

# Critique

Helping Christians Develop Skill in Discernment

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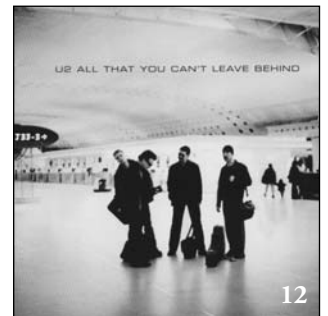
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Denis Haack

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# Editor's Note



## Bad words.

**L**iving in Babylon raises challenges that Jerusalem dwellers never face. In Jerusalem, for example, since life and culture is intimately related to God's word, it is possible for believers to be shielded from offensive

language. Babylonians who visit can be warned to clean up their mouths, but even if they don't, their status as foreigners is reassuring and children who happen to be exposed to their lack of decorum can be warned not to be like the unbelievers. Not perfect of course, but far easier than living in Babylonia where offensive language is not only shouted in the public square, but incorporated into art—woven into the lyrics of songs and the dialogue of films.

We have long argued in these pages that we Christians must not allow our sensibilities to be a barrier to the gospel. (See my series on "Being In the World but Not of It," the next installment of which will appear in the next issue.) The language of my neighbor might be offensive to righteousness, but so is my sin. If I find his language more offensive than my sin, the problem is mine. And there is no biblical warrant for insisting that he clean up his language before I am willing to lay down my life for the sake of befriending him with the good news of Christ. It is true that Paul was "distressed" by the idolatry he found in Athens, but that is quite unlike the "offense" so many take over the behavior of non-Christians today. Our offense makes us withdraw, while Paul's distress motivated him to engage Athenian culture and belief more deeply, even though it was thoroughly pagan.

It is vital to train our children in the importance of words; that what we say matters to the

Lord we serve and love. Small children can be sheltered, but living in Babylon means sheltering will always be both incomplete and temporary. Godly parenting involves more than sheltering. It also involves mentoring our young people so they can honor God with their mouths while being able to interact with unbelievers who hold to different standards. Our example is vital here, and demonstrating both godly speech and a quiet confidence in the power of the gospel in the face of Babylonian offensiveness will prepare them to walk by faith instead of retreating. Failing to react can be a profound grace in an offensive world.

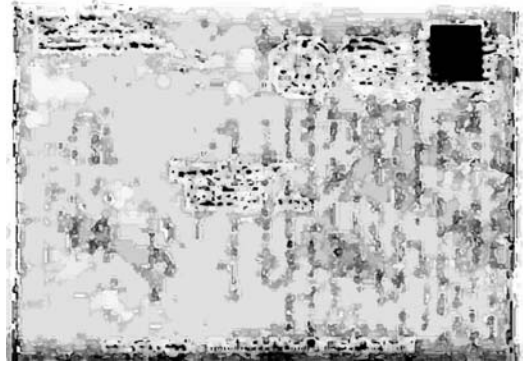
I thought about this because of a word in one of U2's songs quoted in the Tuned In column in this issue. Though commonly heard in Babylon, it is a word that none of us are eager to hear from the lips of our children. So we have masked it with \*\* in these pages, though that will fool no one except for the very young. We've masked it because we want people to not have to hide this publication and masking is usually expected in such instances—though our stance on a number of issues has already put us over the edge for some who name Christ as Savior.

Interestingly, though we have masked the word, the statement in the offending line is correct biblically. The song insists that the world is a fallen place, incomplete and fragmented and sad, and though the lyric uses a word to describe that brokenness which isn't found in most Christian's vocabulary, it doubtlessly speaks to Babylonians. That may not be a sufficient reason to adopt the term ourselves, but it might make us hesitate before we launch the first stone.

We do not print these lyrics lightly, or because we think language doesn't matter, but because just as Paul quoted the pagan poet who was actually speaking of Zeus (Acts 17:28), so we too find truth in surprising places in Babylon.

~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.

I'm intrigued by the ongoing discussion in *Critique* regarding OT law. I think that if we are to participate with nonChristians in credible discussions about the OT—AND if we are to tackle our own uneasy questions about OT law (such as Bob Stevens raised in #6-2001)—we can begin with the fact that Jesus never allowed the OT to function as a formulaic rule book. I accept the Sermon on the Mount as a gauntlet tossed at my feet with the challenge, "Figure THIS into your simplistic readings of OT Law." And so I can sympathize with the questions raised (quite cleverly, I must say) by Dr. Laura's challenger.

In response to Bob's specific peeves, it seems to me that whenever I take offense at the absurdities of OT law, I'm faced with at least three possible dilemmas: (1) Could it be that God is less merciful, just, and sensible than I am? (2) Could it be that the OT law, as it has been handed down to us, is not of divine origin after all? (3) Could it be that I don't really understand all that's at stake, so rather than God overreacting to such offenses as gathering sticks on the Sabbath, perhaps I don't "get" the significance of the Sabbath?

Not to dismiss the first two possibilities out of hand, I must admit that the third makes me squirm the hardest, for it smacks me upside the head with the possibility that I don't understand what holiness is. "Keep the Sabbath holy," "be holy as I am holy"—when I'm honest, I confess that I barely begin to grasp the meaning of those too-familiar words. How, then, can I possibly understand (or share) God's outrage over their violation? However, I don't think that hurts my witness to a nonChristian. Rather, it creates common ground on which we both stand in some degree of ignorance before a Great Mystery—and I would much rather invite someone to explore it with me than represent it to her as a done deal.

As a woman, I constantly flinch over the OT laws that seem to devalue women, in the same way that Bob cries out against the slavery laws. I too am disappointed by God's willingness to merely lead Israel to slightly higher moral ground than her pagan neighbors when He could have expressly condemned the social attitudes and hierarchies that are so offensive to my modern Western sensibilities; but because of Jesus' teaching on divorce in Matt. 19, I know that I need not assume God's "implicit acceptance" of those ancient social practices simply because He did not legislate against them. In fact, there are many places in scripture where God openly makes concessions to human weaknesses (such as giving Israel a king, even though He condemned their desire for one). God is far more pragmatic than we often care to admit.

I look forward to reading the thoughts of other *Critique* readers. The arrival of every issue is cause for celebration and many prayers of thanksgiving in my house. Such a breath of fresh air.

**Sue Radosti**  
Sioux City, IA

In response to the article "Kissing Christian Concerts Goodbye" (Issue #6-2001):  
Maybe one of the reasons Christian musicians "throw in an altar call or a worship service sermonette" is that they feel compelled to appease those Christians who still think that certain genres of music (rock, rap, etc.) are inherently evil or not an acceptable way to praise God. Also, I'm sure some parents wouldn't let their children or teenagers attend concerts if they knew they would just be having fun instead of getting a sermon. However, it is the musician's responsibility to ensure that the possible criticism of a small group of people doesn't ruin the show for the rest of us.

**Roger Braun**  
St. Cloud, MN

## Neo-Paganism on Display

**A** Christian friend volunteers as a helper in her neighborhood public school library—a public school which happens to be in a suburb of a large city in Texas. At this school, a display case or marquee has been provided which is maintained by the school librarian. It usually consists of book recommendations built around some theme appropriate to that particular month, but occasionally involves more elaborate exhibits on some topic, demonstrating the sort of knowledge and research available in the library. Though no one knows how many students, faculty, staff, and visitors pause to take in the details of each display, the prominence of its size and location in the school makes it difficult to miss.

Last October, instead of simply using Halloween as the motif for that month's marquee, the librarian, a thoughtful and

committed neo-pagan, created a display on Wicca. There was a summary of Wiccan belief and practice, something of its history, a few pictures of prominent adherents and rituals, and a couple of books as suggested reading on the topic. When my friend arrived at school the first morning in October, she noticed the display, and stopped to read it. It was attractive and well researched, the sort of high quality work she had come to expect from the librarian.

Later that day, seven Christian teachers came to the library to protest the display on Wicca. They were offended by it, they told the librarian, felt it was inappropriate in a public school, and requested it be replaced by something religiously neutral. It didn't take long before the discussion became a bit heated, since the librarian was not convinced she needed

to dismantle the display, and the teachers threatened to go over her head and take their protest to the principal. Since the librarian and my friend, whose Christianity was well known, had become good friends, she was asked to join the conversation. "You're a Christian, so what do you think of all this?" the librarian asked her.

Which naturally provides an exercise in discernment for the thoughtful Christian. ■

~Denis Haack

### Author's note:

Though liberty was taken in the details of this discernment exercise, I am grateful to Mary Jane Grooms, who volunteers in her neighborhood public school library in Austin, TX, for the story.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What would you have said in response to the librarian's question? Assuming you might want to begin by asking some questions, what would you ask the librarian? What would you ask the Christian teachers who were protesting the display? Are there things that could be said in such a setting, and that a Christian might be tempted to say, but shouldn't? What are they?
2. Since my friend's Christian faith is well known to both the non-Christian librarian and the Christian teachers, how important is it that she side as much as possible with her brothers and sisters in this dispute? Why? To what extent should believers seek to maintain a unified front in the public square before unbelievers? Some claim this unity is connected to our witness before the world, and that a lack of unity will undercut the effectiveness of our witness to the gospel. Do you agree? Why or why not?
3. Some Christians argue that it is important that we insist on basic fairness, or on a "level playing field" in the public square. If Christianity can't be taught or be given any officially sanctioned advantage in public schools, neither should any other religion or world view. All displays in a public school, therefore, should be religiously neutral. Just as Paul appealed to Caesar, unabashedly making use of his rights as a Roman citizen, Christians should make sure their rights as American citizens are not ignored. By this reasoning, the Christian teachers' protest has less to do with their faith, per se, than with a desire for simple justice. Since it is unlikely that a display on Christianity would be tolerated, the display on Wicca should be protested. Respond.
4. My friend, in answer to the librarian's question, responded by first asking both sides a few questions. (Questions for the librarian): Why did she decide to make Wicca the theme of that month's display? What did she hope to accomplish? Why did she feel this was appropriate in a public school setting? What did she hear the teachers asking for? (And to the Christian teachers): What did they find offensive about the display? Had they read it carefully? What did they want the librarian to do?

## Oppression and Salvation

**H**ere and there it is still believed that the Boston house-slave, Phillis Wheatley, whose poem, "On the Death of the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield," came out in 1770, was the first African-American poet published in America. The honor belongs to Jupiter Hammon, a Long Island slave born Oct. 17, 1711, who published in 1761 "An Evening Thought: Salvation by Christ, With Penitential Cries," a poem of 22 quatrains written on Christmas Day, into which Hammon pours all the passion of his gratitude to Jesus Christ.

As to poetic quality, it is certainly inferior to Wheatley's elegy on Whitefield and to most of her poems; as to spiritual sincerity, it is unsurpassable.

Hammon's most important work, however, which was first published in 1787 and went through three editions, was a prose piece, "An Address to the Negroes of the

State of New York." It was, in essence, a 13-page pastoral letter to the black populace of New York, most of which was still in slavery.

Hammon's "Address" is a remarkable piece of work. He writes as an old man, over 70, and he writes to his compatriots as a father and mother wrapped into one—what all pastors ought to be to their people—sometimes soothing, sometimes scolding, always communicating his love for them and the anxiety and pain he feels on their behalf when they act selfishly and irresponsibly. He can hardly bear the deep poverty and misery in which slavery keeps them, but he mourns also how much spiritual hardness of heart and moral laziness he hears is found among them.

Hammon was shrewd enough to see that slaves often had a self-interest in being good servants, and he was bold enough to insinuate the hypocrisy of the white establishment that was constantly blathering about freedom from the tyrannical English but was completely blind to the tyranny it was inflicting on people in its own backyard in the wretched system of race-based slavery.

Jesse Jackson, Louis Farrakhan and other leaders have only been speaking Hammon's wisdom when they exhort blacks to take responsibility for themselves and warn that emotional and social paralysis is the price of defining oneself too much as victim. Hammon appeals to his fellow slaves as people capable of making moral choices and as individuals accountable to God. He makes the stunning claim that, in embracing Christ, they will gain a self-identity that puts them on a par with whites: The same God created both races, redeemed blacks and whites at the cross of Christ and is coming again in a Final Judgment when whites will have not one iota of advantage over blacks!

In the "Address," we see the pleadings of a gentle but serious man, an uneducated but terribly insightful man; a man in love with

God and at the same time profoundly committed to helping other people. He cared deeply about the black youth and expressed in the "Address" his desire that the younger slaves be set free.

However different his social situation, Hammon still has things to say to pastors in our time, and indeed, to anyone serious about empowering those beaten down by condescension and oppression. Though his writings are few and the details of his life are scant, educator Carolyn Reese, in a 1966 article, "From Jupiter Hammon to LeRoi Jones," was right in insisting that Hammon should get more recognition in our schools than he has as the first African-American known to be published in this country.

Seminaries would do well to study the "Address" as a model of pastoral care. Happily, Hammon was given a page in a recently published anthology, *Crossing the Danger Water: 300 Years of African-American Writing* (1993). But that book needn't have offered its thinly disguised apology for his Christian zeal, as if it was an embarrassment to his race.

Jupiter Hammon's Christian conviction animated his life and was the greatest single shaper of the high and noble self-identity he lived with and offered to other slaves. And by appealing to self-interest as well as duty in his moral counsels, Jupiter Hammon, self-taught though he was, showed himself to be an astute theologian of the Bible as well as a keen observer of human behavior and society. ■

~Ron Lutjens

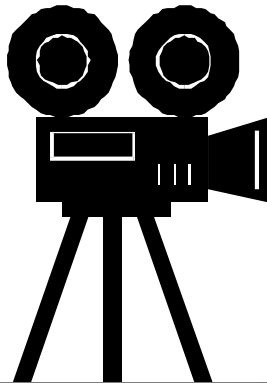
*Ron Lutjens is pastor of Old Orchard Presbyterian Church, Webster Groves. Copyright © 2001 by Ron Lutjens.*

**Source:** "Commentary," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Feb. 17, 1997. Excerpted by permission of the author.

### QUESTIONS CONTINUED

4. What did they hear the librarian saying? And then she said this to the librarian: "As usual, you did a superb job on the display. Each month you show creativity and thoughtfulness, and I really appreciate it. This one is attractive and well researched, and I learned a lot as I read it. It gives me confidence in your ability as a librarian and a researcher, and I look forward to the display in December. I hope you'll research Christmas just as well, and instead of the usual silly bells and Santas, you'll present the history and beliefs surrounding the birth of Christ with the same level of integrity." Respond.
5. If the Christian teachers later say they were deeply hurt and offended by my friend's response to the librarian, what should she do and/or say?

## The Irony and the Odyssey



### A review of *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

by Drew Trotter

#### Film Credits

##### Starring:

George Clooney  
(Ulysses Everett McGill)  
John Turturro  
(Pete Hogwallop)  
Tim Blake Nelson  
(Delmar O'Donnell)  
John Goodman  
(Big Dan Teague)  
Holly Hunter  
(Penny)  
Chris Thomas King  
(Tommy Johnson)  
Charles Durning  
(Pappy O'Daniel)

##### Directors:

Ethan and Joel Coen

##### Writers:

Ethan and Joel Coen

##### Producers:

Tim Bevan  
John Cameron  
Ethan Coen  
and others

##### Original music:

T-Bone Burnett  
Carter Burwell  
Chris Thomas King

##### Cinematographer:

Roger Deakins

##### Costume Designer:

Mary Zophres

106 minutes

Rated PG-13 for some violence and language.

According to Roger Ebert, Joel and Ethan Coen admit to never having read *Homer's Odyssey*, but I suspect that is one more ploy in the brothers' attempt to present themselves as the kings of irony in modern American film. Their most recent movie, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, is based loosely on the epic poem and is the latest in what is becoming a long line of fascinating, brilliant films. The brothers' movies—written, directed and produced by them—walk a razor-thin line between the cynical skewering of American life and a real acceptance of, and love for, the diverse regions and peoples of this country. They have made films about a gangster in Chicago (*Miller's Crossing*), trailer-dwellers in Arizona (*Raising Arizona*), a middle class police-woman in Minnesota (*Fargo*), the inventor of the Hula Hoop in corporate New York City (*The Hudsucker Proxy*), a whacked out “hippie” in southern California (*The Big Lebowski*), and now three escaped convicts in rural 1937 Mississippi. All these characters share the same magnanimous hearts, innocently empty heads and wildly inconsistent activities that mirror a country 92% of whose inhabitants claim to believe in God but only 37% of whom say they believe in absolute truth.

*O Brother* traces the journey of Ulysses Everett McGill (played winningly by George Clooney), a platitude-spouting voice of reason between the angry, suspicious Pete (John Turturro) and the sweet, embracing Delmar (Tim Blake Nelson) as he attempts to get back to his beloved wife

and mother of his seven daughters. The three are members of a chain gang who escape and engage in a series of adventures on the way, presumably to recover the stolen buried treasure Everett promises to split with them. In their travels, they meet up with a one-eyed Bible salesman (Homer's cyclops), three lovely sirens singing a mesmerizing version of “Didn't Leave Nobody But the Baby,” a governor named Menelaus (though he prefers to be called Pappy), a wife named Penelope, and even a blind soothsayer.

The references to the *Odyssey* aren't all the Coens draw attention to, however. As A. O. Scott put it, *O Brother* “is less a retelling of the founding epic of Western civilization than a portable anthology of Americana, a tinker's van festooned with scraps of ‘Moby-Dick,’ ‘The Wizard of Oz’ and Preston Sturges's ‘Sullivan's Travels.’” The convicts meet up with Baby Face Nelson and a blues guitarist modeled on Robert Johnson, the bluesman said to have acquired his skills by selling his soul to the devil (played by real-life guitarist Chris Thomas King).

But the real reference to American folk culture has less to do with characters, real or imagined, than it has to do with music. The film is so filled with what is often wrongly called “country” or “folk” music that the Coens admit that they like to call this film a musical. From a moving, opening scene chant, recorded in the 1920's, to the beat of a real rock-busting crew, to the central theme song recorded by the convicts plus Tommy and repeated several times during the film, a heart-felt, respectful attitude prevails that may indicate a belief



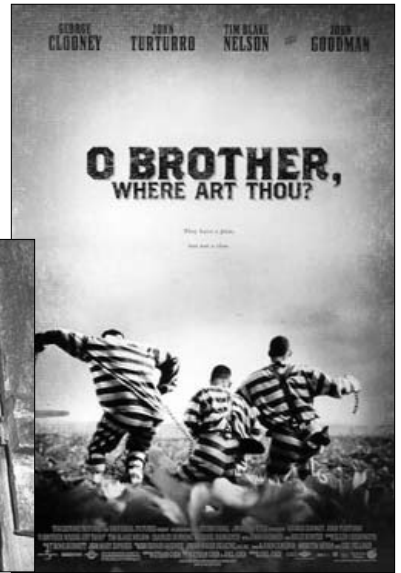
that here, in the music, is a center for life that will hold.

In the knee-slapping comedy of this film, it is easy to lose sight of a more serious purpose that may be there on the part of the Coens. While the film goes back and forth on the subject of religion, sometimes scorning it, sometimes lauding it, at the end of the film, as the three convicts talk about their rescue from hanging, Pete and Delmar agree that they were saved by a miracle in response to their prayers. Everett, always the skeptic of the supernatural, says that what is for them a divinely inspired event is in fact a perfectly explainable natural phenomenon. But he is stopped short by the fulfillment of a specific prophecy made at the beginning of the film, one that indicates that something more than just nature was active here. This comes after another lecture from Everett about how science was going to electrify the whole South and change its way of life forever, making it better. Now he is not so sure, if it means wiping out the music, the cows, and the prayers.

This is not to say, however, that the Coens have made Christianity as the way of salvation a major theme of the movie. What

they do seem to be affirming is a way of life that elevates the values of the simple, the heartfelt and the good. Family, music, belief—all these are affirmed in *O Brother*, and none is particularly elevated above the other.

Something soothing and solid pervades the magnificent sound track of this film with performances by such artists as Alison Krause, Gillian Welch, and Norman Blake. But the Coens may be driving at a deeper idea than salvation through simple living. The film gets its title from Preston Sturges's *Sullivan's Travels*, a 1941 movie about a Hollywood director who makes simple light comedies but has a desire to direct a movie called "O Brother, Where Art Thou?" which would "define the suffering and travail of the oppressed" in depression era



***Family, music, belief—all these are affirmed in O Brother, and none is particularly elevated above the other.***

America. Since he knows nothing about suffering himself, Sullivan goes undercover as a hobo to learn what it is like to be homeless, hungry and poor, getting himself in more trouble than he ever imagined possible. But what he finds out in the end is that the best thing he can do for the poor and the oppressed is to make them laugh, and he gives up on "Oh Brother," claiming in the last lines of the film: "There's a lot to be said for making people laugh. Did you know that's all some people have? It isn't much, but it's better than nothing in this cock-eyed caravan."

The Coens, with their comic vision of the absurd, are saying this through their films: We want to help make you laugh. It isn't much in a world filled with racism, greed, murder, war and hatred, but it is all we've got, and it's better than nothing. So come and laugh a little; at least we can give you that to help you through. They have indeed made Sullivan's "Oh Brother," and, ironically, it is a comedy. ■

~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. Copyright © 2001 by Andrew H. Trotter, Jr.*

## **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

1. Irony has been said to be the dominant idea in films of the last ten years. What is the place of irony in the Christian's view of the world?
2. The main characters in *O Brother* are as benign and lovable as any the Coen brothers have written. Does it matter that they are convicts? Why or why not? Which one did you like the most? Why?
3. Discuss the role music has in the film. The Coen brothers admit to letting music determine much of the movie, so much so they sometimes call *O Brother* a musical. What do you think of the fact that much of it is gospel music?
4. What role does the baptism of two of the characters play in the movie? Why do you think the Coens wrote the script so that the Clooney character was not baptized? What do you make of his prayer at the end of the movie?
5. Is there a place for God in the film? What do you think the Coen brothers think?

## From the Unseen to Tattoos

### Invisible art

It's fairly common knowledge that churches in Europe often contain art. Cathedrals can be popular spots for tourists, complete with altarpieces, stained glass windows, paintings, sculptures, and spectacular architecture. What is less well known, however, is that some of the art is placed so as to be invisible—invisible that is, to the congregation and to a tourist in search of a Kodak moment.

James Pakala, Covenant Theological Seminary librarian, reports an interesting discovery made by a friend of his, professor James Marchand. In the 1970's, Marchand was doing research on medieval stave churches. Stave churches are wooden buildings in which the logs or planks that make up the walls were placed vertically in the ground, rather than horizontally upon one another as in log cabin construction. Stave churches date to the eleventh century in Norway, though none of the originals exist since the posts inserted in the ground rotted away.

A modification was introduced in the twelfth century to correct that problem, and today 29 stave churches remain. Most are small, but a few are both ornate and amazingly large, given the method of construction. (See [www.bergen-guide.com/47](http://www.bergen-guide.com/47) on the Fantoff Stave Church near the city of Bergen.)

In any case, Marchand reports finding paintings in some stave churches that were placed so that only God could readily see them. Apparently commissioned and installed for God's glory and pleasure alone, the Norwegian Christians thought it unimportant that they could see the art.

Dr. Pakala notes how different this is from how we think of art in churches

today. If we have any art at all, it must be prominently displayed. "An outcry would occur in the building committee or congregation," Dr. Pakala says. "But nobody will SEE it THERE!" ■

~Denis Haack

**Sources:** *Select Items* from selected recently arriving periodicals at the library (#174; January 5, 2001) by James Pakala (Covenant Seminary, 12330 Conway Road, St Louis, MO 63141).

### Painful art

I was riding in the car with a Christian acquaintance when we pulled up to a stoplight near a college campus. At the corner a young man was dodging between the cars distributing fliers. He seemed friendly, smiling brightly even though a cold drizzle was falling. Like so many of his generation, he wore rings in his ears, studs in both eyebrows,

*Tattoos and body piercings seem mysterious to most Christians, or even repulsive.*

and on his forearms and reaching up onto his neck from under his collar were tattoos. Just as the light changed he approached us, but my acquaintance waved him away. "I can't imagine wanting to hear anything from someone like that," he said as we drove away.

In our town are several tattoo parlors. One distributes bumper stickers on which their motto is plainly displayed: "You're d\*\*n right...it hurts!"

All of which seems mysterious to most Christians, or even repulsive. What

needs to be asked, of course, is how we can justify being so isolated from such a significant portion of the population we are called to reach with the gospel? And since we expect missionaries to love, even at cost, the tattooed and pierced peoples to whom they are sent, who exempted us?

"What these young people are acting out, whether or not it is acknowledged, is the pursuit of a ritual that will add meaning to their lives," Heather Webb correctly notes. And pain is part of it. "Pain is an attempt to feel something, is against shallow living," Webb says. "Seeking pain can be an indication that something is wrong that needs to be paid for, justified, or made right. It can also be seen as an attempt to 'feel' anything at all."

Tattoos are personal art, an image which somehow captures something of who this person is. It is almost like showing a story, and is achieved in a ritual which marks them as part of a community—a commitment which comes at a cost.

Webb says she hears a generation asking this: "Am I given the chance to be human and known before you dismiss me because of what is on the surface that may startle, surprise, or even offend you? ...Can you see me and respond without judging me only for my appearance?"

How we answer these questions reveals much about the state of our soul. ■

~Denis Haack

**Recommended source:** "Pain as Ritual: Hearing Voices from the Alternative Culture" by Heather Webb in *Mars Hill Review* (Winter/Spring 2000) pp. 49-54. For information contact *MHR* by mail (P. O. Box 10506, Bainbridge Island, WA 98110) or on the web ([www.marshillforum.org](http://www.marshillforum.org)).



# Against Niceness

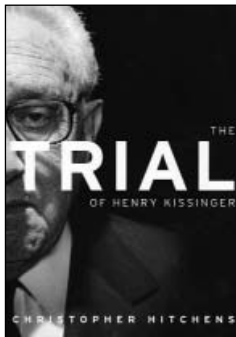
**M**uch has been written about the generalized, mandatory niceness that pervades middle- and upper brow culture. In an essay in the *Atlantic Monthly*, David Brooks notes that today's students at schools like Princeton University are fundamentally nice if also fundamentally amoral. We've come a long way since the days when Sir Thomas More likened Martin Luther to poop and Abraham Lincoln's adversaries called him a gorilla. The last time I heard a sermon on demons, it was prefaced with apologies. The dust jacket of a book I read recently poses the question: "Can Christians take a stand without stepping on toes?" The implication, of course, is that stepping on toes is bad.

It's ironic that probably the closest thing we have to a good old fashioned, in your face, don't-give-me-no-crap prophet these days is the devoutly secular journalist, Christopher Hitchens, columnist for *The Nation* and *Vanity Fair*. It isn't that Hitchens possesses the ultimate hope that drove the biblical prophets, he clearly doesn't, and it's likely that he'd say he's glad about that. But what he does possess is an enviable desire to see the truth about things stated openly and clearly. And since niceness often wars against clear truth, Hitchens finds himself perpetually at battle.

And so it was in the fall of 2001 when Christopher Hitchens could boast that he was one of a small handful of journalists who, all along, would not let go of Clinton's "personal" life. That's because, as Hitchens makes clear in the paperback edition of his excellent text, *No One Left to Lie To* (2000), Clinton has almost certainly raped (as opposed to simply manhandled) at least two

women. "This little book has no 'hidden agenda,'" Hitchens writes in the book's introduction. "It is offered in the most cheerful and open polemical spirit, as an attack on a crooked president and a corrupt and reactionary administration."

As if that weren't enough, in columns in *The Nation* Hitchens called Clinton a "thug" and a "scumbag," and while he took a lot of heat from the Left for his position, some found him singularly refreshing. For while conservatives in Congress and their spinsters were saying, Well, no, we're not upset that Clinton's been groping the help, we're just angry that he told a little fib in a federal court; and while the liberals in Congress and



*Hitchens possesses an enviable desire to see the truth about things stated openly and clearly.*

their spinsters were saying, LET'S JUST MOVE ON...while all this nonsense and lying was going on, Chris Hitchens showed up with the *not juste*: "scumbag." It was politically true and it's theologically true. Clinton is a scumbag, and so am I. But like most people, I'd prefer that my crashing flaws be referred to as "challenges."

Perhaps one of Hitchens' challenges is the anger—nay, the rage—that motivates him. Not the rage of a prophet through whom God makes plain His wrath but the anger of a person who simply but intensely dislikes the world's crooked ways. Thus while one enjoys Hitchens' facility with words and is amazed at his seemingly reckless refusal to say anything but exactly what he thinks, one ultimately puts his work down with hope diminished. Even if the agenda behind his

most recent book *The Trial of Henry Kissinger*—i.e. to have Kissinger tried for "war crimes" committed while serving in the Nixon and Ford administrations—is successful, tomorrow's news will bring another word of another purported war criminal. Hitchens is right not to be nice to war criminals, but in the end he doesn't have a lot to offer. He's a critic not a prophet.

Is there any place for prophets among us today—for men and women who proclaim the uncomfortable truth of God to powers and bureaucracies and churches and friends and culture? Christians want to say yes, but the question immediately begins to unravel, at least among believers devoted to thought and conversation. Varieties of biblical interpretation even among orthodox believers make claims to truth about anything beyond the essentials of faith suspect. And even things once considered clearly beyond the orthodox pale—e.g. homosexuality and first-term abortions—have been opened up for discussion, perhaps because an unwillingness to discuss something is evidence that one isn't nice.

Prophets don't "celebrate diversity," which means that if there are any around today, they must be having a rough time. Not long before Jesus got nailed, a man said to him, "prophecy," and then he punched Jesus in the mouth. In a way, that man is a human prototype. Human beings say that they want to know the truth, but oftentimes they really don't, and once you say it, you should get ready (so to speak) to get clocked in the jaw.

Better just to be nice. ■

~Preston Jones

*Preston Jones, a contributing editor to Books & Culture and book reviewer for the National Post and Ottawa Citizen, teaches at Logos Academy in Dallas. Copyright © 2001 by Preston Jones.*

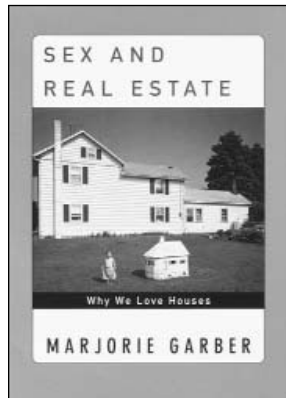
## The Edifice Complex: the

Perhaps it is more pronounced here than in other places. But the evidence seems to indicate otherwise. Dallas, Texas is the real estate capital of America. A large portion of the city's economy is dedicated to real estate oriented business: architecture, real estate development, real estate management, and banking. More than just a local phenomenon, Dallas developers are behind much of the land development nationwide. Compounding Dallas' real estate preoccupation is the fact that north Texas is "topographically challenged." There are no mountains, beaches, or rivers that trump the human scale or man-made monuments. Its history is captured in the beautifully restored *Book Depository*, where Lee Harvey Oswald shot President John F. Kennedy. Its future is captured in the Dallas City Hall designed by world-famous architect, I.M. Pei. Dallas is proud of its buildings (there is even a web site that lists them by height), but even prouder of its homes. It is here that one locates the underlying psychology of the metroplex.

A newcomer to Dallas is often perplexed, even offended, by the common greeting by a perfect stranger: "Where do you live?" At the gas station, the grocery store, the cleaners, or the florist, the question is always the same: "Where do you live?" Dallas like many other cities across America has established a social hierarchy determined by zip code, whether Man-hattan's Upper East Side, San Francisco's Pacific Heights, or Dallas' Park Cities.

Here as well as in all the major cities of America, real estate location and house selection are the primary social markers of status. Here are our monuments to the American Dream coupled in the twin concepts of the saga of the self-made man or woman and the fantasy of home ownership. America's love affair with houses is a cultural indicator of our cultural idolatries.

It is this preoccupation with houses that led Marjorie Garber to write *Sex and Real Estate: Why We Love Houses* (Pantheon, 2000). Professor



***Our homes become symbols of a life we wished we lived, if only we had the time.***

Garber is the William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of English and the Director of the Humanities Center at Harvard University. From the opening paragraph her thesis is clear: real estate has become a relational substitute in the lives of many Americans. She begins, "What do college students talk about with their roommates? Sex. Twenty years later, what do they talk about with their friends and associates? Real estate. And with the same gleam in their eyes. Real estate today has become a form of yuppie pornography."

Our use of words, Garber claims, reveals our heart condition. She makes a compelling case that home-buying has been cast in relational terms. House hunting is like dating. Realtors are the matchmakers. We relate to our homes in relational terms. Homes become surrogate lovers, emotional mothers, trophy wives, summer mistresses, and even

embodied selves.

Her deeper claim is that homes have not only become surrogate relationships, but substitute lives. Our homes become symbols of a life we wished we lived, if only we had the time. "For busy people," Garber explains, "space has come to substitute for time, and the house becomes the un-lived life. In an era when the 'welcome mat and the answering machine' all-too-often stand in for personal greeting and the human voice, the house—with its 'living' room, 'dining' room, 'family' room, and 'media' room, is the place where we state the life we wished

we had time to live." In a housing market filled with "McMansions" and "Starter Palaces," restaurant-like kitchens and spa-like bathrooms are not for cooking or bathing, but indicate that

the owner appreciates fine dining and takes care of his or her body. And so the house becomes the ultimate fashion accessory for the branded persona. Emily Post advises, "If the house expresses the architect or the decorator and not the owner, then its personality is a song out of tune." A cartoon in a 1978 *New Yorker* showed a man confiding to a woman seated next to him in a bar, "I've tried to express myself clearly, but for a truly definitive statement of me you'd have to see my living room."

And so our homes—our largest financial investment—serve to reveal our heart relationship to things in general. Professor Garber quotes one homebuyer's critical observation, "We once lived in houses and worshiped in cathedrals. Now we want to live in cathedrals; what does this say about what we choose to worship?" Indeed.

## Romance of Real Estate

Food and shelter have always been seen as a basic human need. Yet our super-sized houses are testaments to egos run amuck. They give the lie to our true priorities, proportionality, and purpose. The prophet Haggai's complaint was one of priorities. "Give careful thought to your ways. Is it time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while the Lord's house remains in ruin?" Whether the priority is the Lord's house or the Lord's work, we have uncritically followed the cultural patterns and too often put our houses first. We worship in modest functional boxes with faux fronts and live in luxurious homes with exposed imported beams from French chateaux.

We have lost sight of proportionality. Common laborers built the cathedrals of Europe in their spare time over the course of hundreds of years. They stand today as a testament of their cultural priorities—transcendence, beauty, and permanence. Barbara Corcoran, president of the Corcoran Group,

says of contemporary homebuyers, "There's so much new money around, and buyers want to flaunt it. They'll swear and they'll protest and say they don't want to show off, but they do. They want a house that makes a clear, undeniable statement that 'I am rich' and 'I have style.'" And so some future anthropologist will observe that here are cultural artifacts dedicated to ego, opulence, and transience.

Paul's emotional warning echoes in our guilty consciences, "Take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven." One wonders when our attachment to our homes undermines our cognitive awareness of our status as pilgrims. It was in answer to a question about wanting to follow

him anywhere, that Jesus spoke most directly about our over-attachment to homes: "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." To follow Jesus is to be a pilgrim. We are to be like him—spiritual vagrants. We will have no sense of mission if our mortgages cripple our commitment to the kingdom purposes that should animate our lives. We are citizens of heaven. Heaven is not a distant place, but a present reality. "Where do you live?" ■

—David John Seel, Jr.

*John Seel, Ph.D. is the Headmaster of Logos Academy, a Christ-centered classical college preparatory school in Dallas, Texas. He is a frequent speaker on contemporary culture and parenting. He is the author of Parenting Without Perfection: Being a Kingdom Influence in a Toxic World. Copyright © 2001 by David John Seel, Jr.*

### Book reviewed:

*Sex and Real Estate: Why We Love Houses* by Marjorie Garber (New York: Pantheon, 2000) 288 pp.

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by Denis Haack



### Trinity Forum Study Series

More than once in these pages we have recommended this series of study guides, and we remain convinced that though the marketplace is awash with guides, the Trinity Series is really in a category all its own. Creative and stimulating, these curricula are designed "to help thoughtful people examine the foundational issues through which faith acts upon the public good of modern society." The series also models how believers can promote serious reflection without being sectarian. Even if you don't use them in a discussion group—which would be a shame—they will help you reflect deeply on ideas that matter to Christians and non-Christians alike. Drawing together readings from a wide variety of sources and thinkers, each book is a rich resource for busy people who desire to think clearly, live faithfully, and somehow, by God's grace, make a difference. ■

### Recommended books:

*Doing Well and Doing Good: Money, Giving, and Caring in a Free Society* (2001) 283 pp. + 39 page discussion guide. *The Great Experiment: Faith and Freedom in America* (2001) 270 pp. + 31 page discussion guide. Both by Os Guinness (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress).

## U2: A Journey



### The Spiritual Journey of a Rock Band

U2. For their fans (like me), the name says it all. But for those of you who aren't as familiar with them, let me throw out a few points that might give you reason to pay attention to this rock and roll band. For instance, what group was named Band of

the Year in the industry leader *Rolling Stone* in 1983; was later named the Band of the Eighties by the same magazine; and was most recently declared Band of the Year for 2001, again by that same magazine? In 1987 *Time* put them on their cover and named them the hottest ticket in rock—only the third band to make the cover after The Beatles and The Who. U2 has regularly won Grammy Music Awards since 1987, including 3 for their latest album.

But U2 has not only had an influence in rock. More than any other band, U2 has worked for social and political change on a global scale. Just a few examples: they were the show stealers at 1985's Live Aid concert; they've supported Amnesty International with benefit concerts for 15 years; they have been leaders in the Jubilee 2000 Third World Debt Relief movement; and are putting more and more energy into focusing attention on the African AIDS crisis. Their lead singer, Bono, attended the latest G8 summit in Genoa and addressed the assembled leaders; he's met with Pope John Paul II and let him wear his sunglasses; he's spent time with George Bush; and he's taken boat trips with Russian President Vladimir Putin and British Prime Minister Tony Blair. The level of international respect that Bono enjoys and the access he has to the political powerbrokers of world politics is unparalleled for a rock star.

Like most U2 fans, I eagerly anticipated their 10th album. U2 is known for successfully reinventing themselves on almost an album to album basis while continuing to increase their fan base, record sales, and critical acclaim. Musically, they've moved from the angry punk of their first album through various flavors of esoteric ambient and western and

blues tinged rock to heavier Euro-techno and house beats, all the while anchored by lead singer Bono's "most recognizable falsetto in rock music." What kind of sound would they adopt for this latest effort?

Perhaps unlike most U2 fans, however, I was awaiting their album for another reason: I wanted the latest spiritual checkup of this band whose faith I have avidly tracked through their music.

### Origins

Three of the four members of U2—lead singer Bono, guitarist The Edge, and drummer Larry Mullins, Jr.—grew up as speaking-in-tongues Pentecostals in the projects of Dublin. The fourth, bassist Adam Clayton, was an atheist, and the first few years the band experienced recurring tension as Adam felt like an outsider during things like back-of-the-tour-bus prayer meetings. The band worked through it, however, and throughout their 20 year history, U2 has explored their spiritual beliefs and questions through their music.

They started off, as most teens do, idealistic and bold, shouting out their faith from the rooftops. For instance, the opening song of their second album, *October*, was called "Gloria," and is probably unique in being the only punk rock song to have a driving, passionate chorus in Latin:

*Gloria in te domine. Gloria exultate.  
Gloria, Gloria. Oh Lord, loosen my lips.*

The Irish folk-tinged "Tomorrow" testified to their belief in Christian doctrines, as well as their evangelistic impulses, as Bono pleads:

*Won't you come back tomorrow?  
I want you to be back tomorrow!  
Open up, open up to the Lamb of God,  
To the love of He who made the blind to see.  
He's coming back, He's coming back—I believe it!  
Jesus' coming!  
I'm gonna be there!"*

Owing to the obvious spiritual orientation of the first few albums, their first concert tours in the

# Toward Grace

States were played mostly in churches rather than bars or clubs—hardly the traditional start for a UK musical invasion.

U2's popularity and critical acclaim continued to rise, until 1987 when they released their landmark 5th album, *The Joshua Tree*. But their spiritual statements had become less frequent and less direct, and seeds of doubt seemed to be sprouting. One of their biggest hits off the album was "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For:"

*I believe in the Kingdom Come;  
then all the colors will bleed into one.  
But yes, I'm still running.  
You broke the bonds, loosed the chains,  
carried the cross of my shame, of my shame.  
You know I believe it.  
But I still haven't found what I'm looking for.*

On this and their next few albums, it sounds as if Bono, the main songwriter for the band, is dealing with a growing struggle between Romans 7: "What I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do..." and Romans 8: "The mind of the sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace..." Many of U2's songs in this period swing drastically from passionate faith to confused doubt, as the ideals of their faith clashed with their inability to live them out, and the pain and suffering they saw in the world. Throughout, though, there is a recurring plea for God's love to rescue them.

As the band reached new heights of worldly fame and riches, their albums grew more and more cynical, ironic, and dark; though Bono never lost his gift for poetic and thought-provoking lyrics, nor the band their ability to find beautiful melodies. Their ninth album, the Euro-techo *Pop*, is an extended and insightful, if bleak, meditation on how commercialism and consumerism have become the shallow but extensive new world religion, while traditional religion itself has become commercialized. The line between U2's critique of pop culture and their buying into it whole-heartedly was unhelpfully and uncomfortably blurred, however, over the course of the album; they seemed to want to trumpet that pop

is empty and meaningless, but at the same time are unsure what is left after our disposable culture is disposed of. The last song on the album is "Wake Up Dead Man," a return to the theme of the brokenness of this world, but this time the plea for Jesus' rescuing hand becomes a blatant challenge about the problem of evil, and even a question as to whether he really is alive and sovereign:

*Jesus, Jesus help me.  
I'm alone in this world,  
And a f\*\*\*ed up world it is too...  
Jesus, I'm waiting here, boss,  
I know you're looking out for us,  
But maybe your hands aren't free...  
If there is an order in all of this disorder,  
Is it like a tape recorder?  
Can we rewind it just once more?  
Wake up, wake up dead man...*

During these last years I worried about U2's spiritual state, and prayed for them off and on. Had Jesus' warning that "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" proven true for these formerly young believers who had tasted the heights of what the world had to offer them?

## Calm After The Storm

And so I waited with excitement and apprehension for the new album. U2 had journeyed from idealistic, perhaps naive faith through doubt and confusion to disillusionment and cynicism. Were there further depths to plumb, or had God "brought them up out of the miry pit?"

As it turns out, I didn't even need to listen to the music—the album cover gave the answer away. It pictures the four members of the band standing in a brilliant white airport concourse with some pieces of carry-on luggage, as if they're waiting to board a plane. But which plane? Where are they going? The boarding sign in the background reads simply "J33-3" with an arrow pointing down another even more brightly white concourse. When asked by *Rolling*



by  
**Rick  
Goetsch**

# Tuned In cont.



Stone about the unusual gate sign, Bono admitted it referred to God's words in Jeremiah 33:3: "Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know." "It was done like a piece of graffiti," Bono said. "It's known as God's telephone number."

Musically, *All That You Can't Leave Behind* is a move away from electronic beats, back to more classic rock and roll arrangements; away from the dark, dense, ironic musical space they had inhabited recently, to an expansive one of soaring, bright, ringing chords and melody lines. There are elements of all U2's past musical styles in this album, but they aren't there as sad rehashes, a fallback to the safety of "what worked before." Rather, they are references to the best musical places the band has been, while being pushed forward into new and unexplored territory: for instance, some songs have a distinctly Motown, oldies feel to them.

But the most significant change is found in the lyrics. There's a sense of peace, as if the band has learned how to live in a place of calm between the stormy tensions of our sin-broken world and its promised restoration. Bono sounds like a man who has passed through a turbulent flood to reach a place of new solidity. The first song on the album, "Beautiful Day," says as much:

*See the bird with a leaf in her mouth;  
After the flood, all the colours came out.  
It was a beautiful day, don't let it get away.  
It's a beautiful day, don't let it get away.*

The album is filled with references to grace, all the way to the last song entitled simply, "Grace." Next to the lyrics for

that song there is a picture of a dove, and indeed it is a

***Bono sounds like a man who has passed through a turbulent flood to a place of solidity.***

treatment of the Holy Spirit personified as a woman, a technique Bono has used in the past (and which Biblical writers have employed as well; for example, see how Proverbs personifies godly wisdom as a woman). In U2's vision, the Spirit roams the earth working out healing and redemption:

*Grace, she takes the blame, she covers  
the shame,  
Removes the stain, it could be her name  
It's also a thought that changed the world.  
And when she walks on the street you  
can hear the strings;  
Grace finds goodness in everything,  
What once was hurt, what once was  
friction,  
What left a mark no longer stings,  
Because grace makes beauty out of ugly  
things.  
Grace finds beauty in everything.*

Though the Holy Spirit works out God's grace in this world, Bono himself is fully conscious of his own limitations, his inability to even see the world through God's eyes, as he makes clear in "When I Look At The World:"

*When you look at the world, what is it  
that you see?  
People find all kinds of things that  
bring them to their knees.  
I see an expression, so clear and so true,  
That changes the atmosphere when you*

*walk into the room.  
So I try to be like you, try to feel it like  
you do,  
But without you it's no use; I can't see  
what you see  
When you look at the world.*

*I'm in the waiting room, can't see for  
the smoke.  
I think of you and your holy book  
while the rest of us choke.  
Tell me, tell me, what do you see?  
Tell me, tell me, what's wrong with me?*

Everywhere on the album there are exhortations to strip off our concern with the temporary, material things that we can't take with us anyway, and to stop longing after them because they aren't truly what we need.

For instance, "Beautiful Day" ends with the lines

*What you don't have you don't need it now  
What you don't know you can feel it  
somehow  
You don't need it now...*

In "Stuck In A Moment," Bono advises,

*And you are such a fool to worry like  
you do.  
I know it's tough, and you can never  
get enough  
Of what you don't really need...*

It sounds as if this album is the antithesis of *Pop*; or even the antidote to it. Where *Pop* plunged into the depths of over-produced superficial pop culture and came up empty and gasping for meaning, *All That You Can't Leave Behind* soars into a rarified atmosphere of infectious joy, proclaiming that there are deep and transcendent realities such as grace.

That's not to say there aren't songs on the album that deal with more down-to-earth subjects. "Elevation," with its grinding guitars, is a pretty straightforward celebration of the physical side of love, one of God's extravagant gifts, in the tradition of the Song of Songs. "In A Little While" and "Wild Honey" also focus on relationships, and are delightful vignettes on companionship, attraction, comfort, and the promise of a sweet reunion after wanderings.

As I hinted at before, thoughts of mortality and longings for heaven pervade the album. In "Peace On Earth," Bono longs for an end to war and death:

*Heaven on earth, we need it now  
I'm sick of all of this hanging around.  
Sick of sorrow, sick of the pain,  
Sick of hearing again and again,  
That there's gonna be peace on earth...*

*Jesus, can you take the time  
To throw a drowning man a line?  
Peace on earth.  
To tell the ones who hear no sound,  
Whose sons are living in the ground,  
Peace on earth.*

*Jesus, in the song you wrote,  
The words are sticking in my throat,  
Peace on earth.  
Hear it every Christmastime,  
But hope and history won't rhyme,  
So what's it worth, this peace on earth?*

Rather than an abrasive challenge to Jesus, however (as in "Wake Up, Dead Man"), this song is an Old Testament lament, a prophet-like cry of yearning for God's kingdom to come, for injustice to be righted, for the bereaved mother's tears to be wiped away.

"Walk On," shows U2 at one of the things they do best—writing songs that work

on more than one level. The song is dedicated to Aung San Suu Kyi, pro-democracy fighter in Burma, and on that level it is an encouragement to keep going with her fight. But on another level, the song resonates as an exhortation to keep steady on towards the hope of heaven:

*And love is not the easy thing  
The only baggage you can bring...  
Is all that you can't leave behind...*

*Walk on! Walk on!  
What you got, they can't steal it,  
No they can't even feel it,  
Walk on...*

*You're packing a suitcase for a place none  
of us has been.  
A place that has to be believed to be seen...*

*Walk on! Walk on!  
What you got, they can't deny it,  
Can't sell it, or buy it,  
Walk on, walk on...*

*And I know it aches, and your heart, it breaks,  
You can only take so much;*

*Leave it behind, you've got to leave it behind:  
All that you fashion, all that you make,  
All that you build, all that you break,  
All that you measure, all that you feel,  
All this you can't leave behind...*

After the release of this album, I had the chance to see U2 in concert in Cleveland. It would be an understatement to say I was curious to find out if my reading of the strong resurgent Christian spirituality of the album would be supported or undermined by the "Elevation Tour" experience.

In fact, I found that the concert went further than I could have imagined. Two representative examples: in the introduction to

"Where The Streets Have No Name," Bono launched into a long monologue in which he gave glory to God for the band's success and also quoted Psalm 116: "What can I give back to God for the blessings he's poured out on me? I'll lift high the cup of salvation, a toast to God. I'll pray in the name of God, I'll complete what I promised God I'll do, and I'll do it together with his people."

The last song they performed was "Walk On." At the end of the song, Bono sank to his knees while the band kept playing. After thanking the Cleveland fans, he said twice, "Unto the Lord Almighty, thank you!" Then he sang, "Hallelu, hallelu, hallelujah," to the melody of the closing chorus. The song ended, the band left the stage, the lights went up, and "Grace" started playing over the speakers.

As I drifted out with the rest of the audience, I realized with surprise that I felt as though I had been in worship! Many of the college students I work with in InterVarsity went to the concert as well, and they had the same feeling. One of them had gone to the Delirious! concert a few weeks earlier (Delirious! is a Christian praise/rock band from the UK). She told me, "This was a much more worshipful experience than the Delirious! was!" She, too, had had a strong sense of God being lifted up in front of 20,000 rock fans that night.

As I write this, there are rumors that U2 has decided to revisit the US with another, previously unplanned tour. I invite you to consider dropping in on these boys from Dublin, and cheering them on the latest leg of their roller coaster spiritual journey! ■

**-Rick Goetsch**

*Rick Goetsch works with college students as a team leader for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship in Cleveland, Ohio, and would be glad to spend hours discussing the intricacies of U2 for the modest price of a good cup of coffee...*

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# U2 & Public Policy

<http://www.U2.com>

## www.u2.com

This is a website for the merely curious as well as fans; it includes information on tours, discography, the band members' activities, and times when the band members are available to chat online. Helpful for understanding where the band has been and where they're headed.

### Ransom Ratings

**Design:** Fairly well-designed and organized, offering several different ways to browse the site (on the toolbar, in a timeline, or by a scroll bar).

**Content:** Comprehensive and in-depth. Includes every album, video clips, interviews, and speeches (such as Bono's commencement speech to the Harvard Class of '01). Also listed are the organizations they support.

**Ease of Use:** Heavy graphics made this site slow-going with a 56k modem. It's best to have Windows Media Player, version 7, to view the clips. Be prepared to exercise patience (unless you're one of the lucky few who have a cable modem)—you will be rewarded when the clips download!

the Official U2 website

<http://www.eppc.org>

## The Ethics and Public Policy Center

Established in 1976, The Center, located in Washington, DC, is a think tank dedicated "to clarify and reinforce the bond between the Judeo-Christian moral tradition and the public policy debate over domestic and foreign policy issues." Sponsoring conferences, seminars, discussions, and an energetic program of research and writing, the Center is a resource for all those who wish to think about the common good from the perspective of faith. Though you may not agree with every position argued by the Center, your thinking will be deepened by the engagement. Some of the names associated with EPPC that you might recognize include Herbert Schlossberg, David Aikman, and George Weigel. Michael Cromartie is director of Evangelical Studies, and oversees a steady production of thoughtful books, articles, and monographs on a wide variety of issues which will be of special interest to thinking evangelicals.

### Ransom Ratings

**Design:** Simple but sufficient.

**Content:** Designed to introduce the people and resources of the Center, and to allow you to become a member or order books or papers.

**Ease of Use:** Some of the graphics took a bit of time to appear on my screen, but moving through the site was easy. A good number of the resources—including entire books—can be downloaded in PDF format.

Ethics and Public Policy

*Critique* is not available by **subscription**; rather it 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.

*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.

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.