

# Critique

Helping Christians Develop Skill in Discernment

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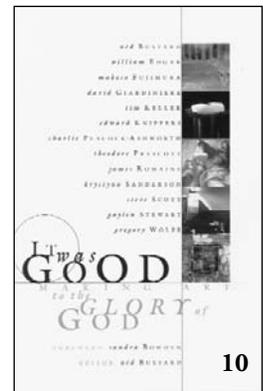
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# Editor's Note

This issue marks a milestone for *Critique*. Since it's #9-2000, it represents the end of the first year of publishing after substantial changes were made in the newsletter. Some of those changes are easily obvious: the new design and regular columns. Some are perhaps less obvious to you, though those of us who work on producing each issue are very conscious of them: word counts, deadlines, and a more regular publishing schedule.

The feedback we've received so far about the changes has been positive. Readers seem to like the new design, and though the content occasionally stirs up a bit of controversy (which isn't all that bad, actually), the only negative comment we've heard is a quiet lament that *Critique* is no longer 3-hole punched. And though I, too, used to store my copies in three ring binders, on this I agree with Marsena (our managing editor) and Bonnie (a graphic artist on Ransom's Board) that omitting the holes makes for a more attractive newsletter.

Marsena and I just finished two days evaluating the past year and planning for 2001. We went over all nine issues, looked at the design, reflected on the content, and tried to determine how we could make *Critique* even better in the future.

One thing we decided is that we need to add a column. It won't appear in each issue, but like Tuned In and Digressions will appear occasionally each year. We're calling it Paper & Canvas and it makes its debut in this final issue of 2000. It'll cover literature and the tangible arts (painting, sculpture, engraving, etc.). We hope next year to have a couple of articles on fiction, and a profile of at least one artist who is seeking to glorify God in their art.

However, since we produce each issue of *Critique* with you—our readers—in mind, we wish you had been able to join us as we reviewed, evaluated, and planned. And though hearing via email or letter is not as good as joining us in the living room of Toad Hall, we'd love to hear what you think. We'd appreciate having you reflect on

the issues of *Critique* that have arrived in your mailbox over the past year, and tell us what's been helpful, and what hasn't. What you've read, and what you've skipped. And whether the newsletter is actually accomplishing its stated goal of helping you gain skill in discernment.

So, if you would, please consider sending us your answers to the following four questions. Be as brief or expansive as you want. Cover everything: the various columns, the design, the content, how the newsletter is financed, whatever. You can even lament the lack of 3-hole punches, if you want to, though I happen to know that particular decision is set in stone. We won't have time to respond to each of you, but we do promise to read each email or letter with care, and to take your feedback and suggestions seriously. Our desire is to make this newsletter a resource that truly counts for God's kingdom. And knowing what our readers think can be a helpful step in that process. So, here are the questions on which we'd love to hear from you:

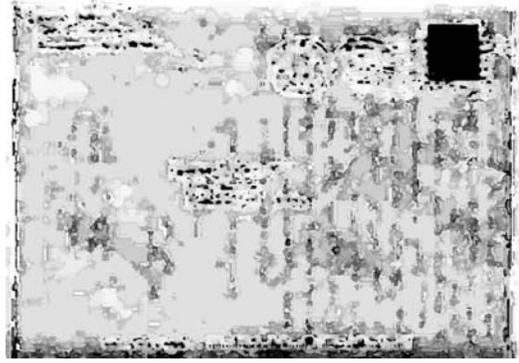
1. What do you find helpful or positive about *Critique*?
2. What is less helpful that you would suggest changing?
3. In what specific ways does *Critique* benefit you in terms of Christian discernment?
4. Is there anything that you never read—and probably never will?

Feel free to email your thoughts to us at (ransom\_fellowship@compuserve.com) or send it snail mail (Ransom Fellowship, 1150 West Center Street, Rochester, MN 55902).

And thank you. ■

~Denis D. Haack

# Dialogue



## A few comments to end the year...

**T**hank you so much for the work you put into *Critique*. Just received the latest issue, and find myself so grateful for the work you do, as I am a learning discerner, but not very good at it yet!!!

I was reluctant when you mentioned changing the format, as I loved the “old” *Critique* for its academic/scholastic flavor—sort of the “discernment journal” look. But the new look has really grabbed me, and I find myself having to pull away from the interesting articles to make supper. Very user-friendly, even my non-academic husband likes to pick it up and browse.

Our son came home from his first semester at college last week wearing a new A&F shirt he was very proud of owning. Thank you for the A&F article that I will pass along to him—he will be very interested that there is a Christian take even on that.

Thanks again for your work—the book reviews are very welcome, the Babylon series is fabulous and I find myself going back to earlier issues in that series, the movie reviews are helpful, etc. I appreciate all of it, including, the *Notes From Toad Hall* from Margie—incredibly encouraging writing from her gifted hand.

**Jean Opelt**  
Green Bay, WI

**M**y one complaint about your publication is that I am tempted to buy books—more and more books! My husband is enjoying the Puritan and Cranmer devotionals presently. That’s o.k.—having met Byron from *Hearts and Minds* [Bookstore; see notice on page 12], I’m happy to support his enterprise.

**Lola Kindley**  
Mariette, GA

**Y**ou have been such an encouragement to me through *Critique* and *Notes from Toad Hall*. I feel that I have been better equipped to engage with my nonbelieving friends and the larger environment of New Orleans through your writings and the questions you pose about books, movies, music, etc. You do a wonderful job of blending cultural sensitivity and compassion for our lost world with sharp discernment and effective technique for us who are in the world, and love the world, though we are not of it. Thank you.

**Kristin Davis**  
New Orleans, LA

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.

## Glory & Failure

### Musings on efficiency and grades.

#### Useless glory

It can be difficult, in our tightly organized and busily productive world, to contentedly engage in useless, inefficient, unproductive things. In fact, when we find ourselves so engaged, the temptation is to justify it by pointing to some benefit we supposedly gain. So we rest from our work because the time away refreshes us, making us able to work harder on our return to the office. Or we collect old postcards because we find them attractive, and because puttering with them is refreshing, which helps us work harder at the office... and so it goes.

Rarely, however, do we ever hear someone simply admit—without any hint of guilt or shame—that they were engaged in an utterly useless activity. Imagine the conversation if someone talked in such terms. “I glorified God by being utterly inefficient and unproductive yesterday. Didn’t get a single useful thing done—and it was all to his glory.”

It’s worth considering whether our reluctance to embrace uselessness isn’t a measure of our captivity to a world which worships at the shrine of the tin god of Success. In writing about a liberal arts education, pastor Peter Leithart argues Christians must not only be willing to admit that some good things—like liberal arts educations—are “useless,” but that “we must be willing to celebrate this uselessness.” He does not suggest this merely as a way to resist the spirit of our consumerist age, but because of what God

has revealed of himself. “We are creatures made in the image of a Creator who makes things that He does not need, things that are not of use to Him. As we imitate His excess, we play music and recite poetry and tell stories.” By this measure, art, painting, literature, plays, weekly days of rest, gardening, or just sitting quietly to watch the sun go down—all these good gifts can be enjoyed, but none need to be justified. “We should not be ashamed of the uselessness,” Leithart says, “for making what we do not need and doing what we have no ordinary use for is part of the glory of being made in the image of the infinitely creative God.”

Ah, the glory of godly uselessness: one more reason to worship the infinitely creative God. ■

~Denis D. Haack

#### Source:

Leithart from “For Useless Learning” by Peter J. Leithart in *First Things* (November 2000) p. 11.

#### Useful failure

Friends who teach in private schools report that most of their students from Christian homes seem driven to excel in every class, at all costs. Receiving any grade other than an “A” is deemed to be virtually a failure, every exam must be aced, and every class is assumed to be of equal importance. The stress to succeed is palpable in the classroom, they report, and heightened remarkably at teacher-parent conferences. I have no way of knowing how widespread this is, nor whether the drive to

succeed is fostered by the school, the parents, or by both. It really doesn’t matter, since the point I want to make here doesn’t depend on any of that.

Students should be encouraged to work hard in school, but older students from Christian homes should also be taught to be discerning about how their schooling fits into the rest of life. In fact, sometimes taking a lower grade in a class might be wise, in order, for example, to concentrate on classes that seem more central to the students gifts and interests, or in order to take advantage of an opportunity for growth outside of school. Going with granddad on a fishing trip, or with dad on a business trip to Japan might very well be worth a “B” in some particular class. Or in all classes that semester. And it can be good preparation for life in the marketplace for some students to learn to accept something less than straight-A’s, as long as those grades reflect both hard work and a balanced life.

The Christian doctrine of calling is predicated on the fact that we are called to serve, love, and obey God as finite creatures. Being finite means we have limits, and that learning to accept those limits is part of faithfulness. That being the case, Christian students must be taught that though their calling to be students means they must pursue their academics as unto the Lord, at times getting an “A” can actually be dishonoring to the Lord. ■

~Denis D. Haack

## Excessive Appetites

An Excerpt from an article in *Christianity Today*, “Rx for Gluttony.”

The word gluttony is scarcely mentioned in the Bible, though Paul implores us to exercise restraint in the use of our bodies. In fact, the biblical writers encourage us to enjoy food as much, if not more, than they warn us against it. Food itself is not shunned in the Christian Scriptures (a distinction from other religions, such as Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism), but it is not supremely important, either.

It is not until the fourth and fifth centuries that we find greater attention to gluttony, especially in the writings of early monks. Gluttony was on the earliest lists of vices drawn up by the spiritual writer

Evagrius (346-99), the monk John Cassian (ca. 360-c.430), and Benedictine-monk-become-pope Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604). These lists eventually evolved into the famous seven deadly sins (pride, covetousness, lust, envy, gluttony, anger, and sloth).

These sins are key because each sin begets “daughter” sins. For instance, Gregory says that gluttony propagates foolish mirth, uncleanness, babbling, and dullness of mind. But each of the seven parent sins can become deadly (that is, “mortal” as opposed to “venial.”) In the case of gluttony, a person who occasionally eats more than is necessary or appropriate has committed only a venial sin; becoming so taken by the pleasure of gluttony that the delights of the palate turn one away from God and his commandments is to commit a mortal sin. Gluttony is deadly when a person makes a god of the belly.

Of the seven deadly sins, gluttony seems the least culpable because it is a vice that arises from our nature. We require food to sur-

vive, and food usually brings pleasurable sensations to the palate...For this reason, one can never be entirely rid of gluttonous temptations. Early monks nonetheless believed gluttony was the first sin to be faced in spiritual and moral battles...

The early monks recognized how gluttony fosters many daughter sins. In a modern context, it might look like this: We work excessively to earn money to indulge our appetites. We envy others who can dine in

exotic fashion. We search for the ever-new taste sensations, refusing to be satisfied with God’s gifts to us. We spend

more on ourselves and thus less on the hunger of the world.

Evagrius, Cassian, Gregory, and Thomas Aquinas outline several evidences of gluttony that we can reduce to six:

1. Gorging ourselves and not savoring a reasonable amount of food.
2. Eating at any other time than the appointed hour (like snacking). For the hermit monk, this usually involved one meal at noon or later. For the monk in community, this involved eating with the community at prescribed times.
3. Anticipating eating with preoccupied, eager longing. The hermit who had his desires under control would not be checking the angle of the sun every 15 minutes.
4. Eating excessively costly foods.

5. Seeking after delicacies. These last two are especially concerned with being content with what we have (cf. Phil 4:11).
6. Paying too much attention to food. This means it is as gluttonous to be over-scrupulous about food (and how our body looks) as it is to overindulge ourselves. Inordinate concern can become idolatry of the creation.

One can see, then, that the evil of gluttony lies not in food itself or in our need to eat it (with accompanying sensations of the palate) but in how we go about our eating and in the thought (or lack of thought) we give to our eating. ■

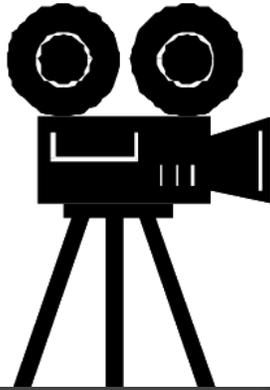
~Dennis Okholm

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**Source:**

“Rx for Gluttony” by Dennis Okholm. *Christianity Today* (September 4, 2000) pp. 63-66.

## Life without You



### A Review of *It's a Wonderful Life*

by Drew Trotter

#### *It's a Wonderful Life*

##### Credits

##### Starring:

James Stewart

(George Bailey)

Donna Reed

(Mary Hatch Bailey)

Lionel Barrymore

(Mr. Henry F. Potter)

Thomas Mitchell

(William 'Uncle Billy'  
Bailey)

Henry Travers

(Clarence Oddbody)

Beulah Bondi

(Mrs. Bailey)

Frank Faylen

(Ernie, Taxi Driver)

Ward Bond

(Bert, the Cop)

##### Director:

Frank Capra

Based on the story, "The  
Greatest Gift" by:

Philip Van Doren  
Stern

##### Producer:

Frank Capra

##### Music:

Dimitri Tiomkin

##### Cinematographer:

Joseph F. Biroc

##### Costumes:

Edward Stevenson

Run Time: 130

Unrated

Frank Capra held America in the palm of his hand for awhile; for many he is still the quintessential maker of movies of hope. Director of fifty-two movies spanning five decades, his films were sometimes known as "Capra corn" because their sentiment was so readily apparent and so deeply felt. Pictures he produced were nominated for academy awards five times, winning once (*You Can't Take It With You*, 1938), and he took home the Oscar for Best Director three times (*It Happened One Night*, 1934; *Mr. Deeds Goes To Town*, 1936; and *You Can't Take It With You*, 1938), being nominated for an additional three. If he had not been hindered by the Second World War, there is no telling how much more he would have done; ten of his movies were specifically to aid the war effort.

*It's a Wonderful Life* is now generally thought to be his best and most important film. In 1998 it was recognized as number eleven in the American Film Institute's rankings of the Top 100 Greatest American Movies of the first century of movie-making. Marking Jimmy Stewart's return to the screen after his time in the war, it moved Donna Reed towards stardom and was filled with supporting characters who were either already famous or were going to be. Gloria Grahame, Thomas Mitchell, Ward Bond and Frank Faylen (the original Bert and Ernie), Beulah Bondi, Henry Travers, and the venerable Lionel Barrymore as the evil Mr. Potter make *Life* come to life in a way that lesser actors could not have done.

The story is a simple one. A small town banker named George Bailey

(Stewart), known for his self-sacrificial deeds of kindness, finally reaches a point of despair and contemplates ending his own life. An angel saves him from suicide by showing him what the world would have been like had he never lived. Wonderful, quaint Bedford Falls would have become evil, sin-soaked Pottersville; numerous people would have been either dead or destitute; Mary, George's wife, would have been the mousy, spinster librarian of the town instead of the vibrant wife and mother she is. The whole wonderful life that many experience because of George would have been a depressing life of drudgery and defeat. The movie ends with George fighting on and the town bailing him out of his financial crisis to the strains of "Auld Lang Syne" in front of the Bailey Christmas tree.

Capra's vision provokes a mixed reaction in the Christian. On the one hand, the virtues of decency, hard work, and looking out for the other guy are winsomely promoted; his movies, and especially *Life*, hold up nicely even in these cynical times. Sex is responsibly presented as the purview of adults who know how to separate mild flirtation from deep, meaningful, married love. While a lax view of alcohol is certainly the rule in *Life*, it is only fair to remind that such was the standard of the day. At least drunkenness is never presented in a favorable light, as it is for instance in 1946's Oscar winner *The Best Years of Our Lives*. Bailey, while attracted to the lights of the big city, notions of progress and building grand buildings, always comes back to reaffirm the superior value of friendship, loyalty, and helping the poor and disenfranchised. The small town virtues of knowing your neighbor and devotion to family are bedrock in *It's a Wonderful Life*.

On the other hand, there are dangers in *It's a Wonderful Life* that come close to ruining its message of hope provided by a

compassionate God. In fact, *Life's* God is often a god of the gaps, there when He's needed, but wholly absent when He's not. The only shot of a church in the movie is a brief cut during a montage of shots around the theme of post-war America, and while prayer has its interesting place throughout the film (see the first discussion question below), it hardly has a regular place in anyone's life in the movie. God does answer George Bailey's famous prayer ("Lord, I'm not a praying man, but if You're up there and You can hear me, show me the way. I'm at the end of my rope; show me the way, O God."), but does that mean George is to be a role model for us? He might be the most dangerous type of all: the one who is so good, he doesn't need God except in a pinch.

But in the end, to fault *It's a Wonderful Life* would be unfair; this is a movie to be savored and for the most part appreciated as demonstrating a profoundly Christian world and life view. After all, God does reach down



***God does reach down and show mercy to George Bailey, and the movie affirms the supernatural, the strong distinction between good and evil, and a fully admirable ethic based on self-sacrificial love.***

and show mercy to George Bailey, and the movie affirms the supernatural, the strong distinction between good and evil, and a fully admirable ethic based on self-sacrificial love. Yes, the movie famously never punishes the evil Mr. Potter, and it occasionally promotes American values of bigger-is-better and pull-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps. But for the most part it shows how good life can be when you live it for others in community with them, depending on your Father in heaven to watch out for and protect you. What better movie to show at Christmas? ■

~Drew Trotter

*Dr. Andrew H. Trotter, Jr., is the executive director of the Center for Christian Study in Charlottesville, Virginia, where he teaches and writes on theology and culture, focusing on modern American film.*

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**Note:**

This review marks the first in an occasional series of reviews of great movies the whole family can watch without fear of seeing excessive violence or nudity or hearing a string of four-letter words. Most of the films will be old classics, many from Hollywood's so-called "Golden Age." Videotapes, or even DVDs, are readily available. We encourage you to watch, and reflect upon, these films as sources of entertainment, cultural education, and at times edification.

**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION**

1. What do you believe about prayer? Is the movie's view of prayer acceptable? Why or why not?
2. How realistic are the characters in the movie, particularly George Bailey and his wife Mary? How important is that to making a good movie?
3. The movie begins in heaven and offers a distinct picture of how people in 1946 viewed the work of angels. What does the Bible say about angels, and how close to that view was the movie?
4. *It's a Wonderful Life* was a flop at the box office when it came out in 1946, despite the presence of one of the era's most bankable stars, Jimmy Stewart. But over the years, especially since 1972, it has become an enormously popular film. Why is that? What does its popularity in reruns demonstrate about American culture today?
5. At the end of the movie, George receives a note from Clarence on the inside flap of his copy of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. The note reads, "No man is a failure who has friends." What is the basis of Christian friendship? How close is the movie to portraying Christian friendship accurately?

## Christ in the OT



**R**eading and understanding the Old Testament correctly means reading and understanding it as Jesus did. And he saw the Old Testament, from beginning to end, as speaking of himself. “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life,” Jesus told the Jews. “These are the Scriptures that testify about me” (John 5:39). Later, in the same conversation he told them that their rejection of him meant they didn’t believe what Moses had written, since “he wrote about me” (5:46). And after his resurrection, talking with two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus, “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Luke 24:27).

Few of us find Christ in the Old Testament, however, except for the prophecies about his birth and death. “We find moral lessons, theological doctrines, and nuggets of wisdom,” Dr. Dan Doriani notes, and though these are not

insignificant, they are not sufficient. “Jesus himself told the disciples that all Scriptures speak of him,” Doriani says. “Jesus does not simply figure in the Old Testament as the object of prophecy. He figures in all its pages.” Being discerning as a Christian requires us to read the Scriptures so that the truth of God’s word renews our minds and shapes our view of life and the world. So if Christ is present on every page of the Old Testament, the discerning Christian will want to find him there.

Charles Drew, an associate pastor at Redeemer Presbyterian in Manhattan, has written a book to help us find Christ in the Old Testament. *The Ancient Love Song* is written by someone who loves the Bible, knows it well, and delights in teaching it to God’s people. This is not a dry exercise in biblical hermeneutics, but an unfolding exposition designed to forever change how we read and understand the Bible. “The Old Testament is a rich and beautiful proposal of marriage,” Drew writes, “designed to win not only our faith but also our affection. Sadly, we are generally so ignorant of this packaging that our love remains unkindled.”

Drew takes us into each part of the Old Testament—history, poetry, wisdom literature, and prophecy—showing how

Christ is central in each. As he develops his message, he shows how the unfolding biblical story of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation is the story of Christ, from beginning to end. And being a good teacher, he not only allows us to listen in as he interacts with the text, but provides study questions with each chapter which force us to read and study the Bible for ourselves, sharpening our ability to read it as our Lord did.

We recommend *The Ancient Love Song* to you. Read it, do the study exercises, and then dig into the Old Testament better equipped to find Christ in its pages. ■

~Denis D. Haack

### Source:

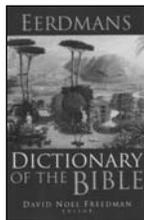
Doriani from “Getting The Message Seminar,” an unpublished manuscript by Dr. Daniel Doriani. Drew from *The Ancient Love Song*, p. 2.

### Book reviewed:

*The Ancient Love Song: Finding Christ in the Old Testament* by Charles D. Drew (Phillipsburg, PA: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing; 1996, 2000) 203 pp.

## Briefly Noted: The Bible from A to Z

by Denis D. Haack.



If you are looking for a new Bible dictionary, you might want to consider *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. Comprehensive yet accessible, it is written by scholars for a general audience. The over 600 authors represent a wide range of theological conviction (from evangelical to Roman Catholic to liberal and beyond), which, depending on what you want in a Bible dictionary, is either a strength or a weakness. I’m glad to have it in my library; though, as with all Bible dictionaries, this one needs to be read with appreciation for the scholarship, and with discernment.

Book noted: *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* edited by David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; 2000) 1425 pp. + maps.

# What Revival Looks Like



**M**any Christians seem clear about their desire for reformation and revival, but they are sometimes less clear when asked to describe exactly what this movement of God's Spirit would look like in our decaying culture. Or what Christians might choose to do—besides prayer—that might serve to prepare the stage for such an event. One way to shed light on this question is to develop a theology of revival, such as Richard Lovelace's helpful study in *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*. Another helpful approach would be to study earlier revivals, which is what historian Herbert Schlossberg has done in his new book *The Silent Revolution and the Making of Victorian England*. This is serious history, carefully footnoted throughout; it is also a fascinating and well-told story of how the evangelical revival of Wesley, Whitefield, and Wilberforce swept through and transformed a decadent society. When Queen Victoria assumed the throne in 1837, the transformation which is known (and sometime derided) as "Victorianism" was already in place. And though far from perfect, Schlossberg argues it represented a transformation of English culture that was so profound that only the term revolution does it justice. In the process, slavery was abolished, education was revitalized, the church reformed, the poverty of the masses was addressed, and morals and manners were renewed.

"The idea of the pre-Victorian period as a revolutionary one is not new," Schlossberg says. "When the French social observer Alexis de Tocqueville arrived in England in 1833, he thought the country had experienced a great revolution that was still in progress. The key lay in his meaning of the term revo-

lution, which he defined as 'any fundamental change in the law, or any social transformation, or any substitution of one regulating principle for another.' He explicitly did not mean 'a violent or sudden change.' He might have gone on to describe that English revolution as a greater one than that of his homeland, which, after all, was followed by a succession of republics, monarchies, and empires. It is hard to see that the life of the typical French citizen (or subject) changed much in the course of this or that political convulsion, if we except the trail of bodies left in its wake, whereas the cultural revolution of which he spoke changed England profoundly and for many decades.

"What sort of change did Tocqueville have in mind when he wrote of the English revolution? Consider his account of a luncheon at the Earl of Radnor's house on May 27, 1835: 'Before coming to table Lord Radnor went to his study; Lady Radnor and his daughters went there too; after a moment eleven or twelve women and eight or ten men-servants came in... These twenty people took their places round the room and knelt down looking towards the wall. Near the fireplace Lord and Lady Radnor and Lady Louisa knelt down too, and Lord Radnor read a prayer aloud, the servants giving the responses. This sort of little service lasted six or eight minutes, after which the male and female servants got up and went out in the same order to resume their work.' And Tocqueville described Lord Radnor, because of his political affiliations, as a *radical*. Everywhere Tocqueville traveled in England he saw this sort of devotional exercise, which he knew very well he would not have seen a half century earlier. Of course, if that had been all

that happened, just a little ceremony superimposed upon the same set of habits and relationships, it would have had little meaning. But Tocqueville observed that the culture had changed in profound ways that were symbolized by such ceremonies, and that is why he called the changes revolutionary."

*The Silent Revolution* is a story of Christian faithfulness in the midst of mistakes, discouragement, and cultural decadence. It is also a story of the grace of God in causing the gospel to ripple out across an entire society. Read it to be encouraged, to learn the lessons of the past, and to be reminded to pray to the One who continues to work in human history. Read it also to be reminded that we must be people of hope and faithfulness even when all around us

***The Silent Revolution is a story of Christian faithfulness in the midst of mistakes, discouragement, and cultural decadence. It is also a story of the grace of God rippling out across an entire society.***

seems dark. By the end of the period covered in this book, the revival was already beginning to unwind. Dr. Schlossberg is presently at work writing the story of that decline.

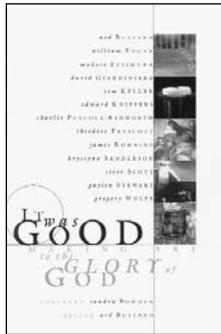
We recommend *The Silent Revolution* to you. ■

~Denis D. Haack

#### Book reviewed:

*The Silent Revolution and the Making of Victorian England* by Herbert Schlossberg (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press; 2000) 314 pp. + notes + index.

## Images of Glory



**H**aving been raised in a pietistic Fundamentalist home, my first art history class in college providentially became one of the defining moments of my spiritual pilgrimage. I had been taught that art is worldly, an unnecessary distraction in a world which is doomed to judgment. Yet, as I sat looking at slide after slide of works of art spanning the centuries, I was overcome by the beauty of what had been produced. How could such creativity be anything but glorious? Slowly, as my sense of wonder increased, that wonder raised nagging doubts about my faith. After all, finding myself attracted to what is worldly and condemned to the fire of God's wrath is hardly reassuring, especially when I realized that the art seemed to be resonating more deeply in my soul than anything my church offered up on Sundays.

Doubt can harden into unbelief, of course, which is a reason it must be taken seriously. It can also, however, prompt the doubter to reexamine things. Thankfully, by this time, I had been introduced to L'Abri, a community of God's people where doubters are welcomed. There I learned that art needs no justification because we are made in the image of the Creator, and therefore called to creativity. Or as Francis Schaeffer put it in a sentence that is burned into my memory, "The Christian is the one whose imagination should fly beyond the stars."

Dutch statesman and theologian Abraham Kuyper said "the beautiful is not the product of our own fantasy, nor

of our subjective perception, but has an objective existence, being itself the expression of a Divine perfection." Our heavenly Father is the infinitely glorious One in whom all beauty has both its source and ultimate fulfillment. This is the reason why beauty can not be separated from truth and morality, and why art is essential to human life. "For as God is infinitely the greatest Being," Jonathan Edwards said, "so he is allowed to be infinitely the most beautiful and excellent: and all the beauty to be found throughout the whole creation, is but the reflection of the diffused beams of that Being who hath an infinite fullness of brightness and glory; God...is the foundation and fountain of all being and beauty." Or, to use the words of the psalmist, "The Mighty One, God, the LORD, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to the place where it sets. From Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth" (Psalm 50:1-2).

Good books on art from a Christian perspective are relatively rare, and so it is a real delight to be able to call attention to *It Was Good: Making Art to the Glory of God* from Square Halo Books. This is very good book, and I hope it is read widely both within the church, and without. A thoughtful collection of thirteen essays by different authors, *It Was Good* is a demonstration of what it means to think and live faithfully regarding the arts. Illustrated throughout with black and white reproductions, the book is further enhanced with thirteen color reproductions on eight plates of glossy paper in the center of the book.

***A gospel which speaks to the mind but not to the heart and imagination is not the gospel of Jesus.***

What is more, *It Was Good* was published with the realization—so important, though so rarely comprehended by Christians today—that there is a pre-evangelistic significance to art for Christians living in a pluralistic, post-modern world. The book was published, editor Ned Bustard writes in the Introduction, to "offer both theoretical and practical insights into the making of art from a biblical perspective. And this is crucially important in our age since the area of Beauty is the only point of connection with society since the bridges of Truth and Goodness have been

burned." In other words, we can not expect non-Christians in our image-soaked culture to find plausible a faith which claims to be good news but is devoid

of the winsomeness of art. Claiming to know the Creator as Father is implausible when creativity is absent in our lives, homes, churches, and conversation. A gospel which speaks to the mind but not to the heart and imagination is not the gospel of Jesus. He is the one who told stories, parables so cunningly crafted that they continue to capture hearts two thousand years later. But note: it is not that we must be interested in art because beauty and creativity has significance in our pre-evangelism (though it does). Rather we must be interested in art, whether we are artists or not, because Christ is the King of glory, to whom and for whom all glory is due. And as we are faithful, exhibiting creativity in speech and life, we will also be effective ambassadors bringing a message of glory to a dark and troubled world.

# and Brokenness

Though *It was Good* consists of thirteen chapters by thirteen authors, it is more than simply a compilation of essays which happen to be on art from a Christian perspective. Carefully developed, the book covers a thoughtful variety of topics designed to give an expansive overview of art and creativity. Each essay can be read on its own, yet the entire volume ends up being more than simply the sum of its parts. But let me note merely a few of the chapters that stimulated my thinking.

**T**imothy Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian in Manhattan lists three contributions that artists bring to the church in “Why We Need Artists.” Artists are needed to equip the people of God for worship, thanksgiving, and praise, and artists are essential for evangelism, “because without art,” Rev. Keller insists, “we cannot reach the world.” Artists are also needed within the Christian community, Keller says, because “reason tells me about the truth, but I really cannot grasp what it means; I can’t understand truth without art.” I suspect that Keller’s argument may surprise many evangelicals. They might respond that though they have no interest in art, they understand the truth just fine, thank you very much. And sadly, it is difficult to convince them otherwise, since this Enlightenment view of truth being purely rational has infiltrated the people of God like a virus, silent but deadly. But Keller is correct, and buttresses his case by drawing on the work of Jonathan Edwards. “Edwards said that unless you use imagination,

unless you take a truth and you image it—which of course is art—you don’t know what it means. If you cannot visualize it, you don’t have a sense of it in your heart.”

William Edgar, professor of apologetics at Westminster Seminary and jazz pianist, writes about pessimism and optimism in “Why is Light Given to the Miserable?” He argues Christians must be people of hope rather than pessimists or optimists, and then he explores the life and music of Johannes Brahms to show how hope can be expressed gloriously in music. “Here is the crux of the matter,” Dr. Edgar says. “How does one describe a world in which God’s good creation has been spoiled by sin, but is being redeemed by His grace? Brahms could be our model. Often in art that claims to be Christian, the balance is wrong.”

And there is so much more. Gregory Wolfe, editor of *Image: A Journal of the Arts and Religion*, explores “Art, Faith, and the

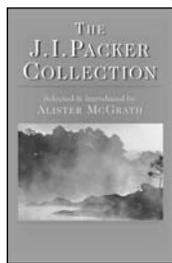
Stewardship of Culture.” Krystyna Sanderson, a New York photographer, writes about light, darkness, and her photographs in “A Sense of Permanence.” Edward Knippers, a powerful and thoughtful painter who expresses in his artwork the narrative of Scripture, explores subject and theme in “The Old, Old Story.” Theodore Prescott, sculptor and professor at Messiah College,

***Artists are needed to equip the people of God for worship, thanksgiving, praise, and evangelism***

writes “Who Do You Say I Am? Artist and Christian: Two Identities, One Person?”

Since Square Halo Books is hardly well known (yet), their statement of purpose is worth noting: “In Christian art, the square halo identified a living person presumed to be a saint. Square Halo Books is devoted to publishing works that present contextually

## Briefly Noted: Thinking w/J.I. Packer



by Denis D. Haack.

Few modern evangelical theologians have been as prolific or as influential as James Innell Packer. Best known perhaps, for *Knowing God*, Packer has been writing thoughtful articles for various publications for over three decades. In *The J. I. Packer Collection*, Oxford professor of historical theology Alister McGrath reproduces 16 pieces by Packer, providing both an introduction and a set of study/discussion questions for each essay.

The range of issues addressed by Dr. Packer is impressive, a testimony to his scholarship and to the fact that for the last half of the twentieth century he has been at the cutting edge of theological reflection. Topics include revelation and inspiration, idolatry, the problem of eternal punishment, C. S. Lewis, revival, the Lordship of Christ, and Christian spirituality. Reading through these essays and using the study questions will help us learn to think theologically by allowing us to be taught by a man whose mind has been renewed by God’s word.

We recommend *The J. I. Packer Collection* to you.

**Book reviewed:**

*The J. I. Packer Collection* selected and introduced by Alister McGrath (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; 1999) 284 pp. + sources.

# Paper and Canvas cont.

sensitive biblical studies, and practical instruction consistent with the Doctrines of the Reformation. The goal of Square Halo Books is to provide materials useful for encouraging and equipping the saints.” Contact them by mail (P. O. Box 18954, Baltimore, MD 21206) or on the web ([www.SquareHaloBooks.com](http://www.SquareHaloBooks.com)).

We recommend *It Was Good: Making Art to the Glory of God* to you. It will help you think Christianly about art, stimulate you to be creative for God’s glory, introduce you to some artists who are seeking to glorify God in their work, and if you are like me, cause you to stop and worship the One whose glory is beautiful beyond all our imagining. ■

~Denis D. Haack

**Sources:** Schaeffer from *Art and the Bible: Two Essays* by Francis A. Schaeffer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; 1973) p. 5; Kuyper from *Lectures on Calvinism* by Abraham Kuyper (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; 1931) p. 156; Edwards from *The Nature of True Virtue* by Jonathan Edwards quoted in *Culture in Christian Perspective* by Leland Ryken (Portland, OR: Multnomah; 1986) p. 70.

#### Book reviewed:

*It Was Good: Making Art to the Glory of God* edited by Ned Bustard (Baltimore, MD: Square Halo Books; 2000) 272 pp. + suggested readings + notes on authors.

#### Artist Intention vs. Viewer Perception

“In our battle-weary culture, concerns about ethical standards can create special problems for Christians who are artists. Pressures from an imagined audience can be troubling. I believe that while artists are responsible for what they make, they are not responsible for what their audience perceives. It is useful here to recall Upton Sinclair’s remark after the success of his famous novel *The Jungle*, published in 1906, which exposed the sordid conditions in Chicago’s meat packing industry. Sinclair hoped to outrage his readers with his descriptions of the low pay, danger, exploitation, and social injustices workers endured. He said, ‘I aimed for their heart, but I hit them in the stomach.’ What outraged readers was not the plight of the workers, but the disgusting and unsanitary ways meat was processed. Their revulsion helped stimulate reforms in the industry.

“This anecdote is relevant to questions of morality in art. Christians who are artists may offend the moral sensibilities of their local church, or a particular audience, even though in their own minds they have worked within the bounds of morality. This is especially true if audiences are looking for a certain position as an indication of the Christian commitment of the artist. There is no easy way out of this dilemma. To the degree that the artist tries to guess an audience’s response and adjusts the work to appease sensitive sensibilities, the likelihood increases that artistic power and expression will be diminished. So while artists must care for their works’ audience, they cannot be controlled by it. In the final analysis, no one can aim art so well as to be assured of audience response. This is true even for advertisers, who spend billions of dollars trying to manipulate audience reactions. And art is hardly advertising.”

Excerpt from “Who Do You Say I Am? Artist and Christian: Two Identities, One Person?” by Theodore Prescott in *It Was Good: Making Art to the Glory of God* (pp. 149-150).

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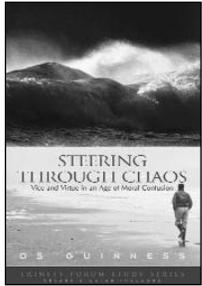
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## Trinity Forum Study Series



Since 1991 Os Guinness has led The Trinity Forum, a nonprofit organization designed to contribute to the transformation and renewal of society through the transformation and renewal of leaders. The Forum hosts an ongoing series of seminars, the format for which is not lectures but rather readings and discussion, enabling participants to engage ideas together. Now the material—the readings and discussion guides—for two of the seminars have been published in book form, *Steering Through Chaos: Vice and Virtue in an Age of Moral Confusion* and *When No One Sees: The Importance of Character in an Age of Image* will be of interest to every thinking Christian who wants to engage issues that matter in a group setting.

Everything you need is included: the readings, discussion questions, even a guide for using the series as a group study. The Series represents a way of thinking and living which is discerning and challenging rather than merely reactionary and comfortable. There is substance here, far more than we've come to

expect from much of the small group discussion material available on the market. And perhaps best of all, the material is specifically designed to appeal equally to non-Christians as well as to believers.

Guinness identifies the assumptions and convictions behind his approach: the Series...

...explores the issues of our day in the context of faith;

...presents the perspective of faith in the context of the sweep of Western civilization, recognizing the vital place of the past in the lives of nations as well as individuals;

...presents the perspective of faith in the context of the challenges of other faiths;

...is unashamed about the necessity for tough-minded thinking;

...recognizes that many of the urgent public issues of our day are cultural rather than political; and

...assumes the special need for, and the possibility of, a social and cultural renaissance in our time.

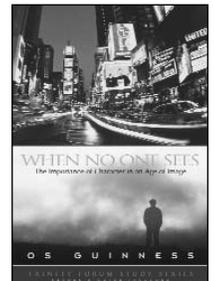
We recommend *Steering Through Chaos* and *When No One Sees* to you. Work through them on your own. Use them as a family with older children. Use them in a small group. And be sure to invite non-Christians to participate. ■

~Denis D. Haack

### Books reviewed:

*Steering Through Chaos: Vice and Virtue in an Age of Moral Confusion* by Os Guinness, edited by Virginia Mooney, reader's guide by Karen Lee-Thorp (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress; 2000) 340 pp.

*When No One Sees: The Importance of Character in an Age of Image* by Os Guinness, edited by Virginia Mooney, reader's guide by Karen Lee-Thorp (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress; 2000) 329 pp.



## Briefly Noted: Sex, Medicine, & Faith



The Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity has published two more volumes in their superb series of books on medical ethics. *The Reproduction Revolution* and *Bio-Engagement* are both collections of scholarly papers on some of the most important bioethical issues of our day from the perspective of Christian faith. For more information on the Center, its newsletter *Dignity*, its journal *Ethics & Medicine*, or its other programs, conferences, and resources, including *The Reproduction Revolution* and *Bio-Engagement* and the other books in this series, contact The Center For Bioethics and Human Dignity, Bannockburn Institute, 2065 Half Day Road, Deerfield, IL 60015. Or phone (847/317-8180), or fax (847/317-8153), or visit them on the Web (<http://www.cbhd.org>).

We recommend both *The Reproduction Revolution* and *Bio-Engagement* to you. If you don't wish a copy for your own library, make sure you have easy access to them by purchasing copies for your church library. And if you are in either medicine or ministry, order the entire series.

### Books noted:

*The Reproduction Revolution: A Christian Appraisal of Sexuality, Reproductive Technologies, and the Family* edited by John F. Kilner, Paige C. Cunningham, and W. David Hager (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company; 2000) 282 pp. + index.

*Bio-Engagement: Making a Christian Difference through Bioethics Today* edited by Nigel M. de S. Cameron, Scott E. Daniels, and Barbara J. White (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company; 2000) 260 pp. + index.

by Denis D. Haack.

## Radiohead's



**for the  
Holes  
in the  
Soul**

Radiohead's long-anticipated record, *Kid A* (2000) is the antidote to the Disneyfied-saccharine-commodification of pop and the misogynist-angry-victimization of hip hop. Instead, *Kid A* is a cerebral rock experience. Here is a rock album for the honest person who eschews numbing feelings, abandoning thought, and playing the victim. David Cheal writes in the *London Telegraph* that "Radiohead are pop stars who prefer to spend their

time thinking about stuff than showing their bottoms to the paparazzi in the south of France." Lead singer Thom Yorke puts it bluntly: "If you want to be entertained, go and see Hanson." Radiohead is the thinking person's rock group. Film actor Brad Pitt has called Radiohead "the Kafka and the Beckett of our generation." And while *Kid A* is a marked contrast to their previous alternative rock albums, it remains infused with the same personal authenticity and artistic integrity that has given Radiohead a near cult-like following on both sides of the Atlantic.

Radiohead is a five-person group from Oxford, England. They met at a private boys school in Abingdon, a suburb of Oxford, and in 1987 formed a group called On A Friday. The band was put on hold as they finished their college education at such prestigious universities as Cambridge, Exeter, and Liverpool Polytechnic. Early in 1991, they regrouped in Oxford, cut a deal with EMI Records, and changed their name to Radiohead (after a Talking Heads' song). Their first three albums met with increasing success: *Pablo Honey* (1992), *The Bends* (1995), and *OK Computer* (1997). *OK Computer* won the band a Grammy Award for Best Alternative Rock Performance in 1998.

*Kid A* defies easy description. It is best described as a deeply personal reflection on the state of one's heart in the midst of a postmodern world. The music conjures a world blurred and out of focus. *Newsweek* called the album, with perhaps a little too much whimsy, a "sure

winner for the 'Lie in Bed, Stare at the Ceiling, Contemplate Life' Album Award." The sense of the album is one of isolation and despair, tension without resolution. The words are loosely littered throughout the musical score like the fragmented musings of one's own agitated stream-of-consciousness: "Yesterday I woke up sucking a lemon," "What's going on?" "Vultures circling the dead," "Who's in a bunker," and "It's not like the movies, they feed us little white lies." *Kid A* raises questions

*Red wine and sleeping pills*  
*Help me get back to your arms*  
*Cheap sex and sad films*  
*Help me get back where I belong*  
*I think you're crazy, maybe*

and emotions about one's place in the world that we have made.

Every cultural artifact serves as the answer to an unspoken question. Linguist Kenneth Burke suggests that a cultural text like *Kid A* is best understood as a symbolic act, what he calls a "situation strategy." A cultural text is the answer to a question, problem, or crisis. It is the listener's responsibility to uncover the question or situation being addressed by the text. Burke writes, "We are reminded that every document bequeathed us by history must be treated as a strategy for encompassing a situation. Thus, when considering some document like the American Constitution, we



# Kid A

shall be automatically warned not to consider it in isolation, but as the answer or rejoinder to assertions current in the situation in which it arose.”

What is the question that *Kid A* addresses? Perhaps the title itself gives us a clue.

“Kid A” is a reference to genetic engineering. This album is a poetic message and warning to “Kid A,” the first cloned human embryo—like the sheep Dolly before him. Like Puritan poet Anne Bradstreet’s “Letter to an Unborn Child,” *Kid A* is a musical message to the first test tube boy as he comes to terms with his own history and the brave new world that begat him. The child awakes to a world where everything seems to be in its right place, and yet no one seems to know the answer to what is going on. Thom Yorke moans, “The lights are on but nobody’s home.” Everyone is walking, but to where? Only death seems real. The album ends with the line “I will see you in the next life.” Life from the test tube to oblivion seems inevitable, but also inconceivable. And so Radiohead captures the

***Stop sending letters  
Letters always get burned  
It's not like the movies  
They fed us on little white lies  
I will see you in the next life***

feeling of confusion that comes from being born into such a meaningless world.

Christians are frequently too quick to give answers. Unless we can identify with a modern seeker’s sense of meaninglessness out of our own life experience or out of empathetic reflection, our answers to their deepest longings will seem trite and sentimental. Theologian John Dominic Crossan captures this feeling when he suggested that for the postmodern person, “There is no lighthouse keeper. There is no lighthouse. There is no dry land. There are only people living on rafts made from their own imaginations.” *Kid A*, like Nine Inch Nail’s *The Fragile*, captures this feeling well.

That this seemingly enigmatic album has been met with commercial success bodes well for our culture. When questions are faced, answers are found. For spiritual sloth is the principal sin of our day. We live in an entertainment economy based on diversion and studied indifference. Fame, fortune, and fashion are the white lies of pop culture that prove empty in real life. Radiohead’s *Kid A* is mood music for facing the inevitable holes in one’s soul. It’s the right place to begin.

And for those who would love those who are still seeking, there is no better way than through music to capture again the feelings of emptiness that can now be filled with God’s love. Let God break our hearts once more for those who still live with the unanswered reality of their questions. “Kid A” is the postmodern Adam—a genetic orphan born into a world that no longer seeks its true home.

Radiohead’s message is that the longings still remain.

~David John Seel, Jr. and Stephan Fisher

*John Seel is the Headmaster of Logos Academy, a Christ-centered, classical, college preparatory school in Dallas, Texas. He is also the author of Parenting Without Perfection: Being a Kingdom Influence in a Toxic World, which is published by NavPress.*

*Stephan Fisher is a 18-year-old senior at Logos Academy and serious Radiohead fan.*

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**by  
David  
John  
Seel,  
Jr.  
and  
Stephan  
Fisher**

# Hymns & Reading Guides

<http://www.tch.simplenet.com>

## The Cyber Hymnal

If you are looking for a resource on Christian hymns, this is a site which you should check out. The Cyber Hymnal includes over 2500 hymns, all cross-indexed according to title, tune, author, composer, topic, and Scriptural allusion. Pictures of authors and composers are often included. If your computer includes speakers and a sound card, clicking on a particular hymn allows you to hear it played (over and over) while you read the words or background information.

### Ransom Ratings

**Design:** Simple but effective.

**Contents:** Worship leaders and Christians seeking to make hymns a part of their devotional life will find this site helpful. Since the music is played, it's possible to use this site to learn new hymns, and to have access to hymns not included in the hymnals we happen to own or to which we have access.

**Ease of Use:** Easily negotiated. The site is obviously designed to serve the Christian community by granting easy access to hymns and the data behind them.

The Cyber Hymnal

<http://www.randomhouse.com/vintage/read/>

## Reading Group Guides

Readers of *Critique* are often encouraged to read and discuss good books, and this site includes a host of book discussion guides that are free and easily downloaded. Though not written from a Christian perspective, the guides are thoughtful and would enhance any book discussion. Titles published by Knopf, Pantheon, Vintage, Schocken, Everyman's, and Random House are included. Graphics of the book cover, and links for information about the author and/or films being made of the book are included.

### Ransom Ratings

**Design:** Attractive, with good graphics.

**Contents:** Click on "Reading Group Guides" to find a list of what's available. Or begin by author or title. In any case, the guides are free, and there is even a page of tips for leading good discussions, and suggestions for the leader. Reading group leaders add their comments to the site via email, which makes it something of an ongoing conversation for book discussion lovers. You can also order the books, but this aspect of the site, though convenient, is not intrusive.

**Ease of Use:** Easy to understand and make use of. Recommended.

Reading Group Guides

**The articles and resources reproduced or recommended in Critique do not necessarily reflect the thinking of Ransom Fellowship. The purpose of this newsletter is to encourage thought, not dictate points of view.**

*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.

*Critique* is sent as a ministry to all donors to Ransom Fellowship, which is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, tax-deductible ministry. Everyone on Ransom's mailing list also receive *Notes from Toad Hall*, a newsletter written by Margie Haack in which she reflects on what it means to be faithful in the ordinary and routine of daily life, and gives news about Ransom's ministry.