

Critique

Helping Christians Develop Skill in Discernment

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Editor's Note



Perspective

The tragedy of September 11, 2001, is so horrific that words tend to fail us. We can not adequately describe what has happened, nor can we give adequate reasons for why God would allow such suffering. And we anticipate the days

ahead with some trepidation, fearing reprisals or the seeking of vengeance instead of justice.

What increases our grief and leaves us even more speechless is the realization that such suffering is all too common in this sad and broken world. To use only one relatively recent event as a comparison, consider the slaughter that unfolded in Rwanda in 1994. If we round off the number of deaths on September 11 to 5000, and multiply it by 3, we have 15,000 deaths. Make that the number of Rwandans killed each day, 7 days/week for 8 solid weeks, and you arrive at the total number of bodies which resulted from the killing spree which tore this African nation apart.

The ancient Hebrew prophets Habakkuk and Isaiah both spoke of the day when "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea." May that day come quickly.

Please send names

If you received this issue of *Critique* by mail, you might have noticed that we included a form on which we invite you to send us the names and addresses of friends to whom we can send samples of our work. We're doing this for several reasons. First, we've worked hard on both *Critique* and *Notes From Toad Hall*—both in terms of content and design—and believe that they are, by God's grace, publications worth reading. Some of you graciously take time to write us, confirming that

conclusion. That being the case, it seems wise to find ways to expand our readership, and receiving referrals from you strikes us as one of the very best ways to achieve this goal. Also, as you might guess, the cost of our publications has increased rather dramatically as we have made these improvements. Both newsletters are longer than in the past, and printing/ mailing costs are higher. Since *Critique* is sent as a ministry to those who financially support Ransom, adding readers means helping to defray those increased costs.

If you do send us names of friends, we will send them one mailing. In it will be samples of *Critique* and *Notes From Toad Hall*, some material introducing the work of Ransom, and information on how they can be added to our mailing list if they desire. They will not hear from us again unless they choose to give a donation or write asking for more information. We will also include a brief note telling them that you asked us to send them the packet. So please be sure to include your name. (And if you prefer, you can send us this information via email instead of using the enclosed form.) And thank you.

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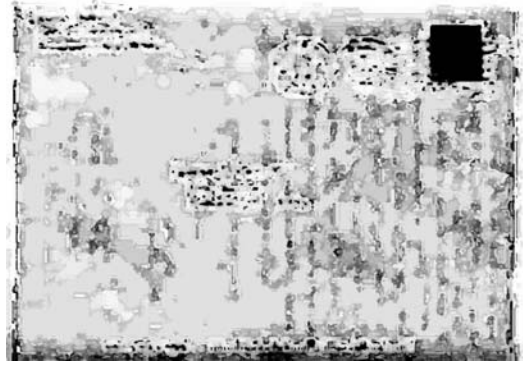
The first index for *Critique* is available (included here for those of you receiving it by mail). All the articles which appeared in the year 2000 in these pages are listed, by subject and by author. Our plan is to provide an annual index which we hope to include in the first issue of each new year.

Eventually, when Ransom's website has been launched, the index will appear there, in a format which will allow readers to easily download and print it. Since it takes time and money to print and distribute it, please let us know whether you find an index helpful, and whether our compilation is in a form that will prove most useful to you. ■

~Denis Haack

Dialogue

Mentors and Time



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 was so stimulated by the recent issue that I just had to send you a note. Donald Guthrie's review of *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams* (#6 - 2001) was so refreshing to this "twenty-something." As a Christian and as a man, trying to find where I fit into God's plans, I have been given great help through mentors in my life. Nevertheless, our cultural habits do not naturally lend themselves to investing in the life of one, or a few younger people in a focused way. We are far too busy and exhausted. I have often prayed and anguished over the lack of opportunity I have had for deliberate and focused mentoring, not just in the area of my spiritual gifts, but the shaping of the whole man.

It is my hope that this discussion will inspire those who are mature in faith and life to make themselves available, or even seek out a few, to prepare them to take their place in life. I understand that this will have to mean slowing down for many. I am reminded of what the aged Wendy said to the middle-aged Peter-Pan in the movie *Hook*: what's so terribly important about your terribly important business (or something like that). Please excuse the bluntness, but I think it encapsulates the folly of our hyper-culture. The "missing-dad" phenomenon has ravaged not only the earthly family, it has ravaged the church family too. "Church-fathers, we need you!...come home."

Thank you for your ministry and for the opportunity to respond. I really appreciate your emphasis on thinking through the issues we face.

Joshua Erlien
Lowry, MN

Denis Haack replies:

You have placed your finger on a vital issue—perhaps THE vital issue—namely time and what Christian faithfulness looks like in our oh-so-busy world. "Distortions in the shape of our time," Dorothy Bass writes in *Receiving the Day*, "foster distortions in the shape of our lives and the quality of all of our relationships. Indeed, these distortions drive us into the arms of a false theology: we come to believe that we, not God, are the masters of time." Jesus accomplished all that the Father called him to do without ever appearing frantic or behind, and without ever allowing "efficiency" or "productivity" to define or deflect his mentoring of the Twelve. At a time when an entire generation is asking whether there is, in the end, anyone truly there for them, the most radical expression of Christian faith is best demonstrated in three simple but profoundly revolutionary things: by listening, by offering hospitality, and by giving the gift of time.

Scaring the Sex

Wisdom is the knowledge of God's world and conformity to it. Wisdom involves realism about nature and human nature. Discernment follows from this. Discernment is the ability to sort through the way we do things in a fallen world, evaluate it according to God's original design, and adjust our loves and actions accordingly. Thus there is a close connection between metaphysics and morality—between how God made the world and how we are to live in it. Without biblical realism and cultural discernment—we play the fool.

Take the well-intentioned movement advocating abstinence in public schools. The Alan Guttmacher Institute reports that sexuality education focusing on abstinence has grown from 2% in 1988 to nearly 25% in 1999. In addition to what is taught in public schools, organizations with names like Free Teens, Pure Love Alliance, It's Great to Wait, and Aim for Success are providing supplemental enrichment programs that sell the virtue of abstinence.

Youth culture is saturated with sex—in the wake of Columbine, marketers were forced to shift their images away from violence to the romanticization of promiscuity. From the explicit pictures of Abercrombie & Fitch magalogs to MTV programming such as "Undressed," the message is the same: having sex is cool.

Just this fall, Amanda Beckner, a high school senior at National Cathedral School, wrote an op-ed in *The Washington Post* entitled, "Hooking Up in High School: What It All Means." "Hooking up," she explained, "encompasses any type of sexual activity, from kissing to oral sex to sex—although, usually hook-ups tend to be on the lighter end of that spectrum." The advantage of the phrase, she continues, is that it is a general term covering all

the bases. "The best aspect of hookups is that no one really has to know the true extent of the hookup because many in the gossip chain are satisfied with the general term. This means that people are not as easily labeled a 'slut' or a 'prude' because people are clueless as to what really went on upstairs at Saturday night's party." Parents everywhere are supposed to be relieved at this frank description of casual, everyday adolescent sexuality.

But this is just an acned alternative mirrored by adult attitudes. The very word

We may be less sanguine about premarital sex's consequences, but few will say it is "wrong."

"adult" has come to be associated with sexual explicitness and freedom. Living together before marriage and meeting someone at a party and going home with him or her are accepted as normal aspects of adult life. In the late sixties almost 80% of Americans thought premarital sex was wrong. Today 50% of adults think it acceptable, and that number increases to 75% for young adults. We may be less sanguine about the consequences, but few will stand up and say it is "wrong."

This is what I found striking as I listened to an abstinence presentation in my church. Sex outside of marriage, I was told, can destroy your dreams. What teenager wants to be saddled with raising a baby? Only those who abstain from sex will find success and freedom. The bulk of the presentation was a detailed description of STDs and how condoms and other contraceptives are not 100% reliable protection from symptoms ranging from infertility (chlamydia) to death (AIDS). Alas, abstinence education often boils down to

fear mongering, a veiled attempt to scare the sex out of you. Parents were told to give their children three messages: 1) I love you, 2) I'm proud of you, and 3) I don't want you to have sex until you are married. The disconnect between adolescent reality and these parental cliches is staggering. Yet parents flocked to the book tables stocking up on what I suspected was nothing but a parental placebo.

"Totally worthless," my high school seniors explained in class the next day when I described the program. "We saw one of these presentations as freshmen," said one student. "The only difference it made was that people were less hungry at lunch." And these students are serious about abstinence.

Katie Roiphe echoes this in her book, *Last Night in Paradise: Sex and Morals at the Century's End*. "What's missing is the ideological force that pulls it all together: God says premarital sex is wrong," Roiphe's right. Not once in the abstinence presentation given in my church Sunday school class was sex put into a moral context. Sex was not described as sacred or connected to our spiritual selves. It was limited to a physical or psychological crisis. The presentation—no doubt limited by the constraints of public schools—was a balancing act between promoting fear and building up self-esteem. "If you avoid these medical risks through abstinence, you are free to pursue your dreams. Sex has consequences. You need self-control. The choice boils down to: You can die or feel good about yourself."

Abstinence education without a culture of abstinence is a weak strategy. When teenage hooking up can be discussed shamelessly in a national newspaper as a taken-for-granted reality, fear mongering about disease will do little when compared to the "adult" status sexual activity sym-

Out of You

bolizes. Teenagers want to act like adults—and they are. Until adult behavior changes, they will have little cultural purchase.

Abstinence without a moral rationale lacks a compelling force. Roiphe observes, “Abstinence, ripped out of its religious context has no more substance than any other commercial jingle. ‘Do the right thing, wait for the ring’ makes no more sense than ‘Coke is it!’ It gives us a code of conduct without a reason to follow it. Abstinence isn’t moral certainty. It’s an unsatisfying substitute. It’s a kind of moral-light.” One cannot achieve abstinence without character. One cannot achieve character without convictions. And ours is a culture without convictions. Truth is created; morals are preferences; and reality is an illusion. The hollowness of our culture goes all the way down. It takes nonbelievers like Roiphe to tell us that, frankly, it’s either God or Nietzsche. “Without God, without rigid rules of social class, without reputations to worry about, we have no material out of which to form new values.” Secularized halfway solutions like abstinence education will not do.

First, sex is not easily controlled even among the most godly. It is naïve to think that a nonbelieving adolescent will be kept from his passions because of scary classroom presentations. The logic of disease will usually lose to the logic of desire.

Second, something as serious as sex education is not best abdicated to the government’s schools. Christian parents should not allow the state to define the terms by which our child’s sexual identity is understood or guided. The limits of public education will not allow a biblical worldview to be a part of the understanding of sexuality.

Third, utilitarian ethics, with its concern for the consequence of actions rather than the action itself, ultimately feeds relativism. Unless there is a God who has the authority to say, “Thou shalt not,” I remain my own god and

arbiter of my own fate.

Fourth, behavior is not changed merely on the basis of information. We need information in order to make informed decisions, but the decisions we make have less to do with information than what we ultimately love and worship. As Puritan John Flavel noted, “The heart of man is his worst part before it is regenerated, and the best afterward; it is the seat of principles, and the foundation of actions. The eye of God is, and the eye of the Christian ought to be, principally fixed upon it.”

Fifth, godly behavior is not possible apart from a change of heart. Certainly there are teenagers who practice abstinence without fol-

To concentrate on behavior rather than on a change of heart is to treat cancer with aspirin.

lowing Jesus. But sexual morals stem from our core beliefs and our foundational loves. To concentrate on behavior rather than on a change of heart is to treat cancer with aspirin. We need laws to constrain behavior. But we need the gospel to change hearts.

Sixth, consistency in godly behavior is not possible in our own strength. Just giving biblical information—“the Bible says...”—is also not enough. The life we have been called to live in Christ is not lived in our own strength. “I can do everything through him who gives me strength,” Paul declares. Sexuality in our context is not something we leave to will power or self-determination. It is God who empowers the believer to live the life of the believer.

Seventh, godly behavior must be reinforced by constructive plausibility structures. We are not to live individualistically, but in community. “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners.” Of the seductress we are

warned, “Keep to a path far from her.” We need accountability because the challenges we face in this area require far more than pious clichés or medical warnings.

Abstinence education, as it is being presented, may do more harm than good. It secularizes sexuality, medicalizes morality, abdicates parental responsibility, addresses symptoms not causes, and disregards the need for the gospel in one of the most important aspects of human identity and behavior.

James Davison Hunter in *The Death of Character: Moral Education in an Age Without Good or Evil* laments that Americans want moral behavior without the moral character it requires. “We want character but without unyielding conviction; we want strong morality but without the burden of guilt or shame; we want virtue but without particular moral justifications that invariably offend; we want good without having to name evil; we want decency without the authority to insist upon it; we want moral community without any limitations to personal freedom. In short, we want what we cannot possibly have on the terms that we want it.” Christians should be the first to recognize that sexual abstinence requires more than what abstinence education provides. It’s time to stop playing the fool. ■

—John Seel

Copyright © 2001 by David John Seel, Jr., Ph.D. David John Seel, Jr., 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*.

Books Mentioned:

Last Night in Paradise: Sex and Morals at the Century’s End by Katie Roiphe (New York: Little, Brown, and Company; 1997) 208 pp. *The Death of Character: Moral Education in an Age Without Good or Evil* by James Davison Hunter (NY: Basic Books; 2001) 336 pp.

War & Busyness

Just War

Given the events of September 11, 2001, it is a good time to review the basic principles of Just War Doctrine, ideas which originated with Augustine and Aquinas (who drew their insights from the Bible).

1. Just Cause (*jus ad bellem*). The side initiating the war must have just cause for doing so. For example, to protect innocent life, to preserve basic conditions necessary for decent human existence, and to secure basic human rights. War must be undertaken only in the face of “real and certain danger.”

Competent Authority. War must be declared by those with responsibility for public order, not by private groups or individuals.

Comparative Justice. No party can claim absolute justice on its side. However, the war may be justified if the party initiating it is comparatively more just. Because justice is relative in this situation, the initiating party must limit its aims and means in pursuit of those aims.

Right Intention. The intention of those attempting to wage war justly must be to achieve only their legitimate objectives, not to go beyond them even in victory.

Last Resort. For war to be justified, all peaceful alternatives must have been exhausted.

Probability of Success. This does not mean certainty of victory, but one must not start a war when the prospects of victory are remote. It would be immoral to spill blood in vain.

Proportionality. The damage to be inflicted and the costs incurred must be proportionate to the good expected by taking up arms.

2. Just Conduct (*jus in bello*). Just as the cause must be just, so must the prosecution of the means of the war.

Discrimination. The lives of innocent persons may never be taken directly, regardless of the purpose for allegedly doing so. Military action must be aimed at military targets, not against innocent people.

Proportionality. The damage to be done and the costs to be incurred must be justified by the military gain expected from the action. This is the proportionality criterion of *jus ad bellem* extended to the conduct of war itself.

Augustine and Aquinas took it for granted that nations have the right to self defense. Once the army of another nation crosses their borders, *jus ad bellem* is already satisfied. The only concern after that point is *jus in bello*. The problem with application to terrorism is that terrorism is not initiated by a legitimate governmental authority and/or an army that we can identify. ■

~Denis Haack

Source:

Adapted from an email from Jack C. Swearengen, Associate Professor, Washington State University.

The Peril of Busyness

We have often noted in these pages that the busyness which accompanies modern pluralism is an issue worthy of careful reflection. In a recent issue of the *New Yorker*, a cartoon showed a rolled up tube of toothpaste, complete with a worn-out looking face, cap off, obviously depleted. “I gave and I gave,” the tube is saying, “until there was nothing left to give.” Sometimes we are called upon in emergencies to give of ourselves without regard to the cost of our sacri-

fy. Many of us, however, live frantically for lesser reasons, perhaps because we are addicted to our own adrenalin, or because we have been seduced by secular notions of efficiency.

Busyness can be perilous to health and to relationships, of course, but it is possible that the danger runs deeper than that. Writing of the need for time to rest and reflect—what she calls “contemplative pause”—educator Sharon Parks identifies a further danger. “Particularly because the phenomenon of busyness has become so pervasive, contemplative pause is increasingly crowded out of our experience...we are in real peril when decision makers and others do not have time for, and are unpracticed in the power of, contemplation.”

I thought about that in light of national leaders who must decide when and how to wage war. I also thought of church leaders, elders and teachers whose lives overflow with good deeds, but whose time is devoid of quiet reflection on things that matter. “Be still and know that I am God.” Perhaps the greatest heresy of our age is to believe that we can achieve the knowing without having first, regularly and unhurriedly, to be still. ■

~Denis Haack

Source:

Big Questions Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith by Sharon Daloz Parks (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass; 2000) p. 145.

Terrorism and Justice

On Loving Our Enemies

Someone asked me after our Tuesday prayer service in response to the terrorist attack, “Can we pray for justice, and yet love our enemy at the same time?” The answer is yes.

But let’s start with our own guilt. Christians know that if God dealt with us only according to justice, we would perish under his condemnation. We are guilty of treason against God in our sinful pride and rebellion. We deserve only judgment. Justice alone would condemn us to everlasting torment.

But God does not deal with us only in terms of justice. Without compromising his justice he “justifies the ungodly” (Romans 4:5). That sounds unjust. And it would be if it were not for what God did in the life and death of Jesus Christ. The mercy of God moved him to send the Son of God to bear the wrath of God so as to vindicate the justice of God when he justifies sinners who have faith in Jesus. So we have our very life because of mercy and justice (Romans 3:25-26). They met in the cross.

So we are not quick to demand justice unmingled with mercy. Jesus demands, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Mathew 5:44-45). And, of course Jesus modeled this for us as a perfect man. “While we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son” (Romans 5:10). And even as he died for his enemies he prayed, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

So the resounding command of the apostles is, “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse...Never pay back evil for evil to anyone...Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. ‘But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink’” (Romans 12:14-20). When we live this way we magnify the glory of God’s mercy and the all-satisfying Treasure that he is to our souls. We show that

At the personal level, we will give our enemies food and drink and put away malicious hatred. But at the public level we will work for justice on earth, if necessary through wise and measured force from God-ordained authority.

because of his supreme value to us, we do not need the feeling of personal vengeance in order to be content.

But it does not compromise this truth to say that God should also be glorified as the one who governs the world and delegates some of his authority to civil states. Therefore some of God’s divine rights as God are given to governments for the purposes of restraining evil and maintaining social order under just laws. This is what Paul means when he writes, “There is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God...[This authority is] a minister of God to you for good...it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil” (Romans 13:1-4).

God wills that human justice hold sway

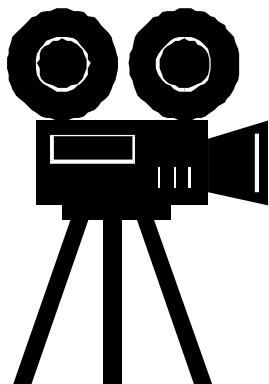
among governments, and between citizens and civil authority. He does not prescribe that governments always turn the other cheek. The government “does not bear the sword for nothing.” Police have the God-given right to use force to restrain evil and bring law-breakers to justice. And legitimate states have the God-given right to restrain life-threatening aggression and bring criminals to justice. If these truths are known, this God-ordained exercise of divine prerogative would glorify the justice of God who mercifully ordains that the flood of sin and misery be restrained in the earth.

Therefore, we will magnify the mercy of God by praying for our enemies to be saved and reconciled to God. At the personal level we will be willing to suffer for their everlasting good, and we will give them food and drink. We will put away malicious hatred and private vengeance. But at the public level we will also magnify the justice of God by praying and working for justice to be done on the earth, if necessary through wise and measured force from God-ordained authority. ■

~John Piper

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Images of Meaning



A review of the director Krzysztof Kieslowski

by Denis D. Haack

Sometimes if the film is good enough and its story told well, a character or image will lodge in the imagination like a splinter, making us wonder and think, pondering its meaning. It doesn't happen often in film, unless the movie is crafted by an artist as creative as the late Polish director, Krzysztof Kieslowski. In his films even minor characters or images glimpsed briefly in the background can take on significance.

In his ten-part series of films produced for Polish television, *The Decalogue*, for example, there is an enigmatic fellow who doesn't seem to be part of any of the actual stories, but who nevertheless shows up in eight of the films. Sometimes he is sitting quietly, sometimes carrying some prop. Often he makes eye contact with the protagonist at a crucial juncture in the story. Who is he? Kieslowski never reveals his

identity, and so leaves us to wonder. Is he a symbol for God, who sees all, even what is done in private? A symbol for conscience since the series, based on the Ten Commandments, explores ethical decisions made by people in the flow of ordinary life? Or since Kieslowski emphasizes that we live out our lives in community, is the man a symbol for the eyes of a watching world? "I don't know who he is," Kieslowski said in an interview, "just a guy who comes and watches us, our lives. He's not very pleased with us."

The films of *The Decalogue* are not expositions of the Commandments, but stories which make sense only in reference to them. In these films Kieslowski and his coauthor, Krzysztof Piesiewicz "placed abstract absolutes into concrete, unpredictable, and yet realistic situations," Agnieszka Tennant notes in *Christianity Today*. "They managed to transcribe the metaphysical into the tangible, without claiming that the end result is a complete picture. The well-developed metaphors and multilayered symbols penetrate to the core of a human soul."

Born in Warsaw in 1941, Kieslowski

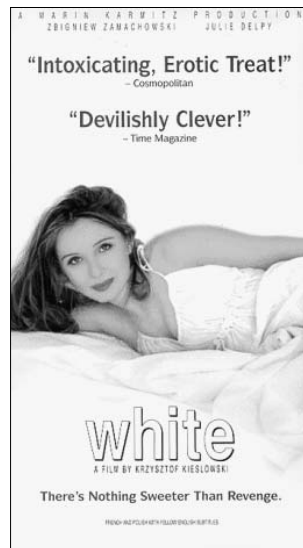
Sources:

"Kieslowski, R.I.P." by Ray Cassin in *Image: A Journal of the Arts and Religion* (Summer 1996, #14); pp. 91-98.

"Shades of Truth: Encountering Kieslowski's Three Colors" by John Ottenhoff in *Christian Century* (September 11-18, 1996) pp. 848-853.

"Kieslowski on the Mountaintop: Ten Commandments From the Late Polish Director" by Joseph Cunneen in *Commonweal* (August 15, 1997) pp. 11-14.

"The Ten Commandments Become Flesh" by Agnieszka Tennant in *Christianity Today* (February 5, 2001) pp. 75-76.



studied at the Lodz Film Academy and for years worked mainly in television. Although much of his early work is difficult to find, *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991); the *Three Colors* trilogy, *Blue* (1993), *White* (1994), and *Red* (1994); and *The Decalogue* (1988) are readily available. In 1994 Kieslowski announced his retirement from film, though acquaintances claimed that he was planning another trilogy, *Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven*. A moot issue, as it turns out, since he died in 1996 at the age of 54.

Though I have no evidence that Kieslowski was a believer, his films are shot through with Christian themes and challenge us to think more deeply about life and ethics. His movies are about “individuals who can’t quite find their bearings,” Kieslowski said, “who don’t quite know how to live, who don’t really know what’s right or wrong and are desperately looking.”

His films are crafted with care. The *Three Colors* trilogy, for example, based on

the three colors of the French flag and their symbolic values (blue, liberty; white, equality; red, fraternity) not only explore those themes but are suffused with those colors visually. Though each of the three can be viewed on its own, viewing them in order reveals subtle and surprising connections. Each tells a separate story with different characters, yet the films contain background scenes taken from the others, and in *Red*, all the protagonists are briefly together, though unknown to one another. Like the image of the tangle of electric wires stretched between houses and tenement buildings which appears on the screen, Kieslowski is reminding an individualistic world that relationship and community are not only essential, but inescapable.

Kieslowski’s films are often enigmatic and occasionally irritatingly obscure. Much is



Kieslowski’s films are shot through with Christian themes and challenge us to think more deeply about life and ethics.

left hanging—sometimes too much—but then perhaps Kieslowski is reminding us that even ordinary life is far more mysterious than we imagine. Full of details that make us wonder, his films tell stories not to entertain but to challenge us to think again and to see in new ways. ■

~Denis Haack

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What was your initial reaction to the film? Why do you think you reacted that way?
2. What is the message(s) of the film? Consider how the film addresses themes such as: the nature of reality or what is really real; what’s wrong with the world, and what’s the solution; the fragmentation of life in our busy, pluralistic world; the significance of relationships and love; the significance and meaning of being human; whether there is right and wrong, and how we determine it; the meaning of life and history; and what happens at death.

Where do you agree? Where do you disagree? Why? In the areas in which we might disagree, how can we talk about and demonstrate the truth in a winsome and creative way in our pluralistic culture?
3. In what ways were the techniques of film-making (casting, direction, script, music, sets, action, cinematography, editing, etc.) used to get the film’s message(s) across, or to make the message plausible or compelling? What details or background images seem to have significance?
4. Most stories actually are improvisations on a few basic motifs or story-lines common to literature. What other films come to mind as you reflect on this movie? What novels or short stories? What Scriptures?
5. With whom did you identify in the film? Why? With whom were we meant to identify? Discuss each main character in the film and their significance to the story.
6. What insight does the film give into the way people see life, meaning, and reality? How can you use the film as a useful window of insight for Christians to better understand our non-Christian friends? Might the film be a useful point of contact for discussion with non-Christians?

What Does Winsome

Part One of a series on winsomeness.

One of our neighbors uses a pickup occasionally to haul junk to the dump or to transport furniture when a new tenant moves into one of his rental units. It's an old pickup, showing signs of wear and the rust so common in this part of the country where salt is used to battle icy streets in winter. The truck sports a bumper sticker which caught my attention one day as he drove down the alley behind our house. "Save me Jesus" were in large-enough print to read as he passed, but I had to walk over to where it was parked to make out the fine print. "Save me Jesus..." it said "...from your followers."

I haven't had the chance to ask him about the bumper sticker. It'll be interesting to talk about it, though I must say that I fear hearing some story in which he was treated poorly by someone claiming to be a Christian. It's entirely possible, on the other hand, that what he's suffered is an offense against the cross, and that no believer has mistreated him. That's a possibility, but it troubles me that I doubt it is the case. Worse, I confess that I would find it almost refreshing to discover he has heard and considered the gospel but rejected it because he finds its claims to be offensive. Refreshing, that is, not because it wouldn't be grievous news—for it is—but refreshing because at least this is an offense that has some integrity.

Given the present state of affairs, what with pluralism and the insistence on tolerance, we may wonder if it is even possible for Christians to be winsome before a watching world. To be attractive, that is, without compromising righteousness or hiding the gospel. Is it possible to

live out and speak the truth so that any offense taken is limited to the offense of the cross?

The answer, I believe, is YES. We will make mistakes and blunder, of course. We have clay feet, and the Scriptures do not give us leave to witness to the truth only after achieving some sort

Jesus was without sin and never compromised the truth, and yet he attracted sinners to himself.

of perfection. There will be plenty for which we must seek forgiveness from our unbelieving friends, but amazingly such authenticity and humility can be attractive in its own way. Our foul-ups can even, by God's grace, at least occasionally be redeemed instead of remaining a hindrance in the relationship.

The primary reason, however, for being confident that it is possible to be winsome and attractive to sinners is the example of Jesus. He was without sin and never compromised the truth, and yet attracted sinners to himself. He even called them to repentance—not a particularly popular message for sinners—and though not all believed, the record of the Gospels is that they followed him around in droves. Our message is the gospel of Christ, and since he is attractive, shouldn't our proclamation be attractive as well? Since our lives are to reflect his righteousness, shouldn't our lives be as winsome as his was?

What an irony: Christ attracted multitudes wherever he went, while

much that passes for Christian witness today is neither attractive, creative, nor winsome, but aggressive, insensitive, and rote. Imagine what it would be like, a friend recently said, to sit in the chair of an angry dentist. Or one who is offended by your dental habits and decides that you need to be taught a good lesson in dental hygiene. Or one who accosts strangers with the sad state of their mouths, expects them to submit to treatment on the spot, and when they refuse issues dire warnings. Or one who has reduced the rich array of dental medicine into a single therapy that can be accomplished in less than five minutes. Or one that uses the identical technique on every patient, time after time.

Graceful, salty conversation

"Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders," Paul wrote to the believers in Colosse, "make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone" (4:5-6). The final Greek phrase translated "everyone," actually means "to each one." Each individual, in other words, "is to be treated as an end in himself," Peter O'Brien notes in his commentary, "and not subjected to a stock harangue." Which is precisely how we want to be treated, and if we think about it, how we would expect to treat anyone who bears the image of God.

Paul's notion of our conversations with non-Christians being "seasoned with salt" is intriguing. Pagans in the first century used the expression to mean witty; Jewish rabbis used it to mean wise.

Look Like?

Wisdom and wit are related, and both are characteristic of the conversations of Jesus recorded for us in the New Testament. His insight into people and the world was astounding, and his enigmatic answers and probing questions fostered reflection and further questions instead of terminating the discussion. He often turned things on their head in unexpected ways, and his stories usually contained twists, often amusing ones. “Those who are the salt of the earth,” O’Brien says, “might be expected to have some savor about their communication.” Salt makes food zesty and flavorful, and keeps it free of corruption. So our witness must never be insipid or dull, never tactless or argumentative. After all, we are witnessing to the Lord of life and glory.

“Ah, well,” someone might respond. “That’s all fine and good for the likes of Paul and C. S. Lewis and G. K. Chesterton, but I’m just an ordinary person. I barely know how to share my faith and now I have to be creatively attractive, too?” A good question. The answer is that we misunderstand the meaning of creative. We are made in the Creator’s image, and therefore creativity is inescapably part of our very being. We may not have artistic gifts, but that’s not the issue. Creativity is expressed not just in art, but in hospitality, warmth, and community when we open our life and heart and home to another, even at cost. We may not be able to write good fiction, but we can all host neighbors for an evening’s reading. We are attractive and winsome when in Christ’s name we ask questions and truly listen, when we share the suffering of another, and when we risk everything to be authentic. From this perspective, it is the ordinary believer who has the best shot at being winsome in life and

conversation. If Paul or Lewis or Chesterton were alive today their fame would likely isolate them, and raise barriers we don’t have to worry about.

That may be reassuring—it should be reassuring—but it still is not an adequate answer for the question we’ve raised. Just what does it look like for a Christian—an ordinary Christian—to be winsome and attractive in our pluralistic world? How might our conversations be graceful and salty as we interact with our non-Christian neighbors and friends? How can we be, in other words, more like Jesus?

Beginning in the beginning

If we wish to reflect on this in the light of Scripture, we will seek an answer in terms of Creation and Redemption—since it is the Fall, the other aspect of the Christian world view which is causing the difficulty. Since we share a common humanity with unbelievers because like them we are made in God’s image, the doctrine of Creation forms a foundation for Christian witness. And since Christ is both our final example and Lord for

Creativity is expressed not just in art, but in hospitality, warmth, and community when we open our life and heart and home to another, even at cost.

all of life, his humanity is the ultimate demonstration of the grace of God in redemption.

The Francis Schaeffer Institute (Covenant Seminary), under the direction of Jerram Barrs, has identified eight principles of communication which are central to the vision and work of the Institute. The principles are their attempt to name vital aspects of communication for the Christian in a fallen

world. The list can be best understood as an effort to imagine Christian witness in light of the doctrine of Creation as demonstrated by Christ. To ask, in other words, what our conversations with non-Christians would look like if we really believed in our heart of hearts what the Bible teaches about every person being created in the image of God and loved by him even at the high cost of the death of his beloved Son. The FAS Institute’s list is as follows:

Respect for those to whom we communicate.
Building bridges of commonality to the listener.

Understanding what others believe.
Language comprehensible and familiar to the listener.

Reasoned presentation of the message.
Clarity, a careful definition of the message.
Challenge to both the mind and the heart.

Imagination and creativity in presenting the glorious gospel.

A list, it seems to me, worthy of being meditated over and prayed for daily.

Consider a few of the implications that follow if I truly believe my neighbors are created in God’s image. Among other things, I will not be dismissive of them, their ideas, their lifestyle, their choices, or their values. Even if they seem repugnant to me, or irrational, or inconceivable, or entirely lacking in common

sense. That might be difficult, of course, especially if they do not return the favor, but such is the cost of following Christ.

This means that I will work hard to never be guilty of misrepresenting what they think, or summarizing it unfairly. I will honestly seek to learn from them, realizing that they live in God’s world just as I do, and so will have learned much that I do not yet know. I will remember how painful it is to

face up to being mistaken, so that my probing of their beliefs will be clothed in humility. I will realize that calling them to repentance requires me to demonstrate repentance, since like them I am a sinner in need of grace. Treating those with whom we disagree with the respect worthy of the person created in God's image is both disarming and heartwarming because such love is in short supply in this broken world. It may not bring all to Christ, of course, but it will mean that we are living out what we claim to believe.

Because I am talking to someone made in God's image, I will take the conversation seriously instead of seeing it merely as a means to an end. As I ask questions of them appropriate to the moment, we might indeed get to the big issues of life. I will not imagine, however, that only a conversation on that level is significant, for that too would treat them with disdain. And just as I resent being invited to "dessert" only to discover I am at a sales presentation, so I will never ask people to take a "survey" which is merely a cleverly written set of questions designed to manipulate the conversation in a certain direction. I will refuse "bait and switch" tactics, in other words, because they treat people with contempt.

In short, treating people as if I truly believe they are created in God's image means nothing less than loving them as Jesus loves them. Which means they should truly believe that I would be willing to die for them. ■

~Denis Haack

to be continued

Sources:

Word Bible Commentary: Colossians, Philemon by Peter T. O'Brien (Waco, TX: Word Books; 1982)

p.243 & *Fullness and Freedom: The Message of Colossians & Philemon* by R. C. Lucas (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; 1980) p.175. "Awakening Christians to Answer the World: An Introduction to the Francis A. Schaeffer Institute at Covenant Theological Seminary" (booklet) available from FSI, 12330 Conway Road, St. Louis, MO 63141.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

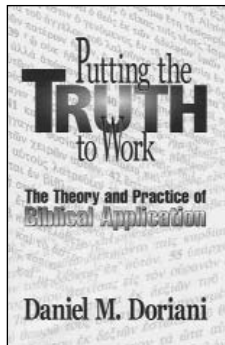
1. How might it be possible to determine the difference between someone taking offense at the gospel and someone taking offense at us? What is our responsibility in this?
2. What was your reaction to the questions about the angry dentist? Is this an unfair metaphor? Why or why not?
3. Where do you see creativity in Jesus? How would you characterize his conversations with unbelievers? To what extent would he have learned this in today's training in evangelism?
4. Discuss each of the eight principles (from the Francis Schaeffer Institute), unpacking their meaning and implications. Have you known anyone who exemplifies them?
5. What problems or hesitations do you face in conversations with unbelievers? Would you hesitate to ask a neighbor about the bumper sticker on his truck? Why or why not? How would you respond if he told of the actions of an offensive Christian?
6. What is the difference between seeking to share the gospel while talking to a friend, and manipulating the conversation?
7. "Treating people as if I truly believe they are created in God's image means nothing less than loving them as Jesus loves them. Which means they should truly believe that I would be willing to die for them." Do you agree? Why or why not? What other implications can you think of that follow from believing that our neighbors bear God's image?
8. Covenant before the Lord to begin praying daily for a non-Christian friend, by name, expressing willingness to be used of God to bring them to Christ. Would they consider you their friend? How can you deepen that friendship?

Listen, Do, & SOAR

Listening and doing “God has spoken” in the Scriptures, J. I. Packer notes, “and godliness means hearing His word. ‘Hearing’ in this phrase means more, of course, than just being in earshot while the message of God is read aloud or recited or explained. ‘Hear’ in its full biblical sense, implies attention, assent, and application to oneself of the things learned; it means listening with a firm purpose to obey, and then doing as God’s Word proves to require.” Attention, assent, application: far from automatic in our fallen and busy world.

It follows that we need to know how to hear and obey God’s word. If you are eager to hear God’s word, but are unsure exactly how to apply its message to your life and culture, or if you desire to sharpen your study skills by learning from a godly teacher, we recommend Daniel Doriani’s new book, *Putting the Truth to Work*. It is a sequel to his book, *Getting the Message* (on Bible study, which we also recommend), and explains clearly and with examples how to hear and apply the truth of Scripture. Though *Putting the Truth to Work* is written for Bible teachers and preachers, this thoughtful yet accessible work should be in the library of every serious student of Scripture.

Hearing, understanding, and applying God’s word has been essential from the moment Adam and Eve were created. After the Fall, the need deepened, for God’s word is the only source of grace and hope. The need has sharpened once again with the advent of modern pluralism. What does biblical faithfulness look like in our postmodern world? If the issue involves food that’s been sacrificed to idols, we can easily find texts which address the question directly. Many of the issues about which we must be discerning, however, are not directly addressed—



increasing the need for us to know how to rightly understand and apply the teaching of Scripture to our lives and to the questions which confront us.

God’s word, the psalmist says, is to light our path in this dark world. “In some churches,” Doriani notes however, “text after text elicits the same few applications: be holy, be faithful, be committed. Week after week, believers

hear that they must serve more, witness more, study the Bible more, support the church more. Worse, some preachers are repetitive and shallow, addressing the same subjects in the same few terms. Even if they avoid the ultimate crime of propagating falsehood, they commit the penultimate crime of making Christianity seem boring and irrelevant.” *Putting the Truth to Work* will help us avoid both crimes—whether in preaching or leading a small group Bible study or in our own study of Scripture. Dr. Doriani, for those of you who don’t recognize the name, is professor of New Testament at Covenant Seminary.

We recommend it to you. ■

~Denis Haack

Source: Packer from *God Has Spoken* by J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; 1979) p. 125.

Book recommended: *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* by Daniel M. Doriani (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing; 2001) 319 pp + Scripture and subject indexes.

SOARING into Bible study

SOver the past few years I’ve been made increasingly aware that some of the classic terms used to define Bible study have become problematic for some Christians. In *Critique*, for example, we have said that Bible study involves five skills: Survey (getting an overview of the whole); Observation (seeing

what the text says); Interpretation (determining what the text means); Correlation (relating the text to the rest of Scripture); and Application (allowing its truth to order our life in a fallen world).

Some, however, have grown up in church settings where two of these terms have been badly abused. Where interpretation is based not on an open and honest analysis of the text, but on a presumptuous declaration of what to believe, no questions allowed. Where application is limited to either moralizing, or a rigid how-to utilitarianism where conformity is prized above all else and which ends up in some form of legalism. Not everyone who uses these terms engages in such shoddy practices, of course, but there is also no reason to insist on using these terms when others will do just as well.

Donald Guthrie, a Contributing Editor to this publication, has suggested replacing the five skills with four (Survey, Observation, Analysis, & Response). A good suggestion, since all the necessary steps can be included and all the troublesome terms deleted. As a bonus the acronym summarizing the study steps is improved—SOAR instead of SOICA. ■

~Denis Haack

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Lives Worth

The writer of Hebrews twice instructs us to “imitate” the faith of those who have gone before us and whose lives have been marked by grace (6:12; 13:7). Good biographies can help us be faithful to that command. They also remind us that if God is willing to use such imperfect servants, perhaps there is some small chance that he is willing to use us as well. With that in mind, we commend these five biographies to you.

“John Newton: The Tough Roots of His Habitual Tenderness”

On New Year’s Day, 1753, at the age of 28, John Newton wrote out what he called his “ultimate desire” for his life: “to make it the end and aim of my life (as it is the privilege and perfection of my nature) to obtain fellowship and communion with God the Father and with his son Jesus Christ.” Newton’s passion for the truth of the gospel was evident in his life, his labor as a pastor, and in the hundreds of hymns he composed.

Never one to sentimentalize sin or to forget the wonder of grace, Newton looked back on his life with unrelenting realism. Raised in a non-Christian home, he took to the sea, lived a rough life of careless decadence and before long was captain of a ship engaged in the horrific trade of human flesh. “I know not,” he once commented, “that I have ever since met so daring a blasphemer.” As a pastor, though, he was remarkably gentle and patient, tender because God had been tender with him. Newton reflected on

such Christian humility with the keen insight and word-craftsmanship of a poet: “A company of travelers fall into a pit: one of them gets a passenger to draw him out. Now he should not be angry with the rest for falling in; nor because they are not yet out, as he is. He did not pull himself out: instead, therefore, of reproaching them, he should show them pity... A man, truly illuminated, will no more despise others than Bartimeus, after his own eyes were opened, would take a stick, and beat every blind man he met.”

Each year at the Bethlehem Conference for Pastors, John Piper gives a biographical sketch of one of his theological heroes. It is always a highlight of the conference, delivered with passion and designed to stimulate the people of God to a deeper understanding and appreciation of grace. At the 2001 Conference, Piper lectured on “John Newton: the Tough Roots of his Habitual Tenderness,” and we commend the message to you warmly.

The Hidden Smile of God

Piper is publishing a series of books containing the biographical sketches given as lectures over the years at the Bethlehem Conference. The first volume, which we also recommend to you, published last year was *The Legacy of Sovereign Joy: God’s Triumphant Grace in the Lives of Augustine, Luther, and Calvin*. The second volume is: *The Hidden Smile of God: The Fruit of Affliction in the Lives of John Bunyan, William Cowper, and David Brainerd*.

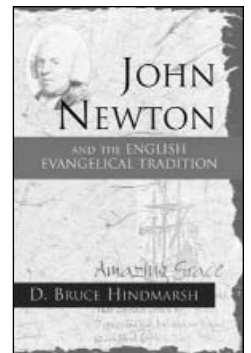
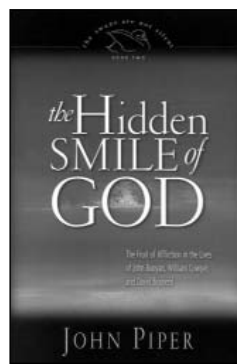
“The afflictions of John Bunyan gave us *The Pilgrim’s Progress*,” Piper

writes. “The afflictions of William Cowper gave us ‘There is a Fountain Filled with Blood’ and ‘God Moves in a Mysterious Way.’ And the afflictions of David Brainerd gave us a published Diary that has mobilized more missionaries than any other similar work. The furnace of suffering brought forth the gold of guidance and inspiration for living the Christian life, worshiping the Christian God, and spreading the Christian gospel.” The story of the three are worth reading, the three stories in one volume speaks eloquently of how God uses suffering in the lives of his people, and Piper’s love for these heroes of faith is contagious.

John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition

Strictly speaking, this interesting study is not a biography of John Newton, at least if we think of a biography as a simple chronological telling of a life story, with only minor and occasional editorial comment by the biographer. Newton’s story is told in *John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition*, but within a detailed and enjoyable scholarly study which reflects on his life and ministry in light of the wider context of the evangelical movement in England. (The author, D. Bruce Hindmarsh, is the James M. Houston Associate Professor of Spiritual Theology at Regent College in Vancouver.)

“John Newton (1725-1807),” Hindmarsh writes, “came to maturity



Reading

during the period which followed the remarkable conversions and field-preaching of the late 1730s and early 1740s, events which signaled the beginning of the Evangelical Revival. By the 1790s, important changes were coming over the religious and political world, and Newton, though revered within his circle, was an old man whose influence was giving way to a younger generation of evangelical leaders. Between these two periods—for which the conversions of John Wesley in 1738 and William Wilberforce in 1785 may stand as symbols—lies approximately half a century during which John Newton's religious convictions were formed and expressed. During these years Newton also emerged as a significant figure with a wide public within the evangelical movement.”

Newton's story is remarkable for several reasons. It is a story of grace, amazing grace, as a man who cares not at all for God is graciously rescued and called into ministry. It is a story of tender patience as Newton cares for hurting people, like the poet William Cowper during dark periods of depression that seemed to be unrelenting and unending. It is a story of a pastor who gave himself to his people seemingly without reservation. It is the story of a poet who wrote hymns still loved today, and who found creative ways to speak the truth into the culture of his day. And it is the story of a man who avoided controversy without avoiding controversial people, winning many to the truth of the gospel through the warmth of his compassion and kindness. He wasn't perfect, of course, but in him was evidence of grace that was undeserved, winsome, and admirable.



Solzhenitsyn: A Soul in Exile

This is not the first biography of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, but it is the one I recommend for several reasons. First, its modest length makes it more accessible than previous biographies. Michael Scammell's *Solzhenitsyn: A Biography* (1984) weighs in at 993 pages and D. M. Thomas' *Alexander Solzhenitsyn: A Century in his Life* (1998) at 537 pages. Joseph Pearce's

offering, *Solzhenitsyn: A Soul in Exile*, is 314 pages. Second, Scammell depends too much on materials from Solzhenitsyn's first wife, an important though bitter source. Thomas weaves rather Freudian interpretations into his narrative, marring the work with commentary which is often less than fully convincing. Though Pearce suggests a greater parallel than I think actually exists between Solzhenitsyn's thinking and that of E. F. Schumacher, it is a minor theme. Third, as an appendix to the book, Pearce includes nine previously unpublished prose poems by the Russian author.

Most important, of the three biographers only Pearce takes Solzhenitsyn's Christian faith with the seriousness it deserves. "Joseph Pearce is best on what matters most about Solzhenitsyn: the centrality of the author's Christian faith," Edward Ericson of Calvin College says. "It is no wonder that Solzhenitsyn chose to...provide him with fresh information. Newcomers to Solzhenitsyn should start with this biography. They will find a highly readable rendition of one of the most sensational lives of the twentieth century."

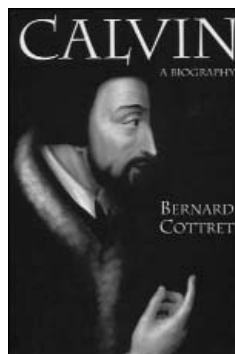
Calvin: A Biography

"I acknowledge myself," John Calvin said, "to be timid, soft, and cowardly by nature." Not

the picture most people have of the great Reformer of Geneva, but then perhaps most people know less about the man and his theology than they imagine. Published in both French and German before a translation made *Calvin: A Biography* available to English readers, the book was written as a corrective. The author, Bernard Cottret, a professor of history at Versaille-Saint-Quentin University in France, was concerned that so much "bigotry" (his term) concerning

Calvin was found among his fellow Christians. "The aim of my book," Cottret says, is "simply to recover the truth, or rather to reclaim the intelligibility of a man in his time." A scholarly work, *Calvin* requires a thoughtful reading, but is worth the effort for those interested in the man, his theology, his times, and his continuing influence. ■

~Denis Haack



Recommended resources:

"John Newton: The Tough Roots of His Habitual Tenderness" by John Piper is available both on audio cassette (for a nominal cost) and in written transcript (free). Order online (www.desiringgod.org) or by phone (888/346-4700) or by mail (Desiring God Ministries, 720 13th Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55415). *The Hidden Smile of God: The Fruit of Affliction in the Lives of John Bunyan, William Cowper, and David Brainerd* by John Piper (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books; 2001) 170 pp. + index. *John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition* by D. Bruce Hindmarsh (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; 1996, 2001) 331 pp. + appendix + bibliography + index. *Solzhenitsyn: A Soul in Exile* by Joseph Pearce (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books; 1999) 328 pp. + index. *Calvin: A Biography* by Bernard Cottret (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; 1995, 2000) 347 pp. + appendix + bibliography + index.

September 11, 2001

Loving God after September 11, 2001

Here are a few resources we found helpful as we struggled to make sense of faith and life following the terrorist attacks in NYC and Washington, DC.

Timothy Keller (Redeemer Presbyterian) ministers in Manhattan, and so speaks as it were from ground zero. Recent sermons address the topic, and we also recommend “Questions on Everyone’s Mind.” Which include: How can you trust God after this kind of an event? Is this a judgment from God on our country? How does vengeance not manifest itself in the Christian community? How do both nation and individual cope with grief? Should America retaliate? What are Christian people to do? (www.redeemer.com)

Covenant Seminary Panel. Five members of the faculty held a discussion in Chapel, which is available free online as either a written transcript or an audio file. Professors of contemporary culture, ethics, theology, New Testament, and missions participated, which caused their comments to be helpfully wide-ranging. Topics include our personal internal response to the tragedy, God’s sovereignty and goodness, God’s judgment, Israel and the Arab world, justice, and talking to our children. (www.covenantseminary.edu)

John Piper (Bethlehem Baptist) posted pastoral letters and identified a number of his taped sermons which will help believers respond biblically instead of being simply swept along with the prevailing ideas of media and culture. Besides the piece by him we reprinted in our Out of Their Minds column in this issue, we recommend “How Shall We Minister to People After the World Trade Terrorism of September 11, 2001?” and “Why I do Not Say, ‘God did not cause the calamity, but he can use it for good.’” Also available is a recording of a radio interview Piper gave within days of the attack. (www.desiringgod.org)

“Riding the Storm: Making Sense of Life in a Time of Evil and Suffering.” A lecture given by Os Guinness the week before the terrorist attack. Available for \$5/CD from The Trinity Forum by calling toll-free 800/585-1070 or on their web site (www.ttf.org).

“Good Wars.” Though written prior to the horrific events which we watched on our television screens, Darrell Cole (College of William and Mary) reviews the principles of just war doctrine. Cole argues that though Christians today still appeal to the ideas put forward by Augustine and Aquinas, our view of war and soldiering is remarkably different from theirs. See *First Things* (October 2001) pp.27-31 (156 Fifth Avenue, Suite 400, New York, NY 10010). Also posted on their website (www.firstthings.com).

by Denis Haack

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.