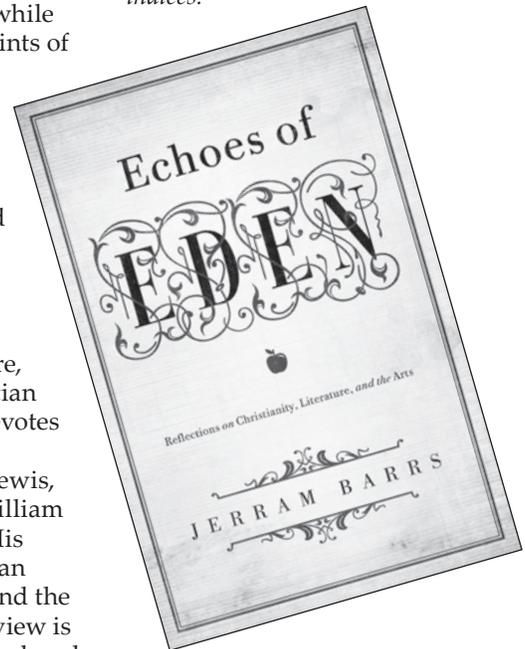
This is essentially what Jerram Barrs calls the people of God to in *Echoes of Eden*. He wants us to be fully aware of the brokenness of the world, while never failing to fully enjoy the hints of the glory of God found in the works of imagination, art and culture made by women and men who bear the image of God. He wants us to know that to be dismissive of literature and art is to be dismissive of grace.

In the first half of *Echoes*, Barrs provides a careful biblical framework for understanding the significance of art and culture, and for embracing it with Christian faithfulness. In the second he devotes chapters to authors he has read, relished and lectured on: C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, J. K. Rowling, William Shakespeare, and Jane Austin. His careful explanation of how human culture—specifically literature and the arts—fits into a Christian worldview is much needed at a time when the church is widely viewed as anti-culture. The chapter in which he identifies eleven

categories by which to judge a work of art is a wise corrective to the defensiveness that keeps many believers from embracing beauty in a fallen world.

“Thinking scripturally about the arts,” Barrs says in the opening line of the book, “is an area where there appears to be great confusion in our churches.” He is correct. I hope *Echoes of Eden* is read and discussed widely. The truth of its message can help nurture a Christian imagination, restore the arts to their proper place in the church, and help us frame the unchanging gospel in a way that will cause a postmodern world to consider its claims. ■

**Book recommended:** *Echoes of Eden: Reflections on Christianity, Literature, and the Arts* by Jerram Barrs (Wheaton, IL: Cross way; 2013) 192 pages + appendix + indices.





To the editor:

Dear Old (of long-standing) Friend:

I read and re-read principle #1 for “shaping Christian faithfulness in discerning whether our nation’s policies and wars are just” [*Critique* 2013:5 p. 16]. I am not sure whether the principle presented is a direct quote from Qs Guinness, or is re-cast in your words. But in either case the paragraph captured my attention. For purposes of completeness, I reproduce it here.

*Resist Politicization. One reason it is so difficult to discuss these things is because our society—and many within the church—have been politicized. By this I mean they tend to see just about everything in terms of the political process. The test is to bring some issue up and see how quickly someone raises politics. We must resist this as Christians for several reasons. First, it is an idolatrous mindset. Everything is related to God, not to politics, which is only a tiny slice of life and reality. Second, politicization undermines the discussion by switching it from a pursuit of the truth and justice to the scoring of points and the taking of sides. And finally, it perverts our perspective by suggesting that politics can solve the deepest problems of the human heart. Rather, politics in a democratic society reflects the hearts of its citizens and leaders.*

*This means that culture is always more influential and important than politics, and the gospel always trumps culture.*

My immediate reaction was that this is a truly fresh and helpful insight. I thought about sending it to all my friends and relatives who are not enlightened enough to see things the way that I see them. But I began to recall your teaching, over the years, about developing a biblical world view—which means (in my words) learning to look at contemporary events and ideas through a biblical lens and critiquing(!) the spiritual, social, psychological, physical, and aesthetic content. The task of developing a biblical worldview is a long and arduous task, and boundless opportunities to veer off course present themselves (I’m beginning to sound like *Pilgrim’s Progress!*).

In my experience, most evangelicals—progressive and conservative—are convinced that their politics are derived from Scripture, and that they are exercising a biblical worldview when they argue their political positions. I even venture to say that, because faith and politics are so deeply interwoven in contemporary thought, many Christians will not recognize or even acknowledge the danger of politicization. The “culture wars” of the recent past may provide a case in point.

In sum, I fear that many, if not most, will interpret “Resist politicization” through their worldview. I have not been able to think my way through this dilemma. Do you think I’m just arguing against a straw person?

With love and respect,  
Jack Swearingen  
Santa Rosa, Ca.

Denis Haack responds:

Thank you for your thoughtful note, Jack. There is no need to qualify “Old,” though you are kind to do so, since it is equally true in both meanings of the word. And this was my thought, though your thinking it might be from Os Guinness is a great compliment.

You understand my point exactly and have identified the problem that would cause me to despair if I did not mean it when I recite the creed together with God’s people, “I believe in the Holy Ghost.”

Politicization is part of what used to be called “the spirit of the age.” It is not something many people consider but is, rather, simply assumed. Rarely questioned, it has become part of what we think of as normal, so that questioning it seems, somehow, radical. It is not merely a problem within the church, but is a mindset the church has absorbed from the wider world. And you are correct: because Christians believe their particular political stance is rooted in Scripture, they are even more unwilling to step back and consider whether politicization is a problem, even though it is a different issue. Politicization needs to be resisted even if our politics were to come from God’s mouth directly.

Like you, I know no way past this dilemma—except my faith that the Holy Spirit has not abandoned the church, though Lord knows it is only grace that he hasn’t. So, I am content, in the small niche that is my vocation, to sound a small alarm and hope, like the bread and fishes, it might somehow be multiplied. It is immensely satisfying to know that someone heard. ■

# Distinctly Different, Distinctly Christian Visions



Guy Chase crafted art that was sharply contemporary, the sort of work that causes me to stop and look more closely, and on reflection notice the gentle wit behind the composition. Sadao Watanabe's paintings also make me pause, drawn in by the gentle warmth of his style that is deeply rooted in an ancient folk tradition of textile dyeing while remaining fully up-to-date. The art they produced is distinctly different but both were deeply committed Christians and their worldview clearly shapes the work of their imagination and hands.

The two books I recommend here are as similar as the artists' work are different. Both are succinct, lavishly illustrated, so that frequent readings provoke new discoveries, fresh glimpses of creativity and beauty. Both consist of a variety of essays by a variety of authors that provides slightly different takes on the artwork and lives of the artists.

Over his career, Chase developed a number of projects or series, each thoughtful and unique. One work that helped me see reality more clearly is "Untitled (ledger for multiple adjustments)" he made in 2001. It is not a collage (at first glance I imagined it was), but a painting. Art historian Karen Mulder says, "it explores the way our lives might measure up or be found wanting in the final tally. To achieve a state of grace, we will all need the mercy of multiple adjustments on the complicated balance sheets of our lives." While at a Christians in the Visual Arts (CIVA) conference I heard Chase introduce his whimsical "Must Love Life," series. It consists of handmade paper shopping bags on which images and messages from Internet dating sites are printed. Fascinating and ironic, detailing a haunting beauty, I know of no statement as deliciously subversive on this modern phenomenon.

Beautifully stylized, carefully composed, and wonderfully painted in clear black lines and simple subdued colors, Watanabe's biblical prints thoughtfully serve the text and stories of Scripture. "A devout Christian," writer John Kohan says, Watanabe "viewed himself simply as a channel through which the power of God worked, and believed that 'profound faith will inevitably assume the form of profound beauty.'" He wanted his work in plain view, so it can be seen and appreciated by ordinary people not hidden away in

some collection. "I owe my life to Christ and the gospel," he said. "My way of expressing my gratitude is to witness to my faith through the medium of biblical scenes."

Guy Chase (1955–2011) and Sadao Watanabe (1913–96) are now both making art for the king they professed as sovereign. We can thank Square Halo for giving us a chance to live with their art, so we can see more clearly that Asaph had it correct so many centuries ago:

*The Mighty One, God the LORD,  
speaks and summons the earth  
from the rising of the sun to its  
setting.*

*Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty,  
God shines forth. [Psalm 50:21–2]*

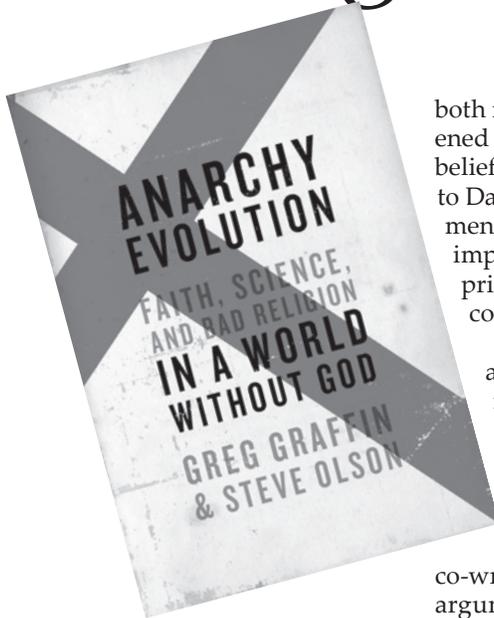
Please get both *The Art of Guy Chase* and *Beauty Given by Grace*. Put them on your coffee table within easy reach—that's where they need to be. ■

**Recommended:** *The Art of Guy Chase* (Square Halo Books, 2011); *Beauty Given by Grace: The Biblical Prints of Sadao Watanabe* (Square Halo Books, 2012)

**Sources:** "From the Lines of Life: Guy Chase and the art of the (Extra)Ordinary" by Karen L. Mulder in *Image* (Number 72) p. 26; "Profound Faith, Profound Beauty: The Life and Art of Sadao Watanabe" by John A. Kohan in *Image* (Number 74) p. 30.

**Note:** To see artists' images from these two recommended books, see the back cover of this issue of *Critique*.

# Resisting Authority, Embracing



Over the past few years I have read the authors known in the media as the New Atheists, and have tried to take their arguments seriously. I expected to enjoy Christopher Hitchens' book more than I did since I've long enjoyed his essays and reviews in *Vanity Fair*, the *Atlantic*, and other magazines for their wit, polemical style, and razor sharp prose. However, *God is Not Great* (2007) is little more than a secular diatribe. And I had read enough of Richard Dawkins to expect him to seem rather pompous in *The God Delusion* (2006) and was not disappointed. What I found disappointing, however, was the theological naivety—if not ignorance—he displayed, because I had assumed his research would be more careful. And

both men seem to argue that an enlightened society cannot tolerate religious belief—to Hitchens it is dangerous and to Dawkins it is delusional. I recommend both books for their societal impact, but think both are compelling primarily for those who are already convinced naturalists.

There is one book to come from a New Atheist, however, that is markedly different, and that I am eager to recommend. The book is *Anarchy Evolution: Faith, Science, and Bad Religion in a World Without God* by Greg Graffin.

(Steve Olson, a science writer co-wrote it but the story, ideas, and argument are Graffin's.) Those familiar with popular music will recognize Greg Graffin as the songwriter, vocalist, and front man for the influential punk band Bad Religion. He also has a PhD (Cornell University), and when he's not on tour he teaches life sciences and paleontology at UCLA.

*Anarchy Evolution* is thoughtful, accessible, and civil. It tells Graffin's story of growing up in a secular family (both parents were professors) with fundamentalist Christian grandparents, his love of music leading to the formation of Bad Religion, his early penchant to resist authority and question dogma, and how his later studies in science made him realize that the anarchy of punk music fit the anarchy implicit in evolution.

*But there is a big problem with resisting authority. If you can't rely on it, what can you rely on? Many people feel very uncomfortable giving up the certainties on which they have based their lives. They think that without a bedrock of belief, their lives will have no purpose or meaning. Many religious people, for example, believe that without religion*

*there can be no morality. They fear that humans might use their free will to do terrible things—steal, rape, murder—if they did not believe in a caring God constantly watching over and keeping them on the path of righteousness.*

*For those of us who see no need for supernatural entities, this is a highly offensive belief. It condemns our lives as deviant and amoral. It also has no empirical proof. The countries that are least religious tend to have the most law-abiding and generous citizens. It doesn't even make sense, as philosophers since the time of Socrates have pointed out. Either harming other people is wrong, in which case God is unnecessary, or harming other people is acceptable, in which case God's admonitions are misguided.*

*Some people have a more basic fear. I've had friends who think that if they question their beliefs in God or spirituality or some "higher purpose," they will begin a long, lonely descent toward nihilistic anarchy in their lives. They fear that they will see themselves as no more than soulless animals, biological mechanisms, bits of a temporary consciousness that will soon be gone forever.*

*This fear is not entirely misplaced. The natural world and the evolutionary processes that produced us are anarchic. There is no ultimate reason for our existence. We were born to parents who loved us, if we were fortunate, and who wanted us to do well in life. But we were not placed on this earth for some divine purpose that only communion with the spirit world can reveal.*

# Anarchy

*However, people make a big mistake if they conclude from the anarchy of the physical world that life has no meaning. I draw just the opposite conclusion. The purposelessness of the natural world emphasizes the tremendous meaning inherent in the human world. [p. 3-4]*

*Anarchy Evolution* explains in some detail why Graffin has come to believe that, “Naturalism can provide the foundation for building a coherent and consistent worldview.” [p. 7] The book is straightforward and honest, addressing the usual arguments that Christians tend to raise to refute a naturalist explanation for life and reality. It’s as if Graffin has been listening to what the evangelical community has been saying and decided to write a thoughtful response. Most Christians will find statements that will surprise them, and will discover that their apologetics, especially their arguments against naturalism, will need serious updating.

There are several categories of people who need to read *Anarchy Evolution*. Those who have grown up in a Christian home and have learned about evolution primarily from believers seeking to refute naturalism. All Christians who have non-Christian friends should read it, as should all pastors and teachers in the church who shepherd Christians who have non-Christian friends. And non-Christians who have begun to believe that Christianity might be true should read it too, so that they can consider a thoughtful and popular alternative to Christian belief.

*Anarchy Evolution* is not merely a presentation of what Graffin believes and why. It is a warm, personal testimony of the delight and confidence he takes in his worldview.

*Life is an act of endless creativity. With all its simmering tragedy and occasional catastrophe, a human life is an amazing thing to contemplate and experience. None of us had any special plan laid out for us when we were born. By abandoning the idea that an intelligent designer created us, we can wake with each dawn and say, “What’s done is done. Now how can I make the best of the here and now?” Life is never static. Despite catastrophic tragedies, life has persisted in evolving new varieties of unimaginable forms. I find comfort in the narrative of evolutionary history. When I create, I feel that I am a participant in the grand pageant of life, a part of the ongoing creative engine of the universe. I don’t know if that feeling is enough to replace the solace of religion in the lives of most people, but it is for me. [p. 251]*

Please read *Anarchy Evolution*. If possible, read it with friends, including some non-Christians who might find that Graffin expresses their deepest convictions and values. Take the time as you read to listen to the music of Bad Religion, since it expresses the same beliefs in musical form. And reflect as objectively as possible on what he is saying, what makes it attractive to so many, where you would agree, what you might challenge, and why. And then reflect on how to state and live out your convictions in a way that a watching non-Christian world might find attractive enough to discuss. ■

**Book recommended:** *Anarchy Evolution: Faith, Science, and Bad Religion in a World Without God* by Greg Graffin & Steve Olson (New York, NY: HarperCollins; 2010) 251 pages + notes.

## RESOURCE

Hearts and Minds bookstore is a well-stocked haven for serious, reflective readers. When ordering resources, mention Ransom Fellowship and they will contribute 10 per cent of the total back to us. ■

**Resource:** *Hearts and Minds bookstore, [www.heartsandmindsbooks.com](http://www.heartsandmindsbooks.com)*



# A Soundtrack for Our Time



Vampire Weekend is four musicians who met as students at Columbia University. *Modern Vampires of the City*, their third studio album, is one of those rare CDs that is so remarkably good, so very thoughtful and beautifully crafted, I felt badly I hadn't purchased it earlier. The music and instrumentation fits the lyrics perfectly, and with creatively inventive sounds and solos full of yearning, *Modern Vampires* doesn't merely reflect life but probes deeper with questions about things that matter most.

*We know the fire awaits unbelievers  
All of the sinners the same  
Girl, you and I will die unbelievers  
Bound to the track of the train*

*If I'm born again  
I know that the world will disagree  
Want a little grace but who's gonna save  
a little grace for me?*

[from "Unbelievers"]

*Modern Vampires of the City* strikes me as a thoughtful postmodern response to having heard something of the Christian message filtered through the sad cultural captivity that has locked the church in irrelevance. In "Ya Hey," a thinly disguised play on God's covenantal name, they wonder how it can be that so many could be so faithless if he is actually God. "Worship You"

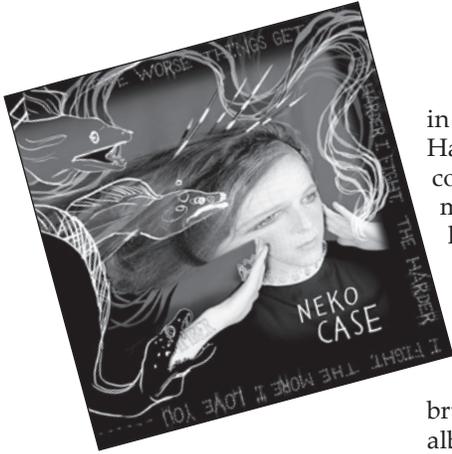
wonders at the exclusiveness of God's desire for praise. And "Finger Back" faces the bleak brokenness of the world and the suffering that flows from it. *Rolling Stone* listed "Unbelievers" as one of the best singles of 2013, saying that in it the band "ponders the possibility of love in a godless age." And the magazine ranked *Modern Vampires of the City* as the best album of 2013.

Please listen to this music. Not only is it worth listening to, and worth liking; but if you care about this world, this is music you need to understand and appreciate. It is a thoughtful and vital soundtrack of our postmodern age. ■

**CD recommended:** *Modern Vampires of the City* by Vampire Weekend (2013).

**Sources:** *Rolling Stone* (#1198/1199; December 19, 2013-January 2, 2014) p. 40, 18.

# Music for When You're Lost



I've heard Neko Case only once in concert—she opened for Emmylou Harris—and ever since I've wished I could hear her live again. There was much to relish: the intensity of her lyrics, the loveliness of the melodies, the simple instrumentation, but those were not what captured my heart and imagination that evening. What did that were the piercingly rich clarity of her voice and the brutal honesty of her songs. Case's latest album, *The Worse Things Get, the Harder I Fight, The Harder I Fight, The More I Love You* not only wins the award for one the longest titles in recent popular music history but displays a virtuosity that reveals how single mindedly she has honed her craft as a musician.

*I wanted so badly not to be me  
I saw my shadow looking lost  
Checking its pockets for some lost receipt  
Where did I leave that fire?*

[from "Where Did I Leave that Fire?"]

The *Worse Things Get* is music that does not allow us the cheap luxury of neutrality, of listening while failing to care. Novelist Walker Percy spoke of being lost in the cosmos, and this is the music that supplies the soundtrack. Neko Case makes "roots music for the rootless, country music for exiles," the *Journal Sentinel* notes, and the deep yearning in her voice helps us know it is not just an act.

"Nearly Midnight, Honolulu" records a brief chance encounter at an airport, of a mother yelling at her child. Case records it as a witness, for the child so that she will know the pain had a real cause and that someone saw, and was sorry. "I'm From Nowhere" is a simple arrangement, just Neko Case vocals and

Jon Rauhouse's superb acoustic guitar. "Ragtime" and "Where did I Leave that Fire?" feature full bands, and even underwater sounds that force us to remember that no distraction can erase the truth the we live in a badly broken world.

*My brain makes drugs to keep me slow,  
A hilarious joke for some dead pharaoh.  
But now, not even the masons know  
What drug will keep night from coming.*

*There are so many tools that are made for  
my hands.  
But the tide smashes all my best-laid  
plans to sand.*

[from "Night Still Comes"]

The *Worse Things Get* is stunningly beautiful and intelligent music, sung with what *Rolling Stone* calls a "knee-buckingly magnificent voice." To think it merely melancholy is a mistake, I think, though the album fills me with a profound wistfulness. Melancholy suggests sadness or depression, but I hear none of that here. Rather this is the music of a musician who knows what it means to be lost in the cosmos, and who wonders, hope against hope, if it is possible to be found. ■

**Sources:** *Journal Sentinel online* ([www.jsonline.com/entertainment/musicandnight-life/neko-cases-voice-shines-in-an-elegant-melancholy-set-b99119422z1-228466661.html](http://www.jsonline.com/entertainment/musicandnight-life/neko-cases-voice-shines-in-an-elegant-melancholy-set-b99119422z1-228466661.html)); *Rolling Stone* (#1198-1199; December 19, 2013-January 2, 2014) p. 26.

**CD recommended:** *The Worse Things Get, the Harder I Fight, the Harder I Fight, the More I Love You by Neko Case* (2013).



C.S. Lewis, translator



# C.S. Lewis: Translator for the Post-Whatever Age

by Timothy Padgett

A difficult task has recently become much harder. Every Christian knows that Jesus' 'Great Commission' gave marching orders to his church to go into all the world and make disciples. That was simple enough, as far as it goes, back when we could reasonably expect that the person on the other end of the conversation just might have the faintest idea what we're talking about when we say "Jesus is Lord!" But even that small comfort has gone the way of all flesh.

As Francis Schaeffer put it decades ago in *The God Who is There*, "One could tell a non-Christian to 'be a good girl' and, while she might not have followed your advice, at least she would have understood what you were talking about. To say this to a truly modern girl would be to make a 'nonsense' statement. The blank look you might receive would not have meant that your standards had been rejected, but that your message was meaningless."

Today it has moved beyond even what Schaeffer prophesied a generation ago. Now, instead of getting that blank look, you are almost certain to be on the business end of righteous indignation, once this fictional girl figures out what you're really saying, that you're not simply expressing your spiritual side, but you actually mean that Jesus is her Lord, too. In the face of this daunting prospect many Christians have given up in despair. Why bother preaching the word when all you get in return is apathy or anger?

*On the cover art: I enjoyed playing with the vintage typewriter from Lewis' era but adding the universe image on the back of the paper to show the bigness of the ideas he tackled.*

—Karen Coulter Perkins, designer



et our divine commissioner has not left us without support. In what can only be the mark of his humorous nature, the Lord we are to proclaim gave us a pattern to follow in reaching our discombobulated age—a man, who, on paper, should be the last sort we would expect. As an archetype of a herald to this anti-everything age, a seemingly stuffy expert on Medieval and Renaissance literature is not who springs to mind. In the life and letters of C.S. Lewis, we find a man uniquely crafted to slip behind the most valiant of defenses. Our bastions of cynicism and self-perceived ironic detachment somehow melt before the simple warmth of this genuine human being, even as this same warmth contains within it an incisive mind, passionately loyal to what are, today, radical truths.

In our world, which sees all beliefs as mere pretexts for power or shields for insecurity, Lewis's path belied such comforting illusions. We assure ourselves that the forms of religion matter less than our sincerity as we express our communal search for eternity. At first Lewis's meandering progress through a series of late nineteenth and early twentieth century religious views fits snugly within our early twenty-first century perceptions of life as a journey. Though born into a nominally Christian family in a nominally Christian realm, our hero soon came to despise his culture's religious expression, arguing in his autobiography that "the impression I got was that religion, though utterly false, was a natural growth, a kind of endemic nonsense into which humanity tended to blunder. In the midst of a thousand such religions stood our own,

the thousandth and first, labeled True. But on what grounds could I believe in this exception? It was obviously in some general sense the same kind of thing as all the rest. Why was it so differently treated? Need I, at any rate, continue to treat it differently? I was very anxious not to."

Left there, Lewis would be more of an asset to today's intellectual climes than the subversive force he turned out to be. After a road filled with twists and turns—a little atheism and agnosticism over here, a period of pantheism and spiritualism over there—Lewis found himself stumbling back first into theism and then, to his great horror, classical Christianity. Unlike the spiritual pilgrimages of our time, for which the travelling matters far more than any arrival, Lewis embraced the faith of his fathers in spite of himself. As he said in *God in the Dock*, "I didn't go to religion to make me happy. I always knew a bottle of Port would do that. If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity."

His willingness to abandon his culture's faith and to forge ahead on his own quest would gain accolades of the highest order from today's cultural gatekeepers. His determination to follow that path to the end, even if that meant a return to traditional Christianity, is something that the watching world doesn't really have a category for. One category our culture can sink its teeth into is the one where Christianity is simply an intellectual construct designed to reinforce the materialistic ambitions of those with the cash.



Once again Lewis' lifestyle swims against this stream. He was a child of relative prosperity and so might be expected to continue with elitist practices once he came in to his own. Yet even when he began to work for one of the premiere educational institutions in the world, he remained in practical poverty. Much of his income that might have allowed a measure of wealth was shared with others. Even when the sales of his books were mounting into the thousands he maintained this generous attitude. He was so generous that his brother had to keep him on a short financial leash to prevent him from spending all his royalties on other people's needs. Rather than becoming a means to acquire more and more wealth, Christianity became the metaphysical justification for accelerating his already charitable nature.

Yet Lewis's ability to subvert the reigning paradigm extended beyond his open-handed generosity. As his style of life, and the lives of unheralded believers down through the ages, turned aside the blows of Christianity's critics by not living up to society's expectations, so too did Lewis's style of argument pull the rug from beneath one of postmodernism's cardinal tenets. Since many in our enlightened age do not place any truth value on any specific ideas, it can be incredibly difficult to convince them that a given principle is true for all people, all the time. Now, they may well believe that something is true for perhaps an individual or a group, but they are unlikely to think that it is in any way true in a general, universal

sense. Ethical standards for one society would not be "true" for yet another across the globe.

Lewis undercut this sort of thinking by appealing to a morality lurking behind all cultures. Calling this the Tao, he disarmed a common criticism posited by postmodern thinkers. Many see any claim to "true truth" by a society or individual as the height of arrogance and therefore ample reason to shun them disdainfully. However, by looking to non-European cultures, to shared ideas of right and wrong, virtue and vice, held by people around the world, Lewis turned the inclusive claims of postmodernism on its ever-so tolerant head. Enlightened critics from our time are then put in the delightfully ironic position of saying that these cultures and their ideologies are wrong, while their own very contemporary Western vantage point is right. The hunter becomes the hunted.

However, razor-sharp incisiveness could be of dubious value if the message were to be delivered with the subtlety of a bulldozer. In one sense Lewis's works were something of an extended reiteration of Paul's message on Mars Hill. Both these men were highly educated members of their respective races, and were conveying precisely the same message. Most pertinently, both used an engaging manner to grab the attention of prospective hearers, and both used familiar imagery rather than technical or idiosyncratic language. Their pleasant delivery hid a radically unorthodox message.

I was once told by a friend that reading Lewis made him feel smart. He said that when he finished reading one of Lewis's books he found that ideas that he had previously thought to be beyond his comprehension were suddenly

grasped with an attitude of, "Oh, I already knew that." Lewis had an ability to take what was complicated, even for the believer familiar with Christian concepts, and have them make perfect sense for just about anyone. Now, you could pass this off by saying that this simply flowed from the nature of his profession. After all, who could be better to explain things than a man whose whole life was words?



But that cannot be all that is going on here. There are innumerable books by the Literati that are completely unfathomable to nearly everyone else, lining dusty bookshelves and rotting into oblivion. Lewis's brilliance as a writer and effectiveness as an apologist was that he could present deep truths in simple forms. He put it thusly, "When I began, Christianity came before the great mass of my unbelieving fellow countrymen either in the highly emotional form offered by revivalists or in the unintelligible language of highly cultured clergymen. Most men were reached by neither. My task was therefore simply that of a translator—one turning Christian doctrine, or what he believed to be such, into the vernacular, into language that unscholarly people would attend to and could understand." In another place he said, "The popular English language, then, simply has to be learned by him who would preach to the English: just as a missionary learns Bantu before preaching to the Bantus....Our problem is often simply one of translation."

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Being discerning includes learning to talk about and live out the truth of the gospel creatively and winsomely in a pluralistic culture. What we say should prompt interest, not end conversations.

— Denis Haack



# T R A N S L A

He used examples that everyone could taste. Beginning his study on universal morality, he started not with Platonic Forms but with issues of fairness his readers would encounter every day, sharing a bit of orange or keeping one's chair. He delineated the reliability of true belief from its flawed believers with an anecdote of a little girl who thought poison consisted of "horrid red things." He explained the difference between merely studying and actually living Christianity by a memory of an afternoon spent in a tool-shed. You can go for pages on end without encountering even a wisp of a technical phrase or theological jargon, all the while letting the deepest of doctrines seep into your soul.

My favorite example of this subversive simplicity came in his book *Miracles*. To those thinking it nonsense to suggest a world beyond the material, Lewis turns to what has to be one of the strangest arguments for a higher order ever put forward. "Almost the whole of Christian theology could be perhaps deduced from the two facts (a) That men make coarse jokes, and (b) That they feel the dead to be uncanny. The coarse joke proclaims that we have here an animal which finds its own animality either objectionable or funny.... I do not perceive that dogs see anything funny about being dogs: I suspect that angels see nothing funny about being angels. Our feeling about the dead is equally odd.... In reality we hate the division that makes possible the conception of either corpse or ghost." To understand this point, no one needs to go out and buy a dictionary or be familiar with an academic style of writing. You must only be human.

This easy nature of his writing style lent his works an insidious nature. Much in the same way that tens of millions of people in the past several years have unknowingly absorbed huge amounts of a Christian worldview through the *Lord of the Rings* films, those who have picked up Lewis's books are in immortal danger of Christian infection. His light style and engaging manner has kept readers off their guard long enough for his message to get under their skin.



In one sense Lewis has been able to reach so many people for Christianity because he has refused to treat his religion as religious, at least in the modern sense of religious as something set apart from "real life." Some of this is just his use of everyday words, but some of his "non-religious" technique is that he never acted as though Christianity was otherworldly. This was wonderfully manifested was in his Space Trilogy. On its own merits the series stands as an excellent trio of novels. The characters are vivid and, while his speculations about the nature of space travel may seem quaint in retrospect, they are certainly imaginative and show keen insight.

It is intriguing that a reader can get quite far into the story without realizing that there is Christian underpinning to the narrative. All you know is that a man has been whisked away on a great adventure in the stars. Even when the

hero meets what is obviously, at least to a Christian, an angel, our author does not present this celestial being in an expected way. Most people, drawing on some combination of *It's a Wonderful Life* and Renaissance paintings, will not notice that the "Eldila" and "Oyarsa" are angels. Less still will most people realize that Maledil and the Old One refer to two persons of the Christian Trinity. By approaching his tale in this way, Lewis manages to de-religicize these biblical beings. These are not the willowy apparitions of popular culture, inducing diabetic fits with their simplistic sweetness, but solid entities with dangerous power that are all the more believable for their menacing possibilities.

In much the same way as he brought the spiritual world into the realm of reality through such ordinary words and images, Lewis also brought the material world into the domain of the sacred through his childlike delight in the beauty of the created order. While this is most often noted in his positive acclaim for mountains and trees, rivers and oceans, birds and beasts, his affection for nature also found voice in his condemnation of those who would desecrate it. Lewis's villains manifest their villainy not only in their diabolical designs against the sons of Adam and daughters of Eve but also in their malevolence towards the lower orders of life.

Some of the most vibrant examples of this evil come, once again, from the Space Trilogy. The antagonist, Weston, is explaining to his supposed inferiors his motivations for cosmic exploration. "It is her right," said Weston, "the right, or, if you will, the might of Life herself, that I am prepared without flinching to plant the flag of man on the soil of



Malacandra: to march on, step by step, superseding, where necessary, the lower forms of life we find, claiming planet after planet, system after system, till our posterity—whatever strange form and yet unguessed mentality they have assumed—dwell in the universe wherever the universe is habitable.” Happily, he gets his well deserved comeuppance shortly after this deplorable speech.

In the next book, Weston’s warped nature bloodily tears into the idyllic setting of yet another world. The hero, Ransom, finds himself on an un-fallen Venus in its own version of the Garden of Eden. Surrounded by this untainted world, Ransom is shocked when he finds a line of small animals eviscerated for no apparent reason and tossed aside like garbage. Soon he locates the source as Weston, in total depravity, is found ripping the poor creatures asunder simply for the pleasure of inflicting pain on others.

In the final book of the series, one of the many antagonists, a Continental aesthete named Filostrato, offers praise to the moon as his ideal world and the cleansing efforts of its inhabitants, “There is a world for you, no?” said Filostrato. “There is cleanness, purity. Thousands of square miles with not one blade of grass, not one fibre of lichen, not one grain of dust. Not even air... They are slowly spreading their hygiene over their whole globe. Disinfecting her...encroaching: the organic stain, all the green and blue and mist, growing smaller. Like cleaning tarnished silver.”

This is quite clearly not the sort of world that most people in the postmodern era, with their passion for all things natural, are hoping to live to see. Lewis’s

words on nature and the mindless evil of exploitation is a readymade connection to the eco-friendly contemporary world. Yet while those today see the protection of the natural environment as an end in and of itself, Lewis challenges them to see the world around them as the precious creation of God himself. Without a real supernatural order spilling over into the natural, without the natural world intimately tied to the supernatural, without a creation that is the work of a creator, all the hopes and dreams of our enlightened society fall as nothing more than ephemeral dust dancing about a meaningless cosmos. While those of the world think they are reading the words of an unusual Christian who “gets it,” little by little they find that it is his Christianity that is getting them.



he works of Lewis have been uniquely effective in reaching out to non-Christians. Much of his success has been due to his winsome nature and appeal to common sense, common ethics, and common ground. But, left there, with nothing more than modifying vocabulary to suit this moment and all those that follow, we would be left with a mediocre faith, a faith lacking its own meaning and its own message.

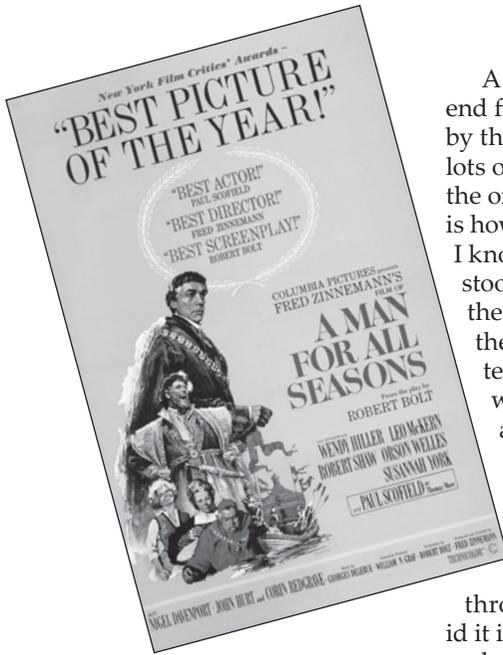
Lewis did not gain his great following by being a better writer or more clever advocate for Christianity. He earned the respect of the watching world by creating works of excellence which spoke in familiar ways and in resonating motifs. Yet, like the biblical writers before him, who used the styles of their day to penetrate the defenses of their world, he did not leave the content of his works to the whims of literary fashions. Rather, he took up the forms of the age only to let the dynamic message of Christianity burst the old wineskins of contemporary belief. Speaking the language of the world, Lewis subversively infused these words with new meaning and thereby turned his readers’ eyes towards a new world. ■

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# Is Anything Worth Dying For?



A few years ago I was part of a weekend film festival in England sponsored by the British branch of L'Abri. I have lots of memories from that weekend, but the one that comes most quickly to mind is how cold it was. Being a Minnesotan I know something about cold. I have stood outdoors in the country in the northern part of the state, near the border with Canada, when the temperature is well below zero, watching the Aurora Borealis sweep across the sky. I have stayed at a remote cabin on the shore of a lake in early winter as the temperature dropped, listening to the deep booms and sharp cracks as the water of the lake froze. I have

thrown a glass of water into air so frigid it instantly burst into a cloud of steam and crystals and not a single drop of liquid hit the ground. I have driven my car after a night of temperatures so low that for the first several blocks I could hear and feel the thumping of the tires turning past the flattened side that had rested against the frozen ground. Still, that weekend in Great Britain felt colder than anything I have ever experienced at home. It drizzled constantly outside, and so the damp—oh, so very damp—seeped into my toes and fingers, so that even rooms with a blazing fireplace seemed chilled. Only the lovely warmth of community and unhurried conversation, with endless cups of hot tea, made us forget the cold.

The film festival was a delightful time, a weekend of art, story, and discussion about the perennial

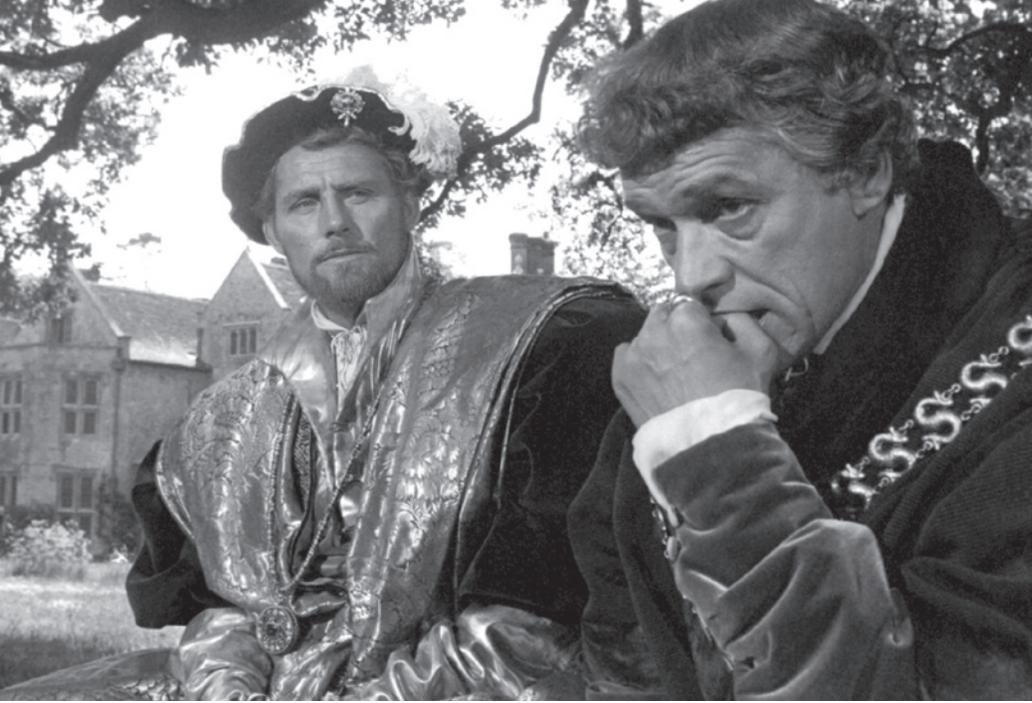
questions that every generation raises in one form or another. I had helped choose the films, and we had decided that one should be a classic, a movie that had been so well crafted that it was good enough to stand the test of time. The film we chose for that category was *A Man for All Seasons* (1966). What we did not expect was that of all the films we watched and discussed, this was the film that seemed to resonate most deeply in the hearts and imaginations of the participants. One man, a student from Korea (if memory serves correctly) wept as he watched. When the film ended, there was a profound silence in the room and, once the discussion began, it was hard to bring it to an end. Though a very well made and compelling film, it is also dated, but that does not detract from the power of the story.

The story line in *A Man for All Seasons* is deceptively simple. Henry VIII was king of England. He wanted a divorce because his wife had failed to provide a son and because he had found a lover. Since the pope would not grant his blessing for such a marital travesty, the king decided to leave the Church of Rome, be declared the head of the church in England, and this way be allowed to take his mistress for his wife. Today, when churches proliferate for reasons far less impressive, this may not seem to be a very big deal. But in sixteenth century Europe, religious belief, the church, the sanctity of marriage, and royal behavior—indeed, the possibility of virtue and vice—were viewed as having true significance for this life, and for the next. So, King Henry asked his nobles to sign The Act of Supremacy and they did so, because Henry was not a king that took disagreement lightly. One man, Sir Thomas More, however, the king's chancellor, would not sign

because his conscience would not allow him to do so. The Duke of Norfolk, a friend who had signed, pleaded with More. "Oh confound all this," The Duke said. "I'm not a scholar, I don't know whether the marriage was lawful or not but dammit, Thomas, look at these names! Why can't you do as I did and come with us, for fellowship!" "And when we die," More responded, "and you are sent to heaven for doing your conscience, and I am sent to hell for not doing mine, will you come with me, for fellowship?" Thomas More resigned his position, but Henry was not content. More was widely famous for his integrity, known to be a man of principle who could not be bribed and who had always refused even the appearance of corruption. Though now he was merely a private citizen of the realm, More's refusal to sign seemed like a trumpet blast against the legal slight of hand the royal court had embarked upon. More was arrested, tried for treason, and beheaded. To the very end he chose principle over politics, virtue over convenience, conscience over pragmatism.

Though it is a simple story, it is not a simplistic plot. *A Man for All Seasons* has a richly developed script in which personal identity and integrity are explored in a setting where one man, standing for what he believes, is convinced that death is preferable to losing his soul. "It is a literate, humane treatment of the dilemma an honest man faces," Roger Ebert says, "in a corrupt society." The film is historically quite accurate, except for two details worth noting. First, More was not the only man to refuse to sign and to lose his head as a result. Though this does not mean that More's stand





was not heroic or lonely, the film can be seen to imply he may have been alone in his stand. The second fact worth noting is that, while in political power, More persecuted heretics (read: Protestants and non-conformists), condemning them to death. I do not mention this to detract from More's integrity, since even here he was following what he passionately believed to be true. I mention it to note the political turmoil of the day, and how the death penalty was used at the time in Europe in instances that today we would find intolerable.

*A Man for All Seasons* explores categories of thought and reality that get to the very heart of what it means to be human. Knowledge is not mere data, neutral bits of information that we can amass or reject depending on how we are feeling at the moment. Knowledge arrives with responsibility and, when we refuse to acknowledge that, we have assumed a stance that is slightly less than fully human.

*A Man for All Seasons* is one of those rare pieces of art that, though clearly dated, remains timeless. It remains timeless, first, by being a superb example of cinematic art. And it remains timeless by raising questions that we must all face—questions of conscience, authority, integrity, law, and love. If I violate my conscience for the sake of convenience, what have I lost? Am I known as someone whose word is inviolate? To what extent is my personal integrity worth suffering loss? And do I believe anything, love anything that is truly worth living, and if necessary, worth dying for? ■

**Sources:** [www.flickfilosopher.com/1999/02/a-man-for-all-seasons-review.html](http://www.flickfilosopher.com/1999/02/a-man-for-all-seasons-review.html); [www.rogerebert.com/rogers-journal/the-best-10-movies-of-1967](http://www.rogerebert.com/rogers-journal/the-best-10-movies-of-1967).

**Credits: *A Man for All Seasons***

**Starring:**

Paul Scofield (Thomas More)  
Wendy Hiller (Alice More)  
Leo McKern (Cromwell)  
Robert Shaw (Henry VIII)  
Orson Welles (Cardinal Wolsey)  
Susannah York (Margaret)  
Nigel Davenport (Duke of Norfolk)  
John Hurt (Rich)  
Corin Redgrave (Roper)

Director: Fred Zinnemann

Writer: Robert Bolt (play and screenplay)

Producers: William N. Graf, Fred Zinnemann

Cinematography: Ted Moore

U.S.A., 1966; 120 minutes

Rated: G

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What was your first impression of the film? Why do you think you responded as you did?
2. Consider the film, as objectively as possible, as a work of art. Reflect on the various aspects of cinematic art (acting, script, cinematography, direction, editing, lighting, musical score, etc.). What was used to good effect? Was anything distracting to you, and to what extent could that be because the film was made in 1966?
3. Imagine the writer and director sitting next to you. As objectively as possible, state in your own words the message(s) communicated by *A Man for All Seasons*. No opinions here—the goal would be to listen so carefully to the film that the writer and director would affirm your statement(s).
4. The main characters of the film each play a strategic role in the development of the story. Consider each in turn, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of their character.
5. Late in the film, Thomas More's daughter visits him in his prison cell in the Tower of London. She obviously respects her father for his integrity, but also yearns for his release. The dialogue is profound and touching:  
*Sir Thomas More: "If we lived in a state where virtue was profitable, common sense would make us saintly. But since we see that abhorrence, anger, pride, and stupidity commonly profit far beyond charity, modesty, justice, and thought, perhaps we must stand fast a little—even at the risk of being heroes."*  
*Margaret More: [crying] "But in reason!*

*Haven't you done as much as God can reasonably want?"*

*Sir Thomas More: "Well, finally, it isn't a matter of reason. Finally, it's a matter of love."*

What does Sir Thomas More mean by that last line?

6. What, if anything, do you take away from this film about how you might think more clearly about your own personal integrity?
7. Sir Thomas More places great significance on his conscience. It matters to him not merely that what he believes is true, but that *he* believes it. Do you believe he is admirable in this, or mistaken? Why?
8. MaryAnn Johanson, (FlickFilosopher.com) says *A Man for All Seasons* is really aimed primarily at a Christian audience—or at least one that accepts religious belief as something that would be worth dying for.  
*"I never really believed More's deep faith in his religion, which led him ultimately to the chopping block. Perhaps that's my problem, and not the film's. As a nonbeliever, maybe I just can't accept that someone would abandon his family and condemn himself to death over a fear of being damned to hell—I find it sad that people will deny their whole lives for the illusory promise of another one. Though Scofield's More speaks repeatedly of his faith, he never made me see beyond my own feelings to feel his."*  
*"A Man for All Seasons is preaching to the choir—if you're in the choir, you may find it a lot more enjoyable that I did."*  
How would you respond to a friend who said this after viewing the film?



Images above are from *The Art of Guy Chase* (Square Halo Books, 2011) and Bowden Collections samples from *Beauty Given by Grace: The Biblical Prints of Sadao Watanabe* (Square Halo Books, 2012). Read more in the page 3 Paper & Canvas article: *Distinctly Different, Distinctly Christian Visions*.

**CHASE**

- a) *Untitled (9,000 dots)*. 1989, ink on cardboard, 11" x 5"
- b) *Untitled Ledger (ledger for multiple adjustments)*. 2001, oil on panel, 15" x 22"
- c) *Must Love Life, No. 32 and No. 41*. 2009, laser print on craft paper with jute handle, 15" x 10" each
- d) *Untitled (icon with checker board)*. 2009, gouache and ink on icon book page, 11" x 8.5"

**WATANABE**

- e) *Last Supper*. 1973, hand colored kappazuri stencil print on washi handmade paper, 9.875 x 6 inches
- f) *Noah's Ark*. 1974, washi, 6 x 9 inches
- g) *The Fourth Angel Blew His Trumpet*. 1980, hand colored kappazuri stencil print on momigami wrinkled paper, 21.25 x 17.75 inches
- h) *Christ Risen*. 1979, hand colored kappazuri stencil print on washi handmade paper, 7.875 x 7.125 inches