

critique

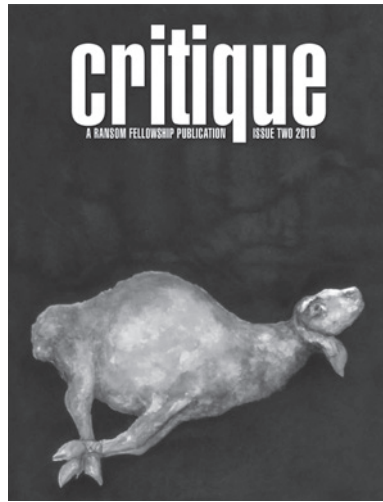
A RANSOM FELLOWSHIP PUBLICATION

ISSUE FOUR 2010



A note from the editor:

A reader wrote to say that she found my comments in response to Melinda Brown's letter [*Critique* #2-2010] to be "condescending." I would never want that to be true of anything I publish, and I am sorry this is how my words were understood. I certainly did not mean to be condescending, and in rereading my response am uncertain what caused the offense. Even when we disagree we must use words with care, and I hope readers will point out when I fail to speak with the care that is required by the faith I profess.



To the editor:

I just read your note in *Critique* [#5-2009] on "Everything is Broken." I didn't have this song and have now downloaded it and am listening to it. Music is so helpful to express what sometimes I have not real words to express. And, while I am not suffering a heart more broken than usual, it is a balm and comfort to listen to this music and remember that there will be a time when things get repaired. I put the song in a very short playlist with Leonard Cohen's "Anthem." It will be there to listen to when I need reminding.

Sandy
Auckland,
New Zealand
via email

Denis Haack responds:

Sandy: Glad you are able to listen to both songs. The more I hear both musicians the more I am convinced Dylan and Cohen are two of the most insightful lyricists of my generation. They capture a deeper



reality in words so freely that I sometimes miss how much of life I would not see if not for them. If I were making a mix I'd add Emmylou Harris' "The Pearl" from *Red Dirt Girl* (2000) to those two and hit Repeat.

To the Editor:

This afternoon I was surprised to find the most recent copies of *Critique* and *Notes from Toad Hall* in my mail. Thank you both for the thought and effort you put into these publications.

Denis, thanks for pointing out Oden's book on how Africa shaped the Christian mind [*Critique* #3-2009]. I hope to order a copy, read it, and then give it to friends of mine who just moved from Chattanooga to Liberia.

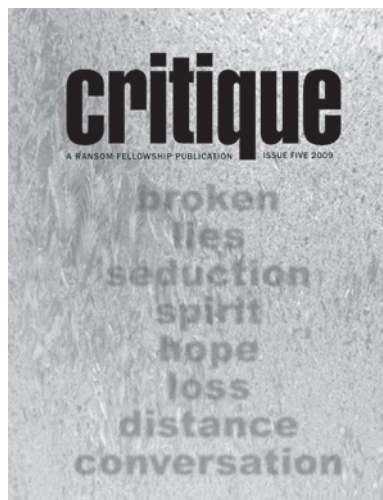
Margie, thanks for your reference to David Nelson's blog post on going home after work. I struggle to stop and rest when it's time, and his article was helpful and convicting. Thank you for the grace with which you often write of rest. I'm gradually learning to receive the gift of rest as a gift from our gracious God.

I am thankful for Ransom Fellowship and the service you are providing to help equip the church to enjoy and embody Jesus in all the corners of our lives and culture. May the Lord establish the work of your hands.

With joy,
Joel Swanson
Ringgold, GA

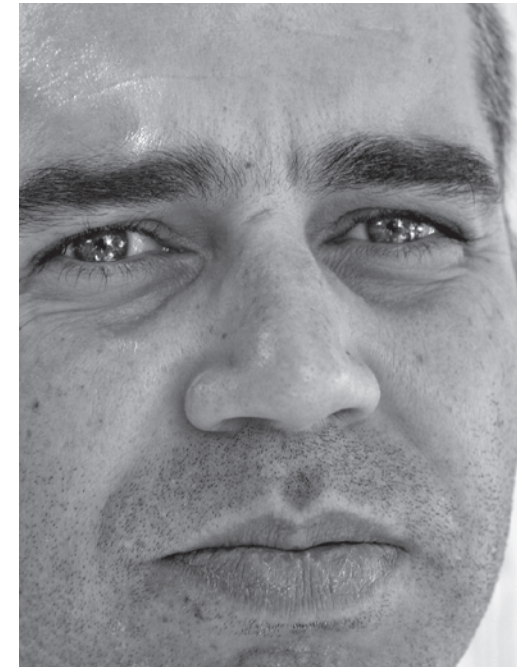
Denis Haack responds:

Joel: Thank you for your kind words. Very. Much.



Text **Ruth DeFoster**

Postville: Undocumented Workers, Immigration & Justice (II)



Six years ago, Raul worked as a dishwasher at a restaurant in Rochester, Minnesota.

He was soft-spoken, slight, and immaculately groomed. He kept his black hair neatly combed back, and he wore a white, short-sleeved, button-down shirt. He never came to work late. He almost never spoke. He had two little girls and a wife in Mexico. He kept pictures of them in his wallet, worn thin from being folded and unfolded again and again.

I know because I worked with him—I was a waitress, a high school student, and the only American employee who spoke even a little Spanish.

About six months after he arrived, the truth emerged: His paperwork was fraudulent. He would have to be let go. My manager lowered his eyes as he approached Raul one night in the kitchen. I struggled to translate his explanation, but it was beyond my ability.

Papers are bad. You have to leave. I'm sorry.

My manager handed him a white envelope. Raul bowed his head, said goodbye, and left, looking stricken. In the envelope was two weeks' pay.

We were sorry to see him go. He was the best dishwasher we'd ever had.

He was replaced by an American—the restaurant was taking no chances this time—who was swiftly fired and replaced again. For months I thought of Raul's family, who were living on the money he sent them. I wondered if they had enough to eat.

I was deeply conflicted. Certainly, Raul was on the wrong side of the law—but although I knew he had come to the country illegally, I couldn't bring myself to see him as a criminal. There was no venom.

In his book, *Christians at the Border*, M. Daniel Carroll R. explains that he prefers the term "undocumented" to "illegal." He writes:

Illegal can carry a pejorative connotation, suggesting by definition that the person is guilty of some act, has few scruples, and is prone to civil disobedience. This is not the case with the overwhelming majority of Hispanic immigrants. Most would gladly regularize their status with the government, but the present system simply does not provide appropriate avenues to do so. What these people lack is the proper documentation required by Washington and the workplace. They are not criminals. At the same time, the label alien can evoke the sense of someone unchangeably foreign and other, without hope of reconciliation or mediation. Illegal aliens, therefore, is unhelpfully prejudicial. Undocumented immigrants is a more just label and better represents the present reality.

I am inclined to agree. I spent seven years in high school and college working in the restaurant industry, and in that time I came to know dozens of Hispanic immigrants—some who were in the States legally, and others who were not—who lived heartbreaking realities. I consider none of them criminals.

A busboy at one high-end restaurant was supporting both his parents and his elderly grandparents in his poverty-stricken Guatemalan hometown. I once gave a female cook a ride home and glimpsed her tiny house—little more than a two-room shanty in a vast housing project I had never seen before, on the edge of town.

I was shocked. Row after row of tiny, shabby houses. All ▶

rented by Hispanic immigrants, mostly men, who worked to send money to their desperately poor families. On one doorstep was a woman with a baby. I remember thinking that anyone who would willingly live in hovels like these would have to be fleeing something worse.

What saddens me most about the immigration debate in this country is the lack of compassion evident in many discussions. Christians and non-Christians alike often cavalierly dismiss undocumented immigrants in black-and-white terms as “criminals,” “aliens,” even “pigs,” (surprisingly, I’ve heard this a lot) without taking their humanity into account.

Certainly, porous borders are a serious problem, a problem about which we should all be concerned. In a post-9/11 world, we are faced with terrifying realities that seemed unimaginable before.

But it is my position that much of the anger in this debate is misdirected at the immigrants—the vast, overwhelming majority of who are good, hardworking human beings. For most, their sole intention is only to provide for their families, who are often living in violent, corrupt, and poverty-stricken environments. This anger would be better directed at employers who are taking gross advantage of the desperation of such immigrants, and government officials who have not allowed immigration law to evolve to meet the reality of our present situation.

I find the Postville raid [see Postville (I) in *Critique* #3-2010 and on Ransom’s web site] especially troubling for a number of reasons. Reports of abuse, of dirty and dangerous conditions accumulated for years. It was a situation that cried out for justice. But when the government intervened, it was to arrest the workers, hundreds of them at a time, in what became only one of many similar raids. They were charged with inflated crimes that they simply did not have the knowledge to commit according to the wording of the statutes; their alleged identity theft was hardly committed “knowingly,” or with the “intent to commit an unlawful activity or felony.” Most of them were provided the false identities by their employer. Many who weren’t simply invented a Social Security number. Authorities took advantage of their desperation to return home and provide for their families by forcing them to take a plea deal that put



them at a distinct disadvantage.

Some have suggested that the recent surge in raids is simply a way to boost the “numbers” of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, a new agency in the Department of Homeland Security that must be seen to produce results to keep its funding. Construction sites, factory sweatshops, and food processing plants make for “easy pickings.” Their workers, who are otherwise overwhelmingly law-abiding, are much easier to pick up than criminal fugitives, who must be captured one at a time. Only five of the 389 workers originally arrested at Postville had any kind of prior criminal record.

And yet I would argue that this is only peripherally relevant to our duty as Christians.

We are called to see the fundamental humanity in all people, who are created in the image of God. Immigrants, too—documented or undocumented—have essential value and divine worth. The Old Testament is full of stories of exodus and migration—God’s people were often strangers in foreign lands, and unwelcome strangers at that. My namesake, Ruth, was forced to assimilate to a new culture and a new people in her loyalty to Naomi. Joseph, Daniel, and David were all immigrants at one point in their lives. Even Jesus had to flee King Herod as a child.

Many Christians (and non-Christians) argue that the word “illegal” before the word “immigrant” tells us all we need to know. They are, by definition, criminals. Christians often rely on a strict reading of Romans 13 to bolster this argument, which exhorts Christians to submit themselves to the governing authorities. But to take this verse without context or nuance is to make the troubling assumption that all laws are equally and inherently good and just. This is a very narrow understanding of a Christian’s relationship to government, and I believe it is deeply flawed. I find this view especially confusing in light of the fact that many people who quote this verse in abject dismissal of undocumented immigrants are also profoundly pro-life, living in a country that has legalized and condoned abortion on a grand scale.

The immigration system in the United States is outdated, confused, unfair, and badly in need of reform. The sweeping immigration reforms that have long been promised would be a good start, but these have yet to material-

ize. I am not suggesting that laws are irrelevant—far from it. I simply believe that it is not the duty of believers to applaud at face value every law, decision, or action of the government. Rather, it is our duty to love our neighbors, to feed the hungry and clothe the poor, to care for the sick. To have compassion for those who suffer.

Rather than succumbing to the easier choice—blind judgment and dismissal of the “other” in our midst—I think a better perspective has already been modeled for us.

Jesus’ encounters with Samaritans the hated “other” to the Jews of his day, exemplifies Christian love. The woman at the well, the leper—both of whom, as M. Daniel Carroll R. points out, were doubly outcasts—were simply his “neighbors,” as his parable about the Samaritan and the injured man in the road further illustrated.

The vast majority of undocumented immigrants are not pigs or criminals or aliens—they are human beings who live and struggle and yearn. They are dying in the desert to get here. They are our neighbors. Nothing less. ✱



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION
by Denis Haack

1. Review the facts of the Postville raid—for the story see “Postville (I)” by Ruth DeFoster in *Critique* #3-2010 and on Ransom’s web site. Did you hear about the raid in the media at the time? Have you heard of similar events? Is the media coverage adequate given the nature of these events?
2. In the past, what has tended to be your position on immigration and the issue of “illegal aliens”? Why have you held this position?
3. DeFoster argues that we should use the term “undocumented immigrants” instead of “illegal aliens.” Do you agree? Why or why not?
4. To the extent of your knowledge of the events in Postville, was the raid and legal disposition of the case a just act by the United States government? Why or why not?
5. DeFoster argues that simply applying the instructions found in Romans 13 concerning obedience to the law is an inadequate Christian response. Do you agree? Why or why not?
6. Do you personally know anyone who is or was an undocumented immigrant, or whose family at one time held that status? How does this knowledge, or lack of it, effect your position on this volatile political issue?
7. Reread and discuss the last four paragraphs of DeFoster’s piece. Where do you agree? Why? What would you challenge? Why?
8. As M. Daniel Carroll R. points out in his book, *Christians at the Border*, the issue of foreigners and aliens is found throughout the Scriptures and their treatment and status is specifically addressed in the Old Testament law. To what extent is your political position shaped by a careful study of these numerous biblical texts? If you were challenged to defend your position in light of these texts, could you do so? What plans should you make?

Ruth DeFoster lives in St Paul, MN with her son 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.

A Story That Needs To Be Told

I love good stories. Sitting in a rocking chair on my grandmother’s front porch on a hot Alabama summer night, listening to my father and his brothers laugh about boyhood egg-stealing; cold November evenings in northern Minnesota while the Block kids recall the bringing-the-horse-in-the-house tale; Edith Schaeffer, dropping names and recounting miracles high in the Swiss Alps: it doesn’t get any better than this.

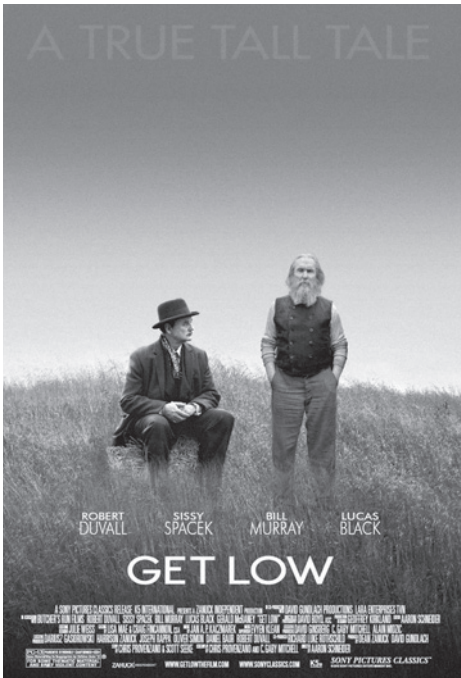
In my opinion *Get Low* tells a very good story. My delight in it is, no doubt, due in part to the fact that Chris Provenzano’s screenplay is as essentially southern a tale as the ones I used to hear on my grandmother’s front porch. The personalities, events, music, the look and feel of it are as familiar to me as my Dad’s stories of his childhood. I know these people. Indeed I wonder how many of them I may be related to. For me watching *Get Low* felt like a visit home. Of course, these qualities that endeared it to me may distance it from others. *The New York Times* review of *Get Low*, while quite complimentary on the whole couldn’t resist this jab: “*Get Low* is, in the end, not quite believable.” Not believable? You need to spend a little time south of Manhattan.

Actor Robert Duvall’s taste in stories is impeccable. Over the years he’s brought many of them to life and created some unforgettable characters: Mac Sledge in *Tender Mercies*, Sonny Dewey in *The Apostle*, Gus McCrae in *Lonesome Dove*. *Get Low*’s Felix Bush is as memorable as any of them. “I talked to God a lot about you over the years,” a friend tells him. “He said he broke the mold when he made you, said you sure were entertaining to watch—but way too much trouble.”

After living alone for more than 30 years in a cabin in the woods near a small town in the hills, Bush startles the local minister with his presence one morning and with an odd request: “It’s time for me to get low,” he says, and explains that he wants to host his own funeral, a big party to which everyone is town is invited to come and tell stories about him. He, of course, wants to be present—alive—and to listen.

From this unconventional beginning the story leisurely unfolds through the introduction and interaction of other memorable characters. When the preacher declines to take part, Bush turns to Frank Quinn (Bill Murray), the director of the local funeral home, whose reservations about the project are easily overcome by his greed: “Oooh, hermit money!” Frank’s greenhorn assistant Buddy (Lucas Black) gently guides Bush—and us—through the preparations. The appearance of Bush’s old flame Mattie (Sissy Spacek) after an absence of many years adds a touch of spice and grace to proceedings.

All these apparently random introductions take on a sharper focus when we meet Charlie Jackson (Bill Cobbs), the minister Bush wants to preach at his funeral. It seems Jackson is the only man alive that knows a certain ▶



Starring
Robert Duvall (Felix Bush)
Sissy Spacek (Mattie Darrow)
Bill Murray (Frank Quinn)
Lucas Black (Buddy)
Gerald McRaney (Rev. Gus Horton)
Bill Cobbs (Rev. Charlie Jackson)
Scott Copper (Carl)
Lori Beth Edgeman (Kathryn)
Linds Edwards (WKNG Announcer)
Andrea Powell (Bonnie)
Chandler Riggs (Tom)
Danny Vinson (Grier)
Blerim Destani (Gary)
Tomasz Karolak (Orville)
Andy Stahl (Photographer)

Director
Aaron Schneider

Producers
Robert Duvall and others.

Cinematographer
David Boyd

Original Music
Jan A.P. Kaczmarek

Runtime
100 min

Release
USA, Canada

MPAA Rating
PG-13

story about Bush and his past, a story that Bush wants told, a story that needs to be told. It’s a story of love and loss, of sin and redemption, of guilt and forgiveness. And I couldn’t help but wonder in hearing it if this is what made *Get Low* so “unbelievable” to the *New York Times*.

What makes a story a story that needs to be told? Writer Rebecca Horton gives this answer:

I sometimes challenge myself by asking the question ‘does this story need to be told?’ ...stories become needed, not because the author felt that they were needed, but instead because there is a deep human longing for truth, meaning, and relationship that extends beyond material need. Good stories scratch the itch that lies just below the surface of things, churning up just enough dust to make others curious.

Get Low admirably scratches the itch without satisfying it. It stirs up the dust just enough to make us curious. It’s a tale that needs to be told. Would that more filmmakers, especially those who are believers, learn to tell it as well. ✿

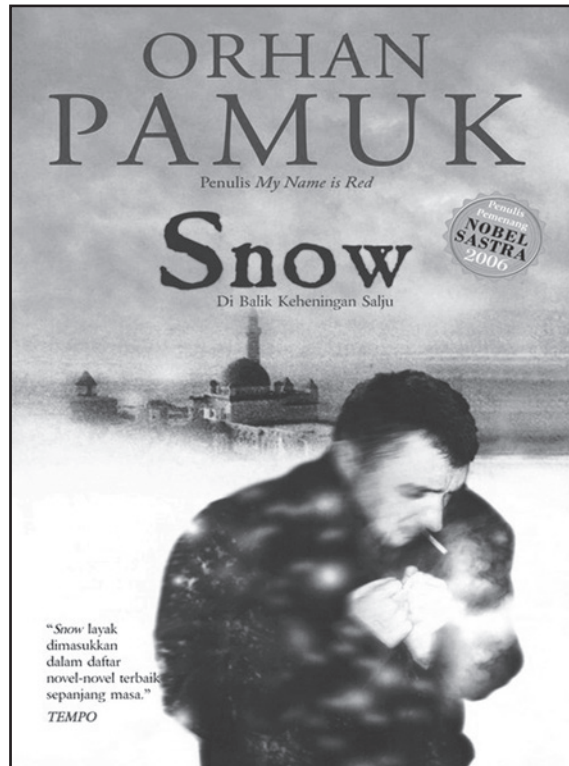


QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Discuss your first impressions of *Get Low*. What does watching this film leave you thinking about?
2. What do you think Felix means when he announces, “It’s time for me to get low”?
3. The original tagline for the film wasn’t the one that survives on most *Get Low* posters—“A True Tall Tale”—but “Every secret dies somewhere.” What is Felix’s secret? Does his need for the secret to become known strike you as believable? Why or why not?
4. Scott Seeke, a Lutheran minister, collaborated with Chris Provenzano in writing *Get Low*’s screenplay. On his blog he writes, “I think the reason I wanted to tackle this topic is because guilt is something we all deal with but that has become taboo in our culture. We don’t know how to deal with it. That includes all churches except the traditional mainline ones. These usually open their worship with a ‘Confession and Forgiveness.’ Everyone else avoids the topic as much as possible. Church experts will tell you that people don’t want to come to church and hear how bad they are. They don’t want to come to church and be confronted with things they have done wrong. Instead, they want to hear a positive message. Which is fine. I get that. I don’t want people to come to church and be beaten over the head with talk of their sin and how much they suck. But when do we talk about guilt? Because it’s there. People feel guilty about things they’ve done. Even in the era of moral relativity, there is still guilt and shame. There is still a need for forgiveness. Guilt and forgiveness is a core part of the human experience. That has not changed and will never change. But we don’t know how to handle it anymore.” Discuss this quote.
5. One critic disparaged *Get Low* saying, “Nothing happened for too long.” Did the film’s pace seem slow to you? Why?
6. When Mattie sees her sister’s picture on the wall of Felix’s cabin, she is shocked and leaves. Do you understand her reaction? Do you agree with it?
7. In Owen Smith’s *New Yorker* review he writes, “Had I been in that crowd, I would have been tempted to shout, Don’t tell us, old man! Keep your mystery, and your land, to yourself! Duvall could have done it; imagine him bending down to whisper his guilt into Spacek’s ear, with Murray close by, eavesdropping, and the rest of us shut out. Or imagine if Felix had died beforehand, leaving his baffled mourners to do the whispering. *Get Low* is deftly played, and it rarely mislays its ambling charm, but what a forbidding fable it could have been if the truth about Felix Bush, rather than emerging into sunlight, had slunk back into the woods.” Discuss this quote. Do you agree with him?
8. In James 5 we are instructed “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” In the protestant tradition we’ve had a tendency not to take this admonition to heart. Discuss your experiences with confession and reconciliation. Is it, as the old saying goes, “Good for the soul”?

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.

Trying to find our way



We have friends who work for the U.S. State Department, and over the years they've accepted posts in countries I've known only through the news. That is not a reliable way to know another nation, so I've asked Ann and Rusty to recommend novels that capture something of the reality of that nation, or society, or people. Proper histories are helpful to learn the facts—the dates and primary events and main characters and such—but fiction can provide a deeper perspective by allowing you inside a people's soul. You get past mere geography to discover the contours of meaning that shape a people's perspective, mold their choices, and inform their destiny. Each time we have read the books they recommended and each time it has felt like moving from blindness to at least partial sight. Each novel has transformed how we understand the headlines and stories in the media, and has informed our prayers as we attempt to follow our Lord's instruction to pray that his will be done on earth as it is in heaven. When Ann and Rusty were posted

to Cuba they recommended Carlos Eire's *Waiting for Snow in Havana*. From Romania they recommended *The Bridge on the Drina* by Ivo Andric. And from Istanbul, Turkey, they recommended *Snow*, by Orhan Pamuk.

The story of *Snow* is deceptively simple, the plot animated by dialogue in a small town cut off from the rest of the world by a snow storm that blankets the landscape in white. A Turkish poet named Ka, living in exile in Germany has returned to investigate the suicide of a series of young women but mainly because he still remembers İpek, a woman recently divorced whose loveliness Ka cannot dislodge from his mind. The town of Kars is hardly a tourist attraction. It's an isolated place populated by ordinary workers despairing their lot in life will ever improve, secularists eager that the vision of a modern Turkey birthed by Atatürk not be undermined, Islamists meeting furtively to plan how to stop the slide of their nation into decadence, members of every conceivable political party, and always, everywhere, sometimes hiding just out of sight, sometimes hovering just outside every conversation, police informants watching, listening, reporting. From the beginning we sense the tension that lurks beneath the surface.

Orhan Pamuk won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2006, the only Turkish citizen to receive that honor. Pamuk, a Muslim, lives in Istanbul where he writes, serving as a visiting professor in the humanities at Columbia University. In *Snow*, the little village of Kars becomes a metaphor for the Turkey he loves and calls home, a land that uncomfortably straddles West and East while the world holds its breath over whether the compromise can hold. ▸

Pamuk stated his views clearly in his Nobel lecture:

What literature needs most to tell and investigate today are humanity's basic fears: the fear of being left outside, and the fear of counting for nothing, and the feelings of worthlessness that come with such fears; the collective humiliations, vulnerabilities, slights, grievances, sensitivities, and imagined insults, and the nationalist boasts and inflations that are their next of kin... Whenever I am confronted by such sentiments, and by the irrational, overstated language in which they are usually expressed, I know they touch on a darkness inside me. We have often witnessed peoples, societies and nations outside the Western world—and I can identify with them easily—succumbing to fears that sometimes lead them to commit stupidities, all because of their fears of humiliation and their sensitivities. I also know that in the West—a world with which I can identify with the same ease—nations and peoples taking an excessive pride in their wealth, and in their having brought us the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and Modernism, have, from time to time, succumbed to a self-satisfaction that is almost as stupid.

The one hurdle I faced in reading *Snow* was some of the dialogue—conversations in Turkey do not follow the usual flow expected when Americans talk. The love for poetry is still very much alive, and conversations in Kars are not efficient and practical but revealing and heartfelt and circuitous. I was reminded that I was the outsider, visiting in the imagination a culture with roots that stretch back to ancient times. This is the land of the Bible thrust into the modern world, the place where St Paul preached and wrote and established churches. If you visit the seven churches addressed by Christ in the first three chapters of St John's Revelation, you will walk on Turkish soil.

It is difficult, I think, for Americans to comprehend the realities of life that many people today face as the normal occurrences of existence. Comfortable with our own view of things we wonder that anyone could see things differently, and why they would persist when there is another way. Since that other way is obvious to us, why wouldn't it be to everyone? We fail to comprehend how much our view of things has been shaped by a particular set of circumstances and assumptions, circumstances and assumptions most do



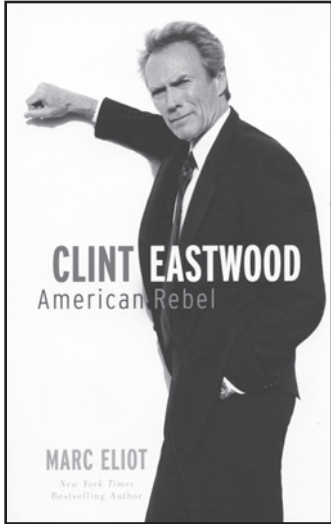
not share and many would challenge.

Christians of all people should be on the cutting edge of such reflection because we are called to be a missional people. Citizens first of all in God's kingdom, we are in exile here, aliens and foreigners (1 Peter 1:17, 2:11) in this world, called to be on the move as sojourners to make disciples of all nations and peoples (Matthew 28:19-20). We cannot be faithful if we do not do the hard work of seeing how others see, of loving them enough to understand their worldview so profoundly that we know it better than they do themselves. Only then can we engage them with the gospel. It takes asking questions and listening. One way to listen is to hear their stories. *Snow* by Orhan Pamuk is one such story, brilliantly told, deeply insightful, and profoundly human. ✱

NOVEL RECOMMENDED

Snow by Orhan Pamuk, translated from the Turkish by Maureen Freely (New York, NY: Vintage International; 2002, 2004, 2005).

Raw Life



It was impossible to predict that the tall rugged actor who played Rowdy Yates in all 217 episodes of the TV western, *Rawhide*, would eventually direct and act in some of the best films to be produced in the final years of the 20th century. The early films that Clint Eastwood is best known for were mongrel works, the trio of spaghetti westerns directed by Sergio Leone and filmed in Italy, *Fistful of Dollars* (1964), *For a Few Dollars More* (1965), and *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (1966). Later Eastwood would create the unforgettable character of Inspector Harry Callahan, the renegade cop in *Dirty Harry* (1971), *Magnum Force* (1973), and *The Enforcer* (1976). These roles are one-dimensional yet iconic, the silent gun-slinging loner whose heroism seems both unremarkable and unplanned as he wanders through a world where injustice preys upon the weak and powerless. Yet, two decades later Eastwood would be responsible for a series of films, as actor and director, that touch on some of the deepest issues of the human heart, including *Unforgiven* (1992), *Million Dollar Baby* (2004), and *Gran Torino* (2008). In maturity the “man with no name” is playing roles marked by nuance and depth, characters we can relate to because they are like us. His best films are good enough to make most fans forget about clunkers like *Every Which Way but Loose* (1978) and *The Bridges of Madison County* (1995).

I decided to read *American Rebel* because I respect Clint Eastwood’s obvious talent, his giftedness in the cinema over a lifetime of work, and so wanted to know more about him. By the time I finished the book, I was even more impressed with Eastwood the actor and director but far less impressed with Eastwood the man. His single-minded pursuit of

control over his work in Hollywood has given him freedom to make the films he wants, but in the process people have been shunted aside when it suits him. His radical individualism has allowed him to carve out a distinctive vision for his craft, but it has also made him willing to use women for his own sexual ends, and the unabashed promiscuity and broken relationships that litter his path to the top are a sad testament to his self-centeredness.

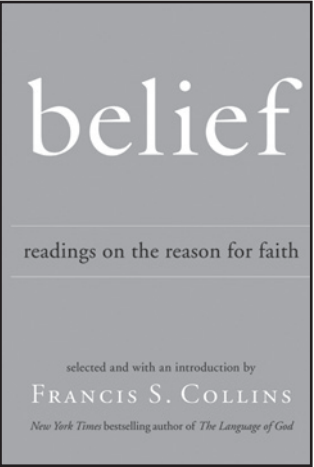
Few books that I have read in the past few years have been a better reminder that we human beings are, in Francis Schaeffer’s term, *glorious ruins*. Gifts are not given only to the virtuous, and though the tower constructed at Babel was idolatrous and destructively divisive it was also a monument to the creativity of its makers as made in the image of God. The Scriptures are critical of the misguided motivations but not the craftsmanship, the technology, and engineering that was involved.

The questions I need to keep before myself as a Christian in this situation are these. First, do I understand that this also applies to me—that whatever giftedness I may possess comes with both blessing and with curse? Certain sins may not be present as patterns that tear at the woven tapestry of my life, but sins certainly are present to rend the beauty of what could be. All fallen people share a common fallenness. And second, have I trained myself to see primarily the curse or the blessing in the work and lives of others? Sometimes we say we are children of the light but seem primarily eager to spot and comment on the darkness.

Clint Eastwood is one of the master storytellers of my generation, and I am grateful for the hours of conversation he has prompted through the films he has made. His movies like his life are a reminder that we live in a world where injustice is rampant and where the yearning for justice that resides deep inside is loudly insistent. Something is wrong, we know it, and we hope for something better. It’s called redemption. In one way, that’s all Clint Eastwood is about. ✿

Book Reviewed
American Rebel: The Life of Clint Eastwood by Marc Eliot (New York, NY: Harmony Books; 2009) 332 pp + sources + notes + filmography + index.

Reading on Faith and Reason



On November 20, 1959 a bank teller named Henry Bemis slipped into the vault to find a moment of quiet during his lunch break for his great love in life: reading. The people in Bemis’ life disdained his passion for books—the bank president berated him and his wife used a marker to painstakingly cross out every line of print in a volume of poetry he loved. A headline in the day’s newspaper announced what everyone already knew and feared, “H-Bomb Capable of Total Destruction.” Suddenly the vault lurches, Bemis is knocked unconscious and when he awakens he wanders into a world that had come to an end. Mutual assured destruction went from Cold War policy to horrible reality and Henry Bemis is the last man alive. He found a gun and briefly considered suicide but then noticed, through his thick glasses, that not all was lost. Canned food overflowed the shelves of abandoned grocery stores and best of all, as he squinted through the massive door of the public library he could see shelves of books stretching back through the length of the marble building. Suddenly filled with the desire to live, Bemis sorted and planned, lining up piles of books he will read with no one to scold or to interrupt, no need to stop for work or to fulfill the petty expectations of others. With piles of books arranged by month, he steps back and stumbles, his glasses fall off, tumble down the steps and shatter against the pavement. “That’s not fair,” he cries. “That’s not fair at all. There was time now. There was all the time I needed! It’s not fair!” The camera pulls back and we watch Bemis, alone and unable to see, trying to find his way among books he will never read. Rod Serling’s narration ends the episode with a voice over that we came to expect at the end of each *Twilight Zone*. “The best laid plans of mice and men and Henry Bemis, the small man in the glasses who wanted nothing but time. Henry Bemis, now just a part of a smashed landscape, just a piece of the rubble, just a fragment of what man has deeded to himself. Mr. Henry Bemis... in *The Twilight Zone*.”

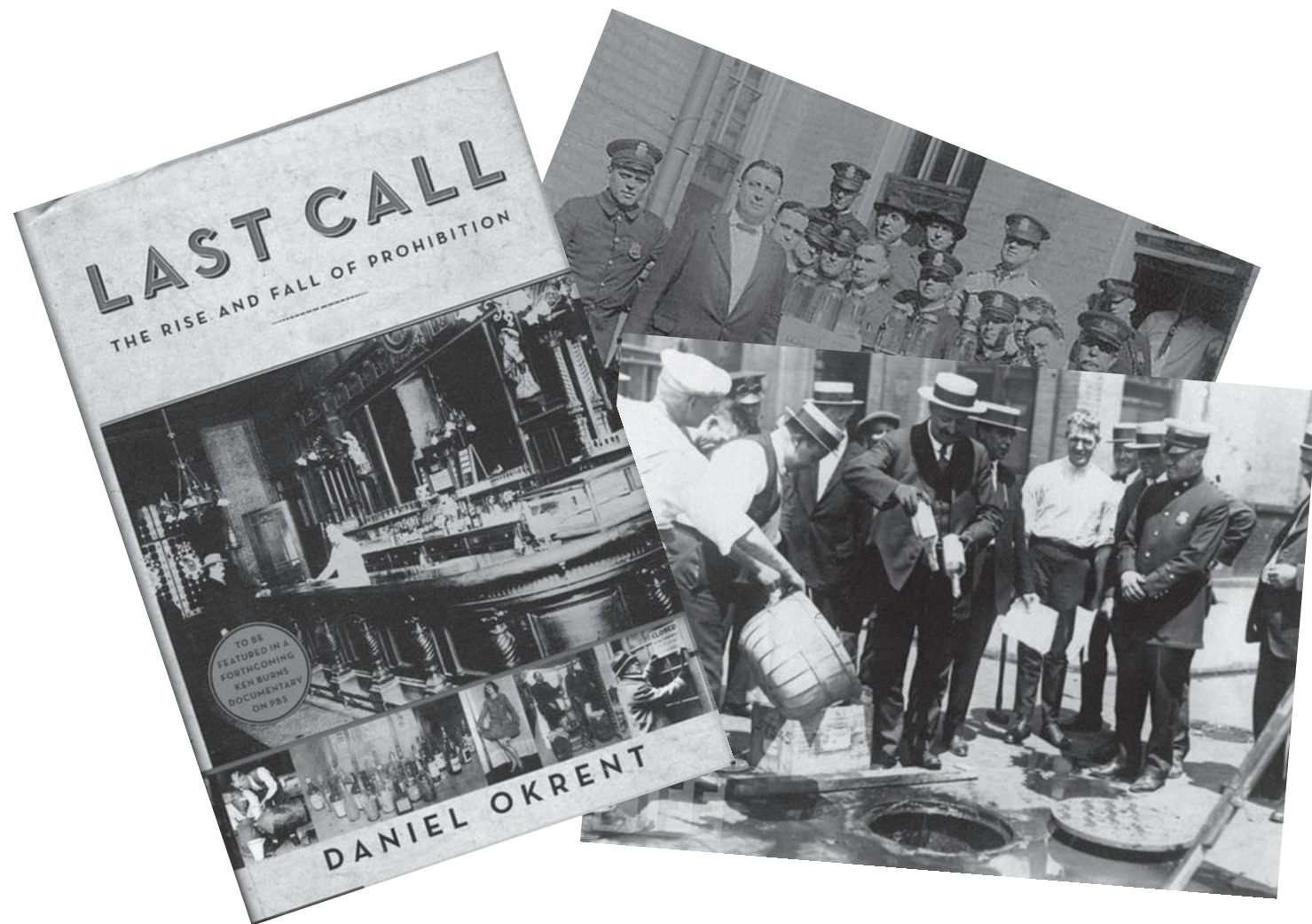
“Time Enough to Last” was one of the first episodes written for *The Twilight Zone*, and starred Burgess Meredith in the role of Henry Bemis. It was a story that imprinted itself on my imagination and haunted my dreams. Books open new worlds to us, transport us over time and space to new places, paint pictures with words and metaphors, descriptions and stories, and help us to see more clearly even though always through a glass darkly. One thing I look forward to in the new earth and heaven is having more than time enough.

Occasionally a book is published that provides us a shortcut so we can dip into a variety of works quickly. Francis Collins, geneticist, director of the National Institutes of Health, and author of *The Language of God* provides us with just that in *Belief: Readings on the Reason for Faith*. He draws together excerpts from the writings of 32 thinkers reflecting on belief, reason, and faith giving us a rich variety of essays to prompt reflection—and perhaps more reading as we go back to the original to read more. Authors include Os Guinness, Dorothy Sayers, John Stott, Tim Keller, the Dalai Lama, Plato, N.T. Wright, St. Augustine, and Madeleine L’Engle. Topics include the meaning of truth, faith and the cry for justice, science and faith, the problem of evil and suffering, miracles, mysticism, and the irrationality of atheism.

Belief is one of those books we can enjoy when time is short, because each chapter fits with the rest yet can stand by itself. Some chapters will reassure you of what you already are sure of, some will challenge you to think in new ways, and others will make you reconsider what you believe and why. *Belief* is not simply a perennial topic, but one of intense interest in our world where so many yearn for spirituality and sense of meaning and direction. *Belief* does not provide all the answers, and you will not agree with everything, but it raises the right questions, and in the process helps us have the chance to sort out the relationship between belief and truth, religion and science, reason and faith. ✿

Book Recommended
Belief: Readings on the Reason for Faith selected and introduced by Francis S. Collins (New York, NY: HarperCollins; 2010) 312 pages + notes.

A SOBER EXPERIMENT



From January 17, 1920 through December 5, 1933, the United States underwent a nation-wide experiment in using law to curb what many found morally and socially objectionable: the consumption of alcoholic beverages. Prohibition involved not just changes in law, and taxation, and law enforcement, and government regulation. It was begun by a Constitutional amendment and ended only when that amendment was repealed. The story of Prohibition seems simple, but the fears and dreams of the human heart weave a tangled web even at the best of times, and as with everything else we face in a broken world the story of Prohibition is one of both good and bad. ▶

There was reason for concern. The consumption of alcoholic beverages in the American Colonies was remarkable. In 1763 there were 159 commercial distilleries producing rum in New England for consumption there. In the early 19th century, liquor was cheaper to drink than tea.

By 1830 American adults were guzzling, per capita, a staggering seven gallons of pure alcohol a year. ‘Staggering’ is the appropriate word for the consequences of this sort of drinking. In modern terms those seven gallons are the equivalent of 1.7 bottles of a standard 80-proof liquor per person, per week—nearly 90 bottles a year for every adult in the nation, even with abstainers (and there were millions of them) factored in. Once again figuring per capita, multiply the amount Americans drink today by three and you’ll have an idea of what much of the nineteenth century was like.

The reasons for such excess can be listed. Water was sometimes unsafe. Conditions in many factories were dangerous, the hours long, and the pay minimal, and many workers found a way to forget their plight in drink. Distillers and brewers became enormously wealthy, and quickly found ways to manipulate the political and economic systems in ways to their liking.

Much of the concern about alcoholism was spearheaded by women’s groups who also sought the right to vote, something that muddled the discussion in the public square. The church got involved, with evangelists decrying the effects of booze and crusaders using hatchets to wreck mayhem in saloons. The fact is that much drinking occurred, much alcoholism resulted, and soon the population had divided into warring political factions of “wets” and “drys.”

In *Last Call*, Daniel Okrent tells the story of Prohibition as it should be told, as a story, full of fascinating characters, singular events, surprising turns, and just enough detail (and footnotes) to make the tale he spins a true history of

the period. This is not merely an informative book, it is a fun read, and I found myself reading sections aloud to Margie simply because they were too good to be missed.

There are several reasons why the story Okrent tells is valuable. For one, we live in a period when warring factions once again dominate the political discourse in the public square. Having a chance to reflect on issues, events, and rhetoric from a distance of decades allows us to consider how best to engage the political and social aspects of our lives as citizens. Prohibition is part of our national heritage, a massive experiment that we would be wise to learn

from, especially when opposing forces in a culture war today similarly jockey for the power to install the legislative agenda they believe best. *Last Call* provides us with a lively opportunity to reflect anew on what shape our citizenship should take, especially when our neighbors hold convictions very different from our own. To what extent should my beliefs—whether religious or moral—be assumed to be for the common good? How do we

determine the common good, and can we work for it without prostituting our souls? When is compromise on moral concerns in the political and legislative sphere a proper choice, and when does such compromise sell out our deepest values?

The story of *Last Call* should be of special interest to Christians because of the role our forebears played in Prohibition. I was pleased to read of Christians who cared deeply about the devastation brought by alcoholism in families and lives, and sought ways to bring hope and change through a practical application of the gospel. And I cringed at statements by religious culture warriors who warned of the dire consequences if the wrong people got elected, and how good things would be if their agenda carried the day. Like today, it was an unholy marriage of the gospel and politics, a chimera that continues to seduce people who should know ▶



better and need to learn from history.

The questions *Last Call* implicitly raises for Christians are probably obvious, but they are important. To what extent can legislation solve social and moral issues, and what are the implications that follow? Christian prohibitionists argued that families were being destroyed by alcoholism, and that lives were being lost as people died that should have lived—was this sufficient reason to impose laws that most of their neighbors opposed? Though it is true that a Christian is called to be faithful in the political sphere of life, when does engagement on specific issues become problematic? Prohibition was successful in one way in that after it was repealed Americans drank less. Does this make the Christian support for it acceptable?

In 1926 Rabbi Morris Lazaron polled fellow members of the Central Conference of American Rabbis to gauge their attitudes regarding Prohibition and to learn something about sentiment in their communities.

There was a wide range of personal opinion among the 122 who responded, wrote historian Marni Davis, but “nearly every rabbi, from every region, asserted that only two groups seemed to favor Prohibition: evangelical Christians and bootleggers.”

Does it matter who agrees with us?

I wish I had space to repeat some of the stories Okrent tells in *Last Call*. Of how under Prohibition doctors were allowed to prescribe alcoholic beverages for patients, and the way that boosted the practices of physicians. Or how obscure pharmacies became chains filling the avalanche of prescriptions. One example involves a man named Charles

Walgreen. In 1916 he owned nine stores, which grew to 20 in 1920, when Prohibition began. Over the next decade his empire expanded to 525 stores, a success the Walgreen family has since credited to the introduction of the milk shake. Or the story of the flotilla of ships that set anchor just outside the territorial waters of the U.S., awaiting the flood of smaller vessels that would quickly arrive to buy the crates filling every nook and cranny below

deck. “In many places,” Okrent records, “nightfall unveiled a constellation of ship’s lights so dense, recalled a captain who serviced vessels anchored off Highland Light on Cape Cod, ‘you would think it was a city out there.’” Or the story of how evangelicals decided—against both biblical and

historical evidence—that communion should be with bread and grape juice, not wine, and how a Methodist named Dr Thomas Welch went on to become a very wealthy man. Or the story of the rise of rampant corruption, bootleggers, and smuggling handled by ever-more violent mobsters. Or the story of how before Prohibition the federal government was funded by the tax on alcoholic beverages, so Prohibition also introduced the income tax. Or the story of how in reality politicians tended to be “wet-drys” or “dry-wets” depending on their districts.

One more story: The town of Virginia lies on the Iron Range of Minnesota, about 250 miles north of where I am typing this at Toad Hall in Rochester, MN. The Range was settled by immigrants willing to work in the iron mines, and has long been known as a place where drinking is both popular and problematic. When Prohibition was introduced, an exception was made in the law for families to ferment some fruit juice for their own use, since that had long been ▶



a standard way to preserve fruit between autumn harvests. One of the results of this exception was that vineyards in California would ship train loads of grapes to cities across the nation for this purpose. The amounts were remarkable. In 1919, for example, 9,300 carloads were shipped to New York, and in 1928 the number had increased to above 27,000. Even small communities ordered carloads, and because the quality of the grapes shipped out varied considerably, the good citizens of Virginia, MN sent their grocer to the San Joaquin Valley in California each autumn to make certain their shipment was acceptable. The grocer found he liked California and the grape business, and by the end of Prohibition decided to move his family there. The grocer’s name was Oscar Mondavi, whose oldest son Robert continued on in the new family business after Oscar’s death.

I recommend *Last Call*. Okrent tells his story well, and the story is worth reading. The story of Prohibition is about a true problem and a false solution, where somehow it is imagined that law can cure the deepest issues of the human heart. This is not the proper role for law and so is bound to fail, but decades later we still wonder how to translate our concerns into legislation for the common good.

The Scriptures call us to a much higher standard, one so high it is impossible to maintain without a holy-spirited infusion of grace. The ancient Hebrew psalmist praises God for his good gifts, which include, “wine to gladden the heart of man” (Psalms 104:15). Make no mistake here. It is wrong to dismiss the good gifts of God even when their abuse is abhorrent and destructive. Alcoholism is a great scourge, but the misuse of something is not a sufficient reason for its disuse. This is why the abuse of alcohol is condemned in Scripture while

at the same time wine is depicted as a sign of God’s blessing and of joy (Deuteronomy 7:12-13; Psalm 104:13-15), and a symbol of the messianic kingdom (Isaiah 25:6; 55:1; Joel 3:18; Amos 9:14; Zechariah 10:7). It is not just the taste of wine that matters then, to the Christian, but the delight that



results when alcohol helps take the hard edge off the toil and disappointment we face in a broken world, a foretaste (no pun intended) of the unbroken joys of service in the kingdom to come. As with all God’s good gifts, though, this can be abused and so excess is forbidden the people of God. “And do not get drunk with wine,” St Paul says, “for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians

5:18 echoing Isaiah 29:9). So we accept God’s good gifts and live enjoying them but within their proper limits.

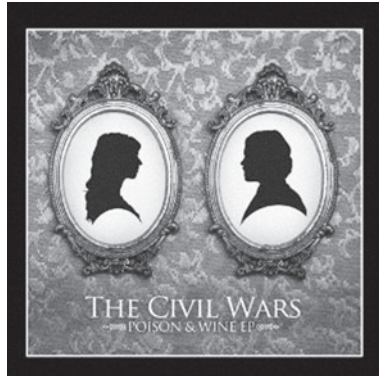
As in every aspect of life, Christian faithfulness cannot and must not be reduced to a formula. It is a walk by faith, seeking creative ways to promote human flourishing in a world seldom given to moderation. The story of Prohibition in *Last Call* provides another opportunity to reflect on just what this might look like—and what it might not. ✱



BOOK REVIEWED & QUOTED

Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition by Daniel Okrent (New York, NY: Scribner; 2010) 376 pp + appendix, notes, sources, & index.

YOU ARE MY FAVORITE SONG



I first heard of The Civil Wars in Nashville, from their producer, Charlie Peacock. They stood out, he said, so it wasn't surprising that their song, "Poison & Wine" had been featured on the TV show, *Grey's Anatomy*. "Joy Williams and John Paul White make up this enigmatic duo of sultry, southern-gothic heartache," Charlie notes. "They are mostly two voices and an acoustic guitar—sometimes a piano."

The *Poison & Wine* EP consists of only four songs, and it makes you yearn for more. The vocals are clear, the melodies lovely, the harmonies effortless, and the performance is simple yet sufficient for the songs to make their way into your heart. Williams and White sing of love, not the endless horizontal shuffling of the characters at Seattle's fictional Grace Hospital, but the love celebrated in the ancient Hebrew Song of Songs. The love we yearn for, yet find so hard, a love that is free yet costly, easy yet hard.

*I wish you'd hold me when I turn my back
The less I give the more I get back
Oh, your hands can heal, your hands can bruise
I don't have a choice but I still choose you*

*Oh I don't love you but I always will...
I always will...*

[from "Poison & Wine"]

This is not the lyrics of the promiscuous but the cry of a heart that knows both that it is fickle and that only love can heal the breach.

Covenantal love must be nourished if it not to be lost, and always our finiteness makes the effort challenging. Some covenants are broken, trust smashed by unfaithfulness and made more hurtful by denial or a lack of repentance.



*Did Sirens steal your heart when you were looking?
Where'd you learn to lie the way you do?
Look's like you made up your mind.
I'd have to say I didn't see this coming
But who does?*

You won't want to see me standing in the door

*So Go, Go, Go
[from "Go"]*

Some covenants remain legally intact but flounder from lack of substance, the rituals of daily life being all that remains of the foundations. The brokenness can seem more than we can bear. How is it that we can be so blind, so cold to the reality of our choices, to the cool calm rationality of our rationalizations?

We know, from deep within our beings that love must somehow be possible and must somehow be the answer. Made in the image of the triune God, we cannot exist apart from relationship, from Him, our personalities and beings so dependent on love that without it we die. Each falling in love is but an echo of a larger reality, each marriage an

imperfect, partial picture of a far greater consummation yet to come.

*Oh dear, never saw you coming
Oh my, look what you have done
You're my favorite song
Always on the tip of my tongue*

*You own me with whispers like poetry
Your mouth is a memory I memorize
So sweet, I hear it echo
Everywhere I go
Day and night
[from "Tip of My Tongue"]*

It is, I think, the simple delights that delight us most. A meal with a few close friends lovingly prepared and presented on a table where a bottle of wine and a vase of flowers add beauty. A bird feeder hanging in a tree in view so the antics of finches, chickadees, and even common sparrows can be enjoyed. Love songs that act like little tokens of good things.

*Meet me in the garden where the weeds grow tall,
Down by the gate*

*I've got a secret that I might tell
It'll give me away
Whatever you do
Keep it with you*

*You and I, well we're just pressing flowers
They're dying, but they're ours
[from "Pressing Flowers"]*

Such is grace in our sad world, and it is not to be despised, or missed. ❀

SOURCE

Charlie Peacock in personal conversation with the author and on his blog, The Record Producer [http://recordproducer.typepad.com/record-producer/].

My Father's Father

*I hear something hanging on the wind
I see black smoke up around the bend
I got my ticket
I want to go home*

*The leaves have changed since I went to leave
Since the last time the train came through
I got my ticket and I want to go home*

*My father's father's blood is on the track
A sweet refrain of sin from the past
I got my ticket and I'm going to go home*

*The winding roads that led me here
burn like coal and dry like tears
So here's my hope
My tired soul
So here's my ticket
I want to go home
Home
Home*

"My Father's Father" from Live at Eddie's Attic, available online for free download at: <http://www.myspace.com/thecivilwars>

Text **Denis Haack**

Lost Sparrow

Chris Billing is an unassuming man, a journalist and documentarian who cares enough for the truth that he is willing to pursue it even at personal cost. For ten years he worked as a journalist in China, from 1996-2001 serving as Beijing Bureau Chief for NBC News. Now he lives and works out of Washington, DC, beginning Small Handful

Productions to make documentary films. His first production, *Up To The Mountain, Down To The Village* (2005) records the story of Mao's youth re-education campaign during the infamous Cultural Revolution in the decade leading up to 1976. Now he has written, produced, and directed *Lost Sparrow*, which is available for purchase in DVD (www.lostsparrow-movie.com) and will be featured in the Fall 2010 lineup of PBS's Emmy Award-winning series *Independent Lens*. The national broadcast is scheduled for Nov.

16, 2010, and will be *Lost Sparrow's* television premier.

Lost Sparrow is a deeply personal story for Chris to tell. He grew up in a comfortable Baptist home into which his parents adopted four siblings from a troubled family on the Crow Reservation in Montana. One night two of the brothers, Bobby (13 years old) and Tyler (11) ran away and in the process were struck by a passing train and killed. Questions remained about the event and as Chris has discovered, his adopted brothers had left to try

to find help for their sister Lana. Discovering the true story has meant uncovering painful truths about his past, his parents, and the tragedy that had occurred so long ago and that continues to send tendrils of destruction into lives and relationships.

We recommend *Lost Sparrow*. Not because it is easy to watch, but because Chris Billing models what it means to be a Christian in a fallen world who has a chance to tell a story and chooses to tell it true. ✱



An undated photograph of the four Crow Indian children, (left to right) Tyler, Bobby, Lana and Janelle, before they were adopted in 1971 by the Billing family. Credit: Cynthia D. Fortune.



A Billing family portrait taken in December of 1977. This is the last family photograph taken before the two Crow Indian boys, Tyler and Bobby (far left), were struck by a train in June, 1978. Credit: Corrigan's Studio, Newport, NY.



An undated photo of the Overlook Mansion in Little Falls, home to the Billing family.

Lost Sparrow (2009)
www.lostsparrowmovie.com
 Produced, written & directed by Chris Billing
 Runtime: 78 minutes