

Critique

Helping Christians Develop Skill in Discernment

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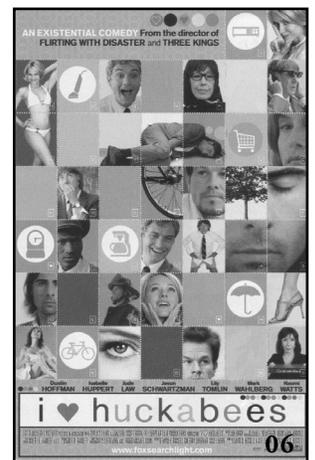
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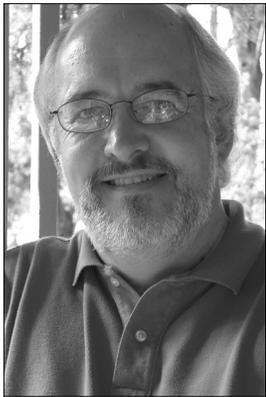
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Editor's Note



Let me know.

Christians—like everyone else—have a variety of responses to the cinema. Some are offended by what they see and hear in many films. Some see them primarily as entertainment, and so rarely think much about

them. And some find film as an art form both entertaining and enriching—able, at its best, to both delight and edify, a rich expression of God's image in his creatures.

When I find people who are willing to discuss film seriously, I like to pose a series of questions, and never fail but find their answers fascinating. Not only do the questions tend to launch a conversation, but they provide a chance to listen to stories which invite reflection on some of the deepest issues of the heart.

Here are some of the questions I pose:

How often do you/your children/your parents watch movies? If there is a generational difference, why do you think that is?

What movies most clearly resonate with the deepest yearnings of your heart? How did they achieve that? What characters, in which films, have you identified with most closely?

What movies challenged your thinking most deeply? How did they achieve that?

What film(s) seemed to best capture the essence of your generation? The older/younger generation? Your vocation? Your family/relationships/marriage? Your spirituality?

Are there movies you saw which you simply "didn't get," but sensed you should?

What film(s) moved you most deeply emotionally? Spiritually? Have you ever been led to worship in a movie? Have you ever sensed God's presence in a film?

Has a film ever convicted you that something is wrong in your life and needs to change?

How has your spiritual pilgrimage been affected by movies? Are there films that forever mark a moment worth remembering in your life?

What's the most number of times you've seen a particular film? Why did you watch it so many times?

Some people say that a movie "changed their life." Can you say that? What film(s) and how?

Have you ever walked out of a film? Why or why not?

What films would you be most pleased to have written/directed?

I ask these questions not because I am taking a survey (I'm not), nor because I use them as a technique to get people talking. I ask because I'm interested in the answers and because the conversations which often result are so satisfying and surprising. If you enjoy talking to people about things that matter, I commend them to you.

And, if you'd like to write up your reflections on some of them and send them to me via email (info@ransomfellowship.org), please do so. Unfortunately, I don't have time to respond to each email, but I promise to read each one with care. We won't have a conversation, but I still am interested.

One more thing: the questions can be easily tweaked to apply to music instead of film. Slightly different topic, but the result can be the same. Both film and music speak deeply to us, and so both are a window of insight into hearts and minds, and points of contact to begin talking about things that matter most. ■

~Denis Haack

Dialogue



re: Nerve-wrecked and accident-prone

Send e-mail to:

letters@ransomfellowship.org

I appreciate if you would keep me updated on your *Critique* magazines. I am from Malaysia, rarely get to see a Christian magazine like this. Thought-provoking and nerve wrecking. I love it. Thank you so much.

Anthony Soon
via email

I so enjoy many of the things you bring to my attention in *Critique*. THANK YOU for sending them all this way.

In *Critique* #5 - 2004, you shared your enjoyment with the rabbi's efforts to be as accident prone as possible through spiritual practices in order to have those accidental realizations of God in his life.

That is a bitter/sweet response to the reality of living in a fallen world, where even God's people do not see God often; where we are kept waiting in faith, love and hope; where evil at times is "oh so strong."

But is it really because of God's spontaneity that experiences with God are "almost accidental?" That would present a different God from the one the Bible talks about, who in his very Being is gracious. The grace of God is not an act, like dancing on the stage of our life on his own cue, but a characteristic of God himself.

God's presence in our life is not limited by selected acts of grace from God's, so that they appear like weird events in the lives of odd people. Instead the limits of our experiences are more of foreign design, introduced by devil and distractions.

Have we not gone further than Scripture tells us if we suggest that God's grace is, if not quite like a random act of kindness, almost like it to all intents and purposes? I find it more faithful to all the effort and struggle God undertakes to reveal himself and to be present to us when we see the interruptions in the grace due to our being kicked out of

the Garden of Eden now and waiting for the restoration.

Surely the Reformers' reaffirmation of salvation by grace insists on God's work for us, not on occasional acts of his power. The rareness is not due to God's spontaneity, but to the many hindrances laid in the way against his continued effectiveness of grace and our experience of it.

Udo W. Middelmann
Gryon, Switzerland

Denis Haack responds

I appreciate your taking the time to write, Udo, and your kind words. I think we read the conversation with the rabbi quite differently. I do not read his comments as suggesting that it is because of "God's spontaneity that experiences with God are 'almost accidental.'" I agree that God's grace is not at all like "random acts of kindness," and that his providence in our lives flows out his grace, for he is and always remains, a gracious God. Rather, I read the rabbi's comments as insisting that though spiritual disciplines are important for our walk with God, they must not be imagined to be like tokens which, when dropped in the correct slot, produce some encounter with the divine. Rather than a mechanical drill, they deepen a relationship, and though God remains gracious at all times, our immediate encounter with his presence and grace can, due to our fallenness and finiteness, feel almost accidental. Certainly I have, during dark nights of the soul, cried out for reassurance, and in the dead silence that followed, trusted in God's promises; while only later, when I have least expected it, has the sweet inner witness of the Spirit been a quiet whisper in my soul.

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

Marsena Konkle
Critique Managing Editor
23736 S. Lakewood Lane
Lake Zurich, IL 60047

or e-mail:
letters@ransomfellowship.org

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.

Hiding Assets

As I travel and speak, it isn't surprising to me that some of what I say is challenged by some who hear me. It's healthy, in fact, because it allows for lively discussion where the give and take of ideas allows us to reexamine our convictions, prejudices, and views.

One thing that is never challenged, however, is the idea that we live in a world where increasingly those around us hold values and beliefs that are different from our own. And that because of this growing pluralism, we find ourselves at least occasionally faced with requests from people that appear to clash with what we believe to be right and true. Requests about which we are required to make a choice, and though we want to do what is right, it is not always immediately clear what that right is. To make matters more complicated, some of our Christian friends may disagree with our decision, and argue that they (and Christ) would have handled the scenario quite differently. Sometimes our

friendships with non-Christians seem to hang in the balance, and our decision can affect their understanding of our faith.

Consider the following scenarios, both of which are based on true stories.

Scenario #1.

A non-Christian friend, let's call her Susan, has just been abandoned by her husband. His family is quite wealthy, and the couple have been living in a house owned by his family. The plan was that he would finish school while Susan supported them with odd jobs, and then she would finish her degree in music. The only financial asset Susan brought to the marriage was a cello, which has been in her family for several generations, and is worth in excess of \$50,000. To keep from losing her cello when their property is divided in the divorce, Susan asks you to purchase her cello for \$500, with the promise to sell it back to her for the same amount after the divorce is finalized.

Scenario #2.

A single mother, let's call her Linda, has been working hard to make a go of things, but some unexpected bills have caught up to her, and she is now faced with having to declare bankruptcy. Alienated from her family because of her pregnancy, you have become her closest friend. She asks you to rent a storage unit in your name, and gives you cash to cover the cost for a year's rental. There is no financial risk for you: at the end of the rental period, either the agreement must be extended or after 30 days the contents of the unit will become the property of the storage company. Though Linda doesn't have much, she intends to store her few items of value in order to hide those assets from the bankruptcy court.

Two requests to help hide assets from the court, requiring a decision. Both raise questions worth discussing. ■

~Denis Haack

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What is your initial reaction to these scenarios? Why do you think you reacted as you did? Have you faced—or heard about—similar situations?
2. Would you purchase Susan's cello? Why or why not? If no, how would you explain your reasons to her?
3. Would it make a difference if Susan was abandoning her husband, rather than being abandoned? Or if they were simply divorcing because both felt the marriage was not worth continuing? Why or why not? If yes, why are you willing to offer grace only to those you deem worthy of it? If Susan was your sister, would that change your decision? If she was a Christian?
4. Would you rent a storage unit for Linda? Why or why not? If no, how would you explain your reasons to Linda?
5. If Linda found someone else to rent it for her, would you help her move her assets into it? Why or why not? If you wouldn't rent it for her but would help her move her assets, why the difference?
6. If you tell Linda no (to either renting the storage unit or helping her move her assets into it), and she responds that true friends are willing to take risks for each other, how would you respond?

Questions continued on next page...

Quotes, etc.

QUESTIONS CONT...

7. Let's assume that Linda did not tell you her reasons until after you had rented the space in your name (which is what actually transpired). What would you do and say? Why? What would you do/say if your spouse rented the unit without talking with you first?
8. Do you feel you need more information, perhaps about the law, before making your decision? How would you handle this if actually faced with these scenarios—without alienating your friend? Let's assume that in both cases, helping to hide the assets is clearly forbidden by law. To what extent should that fact determine what you will do? Why? If this simply settles the issue for you, why aren't you willing to offer grace to a friend who is about to be hurt by the application of law? Since the cello is clearly Susan's, why would you insist that the court, which deems it "community property," is correct? Under what conditions would you be willing to break such laws in order to help a friend? How do you justify your position biblically? To what extent are these scenarios similar to Jesus's willingness to heal on the Sabbath?
9. To what extent do Christians need to come to identical decisions in such matters? Is true community possible if such disagreements exist? How is diversity and unity to be lived out within the Christian community? Why do so many Christians have so much trouble maintaining unity in the face of such diversity?

From words and ribs to creativity.

Listening

"Listening is a rare happening among human beings. You cannot listen to the word another is speaking if you are preoccupied with your appearance or impressing the other, or if you are trying to decide what you are going to say when the other stops talking, or if you are debating about whether the word being spoken is true or relevant or agreeable. Such matters may have their place, but only after listening to the word as the word is being uttered. Listening, in other words, is a primitive act of love, in which a person gives self to another's word, making self accessible and vulnerable to that word."

-William Stringfellow

William Stringfellow quoted in *Everyday Apocalypse: The Sacred Revealed in Radiohead, the Simpsons and Other Pop Culture Icons* by David Dark (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press; 2002) p. 143.

Ribs as sacrament

"It's our intention and our mission to become part of American culture, to become what some call the 'third place.' There's work, there's home, and there's the 'third place.' For some people, it's church; for some, it's Starbucks; for some, it's Applebee's."

-Lloyd Hill

Lloyd Hill, CEO of Applebee's restaurant chain quoted in *Context* (October 2004, A) p. 5.

Good food, good life

"Though Julia Child was a cooking teacher, what she really taught was how to be alive. She lived until she was 91, mocking Atkins, Ornish and anyone else who believed that a slice of French bread or a pat of butter would kill you... She never edited out any of her



mistakes [on her TV program], showing you how to fix them, live with them or bluff. She dropped stuff on the floor, wiped it off and said, 'Remember, you're all alone in the kitchen, and no one can see you...' She fought against anyone who believed in living correctly instead of well. She first fought against recipes that

called for the culinary ease of prepackaged powdered soup and then the dietary benefits of defatted cheese. 'Fake food—I mean those patented substances chemically flavored and mechanically bulked out to kill the appetite and deceive the gut—is unnatural, almost immoral, a bane to good eating and good cooking. I just hate health food.'

-Joel Stein

From "Living Through Better Cooking" by Joel Stein, an appreciation piece on Julia Child in *Time* (August 23, 2004) p. 64.

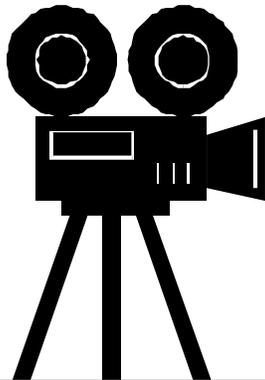
Creativity isn't optional

"Creativity is inherent in each of us. What varies is the way in which we express that energy. It's not how creative you are, it's how you are creative." ■

-Marci Segal

Marci Segal in *Fast Company* (June 2004) p. 16, (www.fastcompany.com).

Reality is a Blanket?



A review of I ♥ Huckabees

by Denis Haack

-“Have you ever transcended space and time?”
-“No. Yes. Uh, time not space. No, I have no idea what you are talking about.”

In case you were wondering, the title of this movie is pronounced, *I “heart” Huckabees*. If that raises the question, “What does that mean?” in your mind, you’ll just have to see the film. I should warn you, however, that while that question gets answered, the film stirs up such a flurry of other questions—all about meaning, as it turns out—that by the end you’ll be wondering what hit you. And it’s just about the only question the movie actually answers.

Which, I think, is the point of the film: to raise some of the very biggest questions about meaning and significance, and make us laugh in the process. Or, as some of the advertisements for the film put it, “*I ♥ Huckabees* is all about what it’s all about.”

The plot is relatively simple. Albert, the poetry-reciting head of a small environmental group trying to save a marsh from being developed, is troubled by a series of coincidences in his life. So he hires the Existential Detectives, played by Lily Tomlin and Dustin Hoffman, to do their thing, which is to follow him around, watch everything he does, and help him sort out the meaning of existence. In the meantime, Albert has signed a contract with Huckabees, a huge superstore, for the resources to save the marsh, only to have the corporation’s PR head, played by Jude Law, cynically manipulate Albert’s Open Spaces Coalition to his own greedy

materialistic ends. Jude Law’s girlfriend, the air-head model for Huckabees played by Naomi Watts, falls under the Detectives’ spell to discover that her real self involves dressing like a farm girl rather than appearing in sexy outfits in Huckabees’ commercials. Albert is linked up with Tommy, played wonderfully by Mark Wahlberg, who joins him in the search for meaning. Then a French philosophical opponent of the Existential Detectives appears and seduces Albert to her view of things. Her motto, neatly printed up on business cards is “cruelty, manipulation, meaninglessness.” All this transpires at a manic pace, until in the end, well, perhaps it’s best to say simply that the film ends.

There have been other recent films that have been as explicitly philosophical as *Huckabees*, but I can’t think of any that were this entertaining. *Waking Life* comes to mind for example, but it was so dry it was difficult to sit through. *Huckabees* is like a roller coaster for the mind, a wild ride through world views to see if anything can make sense of the deep sadness, values, relationships, coincidences, bitter fragmentation, and joys of life in our pluralistic, hectic world. This is the postmodern generation’s approach to philosophy.

“I’m interested in philosophy insofar as it’s practical and it makes you feel more alive,” director David Russell says. “And it makes you more open-minded. That’s really the only way it interests me. So, *Huckabees* is talking about all of these spiritual ideas and putting them in a context without a church. I think they can absolutely live without a church. The ideas are ‘departure points’... Jesus would say this is true: If your spirituality is about your ego then your spirituality is fake. Our ego likes to control things, to have certainty. Certainty is very useful. If it wasn’t, we’d be sitting in our own excrement. But, that certainty can real-

I (heart) Huckabees

Credits:

Starring:

Jason Schwartzman
(Albert Markovski)
Isabelle Huppert
(Caterine Vauban)
Dustin Hoffman
(Bernard)
Lily Tomlin
(Vivian)
Jude Law
(Brad Stand)
Mark Wahlberg
(Tommy Corn)
Naomi Watts
(Dawn Campbell)

Director:

David O. Russell

Screenwriters:

David O. Russell
Jeff Baena

Producers:

Gregory Goodman
Michael Kuhn
and others

Original Music:

Jon Brion

Cinematographer:

Peter Deming

Costume Designer:

Mark Bridges

Runtime: 106 min.

Rated R for language and
a sex scene.

ly close your mind off to the true light of Jesus and to the truth about what is. This film is about ‘departure points,’ departures from certainty and the ego.” Later in the same interview, Russell reads a quote from the poet W. H. Auden which featured in his thinking as he directed the film: “We would rather be ruined than changed. We would rather die in our dread than climb the cross of the moment and let our illusions die.”

The movie blends comedy with philosophical discussion with tragedy, moving between them so quickly that we are constantly kept off balance. The search for meaning is authentic, yet is often met with propositions that are absurd. “Say this blanket represents all the matter and energy in the universe, okay?” Hoffman says to Albert early in the film, poking his fingers into the blanket to produce lumps. “This is me, this

is you, And over here, this is the Eiffel Tower, right, it’s Paris!” And then Hoffman zips Albert into a body bag so he can have some private time to sort that out.

In the end, *Huckabees* is about getting people to stop and reflect for a moment. To be willing to look hard at their assumptions, their prejudices, their convictions and values, their certainties, questions, and doubts, and consider them all carefully in the light of reality as we actually live it. Not to think about big ideas in a comfortable room over coffee and muffins, but in the fast-paced give and take of life that we experience everyday.



The movie blends comedy with philosophical discussion with tragedy, moving between them so quickly that we are constantly kept off balance.

The movie does not provide final answers—and many that are proposed are shown to be absurd—but that isn’t its point. It’s meant to stir things up, not provide closure, to make us wonder, not to provide certainty. And rather than do all this with the solemnity which usually accompanies world view explorations, it does it all in a manic comedy, where the deep pain and delicious irony of life in a fallen world is seen as the backdrop for all our yearnings for meaning and significance in a world that so often seems to be teetering out of control.

I will be very interested to learn how the young adults in my life respond to this film, and how they pose the questions—and answer the questions—raised by the movie. And I look forward to leading some of the discussions, to see where the conversation takes us. The Story of Scripture provides gracious answers to these questions, but they’ll need to be framed in a way that will make sense to a generation who can laugh and wonder at *I ♥ Huckabees*. ■

~Denis Haack

Source: An insightful interview with director David Russell and review of the film, both by Jeffrey Overstreet posted online at www.ChristianityToday.com.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Do you think the director wants us to leave the film wondering what it’s all about? As objectively as you can list them, which basic questions did the film pose?
2. Though G. K. Chesterton blended philosophical musing with wit, world view issues aren’t often explored in comedic form. How effective is *Huckabees* as a comedy? What might we learn from this in our attempt to gain a hearing for the gospel by the postmodern generation?
3. What’s attractive here? How is it made attractive?
4. Which character did you identify with most? Why? What is the significance of each character to the story of the film?
5. Which scene struck you as most funny? Most absurd? Most poignant? Most truthful? Why?
6. The Christian family in the film is depicted as, in director Russell’s words, “big hearted” but “closed minded.” Why might he have depicted them this way?
7. If you were to discuss this film with a group of non-Christians, how might you be able to talk about the gospel in a way that would make sense? Why might the “standard” presentations of “the gospel” fail to communicate adequately?
8. David Russell also directed *Three Kings*. What similarities do you see between the films?
9. In what ways were the techniques of film-making (casting, direction, lighting, script, music, sets, action, cinematography, editing, etc.) used to get the film’s message(s) across, or to make the message plausible or compelling? In what ways were they ineffective or misused?

A Place of No Troubles

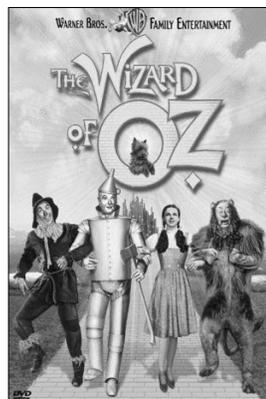
A Review of The Wizard of Oz.

You will know *The Wizard of Oz* as the story of Dorothy and her dog Toto and their journey to the magic land of Oz where they encounter good and bad witches, munchkins, evil flying monkeys, the emerald city of Oz and its sham wizard, talking scarecrows, tin men and lions, eventually learning that “There’s no place like home.” This defining, movie-ending apothegm is the first idea worth contemplating for the Christian because it is both true and not true at the same time. Kansas is a bleak place with Auntie Em and Uncle Henry struggling against the desperate conditions of 1930s dustbowl, plagued by three likeable but less than stellar farmhands, and trapped in a run-down farmhouse where they must work constantly.

But the film makes the point that these externally depressing conditions can be overcome by the right attitude. Dorothy’s hopeful, sunny disposition—made up of equal parts brain, heart, and courage—can be brought to bear on her life in austere Kansas and make it into a color-filled place after all. The touching final scene is surely supposed to make us think that Dorothy has recognized in friends and family a source of stability and goodness that transcends the jazzy Oz with its horse of a different color, singing townspeople, and rich, polished buildings. It takes little knowledge of the Christian faith to see the parallels for the Christian. As Paul puts it: “I know how

to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need” (Phil 4:12).

So Dorothy balances the reality of Kansas with the reality of the lesson learned in Oz. *The Wizard of Oz* is widely believed to be the most watched, and arguably the most beloved, film in American history and audiences gather at Easter time to indulge once again in their



The film makes the point that externally depressing conditions can be overcome by the right attitude.

favorite hope-building story.

The mention of hope brings us to our most conflicting assessment of *The Wizard of Oz*. Try as one might to see it otherwise, *Oz* demonstrates a pull-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps-look-to-the-power-within humanism. Near the end of the film, the tin man asks Dorothy what she has learned. She turns to the good witch Glinda and says: “If I ever go looking for my heart’s desire again, I won’t look further than my own backyard. That’s right, isn’t it?” The witch answers, “That’s all it is.”

The apostle Paul displayed an attitude that conquered the many greys, and often the blacknesses, of his life. But he goes on in the next verse to give the secret of his ability to face “hunger and plenty, abundance and want.” He writes, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Phil 1:13), signal-

ing clearly that the Pharisee who once thought he could do all things through his own righteousness, had discovered the need to depend wholly on Christ and His Spirit, who alone enables the believer to face all the trials of life.

But are we then to hate, rather than love, *The Wizard of Oz*? Something deep within us cries out against taking this route. Why? Because it is part of the magic of movies, indeed the magic of story, that we can fill their spaces with truths we know from other places, emphasizing here, downplaying there, and taking what by common grace a story-maker has

delivered in glorious, enriching fashion and incorporating it into the true story we are living.

Oz has much that is useful: the stark contrast between the evil of the wicked witches and the goodness of the good one, the benefit of community among the four adventurers, indeed the goodness of the common greys of real life. The joy of color and humor, the self-sacrificial kindness of Dorothy toward everyone she meets, the sparkling delight of imagination—all these are worthwhile objects for reflection and incorporation into the holy life. We should be grateful to this charming film for all these. ■

~Drew Trotter

Note:

For a longer, more thorough review, log onto our website (www.RansomFellowship.org/M_Oz.html). 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 © 2004 by Andrew H. Trotter, Jr.

Forgiving & Reconciling

We pray, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us...” then think:

I don't know if I want to. I don't know how. It seems like it would take forever, if it is even possible.

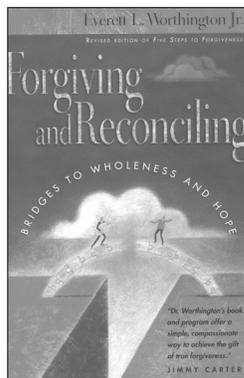
That is what hopelessness in the midst of a broken relationship looks like. Then bitterness sets in and the wounded heart is far from healing, battered about in a perfect storm. How do we find the will to forgive? How do we find the way to forgive? How do we persevere in the hard work over time that forgiving will take? Everett Worthington has been there:

At the emotional crest of that excruciating dark night, I wanted relief from my anger. I needed a rock that would steady my reeling view of the world and myself. I wanted to know and do what God wanted me to do...I wanted to forgive if it would help me deal with my pain, anger, hurt and sadness. If only I could forgive, I thought, I could have peace. (p.23)

We bring our own pain to the task, looking for relief. It is difficult to leave self-interest behind. We want peace and we want God's forgiveness (Matt. 6:14 & 15). We know that forgiving is also about giving. The gift is forgiveness itself that only we can give someone who has injured us. But how can we do this, when we feel hopeless and often bitter?

In his book *Forgiving and Reconciling*, Everett L. Worthington, draws on his own experience of his mother's murder and years of careful research on forgiveness, to show us the way to give forgiveness and find the peace and blessing we seek. Worthington

understands that it is easier to forgive from our own self-interest than for the good of another, but his research has found that the deepest and longest lasting forgiveness is born out of an empathic motive to forgive the one who has injured us. He shows us the difference between decisional forgiveness and emotional forgiveness and how we must bring both to the task.



In his excellent chapter, “The Christian Foundation of Forgiving,” he shows the human and divine sides in for-

The deepest and longest lasting forgiveness is born out of an empathic motive to forgive the one who has injured us.

giveness. He says, “Basically, we are incapable of truly forgiving in a spiritually meaningful way under our own power. Through Jesus’ work applied to us...He can work forgiveness through us” (p. 67). Still we must cooperate with our Lord.

Worthington's research not only helps us to understand forgiveness but also guides us in the practice of forgiveness in a deep way. It is not difficult to understand if we consider the emotional dynamics of unforgiveness—a blend of the negative emotions of bitterness, anger, hatred, hostility and fear born out of a perceived hurt that is registered physically throughout the body—that forgiveness is also emotional. In fact, the body cannot hold both a negative set of emotions and a positive set of emotions at the same time. One will prevail in expression. Worthington explains:

Forgiveness is defined as the emotional juxtaposition of positive emotions (such as empathy, sympathy, compassion, agape love

or even romantic love) against (1) the hot emotions of anger or fear that follow a perceived hurt or offense or (2) the unforgiveness that follows ruminating about the transgression, which also changes our motives from negative to neutral or positive. Positive emotions are juxtaposed against—or experienced at the same time as—the negative emotions...the positive emotions reduce the intensity of the negative emotions. If the emotional juxtaposition is strong enough or last long enough, the unforgiveness is changed so that it can never be experienced again in the same way. Emotional “replacement” has occurred. (pp. 41-42)

This does not mean that the hurt is forgotten but that it is remembered with a different set of emotions associated with it, “amity is substituted for enmity.” Worthington explains in depth how emotional replacement works in the first of five steps to reach forgiveness—recalling the hurt. It is with a changed heart we can offer the agape love of forgiveness to another. Often, it is only by the power of the Holy Spirit and the indwelling Christ that we are able to reach positive emotions such as empathy, sympathy and compassion. Worthington shows us how to cooperate with this process. Emotional

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Resources cont.

forgiveness brings the healing that decisional forgiveness alone cannot. They are both needed, but the feelings do not always follow the simple decision to forgive, especially if the hurt is a deep wound. Worthington says, “God wants us to grant decisional forgiveness eagerly...but also to experience a heart change in which the (emotions) of unforgiveness are replaced with the sympathy, empathy, compassion and love of emotional forgiveness” (p. 55).

In order to reach the heart change that God desires for us, Worthington has mapped out a five step process. The steps spell out the acrostic REACH: Recall the hurt, Empathize, Altruistic gift of forgiveness, Commit to forgive publicly, Hold on to forgiveness.

Many who have been deeply hurt might give up right here, but I would encourage you to keep going and to

engage a trusted friend, mentor, spiritual director or counselor in the process. Worthington shows great sensitivity and compassion as a counselor who knows the difficulties along the path both from his own experience and from years of research and working with others on forgiveness. He does not set us on a course of recalling hurt without some specific guidelines for avoiding pitfalls. He also suggests we start with smaller hurts in past relationships to practice for the deeper hurts and forgiveness needs.

When we have objectively recalled the hurt then we are able to move on to empathy and the altruistic gift of forgiveness. Again, Worthington carefully defines empathy and giving the gift, which is not about forgetting the offense, but is rooted in Christ’s forgiveness. He is faithful to the Scriptures in each step.

Worthington spends the final part of this book helping us understand when and how reconciliation is possible in a relationship that needs the healing of forgiveness. Worthington charts our battered hearts to a way to hope in Christ through this fine work of Christian scholarship and Christian compassion. *Forgiving and Reconciling* is a worthy guide for the will, the way and the perseverance to the healing of forgiveness. ■

~Jennifer Disney

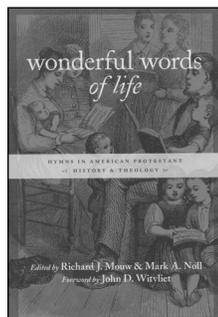
Jennifer H. Disney is a therapist, spiritual director and writer who lives near Minneapolis

Book reviewed:

Forgiving and Reconciling: Bridges to Wholeness and Hope by Everett L. Worthington (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; 2003) 268 pp.

Briefly Noted: Evangelical Christianity

by Denis Haack



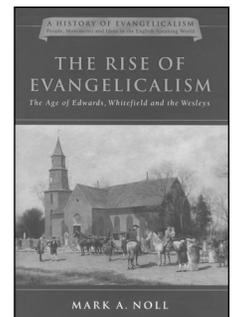
Those who are part of evangelical Protestantism or are curious about evangelicalism will find two recent publications to be of interest.

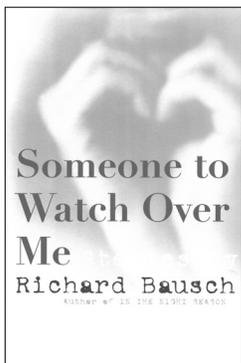
In *Wonderful Words of Life*, eleven scholars and musicians (not all evangelicals) explore the history, theology, and impact of Protestant hymns in worship, devotional life, and society. Though few Christians would doubt the importance of hymns, most give the topic little thought unless some controversy erupts over which ones should be sung in church. Though these essays are scholarly, they are too interesting—and important—to be left to historians and theologians.

In *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, Mark Noll tells the story of the roots of American evangelicalism by writing a history of the era marked

by the leadership, preaching, and writing of Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and John and Charles Wesley. The first volume of a projected five book series, Noll writes a scholarly yet accessible history. This is a story of lively faith, surprising growth, leaders with clay feet, and most importantly, grace. ■

Books reviewed: *Wonderful Words of Life: Hymns in American Protestant History and Theology* edited by Richard J. Mouw and Mark A. Noll (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; 2004) 250 pp. + appendices + indices; and *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield, and the Wesleys* by Mark A. Noll (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; 2003) 293 pp. + bibliography + index.





One of my favorite stories is only eighteen pages long. A length that is easily read in a single sitting, during stolen moments when I should be folding socks or making the bed. It might seem that such a short story

would be incapable of exploring real issues with any depth. Easily read, easily forgotten, right? But such is not the case with “Someone to Watch Over Me” (from the collection by the same name) by Richard Bausch, an author who is capable of capturing a reader’s attention in the first paragraph:

Here are Marlee and Ted, married one year tonight, walking into the Inn at New Baltimore, an exclusive establishment on the main street of this little village in the Virginia hunt country. Ted’s ex-wife, Tillie, recommended the place, calling it the perfect surrounding for spending a romantic evening. A wonderful setting in which to celebrate an anniversary. The fact that it was Tillie who did the recommending is something Marlee didn’t know about until five minutes ago.

The story—all eighteen pages—takes place over the course of an hour or two and includes a single conversation between Marlee and Ted. As you may guess, the evening is not a stellar one. What should have been a romantic celebration of love

turns into a fight that encompasses not only the immediate circumstances of the evening, but their inherent differences, their individual motivations, and their very marriage.

Bausch has a way of capturing the nuances of a fight that is both hilarious and sobering; I can’t imagine that I’m the only one who recognizes myself in the petty and harsh things Ted and Marlee say to each other.

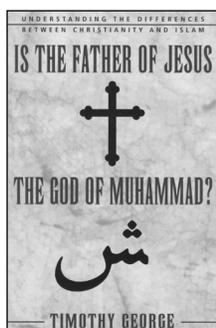
“Someone to Watch Over Me” is worth discussing—and one of the best things about using a short story with a group is that it can be read aloud before the discussion begins. ■

—Marsena Konkle

For in-depth discussion questions, see (www.RansomFelLowship.org/B_Bausch.html). *Someone to Watch Over Me* by Richard Bausch (NY: Harper Flamingo; 1999) 214 pp.

Briefly Noted: Christianity and Islam

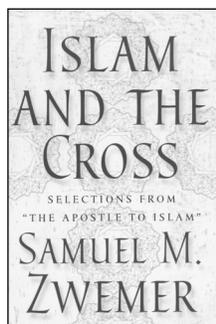
by Denis Haack



If we are serious about engaging our world with the gospel, we will be serious about engaging Muslims with the gospel, for they are our neighbors. According to the U. S. State Department, there are more than 1,200 mosques in America, a 25% increase since 1994. This increase is not due entirely to immigration; it is estimated that 17-30% of the total 5-6,000,000 Muslims in the U.S. are converts to Islam. Two books will therefore be of interest:

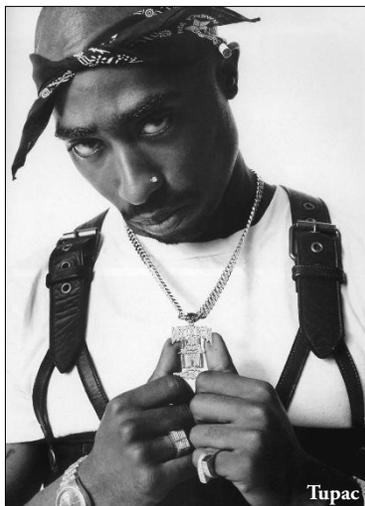
Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad? is not the best title, but author Timothy George (an editor of *Christianity Today*) not only answers that question but helpfully explores the essential differences between Islam and Christianity. Dr George writes not to arm Christians with material for arguments, but to encourage understanding of Islam and compassionate interaction with Muslims.

Islam and the Cross is a reprinting of selections from the writings of Samuel Zwemer (1867-1952). Before becoming a professor of missions at Princeton Seminary, Zwemer was a missionary in the Middle East, where he worked tirelessly to bring the gospel to the Islamic world. In this book some of his most helpful writing on Islam is made available to a new generation of Christians who need to learn from this “apostle to Islam.” ■



Books reviewed: *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad?: Understanding the Differences Between Christianity and Islam* by Timothy George (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan; 2002) 139 pp. + reading suggestions + glossary + notes; and *Islam and the Cross: Selections from 'the Apostle to Islam'* by Samuel M. Zwemer, edited by Roger S. Greenway (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing; 2002) 154 pp. + notes + index.

Hip Hop



Listening to the Hip Hop Culture

Something historic happened in October 2003. As Joan Anderman reported in the *Rochester Post-Bulletin*, “For the first time in the 50 year history of the *Billboard* charts, all Top 10 songs in the country last week were by black artists—signaling the culmination of hip-hop’s ascent as the dominant force in popular music and culture.”

Since then, hip hop has continued to be a dominant force in not only popular music but as Walt Mueller, President of the Center for Parent / Youth Understanding, said, “hip hop is driving mainstream culture.” Hip hop is not a passing fad. Hip hop has lasted nearly thirty years. It is here to stay.

There is a lot of evidence that Mueller is right. In the musical field, rap is being blended with other musical genres like jazz and metal. Rapper P. Diddy has his own clothing line. Rap artists are key spokespeople in commercials for tennis shoes. When Cadillac executives wanted feedback on the future model of the Escalade, they invited rappers and athletes to meet with them. Film soundtracks feature rap songs and rappers like Eminem are starring in movies. I have seen two magazines devoted to the hip hop culture: *The Source* and *XXL*. Pick up a copy at your local grocery store and while you’re there, quench your thirst by sipping on the energy drink, PIMP Juice.

Rap music is everywhere and the postmodern generation that has been weaned on hip hop will not let us ignore it. Young people of all races, ethnicities, and social-economic levels listen to hip hop, whether they are urban, rural, or living in the suburbs. Private school students, public school students, and home schoolers listen to it. God’s people—those who confess with confidence that God is sovereign—have at least two responses. Either we can condemn this hip hop culture and in effect “throw the baby out with the bath water” or we can creatively seek ways to use rap music’s popularity to advance the kingdom.

Understanding Rap

How might we define rap? First, rap is talking in rhyme to the rhythm of a beat, or spoken poetry over other existing music genres. In effect, rappers are poets.

Rap also serves as a forum, according to Rapper Bubba Sparxxx, “to tell people about our lives and what we’ve seen.” Rap artists rap about the good, bad, and the ugly from the perspective of their life’s experiences.

In her book, *Black Noise*, Tricia Rose offers this definition: “Rap music is...a hidden transcript. Among other things it uses cloaked speech and disguised cultural codes to comment on and challenge aspects of current power inequalities...rap music is a contemporary stage for the theater of the powerless.” (*Black Noise*, pp. 100-101)

Rap was birthed in the early 1970s in the South Bronx, NY; however, many believe that rap music had its predecessors in the early 60s and 70s in African American music such as the Last Poets, Gil Scott-Heron, and Millie Jackson, “as well as in the speeches of Malcom X, the Black Panthers, and blaxploitation films.” Blaxploitation, or black exploitation, films featured black actors in gangsta fiction and in “pimp narratives;” narratives that explored the ins and outs of the ghetto redlight district. *Superfly* is one example, about a drug dealer named Priest who was determined to earn enough money so he wouldn’t have to work for white man the rest of his life.

Typically, when you speak of the origin of rap music, three men are mentioned: Jamaican-born Kool DJ Herc who is considered the “godfather of hip hop,” Afrika Bambaataa, and Grandmaster Flash. It’s interesting to note that among these revered founders of hip hop, “money was not a goal,” according to Nelson George’s book, *HipHop America*. “None of these original DJs expected anything from the music but local fame, respect in the neighborhood, and the modest fees from the parties given at uptown clubs or the odd midtown ballroom.”

The first rap song to go mainstream was “Rapper’s Delight” by the Sugar Hill Gang, which

was released in September 1979 and remained on the Billboard chart for 12 weeks, although it never climbed into the top ten. While I was a sophomore at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, KS, we danced to this song at every opportunity and I owned my own vinyl copy.

Listening to the Heart

Listening to any music begins with listening to the heart of the performer and glimpsing their world view. Dr. Walter Turnbull, founder of the Boy's Choir of Harlem, said in his book, *Lift Every Voice*, art "is the one thing that provides a mirror to an individual's soul. The brain is easily confused; the heart rarely lies."

Jesus said something similar in Mark 7: 20-22: "what comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness." In other words, what resides in the heart—the good and the evil—comes out in many forms. Rap music provides an inside look into the hearts of rap artists; it's here that we see the good and the bad, the glory and the shame.

What we hear in rap music emanates from the hearts of persons who are glorious ruins. So, when we listen to rap, what do we hear? Let's begin with the obvious.

Degradation of women. It's painfully clear in predominately gangsta rap that women are mere sex objects. While I don't excuse this behavior, we should not be surprised since we live in a culture that exploits women, a culture that treats women as inferior. We live in a sex-saturated culture in which women are the pawns. Consider Hooters Restaurant, the Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders, or the Hardees commercial where an attractive woman is riding a mechanical bull making very suggestive sexual gestures while eating a burger. Male rappers, like many men, get a power rush when domineering over women. While some rap music is rightfully criticized for its themes of misogyny and denigration of

women, it would be unfair to stop there. For instance, Tupac—an icon of hard core gangsta rap—raps affectionately and tenderly about his mother:

*You always was committed
A poor single mother on welfare,
Tell me how ya did it
There's no way I can pay you back
But the plan is to show you that I
understand
You are appreciated...*

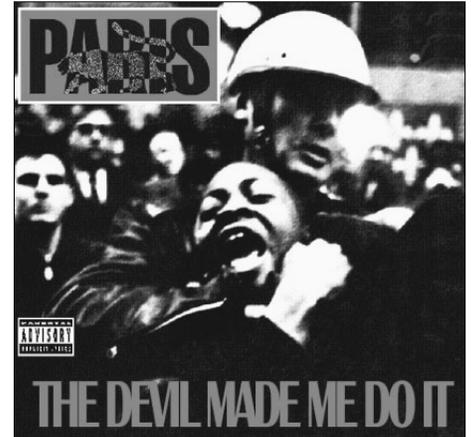
Anger/Cynicism. Much has been made of the angst in rap music. Let me say, this angst is not unfounded, for it finds its roots in slavery, the civil rights period, the days of Jim Crow,

Either we can condemn hip hop...or we can creatively seek ways to use rap music to advance the kingdom.

and quite frankly, the daily black experience which is often one of despair and hopelessness. Dr. Turnbull, who took young African American boys from the Bronx and built an internationally renowned choir, says "these children lived in neighborhoods filled with broken-down spirits and a frustrating sense that the weight of the white man crushed all their positive efforts. The result was a troubling street ethos: get what you can by any way possible." (*Lift Every Voice*, p. 124)

Another source of anger is what Rose calls a chasm. "Rap music...articulates the chasm between black urban lived experience and dominant, 'legitimate'...ideologies regarding equal opportunity and racial inequality." (*Black Noise*, p. 102.) Rap artists see and experience the dominant social order and critique and resist it in their music (and sometimes in life). It's no wonder that the "target" institutions of this angst are "the police, the government, and dominant media." (*Black Noise*, p. 105).

Consider these lyrics from KRS-One, and note their sarcasm:



by
**Luke
Bobo**

Resources

Fire! Come down fast! / You were put here to protect us, but who protects us from you? / Everytime you say, "that's illegal," does it mean that it's true / Your authority's never questioned, no one questions you / If I hit you, I'll be killed, if you hit me, I can sue.

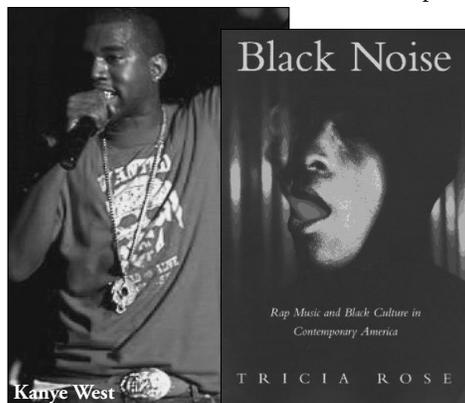
As Rose points out, "Rap music is....a hidden transcript. Among other things it uses cloaked speech and disguised cultural codes to comment on and challenge aspects of current power inequalities...rap music is a contemporary stage for the theater of the powerless." (*Black Noise*, pp. 100-101).

Anger and cynicism is not a recent notion among African Americans. Honestly, as an African American male, I can empathize with these rappers. Rappers choose to express their anger explicitly in their lyrics, however, some African American men cope with their anger in other ways. Some choose to drown or deaden their anger in liquor. Some do drugs. For many, including myself, the savage and brutal beating of Rodney King has been indelibly marked on our psyches. You might say I am a bit cynical of the police and thus I fear not only for myself but also my 10 year old son when he starts driving. I've talked to many black families who live in the suburbs whose sons are often pulled over by the police for no apparent reason.

Nihilism. Like anger and cynicism, the nihilism in rap is not new. We clearly hear nihilism articulated in gangsta rap.

Gangsta rap lasted a decade—beginning in the 80s and peetering out in the 90s—and cannot be understood apart from the introduction of crack into already blighted and drug-infested urban contexts.

Crack-empowered gangs ran on a philosophy of old fashioned, excessive, insatiable, and unending revenge. Crack became a way to earn money fast and led to violence,



Gangsta rap is often the first-person narratives of those who actually lived the lives they rap about, while in other gangsta rap songs, the artists...offer caution and warning about street life.

pushing murder totals in D.C., L.A., and Detroit to record numbers. Cynicism surrounded the police: were they our protectors or co-conspirators?

Gangsta rap is often the first-person narratives of those who actually lived the lives they rap about, while in other gangsta rap songs, the artists are not "gangsters" but instead offer caution and warning about street life. Aside from drugs, you will find in gangsta rap a profound sense of hopelessness, a celebration of jail culture, dominance over the weak (especially women), and violence. Notable gangsta rappers include Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg, Tupac, and Notorious Big. While most of the gangsta rap music has been curtailed, a few gangsta rappers like 50

Cent are still on the scene.

Neo-Black Panther Party Ideas.

The Black Panther Party was a nationalist organization that arose in the middle 1960s. Its Minister of Defense, Huey Newton and other Panthers protested that blacks were not guaranteed their constitutional rights to bear arms in defense of their lives against racist mobs or fascists in or out of uniform. They considered themselves involved in a revolutionary political struggle to reject racism and imperialism or white authority in the United States. As a little boy growing up in Kansas City, MO, I remember having to honor a curfew in fear of clashes or confrontations between the local police and the Black Panthers. But lest I give a one-sided impression of

the Black Panther Party, I should point out that they also led the way for women's equality, and organized programs ranging from free breakfast for children, to free health clinics, to free

clothing drives, to campaigns to stop drugs, crime, and police murder and brutality.

For some Black Panthers, Christianity was not a viable option. Nathan McCall writes in his book, *Makes Me Wanna Holler: A Young Black man in America*, "Christianity was the white man's tool, another way to keep niggers nonviolent so white folks can keep cracking them over the head." This view, that Christianity is solely a white man's religion, is held by many, if not most, Black Muslims as well. You can hear the influence of the Black Panther Party in James Brown's infamous lyrics, "Say it loud, I'm Black and I'm proud." A raised, clenched fist was a sign of the Black Panther movement.

One rapper influenced by the Black Panthers is Paris, a San Francisco rapper and a member of the Nation of Islam (NOI). Consider the lyrics from “The Devil Made Me Do It:”

*P-dog comin' up, I'm straight low / Pro-black and it ain't no joke / Comin' straight from the mob that broke sh*t last time / Now I'm back with a brand new sick rhyme. / So, black, check time and tempo / Revolution ain't never been simple.*

Let's unpack these lyrics. “I'm straight low” means his position is “low” because of white control or colonialism; “the mob” is the Black Panther movement; and “check time and tempo” is a reference to the NOI cry, “Do you know what time it is? It's nation time.”

Other rappers whose lyrics are influenced by the Black Panther Party ideas include Tupac and Kanye West, whose fathers were Black Panthers.

Unfortunately, many people, including Christians, consider all rap music to be gangsta rap and therefore conclude that it's all inherently evil. However, there is quite a bit of rap music that is filled with messages of fun and playfulness. There is more to rap than anger, nihilism, cynicism, and black panther ideas.

Frolic. Chingey, a St. Louis native, makes fun of the St. Louis drawl or diction with his song, “Right Thurt.” Will Smith and Jazzy Jeff celebrate the end of the school year and rap about trips to the park to check out the ladies in “Summertime.” Craig Cornett and his friends Kelly Wild and Sylk Smoov created “Cardinals This Year,” when the Cardinals went to the World Series.

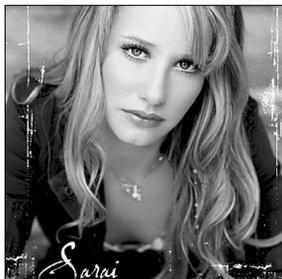
Social awareness. Many rappers are keenly aware of the social issues plaguing us. It is no wonder that authors John Teter and

Alex Gee entitled their book *Jesus and the Hip-Hop Prophets* because many rappers do have a “prophetic voice.” For instance, Lauryn Hill raps about the folly of pre-marital sex in “That Thang.” She asks, “Will that thang (pre-marital sex) really make us happy?”

In “It's Not a Fairytale,” rapper Sarai tells of the real life struggles of being a pregnant teen whose boyfriend has abandoned her:

What can I say / This wasn't supposed to happen / Here I am turned my back on my fam /... This

wasn't even part of the plan / I'm spazzin' out / When I lay down at night the hurt / Just burst out I shoot how could he leave / At my time of need / Especially now I'm pregnant / And due in three / Maybe I



There is quite a bit of rap music that is filled with messages of fun and playfulness. There is more to rap than anger.

should have it / And give it for adoption / I can't graduate...

Yearning for the transcendent. We shouldn't be surprised that even rappers yearn for more. You can hear it in MC Hammer's “Pray.” And as a Muslim, Mos Def yearns for Allah in “Love:”

Pray Allah keep my soul and heart clean / Pray the same thing again for all my team...

Kanye West's song “Jesus Walks” is replete with cries for the transcendent, and despite his faulty Christian theology, you can hear in his lyrics God's passion for the weak, oppressed, and down and out among us.

Quick to Listen, Slow to Judge

As discerning Christians, we would be wise to be quick to listen and slow to pass judgment on rap music. Too many Christians have come to the conclusion that rap is evil and therefore deserves no hearing. But carefully listening to rap music is vitally important because it has messages and themes that run the gamut, and because, as I pointed out earlier, rap is here to stay.

Listening to rap music means trying to understand where the particular rap song falls in the history of rap, and remembering that words have meanings in the context of the hip hop culture. In some ways, this process is akin to Biblical hermeneutics. A passage is rightfully understood by first understanding the history in which it was written.

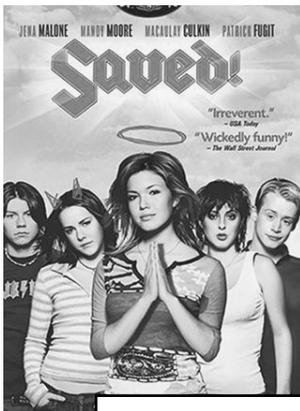
Rap music talks about street life, about women, and societal ills. Some lyrics can be very funny, and others have several themes operating at the same time. In other words, it would be highly unfair to conclude that all rap music has the same message and therefore deserves only condemnation.

So what does it mean to be a Christian in a culture that includes rap music? We can't hold our breath and hope it will merely go away, so I have eight suggestions on Ransom's website for what we can do (www.RansomFellowship.org/Music_Rap.html). ■

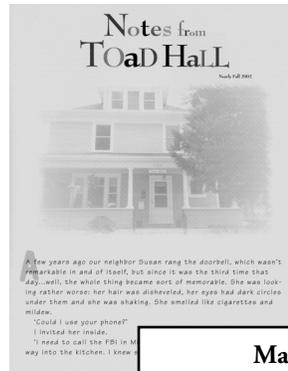
~Luke Bobo

Luke Bobo is the Assistant Dean for Training Ministries at Covenant Theological Seminary with oversight of the Francis Schaeffer Institute, Youth In Ministry Institute and Field Education ministry.

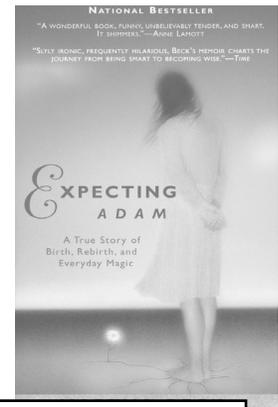
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1. To call attention to resources of interest to thinking Christians.
2. To model Christian discernment.
3. To stimulate believers to think biblically about all of life.

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