

Critique

Helping Christians Develop Skill in Discernment

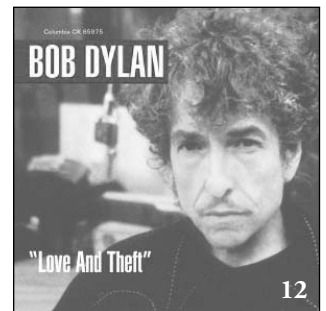
In This Issue

04 **Education, Boxers, & a Birder**

10 Reviews of *The Risk of Education: Discovering Our Ultimate Destiny*, *The Boxer Rebellion*, and *John Stott: A Global Ministry*.

06 **All Boxed In**

A review of Academy Award-winning *In the Bedroom*.



08 **Christ is Lord in Tolerant Babylon**

How should we respond to the claims of pluralism? Another installment in Denis Haack's series on living in Babylon.

10 **A Merer Christianity**

Preston Jones explores the link between Christianity and political stability and whether the former guarantees the latter.

12 **What Good Am I?**

A review and retrospective of Bob Dylan, a musician and prophet for our times.

02 Editor's Note

03 Dialogue

16 Clicks

15 **Christian Horror Films?**

Scott Derrickson claims to be a Christian, but he writes and directs horror movies. Does one exclude the other?

Editor

Denis Haack

Managing Editor

Marsena Konkle, MFA

Contributing Editors

Steven Garber, R. Greg Grooms,
Donald Guthrie, John Mason
Hodges, David John Seel, Jr.,
Andrew H. Trotter, Jr.

Board of Directors

Craig M. Chambers MD
*Dept. of Internal Medicine,
Olmsted Medical Center*

Steven Garber
*Scholar-in-Residence at Council
for Christian Colleges and
Universities*

Donald Guthrie
*Vice President for
Academics at Covenant
Theological Seminary*

Denis and Margie Haack,
co-founders of Ransom Fellowship

Rev. Ed Hague
Senior Pastor, Christ Church PCA

Bonnie Liefer
*Director of Communications
for Coalition for Christian
Outreach*

Henry Tazelaar MD
*Professor of Pathology,
Mayo Medical School*

Submissions

Critique considers unsolicited manuscripts only for poetry.

E-mail: marsena@itis.com
or mail with SASE to:
Critique Managing Editor
406 Bowman Avenue
Madison, WI 53716

Correspondence

All other correspondence and changes of address:

Denis D. Haack
1150 West Center
Rochester, MN 55902
Ransom_Fellowship@compuserve.com

Copyright © 2002 by
Ransom Fellowship

Editor's Note



The gift of resourcing.

I don't know if resourcing is a word (I hope not), but it certainly is a gift. If you doubt that, hang out with Byron Borger. In February I spoke at Jubilee, a conference in Pittsburgh at which Byron of Hearts and

Minds Bookstore had a book table. It was a huge table, piled with books, and not just any books either. This is the sort of selection I imagine when I hear "Christian bookstore." Not all the books were by Christians or about religious topics; rather, the selection had been made by someone who loves Jesus and books, and who has a Kingdom vision of life and culture.

I browsed the table (of course), and not only discovered some titles of which I had been unaware, but listened in as Byron talked to various folk who happened by. Or, I should say, I listened in as Byron used his gift of resourcing. He would engage each person warmly, and before long would ask if they were looking for anything in particular. They would respond with some topic, or issue, or idea, and without so much as a hesitation, Byron would list a series of titles that they should consider. He seems to have read them all, remembered them all, and have them in stock. And throughout it all, his driving passion was to help each person find books that would help them think and live more Christianly in light of their calling or question or interest.

After listening for awhile, I thought I might raise some awfully obscure and abstruse topic to see if he would come up empty, but didn't have to, actually. People were coming up with everything imaginable, and Byron always had suggestions. Even if nothing had been published on the specific issue, he could point to foundational

works that would sharpen their ability to think things through biblically on their own.

I am delighted Byron has agreed to continue his relationship with us. (See the ad for Hearts and Minds in this issue.) I hope you will feel free to call him—he is generous with his gift, and will grace you. Or log onto his website to browse through the numerous reviews he has posted (www.heartsandminds.com). Good stuff.

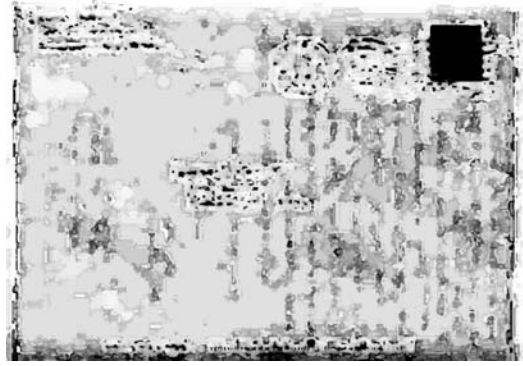
Be sure to click on the "Books by Vocation" section of the site, and get acquainted with it. Byron has developed annotated bibliographies for developing a Christian perspective in 28 areas including business, the creative arts, criminology and law, health care, mathematics, science, urban ministry, and world missions. Most of us will want to use "Books by Vocation" primarily for locating titles appropriate to our own calling and work, but browsing through the bibliographies will enrich us in two other ways. First, the lists will provide titles that will broaden our horizon and deepen our appreciation of God's world. Reading outside our own area can be an opportunity for worship, as well as learning. And second, knowing of resources outside our own interests can allow us to help others, and perhaps give them a gift that deepens their faithfulness.

Hearts and Minds Bookstore stocks the titles we mention in *Critique* and *Notes From Toad Hall*, so if something you read in these pages strikes your fancy, you can order it through them. We hope this is a convenience for you—and it helps us as well, because a portion of every sale is returned to Ransom as a donation. When you place an order, please be sure to mention *Critique*, or *Notes*, or *Ransom* so it will be credited to our account.

And if you ever do raise a topic for which Byron has absolutely no recommendation, know you've just experienced the impossible. ■

~Denis Haack

Dialogue



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

Marsena Konkle
Critique Managing Editor
406 Bowman Avenue
Madison, WI 53716

or e-mail:
marsena@itis.com

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.

The *Chocolat* lecture [given by Denis Haack] at the Rochester L'Abri Conference [Feb 2002] was so insightful and gave me much to ponder. But then, I'm not at all surprised since *Critique* does the same, month after month!

Deb Hodges
Wilmore, KY

There is NO piece of mail I look forward to MORE than *Critique*! Thank you SO much.

Geordie Lawry MD
Iowa City, IA

I was fascinated by John Seel's article "Scaring the Sex Out of You" (*Critique* #8, 2001) and by the subsequent exchange of letters it sparked (*Critique* #9 and #10, 2001). Not that I know anything about abstinence education. I'm not involved in promoting any such program; I've never even heard a presentation. However, sexual abstinence is an issue that arises in on-campus discussions on occasion, so I devoured John's article, expecting the same insights I'd garnered from his stuff on neo-paganism.

I'm sorry to say that I was disappointed. Instead of observations on how it has been done badly and how it might be done better, I found instead a condemnation of the entire project. The major points of John's critique, as I understand it, are as follows. Abstinence education doesn't present a full-fledged moral framework. ("Abstinence without a moral rationale lacks a compelling force.") Its goal is not to bring students to faith in God, who alone can change lives. ("Sexuality in our context is not something we can leave to will-power or self-determination. It is God who empowers the believer to live the life of the believer.") Abstinence education deals with sex as an end in itself, while in truth sex is a

means to the true end of intimacy. ("Sex, in the end, is not the issue. The desire for intimacy and the pain of loneliness are the deeper causes. Half answers turn out to be whole lies.") Thus, abstinence education is more than merely "impotent;" it is "playing the fool."

My goal in responding to John is not to defend abstinence education. I admit that it strikes me as a good idea, if done well, but I'll leave its defense to those who do it. My questions address a more basic issue. Many of the reasons John cites in dismissing abstinence education could also be used to dismiss the value of much of what I do at home, on campus, and in my community. In discussions with my neighbors about cultural and moral issues, I rarely am afforded the chance to present a full-fledged moral framework. Are such conversations "impotent"? On campus I daily deal with issues ranging from sexual abstinence to the problem of evil. At times these talks lead to a presentation of the gospel, at times not. In the latter am I guilty of "playing the fool"?

I think not. My confidence here doesn't spring from faith in pragmatism, but in God's common grace, his working "in all things... for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). To be sure this promise isn't an excuse for half-measures on our part, but it does encourage me to think that the many things I do that fall short of presenting the gospel still have value both in God's eyes and, by his grace, in this world. It seems to me that even abstinence education, incomplete as it is, may be one of the many means whereby God restrains evil, convicts students of sin, and ultimately calls his children to himself.

It's true that sex is more than mere

continued on page 16...

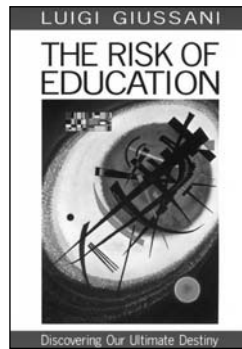
Lessons in Reality:

For those who consciously connect apprenticeship to Jesus with its cultural impact, there is a new form of ecumenism emerging. Among some thinkers the Reformed emphasis on cultural transformation is being fused with a Catholic sacramental vision of reality. Others are incorporating similar views into an expanded understanding of kingdom living that is both deeply spiritual and profoundly earthy.

For twenty years, the theme of “holiness in the heart of the world” has been characteristic of the Catholic Fraternity of Communion and Liberation. Begun in 1954, this lay renewal movement seeks to bring Christ into the woof and warp of everyday living. Its founder is Father Luigi Giussani, for many years a high school teacher in Milan, Italy. He is the author of more than twenty books and in 1995 won Italy’s prestigious National Catholic Culture Prize. He regularly calls modern skeptics to affirm an openness to existence, “a capacity to comprehend and affirm reality in all of its dimensions.” Reminiscent of C.S. Lewis and Francis Schaeffer, Giussani challenges modern unbelievers to allow the full weight of God’s inescapable reality to impinge on one’s beliefs and loves.

This Catholic thinker remains largely unknown within Protestant circles. But his latest book, *The Risk of Education: Discovering Our Ultimate Destiny*, warrants a wider readership. The book is a provocative study of Christian education and spiritual formation. For Monsignor Giussani there is no reality apart from Christ—a fact that must be understood existentially and verified personally. This, he argues, is the core mission of education.

In contrast, what is offered today as Christian education in many churches and schools is woefully ineffective. Both Christian and secular polls show there is no measurable statistical difference in behavior between teenagers who attend these programs and those who do not. Giussani suggests a possible remedy; thus it’s important for youth ministers and Christian educators to familiarize themselves with his work. He writes, “Only a faith arising from life experience and confirmed by it (and, therefore, relevant to life’s needs) could be sufficiently strong to survive in



“Only a faith arising from life experience and confirmed by it...could be sufficiently strong to survive in a world where everything points in the opposite direction.”

a world where everything points in the opposite direction.”

Giussani’s pedagogy involves the following five components.

Total Meaning of Reality

“To educate,” Giussani writes, “means to help the human soul enter into the totality of the real.” Genuine education must face the deeper “why” questions. There can be no complete understanding of reality that doesn’t also address meaning. As one high school student observed, “They make us study a great number of things, but they don’t help us to understand their meaning, and so we don’t know why we have to study.” An education filled with “whats” without “whys” is an education in practical nihilism. The most common adolescent response to such an education in meaninglessness is fanatical single-issue activism or casual nothing-matters indifference.

Giussani believes that conscientious spiritual formation by Christian parents is routinely undermined by their choice of secular schools. “The status of the family as an educator is particularly reflected in the collaborators they choose for their children’s education. It is surprising to watch the common spectacle of families who, after teaching specific beliefs for years, don’t worry about the way in which their children will test them out during adolescence. In this way, they unwittingly but nonetheless disastrously allow the ‘neutral,’ secular school to continue unhampered its work of destruction and disorientation. I

would like to stress that a secular school does not just threaten certain values; more radically, it threatens

the integrity of the student’s soul, his vital energy, and any conception of life in which his family has educated him.”

Explanatory Hypothesis

All education begins with an explanatory hypothesis. Learned from parents and peers, every person begins with a set of assumptions about reality. At first these assumptions are held without question. But for convictions to become one’s own and to grow into adult maturity, it is necessary that these initial assumptions become a problem. This is the most strategic period for Christian education.

However, in our postmodern society many young people grow up without a given tradition or starting point. These adolescents start processing life in a void. Life for them is a series of negations: nothing is true, nothing is stable. Consequently, nothing matters. From such beginnings,

Giussani and Education

a teenager's psychological and spiritual development is intrinsically harmed. "Today, more than ever, society is the sovereign educator or perhaps more correctly, mis-educator. In this climate, the educational crisis appears first as a lack of awareness."

True learning requires a point of departure, a hypothesis with which to compare new ideas. Such is the marked advantage of children raised in genuinely Christian homes. Here a given tradition is the starting point for the child's intellectual and psychological development.

Present Personal Authority

However, a young adult is incapable of moving from tradition to conviction without the help of a teacher or guide. Father Giussani writes, "Psychologically, a genuine dependence on a total meaning of reality requires that the student not engage in the verification process alone, as an independent 'abstract' undertaking: he must do it in community." This is precisely the kind of community that is impossible in secular schools where pluralism and the assumptions of neutrality undermine a unified worldview. Secular schools affirm fragmentation and subjectivism.

In contrast, Giussani argues that the present, personal authority of a teacher is indispensable in Christian education. It is the educator who embodies and makes the explanatory hypothesis real. "The educational role of a person with true authority is first of all one of coherence: a continual reminder of ultimate values and of our commitment to them, a steady standard for judging all of reality, and a stable safeguard of the constantly renewed link between the student's shifting attitudes and the ultimate, total sense of reality." All true education necessitates the embodied presence of a teacher who consistently lives the ideal. Education is incarnational at its core. Giussani explains, "To edu-

cate means to offer a proposal, this proposal will reach the student's heart and move him only if it is carried by an energy originating from the presence of the educator."

Personal Verification

The student must undertake a process of personal verification. "Even a clear presentation of the meaning of things and the real, intense authority of the educator is insufficient to meet the needs of the adolescent. He must instead be stimulated to personally confront his own origin. This means that the student must verify the traditional contents being offered to him, which can be done only if he himself takes the initiative: no one else can do it for him." True Christian education must be more than indoctrination. To teach is to encounter the power of the *imago dei*—the other as a self-determining spiritual being. The student must be free to establish his or her convictions. Particularly in Christian schools, students must be allowed to challenge, raise questions, and express uncertainty. Teachers must work to respect the process and create a safe environment for critical inquiry. True convictions that will stand up under life's pressures cannot be fostered in any other way.

Risk of Freedom

Giving the student freedom to question involves taking a risk. The spiritual moorings of a life are finally at stake. Students can be programmed to give the "spiritually correct" responses. They can tell parents, youth leaders, and Christian educators what they want to hear. But such students, if biblical truth is not also their own settled conviction, will fail life—the bigger test.

In the end, Christian education is not about information transfer as much as life transformation. "The purpose of education is to fashion a new human being: for this reason, the active factors of the education process

must guide the pupil to act with increasing independence and to face the world around him on his own. To do this, we must increasingly expose him to all the elements of his environment, while gradually allowing him more responsibility for his choices." In the end, reality is the best teacher. Reality reveals what the student actually believes. It also reveals whether what they believe is true. It is only as the teacher steps back that out of the shadows the Truth, by which the teacher is inspired, assumes his place.

Monsignor Luigi Giussani offers Christian educators a pedagogy that serves to confront the student's heart with the total meaning of reality. "To educate means to help the human soul enter into the totality of the real." In the end we want real truth, real convictions, real living. It's quite a challenge for a parent or an educator, but nothing less will do.

As I write these words, I have six weeks left to teach my high school seniors. Soon they will leave my apologetics classroom to face academic secularity and college social life. Have I done my job well? Are they ready? No one feels the risk of education more than Christian teachers who watch their students accept high school diplomas. It is then that we remember the words of John the Baptist, "He must increase, and I must decrease." ■

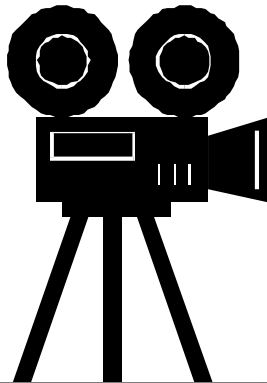
~John Seel

John Seel, Ph.D. is the headmaster of The Cambridge School of Dallas (formerly Logos Academy), a Christ-centered, classical college preparatory school. He is the author of Parenting Without Perfection: Being a Kingdom Influence in a Toxic World (NavPress, 2001) and is a frequent speaker on parenting, education, and culture. Copyright © 2002 by David John Seel, Jr.

Book Reviewed: *The Risk of Education: Discovering Our Ultimate Destiny* by Luigi Giussani (New York: Crossroad Publishing; 2001) 144 pp.

The Darkened Room

All Boxed In



A review of In the Bedroom

by Drew Trotter

Film Credits

Starring:

Tom Wilkinson
(Dr. Matt Fowler)

Sissy Spacek
(Ruth Fowler)

Nick Stahl
(Frank Fowler)

Marisa Tomei
(Natalie Strout)

William Mapother
(Richard Strout)

William Wise
(Willis Grinnel)

Celia Weston
(Katie Grinnel)

Director:

Todd Field

Writers:

Robert Festinger

Todd Field

Andre Dubus (story)

Producers:

Ted Hope
John Penotti
and others

Original music:

Thomas Newman

Cinematographer:

Antonio Calvache

Costume Designer:

Melissa Economy

130 minutes

Rated R for some violence
and language.

In the Bedroom, the writing and directing debut of actor Todd Field, is one of those character-driven, intricately plotted, so-called “small” films which has so many themes, so many things to say, that the lesser examples of the genre fail miserably because they fall self-indulgently into philosophical complexity, leaving the characters, and with them the viewers, behind. Confusion and dissatisfaction result and the audience goes away bewildered and unhappy. *Bedroom*, however, never leaves its characters behind and succeeds brilliantly because of it. Matt and Ruth Fowler, played by British actor Tom Wilkinson and Academy Award winner Sissy Spacek, are the perfect couple in the perfect American town of Camden, Maine, but their perfect, controlled life is savagely destroyed in one moment of horror. Spinning hopelessly toward a conclusion that cannot be assuring, *Bedroom* tells a story of love, passion, revenge, obsession, weakness, miscommunication (and plain old lack of communication), and, most of all, of feeling trapped in a cage of injustice with no way out. It is a parable of our time, a stark and disparaging view of the dysfunctional American family, striving to live “normal” lives with absolutely no resources when the bizarre and the appalling challenge their ostensibly secure existence.

Matt is the family doctor, Ruth the conductor of a choral group at a local high school; they have one adored son, Frank (Nick Stahl), recently graduated from high school and working as a lobsterman for the

summer before he goes off to college. A fly has gotten into the ointment, however, in the person of Natalie Strout (Marisa Tomei easily in her finest role ever), a young, divorced mother of two who is neither the social nor the educational equal of Frank. Ruth fears and despises her, not least because she sees Natalie as the older predator to her son Frank and the younger vixen to her husband Matt’s fantasies. The fly becomes a much more serious monster when Richard, Natalie’s soon-to-be ex-spouse, shows up more often, growing angrier and more threatening each time. Events take their course: Richard murders Frank, but is soon released from jail, and Matt and Ruth must now face life without their son and with his murderer free. They experience tension on every side—from their multi-grandparent friends, a legal system that proves inept, and most of all from each other as each blames the other for failing Frank and ultimately letting him die.

Field’s film, co-written with Robert Festinger, is a masterpiece of misdirection, of fragile hopes dashed. *Bedroom* begins with scenes of Frank and Natalie idyllically romping in the grass and on the beach, Ruth and Matt playfully jostling each other in bed, a comfortable neighborhood picnic, a Saturday morning of lobstering where Matt helps Frank and teaches Natalie’s son Jason about lobsters. It is here that Matt reveals the idea behind the title of the film (another misdirection in that the movie does not even have one on-screen sex scene). Picking up a lobster missing a claw, Matt explains to Jason that when two lobsters, one male and one female, are joined by another “in the bedroom,” as the lobster traps are called, somebody loses a claw...or worse.

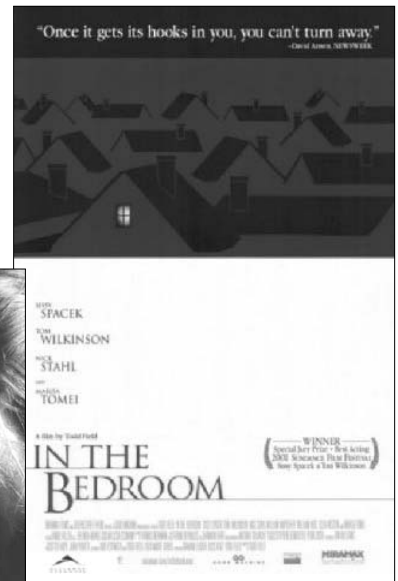
Each of the characters is developed thoroughly; even the town becomes a character, peaceful and safe, full of friends and

family. All appears so stable that even the problematic Richard seems only a small cloud in a beautiful blue sky. This dependability is so well established that as the plot unfolds, the viewer has the feeling that something will happen to make everything all right. That something never occurs.

For those who love beautifully shot movies, *In the Bedroom*, despite its dark content, will be a delight. The use of extreme close-ups (a wedding ring at a funeral, lips mouthing platitudes, coins jangling in pockets drowning dialogue), montage, and composition are remarkably fitted to the effects they intend. A sequence after Frank's death in which Ruth watches TV and smokes cigarette after cigarette is one of the best montage sequences I have seen in a long time, the super-slow fades emphasizing the achingly sluggish pace of life when grief and emptiness consumes one. Frank's closer relationship with Matt and his more distant one with Ruth are stressed regularly by their placement in the frame; one particularly poignant late night non-talk seats Frank at the extreme left of the screen, Ruth at the extreme right, the hard wooden table of their kitchen, and of their rapport, separating them.

The Christian heart will be rent by the story told in *In the Bedroom*. The Christian God, so full of forgiveness and redemption, is absent in every way. The church lacks any resources to face the difficulties Ruth and Matt face. When Ruth visits the priest, all he can tell her is a distinctly insensitive and vapid story that proclaims, "Lots of women have lost children; get over it." At Frank's funeral, Father McCasslin doesn't even read Scripture; sappy poetry brings no

comfort. There is no gospel that listens or prays, much less one that comforts or hopes. Life may appear



Bedroom is a parable of our time, a stark and disparaging view of the dysfunctional American family striving to live "normal" lives with absolutely no resources to deal with challenges to their ostensibly secure existence.

happy, but it is at all times one moment away from despair and endless emptiness.

In the end, Matt and Ruth act to try to relieve their pain. The film rightly and brilliantly leaves ambiguous whether or not they succeed, even in a limited sense. But the closing shot, a widening and pulling back until the whole town of Camden lies under the viewer's eye, peaceful and serene on the surface, but bleeding and festering with

unspeakable wounds underneath, whispers the fear that meaninglessness brings overall. There is no hope, even in, or perhaps especially in, the bedroom of this existence. ■

~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 © 2002 by Andrew H. Trotter, Jr.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. This movie has very little mention of God, either directly or indirectly through symbol, etc. How would it have been different if it had tried to show Him as an active "character" in the plot?
2. The film was written from a short story by Andre Dubus. What are the differences in theme and perspective between the film and the short story?
3. Much is made of the failures of the two main characters, Matt and Ruth, in raising and protecting their son. Did either fail him? In what ways? What did you learn about the practice of raising a child from this movie?
4. The character of Natalie is a tragic one in the movie. What do you think constitutes the center of the tragedy surrounding Natalie?
5. Pain is inflicted on every side in *In the Bedroom*. Describe the scenes in which the pain is the worst according to your opinion. How could it have been avoided? After being caused, how could the pain have been alleviated?
6. This is a realistic story, told in a strongly realistic style. How does "real" life differ for you from the life Matt and Ruth live? What could they have done differently in order to live life better?

Christ is Lord

In a fallen world, the truth of the gospel will in some way or another always be in tension with at least some of the ideas, values, and beliefs that happen to hold sway at the moment. The tension may shift from time to time or from generation to generation, but never ends, and will not until Christ returns to consummate his kingdom. Even if we lived in Jerusalem (speaking metaphorically), we wouldn't be free from sin, and sadly, those who take the Scriptures most seriously as God's word (as the Pharisees did) can run afoul of the truth. Since we find ourselves not in Jerusalem but living as exiles in pluralistic Babylon, among those who do not accept the Scriptures as God's word, we need to find a way to winsomely address those points at which the gospel comes most sharply into tension with Babylonian beliefs and values.

An obvious—and seriously troubling—point of tension arises from the postmodern notion that tolerance is a value that trumps all other considerations. In a pluralistic world, it is asserted, a multiplicity of religions jostle for acceptance, so to guard against an outbreak of religious warfare, no religion must claim superiority over the others. Besides, no one has a monopoly on truth. It's fine to believe in Jesus, the reasoning goes, but don't claim my belief in Baal is wrong or that Jesus is the only way to God. In Babylon, in other words, Jesus is merely one god among many, and his religion no better than any other.

As Dick Keyes points out in *Chameleon Christianity*, at points like this Christians must beware of two

equally unhelpful reactions. The first accommodates to the surrounding culture, so that Christ's claim to be Lord of all is either quietly downplayed or perhaps even disbelieved. The second unhelpful reaction is to throw down the gauntlet, insisting that Christ's claim must be the opening point in the conversation, even if this stance isolates the church and effectively ends the discussion. Both reactions are highly attractive (in their own perverse way), which is why the believer who leaps in either direction always finds plenty of company. In reality, however, as Keyes shows, both reactions are not

Faithfulness requires that we proclaim the gospel of Christ without compromise and that we show it to be both glorious and attractive.

only unhelpful but constitute a denial of the gospel.

The two reactions just described are perhaps best understood as a false dilemma: either an attractive gospel or an uncompromising one. But as Christ's own example demonstrates, we need not choose between the two—and must not—because we are called to both. Faithfulness requires that we proclaim the gospel of Christ without compromise and that we show it to be both glorious and attractive because to do otherwise is to proclaim a lie. We must love our postmodern friends enough to refuse to downplay the good news that Jesus is Lord, as we creatively find ways to live out and talk about that truth in a way that can be understood in a pluralistic setting.

What might this look like?

Timothy Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian in Manhattan, can help us see what this sort of faithfulness might look like. Since September 11, roughly 30% of those attending services at Redeemer have been non-Christians. Non-Christians, he says, who are so “steeped in religious pluralism,” that they “have little patience for claims of Christianity's superiority.” In “Preaching Amid Pluralism” (in *Leadership*)—an article I commend to you—Keller explains how he seeks to go about “elevating Christ in a culture that sees all religions as equal.”

First, Keller says, he is careful never to malign other religions, nor does he “directly make the naked claim ‘Christianity is a superior religion.’” Both tend to terminate the conversation, transform the relationship into a debate, and allow the unbeliever to assume the implausibility of Christianity. What he stresses instead, he says, is the distinctiveness of the Christian faith.

“After the World Trade Center tragedy,” Keller writes, “between 600 and 800 new people began attending Redeemer. The sudden influx of people pressed the question, ‘What does your God have to offer me at a time like this?’ I preached, ‘Christianity is the only faith that tells you that God lost a child in an act of violent injustice. Christianity is the only religion that tells you, therefore, God suffered as you have suffered.’ That's worded carefully as a way of saying, ‘Other religions tell you many good things, too. But Christianity is the only one that tells you this. If you deny this, then you lose a valuable spiritual resource.’ Pluralists get stumped by that because they realize that they want

in Tolerant Babylon

the distinctives of Christianity—a God who has known human pain, salvation by grace, and the hope of heaven—in their times of need.”

What I like about this is its creativity. It proclaims the gospel clearly and truthfully, yet in terms which speak directly to the needs, questions, and lives of the non-Christians who are being challenged to consider the claims of Christ. Such creativity is costly, but then our Lord warned us that following him would not be comfortable.

Then, because the notion of tolerance is deeply ingrained in his listeners, Keller also talks about religious pluralism, uncovering its hidden yet very real flaws:

“For example, pluralists contend that no one religion can know the fullness of spiritual truth, therefore all religions are valid. But while it is good to acknowledge our limitations, this statement is itself a strong assertion about the nature of spiritual truth. A common analogy is cited—the blind men trying to describe an elephant... This is supposed to represent how the various religions only understand part of God, while no one can truly see the whole picture. To claim full knowledge of God, pluralists contend, is arrogance. I occasionally tell this parable, and I can almost see the people nodding their heads in agreement. But then I remind them, ‘The only way this parable makes any sense, however, is if you’ve seen a whole elephant. Therefore, the minute you say, ‘All religions only see part of the truth,’ you are claiming the very knowledge you say no one else has.”

Another important way to emphasize the distinctiveness of Christianity, Keller says, is to talk about moral behavior not

merely in terms of law, but by rooting morality in grace. The goal of the gospel is not the reformation of outward behavior but the transformation of the person. Our morality is to be the result of faith, as we are filled to overflowing with delight in the glory, joy, beauty, and grace of God. When morality is seen as merely an issue of law and justice, Christianity looks like every

other religion. When morality flows out of a living and vibrant relationship with God, however, the transformation of the person by the indwelling Spirit can not be denied.

When morality is seen as merely an issue of law and justice, Christianity looks like every other religion.

And finally, Keller says, Christians should demonstrate a practical distinctiveness that will be obvious to the watching world. And the horrific events of 9/11 gave Christians in New York an opportunity to demonstrate it. “There are perfectly good excuses for non-believers to flee this city,” he notes. “But Christians have every reason to stay. That’s a distinction anyone can see.” We are called to minister, not to escape to some imagined place of comfort and safety. Even at cost. ■

~Denis Haack

For further reading and reflection:

“Preaching Amid Pluralism: Elevating Christ in a culture that sees all religions as equal” by Tim Keller in *Leadership* (Winter 2002) pp. 34-36. *Chameleon Christianity: Moving Beyond Safety and Conformity* by Dick Keyes (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books; 1999).

“The Uniqueness of Christ—Why Only One Truth & One Way?” a lecture at the 2002 Rochester L’Abri Conference by Dick Keyes (www.soundword.com).

Editor’s Note:

This is the ninth in a series of studies on being in the world but not of it. The previous articles on being faithful as exiles in Babylon are available as a reprint.

Please send \$5 per copy payable to Ransom Fellowship (not tax-deductible) to 1150 West Center, Rochester, MN, 55902. Donors to Ransom may request an email copy (pdf format) of the reprint free of charge (Ransom_Fellowship@compuserve.com).

Order From:



Distinctive Books and Music

www.heartsandmindsbooks.com
read@heartsandmindsbooks.com

234 East Main Street
Dallastown, PA 17313
(717) 246-3333

All books mentioned in *Critique* may be ordered directly from Hearts and Minds. A portion of the proceeds will be donated to Ransom Fellowship.

A Merer Christianity

For a long time I found it perplexing that some of the most politically chaotic regions of the world are also places either where Christianity has been strong for some time or is now growing rapidly. Equally perplexing was the fact that the most stable regions in the world are also the most secular. Christianity is enjoying phenomenal growth in many countries in Africa, yet that continent remains mired in political corruption and, given several African nations' natural resources, wrenchingly unnecessary poverty. The population of Sweden, on the other hand, is generally irreligious, but that country is at peace; it enjoys low crime rates and its political system seems (so far as I know) to be functioning fairly well.

Upon reflection I realized that my perplexity stemmed from a basic confusion. Somewhere along the line I had picked up the idea that Christianity meant political order while irreligion

meant disorder. But, at least at this time in history, it seems that that cherished idea is false.

Consider that the New Testament never claims that faith and civic peace will always coexist. Time and again, New Testament writers implore Christians to love one another (John 15:12), to be civil to one another (I Peter 3:11), and so on. The Scriptures remind us that peace and

Somewhere along the line I had picked up the idea that Christianity meant political order while irreligion meant disorder.

harmony are things that flawed men and women must consciously strive for (Romans 14:19). But never, as I recall, does Jesus promise democracy to the faithful, or hassle-free voter registration for those who give to the poor, or honest courts for those who lay down their lives for others. Rather, Jesus' own example

seems to suggest that if you give to the poor, then you should expect to get kicked in the teeth; that if you strive to be kind, then you should expect to be exploited; and that if you take up the cross, then you should assume that, eventually, someone will nail you to it. "I did not come to bring peace but a sword" (Matthew 10:34).

In the first instance (antiquity), civic peace and order came to Christians via the Roman Empire, the *Pax Romana*, a pagan invention that ended up serving Christianity's purposes. In the second instance (the early modern period), peace and order came to western Christians and, in later years, to their colonial converts via political "rights" (about which the Bible says nothing). Rights-talk and Christianity inhabiting the same culture, the two became intimately associated with one another in westerners' minds, partly because the notion of rights could not have come into existence without the

Briefly Noted: When History Repeats

by Denis Haack



In 1900, the Boxer Rebellion rippled like a violent earthquake through China. For years there had been simmering discontent over the flood of Westerners who had arrived with their technology, Christianity, and culture. Western powers forced concessions from the Empress, and their innovations brought massive changes to a way of life that was rooted in traditions that stretched back over hundreds of years. Then, a violent, mystical movement began in the countryside, and swept across China, terrorizing the foreigners. No one imagined that these Boxers—as they were called, contemptuously by the Westerners—would so quickly become a movement which would require a multi-national military force to suppress. In *The Boxer Rebellion*, Oxford-trained historian Diana Preston tells this story which is of interest for two reasons: because so many missionaries were martyred during the uprising, and because this was the first multi-national peace-keeping force in which America took part. The book reads like a novel, and eerily parallels the daily news. ■

Book recommended:

The Boxer Rebellion: The Dramatic Story of China's War on Foreigners That Shook the World in the Summer of 1900 by Diana Preston (New York, NY: Berkley Books; 1999, 2000) 360 pp. + notes + index.

benefit of the earlier Christian notion of the individual worth of every person (John 3:16).

While the twentieth century has shown that secularists and pagans are capable of horrendous evil (e.g., Hitler, Pol Pot, Mao Tse-Tung, Stalin, the abortion industry, porno king pins), it has also shown that, at least for a few decades, secularists can create orderly political systems where the free speech of the already-born, the healthy, the young, and the politically correct is generally protected; where the destitute are provided for by the state (the Church effectively having gone out of business); and where some measure of upward mobility is available to the ambitious (think, for instance, of Canada or Australia).

Of course, a concern for free speech can be grounded in a belief that, since Jesus gave his life for all men and women, every person is of inestimable value. Undoubtedly, the push in the West to create welfare states in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had its roots in general Christian concerns inspired by the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5-7). And, at the same time, Paul's injunction that those who do not work should not eat can be used to support a capitalistic outlook (II Thessalonians 3:10). Indeed, it's unlikely that either social democracy or capitalism could have been invented outside of a generally Christian culture. But whether democracy and capitalism of a constructive kind (as opposed to the radical libertarian kind) need the Christian Gospel to carry on seems, at the moment, doubtful.

Surely, the inconvenient—e.g., troublesome fetuses and babies, old people and the seriously deformed—will have it hard in the West for years to

come. But so long as most westerners want to live peaceful lives (this desire itself serving as an excuse for snuffing the bothersome), then there is little reason to assume that the West will come unglued. Christians might have to face the hard truth that secular society can get along pretty well without them.

Or, to take the opposite tack, perhaps the West is on a slow but sure march toward disintegration and/or tyranny, as many conservatives seem to think. But if that is so, it isn't clear (as is often said) that a return to Christianity among western peoples can arrest that process. The Second Great Awakening led to abolitionism but also to a more fervent belief among many southern Christians that slavery (a form of tyranny) was good for Africans, as well as for the bottom line. I don't doubt the seriousness of these southern Christians' faith. What seems clear, though, is that the political regime they supported was degrading, and its dismal effects linger in the United States to this day.

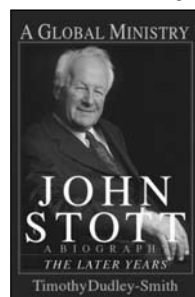
So, to return to the present: most Christians around the contemporary world inhabit banana republics, third-world disaster areas, and under dictatorial regimes. In some of these countries—e.g., the Philippines and every nation in Latin America (excepting Cuba)—Christianity is the prevailing faith. But that seems to have no bearing on governmental corruption, drug-running, and rampant poverty. It seems that Christianity and political freedom are not necessary partners. ■

—Preston Jones

Preston Jones, is a contributing editor for Books & Culture. His essay "History Discernment and the Christian Life" is published in Best Christian Writing (Harper San Francisco, 2001) and "Growing Up White in Black America" is published in The Emergence of Man into the Twenty-First Century (Jones and Bartlett, 2002). Copyright © 2002 by Preston Jones.

Briefly Noted: One-of-a-Kind Leader

by Denis Haack

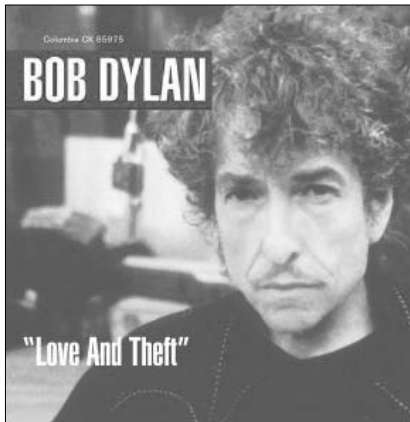


I have always found it impossible to remain neutral when John Stott preaches from the Scriptures. He seems to talk personally to each person in his audience—without affectation, almost calmly, it seems—and yet preaches with amazing power, authority, and grace. His unfolding of the text is always accomplished with clarity and a disarming simplicity, a simplicity made possible by unhurried meditation and prayer, and the careful, deep study of a gifted scholar. Now in the final years of his long and fruitful life, we can be grateful that Stott's biography has been written by his friend, hymn-writer and bishop Timothy Dudley-Smith. In the first volume, *John Stott: The Making of a Leader*, Dudley-Smith told the story of Stott's life from 1921-1960. Now, in *John Stott: A Global Ministry*, he brings us into the '90's. This biography is massive and detailed, the story of a man who with great energy served Christ and his Church. It honors an evangelical pastor, birder, and theologian who made God's word the center of his life and work, and whose impact for the Kingdom has been enormous. ■

Book recommended:

John Stott: A Global Ministry by Timothy Dudley-Smith (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; 2001) 455 pp. + notes + index.

What Good



A Troubadour For Our Times

I listened to Bob Dylan's latest CD for the first time a few days after the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. I was in Jackson, Mississippi, stranded there when air travel was suspended on Tuesday, September 11. I was supposed to fly home on the 12th, but planes had been grounded. Finally, on Friday I was able to rent a car. It had a CD player (though no cruise control), and since I was looking at two days of driving, I stopped by a music store and bought a copy of

Love and Theft.

It is Dylan's 43rd album, and had been slated for release on 9/11, the first studio album he has recorded since *Time Out of Mind* in 1997. "*Love and Theft* takes us on a full-blown tour of American song," Rob Sheffield notes in his *Rolling Stone* review. "Dylan veers into country, ragtime, vaudeville, deep blues, cocktail-lounge corn, the minstrel show... *Love and Theft* comes on as a musical autobiography that also sounds like a casual, almost accidental history of the country. Relaxed, magisterial, utterly confident in every musical idiom he touches, Dylan sings all twelve songs in a voice that sounds older than he is, a grizzled con man croaking biblical blues."

As I drove north on the Interstate through the Mississippi country-side I thought of the pastel hues with which this rural landscape had been painted in the Coen brothers' film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* A few miles outside of Jackson I slipped *Love and Theft* into the player. The second song is "Mississippi," and in a way that unsettled me, the lyrics spoke directly to the events that had overtaken my life that week.

*Every step of the way, we walk the line
Your days are numbered, so are mine...
Sky full of fire, Pain pouring down
Nothing you can sell me, I'll see you around
All my powers of expression and thoughts so sublime
Could never do you justice in reason or rhyme*

*Only one thing I did wrong
Stayed in Mississippi a day too long*

I am not suggesting that Dylan predicted the events of September 11; uncanny concurrences do not imply cause and effect. On the other hand, I was not surprised to find that *Love and Theft* resonated deeply with my life and world—Dylan's music has been doing precisely that for thirty years. To be relevant, great artists need not predict the future because a greater truth is at work: great art speaks to present reality, regardless of how the future happens to unfold.

"His words have always had an almost Biblical uprightness," Bono writes. "No matter where you are in your life, there's a Dylan record that helps you map out the locale." Pulitzer Prize winning author Michael Chabon remembers being introduced to Dylan's music as a thirteen-year-old. "I thought I recognized," he says, "in the ache and the ardor of that windblown, Jewish-cowboy voice, the contours of a world I was just beginning to know." Novelist Larry Woiwode first heard Dylan in 1963. "The first sound of his voice entered me like electricity. I didn't think of him as a great poet, as academics have, but a troubadour, a newsbringer in touch with his and the world's makeup and not about to falsify his report for any favored political group or audience."

Chart out Dylan's music over time, and you chart out American culture—and Dylan's pilgrimage within that culture—out of the long folk, black gospel, and blues tradition through the idealistic rebellion of the Sixties to the terrorist sobriety of the new millennium. "Every one of the records I've made has emanated from the entire panorama of what America is to me," Dylan says. "A song is a reflection of what I see all around me all the time."

The achievement of maturity

When *Rolling Stone* asked him about this song ("Mississippi") in relation to 9/11, Dylan's response was marked by insight made possible only by maturity. He began by quoting a few lines from a poem by Rudyard Kipling.

Am I?

*We have done with Hope and Honour, we are lost
to Love and Truth*

*We are dropping down the ladder rung by rung
And the measure of our torment is the measure of
our youth*

God help us, for we knew the worst too young!

"If anything," he said, "my mind would go to young people at a time like this."

Mikal Gilmore points out that 2001 was something of a milestone in Dylan's life. He turned sixty, won an Oscar (for Best Original Song: "Things Have Changed" in the film *Wonder Boys*), toured almost non-stop, released *Love and Theft*, which says Gilmore, "makes most contemporary pop music seem jejune and passé by comparison," and began writing a series of autobiographical books based on his music, the first slated for publication in 2002. What is noteworthy, however, is not these particular achievements except insofar as they serve as markers of Dylan's maturity, not simply in years, but in musical and poetic integrity—a maturity achieved by only a few, whether artists or not. This is not a voice seduced by the youth culture. As Wheaton College professor Alan Jacobs notes, Dylan "never spoke as a young man, but rather as the custodian of ancient traditions."

"In Dylan," Dr. Jacobs writes, "the prophet meets the bluesman: the ancient laments of Israel rejoin songs born in slavery and the cotton fields. From this vantage point it seems that it should have been obvious—though of course it wasn't—that Bob Dylan would become not just a monument of popu-



lar culture, but also a key figure in the social history of American religion." Immersed as he was in the heritage of blues, gospel, and folk music, he has written songs of rich poetry which have captured the imagination of thousands. The real test of this is not

Dylan's continued popularity, but rather the numerous lines and images from his lyrics which are imprinted in our culture's common language. Listen: they're everywhere, blowin' in the wind.

A spiritual pilgrimage

Woven through Dylan's music is the story of his spiritual pilgrimage, which is, Woiwode says, his "glory." Made most explicit on *Slow Train Coming*, *Shot of Love*, and *Saved*, Dylan's confession of faith was greeted enthusiastically by Christians, who quickly turned against him when succeeding albums failed to be as explicit. Like an unfaithful bride who leaves unless she hears the same words repeated daily without fail, the Christian community is a fickle lover. "I suspect," Woiwode says of Dylan, "he found the liberty of serving his Savior in his art rather than through churchy confession." Which reminds me to pray for him, since the pressures of his world must be enormous, and sadly, he can not count on the people of God to either recognize or appreciate the good news of art well done. "He has sung with eloquence about so many issues at times when the news about them was needed," Woiwode says, "and has so often hit the target dead center, I often wonder if he isn't hot-wired to a manifestation of the Holy Spirit."

One of the prophetic themes which has threaded its way through Dylan's music from the beginning is the brokenness of this sad world. In 1963, Dylan rasped out "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall," turning the metaphor of the cool refreshment of rain into the possibility of judgment.

*And what did you hear, my blue-eyed son?
And what did you hear, my darling young one?
I heard the sound of a thunder, it roared out a
warnin',
Heard the roar of a wave that could
drown the whole world...
Heard one person starve, I heard many
people laughin',
Heard the song of a poet who died in the gutter,*



by
**Denis
Haack**



*Heard the sound of a clown
who cried in the alley,
And it's a hard, and it's a
hard, it's a hard,
And it's a hard rain's a-gonna fall.*

The image returns in “High Water (For Charley Patton)” on *Love and Theft*, but this time the flood seems deeper, the danger greater.

*Highwater rising, six inches above my
head
Coffins droppin' in the street like
balloons made out of lead
Water poured into Vicksburg, don't
know what I'm gonna do
Don't reach out for me, she said, can't
you see I'm drowning too
It's rough out there
Highwater everywhere*

The brokenness is also reflected in fragmented relationships. Some of his early love songs reflected the casual promiscuity of the sexual revolution. But they could also be warm and tender, since for all the folly of his generation, Dylan has continued to believe—correctly—that love is indispensable and relationship essential.

*If not for you,
Winter would have no spring,
Couldn't hear the robin sing,
I just wouldn't have a clue,*

*Anyway it wouldn't ring true,
If not for you.*

“If Not for You” (1970)

And on later albums (listen to *Planet Waves*, for example) he has songs of mature and responsible love, which both celebrate committed relationships even as, in the tradition of the Song of Songs, they quicken the pulse.

The haunting voice

For all his albums, Dylan is perhaps best thought of as a troubadour. He is a tireless performer, and seems to be on the road constantly. If you want to know his music, he says, you need to come to a live performance. It is in concert that the music lives. Both times I've seen him in concert he said little, allowing his music to speak.

In 1965 Dylan picked up an electric guitar and alienated the audience at the Newport Folk Festival. Prior to that he had, in good folk tradition, used only acoustic guitar and harmonica, held on a wire stand before his mouth. They didn't appreciate the change, but Dylan forged ahead and transformed rock music, which he somehow sensed would be the genre (in contrast to folk) of the next generation. In the process he issued a call for social justice, reminded us of love and the reality of God, made poetry come alive, and helped millions make sense of their world in light of the biggest questions that can be asked.

The danger for anyone who truly faces the fragmentation and fallenness of the world is either despair or cynicism, the twin temptations of our postmodern age. For all his gritty honesty, Dylan has

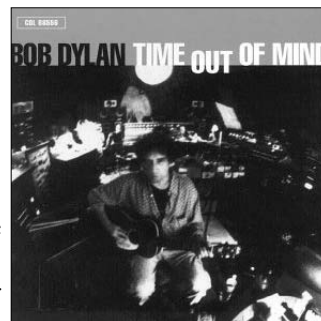
never succumbed to either. Sometimes, like U2 on *All That You Can't Leave Behind*, he has sung of grace. Often, as on *Love and Theft*, he makes us laugh, not with frivolous wit, but with a humor which is redemptive, giving glimpses of hope in the midst of pain.

His is a haunting voice, not smooth and trained and controlled, but variable, earthy, on edge, and compelling. Over the years Dylan has sung as if his voice is another instrument, never predictable and always very much alive. Listen to him sing and the impression is not something nice flowing over you, but of deep truths made painfully beautiful, firmly planted so as not to be easily forgotten.

*What good am I if I say foolish things
If I laugh in the face of what sorrow
brings
If I just turn my back while you
silently die
What good am I?
“What Good am I?” on *Oh Mercy**

Indeed, what good are we? ■

~Denis Haack



Sources: “Bob Dylan *Love and Theft*: Dylan's forty-third album presents the history of American music” by Rob Sheffield in *Rolling Stone* (Sept. 27, 2001) pp. 65-67. “Bob Dylan: an interview” by Mikal Gilmore in *Rolling Stone* (Nov. 22, 2001) pp. 56-69. “Bob Dylan” by Mikal Gilmore in *Rolling Stone* (Dec. 6-13, 2001) p. 116.

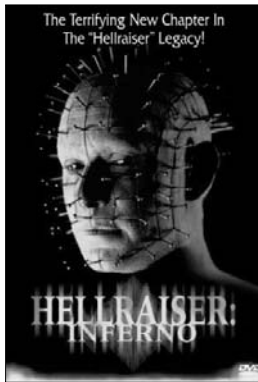
“Happy Birthday Bob: An appreciation of Dylan at 60” by Bono, Michael Chabon, et al., in *Rolling Stone* (June 7, 2001) pp. 48-52, 122. “Dylan to CNN” by Larry Woiwode in *Image: a Journal of the Arts and Religion* (# 28) pp. 95-101 “It Ain't Me, Babe: Bob Dylan, reluctant prophet” by Alan Jacobs in *Books & Culture* (May/June 1998) pp. 16-19.

Christian Horror Films?

We take film seriously in these pages, and for good reason. For one thing, it is an art form of enormous power, beauty, nuance, and creativity. To despise the product of the hands and imaginations of people made in God's image is to disdain a good gift of God. As well, missionaries have long realized that to know a people you must listen with care to their stories. It is in stories that we reflect on our deepest dreams, ideals, and fears, and try to make sense of life and reality. When, for example, we tell the story of Christian martyrs to our children, we pass on convictions about what we should be willing to live for, and tell of heroes who were willing to die for them. When we want to hear the stories of the postmodern generation, we will take movies seriously, for their stories are told not primarily in books or in church or around the dinner table, but in the theater. When we engage the cinema, in other words, we engage the stories of Babylon.

By God's grace, there is a growing number of young Christian artists obeying a call to work in Hollywood. They need our prayers. They also need our patient support, as they seek to learn what faithfulness looks like in the world of cinema.

One such young Christian film director and writer is Scott Derrickson, and his chosen genre is the horror film. Recently he gave a lecture at Biola University explaining his work. "My work in the horror genre has made me controversial among Christians," Derrickson says. "But as a Christian, I



defend horror films. No other genre offers audiences a more spiritual view of the world, and no other genre communicates a more clearly defined moral perspective." Derrickson and his writing partner, Paul Harris Boardman, wrote *Urban Legends: Final Cut* and *Hellraiser: Inferno*, which Derrickson also directed.

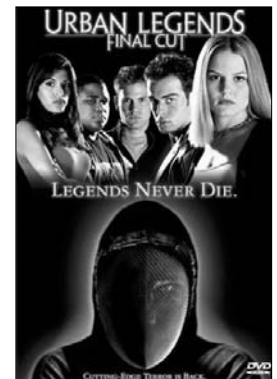
"The most common problem of Christian art," Derrickson says, "is that it tries to get to grace too quickly. It's uncomfortable with tension. It's uneasy with any questions left hanging. My work on *Hellraiser: Inferno* was in some ways a personal rebellion against all this. I wanted to make a movie about sin and damnation that ended with sin and damnation. After all, isn't that the experience of many people? Isn't that descriptively true? Some Christians who have seen that film like to quote Philippians 4:8 to me: 'Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report... think on these things.' And I stop them and say, 'Wait a minute, what was the first thing you said? Whatsoever

things are true.' Things that are true are not necessarily lovely..."

Derrickson's lecture, "Behind the Lens: A Christian film maker in Hollywood," has now been published in *Christian Century* and is worth reading. As an exercise in discernment. To listen in as a young believer wrestles with the implications of his calling and vocation. And, for a really adventurous small group, as something to discuss in light of viewing one or more of the horror films produced by Derrickson. ■

~Denis Haack

Source: "Behind the Lens: A Christian film maker in Hollywood," by Scott Derrickson in *Christian Century* (January 30-February 6, 2002) pp 20-24.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Using Derrickson's own words, summarize his message. What sentences in his article are most essential to his argument?
2. What do you find attractive or plausible? Where do you agree? Why?
3. Where do you disagree? Why?
4. To what extent can the horror genre be embraced by Christians? Why? Must every film by a Christian writer/director contain some theme of grace? Why or why not?
5. What did you learn from "Behind the Lens" that will inform your prayer life? Your watching of movies?
6. To what extent would you be comfortable with Derrickson joining your local church? Working with the young people of your church? Assuming he made a credible profession of faith in Christ, what would you say to those fellow members who argued that anyone who directs a film like *Hellraiser: Inferno* simply can not be godly believer?

Dialogue and Clicks

continued from page 3...

biology. We are too easily satisfied with “drink, sex, and ambition, when infinite joy is offered us.” Still dealing with sex as merely a means to the end of intimacy is incomplete, too. Why else would the chief problem I deal with among male students be internet porn? Its attractions are many, to be sure, but among them is the freedom of sex without intimacy. Simply scaring my students away from their computers doesn’t solve the problem, but I find that encouraging exercise, rest, proper nutrition, and accountability structures along with prayer is helpful. They work for the same reason that abstinence education, if done well, may work—because they deal truthfully with what it means to be sinners, made in the image of God.

Greg Grooms
Austin, Texas

Studies in Islam

<http://www.arches.uga.edu/~godlas/>

Islamic Studies

Dr. Alan Godlas, professor of religious studies at the University of Georgia, maintains this helpful website to provide a scholarly overview of Islam and related topics. Though the material will be of interest to scholars, anyone interested in learning about Islam, terrorism, the Qur’an, and current events relating to them should visit this site. As Christians we should know about Islam. Not just because of 9/11, but because in our increasingly pluralistic society, chances are that our neighbors, colleagues, and friends will be Muslims. Having accurate information is essential, and this website provides a massive amount of scholarly information free of charge. (I am grateful to the librarian at Covenant Seminary who called attention to this website in an issue of his *Selections*.)

Ransom Ratings

Design: Simple but sufficient, with a few graphics but primarily documents.

Content: The range of materials is impressive. Articles on 9/11; on Muslim criticism of the Taliban and of Bin Laden; on Islamic history, philosophy, science, and art; on Shi’ism and other Islamic sects; on Sufism and Islamic mysticism; as well as a copy of the Qur’an, glossaries, and FAQ. Among the mass of resources available here, two interesting titles caught my eye: “Where was God on September 11th?” by Abdulaziz Sachedina (Muslim professor at UVA), and “Yoga and Terrorism” by Dr Georg Feuerstein (Yoga scholar). And there is a link which allows us to browse *The Alternative*, a novel written by an American Muslim “concerning the sweetness and sublimity of essential Islam.”

Ease of Use: The lists of documents and links are easy to navigate.

Critique Mailing List:

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. **To receive *Critique*, send donation** with mailing address to:

Ransom Fellowship, 1150 West Center, Rochester, MN, 55902.

Everyone on Ransom’s mailing list also receives *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.