

critique

A RANSOM FELLOWSHIP PUBLICATION

ISSUE THREE 2010

Inception

From Story to Drama

Postville's Justice

God Shuffled His Feet

Walking in Dreams



Common Sense and Canon Sense

I suspect everyone knows what common sense is, though not everyone exhibits it. It's that almost inexplicable practical wisdom that some people have for choosing rightly and living rightly, even in novel situations. It can't be taught in a workshop, though workshop leaders that exhibit it tend to be better teachers. It can't be summarized in a book, though authors who have it tend to write better books. Proverbs embody bits of it. Probe into the lives of people who demonstrate common sense and you'll probably find three common elements.

An attractive mentor of some sort who was characterized by common sense, a view of the world in which practical wisdom for living well is valued highly, and experience in living where there was safety to fail, learn, and keep on keeping on.

Wheaton College theologian Kevin Vanhoozer proposes that Christian faithfulness includes what he calls *canon sense*. It's practical biblical wisdom for choosing and living faithfully in a fallen world, demonstrating grace even in novel situations. Like common sense, it is learned in living, with a mentor who sees and lives life in deeply biblical categories and for whom faithfulness is a way of life. Canon sense is what attracted me to Francis Schaeffer in the Sixties.

Canon sense, Vanhoozer says, allows us to live within the unfolding biblical story. Where the Story of Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration shapes our perception of life and forms us into a character fit for dwelling in that story. Like actors who "get into" a part so deeply they can improvise when something unexpected suddenly happens on stage, we can know and live in our script, the canon of Holy Scripture, so deeply that we will be able to instinctively improvise a scene the script does not specifically address. This is not going beyond the script but rather dwelling more deeply in it.

What drew me to Schaeffer was not perfection, but his canon sense. His willingness to not just profess that Christ is Lord of all, but to actually live as if it were true. To not just preach the gospel, but to seek to demonstrate that it has something substantial to say about every part of life. Since people are made in God's image, unhurried conversation, listening, and asking questions were essential to faithfulness. There was no reason to be defensive or withdrawn because although we do not have all the answers, God has spoken in a way we can understand. This was new, and attractive because I sensed that canon sense is rooted in the grace that promotes human flourishing. ❀

Source

The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology
by Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005)
457 pages + bibliography + indices.

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DIALOGUE *readers respond*

To the editor:

I had the choice between *The Sun* and *Critique* to swat a fly. I chose *The Sun*. You can quote me on that if you want.

Katy Bowser Hutson

Nashville, TN

via Facebook

Denis Haack responds:

Katy, you have exquisite taste.

To the editor:

In reference to your comment in your article in *Critique* [#2-2010] entitled, “None Other Lamb” about your not being able for conscience sake to sing the Isaac Watts’ hymn, “At The Cross.” Watts’ original version of the hymn did not include the refrain—this was added later. I agree with you about the refrain, but let’s not blame dear old uncle Isaac for it.

Incidentally, the same thing was done with Watts’ hymn that has come to be known as “We’re Marching To Zion.” The original (“Come Ye That Love The Lord”) is about the glory of corporate worship. However, years later when the “We’re marching to Zion...” refrain was added, it changed the meaning of the song as referring to Heaven rather than the corporate gathering.

Craig Pitman

Worship Leader, Trinity PCA

Murfreesboro, TN

To the editor:

Thanks for your piece on hymnody, “None Other Lamb,” which I’ve just gotten around to reading [*Critique* #2-2010].

I must gently rebuke you, however, for blaming the “chorus” of “At the Cross” on Isaac Watts. He could never write such an atrocious piece of doggerel. Just considering the hymn on its own, you can see two completely different hands at work in the verses and the chorus. There is nothing that ties the verses and the chorus together other than proximity and tradition—not the meter, not the richness of vocabulary, grammar, or diction—nothing at all.

*Alas! and did my Savior bleed
And did my Sov’reign die?
Would He devote that sacred head
For such a worm as I?*

Refrain:

*At the cross, at the cross where I first saw the light,
And the burden of my heart rolled away,*

*It was there by faith I
received my sight,
And now I am happy
all the day!*

*Thy body slain, sweet Jesus,
Thine—
And bathed in its own blood—
While the firm mark of
wrath divine,
His soul in anguish stood.*

*Was it for crimes that I had done
He groaned upon the tree?
Amazing pity! grace unknown!
And love beyond degree!*

*Well might the sun in darkness hide
And shut his glories in,
When Christ, the mighty Maker died,
For man the creature’s sin.*

*Thus might I hide my blushing face
While His dear cross appears,
Dissolve my heart in thankfulness,
And melt my eyes to tears.*

*But drops of grief can ne’er repay
The debt of love I owe:
Here, Lord, I give myself away,
'Tis all that I can do.*

The person who wrote the lyrics to “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” and “Joy to the World” (“let men their songs employ”) could never write “and now I am happy all the day,” except as a joke, or perhaps as a 6-year old.

I don’t know the history of the hymn, but it sure looks like one of those hymns where some kind of “Singspiration” song leader thought that the old thing could be “livened up” a little with a peppy little chorus; and now all that people remember of the hymn is the chorus. That is probably a hymn that needs to be reclaimed with a new and appropriate tune, with the dreadful chorus excluded.

That also perhaps serves as a word of warning to the present Contemporary Christian musicians, who try to “liven up” old hymns with their own artful interventions. That can work if done well; but if not done well, it degrades the original, rather than enhancing it.

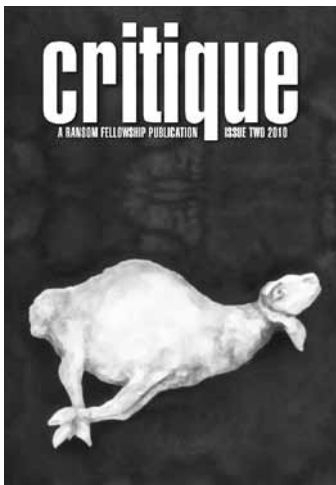
Blessings to you and Margie!

Lee Cerling

Pasadena, CA

via e-Mail





DIALOGUE *readers respond*

To the editor:

Thank you for your personal reflection on some of the hymns that have captured your heart and imagination! [*Critique* #2-2010]. My wife and I have long enjoyed the refreshment and challenge we receive in each issue.

I travel from home for long periods for my work, so it is quite possible you have already received a note or two with regard to your reference to the Isaac Watts hymn.

The refrain “At the cross...” represents a taking of liberties by the 19th C. American revivalist Ralph E. Hudson, who in my opinion did much damage to Watts’ “Alas, and Did My Savior Bleed” by adding an unrealistic and theologically untenable refrain to what I believe is quite a profoundly beautiful expression of our savior’s sacrifice of love.

Otherwise, a fine précis of the glorious Rossetti text! Thanks for all you and Margie do to keep us in full discernment.

Craig N. Hodges, D.M.A.
Kalispell, MT
via email

Denis Haack responds:

Craig, Lee, and Craig: Rarely have I been so delighted to receive so much correction. You are correct, I hereby publicly register my mea culpa, and promise that if possible I will track down and apologize in person to Mr. Watts in the new earth. Thanks for being such thoughtful readers.

To the editor:

Got the latest *Critique* [#1-2010]. Great. Really enjoyed it. Especially liked the brief article at the end about being lost, “Questions for Lost People.” Going to revisit the *Avatar* feature by Steven Garber a time or two more, I think, before I get as much of it as I’d like.

Jake Meador
St Paul, MN
via Facebook

To the editor:

Denis, simply to say to you, my friend, that your essay on being lost, “Questions for Lost People,” in *Critique* [#1-2010] is as good as anything I have read from you. Very well

done. From the smile over you and Margie in the car, to the meditation on pop culture into lostness, to the biblical reflection, you write with understanding and clarity that is a gift to all.

Very proud, very glad, to have you as my friend.
Steven Garber
The Washington Institute
Washington, DC
via email

Denis Haack responds:

Jake and Steve: It is a grace to know you as friends, and your kind words are an encouragement to, as Schaeffer was fond of saying, keep on keeping on. Thank you.

To the editor:

Hey Denis and Margie, I’m becoming somewhat of a pest, I suppose, but had to tell you how much I’m loving *Critique* #1-2010, what I’ve read so far. LOVED Steven Garber’s article on *Avatar*—quoted him twice in my sermon on Sunday. I was in the final verses of 1 Thessalonians 3, talking about increasing in divine love, and quoted his reference about Michael Polanyi—“what does it mean to know and how do we learn to become responsible for what we know?” Knowing that God loves us is not enough—we need to “become responsible for what we know” by loving others. Anyway, I appreciate you both so much, and Dr. Garber’s wonderful article.

Blessings.
Edwin Shepperson
Grace Church
Albuquerque, NM

Steven Garber responds:

Dear Ed,

Your country is my country; I was born under the Sangre de Cristos—so we already have more in common than you knew.

Thank you for your kind note. As you might expect, I am very glad that you saw what I saw, and were able to understand its meaning for your people there in Albuquerque. To know and to love seems to me to be the heart of a good life, but then also the hardest part of life too. Written into that is the vision of responsibility for what we know. In the most common experiences of life, we do expect that people will connect knowing with doing, knowledge with responsibility; marriages and families rest on this, as do courts and cultures. When we are not, everyone suffers.

Reality Revisited

Pardon him, Theodotus: he is a barbarian, and thinks that the customs of his tribe and island are the laws of nature. [George Bernard Shaw in *Caesar and Cleopatra*]

Shaw has had lots of fans in recent years. “Constructivists,” as some are called, think that knowledge has much more to do with social interactions than reality. The upside to this is obvious: freedom, freedom from taking the tension of our differences too seriously and freedom to go with what one feels is right. It’s a freedom Hollywood has long celebrated in films like *Dead Poets Society* (1989) and *Pleasantville* (1998).

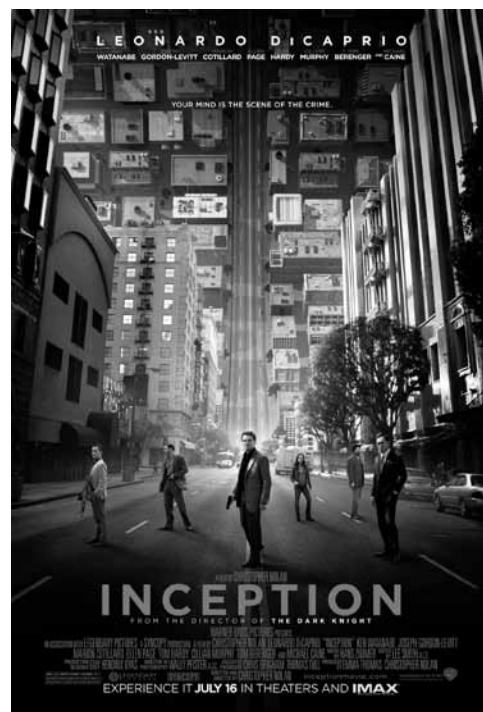
Christopher Nolan isn’t an old-fashioned barbarian, but at the very least he sees a downside to not knowing. For example consider his latest film, *Inception*.

Cobb (Leonardo DiCaprio) is an Extractor, a thief who makes his living by entering the dreams of others and stealing their ideas. It is quite a lucrative business, but for him it has several downsides: it’s dangerous and, thus, exciting (for us if not for him); it cuts him off from his family for reasons you should learn only by watching the movie; it is confusing. The last in Nolan’s opinion may be the worst.

At first glance *Inception* is a typical summer movie, teeming with romance, action, and stunning visuals. Cobb is blackmailed by Saito (Ken Watanabe) into using his dream-walker skills to plant an idea in the mind of a business rival. With the help of Ariadne (Ellen Page), Arthur (Joseph Gordon-Levitt), Eames (Tom Hardy), and Yusuf (Dileep Rao), he concocts a scheme complicated enough to confuse Sherlock Holmes.

Thankfully even as it embraces the summer movie motif, *Inception* transcends it, and its sizzle makes its steak all the more satisfying. The story within *Inception*’s story is Cobb’s story, a story filled with questions. He and his wife Mal (Marion Cotillard) once chose to live in their shared dreams. In them they enjoyed god-like freedom to create a world in their own image, according to their own imaginations. But their delight in it was tempered by troubling questions: Is it really real? If it isn’t what is? How can I know? Give Nolan credit here: he’s not content to sweep these nagging doubts under the rug and enjoy the fruits of freedom. They obviously drive him crazy and through him, Cobb.

Constructivists think asking such questions is a no-win situation, as Stanley Fish once famously pontificated: “I would believe in absolute truth, if there was an explanation of reality which was independent of the standpoint ▶



Starring

Leonardo DiCaprio (Cobb)
Joseph Gordon-Levitt (Arthur)
Ellen Page (Ariadne)
Tom Hardy (Eames)
Ken Watanabe (Saito)
Dileep Rao (Yusuf)
Cillian Murphy (Robert Fischer)
Tom Berenger (Peter Browning)
Marion Cotillard (Mal)
Pete Postlethwaite (Maurice Fischer)
Michael Caine (Miles)
Lukas Haas (Nash)

Director

Christopher Nolan

Producers

Christopher Nolan, Jordan Goldberg, Emma Thomas, and others

Cinematographer

Wally Pfister

Original Music

Hans Zimmer

Runtime

148 min

Release

USA, UK

MPAA Rating

PG-13

of the observer.” If he’s right, then all perceptions as far as we know are just perceptions, all are equally trustworthy and untrustworthy, and the question “What is real?” becomes impossible to answer. If he’s right, then so is Saito, when he tells Cobb, “Don’t you want to take a leap of faith? Or become an old man, filled with regret, waiting to die alone?” And Mal is right when she begs Cobb simply to forget the questions and love her: “You’re waiting for a train, a train that will take you far away. You know where you hope this train will take you, but you can’t be sure. But it doesn’t matter, because we’ll be together.”

How does Cobb answer the questions? Well, just as no good question is ever answered well just in theory, you’ll need to watch *Inception* to appreciate how Cobb deals with his dilemma. But before you do, let me encourage you to do two things. First, watch Nolan’s *Memento* (2000); it’s a more confusing film in many ways than *Inception*, but clearer in its revelation of Christopher Nolan’s worldview. Then, read chapter 1 of Romans. Paul argues that there are a couple of things that we cannot not know: that God exists and that we are guilty.

One imagines that Paul and Christopher Nolan would have much to discuss after watching his film. I cannot imagine a better film to discuss after watching it with friends of my own. ❀

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What were you thinking about as this film ended?
2. What images from the film linger most vividly in your mind? Why do you think you were struck by them so forcefully?
3. In one of *Inception*’s central scenes 19th century opium dens are recreated by dreamers instead of drug-users. How did this sequence make you feel? Why do you think you felt this way?
4. Miles, endearingly acted by Michael Caine, plays the professor, a central figure in Cobb’s life. What does he represent to Cobb? What is his role in advancing the story?
5. Nolan recently remarked, “I like films where the music and the sound design, at times, are almost indistinguishable.” (He lists Pink Floyd’s *The Wall* as one of his influences here.) Discuss his use of sound/music in *Inception*. Did it interfere with your perception of the film or undergird it?
6. In your opinion is romance presented positively or negatively in *Inception*? How does it aid and/or hinder Cobb from resolving his dilemma?
7. Early in the film Saito challenges Cobb, saying, “Don’t you want to take a leap of faith? Or become an old man, filled with regret, waiting to die alone?” What does he mean by this? What is he challenging Cobb to do and why?
8. Cobb’s usual goal is to steal ideas. In *Inception* he’s forced to plant an idea, which is both more difficult and more powerful, in his words, “The seed we planted in this man’s mind may change everything.” Discuss how the power of ideas is presented in the film. Do you agree with Cobb’s assessment here or not? Defend your answer.
9. What is the chief danger Cobb faces in *Inception*? How in the end does he face it? Does he find answers to his questions? What are they? Do you agree with him/them? What is he certain of in the end?
10. At the end of the movie, does the top fall or not? Defend your answer, not in terms of what you want to happen, but from what you’ve seen in the film.
11. If you were privileged enough to view *Inception* with Christopher Nolan, what questions would you like to discuss with him afterwards?



Greg Grooms, a contributing editor for *Critique*, lives with his wife Mary Jane in a large home across the street from the University of Texas in Austin, where they regularly welcome students to meals, to warm hospitality, to ask questions, and to seriously wrestle with the proposition that Jesus is actually Lord of all.

Discernment 301: From Story to Drama

I wish I could read this aloud to you, but I can't. We aren't in the same room, for one thing, which is a problem. I suppose I could take the time to record it and post an mp3 file on our web site, but too few of you would stop and listen to it—life is too busy. So, here it is, in print. I know this is hard, but please try to imagine it being read aloud to you, because a good story is even better when someone who loves stories reads a story aloud to you. Children understand the truth of this instinctively but many adults somehow forget it, or come to believe they are too busy to put reading aloud into their schedule. The ancients rightly called such failures in adults a lack of wisdom. Anyway, here is the beginning of a story, one story out of many—the opening pages of a remarkable novel by Hwee Hwee Tan—that I would read aloud to you if I could:

"Are you a Singaporean citizen, over twenty-one, and a lawyer?" he said.

I recognized that voice at once, the English accent, the voice roughened by too much tar and endless lager sagas. It could only be Andy. Now the above question might seem fairly innocuous to the casual eavesdropper, but in this instance it caused me a great deal of aggravation. Believe me, if Mother Teresa was in my place, if she was asked the same question under the same controlled circumstances, it would be enough to make her chuck her role as the saint of the century and send her screaming down the streets, going apeshit, looking for babies to kick. Why was Andy's question so provocative? I'll tell you why. Firstly, not only because it was one in the morning (and looking at my glow-in-the-dark Casio clock, I saw that it was 1:16 a.m. to be exact), but secondly, and more importantly, Andy knew, that I knew, that he knew, the answer to all three questions, because five hours earlier he was supposed to meet me outside Tung Lok Shark's Fin Restaurant to celebrate my getting the license to

practice law. Of course, Andy didn't turn up. I hate eating alone, so I went home early, and woe to me—I returned to the flat only to find my mother having a karaoke night with her mah-jong playmates. So instead of feasting on Abalone Delight and Peking Duck, I spent my evening trying to block out the sound of fifty-something housewives wailing songs from the Karaoke Hit List From Hell, songs like "Sealed With A Kiss", "Singapore, Oh Singapore (Sunny Island Set In The Sea)", "Tie A Yellow Ribbon Round the Old Oak Tree", "Que Será Será", and "Ne Xin Li Ken Ben Mei Yao Wo" (or "Your Heart Never Had Me"). Trust me, you haven't seen something truly Satanic until you've seen your mother belting out "Chain Reaction" complete with Diana Ross hand actions and bum wiggles. So, as you can imagine, when Andy phoned, I was in less than a good mood. What would you do—after the pain in your ears has subsided, when you've finally managed to fall asleep—what would you do, if you were woken at one in the morning by someone who had stood you up five hours earlier, and asked three completely inane questions?

I pondered my options, rolled over the choices that came to mind, and finally decided upon the calmest, ▶



the most apposite, indeed, the most mature response. I slammed down the phone. It rang again, and I picked it up and said, "I'm very pissed off now, and you have about five seconds to make me un-pissed-off, preferably using a technique which involves three words or less, or else this phone is going down again."

Silence on the other end as Andy paused to think of those all-important three words. As our Andrew ponders upon those crucial phrases, perhaps now would be a good time to introduce him. This is a tricky process because of the Eugene Connection. Andy wasn't really a friend, he was more like a friend-in-law—I knew him through Eugene. Eugene was my neighbor-cum-childhood playmate. When we were kids, we had great adventures together, like investigating "The Case of Mrs Lam's (possibly) Murdered Maid", but that's another story. Now pay attention, here's where it gets complicated, because Eugene is one of those people with those intricate, exotic backgrounds that most normal people like me would kill for. During his teens, Eugene and his parents emigrated to Holland to open a Chinese restaurant. He returned to Singapore for a few years to complete his National Service, then he went to university in England, where he met Andy. They became best friends, and spent their undergraduate years cultivating their passion for soccer, kebabs, and Cocoa Bombs. Anyway, post-graduation, when Andy (unsurprisingly) couldn't get a job in England, he decided to go East to seek his fortune.

Andy finally thought of those three magic words—"I'm in jail."

What is it about a good story that captures us so intensely?

Sometimes, after we have made tea and lit candles, especially on a wintry evening when it gets dark early here in Minnesota, we find comfortable spots in the living room to listen to a story. Friends who join us have commented that it's like being a child again, but that's just the surface memory I think. What's really happening is that something deeply human is occurring. Life is inexplicable without story, so to hear a good story is to be transported in imagination to the deepest intersection of mystery, reality, and meaning.

We need to visit that intersection regularly because our lives are a story. We often speak in such terms, as when we ask a new friend to tell us their story, meaning of course the story of their life. And we all live out our stories in a greater or larger narrative in history in which we play only a small part but which defines our story, shapes its details and signifi-

cance, its twists and turns, its ups and downs, its outcome. Finding meaning and a sense of direction in life requires that we locate our individual story in a larger story that will give it significance in a way that transcends the details of the here and now. This is why religious traditions always involve narratives, myths that give a wider perspective on things. For the Christian the Scriptures provide us with a story: Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration. John Stott correctly says this 4-fold story provides the "true perspective from which to view the unfolding process between two eternities, the vision of God working out his purposes. It gives us a framework in which to fit everything, a way of integrating our understanding, the possibility of thinking straight, even about the most complex issues."

Though he doesn't use the term, Stott is talking here about being discerning. As we learn to see things through the lens of the biblical Story, we will increasingly be discerning. Instead of merely reacting to things or being non-committal and withdrawn, we will be responding in a way that is in keeping with The Story even as we live its reality out in novel situations.

The increasing diversity and pluralism of our world means that our neighbors, colleagues, and friends do not necessarily share our deepest convictions and values. This means that we tend to find ourselves in situations or presented with challenges that are not addressed in any specific passage in the Bible. On the one hand, if you are behind in your bills and are thinking of holding up a bank, you can find really specific texts about that (they all say don't do it—that stealing is bad). If, on the other hand, you are wondering if you can drive a Muslim neighbor to the mosque for Friday prayers, no specific verse addresses that specific question. The same goes for attending the housewarming

The increasing diversity and pluralism of our world means that our neighbors, colleagues, and friends do not necessarily share our deepest convictions and values.

party for an unmarried couple who have just moved in together and who request that gifts in their name be given to the local coalition working to legalize gay marriage. But answer these questions we must, if we want to be faithful to our Lord in our pluralistic world and more than merely reactionary or non-committal—neither of which contribute to human flourishing or are sufficient for Christian faithfulness.

Being discerning is the process by which we apply the revelation of Scripture to life even when we need to respond to something that the Bible does not specifically address. Some believers seem distressed to discover that issues ▶

READING THE WORD

arise for which they can find no proof text on the topic. Distressed to think they might do something wrong, they withdraw, feeling defensive. The problem is that they have failed to understand what God has graciously provided in his written word. The Bible is not primarily a list of instructions on how to live, though it is full of wise instruction about living in a way that both pleases God and causes us to flourish as his creatures. The Bible is not primarily a reference work consisting of a series of proof texts about the details of life because too much of what daily life entails is not addressed in any text. The Bible is not primarily a scholarly systematic theological treatise, though it reveals a rich set of doctrines that can shape our minds, hearts, and imaginations so that by grace we think God's thoughts after him (though imperfectly, of course). The Bible is, rather, primarily the revelation of Jesus Christ in the unfolding story of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration, the narrative of history and reality in which we live and in which God is bringing all things to their appointed end in and through his Son for his own glory. The Bible tells us The Story that fulfills and completes every human story in a way that is beyond our wildest dreams.

In *The Drama of Doctrine*, a rich but dense book, theologian Kevin Vanhoozer proposes that we take the story metaphor one step further. Instead of simply imagining being in a story, he says, imagine life as being in a play, a full drama unfolding on a stage before a watching world. Think of the canon of the Scriptures as a script, in which we have a part to play. The community of God's people then becomes the company of actors, pastors and elders are unit directors under the directing guidance of the Holy Spirit, and theologians are specialists that help us make proper sense of the script. It's a divinely inspired script, in which Christian belief, Vanhoozer observes, "serves the church by directing its members in the project of wise living, to the glory of God."

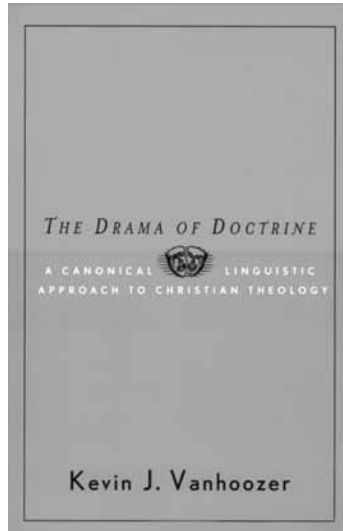
Vanhoozer's metaphor won't make sense if the play we imagine is an amateur production in which the actors are enthusiastic but limited to reproducing the script by rote memory. Instead imagine a production in which professional actors are so immersed in the script that they become their character to an extent that only those whose true vocation is in the theater can achieve. This sort of actor becomes the character they are playing and the plot becomes their story. Something magical happens at moments like that that reveals the inner essential wonder of the art of the theater.

Dustin Hoffman in *Rain Man* (1989), Jeff Bridges in *Crazy Heart* (2010), Francis McDormand in *Fargo* (1997), and Meryl Streep in *Sophie's Choice* (1983) all represent fine examples from film. It isn't just that the actors give fine performances, though there is that. It's that somehow the actors stop being themselves, transcend their own identity and become their character. The phenomenon isn't limited to serious plays or movies, either. Watch Jimmy Stewart in *Harvey* (1950). His co-star, though we never see him is Harvey, an invisible six-foot white rabbit. Stewart's brilliance as an actor makes us believe Harvey exists, drawing us into a story of family, friendship, and loyalty that utterly transcends the silliness of the fantasy to touch on themes that matter most in life.

"Doctrine tells us not how to pretend to be something that we are not but rather who we really are," Vanhoozer says, "creatures made new in Christ." Rather than being an invitation to hypocrisy, seeing faithfulness as a drama is a call to dwell in and live out the

unfolding Story of redemption revealed in Scripture that is fully real but not yet fully consummated.

The interesting thing is that this vision of things provides a true basis on which the players can go beyond the script without ever departing from it. The unfolding biblical Story, Vanhoozer argues, "is a guide for the church's scripted yet spirited gospel performances... The Holy Spirit is both author of the script and the one who guides the church's contemporary performance—its improvisatory variations—on the script." Now, when some unexpected twist suddenly occurs during a play accomplished actors improvise not by making something up, but by remaining in character so profoundly that what unfolds on stage would be in the script had the writer addressed such an event. A similar thing happens when film-directors allow accomplished actors to improvise in a scene. They go beyond the script but never go against it, extending it into something new because they have absorbed the story into their soul. In this vision of things, Christian faithfulness does not entail straining to locate proof texts that apply to our situation, or developing legalisms to generate conformity. Instead, faithfulness means being so steeped in God's word that our responses are shaped by its truth even when applied to situations not specifically addressed in any text of the Bible. "This is what the canon, the church's Scripture and the Christian's script, ultimately provides: the ability to make judgments about the true, the good, and the beautiful that are fit 'in Christ.'" ▶



Being in Christ, we can then live as in Christ, even when we are faced with a choice or event or challenge that is not specifically addressed in the script. The canon helps “us discern what, in light of the drama of redemption, is fitting language and action for Christian disciples,” even in novel situations.

Discernment was one of the essential things the prophet Jeremiah mentioned in his letter to the exiles (Jeremiah 29:8-9) who had been carted away to Babylon. Of course they would need to be discerning about the new culture they found themselves in, with its beliefs and values that were very different from those of Jerusalem. On their arrival they were immersed in studying the language and literature of Babylon (Daniel 1:4). In other words they entered into and engaged its culture. Being discerning would be a safeguard. They could learn the material well yet not be drawn in unawares. They were also to be discerning about voices from amongst the people of God who claimed to speak for God but didn’t. The prophet’s letter made clear they were not to rebel, or seek to escape, or withdraw. Instead, for the glory of Yahweh who had ordained them to live in exile, they were to work for the good of the city in which they found themselves. The city in which they found themselves, Babylon, was a diverse place. The Babylonian army had swept across the known world and brought back the best and the brightest to serve Nebuchadnezzar and his empire. The religions, lifestyles, values, beliefs, and languages of the world were there, and the exiled people of God were a minority in the midst of a diverse culture. In precisely the same way and for precisely the same reasons we need to develop skill in discernment as well.

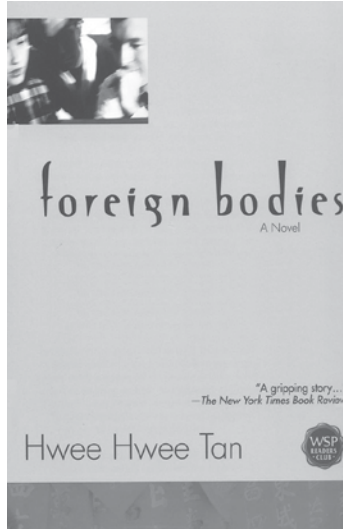
Improvisation in Vanhoozer’s model does not imply moving beyond the Scriptures but rather involves a display of holy spirited wisdom in fleshing out God’s revelation even when our circumstances do not match any specific biblical text. Rather than moving *beyond* the Scriptures, the description of moving *more deeply* into would be more appropriate. This is what Daniel and the other exiles were required to do in Babylon. The Mosaic law was specific about worshipping any god other than God (compare Daniel 3 and Exodus 20:1-4), but it offered no particular guidance on how to respond to being given pagan names (Daniel 1:7). In one case (worshipping an idol) the exiles objected, even though it put their lives at risk, in the other (going by names exalting pagan gods) they raised no objection. In both cases they were faithful to God.

“It is a matter,” Vanhoozer says, “of living well with others in the world to God’s glory.” The exiles properly refused to accept any god other than Yahweh, but they also properly did not object when Babylonians acted as Babylonians do, in ways consistent with their own pagan culture, beliefs,

and values, in this case to give the exiles new names. They never compromised the sovereignty of God but never insisted that the Babylonians change to become something they were not.

Like the exiles in Babylon we find ourselves in uncharted territory as the culture in which we are ordained to live becomes more pluralistic and post-Christian. Uncharted in terms of a list of proof-texts that provide rules for every circumstance, that is, but not unscripted. We have a script and can learn to live in it so completely that we see everything in terms of it—even issues and questions that go beyond the details of the script. Anything less cuts us off from God’s word of grace—and whether this involves being

reactionary or being non-committed and withdrawn, as we are reminded in the opening poem of the Psalter, both lead to spiritual drought, not human flourishing. This is what C. S. Lewis was referring to when he said, “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.” Just as the exiles in Babylon could know they had not been abandoned by God, so we can live in the assurance that the love of God as expressed in the living Word, the Lord Christ and in the written Word, the Scriptures, is unchanged, and will remain so, world without end. ✱



SOURCES

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Listening to Critics: When Musicians Raise Questions About Faith (II)



It was one of those rare moments in life. It's only happened twice to me, that I remember exactly where I was and what I was doing when I heard a song for the first time. It was 1993 and I was in a theater waiting for a movie to begin, which movie I do not remember. Between films the theater streamed a local rock radio station through their sound system. The music had been unremarkable, a series of apparently popular and forgettable songs that seemed to have more in common with marketing than they did with art. It was almost time for the movie to begin.

The next song was one I hadn't heard, and suddenly I found myself hoping the movie wouldn't begin before it finished. It opened with rhythmic scratchy sounds imitating the flaws on an old vinyl record, and after a moment the scratches merged into the percussion of the song. A rich bass-baritone voice—uncommon for rock vocalists—sang lyrics that told a mysterious story, painted impressions in my imagination, and creatively touched on some of the deepest questions that human beings have raised since the dawn of time. I loved the sound, the arrangement, the choice of instruments, the vocal performance, the lyrics. After the movie I stopped by a record store to get a copy of the album.

Really good music, of every genre, is always about more than mere entertainment. The musician expresses realities that are best communicated through metaphor, sound, poetry, and the allusive beauty of art. When we truly receive the music rather than just casually listen, we end up seeing

more deeply into life, in part or in whole, for blessing or for curse.

Good music is an expression of the artist's deepest yearnings, fears, hopes, dreams, and worldview. Music is more than that, of course, but it is certainly that. And because the artistic gift involves seeing with clarity, the art that is produced often helps to both shape and reflect the artist's culture and times.

So, for those of us who take Christian faith seriously, listening to the music crafted by artists who raise challenges to our faith is not just interesting but vital. It's a good way to hear the doubts and questions that we need to address if we are to live out and talk about our faith in a way that can be appreciated and understood in our pluralistic world. This is the purpose of this series of articles. (The first is posted on Ransom's web site—the song was “It Ain't Necessarily So” from Gershwin's classic American opera, *Porgy and Bess*.)

There is some risk here. That some might think I am only concerned for the lyrics of the songs, or that I'm reducing them to their theological content. Doing so would mistreat the music and the artists. Nor am I suggesting that all the musicians produced these pieces to criticize the Christian faith, which I don't think is true. An artist's convictions naturally tends to shape their work, so their doubts and beliefs, positive and negative, will make some appearance. I expect non-Christian artists to produce art with integrity, and that means that they will, occasionally at least, raise challenges or questions or criticisms of Christianity. What I am arguing here in this series is that the music involved ▶

can still be lovely, meaningful, and help us as Christians see more clearly.

Such is the song I heard that day in the theater. “God Shuffled His Feet” by the Crash Test Dummies, with lyricist and lead vocalist Brad Roberts.

Critic song #2.1: “God Shuffled His Feet”

*After seven days
He was quite tired, so God said:
“Let there be a day
Just for picnics, with wine and bread”
He gathered up some people he had made
Created blankets and laid back in the shade*

*The people sipped their wine
And what with God there,
they asked him questions
Like: do you have to eat
Or get your hair cut in heaven?
And if your eye got poked out in this life
Would it be waiting up in heaven with your wife?*

*God shuffled his feet
and glanced around at them;
The people cleared their throats
and stared right back at him*

“God Shuffled His Feet” is a richly creative song, with the percussion, instrumentation, arrangement, and vocals befitting the lyrics. It is a song that has a child-like simplicity and charm while evoking questions that are raised by people of all ages. What happens after death? And what about the heartaches, disappointments, and disabilities suffered in this broken world? Even if they are repaired, what about the lost years and dashed hopes that dogged us for an entire lifetime? Even if the pain is somehow dulled or forgotten, the pain was still a tragic reality that can’t be erased. Even if evil is somehow done away with at the end, the scars its ravages carved across souls and time remain a reality, and will remain in memory unless heaven

is the rough equivalent of a lobotomy. Doesn’t that matter? Can even God deal with such a reality?

*So he said: “Once there was a boy
Who woke up with blue hair
To him it was a joy
Until he ran out into the warm air—
He thought of how his friends would come to see;
And would they laugh,
or had he got some strange disease?”*

*God shuffled his feet and glanced around at them;
The people cleared their throats
and stared right back at him*

*The people sat waiting
Out on their blankets in the garden
But God said nothing
So someone asked him, “I beg your pardon:
I’m not quite clear about what you just spoke—it
Was that a parable, or a very subtle joke?”*

*God shuffled his feet and glanced around at them;
The people cleared their throats
and stared right back at him.*

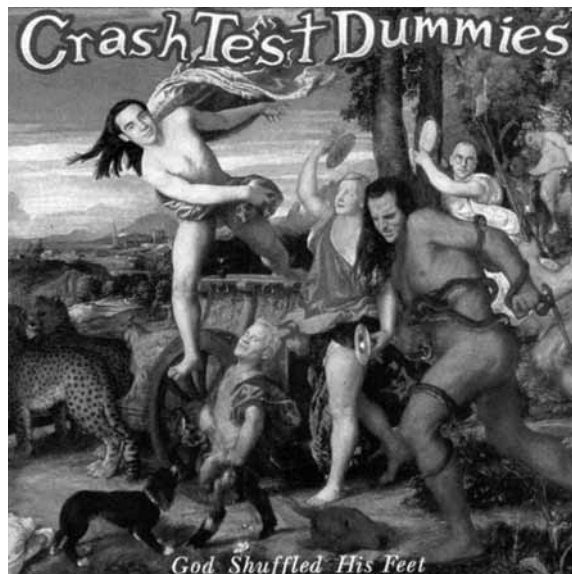
[Appears on *Crash Test Dummies* (1993)]

God has answered, but the answer is insufficient—an answer that intrigues, but that fails to satisfy. And so in the world of the song we are stuck, in a sort of limbo, our questions made sharper with the sense that the God who should be able to answer refrains from doing so. Or even worse, possibly cannot. So trust is rendered impossible. And with no trust, no real relationship is possible.

This song, it seems to me, is not an angry fist shaken against the sky but a sorrowful lament. God’s existence is not challenged, but hard questions about hope, redemption, sorrow, and eternity—which both children and adults raise—go unanswered.

I believe Brad Roberts and his band are on to something. I hear the same issues being raised by lots of people. And I notice that many Christians find it difficult to field thoughtful responses to

those issues that seem satisfying and compelling. Actually, I’ll go one step further: most of the descriptions of heaven ►



TUNED IN

I hear make me certain of two things: the description does not reflect what the Bible teaches about the new earth, and the heaven they describe (made of metal, worship-service-forever, little if anything else, spiritual without the problematic physical) is not particularly the sort of place most people yearn for as a spot to live forever.

Which leads to some great questions. What is the Christian hope? What does it imply for the disappointments and illnesses we suffer? Why do common descriptions—by Christians, mind you—of heaven and eternity so often seem unattractive? And what do the Scriptures really teach about this? After all, if it is our true home with our true Father, if it is the final destination, and if it embodies the full purpose of all of history, then we can be certain the Christian hope will not only fulfill the very deepest yearnings of the human heart, it will do that and far, far more.

It sounds as if Brad Roberts, like many others, hasn't heard about that hope. And sadly, he won't hear about it from many Christians today or in many churches.

"God Shuffled His Feet" reminds me we have work to do. And I am grateful for the reminder, even as I am touched by the music's beauty, a glimpse of glory of a God who does not shuffle but strides through human history with redemption.

The Crash Test Dummies have stronger things so say, sharper challenges to raise in other songs.



Critic song #2.2: "Mmm Mmm Mmm Mmm"

*Once there was this kid who
Got into an accident and couldn't come to school
But when he finally came back
His hair had turned from black into bright white
He said that it was from when
The car had smashed so hard
Mmm Mmm Mmm Mmm*

*Once there was this girl who
Wouldn't go and change with the girls in the change room
But when they finally made her
They saw birthmarks all over her body
She couldn't quite explain it
They'd always just been there*

Mmm Mmm Mmm Mmm

*But both girl and boy were glad
'Cause one kid had it worse than that
'Cause then there was this boy whose
Parents made him come directly home right after school
And when they went to their church
They shook and lurched all over the church floor
He couldn't quite explain it
They'd always just gone there*

Mmm Mmm Mmm Mmm

[Appears on *Crash Test Dummies* (1993)]

This is a song I cannot hear without great sadness, a realization that for many the worship of Christians is not a mysterious wonder but an embarrassing spectacle. Those of us who are in traditions where lurching and shaking is not part of the liturgy are not, however, off the hook. It is worth asking whether our service of worship is inviting to those who are non-Christians and even unchurched. Like people who chatter without thinking and end up being misunderstood, our worship can get stuck in mindless repetition rather than expressing the freshness of the gospel. ✿

An invitation to my readers: I will happily include material from you in future articles in this series. Send me by email the name of the song, the artist(s), album title, the full lyrics, and a brief reflection (max 500 words) on what you hear. Are questions being raised, or a challenge issued, or disillusionment explored, or an alternative belief proposed, or anger expressed? What should Christians hear in, appreciate, learn and take from the song? Write so that both Christians and non-Christians can enter the conversation comfortably. Though you will retain the copyright, submitting grants me the right to edit, publish, and post your submission on Ransom's web site.



Postville: Undocumented Workers, Immigration & Justice (I)

Everything changed for Postville on a morning in May.

At 10 a.m., immigration agents descended en masse upon the tiny Iowa town. They arrived in buses, vans, and helicopters to carry out what would become the largest immigration raid in American history.

On May 12, 2008, in an operation involving at least 900 agents, Immigration and Customs Enforcement raided Agriprocessors, Inc., which was then the largest kosher slaughterhouse in the U.S. Before the raid, Agriprocessors employed 968 workers, most of whom were Mexican and Guatemalan immigrants.

In the hours following the arrests of 389 slaughterhouse employees, spouses and children of detained workers flooded the sanctuary of nearby St. Bridget's Catholic Church. They stayed for days, waiting for news, sleeping on pews.

Almost a fifth of the town's population of 2,273 had been swept up in the raid. Some families fled in fear. Others waited anxiously in church pews. The town's residents reeled in its wake.

But the raid was only the beginning. ▸

READING THE WORLD

Despite its small size and relatively obscure location, Postville was no stranger to change and upheaval. In 1987, it faced a drastic cultural chasm when a group of Hasidic Lubavitch Jews from Brooklyn bought an unused meat-rendering plant just outside the town. Agriprocessors, Inc., was formed, and a kosher empire was born.

As the ultra-Orthodox Luvavitcher population grew and the kosher slaughterhouse thrived, the town of Postville was forced to adapt to the presence of new arrivals. Power struggles emerged in the wake of the schism between the town's original residents and the burgeoning Jewish population that soon followed the owners of its new-business.



When Aaron Rubashkin, a Brooklyn butcher, bought the defunct HyGrade meat-processing plant in the late '80s, the town was financially destitute. Soon, though, Agriprocessors became a huge international success, Postville's Jewish population surged, and Postville's financial prospects seemed brighter than ever.

But there were problems. The town's new Hasidic residents kept to themselves; they had little interest in integration with their new neighbors. Suspicions and anti-Semitism flared amongst the Iowans, who were unused to the foreign traditions and language of the Hasidim. They swept through town in broad-brimmed hats, long black coats and full beards. They seemed indifferent, even contemptuous to local traditions.

According to Stephen Bloom, a journalist who wrote an account of the culture clash in Postville, by the late '80s the town "had more rabbis per capita than any other city in the United States, perhaps the world."

As the Lubavitchers bought more real estate and began to have an impact on the town's finances, many longtime Postville residents began to feel marginalized. As tensions mounted, the Jewish residents responded by becoming more isolationist.

The power struggle between the two groups culminated in a referendum for the town to annex the land on which the plant stood. This would allow the town of Postville to tax the increasingly successful business just outside its perimeter. Agriprocessors was growing, opening factories all over the U.S. and taking over an increasing share of the kosher meat market.

Sholom Rubashkin, Aaron's son and the CEO of Agriprocessors, threatened to leave the community if the factory were incorporated. But the referendum passed, the slaughterhouse was incorporated into Postville, and the Lubavitchers did not leave. The town achieved an uneasy cultural equilibrium.

In the meantime, the Eastern European immigrants who had made up the majority of Agriprocessors' workforce were gradually replaced by Hispanic immigrants. An influx of Mexicans and Guatemalans steadily settled in Postville to work at the slaughterhouse, bringing families with them.

By the time of the 2008 raid, many local Hispanic families had called Postville home for years, even decades. Postville had become a town of unusual diversity in the rural Iowan landscape.

In 2003, longstanding ethical concerns about the operation of the slaughterhouse gained prominence when PETA wrote a letter to Agriprocessors, threatening them with exposure of what they alleged to be violations of both "common decency" and Jewish law in conjunction with Agriprocessors' questionable brand of ritual slaughter. A year later, PETA posted a graphic undercover video taken at the plant that allegedly showed animal cruelty. In a concurrent USDA investigation of the factory, it became clear that the slaughterhouse had violated animal cruelty laws.

The USDA report, which wasn't released until 2006, indicated, among other things, that inspectors, rather than stopping the inhumane practices, took bribes from company managers. In 2006 USDA issued Agriprocessors a warning detailing the problems at the plant.

While the Rubashkins challenged the charges of animal cruelty, they faced a confrontation on another front—Agriprocessors employees in a Brooklyn plant voted to unionize.

This push to unionize grew out of a larger dissatisfaction among workers at Agriprocessors factories. For years, employees at many Agriprocessors plants, including the one in Postville, had alleged serious workplace safety problems, ranging from the hiring of underage workers to unpaid overtime and dangerous working conditions that produced serious injuries. Their complaints produced few results.

Agriprocessors refused to bargain with the workers pushing to unionize, arguing that the illegal immigrant status of many of the workers rendered their vote invalid. As the conflict over unionization raged in Brooklyn, a 2006 investigation by an independent commission of rabbis found a number of troublesome cases of worker mistreatment at Agriprocessors plants, including favoritism, poor training, and unsafe conditions. ▶

The struggle to unionize ended in Brooklyn when the National Labor Relations Board ordered that Agriprocessors honor the vote. But in Iowa, a similar attempt by the United Food and Commercial Workers was having little luck in unionizing workers in Postville. The push for unionization in Iowa came on the heels of lawsuits from former local employees, who claimed they were not paid for overtime.

When Agriprocessors was served with a spate of Social Security Administration no-match letters in 2007 for its Postville employees, it forwarded them to its workers, who were asked to reconcile their records or lose their jobs. After the records were reconciled, workers would allegedly have to work their way back up the pay scale, starting again at minimum wage.

In response to the prospect of starting at the bottom again, and unhappy with working conditions, Postville workers staged a walkout. The walkout accomplished little.

It wasn't until March 2008 that Iowa Occupational Health and Safety issued a press release describing 39 violations of safety and health at the Agriprocessors plant in Postville. It issued a \$182,000 fine.

In the evidence that came to light in a Senate hearing on OSHA violations, it became clear that within a five year period Postville's OSHA log revealed no less than 20 violations. Between the years of 2001 and 2006, the logs recorded five amputations, along with dozens of other severe injuries—broken bones, eye injuries, and hearing loss.

It was in this context—amid the tangled web of workplace violations, union battles and animal cruelty allegations—that the crippling Postville immigration raid swept up almost 400 employees at the slaughterhouse on the morning of May 12.

While family members of arrested workers crowded St. Bridget's sanctuary, detainees were shackled and bused to the National Cattle Congress in Waterloo, a cattle fairground that became both a temporary detention center and the site of makeshift courtrooms for swiftly-held trials and sentencing hearings.

Cameras were not allowed inside the compound. But in an essay about the experience of serving as an official translator for the proceedings, Dr. Erik Camayd-Freixas, a professor at Florida International University, described the scene:

Driven single-file in groups of 10, shackled at the wrists, waist and ankles, chains dragging as they shuffled through, the slaughterhouse workers were brought in for arraignment, sat and listened through headsets to the interpreted initial appearance, before marching out again to be bused to different county jails, only to make room for the next row of 10.

Several dozen were released to await their trial with ankle monitors, to care for children for whom they were the sole providers. Detained women were held in nearby county jails. The men slept in cots in a gymnasium at the 60-acre Cattle Congress, where scores of ICE agents and U.S. Marshalls had set up trailers alongside Homeland Security buses. Overnight, the Cattle Congress had become a hive of activity.

The arrested workers all waived their right to be indicted by a grand jury. Most begged to be deported as quickly as possible, because they had families to support back home.

Instead of being charged with the usual administrative violations, though, Agriprocessors workers were instead charged with "aggravated identity theft," a serious crime. They were offered a uniform plea agreement in which they could choose between a few possibilities: They could plead guilty to the charge of knowingly using a false Social Security number, thereby avoiding a heavier charge of aggravated identity theft, and serve 5 months in jail before being deported. Or they could plead not guilty, and wait six to eight months for a trial—without the possibility of bail, because of their immigrant status. If they pleaded not guilty, and ▶



READING THE WORLD

if they won their case, they would almost certainly spend more time in jail awaiting trial than if they pleaded guilty. If they lost at trial, they would run the risk of an additional two-year sentence. Either way, they would be deported.

According to Camayd-Freixas, many of the workers didn't know what a Social Security card was, or what it was for. He said many immigrants—many of them illiterate in both Spanish and English—did not know the difference between a Social Security card and a green card. They said they had bought false documents from smugglers in Postville, or gotten them directly from supervisors at the Agriprocessors plant. Most did not know that the original cards could belong to Americans and legal immigrants, Camayd-Freixas said.

When ICE examined the Social Security numbers of Agriprocessors employees in the process of obtaining a warrant, 147 of the “no-match” numbers came up as “invalid”—Social Security numbers that were never issued to a person. Numbers that were simply made up. Other no-match numbers were valid, but in the 697 cases of non-matching Social Security numbers, only one coincided with a reported identity theft.

In four days' time, appearing before judges 10 at a time, 297 workers accepted the plea agreement and were summarily shipped off to jail.

The legal storm began brewing even before the flurry of trials had ended.

It turned out that a “legal blueprint” for the fast-track



Most, he said, were simply consumed with fear for their children and families back home, like one interviewee he described in detail:

The client, a Guatemalan peasant afraid for his family, spent most of that time weeping at our table, in a corner of the crowded jailhouse visiting room. How did he come here from Guatemala? “I walked.” What? “I walked for a month and ten days until I crossed the river.” We understood immediately how desperate his family's situation was. He crossed alone, met other immigrants, and hitched a truck ride to Dallas, then Postville, where he heard there was sure work. He slept in an apartment hallway with other immigrants until employed. He had scarcely been working a couple of months when he was arrested.

trials had been prepared well ahead of time, a 117-page compilation of scripts that laid out, in painstaking detail, the hearings that would take place in the crush following the raid. One immigration lawyer, Lucas Guttentag, called it a “guilty plea machine.” Rockne Cole, a defense lawyer who received the scripts on the day of the raid from the prosecutors, walked out in disgust and refused to represent any arrested immigrants.

“What I found most astonishing,” he later wrote, “is that apparently Chief Judge Reade had already ratified these deals prior to one lawyer even talking to his or her client.”

Questioned, too, were the uniform 5-month sentences imposed upon immigrants who took the plea agreement. The discretionary sentence for the lesser charge alone was zero to six months. The plea agreement placed defendants ▶

solidly on the high end of the scale. Without the greater charge of aggravated identity theft looming over their heads, with its mandatory minimum sentence of two years in prison, most defendants would have been deported immediately with only probation.

But the raid, devastating in its consequences to Postville and its local Agriprocessors employees, had an unexpected side effect: It brought to light longstanding charges of abysmal working conditions that had gone largely unnoticed for years.

On May 27, Uri L'Tzedek, an Orthodox social justice organization, delivered a letter to Aaron Rubashkin demanding federal minimum wages, ethical workplace standards, and worker safety. It was signed by hundreds of American kosher meat consumers, 200 rabbis, principals, educators, and other community leaders.

From there it was all downhill for the Agriprocessors empire.

Labor Ready, a temp firm hired to fill the worker void, pulled 100 of its employees from the factory because of safety concerns. Postville began a sharp economic decline. Crime increased drastically.

In July, immigrants still living in Postville told their stories to members of the U.S. Congressional Hispanic Caucus. Former workers—some still awaiting trial with ankle monitors—told of unpaid overtime, sexual abuse by supervisors, and injuries on the job. Joe Baca, a member of the Congressional delegation, referred to the raid and subsequent criminal charges as a “kangaroo court.”

Iowa Governor Chet Culver compared pre-raid conditions at the Postville plant to Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* in a guest column for the Des Moines Register:

Alarming information about working conditions at the Postville plant—including allegations ranging from the use of child labor in prohibited jobs to sexual and physical abuse by supervisors; from the nonpayment of regular and overtime wages to the denial of immediate medical attention for workplace injuries—brought to national attention by the raid forces me to believe that, in contrast to our state’s overall economic-development strategy, this company’s owners have deliberately chosen to take the low road in its business practices.

PETA released a third video from inside the Agriprocessors plant in September.

And on September 9, 2008, the Iowa Attorney General’s Office charged Agriprocessors with more than 9,000 child labor law violations, naming Aaron Rubashkin, Sholom Rubashkin, and several human resources employees.

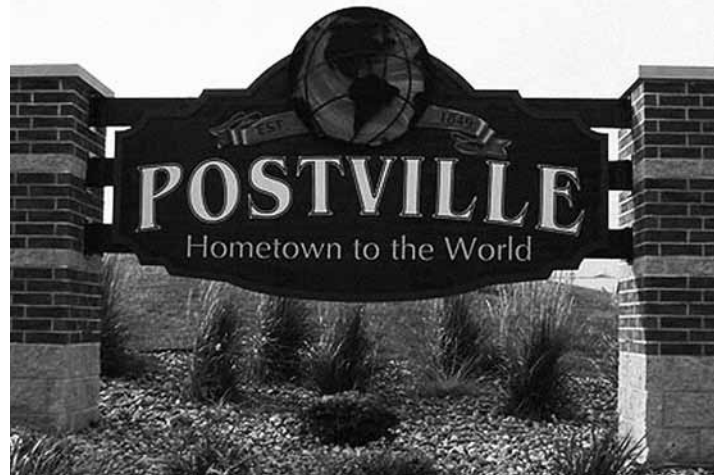
By late fall, Postville landlords began evicting tenants. The town of Postville was in such dire economic straits that many organizations collected donations for their support. Sholom Rubashkin, out on bail for the initial charges of conspiring in immigration-related offenses, was re-arrested on charges of multi-million dollar bank fraud. This time there was no bail.

In November, a new grand jury indictment was unsealed for Agriprocessors. Many of the plant’s management, including Sholom Rubashkin, faced new charges related to immigration and document fraud. Postville Mayor Bob Penrod asked the Iowa Governor’s Office to declare his town a human and economic disaster area.

Finally, Agriprocessors filed for bankruptcy. Company trucks were repossessed. Paulauan and Somali immigrants who had begun to trickle into the town to work at the factory left. The assets of two major rental companies owned by Agriprocessors were taken over by banks. And despite a federal grant the town received in late November, the money was not enough to keep businesses afloat, and the town’s rental-housing market collapsed.

Postville is becoming a ghost town ❁

To Be Continued...



EDITOR’S NOTE

The facts and quotes included in this piece are all readily available in the public record. Though this is not the entire story (details about Agriprocessors have continued to appear in the news), this report covers the story of the undocumented workers. Part II will appear in the next *Critique*, complete with questions for discussion and reflection.

Ruth DeFoster lives in St. Paul with Calvin. A doctoral student in mass communication at the University of Minnesota, her research and writing focus on media ethics and law, particularly media coverage of terrorism and crime.

Text **Matthew Hundley**

In Dreams I Walk With You

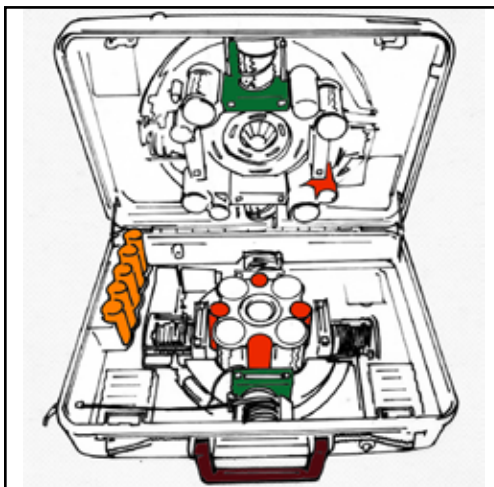
These people also, relying on their dreams, defile the flesh, reject authority, and blaspheme the glorious ones.
-Jude 1:8



La Jetée (1962) Chris Marker's post-apocalyptic film touches on memories and dreams as a means for the protagonist to escape the present and re-invent his past. This work of aesthetic genius inspired Terry Gilliam's *12 Monkeys* in which dreams, memories, freedom and sanity are all intrinsically linked.



Nightmare on Elm Street: Dream Warriors (1987) This second film in the classic horror series deals with neuroparticipation as a means to squash the dark nemesis Freddy. The twist in *Nightmare 3* is that not only are participants able to share in their dreams, but the chief character of their dreams steps into their reality as well.



PASIV Device (dream machine) from *Inception*.

Dreams are an area of our lives—our minds—which remain shrouded in mystery. Why do we dream what we dream? What is their purpose? What does God have to say about dreams? Scripture calls for great responsibility when it comes to dreams. Daniel, on one hand, could “interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems” (Daniel 5:12). False prophets, on the other, lied in God’s name proclaiming “I have dreamed, I have dreamed!” (Jeremiah 23:25) As with any area of God’s control, man desires to gain mastery over thoughts and dreams. There are shaman and yogi’s who claim to have the power to enter dreams. Recently a Japanese medical team unveiled technology which moves towards the ability to record dreams. Tampering with the mind has been a popular theme in science fiction as well as film, leading to the development of its own area of study: Oneiric Film Theory.

More films that get into our heads...

Un Chien Andalou (1929: Luis Bunuel, Salvador Dali)
Alice in Wonderland (1933: Norm McLeod)
Wizard of Oz (1939: Victor Fleming)
Meshes of the Afternoon (1943: Maya Deren)
Brazil (1985: Terry Gilliam)
Total Recall (1990: Paul Verhoeven)
Open Your Eyes (1997: Alejandro Amenabar)
The Matrix (1999: Andy and Lana Wachowski)
The Science of Sleep (2006: Michel Gondry)
Pan's Labyrinth (2006: Guillermo del Toro)
Inception (2010: Christopher Nolan)

For a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words.
- Ecclesiastes 5:3



Dreamscape (1984) could be seen as a pre-cursor to *Inception*. In the film doctors send psychically gifted men into dreams (neuroparticipation) as a means of conducting psychotherapy. Eventually a key government leader seeks to capitalize upon this technique for for international espionage.



Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004) doesn't deal directly with dreams, but does deal with the mind, specifically the selective removal of unwanted memories. The ability to manipulate memories and dreams is at the heart of many dream films and pushes us toward futuristic settings found in *Total Recall* and *The Matrix* films.