

Critique

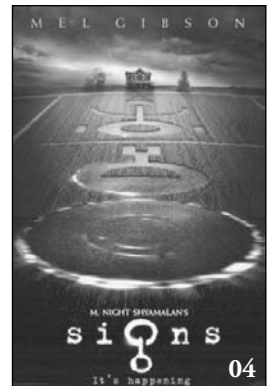
Helping Christians Develop Skill in Discernment

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Editor's Note



Repose
“John Calvin believed that an unredeemed life keeps oscillating back and forth between pride (‘I’ve made it!’) and despair (‘I’ll never make it!’). In his view, redemption gives people security, or (one of Calvin’s favorite words) *repose*. His idea

was that those who lean into God’s grace and let it hold them up can then drop some of their performance anxiety.”

Repose: to lie at rest, calmly and at ease; to depend on; to be tranquil, quietly having peace of mind, freedom from worry.

When I read this in Cornelius Plantinga’s new book, *Engaging God’s World*, two things popped into my mind. First, I certainly don’t hear that word—repose—used very often. Second, I don’t hear it used very often of me.

Being a student again after so many years means that some of what I do now is actually graded. And being a student with two grown daughters means that there are three women in my life who expect to see those grades. Funny the ways the Lord reveals that I’m not as free of performance anxiety as I may have thought.

The question worth asking, of course, is that if repose seems fleeting to me, why haven’t I learned to lean into God’s grace and let it hold me up?

“Christians have been put in a solid position where the reform of culture is concerned,” Plantinga continues: “we have been invited to live beyond triumphalism and despair, spending ourselves for a cause that we firmly believe will win in the end. So, on the one hand, we don’t need to take responsibility for trying to fix everything. The earth is the Lord’s, and he will save it. On the other hand, we may take responsibility for contributing what we uniquely *have* to contribute

to the kingdom, joining with many others from across the world who are striving to be faithful, to add the work of their hands and minds to the eventual triumph of God.”

It’s sad how fleeting repose can be, how easy it is to oscillate between pride and despair, even for the people of God. And unless I’m mistaken, our frantic world is yearning to find a source for true and lasting repose. “Lean into God’s grace and let it hold me up.” That’s more than merely a nice turn of phrase—living it day by day before a watching world would be a radical demonstration that God exists, that grace is real, and that hope is more than a pipe dream.

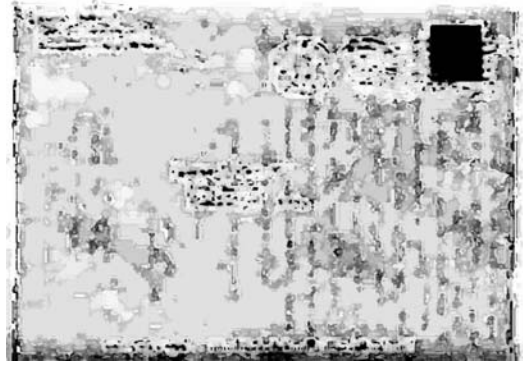
Dual duty

In previous *Critiques*, we’ve recommended books by Daniel Doriani, and are pleased in this issue to reprint one of his articles. Doriani is a seminary professor who writes engagingly and is used of God to teach Christians how to study the Bible. So, please consider reading “Working in Difficult Places” at least twice—it’s that good. Read it once to reflect on the lessons he extracts from the Old Testament about whether we can in good conscience work for unjust employers. His topic is one that discerning believers will be concerned about, because the marketplace is full of corruption and business is pursued by fallen people. Then read it a second time to examine the wonderful way he handles these ancient texts, taking stories we may know but seldom apply and makes them amazingly alive and relevant to life in the 21st century. He demonstrates Bible study skills that we all need to nurture if we desire to live under the authority of God’s word.

If you haven’t read his books on Bible study, perhaps the article will prompt you to do so. *Getting the Message: A Plan for Interpreting & Applying the Bible* and *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory & Practice of Biblical Application* are both highly recommended. ■

~Denis Haack

Dialogue



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

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

Enough!!!!!!! Do you think most of your readers really care about the internal cat fight going concerning "Christian Classical Learning?" [*Critique* #3 - 2002] Be discerning and cut the dribble...

Bruce Fogerty
Dallas, TX

Thank you so much for the material on the Classical Christian school movement. Jones's article is soooooo needed in this day and age when leaders like Wilson want to call themselves fully and authentically Christian because they are pristine regarding individual righteousness but play like cultural unrighteousness is something other than spiritual. I thought Jones treated the strength and weaknesses of the movement well and fairly. Praise the Lord!!

Even more blessed is that Dennis Haack can see and will call attention to these cultural sins instead of acting like they are not there.

Stanley Morton
Lancaster, PA

Again and again, thanks for the work you do in helping us discern more carefully and clearly. We continue to fight over *Critique* and *Notes From Toad Hall* when they come. Your articles fascinate our teenagers, and rightly so. You speak the Word of God into their (and our) culture.

Jean Opelt
Green Bay, WI

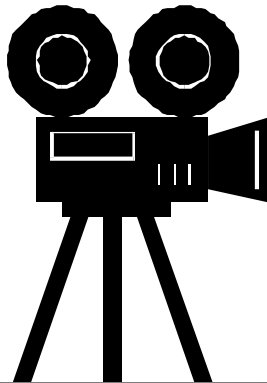
Iwanted to tell you about the influence your publication has had on my life and work.

Critique has mainly influenced me in terms of evangelism. I don't simply begin a conversation anymore with: "Would you like to know God personally?" Instead, I begin a conversation and actually spend most of my time listening. You might be surprised that someone on staff with Campus Crusade would have trouble listening, but it is unfortunately true (just ask my fiancé). God has used this skill (listening) in my life to make me much more effective in reaching students. Our conversations are richer, have more depth spiritually, and actually hit upon real-life issues. Yes, they are longer than normal and I don't seem to have the same number of conversations as before, but the quality of the conversation is much better. Most importantly, students usually leave hungry for more, thirsty for truth. Thank you very much for your publication.

Dennis Beck
Orlando, FL

The Darkened Room

Is Anybody There?



A review of *Signs*

by Denis Haack and Hans Madueme

Film Credits

Starring:

Mel Gibson
(Graham Hess)
Joaquin Phoenix
(Merrill Hess)
Rory Culkin
(Morgan Hess)
Abigail Breslin
(Bo Hess)
Cherry Jones
(Officer Paski)
M. Night Shyamalan
(Ray Reddy)
Patricia Kalember
(Colleen Hess)

Director:

M. Night Shyamalan

Screenplay:

M. Night Shyamalan

Producers:

Kathleen Kennedy
M. Night Shyamalan
and others

Original music:

James Newton Howard

Cinematographer:

Tak Fujimoto

Costume design:

Ann Roth

Runtime: 106 min.

Rated PG-13 for some
frightening moments.

There is plenty about *Signs* we'd love to mention in this review, but won't because that would ruin it if you haven't seen it yet. We encourage you to see it and then discuss it, with both fellow believers and with non-Christians. It's not only a finely crafted piece of cinematic art, but it invites us to reflect on issues that matter. Shyamalan is famous for inserting twists in his plots, often in the final scenes of the movie. Twists abound in *Signs*—not just at the end—but we'll not reveal them here.

M. Night Shyamalan (pronounced SHAH-ma-lawn) is 32 years old, was born in India and raised in the U.S. The "M." stands for Manoj, and "Night" was a name he made up in college; his actual middle name is Nellyattu. The silver charm he wears around his neck was a gift from his father, and contains Sanskrit proverbs which "keep him grounded." Raised Hindu, his parents sent him to a private academy associated with the Episcopal Church. Both parents are physicians, and his wife and nine other family members have doctorates. In *Signs*, the artwork done by Bo Hess, played by the charming Abigail Breslin, was actually done by Salek, Shyamalan's daughter.

The most important fact about Shyamalan, however, is that he is one of the finest story-tellers at work making movies today. *Signs* is a well made sci-fi thriller which is also a sensitive exploration of important, timeless, eminently human questions. Questions of faith, of providence, and of whether life is a series of meaningless

coincidences in which we hope for luck, or whether there is something—someone—beyond the here and now to give it meaning. Its ability to unfold a suggestively allusive portrayal of life that encourages even the most thoughtless postmodern to think renders efforts like *Left Behind* artistic humiliations of the first caliber.

Shyamalan's creative playfulness is evident in the way he has fun with his audience. The trailers for *Signs*, for example, give the impression that this is an ordinary shoot-'em-up-alien-crop-circles-flick. Crop circles and aliens, indeed. Yes they appear, but by the end seem almost incidental. They provide a few moments of delicious fright, but are merely the means to a greater end—steps along the way in a pilgrimage of faith.

Signs is scary, but it doesn't depend on the cheap tricks often used in thrillers. We aren't assaulted by noise, for example, but instead enveloped in silence. A silence so deafening that the barking of a dog we knew was there can make us jump. This is the soft quiet of unease, like the faint yet disturbing sounds we hear in our own house when as children we were left alone for an evening. Shyamalan uses light and darkness effectively, as well as the movement and placement of the camera. As the family walks across the yard of their two-story farmhouse, the camera follows them from within the neighboring rustling corn field, as if we were not the only creatures that happen to be watching. Shyamalan also uses comic relief brilliantly, using humor to relieve the tension. One gets the impression this is a thriller that was made not to scare us, but to scare us into thinking.

Also worth noting is the absence of vulgarity. Movie enjoyment for the average Christian requires a struggle to get beyond the shores of language, violence, and sex into the deeper waters of thoughtful bibli-

cal reflection. Yet here is none of that. No sex, nudity, profanity; and even the violence against the alien invader is both muted and justified. Shyamalan is recovering some of the true art of storytelling. And surely, he is not far from redemptive storytelling.

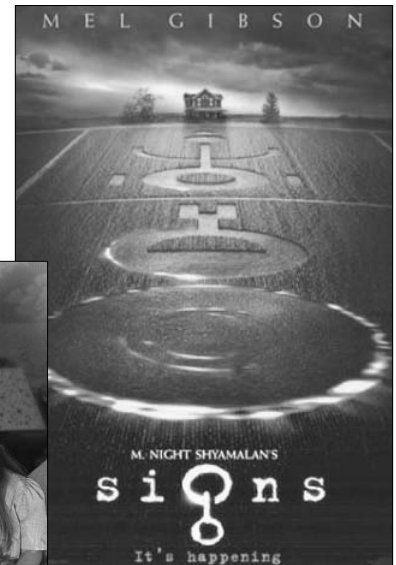
Just as Alfred Hitchcock made cameo appearances in his films, Shyamalan has appeared in his last three movies, and in *Signs* he plays a more substantive role than usual. Note the scene in the pizza parlor, when the whole family stares at Shyamalan. "Is he the one?" asks Bo. Later we discover he is the one who is behind the pain in their father's heart and life, and his loss of faith. Of course Shyamalan is also the one who created the characters, wrote the story, and directed the movie. We suspect he enjoyed writing that scene.

On one level *Signs* is the story of Graham Hess, played by Mel Gibson, an

Episcopal priest who lost his faith when tragedy took his wife. His younger brother, Merrill, played by Joaquin Phoenix, has moved in to help with the farm and raise the two children, Morgan (Rory Culkin) and Bo.

Mysterious crop circles appear in their corn field and quickly it becomes clear that an invasion from outer space has begun. As they retreat to their basement in fear as the aliens close in, life is stripped to its essentials. And it is on this level, within hearts and minds, that the real action transpires.

Some think the ending is too neat, but



One gets the impression this is a thriller made not to scare us, but to scare us into thinking.

we disagree. Sometimes, by grace, happy endings actually occur in this sad world. ■

-Denis Haack and Hans Madueme

Hans Madueme is completing his internal medicine residency at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN. He hopes to begin seminary in the fall of 2003 at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, IL.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What was your initial reaction to the film? Why do you think you reacted that way?
2. In what ways were the techniques of film-making (lighting, cinematography, sound track, casting, direction, dialogue, sets, editing, etc.) used to get the film's message(s) across, or to make the message plausible or compelling? How were they misused?
3. What is the message(s) of the film? What is attractive here? How is it made attractive? Where do you agree? Where do you disagree? Why? In the areas in which we might disagree, how can we talk about and demonstrate the truth in a winsome way in our pluralistic culture? More specifically, what do you think of the depiction of "faith" in the movie? Is it similar to biblical faith? Why or why not? What did you think of the depiction of providence? What Scriptures come to mind as you reflect on *Signs*?
4. What do you think the cameo appearance of the writer/director, M. Night Shyamalan, added to the film?
5. Some argue that film is primarily entertainment, and that compared to literature, it is by and large unable to raise deep questions in a meaningful way. How does *Signs* figure into your position on this issue?
6. Based on the previews, what kind of movie were you expecting to see? What role did the crop circles and aliens play in this movie?
7. What does the title, *Signs*, refer to? What specific signs did each character provide in the overall plot and the case for faith (as opposed to chance)?
8. With whom did you identify in the film? Why? With whom were we meant to identify? Discuss each main character in the film and their significance to the story.
9. What insight does the film give into the way postmodern people see life, meaning, and reality? How can you use the film as a useful window of insight to better understand your non-Christian friends and neighbors? Might the film be a useful point of contact for discussion with non-Christians? What plans should you make?

Working in

One of my Christian friends works for a large media corporation. His company produces various radio programs, magazines and television shows, generally of a wholesome kind. But one year his corporation acquired “The Jerry Springer Show.” The acquisition occurred before Springer became the impresario of high sleaze, but he was hardly a friend of virtue, even then. My friend had no contact with Springer or his program, but as the chief financial officer of the corporation, he could not claim to be entirely disengaged from its immorality and folly. Some of my friend’s fellow believers thought he should quit, perhaps in protest, perhaps to avoid the pollution of even incidental involvement with debasing entertainments. Of course, some of them already wondered why any Christian would *ever* work for a public media company. But my friend stayed on, and the problem resolved itself when the corporation sold the Springer show a few months later. Still, did he make a mistake? Did he compromise his integrity, or did he wisely retain his ability to lead faithfully from a strategic position?

If we think seriously about work, we encounter a steady stream of questions like these. If we engage the challenge of exercising the faith at work, hard questions will inevitably surface. Here are a few that I have heard:

A man who has worked in the marketing department for a beer company for fifteen years becomes a Christian. Does he have to quit and find a new job?

A software engineer is appointed to a work group assigned to write a program for the more efficient, hence more profitable, generation and distribution of lottery tickets. She will work solely on the technical issues and will never be directly

involved in sales. Can she work on the project, or should she petition for reassignment?

A plant manager manufactures a good industrial product, but his chief competitor has found an effective way to distort key data to make his product look better, though it is actually inferior. Some of his customers believe the competitor’s claims, and he is starting to lose them. Should he counterattack and match distortion for distortion?

A pharmacist has begun to see prescriptions for RU 486, the so-called abortion pill. RU 486 also has a beneficial effect on high blood pressure, and that’s what the prescriptions say. But when the patient is a young woman, the pharmacist wonders what to do.

Unfortunately, the Bible never declares whether we can work in dubious companies or governments.

A morning radio talk show host becomes a Christian. His radio “personality” is a witty guy who uses a lot of sexual humor. His audience and his manager expect it. If he tries to change, he will probably lose his job. What should he do?

A managing partner in a financial company is well respected, well paid and influential. His boss is brilliant but tyrannical. He wonders, “Should I take a position in another company? Or should I stay on and endure some misery to shield others from the boss’s excesses?”

So we ask, “For whom can I work, and under what circumstances? Am I betraying my faith when I get entangled in secular affairs? Can I work for a company that makes a few questionable products? What if I have to work on those

products? What if I do not?” May a Christian work for a government that denies or even assaults Christian values? For a government that supports abortion rights? For a government that *promotes* abortion and vetoes pro-life initiatives? Must we leave a position if we may have to soil our hands a little?

First Principles

Whenever we encounter difficult questions, it is beneficial to state our first principles. These are stakes in the ground, marking the boundaries of our answers, just as stakes in the ground mark the four corners of a building. Whatever else we may say—whatever turrets, alcoves or verandas we decide to erect—the building stays within the parameters set by the four corners of the building. Likewise, whatever ideas we explore, we must never take a position that contradicts our first principles.

The first principle is this: While a man is responsible to provide for his family, he neither pleases God nor serves his family if he does so through sinful activity. Believers may never take work that requires them to sin. Christians may not be hit-men, drug-runners or prostitutes. If we must choose between unemployment and a job that requires immorality, then we choose unemployment. Working for a misguided government is one thing; working for a criminal state is another.

But is it wrong to work in a wholesome branch of a large corporation that also has unwholesome divisions? Today, the sources and delivery systems for entertainment are changing rapidly so that companies constantly enter new alliances as they pursue growth and profits. At this moment, the media giants of North America produce both the best

Difficult Places

and the worst in the arts, entertainment and information. The most conservative news outlet champions the most degrading television dramas. The source of the best children's programming also produces salacious and blasphemous movies. Another creates some of the most ennobling and some of the most degrading programming. Might a Christian report on politics for the first, produce children's programs for the second or write scripts for the third?

Some say, "Obviously not. If someone wants to report, produce or write, he should do it for an enterprise he can fully support." But others reply, "Do you really want all Christians to leave the largest media companies in America? Do we want to abandon all of the most influential enterprises? If we object to their products now, what could we expect if every Christian influence were removed?"

Disciples need to know how to conduct themselves with integrity, to remain holy in unholy places. Unfortunately, the Bible never declares, in so many words, whether we can work in dubious companies or governments. The Bible is the story of redemption, not a package of judgments answering our individual ethical quandaries followed by decrees on the proper implementation of the aforementioned judgments.

The Bible defines holiness at work through stories as much as laws and legal cases. Fortunately, the stories describe godly men and women who faced our very questions. Those stories form a pattern consistent enough that we can see a way of life that God blesses. The stories describe believers involved in government, starting with two Israelites in Pharaoh's court.

(On obtaining guidance from narrative, see Daniel Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2001), 189-212.)

Case #1: To Work or Not To Work for Pharaoh

The Pharaohs of Egypt were as autocratic as any rulers of antiquity. Whatever we think of power hungry or corrupt businesspeople and politicians, none match the Pharaohs, who claimed to be deities, claimed the right to be worshiped and claimed to own all the land of Egypt. (Of course, they let farmers use most of it, if they rendered a tribute from the fruit of the land.)

But when one Pharaoh dreamt of seven lean cows eating seven fat cows, God's servant Joseph was willing to serve that Pharaoh by interpreting his dream, as God revealed it to him. He told Pharaoh the cows represented seven years of abundance followed by

The stories of Joseph and Moses suggest that believers may or may not work for evil masters, depending on the circumstances.

seven years of famine. He urged Pharaoh to make the surplus in the years of abundance his store for the years of poverty. Pharaoh was so impressed that he made Joseph his second-in-command. In that role, Joseph preserved the lives of many Egyptians and rescued his own family during the famine. By serving a ruler whose political system rested on blasphemous, megalomaniacal claims, Joseph kept the covenant family alive during a life-threatening famine.

It seems, therefore, that believers *may* work for anyone. But wait. Four hundred years later, another Israelite, Moses, *refused* to serve another Pharaoh. Moses was born a Jew, of course, but Pharaoh's daughter adopted him into the monarch's family. Hebrews describes it this way:

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along

with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible (Heb 11:24-27).

So Moses refused to work for a second Pharaoh. We can see why. First, Moses had another calling—to lead Israel out of Egypt. Second, he could not serve *his* Pharaoh. Egypt's leaders had turned murderous. One planned to exterminate God's people by ordering the death of all their male infants. The current Pharaoh enslaved the nation of Israel, imposing impossible burdens, threatening to work them to the death.

The stories of Joseph and Moses suggest that believers may or may not work for evil masters, depending on the circumstances. A number of additional Bible narratives point in the same direction, beginning with the account of Ahab, Elijah and Obadiah.

Case #2: To Work or Not To Work for Ahab

Ahab was one of the most wicked kings of Israel. Perhaps you recall that after the death of Solomon, Israel divided into northern and southern "kingdoms." The southern kingdom, centered in Jerusalem, was generally more faithful. The southern kings typically used the temple in Jerusalem that God had ordained for worship. But the northern kings spurned the temple God had ordained as the place of worship and sacrifice. They established new centers of worship in the cities of Dan and Bethel and ordained their own priests and prophets. At first, they still meant to worship God, but through golden calves they fashioned. (They thought they could break the second commandment while keeping the first.) But then King Ahab came along. The Bible says, "Ahab did

Reading the Word cont.

more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him.” He considered it trivial to worship at the golden calves. So, after he took a pagan wife, Jezebel, he began to serve other gods. “He set up an altar for Baal in the temple...he built in Samaria.” Thus Ahab “did more to provoke the LORD to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him” (1 Kgs 16:30-34).

Ahab lived out this “faith” in various ways. His wife, Jezebel, gave herself the task of killing the Lord’s prophets, and Ahab did nothing to stop her. Ahab had contempt for the law and the social system of Israel; he ruled like an oriental potentate. He took whatever he wanted and killed those who stood in his way (1 Kgs 21).

Surely, no believer could work for Ahab, not for one so dedicated to the perversion, even the destruction, of true religion. Elijah appeared to think not. He burst into Ahab’s court and declared God’s judgment on Ahab’s regime: “As the LORD God of Israel lives, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word” (1 Kgs 17:1). Then, without another word, he disappeared.

After three years of drought, Elijah returned to confront Ahab. Yet he did not initially appear to Ahab but to a man named Obadiah, the manager of his palace. The book of 1 Kings introduces him this way: “Obadiah was a devout believer in the LORD. While Jezebel was killing off the Lord’s prophets, Obadiah had taken a hundred prophets and hidden them in two caves, fifty in each, and had supplied them with food and water” (1 Kgs 18:3-4).

This is astonishing. A godly man holds a position as the palace governor

for the most wicked king that Israel has ever seen. How this transpired, we do not know. (Was his father a palace manager? Had he come to faith mid-career?) But Obadiah understood that God had providentially placed him in a terrible but strategic place—the court of a wicked monarch. In that very place he found a singular opportunity to undermine Ahab’s evil regime. And he did so, at great personal risk. Three times Obadiah said Ahab might kill him simply for giving an erroneous report about Elijah’s

Sometimes we handle hostility by getting out of its way, not by seeking safety. But other times we stand our ground despite the danger.

location (18:9-14). What then would Ahab do if he knew his palace manager worked for the Lord’s underground, feeding the very prophets that he and his queen wanted to kill?

But Ahab did not know of Obadiah’s courageous deeds. He trusted Obadiah and summoned him to seek water. As Obadiah searched for the liquid of life, Elijah met him. Obadiah recognized him and bowed down to the ground to honor the prophet (18:7).

Elijah told Obadiah, “Go tell your master, ‘Elijah is here’” (18:8).

To paraphrase, Obadiah replied, “You don’t know my master. If I tell Ahab you are here and he doesn’t find you, he will kill me. Yet I have worshiped the Lord since my youth. I hid a hundred of the Lord’s prophets in two caves and supplied them with food and water” (18:12-14).

But Elijah assured Obadiah, “I will surely present myself to Ahab today” (18:15).

The Lessons of Obadiah and Elijah

When we read the Bible, we typically hurry past the meeting between Obadiah and Elijah, since, so it seems, it merely sets up the dramatic encounter between Elijah and the Baal prophets on Mount Carmel. But if we pause to compare Elijah and Obadiah, important points emerge.

- Elijah serves God by standing against the king’s court.
- Obadiah serves God by staying within the king’s court.
 - Elijah shouts judgment from outside and criticizes the regime of the king.
 - Obadiah keeps silent inside and organizes a relief effort for the prophets.

Thus two men of God have callings to opposite places, one protesting evil from outside, one mitigating evil from the inside. Yet each man respects the other’s calling. Obadiah honors Elijah’s role as a prophet against Ahab’s house, and Elijah accepts Obadiah’s role as a manager within Ahab’s house. So far as we know, Obadiah worked for Ahab without compromise. He did not participate in Jezebel’s program of murder, but undermined it from within. Thus neither man questioned the other. Each knew his own calling and believed God worked through another calling for his brother.

The implication is clear. If Obadiah could serve God by working for Ahab, a murderous oriental potentate, then believers may work for almost anyone, *if* they can obey God and accomplish his purposes there. Obadiah’s vocation shows that believers can serve God, even if at great risk, in hard places. If Obadiah can work within a corrupt establishment, then we can work within one too, *if* we resist compromise, limit evil and promote justice.

Jesus preached what Obadiah practiced. When he sent the Twelve on their first preaching mission, he said, “On my account you will be brought before governors and kings...When they arrest you, do not worry” for the Holy Spirit will speak through you (Mt 10:18-20). Of course, we do not court danger. Sometimes, Jesus said, when we are persecuted in one place, we should “flee to another” (Mt 10:23). That is, sometimes we handle hostility by getting out of its way, by seeking safety. But other times we stand our ground despite the danger. Jesus modeled this. He occasionally fled an angry crowd, but at the right time he stood his ground, though it cost him his life.

We can learn from both Obadiah and Elijah. In a way, both of them point to Christ. Elijah resembles Christ in many ways: he healed lepers, multiplied food, raised the dead, announced God’s judgment on a corrupt generation and entered solo combat, to the death, against evil. Obadiah foreshadows the work of Christ too. Like Jesus, he got his hands dirty as he refused to separate himself from unsavory people. Like Jesus, he submitted himself to the government of unjust rulers. Like Jesus, he fought to protect his defenseless people. Obadiah understood the principle of the incarnation: We must accept the station God gives us and do the work he bestows, even if hands become dirty and a body is broken.

Other Servants, Other Lessons

When national or state politics produce a mass of reprehensible public policies and private peccadilloes, Christians wonder if it is still possible to serve in public. The cases of Joseph serving Pharaoh and Obadiah serving Ahab, both to save lives, suggest that the answer can still be yes. But Joseph and Obadiah are hardly the only Israelites to work for

pagan kings. Many did so, and they received praise, not blame, in Scripture: Daniel was a trusted advisor in the houses of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar of Babylon; Ezra and Nehemiah were both high officials in the administration of Artaxerxes of Persia; Esther served God’s people at great risk in Xerxes’ palace. Indeed, she won a beauty contest and so became a pagan king’s wife. From that role, she spoke to deliver her people.

Yet believers may not take every post. Moses refused to serve an oppressive Pharaoh. We reject both total withdrawal and groundless optimism. The accounts of Daniel and his friends show the risks of working for a pagan monarch. When required to bow to an idol or stop praying, they refused and risked every-

Some may blanch at the thought of entanglement with weaponry or the world’s entertainment, but the alternative—isolation—is unbiblical and intolerable.

thing for God’s sake (Dn 1:11-16; 3:1-30; 6:4-24). Of course, Daniel and his friends escaped the fire and the lions, but it can turn out differently. Some escape the edge of the sword, but others perish (Heb 11:34, 37). Jesus became the preeminent example of one who takes risks for a difficult vocation. He sacrificed the most and risked the most—if “risk” is the correct word when the outcome is certain.

If Joseph, Obadiah, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther could all serve faithfully, with divine approval, for wicked monarchs, then certainly Christians may work within governments and businesses that operate on secular, even godless principles. But believers do not have permission to “fit in” with every corporation or government. In some positions, a Christian can only work with integrity if he or she is willing to protest, to suggest alternatives and, if necessary, to refuse to follow orders.

So, may a believer work for a pro-choice government? For an advertising agency that has a few beer or cigarette accounts? For a defense contractor—that is, for a company dedicated to defending some lives, but threatening others? The answer has to be, yes, we may, if from our positions we can serve God, restrain evil and advance love, justice and mercy. Still, we cannot simply do whatever we are told. We must work in ways that prove our love for God and mankind.

Some may blanch at the thought of entanglement with weaponry or the world’s entertainment, but the alternative—isolation—is unbiblical and intolerable. If all believers refused to work for media corporations if even one arm produced something question-

able, there would be no Christian influence in the largest media outlets. Then who would speak for biblical morality, for a biblical worldview, for a fair representation

of Christianity? We could say the same thing of the armed forces. Consider the loss if all Christians avoided military service out of fear of sullyng themselves. The military and the diplomatic corps need the sober realism that comes from a Christian concept of sin, which teaches us that improved communication will *not* solve every problem. Some people are evil—lying, grasping and vindictive—and no amount of diplomacy can change that. The military also needs just war theory, as it provides principles for defending civilians trapped by war and restrains, as far as possible, the death and destruction of war.

The apostle Paul affirmed the need for Christians to stay engaged in society in a side remark he made while discussing church discipline. Among other things, Paul said believers must separate from those who had not repented after the church disciplined them. That is, we must avoid ordinary fellowship

Reading the Word cont.

with self-proclaimed Christians who live in rebellion against God. But some readers thought Paul meant they should separate from all non-Christians. Paul replied this way (1 Cor 5:9-11):

I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler.
(emphasis mine)

So, if the Corinthians wanted to avoid all contact with immoral, irreligious people, they would have had to leave the world entirely. But Paul hardly wanted that! We must stay engaged with the world.

But we do not merely stay. We are God's ambassadors, representing his standards and goals. We engage the culture and accept the pressures that arise. Opposition is one danger, but fitting in too well is another. After all, western culture still esteems many Christian values. Thus, if we have talent and work hard, we are more prone to promotion than to persecution.

But, as we taste success, the pressure to fit in mounts. The desire to attain or retain affluence can lead to compromises. To prevent compromises, we can ask ourselves a few questions:

Am I working as a servant of the kingdom, an agent of righteousness and reform? Or am I merely fitting in, doing a job, making a living?

When potential conflicts between business and kingdom goals arise, do I

stand on principle or do I do "whatever it takes" to keep my job?

What motivates me? What guides my decisions? Fear of the opinions of others? Greed for wealth? The insights of other believers in my field? Love for God and neighbor?

If you work with any fellow believers, put it corporately: Are we striving to see our work and careers as God sees them? Do we consult as we should? Do we work together to achieve positive goals and to defeat temptations?

We are God's ambassadors, representing his standards and goals. We engage the culture and accept the pressures that arise.

Is there someone in my life who can correct my self-deceptions? Someone who can stop me from excess hours when work is alluring, or from quitting too early when work is taxing?

Working in Unpopular Occupations

Every year a polling organization publishes its list of America's most and least respected occupations. The hero list is familiar. Nurses and doctors top the list, followed closely by teachers, veterinarians, pharmacists and even the clergy. The villain list is familiar, too. Last year's poll placed telemarketers next to last. Real estate agents were tenth from the bottom, with lawyers ninth and gun dealers eighth. Sadly, members of Congress were sixth, insurance agents fifth and used car dealers dead last.

These rankings can hurt. Many lawyers and Congressmen, to name just two occupations, have great expertise and skill. They care deeply about justice and

have sacrificed much for good causes. They work in potentially noble professions where something has gone wrong. Law and government need *ordinary* Christians who will work in them, with integrity, every day. They also need *visionaries* who will work to reform the structures that allow abuses in law and government. They need men and women of God who know how justice and mercy can flourish again. Precisely because something has gone wrong, disciples should not flee those fields, but remain in them to bring the light of the gospel and the will of God to bear on them.

But we dare not forget less promising spheres such as telemarketing and used car sales. Consider the benefits if every telemarketer were honest, gentle and considerate. And we certainly need more used car dealers who live by biblical principles.

Not long ago, I reluctantly concluded it was time to purchase a used car for the two teenage drivers in my home. Taking my oldest daughter with me, I went to a dealer with a reputation for honesty. The first salesman I met sold new cars, so he recommended a friend. "Look for John on the back lot. He's our best man." In a few minutes I found John, speaking enthusiastically to a customer. When he was free, I started to describe our needs. John listened intently for a few moments, then lit up. "You know," he said, finger now stabbing the air, "I've got a car I positively *stole* from a family just yesterday. Got it on a trade-in. They got a lot of money from an insurance settlement and wanted to get something new. I stole it from them, so I can give you quite a deal."

The salesman launched into his description, but I could hardly listen. I

was marveling, “The first thing this man tells me is that he robbed a customer just yesterday. Why would he want to start a sales relationship that way?”

I decided to speak up, if only to instruct my daughter, “So you’re telling me you stole this car from a customer yesterday, so you can offer me a really good deal?”

“Yes, absolutely.”

“But if you stole it from *yesterday’s* customer, what does that say about what you may want to do to me today?”

He looked utterly baffled, so I tried again, “If you say you stole the car from a careless customer yesterday, doesn’t that imply you might try something similar to another customer—maybe even me—today?” Again, blank incomprehension ruled his face. I tried one more time, then gave up. Afterwards, my daughter and I concluded that we apparently met a man so accustomed to lying and manipulative braggadocio that he could not even hear himself. And this was their “best man!” How I longed for an honest used car salesman that day.

A believer might say, “I don’t want a job in used car sales. It is too disreputable. There is too much dishonesty.” But it would be better to say, “Society needs honest used car salesmen. I love cars and have skill in sales. Therefore I want to take that job and shed God’s light in a dark place.” The world would be a slightly better place if more honest people sold used cars.

The field of politics also needs godly influences. Politicians need honesty and integrity to resist pressures for corruption. Today, temptation comes in the form of campaign contributions. Tomorrow, it will take another shape. The powerful always have ways to promote themselves through the exchange of favors. God ordained government, but power, mixed with sin, always invites sin. Therefore, God blesses government but regulates it (Dt 17:14-20). Scripture calls it an

instrument of God’s justice in Romans 13, but an instrument of Satanic oppression in Revelation 13. Since it can become either one, we need Christians in government.

The less honored the profession, perhaps, the greater the need of Christian influences. Of course, some occupations are intrinsically immoral or degrading; no one is called to reform them. But some honest callings have been corrupted and are ripe for restoration. If we enter with hope, prayer, skill and co-workers with an agenda for reform, we can make a difference. We must be prepared for resistance. But if we stand together, we see that “a cord of three strands is not easily broken” (Eccl 4:12). More than that, we have reason to hope that reforms will work, for God designed the world to work best when we do things his way.

Perhaps Jesus summarized it best when he concluded his overture to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. When disciples live out their faith, he said, four things can happen. First, the world may be so offended it resorts to persecution (5:11). Second, we may function as

the salt of the earth (5:13). Salt retards decay; to be salt is to slow down the corruption caused by sin. Third, we can be light for the world (5:14). Light does more than lessen sin; it gives positive direction to the world. Finally, at best, our righteousness can so shine that men will praise our Father in heaven (5:16). That is, they do not merely admire us, but they see that there is something—Someone—behind us, granting the wisdom and strength we display in our work. May we who work in politics and the media and used car sales and all the rest make this our prayer: That our presence should restrain evil and cast light in dark places, that men and women might see our good works and praise the Father for them. ■

~Dan Doriani

*Daniel M. Doriani holds a PhD from Westminster Theological Seminary and is Dean of Faculty and Professor of New Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary. He is presently writing a book on work. © Daniel M. Doriani 2002. Reprinted by permission from *Presbyterion: Covenant Seminary Review* (12330 Conway Road, St. Louis, MO 63141) 28/1 (Spring 2002): 1-11.*

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. At the beginning of his article, Dr. Doriani lists case studies in which Christians in the marketplace found themselves in “difficult places.” What was your initial response to each one? Did reading the article cause you to think differently about any of them? Why or why not? Can you think of other case studies that could be added to the list?
2. What ethical issues are involved in your vocation? What issues of justice? Of truth? How have you addressed them as a Christian? Are you convinced your response has been satisfactory? Why or why not? Does this article shed any light on your situation?
3. “Disciples need to know how to conduct themselves with integrity,” Dr. Doriani says, “to remain holy in unholy places.” Do you have the knowledge you need? How do you know? What does Doriani mean by “integrity?”
4. Reflect on Doriani’s use of Scripture to identify principles by which we are to live. Did you identify the same principles when you read these texts in the past? Why or why not?

[Questions continued on next page...]

It Ain't Necessarily

[Questions continued from previous page...]

5. Doriani mentions “calling” several times in the course of the article. How vital is calling to his argument? To what extent do you know your calling? How has that knowledge affected your decisions and life?
6. Elijah had a very different working relationship with King Ahab compared to Obadiah. Yet, Doriani says, “neither man questioned the other. Each knew his own calling and believed God worked through another calling for his brother.” To what extent are you comfortable with this level of diversity within the Christian community? To what extent would it be tolerated in your church? Why is conformity so highly prized in such matters?
7. Using Doriani’s own words, list the specific principles he extracts from the Scriptures concerning believers working in difficult places. What is your response to them? To what extent do they seem new or radical? Why do you think that is? Do Christians today know, believe, and follow them? Why or why not?
8. To prevent compromise, Doriani lists a series of questions we should ask ourselves. Do so. Are there any that give you pause?
9. “The less honored the profession,” Doriani argues in his conclusion, “the greater the need of Christian influences.” What difficulties will believers face in those vocations? In the church as they enter those vocations? How should the church provide for support and encouragement? If you know of believers in such vocations, what plans should you make?

*“It ain’t necessarily so, it ain’t necessarily so,
The things that you’re liable to
read in the Bible,
They ain’t necessarily so...”*

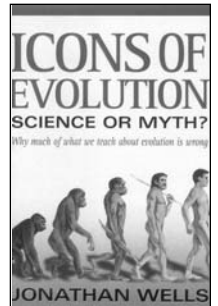
George Gershwin’s opera “Porgy and Bess” was the hit of the season in the fall of 1935. It soon had people all over the world singing of the dangers of naively believing what you read in a good book.

In *Icons of Evolution* Jonathan Wells sings the same song, but with an important twist: the good book we shouldn’t trust isn’t the Bible, but rather our biology text. It seems many of the examples they offer in support of the theory of evolution—the “icons” of the title—are false or misleading.

This shouldn’t be news to anyone with school-age children. Through the years my own kids have come home with a mix of confused ideas about evolution often garbled in the teaching of football-coaches-turned-biology-teachers. (In 1981 British paleontologist Colin Paterson asked a group of experts at the Evolutionary Morphology seminar at the University of Chicago a simple question: “Can you tell me anything you know about evolution, any one thing...that is true? After a long silence one person replied, “I do know one thing—it ought not to be taught in high school.”) So I’ve often ironically found myself in the odd position of clarifying the teaching of ideas I don’t endorse. “No, kids, evolutionists don’t present X that way any-

more.” Here X includes the Miller-Urey origin of life experiments, Ernst Haeckel’s embryos, *Archeopteryx*, peppered moths, Darwin’s finches, 4-winged fruit flies, fossil horses, and the apes-that-become-men, just to name a few.

In *Icons* Wells chronicles for a broad audience what I’ve been muddling through with my kids for years. For laymen his explanations will clarify how the case for evolution has often



Icons clarifies how the case for evolution has often been misrepresented.

been misrepresented. At the same time his careful notes and detailed appendices will satisfy the student in search of more detail. This is a book almost everyone can and should read.

To be sure, informed students of biology won’t find much that’s new in Wells’ work—much of this stuff has been a matter of scientific record for years—but that’s what makes his critique so damning: if publishers and teachers have been aware of this stuff for so long, why does it keep showing up in textbooks?

Take Ernst Haeckel’s embryos for example. When I was an eighth grade biology student, I was taught his maxim “ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny,” i.e., an organism will retrace its evolutionary heritage in the stages it goes through in its embryological development. As evidence of this our

So

text included a picture of the “gill slits” on a human embryo. Now embryologists have long known (even when I was in school) that the pharyngeal folds on the human embryo are not gills at all and never develop into a part of the respiration system. Furthermore it has been more recently recognized that Haeckel not only selectively chose embryos that appeared to make his point, he also misrepresented them in his drawings. (Harvard’s Stephen Jay Gould once called this “the academic equivalent of murder.”). Still, Wells notes, despite these problems, some popular biology texts published as recently as 1999 include not only Haeckel’s conclusions, but his faked drawings, too.

The Important Question, of course, is why? Wells’ answer:

Most biologists are honest, hard-working scientists who insist on accurate presentation of the evidence, but who rarely venture outside their own fields. The truth about the icons of evolution will surprise them as much as it surprises anyone else.

What about textbook writers who know they are distorting the truth? Here Well’s quotes Harvard biologist Louis Guenin:

The pivotal concept here is candor, the attribute on a given occasion of not uttering anything that one believes false or misleading. We describe breaches of candor as deception. An investigator induces and betrays a listener’s trust by signaling “I believe it” while believing a false utterance false or a misleading omission misleading.

I’m pleased to note that in *Icons* Wells isn’t preaching to the choir; he doesn’t couch his arguments in tones that will appeal chiefly to those who already agree with him. His goal here is to persuade his readers, not to antagonize them.

This makes the response to *Icons* in the secular press the more puzzling to me. Recent reviews by Massimo Pigliucci (professor of biology at the University of Tennessee and chair of its Skeptics Forum) and Eugenie C. Scott (director of the Center for Science Education) dismissed *Icons* as nothing less than an attack on science itself. Neither challenges Well’s presentation of the facts, but both charge him with seriously distorting them in order to undermine science and advance religion. In truth his goal is much more modest: changing the way science is taught, for the goals of science (no matter how lofty) are never advanced if tied to falsehood.

One last word here: the same thing is true (or should be) of the goals of true religion. A noble goal—the doctrine of creation—isn’t advanced if it is tied to error. Creationists should bear this in mind because we, too, have been guilty at times of perpetuating our own dubious icons. Some (a moon that isn’t dusty enough) we should bid farewell to; others (the ‘missing’ layers of rock in the Grand Canyon) we should be careful not to oversell. Books like *Icons* rightly insist upon integrity in science, but in

embracing them, creationists should insist upon the same integrity in our own scientific efforts.

I recommend *Icons of Evolution*. Those who enjoy it might also take a look at *Science Held Hostage: What’s Wrong with Creation Science and Evolutionism* by Young, Menninga and Van Till (IVP, 1988). ■

—Greg Grooms

Greg Grooms is the director of the Probe Center, a Christian study center serving students at the University of Texas at Austin. Copyright © Greg Grooms, 2002

Book reviewed:

Icons of Evolution: Science or Myth? Why much of what we teach about evolution is wrong by Jonathan Wells (Regnery Publishing, 2000) 248 pp. plus 2 appendices, research notes, and index.

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Leonard Bernstein's



Music of the Old Testament for the 21st Century

In 1965, Chichester Cathedral, with her sister cathedral in Salisbury, commissioned American composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein to compose a setting from the book of Psalms. Bernstein took up the challenge with relish. He had just spent a sabbatical from his job as Music Director of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra composing and found the ordeal rather frustrating. He had attempted to compose some works in the by then well-

established serial technique so familiar to composers such as Pierre Boulez, Elliott Carter, and even his good friend Aaron Copland. However, he found after several aborted attempts that he was not completely comfortable with the technique, and when he began the Chichester commission, he turned back to his beloved tonality as well. He told me once that this work was his most “B-flat major work,” meaning that it was straightforward in its harmonic simplicity. And compared to most of the music written in the 1960s, he is right, this work is harmonically very simple. Those who have not heard much of the art music of the mid 20th century—late Stravinsky, Carter, Boulez, Stockhausen—may think on first hearing that this work is rather dissonant, but when compared to these others, it is very conservative.

The simplicity is delightful. In three movements, Bernstein sets all or part of 6 psalms. In the first, we hear a celebration of joyful worship, the second a picture of the clash between the faithful and the faithless, and the third, after a painful prelude, a statement of proper humility before God, ending with quiet joy.

The first movement begins with an explosion of dissonant color. The chorus sings, “Awake psaltery and harp! I will awake the dawn!” from Psalm 108:2. This introduction is at first a bit off-putting but when heard in context, it is a marvelous introduction of both the whole piece and the melodic motive that will return many times throughout the work. The motive Bernstein crafted is this: Bb, F, Eb, Ab, Bb. This short melodic

figure works its way into a full-blown melody by next repeating itself a step higher (C, G, F, Bb, C), then re-arranging itself and descending twice (G, D, C, F, G) and ending on the beginning note of Bb. This melody returns at the end of the first movement with the last choral statement, “The Lord is good.” And again at the beginning of the third movement, hidden in the tortured string interlude, and finally transformed in the final choral of the third movement, where the choir sings, *a capella*, “Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity.” Each appearance of this melody is harmonized differently, giving each a different character, but bringing a unifying effect to the piece as a whole.

But back to the first movement—after the introduction, we find a delightful setting of the entire text from Psalm 100. The dance-like celebration starts with the men of the chorus singing, “Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth!” in 7/4 time. That means there are 7 beats in a measure, and makes for an odd dance indeed. It feels like it should be three equal groups of two beats (“1 and 2 and 3 and 1 and 2 and 3 and” etc.) but with the added 7th beat, it ends up being “1 and 2 and 3 and *and* 1 and 2 and 3 and *and*!” But the result is a very middle-eastern dance that is infectious.

The second movement pits two different psalm texts against one another. To begin with, a young boy sings Psalm 23, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” The boy soloist is a requirement, Bernstein insists; even though the part is in the women’s alto range, he will not have a woman sing it. The reason has to be that this is David himself as a young man singing his most famous song accompanied by David’s own instrument, the harp. In a pastoral setting, the women of the chorus join the soloist and sing his melodies, continuing the text until everything seems like it will resolve quietly, the men of the chorus aggressively enter singing, “Why do the nations rage, and the peoples plot in vain?” from Psalm 2. The men grumble and threaten as they sing the first few verses of the psalm, contending with the women when they reenter with their Psalm 23 melody.

The Chichester Psalms

The two groups clash, and eventually the conflict is resolved in favor of the peace and trust of Psalm 23. The men begin to wane and what were shouts and jeers become softer and softer until they grumble and whisper and disappear. The boy soloist returns to placidly finish out his song, and by the end, all of Psalm 23 has been sung, and resolution is sure. But, at the very end, under that last note, the orchestra very quietly plays the men's Psalm 2 music, implying that the conflict is not over, but only put off for a time. We still live in a fallen world, and full-blown resolution will not happen before the heavens and earth are remade.

The beginning of the third movement is a tense and anxious string interlude. The melody set in the beginning of the first movement is almost lost in the thick dissonances. Unrest, hopelessness, angst, and the trials of this world are expressed here. After one hard pull there is a restless quiet, and we hear the trumpet play a twisted and mocking version of David's melody from the second movement before we are thrown back into pain. Then suddenly we are given a glimpse of concord; the dissonance clears and the violin melody reaches upward three times, each higher than the one before, each softer and softer, and finally, looking upward, waits.

The men enter, this time singing a lyrical setting of Psalm 131, "Lord, Lord, my heart is not proud, my eyes are not haughty. I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me." This embodies a deep spiritual truth, that the world is chaotic and evil, and hope would disappear altogether if we were to try to make sense of it all ourselves, but when we look to God in humility, we are given a peace that transcends understanding. This is what is stated here—the trials of this world are no match for the peace of God, but access to it comes only through humility, trust, and death to self.

In this movement, the men sing, the women join them on the second statement of the melody, and finally they come to resolution, turning the music completely over to the orchestra. The orchestra offers the theme by way of a marvelous cello quartet. This statement is sweet and simple, and leads to a return of the choir, singing the melody now without

words. The peace and joy offered is expressible through, "Ahhhh." After that, the only thing left to do is to call others to the joys of heaven. The chorus sings, "O Israel, put your hope in the Lord, both now and forevermore." Stated once by the chorus, then a delicate last time by four vocal soloists that climb "farther up and farther in" until they disappear into heaven itself, leaving one final magical moment.

This last is the great marvel of the work. It serves as a closing moment, and a final looping back to the beginning of movement one. The opening theme (Bb, F, Eb, Ab, Bb) is sung with new and magical harmonies. The entire opening melody is reprised here, but this time in radiant quiet and peace. The text the chorus sings, without orchestra, is the first verse of Psalm 133, "Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity." The piece ends with a long "Amen," while the trumpet and harp play the opening motive one last time, and the final chord is held as long as it is possible to hold it.

The piece is a marvel in 20 minutes, and is perhaps my favorite of all of Bernstein's compositions. I know I am in good company, as the composer told me himself that he felt the same way. I hope you will find the recording I have suggested and give it a good listen or two. It repays repeated hearings, and opens the eyes of the imagination (as all great art should) to new aspects of the psalms and the God they describe and worship.

I recommend the oldest recording I have heard of the piece, one recorded in 1965 (the year the piece was composed), conducted by Bernstein himself: *Leonard Bernstein: A Tribute*, Sony Classical, SMK 46701. ■

~John Mason Hodges

John Mason Hodges is Associate Professor of the Arts at Crichton College, Memphis. His background is in orchestral conducting, and performs occasionally with his Ars Nova Chamber Orchestra, and as guest conductor for various instrumental and vocal ensembles. He lives in Memphis with his wife Day, and their son Mason.

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The trials of this world are no match for the peace of God, but access to it comes only through humility, trust, and death to self.

by
**John
Mason
Hodges**



of Kitsch and Silliness

<http://www.ship-of-fools.com>

Ship of Fools

For those who were wondering whether Great Britain has the equivalent of *The Wittenberg Door* to poke fun at Christians, the answer is Yes—*Ship of Fools: The Magazine of Christian Unrest*. “We see ourselves as both serious and satirical, entertaining and thought-provoking,” editor Simon Jenkins says, “helping Christians to do some head-scratching about their faith, and inviting people of other faiths, or of no particular faith, to talk to us.” There is one difference between the *Door* and *Ship of Fools*, however: both use satire to expose the kitsch and silliness in Christian circles, but at *Ship of Fools* you can place an order.



Ransom Ratings

Design: Simple but effective, with tightly edited prose and easily loaded graphics.

Content: The website is divided into a variety of sections, satirical articles and a discussion board. *Gadgets for God* shows religious objects, with brief descriptions and pictures. For example, the mug titled “The King is Coming” shows a dark city skyline which changes to an image of Christ coming in a blaze of light. “Everyone who sees it is profoundly affected when they watch the amazing transformation,” the manufacturer claims. “This is truly a ‘conversation piece’ that is worth talking about, time and time again.” You can also order a Martin Luther Bobble Head Doll, a Jesus Doll (“incredibly huggable”), and the Fire Bible, which uses batteries to ignite lighter fluid so that flames shoot up when it’s opened (so everyone can see how “hot God’s word is”). Other sections include *Signs & Blunders* (“those areas of church life least likely to win a burst of the Hallelujah Chorus”), *Fruitcake Zone* and *Mystery Worshiper* (where *Ship of Fools* staff visit churches and evaluate the services).

Ease of Use: Free for browsing. Ridiculous.



Denis Haack

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Critique is a newsletter (published nine times each year, funds permitting) designed to accomplish, by God’s grace, three things:

1. To call attention to resources of interest to thinking Christians.
2. To model Christian discernment.
3. To stimulate believers to think biblically about all of life.

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