

Critique

Helping Christians Develop Skill in Discernment

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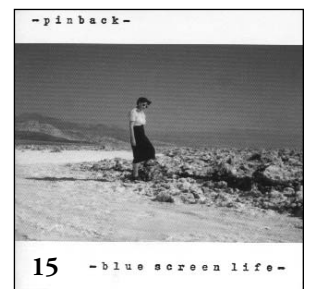
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Editor's Note



In Stereo and disagreement.

In this issue of *Critique*, we introduce yet another column: In Stereo. We know so many different people with diverse musical tastes that we wanted a way to share with you what they're

listening to. Jeremy Huggins helps launch this column (p. 15) by telling us about some of his favorite artists whom we'd never heard of before—we hope you will be as curious and inspired as we were. Look for In Stereo to crop up periodically.

We continue to hear from people about Preston Jones' article on Christian classical education [*Critique* #3 - 2002]—both from those who agree and those who don't. I admit we were surprised it caused such a sensation, perhaps because we were expecting to hear more about Steven Garber's review of the significant but highly profane movie *Magnolia*. But it shouldn't have surprised us because most Christians know intuitively that discernment is needed when engaged with Babylon. Less intuitive, however, is the need for discernment when it comes to the Christian community. We all worship the same God and study the same Scripture so it's easy, albeit dangerous, to accept unquestioning the words of Christian authors, speakers, and leaders.

Many Christians are uncomfortable with disagreement. In Sunday school classes, small groups, or during times of fellowship, I've witnessed much clearing of throats and shuffling of feet when a Christian dares to utter the fateful words, "I disagree." But imagine what we would be like if we were never challenged. I am so often blind to my own sin that I need my husband and friends and other Christians to hold me accountable, to point out not only where I'm right, but

also where I'm wrong. Thus it is that we hope everything we publish in *Critique* will provoke greater discernment, whether about things of the world, our own hearts, or the Christian community.

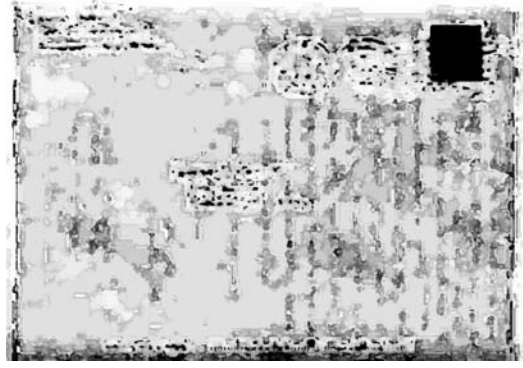
In this issue, we have devoted more pages than usual to Dialogue because Jones' article so obviously touched a nerve. The fact that this discussion is sometimes heated does not deter or frighten us, and we hope the same is true for you. We sharpen each other most when we disagree *as long as* we truly engage the issues; it's good for our souls to be around people who don't think exactly like us.

Denis' latest installment on what it means to be winsome (p. 10) is a timely addition to this discussion. He rightly points out that we need to develop skill in asking questions and listening attentively to the answers when we're conversing with non-believers. We need to do the same with fellow believers. Our conversations with each other should not sound like mini-sermons designed to homogenize all our attitudes and beliefs or squash criticism. Rather, we need to actively seek out accountable relationships and open ourselves to questions while subjecting our leaders—whether they be local or national—to the same scrutiny. No one is immune to making mistakes and we do ill to follow blindly even the most charismatic Christian leaders.

Having devoted so much space to the discussion in this and previous issues, we won't be able to publish any more letters on this topic, but we hope the conversation will continue. Seek out other believers who are as concerned about your children's education and the integrity of our Christian leaders as you are—and please, take the time to ask questions and listen closely to the answers. ■

~Marsena Konkle
Managing Editor

Dialogue



re: Preston Jones' article "Christian Classical Learning"

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 read Preston Jones' piece on Christian Classical Learning [*Critique* #3 - 2002, pp. 12-13] with some interest, having been named in the piece as one from whom classical educators should start distancing themselves. I have never before had a case of classical cooties, although I suppose if you follow the ecclesiastical pronunciation it would have to be *chooties*.

Either way, two comments. In his comparison of the two classical Christian school organizations, Mr. Jones was unfortunately unable to check his facts before going to print. In the areas where he expressed concern—lack of generic ecumenicity, sympathy for the Confederacy, etc.—as measured by the public positions of board members, ECCCS (now renamed the Society for Classical Learning) is every bit as full of beans as we are (we being ACCS). Now mind you, I don't mind comparisons between the Army of Northern Virginia and the Tennessee Volunteers, but I do mind if the article in question argues that one of them was fighting for the North.

And secondly, with regard to whether a paleo-conservative presence in the classical Christian school movement is desirable, I would of course argue in the affirmative. For example, Christian Kopff, an outstanding scholar associated with SCL, is a writer who has ably written for the outstanding paleo-conservative magazine *Chronicles*. But I have no doubt if you asked the handwringers at the *Intelligence Report* about *Chronicles*, you would get wild charges of thought crimes and more. I mention this because *Intelligence Report* was cited for some reason by Mr. Jones as a responsible publication.

In short, if we were to start following Mr. Jones' advice, we would decimate our ranks, and lose some of our best people. This is not what we intend to do. As parents increasingly flee the odious effects of the "big tent plural-

ism" in the government schools, it is hardly appropriate to try to attract them with a *smaller* version of the same thing.

Douglas Wilson
Moscow, Idaho

Jones responds:

Many thanks to Douglas Wilson for his letter. Mr. Wilson insists that there are no real differences between the ACCS and the former ECCCS (now the SCL) despite the fact that the SCL's current executive chairman and other prominent people within it maintain that there are. But let's concede that there are (to use Wilson's term) "paleoconservatives" in the SCL. So what? I never criticized anyone's personal politics. What I criticized was Mr. Wilson's published (and therefore very public) small book, *Southern Slavery As it Was*, which claims that the ante-bellum South was, literally, God's chosen country, that blacks pretty much liked being slaves, that blacks and whites never got along better than when the former lived under the Black Codes, and that life went to pot when the Yankees messed things up.

It isn't anyone's politics I have a problem with; it's historical nonsense such as Wilson's that I have a problem with—especially when that nonsense marches under the banner of God-given truth. Given an even sampling of the historical evidence, Wilson's book could not withstand even slight historical scrutiny; and his claim that slavery is just fine with God seems problematic in light of the thrust of St. Paul's thought on the subject in, for example, Philemon.

I surmise that Mr. Wilson approves of the First Amendment because it protects his right to publish junk history (and, unfortunately, to mislead the well-meaning but ignorant). But the logic that stands behind the First Amend-

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Dialogue cont.

ment also stands behind the Thirteenth (which abolished slavery in the U.S.), as well as behind the contemporary efforts of American Christians to end slavery in Sudan and the sexual slavery of teen girls in Southeast Asia.

I've met seventh graders who went to primary schools where Wilson (and his fellow traveler George Grant) is idolized. These seventh graders were taught, among other things, that the Ku Klux Klan was a charitable organization that rescued the South from the miserable northern carpetbaggers during Reconstruction. It's true that, like most terrorist organizations, the Klan took care of its own. But it did different, rather unpleasant things to other people—lynching and school burning, for example. But the Christian seventh graders I spoke to hadn't heard about that.

Preston Jones

In Mr. Jones's article, he makes the following observations about the Christian classical school movement:

- "There is a tendency to embrace the word [classical] with insufficient discernment."

- "Many classical schools seem to be less than discerning when it comes to interdenominational cooperation... Catholic teachers are excluded from participation."

- "There's something strange about embracing a pedagogical device invented by the Catholics...while at the same time excluding Catholics from the classroom."

To support his first point, Mr. Jones states "Infanticide, ruthless gods and blood sports are part of classical civilization, and being ancient doesn't make something worthwhile." Be that as it may, it is hardly a refutation of using the label "classical." Infanticide (in the form

of abortion), ruthless gods (greed and materialism), and blood sports (professional wrestling and football) are part of contemporary civilization and being modern doesn't make something worthwhile either. Furthermore, being ancient doesn't make something worthless. Many ancient writings, works of art and ways of teaching have been preserved because of their enormous value. Frankly, his argument is a *non-sequitur* and has no relevance as a criticism of the classical Christian school movement.

His second point seems worth considering at first. It is true that the different Christian denominations should work together in a spirit of brotherly love, respecting each others' differences and emphasizing those things they have in common. However the example he uses is not that of another denomination, but a different religion. Catholicism is not orthodox Christianity and cannot be considered a Christian denomination. Any faith which claims that Mary, the mother of Christ, is co-redemptrix is by definition a separate faith. Orthodox Catholics, who hold firmly to the pope's teaching, could create confusion in an environment which teaches that redemption comes only through Christ. Therefore it is not surprising that Catholics are excluded from some definitions of what comprises a Christian school.

As to his third point, though Catholicism is a separate religion, that doesn't mean that Catholics have not made worthwhile contributions to the world, including the realm of education. If the trivium works, it works, no matter who created it (I don't think that the Catholics did). If it is strange that a Christian school embraces a "pedagogical device invented by the Catholics, while at the same time excluding Catholics from the classroom," then it should be equally strange to have a

Christian school teaching a discipline founded by an atheistic humanist (psychology) without having an atheistic humanist as its primary teacher. Mr. Jones' reasoning simply doesn't hold. It should also be pointed out that Mr. Jones criticizes the teaching of Latin, which the reformers "did so much to shove aside." This is yet another *non-sequitur*. Latin was pushed aside to enable the common person, who typically did not read or understand Latin, the opportunity to read and understand the scriptures.

Next, Mr. Jones states "if the Christian classical schools movement is going to be taken seriously...its members would do well to distance themselves from some of their current leaders." His supporting argument relies on the fact that Douglas Wilson, along with Steven Wilkins, authored *Southern Slavery As it Was*. The problem, according to Mr. Jones, is that the book maintains that the antebellum south was a holy land, and that Mr. Wilkins is a neo-confederate. Not having read the book, I cannot address any argument based on it. However, what is wrong with Mr. Wilson co-authoring a book with a neo-Confederate?

The reason I ask is that the Civil War was, and is, a complex issue. It was not fought merely over slavery, but also over the nature of state's rights. It would be unfair and untrue to maintain that Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee and other leaders of the Confederacy fought solely for the cause of slavery, if they fought for it at all. They fought because they believed that the individual state should have a higher level of authority than the federal government. This is a valid and functional form of government, and is the system that has been in use in Switzerland for nearly 500 years. Labeling Mr. Wilkins a neo-Confederate without

explaining his views further (is he a true Confederate favoring state's rights, or a racist, separatist wacko) is unfair and a typical liberal tactic. I am, by the way, a Yankee, and my wife is a political Confederate.

Mr. Jones then praises the good education "thousands" of children have received at classical Christian schools but laments "it's a sorry fact that Christian education is often academically inferior to what can be had at good public schools." Well, which is it? And where are the statistics to back it up?

Finally, he states that "it's also sad that elements of the Christian classical schools movement are motivated by cultural and denominational separatism—in the worst cases, by neo-Confederate civil religionism." Throughout the article, Mr. Jones talks about "leaders," and "elements" in the plural. However, he only mentions Douglas Wilson. Why are no other leaders mentioned and criticized? Is Mr. Wilson the only figure out there leading the ACCS? If not, it isn't right to criticize an entire movement teaching thousands of students based solely on the work of this one man, especially if Mr. Jones cannot support his criticisms with more substantive arguments. Mr. Jones seems to be relying on harsh, negative sounding labels to make a case against one person. This is disappointing, as his criticism closely resembles spin tactics commonly used by mainstream media, not a Christian publication.

I find Mr. Jones' article to be reactionary and poorly reasoned. This is unfortunate as, otherwise, I admire him and am a fan of The Cambridge School of Dallas. I think that he and Dr. Seel are doing a great work, and are to be commended for it. This is not, however, one of his better efforts. I am a little surprised that it was published by *Critique*. It was a good exercise in discernment, but I'm not sure that it was intended as such.

Michael A. Brown
Plano, TX

Jones responds:

I thank Mr. Brown for writing. Though somewhat infelicitous, I think it would be easiest to respond point by point:

· I didn't intend to "refute" the word "classical." I wrote that there's a "tendency" to use the word uncritically. For example, Christian classical schools often refer to the trivium as "classical" when in fact it was first formulated in the middle ages. I agree that being ancient doesn't make something worthless. Like all things human, ancient things need to be examined critically.

· The idea of Mary as "co-redemptrix" is not established Catholic dogma. As for Catholics and the invention of the trivium, since it was formulated in the middle ages, and since the only Christians in Europe at the time were Catholics, then it must have been formulated by Catholics. I'm sorry that Mr. Brown excludes Catholics from the household of faith. Perhaps he might someday read Flannery O'Connor, Evelyn Waugh's novel *Brideshead Revisited*, J.R.R. Tolkien's letters, G.K. Chesterton, St. Augustine, or Pope John Paul II to discover that Catholics have something to say about grace.

· I'm not sure I understand Mr. Brown's comments about psychology. The only thing I'd say in response is that, neurophysiological and psychobiological aspects aside, the chief insights of psychology that have proved to have staying power are taken up, in one form or another, in the Scriptures.

· Mr. Brown's point about Latin and the Scriptures is well-taken and itself suggests how odd it is for anti-Catholic schools to emphasize the teaching of Latin.

· I have addressed the questions concerning Doug Wilson previously. To reiterate my central point, my problem isn't Wilson's politics; it's the bogus and pernicious "history" his book promotes. I didn't intend to write a profile of Wilson or Wilkins, which is why I

pointed readers to a publication that has profiled Wilkins: *Intelligence Report*.

· I think it's safe to say that thousands of Christian kids are getting good educations and also to say, simultaneously, that Christian education is often inferior to what students can get at good public schools. In the Dallas area there are three Christian classical schools, each of which provides a better education (generally speaking) than what can be gained at the local public schools. Add the student bodies of the three schools up, and you have a few hundred students. Duplicate that across the country, and it won't take long to get to "thousands," while at the same time recognizing that many Christian kids in other schools are still not being well educated, or as well educated as they might be at GOOD public schools. This latter point, I confess, is based on anecdotal evidence I've collected over the years.

· I didn't mention other names because I didn't intend to write an expose. Suffice it to say that another major player in the Christian classical school movement got his "doctorates" ("Ph.D.," "D.Litt.") from Internet degree mills. Academic accountability in the higher reaches of the Christian classical schools movement is lacking.

I suppose the last thing I would say is: if interested readers go back to the article that started this conversation and then read the various responses and counter-responses, they will get a good sense of the very real challenges the Christian classical school movement faces. Then, Christian teachers who are serious about the faith and rigorous learning can jump into action and make a positive contribution to the kingdom of God.

Preston Jones

Of course we need to be discerning about what our own leaders and prophets are teaching. And of course this truth

continued on next page...

Dialogue cont.

applies to Douglas Wilson just as it applies to any Christian leader. None of this should be counterintuitive to anyone who believes that “in Adam’s fall, we sinned all.” So, even though I am headmaster of a school that is a founding member of the Association of Classical and Christian Schools (ACCS), I have no problem with Dr. Jones, or anyone else, raising questions about Douglas Wilson or the ACCS. I raise them myself quite frequently.

Nevertheless, it seems to me that Dr. Jones is not so much raising questions as making assertions. He does not raise the question of whether classical Christian schools should include Catholics and exclude neo-confederates; he asserts it. He asserts that the Reformation did much to shove aside the trivium and the study of Latin. He asserts that the ECCCS is the “most promising association within the broader Christian classical school movement.” He asserts that “if the Christian classical schools movement is going to be taken seriously...its members would probably do well to distance themselves from some of their current leaders.” Yet, he also asserts that it is “sad that elements of the Christian classical schools movement are motivated by cultural and denominational separatism.”

Even if Dr. Jones were correct in all his assertions, it seems that *Critique* could better help Christians develop skill in discernment by presenting pro and/or con arguments for the various positions discussed. Why should, or should not, Catholics or Presbyterian neo-confederates be excluded from schools established by Protestants? Is it true that the Reformation did much to shove aside the trivium and Latin, and if so, why should, or should not, Protestants get involved in bringing them back? Why should, or

should not, classical Christian schools care about being taken seriously in the academic world? Why should, or should not, classical Christian schools be separatist (and how should the advice to “distance” be understood other than as separatist advice)? The answers to all these questions may seem self-evident to Dr. Jones and *Critique*. However, self-evident matters do not call for discernment.

Furthermore, while Dr. Jones is correct that Douglas Wilson is co-author of the monograph entitled *Southern Slavery As It Was*, his claim that the book maintains that “the antebellum South was, literally, a holy land,” is completely untrue. That book does say the South had a “pervasively Christian culture” (Dr. Schaeffer said the same about the entire pre-1960s United States). However, it also says the following:

1) “We have no interest in defending the racism...which was often seen as the basic justification for the system [of slavery], and we do in fact condemn it most heartily.” (p. 8)

2) “Was the South a nation in covenant with the Lord Jesus Christ? Had it undertaken formally to conform all its laws, including its laws on slavery, to the laws of Scripture? The answer is clearly no: the South was not a Christian utopia.” (p. 16)

Dr. Jones is also wrong in his implication that classical Christian schools believe that being ancient makes something worthwhile. My experience is that, although they clearly have a high regard for history and tradition, most endeavor to eliminate any kind of chronological snobbery from their students’ thinking.

For those of us who represent Christ in schools, all of these issues are important to discuss. Most of them do call for great discernment to understand intellectually or

to act on existentially. Nevertheless, as we raise these questions and discuss them, we should handle opposing viewpoints with care and precision. As Christians, we are called to love even our enemies—whether they are Babylonians or Christian leaders.

Keith E. Phillips
Rochester, MN

Jones responds:
I also thank Mr. Phillips for his letter, which was composed after a meeting held at his school where Douglas Wilson brought my article to the wider Christian classical school movement’s notice. Mr. Phillips is right that I made a number of assertions. I did so because, in addition to informing readers, I wanted to state my opinion about some things. That is why the article was printed in the Reflections column in *Critique*.

Mr. Phillips’ point about Protestants and Latin is a good one, and I hope he will do everything in his power to promote the serious study of that most wonderful language (along with New Testament Greek).

I have nothing against neo-Confederates having their own schools. It’s a free country. My problem is that, so far as I know, the Bible has nothing to say about the moral superiority of the ante-bellum South. So neo-Confederates who conflate their political views with Christianity are, at the least, on shaky turf. The Bible does, however, have something to say about the need for disciples of Jesus to make common cause with one another. So it seems that the biblical grounds for joining up with Catholics who are disciples of Jesus are stronger than they are for joining up with neo-Confederates who effectively want to make Jesus a servant of their political cause.

Another reason for Christians to give
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Longing for Inner Peace

If you have visited a Christian book store recently, you will know that self-help and self-improvement books abound. Some are little more than thinly disguised religious versions of secular books, but most claim to offer distinctly biblical advice.

One popular topic involves dealing with stress and anxiety, both of which are constant complaints in our busy lives. Christians are not only stressed, we have an added burden of guilt which arises from the conviction that for God's children worry is a sin and peace is a virtue. Doesn't Paul argue that we should "not be anxious about anything," but instead be characterized by "the peace of God, which

transcends all understanding?" True spirituality, it is believed, will decrease stress; peace is a fruit of the Holy Spirit and so an inner calm will rule any heart sold out to God and his will. Some use their sense of inner peace as a barometer for reading God's will. If you feel "at peace," proceed, but if inner peace is absent, it's probably not God's will.

One Christian psychologist begins his advice with a paraphrase of Proverbs 23:7: "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." He then applies this by listing nine things that, he says, will lead to healthy living and inner peace:

"Memorize Scripture; be willing to love; take time to laugh; face your fears; accept

yourself as you are; refuse to worry; give everyone, including yourself, a break; give problems time; watch closely how you allow yourself to be entertained."

It seems rather petty to raise questions about such a list, or about the deep yearning for inner peace and tranquility that so many have. On the other hand, just because something is commonly accepted within the Christian community doesn't make it correct. So, let's be discerning about it. ■

~Denis Haack

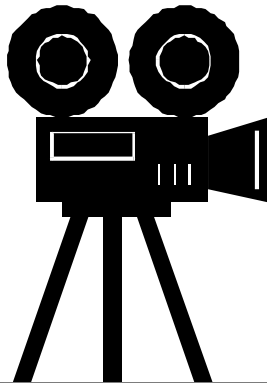
Source: *Their Blood Cries Out: The Untold Story of Persecution Against Christians in the Modern World* by Paul Marshall (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing; 1997) pp.153-155.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. To what extent do you yearn for peace and tranquility? What is the source of your anxiety or lack of peace? How do you know? To what extent would you link true spirituality and inner peace or tranquility? Why? How would you make your case from Scripture?
2. What is your initial response to the list by the Christian psychologist? What makes it attractive? Where do you agree? Why? Disagree? Why? What biblical reasons would you give?
3. Can the yearning for inner peace ever be problematic? How or when? How do you know? How would you make your case from Scripture?
4. To what extent should inner peace be used to determine God's will? Is it ever possible that following God's direction will result in a distinct loss of or decrease in inner peace? How do you know?
5. Look up and study each biblical text mentioned or alluded to in this article. Are they misused within the Christian community? How? What do they, in fact, teach? To what extent is your interpretation reflected in how the church has understood them over the centuries—especially during periods of suffering and persecution?
6. "The call to 'seek peace and pursue it,' has become" Paul Marshall says, "a ceaseless quest for personal tranquility: no stress, no guilt, no 'unhealthy' emotions." What's the difference between the two? What difference does it make?
7. Commenting on the above list, Marshall says: "The problem is not whether some or all of this may be good advice. It is that this inward focus is *all* the advice that is given: It leaves the impression that life is about inner peace." Dr. Marshall addresses this issue in a book on the horrific persecution that fellow believers are suffering around the world today. He asks why the evangelical church has failed to do much about it, or even to be informed enough to pray intelligently. "It is difficult to imagine Christians immersed in this perspective" of inner peace, he says, "being able to get their noses out of their navels long enough to consider whether their peace should be tied to the fate of suffering sisters and brothers around the world. It is equally difficult to imagine such a list giving much comfort to Christians who really are persecuted... Clearly, a positive outlook can have value in dealing with most of our ordinary day-to-day frustrations. But if God is always supposed to provide relief, then suffering Christians seem to make God appear untrustworthy and the product unreliable. Why hasn't Christianity 'worked' for the Sudanese the way it does in America? How can the prayers of suffering Christians in Vietnam remain unanswered?" What is your response to Marshall's analysis? Why?
8. To what extent is your peace tied to the fate of your suffering brothers and sisters? Rewrite the list to better reflect a biblical view of Christian faithfulness in our stressful and bloody world.

The Darkened Room

Here He Comes to Save the Day



A review of Spider-Man

by Drew Trotter

Film Credits

Starring:

Tobey Maguire

(Peter Parker/Spider-Man)

Willem Dafoe

(Norman Osborn / The Green Goblin)

Kirsten Dunst

(Mary Jane Watson)

James Franco

(Harry Osborn)

Cliff Robertson

(Uncle Ben)

Rosemary Harris

(Aunt May)

Director:

Sam Raimi

Comic book writers:

Stan Lee

Steve Ditko

Screenplay:

David Koepp

Producers:

Avi Arad, Stan Lee and others

Original music:

Jerry Cantrell

Cinematography:

Don Burgess

Costume Design:

James Acheson

Runtime: 121 minutes.

Rated PG-13 for stylized violence and action.

Spider-Man is a phenomenon. A bona-fide, honest-to-goodness phenomenon. Made for \$139M, it has to date grossed over \$383M, more than any picture this year or last. Raking in \$115M, it set the non-holiday opening weekend box office record, but it did not simply eke out its victory. *Spider-Man* gathered \$30M more than any picture had ever done, demolishing the idea that a \$100M opening weekend was an impossibility. And it showed phenomenal staying power, setting records its second and third weekends, too. It now stands, barely two months after its release, as the fifth leading US box office draw of all time, ahead of such movies as *Forrest Gump*, *Jurassic Park*, and *The Lion King*. This performance raises an important question, especially for the Christian: why such a stir, especially among teens who make up the vast majority of its viewing audience?

No one would claim the special effects of the movie make it, well, special. They are well-choreographed and created, involving flying battles high above the streets of New York City, but with fairly standard “save-the-damsel-on-the-crumbling-ledge” and “save-the-busload-of-children” content reminiscent of *Batman* and *Superman*. While the stunt work on the movie is breath-taking—an art lost in many special effects movies today—this is hardly enough to raise it to such dizzying box office heights.

The success of other super-hero pictures has been attributed to the distinctiveness of their “bad guys.” Jack Nicholson as the Joker in *Batman* and Gene Hackman

and his team in *Superman* arguably made those pictures what they were by adding a comic element to the frightful (Hackman in *Superman* as comic relief to the more sinister Terence Stamp and his Krypton-based baddies). While there was much more that made both *Batman* and *Superman* work, some critics felt that, if not for the innovative character of these opponents, both movies would have been in trouble rather than being the great successes they were.

But with *Spider-Man*, the opposite is true. Though Willem Dafoe does an excellent job as the Green Goblin, more than one critic has pointed out how silly his costume is, and how distracting the whole character is in its conception. Regular psychological battles with “the evil ‘goblin’ within” seem forced and confusing. Are we supposed to believe that Norman Osborn is basically a good guy who is changed by experimental drugs into the bad guy he becomes? If so, why is he so angry and ambitious before he takes the drugs? And what causes the changes back and forth; is there a reason for the timing of the effects that cause the Goblin to arise? Answers are not forthcoming.

One could argue that *Spider-Man*, through a combination of factors showing both talent and dumb luck, had so many things going for it that they simply all added up to a blockbuster film. A young actor (Tobey Maguire) and actress (Kirsten Dunst) who just happened to hit the crest of popular fame as the movie came out; the brash, yet sympathetic perspective of New York and its inhabitants (the entire movie is set there), aided, of course, by the events of 9/11; the familiar, but innovative special effects and stunts mentioned above; a script that has both action and romance—all these simply added up to a box office sensation.

But I think the answer lies deeper, somewhere within the soul of the youth of

America. *Spider-Man* offers all the elements listed above, but it offers two things most movies today don't, but should: a moral clarity and a call to self-denial. Stan Lee (the creator of the *Spider-Man* comics along with illustrator Steve Ditko), wrote in the *New York Times* when the movie came out that one of the reasons *Spider-Man* became such a comic book sensation was a lack of moral clarity, that he showed a super-hero who was unsure of himself and whether or not he was doing the right thing. This may be true of the comics, and is somewhat true of the film, but does not signal moral complexity. *Spider-Man* may be unsure of his motives and even his course of action, but there is never any question that there is a right thing or that its opposite would be truly evil. The only question is which direction is the right one, not whether or not there is a right one. This is illustrated dramatically when the Goblin supposedly puts Spidey in the unsolvable situation of having to choose between letting his girlfriend drop to her death or saving a cable car loaded with children, or vice versa.

Spider-Man figures out a way to save both.

Though there is confusion concerning Green Goblin's moral character, there is no confusion about Peter Parker, the nerdy kid

who is bitten by a genetically enhanced spider and becomes the protector of the weak and disadvantaged. He loves his adopted parents (his aunt and uncle), has a crush on the girl next door, is a loyal friend, studies and works hard, and always tries to help his fellow students—in short he is very good. On the other hand, the very confusion surrounding the character of Norman Osborn (the Green Goblin) insures that the “bad” side of him is indeed wholly bad. Moral clarity is something for which kids yearn in their teenage world of change and uncertainty, and *Spider-Man* offers them a picture of it, one that looks very much like them.

The second aspect of this film that makes it attractive to teenagers is even rarer in Hollywood than moral clarity: the idea of self-denial. At the end of the film, Peter Parker can finally have the one thing he has wanted all his life, the love of his dreams, Mary Jane



Spider-Man offers two things most movies today don't: a moral clarity and a call to self-denial.

Watson. But he knows what she does not, that he is *Spider-Man* and that for her to love him, especially to marry him, would be for him to endanger her in ways that are unfair and irresponsible. As he walks away, rejecting her love and not even able to tell her why or that he wishes with all his might that he didn't have to do so, the words—repeated often in the film at key moments—of his dead Uncle Ben ring in his (and our) ears: “With great power comes great responsibility.” Parker must suppress his own desires in service to the higher good of using his powers to fight crime and evil wherever he can.

It is a theme that one wonders Hollywood has not used more often; whenever it does, the potential for greatness results. After all, what makes *Casablanca* arguably the greatest movie of all time? A love deeply and passionately presented that is nevertheless denied because “after all the lives of two or three people don't matter a hill of beans in this world...” In the world of 9/11, teenagers are crying out for models of self-sacrifice and moral certainty, and they find both in *Spider-Man*. ■

~Drew Trotter

Dr. Andrew H. Trotter, Jr., is the executive director of the Center for Christian Study in Charlottesville, VA, 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. When Spider-Man saves Mary Jane the first time, he delivers her to a churchyard. When Aunt May is attacked but not killed by the Green Goblin, she is kneeling by her bedside, reciting the Lord's Prayer. What other religious elements are in this film? What is their significance?
2. What do you think of Peter Parker's reluctance to speak in the movie? Is it always the right thing to do? Why or why not?
3. What do you think of the movie's tagline: “With great power comes great responsibility”? How does Parker come to realize the weight of that truth?
4. Which character, other than Peter Parker or Mary Jane Watson, is the most appealing to you? Why?
5. Neal Gabler has written that the main attraction of teenagers to *Spider-Man* is the movie's transformation of a nerd into a super-hero. What do you think of this thesis?

What Does Winsome

At a recent conference for pastors I was amused during the Q&A session by how few questions were actually raised. It's not that no one was interested in participating. There was a long line at the microphone in the aisle; so many, in fact that only a fraction had a chance to speak before time was up. What was amusing was that almost no one actually asked a question. Instead, they made comments, sharing a quote or telling a story or expanding on some point that one of the speakers had made. The moderator mentioned—more than once—that the hour was intended for asking questions of the speakers, but his reminders seemed to fall on deaf ears. A few of the participants asked questions, but most contributions were little monologues. The tone was that of proclamation rather than questioning, of seeking to instruct rather than being content to listen.

As I sat there, my attitude slowly shifted from amusement to irritation. I had paid good money to attend this conference, and the idea was to learn from the speakers, not hear every Tom, Dick and Harry pontificate about their latest hobby horse. My irritation turned into disgust, and I walked out. It was only later that I recognized my self-righteousness, and remembered that I, too, prefer proclamation to listening. Not only is asking good questions hard work, but sad as this is to confess, I tend to prefer almost anything I have to say, to anything you have to say.

There are other reasons why many of us aren't good at asking questions. We have never practiced the skill, and so aren't very comfortable with trying. Or we

have a limited understanding of what teaching or mentoring or evangelizing includes. We imagine it to be merely a transfer of information instead of a dynamic process in which we walk alongside another person, helping them discover truth. And then there is the ever-present problem of busyness. Let's face it: simply telling you what to think takes far less time than helping you think it through. Less effort, too. And I maintain more control over the conversation if we stay away from questions, since I can never be quite sure where your answers will lead us. It's troubling for the discussion to

Many of us think of witnessing as almost exclusively proclamation, with a few questions thrown in as a staged tool to launch the presentation.

wander off into areas about which I know little, or worse, have doubts about.

In *Church on Sunday, Work on Monday*, authors Laura Nash and Scotty McLennan are concerned that little meaningful conversation occurs between the Church and the business world, even though many on both sides desire it. And now because businesspeople are open to spiritual concerns in a new way, a host of programs and experts have arisen to address that need, but the spirituality taught in these seminars is seldom Christian in any meaningful sense. Though Nash and McLennan identify numerous reasons for the failure to communicate, and though there is culpability on both sides, one reason they identify is that Christian leaders don't ask questions or listen. "Even among those who were enthusiastic about possibly creating a forum or other occasion to explore faith and work," they write, "few [clergy] sug-

gested that they were eager to hear what businesspeople had to say about their impressions of the tension they faced at work. Feeling they had seen just about enough of what business really cares for—consumerism, selfishness, careerism, insensitivity—they prepared themselves for lecturing, not listening."

Windows into hearts & minds

Before we get too critical of those clergy, we should consider whether there aren't times when we act similarly. Whether there aren't situations in which we assume we already know enough about the other person to skip asking questions or listening, and simply get to the proclamation we want to give.

One place this weakness tends to show up is in our interactions with non-Christians. Our preference for telling rather than listening, of proclaiming rather than asking questions is one reason I think so many non-Christians find many presentations of the gospel to be unattractive and less than fully personal or engaging or winsome. Many of us think of witnessing as almost exclusively proclamation, perhaps with a few questions thrown in as a staged tool to launch the presentation. The questions can have the added problem of being duplicitous, in the form of a fake "survey," the results of which are meaningless except to provide an opportunity for the witnesser to say what they intended to say all along. But even for those of us who eschew such techniques, asking sensitive, creative, and appropriately probing questions can be a challenge. Learning to ask such questions is part of learning to listen, and both are skills that can be developed and practiced, by God's grace, as we seek to live winsomely before a watching world.

Look Like? (Part 3)

If we are to demonstrate the power and attractiveness of the gospel, we must exhibit a true authenticity as the people of God. Entering into a conversation with a non-Christian is not a signal to launch a technique, but a God-ordained opportunity to have a relationship with someone made in the image of God. People made in God's image should be loved as we desire to be loved, by being listened to with care and attention. And because we live in an increasingly pluralistic world, among people who do not necessarily share our deepest convictions and values, asking questions and listening takes on added importance.

"We need to learn to ask questions that will help us understand the heart and mind of each individual we meet," Jerram Barrs says. "The fundamental issue here is one of love. Do we care enough for people that we want to get to know them, so that what we say to them will be... a word fitly framed to touch the inner being of the unique person before us?"

That's all fine and good, someone might object, but if the gospel is proclaimed, surely we can't complain about that. There can't be any harm in telling someone the truth, even if it happens to be in terms they don't fully understand or appreciate. Not so, Barrs insists. "Evangelism that bypasses understanding runs the risk of offending people and turning them away from Christ. Such evangelism makes them feel treated without respect or discernment, just a number on the end of a sales pitch. Or they may sense they are being used to assuage our sense of guilt about not doing evangelism, or that we are doing some spiritual good work that will make God pleased with us but that shows no concern for them."

There's another problem with evangelism without understanding. It is contrary to

the example set by Christ in the Scriptures. He didn't treat Nicodemus (John 3) and the Samaritan woman (John 4) to identical presentations. Neither did Paul say the same things to the people of Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13) as to the people of Athens (Acts 17). Both Christ and Paul knew whom they were talking to, and spoke accordingly. And lest we think that Christ, because of his divinity, and Paul because he was an apostle, came by their insight into their audience effortlessly, consider the text again. Both asked questions.

Willing to learn

Here's an even more radical idea. As we ask questions of non-Christians, we must be prepared and eager to learn from them, not just gain ammunition or an opportunity for the

"Do we care enough for people that we want to get to know them, so that what we say will be a word fitly framed to touch the inner being of the unique person before us?"

gospel presentation that is to come. The conversation itself should have integrity. We are talking about having a relationship—whether briefly as we sit beside them on a plane or long-term as neighbors who can become good friends—with people for whom Christ died. And though they may know nothing of saving grace at the moment, they may, through God's common grace have much to teach us about many things.

In the 1980s, Peter and Miranda Harris established A Rocha, a bird observatory and conservation center in Portugal. They welcomed strangers into their home, inviting them to help conduct field studies, enjoy the creation, and care for the earth. They began A Rocha because they are Christians and so

take seriously the biblical command to care tenderly for God's world. John Stott calls A Rocha "an exciting, contemporary form of Christian mission." Yet, as we might imagine, things don't always flow smoothly in such a setting. People come and go, and studies of migratory birds must follow the bird's schedule, come what may. "Many of those who stay here are far more impressive and seem far more calm and coherent than we do," Peter Harris writes. "Among our early visitors were a couple with three small children, unmarried Vegans with an unswerving determination to live sensitively in the fragile environment of the planet. It is quite a challenge to encounter such radical commitment. Their serenity was impressive, not least because at the time we were trying to cope with a particularly full house. [Their] quasi-Buddhist reverence was no path to God, although there were many things they could teach us." Sometimes, Harris says, Christian visitors would "almost begin a conspiracy" to influence the non-Christians to believe in Jesus. "We would have no part of that," he says. "We have no option but to be honest about him

and ourselves... I can think of many conversations with many people, and often they are in the form of an adventure, because genuine questions need genuine answers. By definition, if we are going to listen to each other, we do not know where the conversation will lead us. Our relationships with each other and those who stay with us can be taken at face value, and hold no hidden agenda."

The community lived out at A Rocha is far from perfect, but it is a setting in which both Christians and non-Christians can come together, learn from one another, work together to care for and enjoy creation, and converse as those who bear God's image. And because Peter and Miranda Harris and their staff are believers, it is a place where numer-

ous people have come to look at birds but leave having seen both birds and the truth of the gospel.

Comfortable with unbelievers

There is an offense to the cross, but a graceful life and manner of conversing is both warmly personal and profoundly attractive. That is why sinners flocked to Jesus.

Yet, too often followers of Christ are uncomfortable around non-Christians. We feel ill at ease, and unable to simply enjoy a conversation with them that is relaxed and personal. “Not only did he come from heaven to earth to make contact with mankind,” Stott says of Christ, “but during his public ministry he mixed freely with the world. He attracted sinners. They knew that he had come to call them to repentance and that his message proclaimed righteousness. Yet, far from being repelled, ‘tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.’ He befriended them. He did not seem to be at all embarrassed by them; he was at ease in their company. His viewpoint was radically different from that of the Pharisees. ‘Pharisee’ means separatist. They would gather up their robes and recoil in self-righteous horror from the prostitute; Jesus allowed a prostitute to wash his feet with her tears and wipe them with her hair. The Pharisees had no dealings with publicans, regarding them as politically and morally despicable; Jesus entered publicans’ homes and ate with them. The Pharisees threw stones at lepers to make them keep their distance; Jesus stretched out his hand and touched a leper into health.” Christ never for a moment compromised nor did he ever withdraw. In fact, he was

on comfortably intimate terms with the sort of people many Christians feel uneasy being around. “Are we like Jesus or the Pharisees?” Stott asks. “We find the company of Christians congenial and are uncomfortable in the presence of non-Christians. And in this we are poles apart from Jesus Christ.”

Though it is true that I might have more in common with a fellow Christian than with an unbeliever, discomfort and unease should not loom between me and my unbelieving friends. They too are made in God’s image, and like me, are

Something good conversationalists all have in common is the ability to ask questions, a willingness to listen, and an eagerness to learn.

sinners in need of grace. They are creative and significant, have much to teach me, and wrestle with similar questions, doubts, and fears. We would do well to become better conversationalists—and something good conversationalists all have in common is the ability to ask questions, a willingness to listen, and an eagerness to learn. Becoming more comfortable with these simple skills may make us more comfortable with people. Comfortable with conversations that are allowed to be natural and holy spirited. Including conversations with people who do not share our deepest values and convictions.

Skill in asking questions

By God’s grace all of us can develop skill in asking questions. Not as a technique, but as a true desire to listen, to understand, and to befriend. There are a number of ways we can begin to do so.

First, we should pray for grace that we might grow in the skill. And remember as we pray that we are addressing the Lord who asked questions and listened with care to the answers. Not because he was clueless about things, but because he showed love by conversing with people in a way that demonstrated his care for them.

Related to that, we could spend time meditating on the biblical texts in which God (in the Old Testament) and Christ (in the New) ask questions. What were the questions like, why were they asked, and how did they probe the inner recesses of hearts and minds? Helpful in this study is Dick Keyes’ lecture, “Jesus the Questioner” given as a workshop at the 2002 Rochester L’Abri Conference—an audio tape can be ordered online (www.soundword.com).

We can also learn from people who are good at it. Some have written books in which their giftedness in asking keenly-crafted questions is evident. Though as a postmodern philosopher he believes that the question, rather than any final answer is all that we have, Christopher Phillips has dedicated his life to leading thoughtful discussions. His *Socrates Café* is a lively exchange of questions and ideas about things that matter. Sharon Parks is similarly helpful in her book *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith*. And don’t miss Steven Garber’s book *The Fabric of Faithfulness*. The product of a mind and heart deeply immersed in the truth of God’s word, *Fabric* not only teaches us about knowing and doing, it also demonstrates how a master teacher asks questions that uncover truth.

Better yet, begin to pray for a mentor who can demonstrate the skill. Attend a seminar led by Steven Garber or Donald Guthrie—two godly teachers who are especially gifted in asking questions. Seek to come alongside someone who is a comfortable conversationalist and learn from them.

We can also simply begin to actively trust God by asking more questions in conversations, whether with individuals or in groups. Over the years Margie and I have often covenanted together to “proclaim” less at the Bible study we were about to lead, and to teach primarily through asking questions. We’ve worked hard to develop questions ahead of time, and then tried to be sensitive listeners during the study so we could ask questions that prompt further reflection and discussion. And we’ve evaluated afterwards, seeking to learn from our mistakes and giving thanks when by grace we’ve been used to stimulate people to think in new ways. When we have someone over for supper, we try to ask questions to learn something of their spiritual pilgrimage, their doubts and ideas and hopes. These are small steps, perhaps, but they’ve helped us treat people as if they were truly made in God’s image. Be willing to be pushed outside your comfort zone. If someone’s answer to a question takes the conversation into an area about which you know nothing, relax. It’s a God-ordained opportunity to learn, to walk by faith, and when necessary, to say, “I haven’t got a clue.”

A few things are certain. It’s amazing how much you learn when you listen. It’s also amazing how cared for we feel when someone asks us a question and then

really listens to the answer. And it’s amazing how the gospel is so rich and so deep that it addresses the reality of every person with their own ideas and values and yearnings. Not just in some general way, like a mortar shell lobbed in their vicinity, but like a sword piercing down into the recesses of their darkest secrets. They may reject that piercing, of course, but at least they won’t be able to dismiss it like they can the mortar shell, which is so impersonal and unspecific. They may even imagine the mortar wasn’t meant for them.

Learning to ask questions and listen, instead of simply issuing proclamations, doesn’t guarantee that the world will believe. It may make us believers less argumentative and more winsome, however. And for those

of us who wish to be like Christ, that would certainly be a step in the right direction. ■

~Denis Haack

to be continued

Sources:

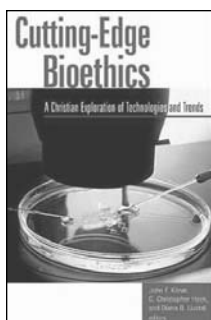
Church on Sunday, Work on Monday: The Challenge of Fusing Christian Values with Business Life by Laura Nash and Scotty McLennan (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass; 2001) p. 130. *The Heart of Evangelism* by Jerram Barrs (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books; 2001) p. 234, 237. *Evangelism: Why & How* by John R. W. Stott (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; 1962) pp. 23-25. *Under the Bright Wings* by Peter Harris (London: Hodder & Stoughton; 1993) pp. 90-91, 95.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Can you think of a time you were taught something important by being asked questions instead of simply being told about it? How did it make you feel? How effective was the learning? Why do we find it difficult to ask questions? To listen?
2. Have you known anyone that was a gifted conversationalist? What was their impact?
3. Consider the quote by Peter Harris about learning from the Vegan couple that stayed with them at A Rocha. What is your response? Why? Also consider the quote about how they pursued conversations with those who came. What is your response? Why? Should we never have “an agenda” or “strategy” when talking to non-Christians? Why or why not? If you think an agenda permissible, are there any limits to this agenda? What would they be?
4. Several reasons were listed as to why we may feel uncomfortable in conversations with non-Christians. Can you think of others?
5. A Christian argues that in a conversation with an unbeliever, we should use the time when they speak not primarily to listen, but as an opportunity to prayerfully consider what we should say next, and how we can turn the conversation towards the gospel. Another argues that we don’t really have much to listen to, since at root everything is simple: everyone is a sinner and needs forgiveness. Just get the conversation around to that and present Christ. How would you respond? Why?
6. Do you agree with the notion that our faith will not be winsome to unbelievers if we are uncomfortable with them, or ashamed of being seen with them, or uncomfortable conversing with them? Why or why not? Consider the quote by John R. W. Stott on the example of Christ. Do you agree? Why or why not?
7. What plans should you make to develop skill in asking questions?

Our Brave New World

Medical technology is aggressively expanding in ways that only a few years ago were imaginable only as science fiction. The human genome project, xenotransplantation (transplanting animal material into humans), cybernetics, nanotechnology (engineering on a molecular level), and stem cell research are just a few of the areas being developed in laboratories, and being debated in the public square. It is a debate that the church must seek to enter with a thoughtfulness



“New technologies promise vast improvements in health care... but may prove devastating.”

honed by the truth of God’s word. *Cutting-Edge Bioethics*, an important voice in that debate, is the latest in a series of books from The Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity. The Center is a think tank exploring medical ethical issues from the perspective of Christian faith. “New technologies promise vast improvements in health care and for the first time genuinely present the possibility of overcoming major disabilities such as blindness and paralysis. But at the same time these technologies may prove devastating: promoting loss or erosion of per-

sonal identity, tightening the new shackles of an ever more powerful technological tyranny, or even contributing to the destruction of our species.” This warning from the editors of *Cutting-Edge Bioethics* may sound like science fiction, but it is not. Read this collection of scholarly papers if you would like to listen in as serious Christians reflect on the issues involved in the new technologies and trends in medicine. ■

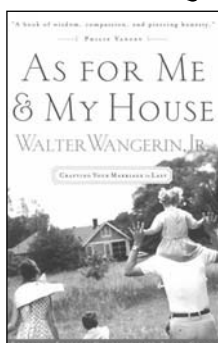
~Denis Haack

Book recommended:

Cutting-Edge Bioethics: A Christian Exploration of Technologies and Trends edited by John F. Kilner, C. Christopher Hook, & Diann B. Uustal (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; 2002) 193 pp. + index.

Briefly Noted: Redemptive Marriage

by Denis Haack



Walter Wangerin, Jr., Lutheran pastor and author of the superbly crafted novel, *The Book of the Dun Cow*, has written what must be one of the very best books on marriage that is available on the market today. *As For Me & My House* is a delight to read for its refreshing honesty, its wonderful prose, and for the biblical instruction that is woven creatively into the story of the author’s own marriage. There is nothing dry or academic here, but a living story which makes us fall deeper in love with both our spouse and our heavenly Bridegroom. Those who are planning to get married and those already married would do well to read this book, and to work through the study guide with their beloved. The story Wangerin tells is lovely, but never sentimental. He allows us access into the reality of his own marriage to Thanne, and we are richer for it. Each step of the way he is guided by the greater Story of Creation, Fall and Redemption, which is the larger reality in which we live and move, and marry. *As For Me & My House* is not another how-to book, thankfully, since we already have too many of those around, but it is practical. He doesn’t load us down with rules, but thrills us with grace, and as a result a yearning for an ever deeper covenantal relationship is nurtured within us. ■

Book recommended: *As For Me & My House: Crafting Your Marriage to Last* by Walter Wangerin, Jr. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson; 1987, 1990) 252 pp. + Study guide.

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Listen Jeremy Listen

Death Cab for Cutie, *The Photo Album* (2001)

Death Cab has been delighting the indie scene in Seattle for years. Though not its most critically-acclaimed album, this most recent release covers more bases than its predecessors. Drawing on the emotional costs of touring and loving and leaving, of sojourning more than just physical geography, Death Cab has done away with much of its adolescent pre-tension and moved on to honesty—lyrics that have been stripped to gravel, lyrics that will appeal to a younger generation struggling with lack of identity, with longing for home, with the willingness to take to the road if it means finding rest. (barsuk.com)

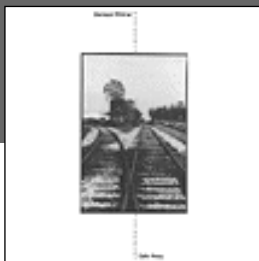


Red House Painters
Songs For a Blue Guitar (1996)
Frontman Mark Kozelek's voice is a winter landscape. Winter in San Francisco. His lush guitars and harmonies are a tribute to nostalgia; his distorted solos are a tribute to sobriety; the layering of *Songs* is a tribute to beauty. *Songs* is deliberate and unexpected, its influence on down-tempo rock overwhelming and understated. (cdnow.com)



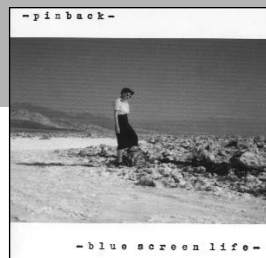
Denison Witmer
Safe Away (2000)

Whereas much of the "new folk" picks its way inward, and only inward, Witmer writes songs that turn our insides out. *Safe Away* is honest about melancholy but assured of Spirit. With an acoustic guitar and a lullaby Hammond, Witmer asks the listener to look in, and, finding Safety in an alternate tuning, to look away from self. (burntoastvinyl.com)



Pinback
Blue Screen Life (2001)

San Diego-based Pinback's recent release is a collage of acoustics and harmony and electronics and memory. Without relying on any individual element, Pinback manages to amalgamate apparently discordant sounds into a modern serenade, a digital-acoustic tapestry. This is groovy acoustic math rock. Sound stiff? If you can manage to make it through Track 5 without beat-tapping your steering wheel, I'll buy the CD from you... (pinback.com)



-Jeremy Huggins

Jeremy Clive Huggins (eprentis@aol.com) is a recent Covenant Seminary graduate (read: unemployed) who prefers the color brown, enjoys long stalks on the peach, and requires at least one hour per day of listening to music in his Dodge Dart. He is currently looking for Lola.

Pedro the Lion, *Control* (2002)

David Bazan (lead member) is one of the most honest and piercing lyricists in the independent music scene. And David Bazan is a Christian. Committed to understanding and critiquing the human heart, Bazan's music is Schaefferian in its ability to push an unbelieving worldview to its bare, and, thus, polluted, conclusions. Unlike Schaeffer, Bazan has only 45 minutes to do it, so his apologetic feels like a punch in the throat, a guitar in the craw. *Control* is a concept album, a story of infidelity, of pretentious commitments, a story that pushes the believer to question his own fidelity. Pedro the Lion is an instrument of holy discomfort, and for that, believers should open their ears and their hearts. (jadetree.com)



continued from page 6...

Catholic believers preference over neo-Confederates is that, like all Christians, Catholics can trace their history to the apostles and Jesus himself. Neo-Confederates can trace their history only to political agitations of the nineteenth century, particularly the immediate post-Civil War era. Catholics (like all Christians) possess a long, well documented and serious tradition; neo-Confederates possess a yearning for a wonderful society that never existed. The implications of both these worldviews for education are considerable.

As for Mr. Phillips' quotation about racism, I am glad he has provided me with an occasion to note that I never accused Mr. Wilson of racism. I grew up the sole white boy in a black neighborhood, so I know something about racism. And I resent the casual way the word is handled in the public sphere.

What I charged Mr. Wilson with is writing junk history dressed up as gospel. Mr. Wilson writes, for instance, that the slave system bred bonds of "mutual affection" between the races, which is, by implication, to make the astonishing claim that blacks pretty much liked being slaves and

that the God who presided over this "pervasively Christian culture" approved of it as well—until the troublesome Yankees messed things up. To get a feel for the preposterousness of this, one could start, for example, with some memoirs by former slaves. Not even meek and mild Booker T. Washington claims to miss the good ol' days in the cotton patch.

Another point: before the Civil War, crime and violence were more widespread in the South (and the West) than in the North, so I'm glad, as Mr. Phillips points out, that Mr. Wilson doesn't think the ante-bellum South a "utopia." But Mr. Wilson does suggest rather straightforwardly that the South came about as close to godly utopia as any society has. (At the same time that Southerners were making this claim for themselves, the French Canadians in Quebec, the Metis in Manitoba, and the Mormons in Utah were making the same claim for themselves.)

I encourage Mr. Phillips to take Mr. Wilson's little book to the departments of history at his local colleges or universities to see what they think about it. If the professors there are half decent, they will go

immediately to the endnotes, and there they will discover that very few primary sources are consulted and that a massive historiography on the ante-bellum South is ignored altogether. Or better yet, instead of lurking behind a vanity press, Mr. Wilson can send his book to an academic publishing house where it can undergo anonymous scrutiny. It's called accountability, and so far as I can tell from the Scriptures, God is for it. (I've had a number of articles published in professional journals. The criticism one gets in the editing process is not fun, but it is very helpful.)

Finally, I am glad that Mr. Phillips is the headmaster of a school that is a founding member of the Association of Classical and Christian Schools, a movement which has done so much good, the pseudo-scholarly posing of its "father" notwithstanding. And I consider no one involved in this discussion an "enemy."

Preston Jones

***Critique* Mailing List:**

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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.