

# critique

A Ransom Fellow

2014 Issue 2

## RAVENS, CONSIDERED



## CRITIQUE



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Except where noted, all articles are by Denis Haack.

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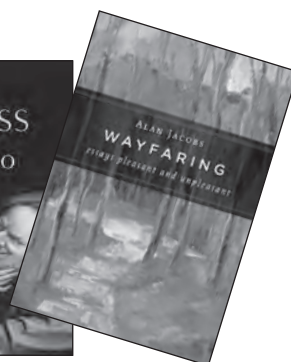
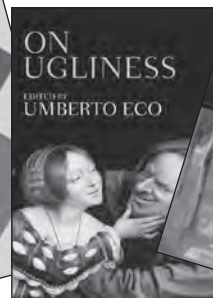
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# Omne Quod Spirat Laudet Dominum



We drove to the Twin Cities last night (in a light snowstorm) for a concert by the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra (SPCO). The traffic on the highway was slower than usual and the plows were out, but we had allowed extra time.

We've grown to love the SPCO and last night's performance was one we'd anticipated eagerly. The program featured two composers. The first was Antonio Vivaldi (1678–1741) and consisted of his justly famous concertos named *The Four Seasons* (1725). The SPCO played them in order—*Spring*, *Summer*, *Autumn*, and *Winter*—each concerto featuring a different SPCO violinist in the solo part. The second composer on the program was John Cage (1912–92). The piece chosen was his *String Quartet in Four Parts* (1950), the four movements interspersed with the Vivaldi compositions—"Quietly Flowing Along" (summer), "Slowly Rocking" (autumn), "Nearly Stationary" (winter), and "Quodlibet" (Latin, meaning what you please, evoking spring). Four members

of the SPCO formed the quartet, sitting apart from the rest of the orchestra. It was a beautiful performance and a stimulating program of strikingly contrasting approaches to music.

*The Four Seasons* is arranged for solo violin, harpsichord and strings, so on stage in the midst of the orchestra was a harpsichord. This one is painted a gentle pale green, and the interior gold with red trim. On the underside of the lid, raised for the concert, Latin script spells out, *Omne Quod Spirat Laudet Dominum*. I wondered what it meant so at intermission looked it up. It is from Psalm 150:6, the final verse in the psalter: "Let everything that breathes praise the Lord."

Turns out Layton James, who retired in 2011 after being principal keyboardist in the SPCO for 41 years, built the instrument. He also serves as music director in a Lutheran church and that perhaps has something to do with his choice of text.

As the orchestra played each concerto, you could see members of the quartet following along with the music, smiling, involuntarily moving as if they too were playing. I did not notice that any of the orchestra members did the same as the quartet played Cage's composition. It was also noticeable that the audience was openly restless while Cage was played. Cage was famous for developing methods of composition based on chance, "minimizing," the program notes said, "the role of the composer as the all-important driver of self-expression." Any expression of humility is admirable in a world that is sick unto death from self-centeredness and pride. Cage's music is less well known and is difficult for most people to appreciate except on a formal level. The stark sounds, often discordant and harsh, evoke reminders of darker

memories in the unrelenting passage of time. The evening was a good reminder that the point is not whether we like a piece of art but whether we *get* it.

The concert, with its bold contrast in the music of Vivaldi and Cage, demonstrated the power of convictions and values, demonstrating once again that what we believe and how we live in light of those convictions and values really matters. After the concert I walked out into the cold night air glad that the SPCO had included both Cage and Vivaldi in the program. The two composers' integrity in pursuing their convictions, translating them into art, and their courageous willingness to push against the popular expectations of their day provide a glimpse of the likeness of God in which both artists were made.

It is true that all that has breath should praise the Lord. I do not know whether either composer wrote these compositions intentionally, consciously pursuing this end. But last night their music prompted me to praise, and for that I am grateful. ■

# Vital Questions about Your Life

In a brief piece posted online by *The Huffington Post* (03/02/2014), Susie Moore, a life coach in New York City, listed “5 Killer Life Coach Questions You Can Ask Yourself.” She doesn’t say much about each question, which is good since the point is for her readers to reflect on them, not listen to her talk about them.

1. *How happy am I overall, today, out of 10?*
2. *What type of life do I want to lead?*
3. *What does success look like to me?*
4. *What brings me joy?*
5. *What can I do in the next two weeks to bring more joy, passion and purpose to my life?*

These are questions Moore uses to help her clients examine their lives, identify where change might be wise, and then make plans so that they might better flourish in the coming years.

I know nothing about Susie Moore, but I certainly admire her use of thoughtful questions to prompt reflection. Setting aside unhurried time to ask some carefully worded questions about our lives can be a good exercise. Life has a tendency to get away from us and, if we don’t pause periodically to reflect on how things are unfolding, it’s easy to end up living not intentionally but by default. Expectations and busyness slowly begin to press into our time and energy, and soon the priorities we set for ourselves have been supplanted by a new set that takes on a life of its own.

Margie and I used to set aside time each quarter to review our calendars and assess whether the priorities we had set based on our sense of calling were reflected in how we actually were using our time and to what we were saying Yes and No. Almost every quarter we found ourselves trying to figure out how we could deviate so far from what we had so carefully planned. It was a very discouraging discovery. We finally solved our discouragement by agreeing that we should simply accept that we were far too fallen to maintain proper priorities for anything close to 120 days. We once attended a reading by author Jon Hassler who put our discovery into an axiom he lived by: When you are failing to meet your expectations, lower them.

One of the things we discovered about ourselves involved our sense of calling. Coming to identify God’s particular calling is a process that takes time. It involves trial and error,

evaluation, feedback from others, and none of that came quickly or all at once. Still, it is knowing our calling that lets us know to what good things we need to say No so that we can say Yes to the things that fit us. Repeatedly, as we sought to examine ourselves, we’d discover that other people’s expectations or good projects had deflected us from our calling. It’s great that there are all sorts of opportunities to serve, but just because it’s a good chance to do a good thing doesn’t mean we all should sign up. Or that, once we have signed up, we should keep doing it until the end of time. Sometimes saying Yes to good things is a lack of Christian faithfulness.

The most famous proponent of the examined life, Moore notes, is Socrates. “An unexamined life,” Plato reports him as saying, “is not worth living.” It’s one of those propositions that seems so obvious and self-evident that few serious arguments are raised against it. We may bemoan our failure to live an examined life, but I’ve yet to meet anyone who seriously thinks the only life worth living is one lived entirely by default—if such a thing were even possible.

For the Christian, however, Socrates’ statement doesn’t quite capture the significance of the issue. St. Paul warns that if we fail as citizens of God’s kingdom in regular and careful self-examination we are risking not merely an unworthy life but the judgment of God (1 Corinthians 11:28). This may not be a popular notion, but there it is. “Examine yourselves,” is the apostolic word, so that part is settled. All that remains is figuring out how we might well accomplish that self-examination.

The idea of developing a set of questions on which to reflect when we periodically set aside some time for



self-examination is one that we should consider. Because we are finite, we cannot anticipate all that our choices will bring, to say nothing about how our social and cultural context will morph over time. Complicating matters is the fact that we are also fallen. If being finite means our priorities can need resetting because we are able to see things only in part, being fallen means our priorities are easily perverted by pride, trying to please others, or are being seduced by the values of ideologies and the various other idolatries that surround us in the world. The point is not to beat ourselves up for getting somewhat off track. The point is intentionally having to pause, reflect, repent, review what's most important, and sharpen the focus of our lives.

All of which suggests something worth some discussion and reflection. ■

**Source:** [www.huffingtonpost.com/susie-moore/life-lessons\\_b\\_4810320.html?utm\\_hp\\_ref=world&ir=World](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/susie-moore/life-lessons_b_4810320.html?utm_hp_ref=world&ir=World)

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Do you regularly set aside unhurried time for thoughtful self-examination? If you do, how do you usually structure it? If you don't regularly set aside such time, why don't you?
2. Some might respond that they are too busy to add time for self-examination. How would you respond?
3. How significant is regular, thoughtful self-examination? What reasons would you give to support your position? To what might you be willing to say No in order to say Yes to this?
4. What do the Scriptures teach about self-examination, or living an examined life?
5. What is attractive or helpful in having a set of carefully developed questions to aid in the process of self-examination? Are there ways in which such a set of questions could become detrimental?
6. Different stages of life might introduce concerns for growth that are unique to, or of special importance to, that stage. If this is true of you, what question might you want to include that would cover it?
7. Discuss each of Moore's five questions. What is each attempting to uncover or examine? What do you find most helpful about the list? What is least helpful? Why?
8. Reword any of Moore's five questions to better fit your sense of life and the meaning of human flourishing. Add any question you believe is needed to complete the list, being careful to not expand it too greatly—too long a list will make reflection more difficult.
9. The Lord's Prayer (Mathew 6:9-13; Luke 11:1-4) is best understood by Christians as our Lord's concise summary of the things that should shape our most basic and essential concerns, priorities, thinking, and life. Compare this prayer with the list of questions you are developing. Does the Lord's Prayer suggest you should add a question, reword one, or perhaps define a question within the parameters of the prayer's meaning?
10. To what extent can you identify your particular calling from God? How does your calling help define the questions on your list?
11. What practical plans should you make to use your set of questions?

# Discernment 101a

The process of Christian cultural discernment involves asking a series of questions that allow us to deepen our understanding of whatever it is we are seeking to engage. Whether it is a novel or film, popular song or news article, lecture, essay or statement by a friend, political ideology, or whatever, the questions form a framework for reflection, learning, and conversation. The questions are simple enough to teach to children and probing enough to guide a scholar's inquiry. They can be easily adapted and expanded to fit the subject at hand and can be summarized to look like this:

*What's being communicated?*

*What's made to be attractive? How?*

*Where do I agree? What might I challenge? Why?*

*How can I speak and live the truth in a creative and understandable way in my pluralistic world?*

One thing that is essential to understand is that the first two questions call for careful *objectivity*. They do not ask for our opinion, or for our judgment, or for our feelings. What we believe enters the discernment process, but later, in the third question. For the first two questions—What's being said? What's attractive?—we need to carefully observe, listen, see, and understand as clearly and objectively as possible.

Here's a good way to put this into perspective. As you seek to answer the first two questions, imagine that the author of the book or magazine article you are reading, or the director of the movie you are watching, etc., is present. Your goal with these first two questions is to provide answers that will satisfy them. Your summary and talk should reflect such objectivity that the author or director will respond, "You listened to me well. You took me seriously. Thank you."

So, for example, when I am leading a film discussion, I tell people we are going to begin by examining the film as carefully and objectively as we can. I tell them not to raise their opinion or express how they feel—there will be time for that later. We're going to begin objectively and then—and only then—we'll be ready to respond to the film.

There are multiple reasons for beginning the process of cultural discernment this way, as objectively as possible. The artist is a person made in God's image,

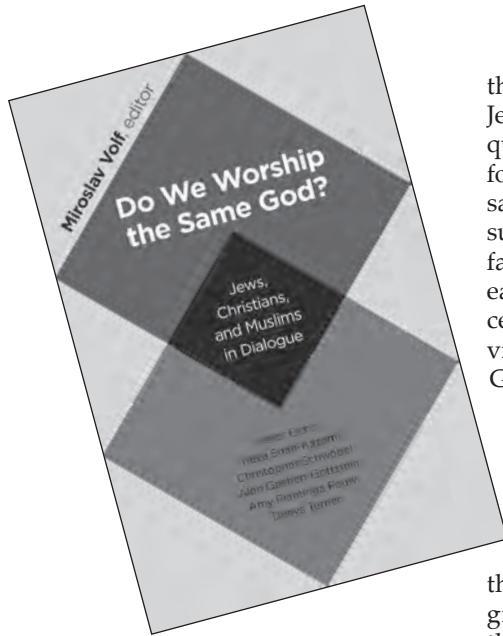
and so must be treated with dignity and care. This is true regardless of what they believe, how they live, or the god they worship. Second, if we do not first carefully listen, how can we possibly know how to respond or to what we are actually responding? C. S. Lewis argued that we should receive an artwork before we can properly judge it. Third, beginning with our opinion or some point of disagreement—as too often happens—merely makes us seem disagreeable and arrogant.

Some Christians are so eager to insert some Christian message into the conversation that they feel obligated to talk about the "gospel." (I use quotation marks because usually only the atonement is mentioned, which is only one aspect of the good news about Christ.) When St. Paul entered Athens and saw that "the city was full of idols," he did not begin telling people about how Jesus died for them. Instead, he "went through the city and looked carefully" so he could understand Athenian beliefs and practices (Acts 17:16, 23). And when he did speak, he had something creative to say that presented Christ as Lord in a way that the Athenians could understand. Some of them even believed (17:34).

Beginning as objectively as possible not only provides a good basis for continuing the process of discernment; it demonstrates something essential about what we believe. ■

*This brief piece expands on "Discernment 101: An Explanation of Discernment," on Ransom's website.*

# Is My God Your God?



Discerning Christians know that speaking the gospel creatively and attractively into our pluralistic twenty-first century world requires that we first listen with care. Because Christ is Lord of all, and because the unfolding biblical story of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration embraces all of life, culture, and reality, the Christian need not worry where a conversation is headed. Not only is the Holy Spirit actually at work; every idea, yearning, value, and belief can be explored without fear or defensiveness in light of the biblical worldview.

Since the pluralism in which we live includes believers from other religious traditions, the question naturally arises as to whether we worship the same God. This is especially compelling with

the three great Abrahamic traditions: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim. The question needs to be answered not just for the sake of civility, but also for the sake of clarity. We will likely fail to persuade one another of the details of our faith if we fail to properly grasp how we each comprehend the most essential and central aspect of our respective worldview, namely, the person and nature of God.

In *Do We Worship the Same God?* Yale theologian Miroslav Volf brings together Jewish, Christian, and Muslim thinkers to discuss the question. The six papers included in this volume are scholarly works of theology—what one would expect in a graduate level seminar—and reward a thoughtful reading.

All the authors correctly conclude that the answer to the question is both Yes and No. As they demonstrate, thinking through what that implies in practical terms is the more difficult and pressing task. There are implications both for personal relationships and for political realities.

The three chapters in the book by Christians were disappointing to me primarily because the arguments were not rooted specifically enough in Scripture. I understand the question being explored here is a deeply philosophical one but, in a Christian perspective, it cannot be allowed to be merely philosophical. The most helpful chapter, in my mind, is the Muslim contribution, “Do Muslims and Christians Believe in the Same God?” by Reza Shah-Kazemi from The Institute of Ismaili Studies. It is by far the longest (taking up almost half the book) and one of the richest, and it allowed me, at least for a few moments, to see things from a more distinctly Islamic perspective.

The primary practical issue, as Volf notes in his Introduction, is whether Christians, Muslims, and Jews can live together in civility and peace. That is a pressing issue in our world, and no doubt will continue to be so in the years ahead.

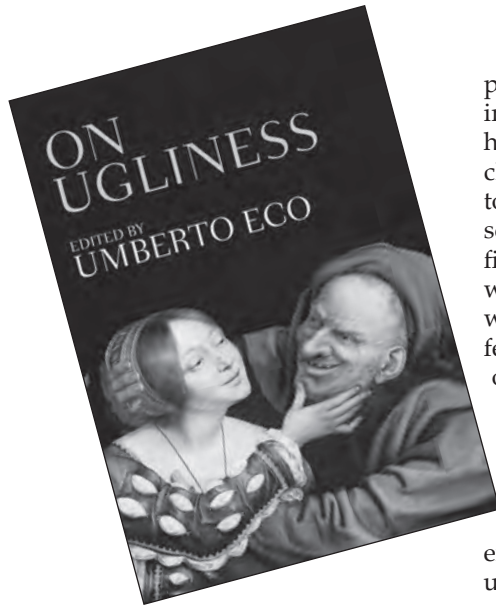
Whether Muslims, Jews, and Christians believe in the same God allows us to begin to explore the values we share in common that will allow us to live together and work together for the good of all. This is a vital discussion, even though we understand that theological and philosophical agreement among scholars will not be enough to carry the day. In the end, as a Christian, I must love my neighbors even at the cost of my rights, job, reputation, or life, whether they worship the true God, or not, or choose to reciprocate in love, dislike, cynicism, or indifference.

Probably few of us are called to join the scholarly conversation, but we must do what we can in the ordinary faithfulness of our lives. Volf’s book can help sharpen our thinking. All of us can love our neighbor, and must, if we truly follow Christ.

A good first step is to call your neighborhood mosque and synagogue to find when you might visit, listen, and ask questions, and learn what you can read to better understand who they are and what they believe. If there are no Muslims or Jews in your neighborhood, make certain you aren’t looking past them. And then keep listening: the pluralism of our world is growing rapidly and shows no signs of slowing down. ■

**Book recommended:** *Do We Worship the Same God?: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Dialogue* edited by Miroslav Volf (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; 2012) 165 pages.

# The Truth of Ugliness



Last night before sleep I looked at some photos—pictures of beauty and ugliness—that had been gathered on a web news site. There were collections of moments of victory at the Winter Olympics, and another of drops of water freezing into snowflakes magnified so we could glimpse the delicate crystal prisms as they formed. Then I clicked on a collection of shots from the protests that have beset Independence Square in Kiev in recent days. The sight of the violence and bloodshed was heart rending: lifeless bodies laid out on tarps,

police officers beating and being beaten, inadequate emergency triage centers helping the wounded, protesters with clothing in flames as they attempted to keep government forces out of the square by lighting their barricades on fire. The eyes of Olympians were alive with excitement, the eyes of Ukrainians were wracked with pain, anger, and fear. Another set of photos was a tour of the “Museum of Corruption,” the ostentatiously opulent palace ousted Ukrainian President Yanukovich had built for himself while the country’s economy languished. In these, the beauty of art, craftsmanship, and exquisite materials was twisted into an ugly display of arrogant greed. Beauty and ugliness are everywhere in our broken world, if we have eyes to see, and it can be debated which one takes precedence.

Novelist Umberto Eco points out that it’s not quite accurate to assume that ugliness is simply the opposite of beauty. He notes that “all the synonyms for *beautiful* could be conceived as a reaction of disinterested appreciation”—terms like harmonious, sublime, pretty, delightful. In contrast he notes, “almost all the synonyms for ugly contain a reaction of disgust, if not of violent repulsion, horror, or fear”—terms like abominable, revolting, indecent, displeasing (p. 16). The idea of beauty lends itself to quiet reflection, while ugliness evokes a deep, visceral reaction. Just as standards for beauty are not identical across cultures and time, so it is with definitions of ugliness. And to complicate things further, in the West there is a long tradition of belief that “any form of ugliness can be redeemed by a faithful and efficacious artistic portrayal” (p. 19). A good artist can make a lovely painting of a heap of rotting, repugnant trash.

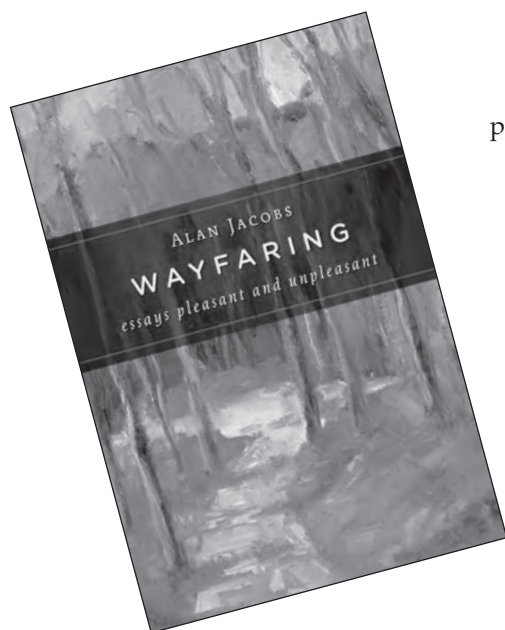
In *On Ugliness*, Eco stimulates us to think through the meaning and depiction of ugliness in a lusciously illustrated book that covers 2500 years of Western art and literature. Eco separates the various depictions of ugliness over this span of history in a variety of helpful categories: the obscene, witchcraft, the apocalyptic, comic, industrial, kitsch, decadence, and more. Naming the manifestations of ugliness in this way allows the role, meaning, and effect of ugliness to take on sharper relief. *On Ugliness* also showed me the importance of understanding ugliness if we want to be discerning about beauty. Not because beauty cannot be embraced and enjoyed before first gazing on ugliness, but because isolating ourselves from ugliness can cause us to mistake sentimentality for beauty. *On Ugliness* also reminds me that although beauty attracts us because we are made for it, courage is required to intentionally face ugliness. It is because there is such a reactive element in recognizing ugliness that we need to be certain we can face it in our broken world without merely being reactionary. After all, as the sets of photos I looked at demonstrate, ugliness smears much of life in a fallen world.

I wouldn’t put Eco’s book on the bedside stand in your guestroom. And I shouldn’t have to mention that you will find some of the illustrations and excerpts included in the book to be revolting. It is, after all, *On Ugliness*. ■

**Book recommended:** *On Ugliness* edited by Umberto Eco, translated by Alastair McEwen (New York, NY: Rizzoli International Publications; 2007) 439 pages + appendices.



# Reflections Worth Reflection



When Alan Jacobs' name appears in some publication, I always anticipate reading the essay he has written with a quiet confidence born of experience. My experience has taught me that I will find whatever he has penned to be well written, thoughtful, and stimulating. I should probably also note that, when his name appears, a sense of dismay arises within me born of the knowledge that here is a man who can write faster than I can read. Why is it that gifts are so obviously distributed in such an unfair manner in this wretched world? Why...

OK, I am back. Sorry. Let me continue.

Eighteen of Dr. Jacobs' essays from *Books & Culture* and *First Things*, plus two pieces that were previously unpublished, have been collected in *Wayfaring: Essays Pleasant and Unpleasant*. As Carlos Eire, author of *Waiting for Snow in Havana* notes, "There is nothing unpleasant here, so never mind the title."

Here is a brief sample of Jacob's prose, from "Reading the Signs."

*I will always remember the day I discovered the concept of irony—not the word; that would come much later. But when I did learn the word, a smile of recognition spread across my face and an image came to my mind.*

*I was perhaps six or seven years old. It was a hot summer's day in Birmingham, Alabama, and I was making my more-or-less daily pilgrimage to Snappy's Service Station to get a Coke. A new Chevron emporium stood nearby, but its Cokes came only from a modern coin-operated machine. At Snappy's you had to fish them out of a big red waist-high cooler with a sliding glass door on top, and then you had to pay at the register, but it was worth it because the drinks often were slightly slushy with ice. My friends and I scorned the modern machines.*

*But as I approached Snappy's on my banana-seated red bike, my mood of anticipation was suddenly broken, and I braked to a quick stop. There in front of the station a car had crashed into a light post—and, to judge from the condition of the car's front end, had done so at a significant rate of speed. No one was in the car or nearby, nor, as I watched, did any ambulance or police car turn up, so perhaps the accident had happened some time earlier. The only movement at the scene came from the rectangular plate dangling by a single bolt from the front of the car, swaying a little in the hot breeze. It read GOD IS MY CO-PILOT. (p. 83)*

Jacobs' imagination ranges widely and never gets bogged down in scholarly jargon or floats off into technical concerns of interest found only in obscure corners of academia.

I recommend *Wayfaring* to you. It allows us to listen in as a keenly discerning Christian mind reflects on W. H. Auden, Harry Potter, trees, Kahlil Gibran, *The Green Bible*, the clever (or just silly) signs that appear in front of many church buildings, and more, much of which is rooted in reading and literature but not limited to it.

When you get the book, take your time reading it. Alan Jacobs' essays are worth savoring. And know that probably, in the time you took to read *Wayfaring*, he has produced twice as many words worth reading.

Like I used to tell my kids: Life is unfair. Get over it. ■

**Book recommended:** *Wayfaring: Essays Pleasant and Unpleasant* by Alan Jacobs (Grand Rapids, MI: Williams B. Eerdmans Publishing; 2010) 154 pages.

## RESOURCE

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# RAVEN



# S, CONSIDERED

One of the ways the New Testament Gospels lend plausibility to what they record is in the ring of authenticity that is found in the teachings and sayings of Jesus. As we would expect from a provincial rabbi of his day, he displays a deep knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures, teaches in ways clearly shaped by the ancient wisdom tradition of the Old Testament, and often refers to things that would commonly surround an itinerant preacher in first century Israel.

One well-known example of referring to things within eyeshot of him and his listeners at the moment is his reference to ravens. He mentioned ravens when telling his followers that he expected the citizens of his kingdom to be different from those whose primary allegiance was directed to the various rulers, realms, gods and ideologies of this world. We are not, he taught, to order our life, thinking, and priorities around what “the nations of the world seek” (Luke 12:30, see also Matthew 6:47). Rather, our life, thinking, and priorities are to be ordered around seeking his kingdom (Luke 12:31). This was a radical idea then, and remains radical today. Perhaps that is why many of the explanations of this text that I’ve heard strike me less as an explanation and more as an effort to explain its’ meaning away. Jesus clearly explained what he meant, though his ideas are

so countercultural as to seem almost unimaginable in today’s consumerist society. We are, he insisted, to intentionally order our life so that actually trusting him, day by day, for food, clothing, and shelter is a reality (Luke 12:29).

Exploring what that could look like is both interesting and important, but not my point here. Rather, I am interested in the fact that Jesus pointed to the ravens in giving his followers a sufficient reason to trust God. He put it this way:

*Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!*

Seems simple enough—so let’s consider them.

**T**he word Jesus used for “raven” in this text appears only here in the New Testament. It refers to ravens, crows, and similar birds, all of which were known for their voracious appetites.

Jesus was not being inexact or ambiguous in using this general term that included a variety of species. In his day, birds were identified in ordinary speech not according to a classification system based on specific species like we use today, but according to some feature that was commonly seen as characteristic of them. Palestine has at least eight varieties of ravens and they were, and are, as common in the Middle East as they are, along with their close cousins the crows, throughout the world today.

Look at and reflect on these birds, Jesus said. They’re actually hard to miss, with striking black plumage, large flocks, loud, raucous calls, and ease at adapting to urban as well as rural life. The city in which I live as I write this has been forced to consider them. For

the last few years, vast flocks of crows have descended on the city center to roost at night. They fill trees along the downtown streets, covering sidewalks and parked cars with sticky white droppings, covering surfaces in ways that are frankly impressive. The city has hired “bird abatement services” to get rid of the pests, but so far the crows seem largely unmoved. The flock does move when the abatement efforts get annoying, but only to other trees in other parts of the city. Each morning they fill the sky leaving the city to feed, and each evening they return. Several neighbors have mentioned that their money is on the birds.

Consider the ravens, Jesus said. They have huge appetites because they are big, active birds that don’t plant or harvest or set up storage bins, and yet they are fed by the good providence of God. Don’t you know, he asks, we are even more precious to God than ravens?

If we consider the birds as Jesus instructs, it seems to me that we’ll end up making an observation, and come to a conclusion. The observation is this: *There is far more going on in God’s world than we can possibly imagine.* And our conclusion will be this: *Even in a culture of disbelief there are good and sufficient reasons to trust God today, and tomorrow, and the day after that.* Trust him not simply for salvation or forgiveness or life after death or anything else like that—though he can be trusted for those things—but so we can intentionally order our life to trust him day by day for practical, everyday, ordinary things like food, clothing, and shelter.

Let me explain how I arrive at this.



I was first able to really watch ravens and their close relatives, crows, about twenty years ago during deer hunting in the woods in the northern part of Minnesota near the Canadian border. I liked the early morning hunt best. The air would be frigid as I stumbled into the woods in the dark, trying to find the ladder leading up to the tree stand where I was supposed to sit and watch for deer.

"It's straight in about 25 yards—you can't miss it—just walk straight into the woods and it'll be right there," I was always told. It was a lie. I could miss it and usually did. I would get out of the pickup on a dirt road, wade through the deep snow in the ditch, and plunge into the woods. The deer stand was never right there. For one thing, you *can't* walk straight into the woods—there's something called trees in the way. So I'd wander around in the dark for a while and finally sit down on a log and wait for the sun to come up. Then I'd find the deer stand, climb up into it, and sit down; and as the light grew, something almost magical would happen.

Slowly the woods woke up. The chickadees always appeared first. Their little calls would announce their arrival, and I would watch little flocks of them flitting through the branches of the trees, searching for food. They did not seem to notice me as they moved through the woods from tree to tree, but would land on nearby branches or on my mitten, cock their head to look at me with a pitch black eye, apparently decide I wasn't edible, and then flit casually on to the next perch.

Other early risers were the ravens and crows. Ravens are the larger of the two, but it can be difficult to tell them apart. Both species belong to the same genus, *Corvus*. I would spot them flying lazily just above the tips of the trees, always glancing around at everything as they went.

Until I spent time in the woods, I didn't realize the wide range of calls they make. Most of us know the loud, abrasive, harsh caw they are famous for. I usually didn't hear that in the woods as the sun slowly rose. Instead, I heard almost musical warbles, deep murmurs, gurgling croaks, and on still days I could hear the steady, gentle flapping of their wings as they passed overhead. Their black plumage stood out from the snow, the overcast sky, and the white bark of the birch and poplar trees. Unlike the chickadees that seemed to ignore me, the ravens always seemed to know exactly where I was and that I didn't belong there.

The first mention of ravens in Scripture occurs in the story of one of the oldest events in human history—the great flood that occurred in the days of a man named Noah. Humankind, insisting on autonomy from God, descended into cycles of violence and corruption for which there seemed no end. When no hope for repentance remained, God sent a flood as judgment on the earth he had made. Before the flood began, he commanded Noah to build an ark in which Noah and his family, and a sampling of the creatures of the earth, would be saved. The flood wrecked horrible devastation. After the rains stopped and the water started to recede, Noah released a raven from the ark. "At the end of forty days,"

the Scriptures record, "Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made and sent forth a raven. It went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth" (Genesis 8:6-7).

There are theories why Noah chose a raven for this task, but we can't know for certain because the Scriptures do not tell us. We can be content with knowing that a raven was one of the messengers used to assure a saved humanity that God's judgment had been completed and that they had escaped that judgment by grace.

The story of the great flood is not just one of the oldest stories in human history. It is also one of the most influential. People groups the world over have ancient flood myths as part of their religious and cultural heritage. We can't know for certain, but the ancient story of Noah's release of a raven might be a reason why ravens have so often been considered to be spiritual harbingers, dark and mysterious messengers that bridge the natural and supernatural realms.

In Greek mythology, for example, ravens were associated with Apollo the god of prophecy. In Norse mythology, the god Odin was imagined as having two ravens as companions that served as his ears and eyes. Each day the birds flew out and later returned, bringing him news of the world. Both the ancient Welsh and Celtic peoples had gods whose names were the words for "raven." The Hindu god named Shani is often pictured seated on the back of an enormous crow. In the Islamic Qur'an,



the story of Cain and Able includes a detail not found in the biblical version, namely, that a raven taught Cain how to bury Able's body after Cain had murdered him. And the raven appears often in the legends of Native cultures especially in the American northwest and across Siberia.

Edgar Allen Poe's classic, haunting poem, "The Raven," first published in 1845, was something a lot of my generation was assigned in English class.

*Once upon a midnight dreary, while I  
pondered weak and weary,  
Over many a quaint and curious volume  
of forgotten lore,  
While I nodded, nearly napping,  
suddenly there came a tapping...*

This is literature that can trigger nightmares in a teenager.

Given all this, it isn't surprising that a classic supernatural-thriller film is named, simply, *The Crow* (1994, dir. Alex Proyas). The script is based on a 1989 comic book of the same name. The film begins with a voiceover, and the narration in those opening moments captures the idea behind the story of the film well:

*People once believed that when someone dies, a crow carries their soul to the land of the dead. But sometimes, something so bad happens that a terrible sadness is carried with it and the soul can't rest. Then sometimes, just sometimes, the crow can bring that soul back to put the wrong things right.*

*The Crow* starred Brandon Lee, the son of the famed martial arts actor, Bruce Lee in what turned out to be Brandon's final film. Lee played Eric Draven, the Crow, a rock musician who returns from the dead to avenge the brutal murder of himself and his fiancée. The film

took on special meaning in the world of horror films when, due to a horrible mistake by a prop man on set, Brandon Lee was shot and killed during the filming of a scene.

In J. R. R. Tolkien's masterpiece *The Lord of the Rings*, the massive and intelligent ravens of Ravenhill were friends of the dwarves. "When Peregrin Took became one of the Guards of the Citadel," we are told, "his new garments included a 'high-crowned helm with small raven-wings on either side.'"

And in the enormously popular book and television series *A Game of Thrones*, the forth novel is titled *A Feast for Crows* (George R. R. Martin, 2005). Crows feature prominently in the series, as messengers, symbols of darkness and harbingers of death.

*The stench of death was growing stronger, despite the scented candles. The smell reminded Jaime Lannister of the pass below the Golden Tooth, where he had won a glorious victory in the first days of the war. On the morning after the battle, the crows had feasted on victors and vanquished alike, as once they had feasted on Rhaegar Targaryen after the Trident. How much can a crown be worth, when a crow can dine upon on king? (p. 138)*

Besides the possible influence of the flood narrative and the fact that ravens and crows can imitate human speech, they are probably imagined in such mystical terms also because they congregate where death has occurred. Flocks feed on the bodies of the dead, and they can be found in all the empty

places where warfare, famine, and plague have blasted the landscape into desolation. The ancient Hebrew prophet Isaiah warned that nations guilty of economic injustice, oppression of the weak, and violence against the innocent would face the judgment of God. The metaphors he used for the warning are strikingly violent:

*Draw near, O nations, to hear,  
and give attention, O peoples!  
For the Lord is enraged....  
The [guilty nation's] slain shall be cast out,  
and the stench of their corpses shall rise....  
From generation to generation [the land]  
shall lie waste;  
none shall pass through it forever  
and ever...  
the raven shall dwell in it  
(Isaiah 34:1-3, 10-11)*

**W**e must not miss the grace that is found even here. The ravens and crows in these desolate lands clear away the decay just as today we see crows and ravens along the highway eating the remains of road kill. The world would be a far more horrible mess than it already is if the birds did not fulfill this cleansing, renewing role. In so doing, a thoroughly disgusting act becomes a gift in a world where death and the stink of putrefaction threaten to overtake the living.

Their association with death and decomposition may have been the reason ravens and crows were listed in the Hebrew law given by Moses as unclean for eating by Israel. The Old Testament people of God were not to eat them—or vultures or cormorants, for that matter. These birds were to be considered unclean.

It was not that God despised these creatures he had made, but rather that his people were not to see anything in a broken world as neutral, as if some corners of creation were beyond the edges of God's kingdom. Even what they ate was to be considered something that mattered when life is lived before the face of God.

Ravens were to be considered unclean, but the Scriptures insist God did not withdraw his care from them. For example, consider what is recorded about ravens in the book of Job. There we listen in as Job and three friends argue over why suffering occurs. Job had been a prosperous man with a large family when a series of disasters wiped out his wealth, killed his children, and destroyed his health. The four men debated the issue at length, sitting together for days, taking turns giving long speeches that claimed Job must have sinned horribly for such calamity to come upon him. Then a whirlwind appeared and God spoke from its depths. He was not, to say the least, very impressed with the discussion.

"Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" God demanded. "Dress for action like a man," he told Job.

*I will question you, and you make it known to me.*

*Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?*

*Tell me, if you have understanding...*

*Who provides for the raven its prey,  
when its young ones cry to God for help,  
and wander about for lack of food?*  
(Job 38:2-4, 41)

The Hebrew poet insists in Psalms 147 that the answer to this question is God himself. "He gives to the beasts their food," the psalmist says, "and to the young ravens that cry" (Psalm 147:9). Though he designated the ravens as unclean for eating for his people, God sustains them, hears their young call out in hunger, and provides them with sustenance. God has not turned away from his world even though it is broken and bent and filled with death and decay.

**T**he Scriptures also note the raven's beauty, their dark plumage so black they seem to set the final standard for the color. In the wonderful wedding song recorded in Scripture, the Song of Solomon, the bride celebrates the attractiveness of her beloved.

*My beloved is radiant and ruddy,  
distinguished among ten thousand.*

*His head is the finest gold;  
his locks are wavy,  
black as a raven.*

(Song 5:10-11)

One other time in Scripture God used ravens directly as his servants, this time to bring food to a prophet who had spoken truth to power and whose life was threatened as a result. Israel's king at the time was Ahab, a cruel and greedy man, whose wife Jezebel worshipped a pagan god, Baal, and who set out to slaughter every prophet of Yahweh she could locate. Baal was the Phoenician deity of fertility, thunder, and rain. Even today, in the Arabic spoken along the eastern edge of the Mediterranean, the adjective *ba'al* is applied to farming that uses no irrigation but depends on rainfall alone to water the crops. In any case, in a challenge

directed at Jezebel's false god, Yahweh told the prophet Elijah to inform Ahab that it would not rain until Elijah said it would. Jezebel, as you might guess, was not happy. "'Depart from here,' God told Elijah,

*'and hide yourself by the brook Cherith... You shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.' So he did... And the ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening.*  
(1 Kings 17:3-6)

The drought went on for three long years.

Imagine what that would have been like. I look forward to meeting Elijah someday, and I look forward to hearing more of the story—what was it like to be fed by ravens twice a day? Did they just drop the bread and meat and fly on, or did they hang around in a huge, noisy flock? By the way, a flock of crows is called a *murder*, and a flock of ravens is called an *unkindness*. What an irony: an unkindness of ravens or murder of crows fed Elijah twice a day at God's command, divine messengers that kept him alive while the queen's soldiers scoured the land seeking to take his life. Doesn't it seem that Elijah learned there is far more going on in God's world than we can possibly imagine? This certainly is one thing this story reveals to me. And if he could do that then, we have a good reason to trust God today and tomorrow.



**O**ne of the people groups that saw the raven as a messenger that bridged the spirit world and human world is a tribe of Native Americans who called themselves the Skitswish, which in their language means, simply, “the people found here.” They still live on their traditional lands. “We are here,” a tribal elder explains on the tribe’s website, “because this is where the Creator put us. This is where we will always be.” The French fur trappers and traders, who were the first whites to make contact with the tribe, called them the Coeur d’Alene, by which they are still known today.

Catherine Elston, who teaches Native American history at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, tells a story the Coeur d’Alene have kept alive in their legends, songs, and oral history for over two centuries. The story is about a great chief who claimed to know and understand the language of the ravens and crows, and told his people what the birds taught him.

The Coeur d’Alene’s tribal territory was in Idaho. In summer they lived high in the mountains and in winter they would come down into the valleys. They hunted elk and deer and caught fish in the mountain streams. On the plains of Montana were great herds of buffalo, but that was Blackfoot territory, a tribe that had long been the enemies of the Coeur d’Alene. In 1740 the Coeur d’Alene numbered about 500 people, and that year about 100 braves and their families followed their chief out of the mountains of Idaho onto the plains of Montana to hunt buffalo.

The Coeur d’Alene established camp, and scouts were sent out to locate buffalo. While they were searching, the chief announced that three ravens were coming to bring them news. Within a few minutes, three ravens circled overhead and gave out three harsh calls. The chief said the ravens told him their enemies the Blackfoot had already spotted them and were getting ready to attack. The ravens warned that a battle would occur, and that the Coeur d’Alene needed to be careful that no more than seven Blackfoot braves were injured. If more than seven were wounded, the Coeur d’Alene would suffer terrible losses. If no more than seven fell, the Coeur d’Alene would be victorious. And so it was. After the fighting, the Coeur d’Alene located a huge herd of buffalo and started home to Idaho with 200 packhorses loaded with meat. From that time on, their chief was known as Circling Raven.

During the winter of 1740, as usual, the Coeur d’Alene camped at the fork of two clear rivers in the mountain valleys of Idaho. While they were living there, Circling Raven was visited once again by ravens. They told him that very long ago, in a land very far away, during the winter solstice a savior of the world had been born. The Coeur d’Alene were to remember this savior, and especially at the winter solstice were to mention this savior in their prayers. The birds also told Circling Raven that within 100 years men in long black robes would arrive and tell the Coeur d’Alene the rest of this savior’s story.

For the rest of his life, Circling Raven sent scouts to search for the men in long black robes, but none were found. When Circling Raven died, his son Twisted Earth became chief in his place. He remembered what his father had taught him about the savior, continued the winter solstice celebrations Circling Raven has established in honor of the savior, and made certain the Coeur d’Alene did not forget to honor this one who had been born. Twisted Earth also sent out runners regularly to look for the promised men in black robes. Finally, on June 2, 1842, Jesuit missionaries, wearing their traditional long black robes arrived in the mountains of Idaho and told the Coeur d’Alene the rest of the story about the savior of the world who had been born. In the Coeur d’Alene they found a people who already knew of the savior’s birth and had long believed in him.

**T**his is some of what I have found so far in my attempt to consider the ravens. Though unclean for eating according to the Old Testament law, they are strikingly beautiful birds as Solomon, the great lover and poet noticed. The Creator himself is on record hearing the cries of their young and providing them the food they need. When Noah needed to know whether the flood had abated he chose a raven to fly out and bring back the answer. Ever since the fall, ravens have congregated in desolate places, battlefields and ruins, helping to erase some of the decay left behind in a world where death haunts our existence. When Elijah had to flee the murderous rage of Jezebel he hid in a seasonal waterbed—what in Palestine is known as a wadi—at the command

of God, and was saved from starvation by being fed bread and meat twice each day, delivered on schedule by ravens.

We are trained, in an age where disbelief has become normative, not to believe any story that suggests that reality extends beyond the narrow limits of the here and now that we can measure and submit to scientific study. And yet, when we listen with care, we discover that, the world over, ravens keep appearing in the myths—the imaginative stories—people tell when they try to make sense of life. In itself, of course, this does not prove anything. It does suggest, however, that deep in the memory of humankind there is a recognition that in nature—including in ravens—there are, for those with eyes to see, glimpses of something that extends farther and deeper than the horizons of time and space. It is, I believe, evidence of the presence and power of God.

Each spring, fledgling ravens in the nest grow quickly and cry out to be fed. The ornithologist can tell us a lot about those cries, how adult ravens respond, how it is that ravens have adapted so well to the modern world of cities, and how ravens and crows fill such a vital niche in the world where death and refuse still leaves an ugly trail of decay in God's good world. I am glad when modern science tells us these things, and I find their discoveries both fascinating and important. When I am told, however, that this is all that can

be known, and that to believe anything more than this is simply implausible, I cannot agree. After all, if nothing but bare facts are meaningful, how can we even know that the meaning we assign them has any meaning? To live in such a world is too large a leap of faith for me.

I see no necessary reason to disbelieve Elijah's story that ravens came twice a day to bring him bread and meat. And believing it provides me with an insight into reality that makes it possible to hope for the future and to trust God today. I don't hope to be fed by ravens—I prefer my food to arrive in sterile plastic wrap. Instead, I can have hope because, even though I don't know and can't know what the future will bring, I can know I've been given a reminder in the ravens that there is far more going on in God's world than I can possibly imagine. And because of that, even in a culture of disbelief, I am provided a good and sufficient reason to intentionally order my life so that I trust God today, and tomorrow. ■

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*Note: The material in this piece was originally given in slightly different form by the author as a sermon at Trinity Presbyterian Church (Rochester, MN) on Sunday, December 29, 2013, on the event of ending one calendar year and beginning another.*





# Where Cynicism Reigns



In the traditional Christian view of things, the temptation to feel, think, and live in ways that are less than virtuous comes from one or more of three sources: the flesh, the devil, and the world. The flesh refers to what is within us, our broken nature that tends towards selfish pride and tempts us to substitute personal gain or pleasure for what is right and good. The devil refers to the spiritual forces of personal evil that prowl the darkness seeking to distort grace, subvert hope, undercut redemption, and in the end, devour our very being. We cannot always tell when the flesh ends and the devil begins, but identifying the exact line is of little importance since the end of both are identical, namely sin, corruption, some destructive impulse, and ultimately, death. This is why sharpening our conscience—aligning it with true standards of virtue and rooting out legalisms that distort the true meaning of goodness—is such a vital task.

The third source of temptation, the world, can be the most difficult to identify because, in some ways, it exerts the most subtle influence of the three. The world refers not to human culture but to the systems, institutions, loyalties, ideologies, and values that order the society of fallen humanity in ways that, in part or in whole, resist God's kingdom. No system—political, economic, tribal, nationalistic, church, or any other—in a fallen world is fully pure, so none are able to fully provide for complete human flourishing. It is why we pray as our Lord taught us, that God's kingdom would be on earth as it is in heaven.

Sometimes the systems of the world are so perverse (think North Korea), the oppression so obvious, that the evil is abhorrent to everyone. For most of us, especially those of us who live in the twenty-first century West, the world system in which we live is mostly good and partly bad for human flourishing, so we simply go with the flow. Since no world system, however, is the equivalent of God's kingdom, we must always be alert to ways that ours will tempt us in directions contrary to the reign of Christ as Lord.

We live embedded in the world like the proverbial frog in a pan of heating water. The difficulty comes from the fact that the water we swim in is our permanent environment, so it's easy to miss the fact that the temperature is rising. As the water temp goes up a degree or two, we hardly notice. We've just become accustomed to the world. This is why developing skill in discernment is so vital in the process of deepening our discipleship. Being able to identify the characteristics of our world means we'll be able to resist being molded into its shape.

Without taking the time to defend this proposition, I suggest one characteristic of the world in which we live is cynicism. It's not merely out there, but it's in the air. It often shows up in ways that make us laugh, and seems to be caught as easily as the common cold.

"Cynicism, as we use the word today," Dick Keyes says, "has to do with seeing through and unmasking positive appearances to reveal the more basic underlying motivations of greed, power, lust, and selfishness. It says that every respectable public agenda has a hidden private agenda behind it that is less noble, flattering, and moral." Because cynics essentially belittle those who oppose them or hold differing opinions, beliefs, and values, they imagine that they occupy the moral high ground. After all, in a fallen world, some measure of suspicion is wise—things are often *not* as they appear. Since people who are different from us are finite and fallen, finding some inconsistency or something less than admirable in them is always possible. Though the cynic assumes the moral high ground, in reality, of course, such cynicism is doubly wrong: it refuses to treat others with the full dignity of being created in God's image, and it assumes a level of insight into others that only God possesses. Still, cynicism is an essential part of our world, hidden in the blather of pundits and media commentators, implicit in articles and talks, animating witty conversations in coffee houses,

and provoking knowing laughter in Christian audiences when speakers describe non-Christian beliefs and actions in ways that believers find silly.

No Christian wants to resist the values and realities of God's kingdom. None of us want to do things that will undercut human flourishing—our own or anyone else's. None of us set out to intentionally become more cynical. It simply happens, if for no other reason than the fact that something so ordinary and ubiquitous begins, after a while, to feel, well, natural. And so it goes.

There are several ways to become sensitized to the characteristics of the world—to what earlier generations called "the spirit of the age," the things built into the structures, attitudes, and institutions of our world that systematically resist God's kingdom. One is by listening to the voice of discerning observers. In the case of cynicism we can be grateful for Dick Keyes' superb study, *Seeing Through Cynicism* (IVP, 2006). If you haven't read it, please do. By the end you will still see our world through a glass darkly but with far greater clarity than before.

Another way to become sensitized is to read the work of those who have lived in very different settings from our own. For the Christian, this can include the Puritans, the Reformers, the early church Mothers and Fathers, and the growing number of Christian voices from the developing world. Seeing through their eyes means seeing through eyes molded by pressures different from our own setting.

Another source of insight is art. Artists are often sensitive to what lies in the shadows, and they can use their creativity to shed a glimmer of light onto what is otherwise hidden. Good storytellers excel in this task. The ancient Hebrew prophet Nathan, for example, spoke truth to power in just this way with a story about a wealthy man's pet lamb (2 Samuel 12), and Jesus uncovered the hidden darkness in a man's soul by telling a story about a traveler and a band of thugs (Luke 10).

We listen to good stories, are drawn in, and in the end made to see daily, ordinary reality with greater clarity because our imagination has been enlarged and enlivened. The story allows us to clearly see things we had not noticed previously or perhaps had looked past as unremarkable, insignificant, or natural. Abstract notions like cynicism are made incarnate, and so something hiding in plain sight can be felt and seen and heard and touched. Just hearing the truth about something is not sufficient—truth must be incarnated in story if it is to flower into its full meaning and goodness. This is the nature of reality.

*House of Cards*, an original Netflix series, is not just good television; it is a brilliantly disturbing study in cynicism. (As I write this, two seasons of 13 episodes have been released, with word that season three is being produced.)

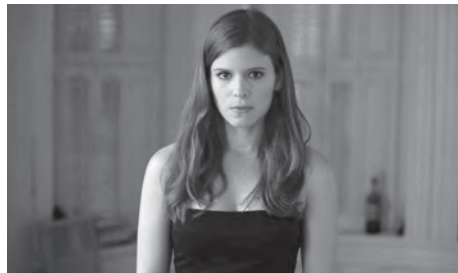
The story line can be summarized in three simple statements. First, imagine key players in Washington, D.C.: a member of Congress rising rapidly in the nation's leadership, the CEO of a major nonprofit organization awash with money and worldwide influence, several journalists at a major newspaper and an influential news blog, some wealthy business leaders and financiers, and a host of political operatives and lobbyists who settle for nothing but winning. Then, imagine them all as being completely cynical. They all believe the end always justifies the means as long as the end being won is what they want. Imagine them so hungry for their own ends that they actually believe their ends are always for the common good. And then, *House of Cards* asks, what might that look like? Why, the series seems to say, it looks remarkably like Washington, D.C.

For all its high production values and compelling story line, *House of Cards* is a difficult series to watch. The cold political calculation where power always trumps people is chilling, even when it is supposedly used for the common good. Everyone is convinced

they can see through everyone else, and principled compromise, so essential if the common good is actually to be achieved in a free society, is replaced with a single-minded determination to best one's opponents by raw political, economic, and rhetorical power. I am not easily scared by what I see on the screen, but sometimes the icy maneuvering of Congressman and later Vice President Francis Underwood, played with an intense brilliance by Kevin Spacey, is frankly frightening.

*House of Cards* is scary, not because it is a horror story, but because it relentlessly shines light into a dark corner of my soul and my society, and what is shown to be there is not good. ■

**Sources:** Seeing through Cynicism: A Reconsideration of the Power of Suspicion by Dick Keyes (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; 2006) p. 11; LefsetzLetter archives (<http://lefsetz.com/wordpress/>)



## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Where do you see cynicism in yourself? In society? In the workplace? In the culture wars? In politics? In the press? In the church?
2. About whom do you find it easiest to be cynical? What does this say about you?
3. What is it that makes cynicism so attractive, and even fun?
4. In what ways were the techniques of television (casting, direction, lighting, script, music, sets, action, cinematography, editing, etc.) used to get across the message(s) of *House of Cards* or to make the message plausible or compelling? In what ways were they ineffective or misused?
5. With whom did you identify in the series? Why? With whom were we meant to identify? How do you know? Discuss each main character in the film and their significance to the story.
6. What is the difference between gaining political power through truly compromising with one's opponents and political maneuvering using power to achieve one's ends?
7. To what extent are you tempted to cynicism? Do you find *House of Cards* helpful (in revealing the nature of cynicism) or hurtful (in making you more cynical about your world)?
8. What other themes are woven into the story, character development, and events depicted in *House of Cards*? To what extent are they also characteristics of the spirit of our age?
9. Bob Lefsetz, author of the widely read online *LefsetzLetter* (March 3, 2014) listed eight "House of Cards Lessons" and his list is well worth discussing: 1. You need a partner, 2. You can't worry what people say about you, 3. Don't be a wimp, 4. Know the game, 5. Align yourself with winners, 6. Learn how to say yes, 7. Success is a power game, and 8. Eat or be eaten.





**Credits: *House of Cards***

**Starring:**

Kevin Spacey (Francis Underwood)  
Robin Wright (Claire Underwood)  
Michael Gill (President Garrett Walker)  
Michael Kelly (Doug Stamper)  
Nathan Darrow (Edward Meechum)  
Kate Mara (Zoe Barnes)  
Gerald McRaney (Raymond Tusk)  
Sebastian Arcelus (Lucas Goodwin)  
Rachel Brosnahan (Rachel Posner)  
Molly Parker (Jackie Sharp)

**Directors:** James Foley, Carl Franklin, John David Coles, and others

**Writers:** Andrew Davies, Michael Dobbs, Beau Willimon, Kate Barnow, and others

**Producers:** Kevin Spacey, Dana Brunetti, Andrew Davies, David Fincher, and others

**Series Music:** Jeff Beal

**Cinematography:** Igor Martinovic, Eigil Bryld, and Tim Ives

**Release:** USA, 2013, 2014