

# Critique

Helping Christians Develop Skill in Discernment

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In a consumer society, ads and commercials inform of us more than what is for sale. It's worth a closer look.

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by Kathleen L. Housley, reprinted from *Image*

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Editor  
Denis Haack

Layout & Web  
John Hake

Contributing Editors  
Jennifer Disney, Steven Garber,  
R. Greg Grooms, Donald Guthrie,  
Marsena Konkle  
John Mason Hodges, Preston  
Jones, David John Seel, Jr.,  
Andrew H. Trotter, Jr.

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Steven Garber  
*Scholar-in-Residence  
The Evermay Project  
Washington DC*

Donald Guthrie  
*Vice President for  
Academics at Covenant  
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Denis and Margie Haack  
*co-founders of Ransom Fellowship*

Rev. Ed Hague  
*Pastor of Adult Discipleship  
Wildwood Presbyterian Church*

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

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

Submissions  
*Critique* considers unsolicited  
manuscripts only for poetry.  
info@ransomfellowship.org  
or mail with SASE to:  
**Ransom Fellowship**  
1150 West Center Street  
Rochester, MN 55902

Correspondence  
All other correspondence  
and changes of address:  
**Critique**  
1150 West Center Street  
Rochester, MN 55902  
info@ransomfellowship.org

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# Editor's Note



## Saying Goodby

As each issue of *Critique* takes shape, this is usually the last column to be written. Most of the time I have difficulty knowing what I should write about in such a brief space. So I usually put it off as long

as possible. This time, however, it's different. I know exactly what I need to write about, so it was the first column I drafted. Trouble is, I wish it didn't need to be written.

As you might have noticed if you looked at our masthead on this page, Marsena Konkle has resigned as Managing Editor. Her work as a novelist has grown more demanding, with deadlines to meet, editors to work with, and manuscripts to rewrite and edit. We're very pleased at that. We are delighted her first novel is scheduled for publication (Paraclete Press), while a second novel is taking shape on her laptop. Good writing is effortless to read, but it doesn't happen by magic; it requires not only a gift, but hard work and the discipline to keep at it daily.

Marsena used her gifts freely during her time with Ransom, though she wasn't always visible. She designed, launched, and maintained Ransom's web site, making it a useful extension of our writing and teaching. She redesigned both *Critique* and *Notes From Toad Hall*, making them both more readable and attractive—especially to

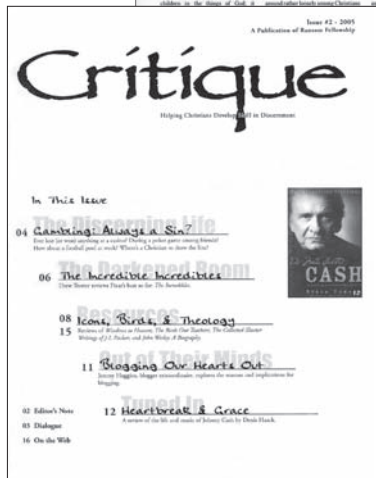
the postmodern generation. She edited both publications, helping to shape and to sharpen what we had written. She kept in touch with *Critique's* contributors, setting deadlines and helping ensure that our publication schedule stayed on track. She edited their contributions with such care and expertise that even our most particular writers trusted the changes she would make. Their voice and ideas remained unchanged, even if the article were shortened or the prose made clearer. Both Margie and I had been writing for years before Marsena began working with us, and it took some getting used to. Before, we pub-

lished what we wrote, simple as that. Then pieces began coming back, with red markings, including, at times, whole paragraphs crossed out. In the margin would be a note: "Good ideas, Dad, but they have nothing to do with this article. Save them." And she would be right.

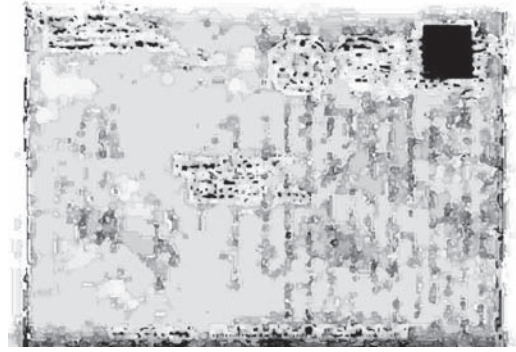
There's also the special delight we took in working with our daughter. Few people know us as well. Few people have a better sense of what Ransom is all about. There's something very special about that, and we have cherished it.

The decision Marsena made is a good one, but we'll miss her work as Managing Editor. (Thankfully, her name is now in the list of Contributing Editors, meaning her writing will appear in these pages each year.) We may find another Managing Editor someday, but we won't be able to replace her. ■

~Denis Haack



# Dialogue



## re: Reality TV, Bumper Stickers, & Hip Hop 101

Send e-mail to:

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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.

**V**ery impressed with your article regarding “reality shows” [*Critique* #3 & #4-2004]. My sentiments exactly. May all of your work and your efforts glorify the Savior Jesus Christ.

**Bob Winstead, Executive Director**  
“Entrepreneurs” *The Reality Show*

**I** liked your article on bumper stickers [*Critique* #5-2004]. The issue is germane to a lot of things (like jewelry or “Christian” home decor or ...) in our Christian subculture. Who is the message for? What are we trying to communicate to the world? Some messages seem like just a smug holier-than-thou putdown or a private joke. I had a bumper sticker on my car that said “Equal rights for unborn women” because it grieves me to think of baby girls being killed in India and China and even here because the parents want a boy. One day I returned to the parking lot to find that it had been slashed off with a razor. It doesn't seem like that person and I had a very meaningful dialogue about our differences. Perhaps I dislike some of them because I have never met anyone who became a Christian because of a bumper sticker. Most seem to enter the Kingdom because of one of the Lord's ambassadors modeling the truth in their relationship.

**Dan and Lynn Pisaniello**  
Lowville, NY

**W**ow, guys, what a blessing. After a particularly depressing morning and then an hour of meditation I felt compelled to go to the pc and was led to your site. I love what you guys are about. Makes me feel like I'm not alone. Thank you.  
Respectfully,

**J. Steven Marvel**  
Broken Arrow, OK

**T**hank you so much for printing the excellent article on Hip Hop 101 [*Critique* #9-2004] by Luke Bobo. It convicted me that I should listen to more Rap and Hip Hop even though it might not be naturally attractive to me. Rap is an important feature (for better or worse) of our recent Western culture and we should know more about it in order to love our neighbors.

The quote “The brain is easily confused; the heart rarely lies” from *Lift Every Voice* by Dr. Walter Turnbull is very important. It seems to express the left brain/right brain or heart/head dichotomy and encourage us to follow the right brain or heart part of ourselves in order to be more real or honest. We like to think that our hearts are good and honest but the Bible doesn't seem to teach this consistently. Jeremiah 17:9 “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure...” and 10 “I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind...” and Ezekiel 18:31 “... get a new heart...” seem a counterbalance. We live in an age of experientialism and following the impulses of the heart. Seeking to help people renew their minds and have the whole counsel of God is often looked down upon. Jesus died to heal us and put us together again as heart and mind and everything else. He doesn't want us to choose one or the other. (I don't think Luke Bobo is recommending this, either.) People who are much in touch with their hearts need to get in touch with their heads and the other way around. We should empathize with our hip hop neighbors' experiences and reactions and take their words and ideas seriously. God does both.

**Ellis H. Potter**  
Riehen, Switzerland

## It's everywhere,

**A**dvertising is the 'wonder' in Wonder Bread."

Jef I. Richards  
(professor of advertising)

"We find that advertising works the way the grass grows. You can never see it, but every week you have to mow the lawn."

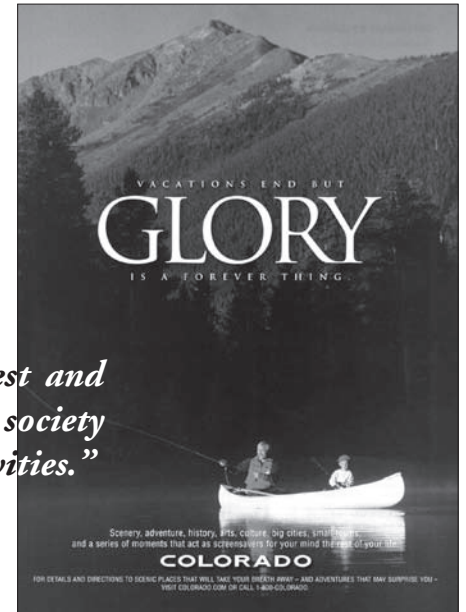
Andy Tarshis  
(advertising executive)

Advertising is so much a part of our daily life, so tightly woven into the fabric of what surrounds us in our consumer society that most of us don't give it much thought. We only pay attention occasionally, when we're shopping for something, or during Super Bowl games when

advertisers launch their best commercials, or when our attention is snared by an advertisement that is especially creative, effective, funny, or offensive. The rest of the time we take pride in knowing we've trained ourselves to let them just slip past us, a steady, unrelenting flow of ads, commercials, slogans, images, jingles, and billboards in the background of our consciousness.

*"The ads of our time are the richest and most faithful reflections that any society ever made of its entire range of activities."*

Allowing advertising to slip past us, however, is something we should reconsider. We might only imagine it is



### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. To what extent are you discerning about the advertising and consumerism of your culture? To what extent are you merely reactionary? What plans should you make?
2. Begin collecting magazine ads, beginning with magazines you read regularly. (This can be done by individuals, of course, but can also be a good exercise for members of a family or small group.) On your next trip to a book store, purchase a number of magazines that are outside your usual reading habits, selecting samples from a variety of genres: fashion, gaming, youth, men, women, music, movies, hobbies, travel, style, celebrity, special interest, etc. Let friends and neighbors know you are doing this, and without being asked, some will provide you with ads that they noticed. Collect ads that catch your attention, seem especially creative or effective, or which contain appeals to values and ideas beyond the product being advertised.
3. Identify the product or service each ad is advertising. How much—or little—do they inform you about that good or service? Does this matter?
4. What value(s) or assumption(s) motivates the advertisement? How are these values and assumptions made to appear attractive? Jaguar, for example, recently ran a series of ads based on the seven deadly sins: as in lusting after their cars is a good idea. Such values and assumptions, however, are more often hidden and less blatant. How can we be sure we are not reading into the ad things that the advertiser never intended?
5. How would you characterize the ads placed in Christian magazines? Try to view them through the eyes of a non-Christian—how do they look from that perspective?
6. What ads did you find that paralleled Christian values and assumptions? A travel ad for the state of Colorado, for example, shows a father and son in a canoe, fishing in a lake behind which rises a magnificent mountain peak. "Glory," the bold headline read, and in smaller print, "Vacations end, but Glory is a forever thing."

Questions continued on the next page...

# pay attention

slipping past—and off—us, without impact. I have found, for example, that people who claim to ignore advertising have little trouble matching advertising slogans with the products they represent—even for products they don't purchase themselves.

"Advertisements ordinarily work their wonders," Michael Schudson says in *Advertising, The Uneasy Persuasion*, "on an inattentive public." Christians have an added incentive to pay closer attention.

It is one thing to recognize that simply by being alive, all human beings are consumers; it is quite another to live in a culture where Consumerism is a primary idolatry yet never take the time to reflect Christianly on the

advertising which animates and empowers that seductive golden calf.

Christian discernment involves the community of God's people intentionally reflecting on all of life and culture from the perspective of a biblical world view. So, if the truth of God's word illuminates our path, we need to let it shine on the flurry of messages, images, and slogans that are constantly elbowing into view.

Since advertising is central to a consumer society, ads serve as a window of insight into the culture of which we are a part. "Historians and archaeologists will one

day discover," Marshall McLuhan wrote, "that the ads of our time are the richest and most faithful reflections that any society ever made of its entire range of activities." So, pausing occasionally to look and listen can help us see more clearly what faithfulness looks like in a world where buying can feel cathartic, and where owning an updated model feels like a right.

Advertisements do not merely showcase particular goods and services, but express and embody values, assumptions, beliefs, and lifestyles. "Advertising is an incredibly powerful

***Advertisements do not merely showcase particular goods and services, but express and embody values, assumptions, beliefs, and lifestyles.***



## ...QUESTIONS CONTINUED

7. What ads, if any, would you not have been willing to work on if you were employed by an advertising firm? Why? How would you explain your objection to your (non-Christian) co-workers? Can a Christian help non-Christians produce ads which appeal to non-Christian values? Why or why not? An ad for Adobe Photoshop software, for example, shows a picture of a lovely lake, the mirror surface of the water blending into a brilliant blue sky. In the background on the shore a line of pine trees are reflected in the water. And in the foreground a woman is walking, leading a dog on a leash, on the water, with ripples from her footsteps stretching back behind them. "Work a few miracles into your daily grind," the copy says. Some Christians object to this ad as sacrilegious—would you? Why or why not? How would you explain your position to believers who take the opposite view?
8. In what ways would you say you have been most effected by advertising? What effects of advertising can you identify in your family, friends, neighbors, or co-workers?
9. Winston Churchill said: "Advertising nourishes the consuming power of men. It sets up before a man the goal of a better home, better clothing, better food for himself and his family. It spurs individual exertion and greater production." Similarly, advertising executive Ray Locke says: "Next to Christianity, advertising is the greatest force in the world. And I say that without sacrilege or disrespect. Advertising makes people discontented. It makes them want things they don't have. Without discontent, there is no progress, no achievement." To what extent do you agree? Why?
10. Christian author Malcolm Muggeridge argued that "history will see advertising 'as one of the real evil things of our time. It is stimulating people constantly to want things, want this, want that.'" On the other hand, David Ogilvy asserts that "Advertising is only evil when it advertises evil things. I did not feel 'evil' when I wrote advertisements for Puerto Rico. They helped attract industry and tourists to a country which had been living on the edge of starvation for 400 years." With whom do you agree? Why?

Questions continued on the next page...

# The Discerning Life

form of popular culture that influences us on levels far deeper than getting us to choose certain products,” Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor write. “Good advertising does not just circulate information,” Leo Burnett notes. “It penetrates the public mind with desires and beliefs.”

Each time I lead a group in reflecting on advertisements the discussion is not only interesting and instructive, but

fun. Collecting a variety of magazine ads is easy. Looking through them as a family or small group tends to prompt spontaneous conversation and laughter. This not only helps us see more clearly, it sharpens our skill

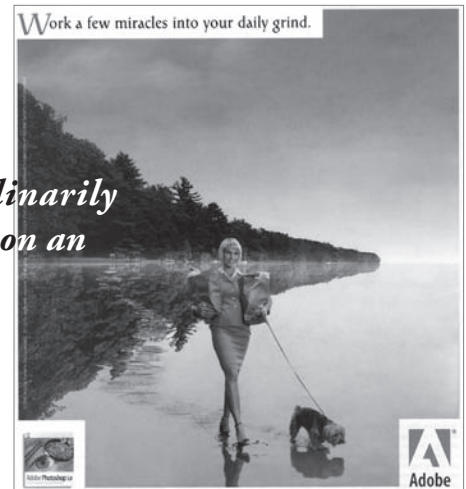
in discernment, making it more a habit of

the heart. Participants often report after the discussion they are more aware of the advertising bombarding them, and better able to identify the values and assumptions hidden within them.

The questions for reflection and discussion accompanying this article are designed to help you get started. ■

~Denis Haack

**Sources:** Richards, Locke, Schudson, Churchill, Tarshis, Muggerridge, Ogilvy, Sandage, & Burnett from “Advertising Quotes, The University of Texas at Austin” online (<http://advertising.utexas.edu/research/quotes/index.asp>); Detweiler & Taylor in *A Matrix of Meanings: Finding God in Popular Culture* (Baker Book House; 2003) p. 84; Marshall McLuhan quoted in *A Matrix of Meanings*, p. 63.



## ...QUESTIONS CONTINUED

11. “Advertising is criticized on the ground that it can manipulate consumers to follow the will of the advertiser,” writes Charles Sandage in the *Journal of Advertising*. “The weight of evidence denies this ability. Instead, evidence supports the position that advertising, to be successful, must understand or anticipate basic human needs and wants and interpret available goods and services in terms of their want-satisfying abilities. This is the very opposite of manipulation.” Do you agree? Why or why not?
12. It’s easy to criticize advertising, but we should remember that it does a number of important things well—for example, letting us know of products available on the market, and producing revenue for magazines and newspapers to which we subscribe. Can you think of other positive functions it performs? Where does it cross the line from helpful to unhelpful, from informative to manipulative, from welcome to intrusive?

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

# by Kathleen L. Housley

## Babel

**L**et us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.

—Genesis 11:4

The demolition blast was so intense  
it blew away their common tongue.

Across the plain of Shinar,  
parts of speech shrapneled the ground.

Syntax rained down like gobs of tar.  
Nouns whirled in vortices of brick dust.

Mute, the people stood owl-eyed  
in a heavy ash-fall of vowels,

shielding themselves from verbs  
that ricocheted through the hush,

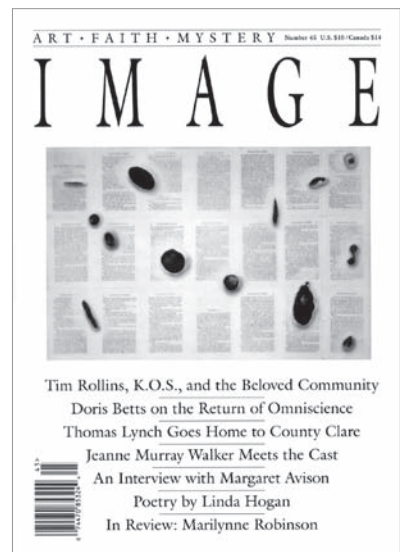
while spores of language settled  
on their hair—Algonquian, Basque,

Belarusian, Maori, Tamil, Aleut—  
and sprouted into an unspoken longing

for empty homelands only distant offspring  
would reach via land bridge or reed boat,

borne by a shockwave of syllables  
and a hunger for a name older than words.

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**Editor's Note:** "Babel" first appeared in *Image* (Spring 2005; #45) p. 64, and is reprinted here with the generous permission of Kathleen Housley and *Image*. We recommend *Image* to you, a quarterly journal exploring faith, art, and mystery which will nourish your imagination, mind, and heart ([www.imagejournal.org](http://www.imagejournal.org)).

## An Ordinary Hero



### A review of Hotel Rwanda

by Denis Haack

Hotel Rwanda  
Credits:  
Starring:  
Don Cheadle  
(Paul Rusesabagina)  
Sophie Okonedo  
(Tatiana Rusesabagina)  
Nick Nolte  
(Colonel Oliver)  
Joaquin Phoenix  
(Jack Daglish)  
  
Director:  
Terry George  
  
Producers:  
Sally French  
Terry George  
A. Kitman Ho  
  
Screenwriters:  
Keir Pearson  
Terry George  
  
Consultant:  
Paul Rusesabagina  
  
Cinematographer:  
Robert Fraisse  
  
Edited By:  
Naomi Geraghty  
  
Original Music:  
Jerry Duplessis  
  
Casting By:  
Richard Pagano  
  
Runtime: 121 min.  
Rated PG-13 for violence  
and brief language.

Tension between Hutus and Tutsis can be traced all the way back to the 14th century. That was when Tutsis migrated into Hutu territory and achieved political dominance over the more numerous Hutus. For the next six centuries the area known today as Rwanda was ruled by a Tutsi *mwami* (king). In 1890 European colonial powers entered the picture, with first German, and then Belgium rule. In 1959 violence broke out over the selection of a new *mwami*, displacing 100,000 Tutsis who fled into neighboring countries. Rwanda gained independence from Belgium in 1962, with Hutus (84% of the populace) and Tutsis (15%) living amid intermittent outbreaks of violence resulting in both the loss of lives, and the displacement of thousands. In 1990 the Rwandan Patriotic Front, mainly Tutsi warriors, invaded Rwanda from Uganda, prompting Rwanda to institute political changes, but new violence broke out anyway. In 1993 a new agreement was reached and a small United Nations peacekeeping mission was established. Then in 1994 President Habyarimana of Rwanda, a Hutu, died in a suspicious plane crash, at which the violence exploded into genocide, fanned by radio stations calling on Hutus to kill their Tutsi neighbors.

The numbers are so appalling they

are difficult to grasp. Over the course of 100 days, between 800,000 and 1 million women, men, and children were slaughtered—mostly Tutsis and moderate Hutus brutally hacked to death with machetes. Urgent appeals to the world community went unanswered, and the tiny UN force was impotent; the most powerful nations in the world actively resisted allowing the United Nations to take more aggressive action. Eventually the Rwandan Patriotic Front counterattacked, taking control of Rwanda, as more than 2 million Rwandans, mainly Hutus, fled as refugees. Relief agencies estimate that more than 100,000 have since died through disease in the crowded, desperate camps. Something like 300,000 children are now orphaned.

But there is more. During Belgium colonial rule, Christian missionaries flood-

*Over the course of 100 days, between 800,000 and 1 million women, men, and children were slaughtered—hacked to death with machetes.*



ed into Rwanda. Today, in this most densely populated of all African nations, 94% of the populace claim to be Christians (57% are Roman Catholic, 26% Protestant, & 11% Adventist). The horrific slaughter of 1994





*He had never intended to be a hero. He simply made a series of choices, moral choices, and in so doing, became a true hero.*

turns out to be Christian against Christian.

In Kigali, the capitol city of Rwanda, there was a precarious oasis in the midst of the slaughter. More than 1,200 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were given sanctuary in the 4-star Hotel des Mille Collines, which usually catered to European travelers (who were evacuated once the violence began). The hotel manager was Paul Rusesabagina, a Hutu whose wife, Tatiana is Tutsi. For three long, horrifying months Paul used his wits to keep them alive, as sounds of the killing echoed outside the hotel wall, and as soldiers came to the hotel demanding access to its helpless inhabitants. Rwanda has long been rife with corruption, and over many years as hotel manager Paul had curried favor with local businessmen and army officers. Now he dug deep into the hotel's vaults, using bribes

and calling in favors to keep the killers at bay. He never intended to be a hero. He simply made a series of choices, moral choices, and in so doing, became a true hero.

*Hotel Rwanda* tells the story of Paul Rusesabagina, with a superb Don Cheadle in the lead role. From the day he read the script Cheadle wanted to be involved. "It was a story that had to be told," he says. Director Terry George was careful in how he filmed the horrific violence of the Rwandan genocide. Little of it is actually depicted, because he didn't want anyone to refuse to see the film on that account. Instead of gore, we join



the huddled refugees in the hotel, not seeing the killing that swirls around them, which increases the sense of terror. *Hotel Rwanda* is a finely crafted film, using 15,000 African extras to recreate the crowded streets and back alleys where so many perished. Two scenes stand out in my memory as particularly effective in this regard. In one scene, one of Paul and Tatiana's sons disappears at night, to be found later huddled speechless in a hedge. They carry

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. How did you respond to *Hotel Rwanda*? What emotions did you experience as the film progressed? Do you remember where you were when the Rwandan tragedy unfolded? How did you learn of it? What was your response to the news?
2. 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?
3. In many countries like Rwanda, "petty corruption" is so much a part of daily life that workers like hotel managers consider bribes for officials simply one more "business expense." Can Christians engage in such behavior? Why or why not? Can they use bribes and favors as Paul Rusesabagina did to keep refugees alive in desperate days? Some biblical heroes—Samson, for example—were less than noble in life, though he was used of God (Judges 13:5, 24-25) and noted as a person of faith (Hebrews 11:32). How does this effect the Christian understanding of heroism?
4. Discuss Paul Rusesabagina's heroism. How was it manifested? How does it compare to the "Super-heroism" of films like Superman, Batman, or Spiderman? How does it compare to Christian notions of heroism?
5. One reason that is given for America's lack of response to the Rwanda genocide is that a year earlier, US forces in Somalia were lured into a trap, a story told in *Black Hawk Down*. "The Somali debacle of 1992-93 constrained the West's response to Rwanda's humanitarian disaster," Tracy Kuperus of Gordon College writes for the Association for Public Justice, "but there is a another, more telling reason: location, location, location. U.S. foreign policy is directed towards those areas where our security is threatened or our national interests are challenged, and Rwanda is considered non-vital to our national interests." On what basis should America's leaders frame U.S. foreign policy priorities?

Questions continued on the next page...

# Darkened Room cont.

him indoors to discover that though unharmed, he is slippery with blood. We didn't need to see what he saw to share his horror. The other scene occurs when Paul and an assistant have ventured out of the hotel grounds in a van to find food and supplies. In the dark of early dawn, they drive down an eerily deserted mist-covered road. The van lurches violently as they slowly make their way, until it becomes clear the lurching is caused by more than the usual potholes. They have been driving over bodies, and as the mist begins to clear, the road in both directions is littered with them.

Nick Nolte, as the desperate yet largely helpless head of the UN peacekeepers, plays a frustrated man representing those who could help but who refuse to do so. Paul's wife, Tatiana is played wonderfully by Sophie Okonedo, who helps us feel not just the fear of those days, but the strength required of a woman who urges her husband to do what is right, even at the risk of their family's lives. "Paul provides the film's moral center," one film reviewer said, "but Tatiana is, in many ways, its heart. Through her, we witness both the horror of seeing one's family ripped apart and the love that can, against

the odds, help keep it intact. Okonedo's face registers every raw emotion, from terror to steely resolve, helping lend the

***"I think if people see this footage they'll say 'Oh, my God, that's horrible.' And then they'll go on eating their dinners."***

film its harrowing, almost documentary-like-feeling."

Early in the film, Jack, a Western reporter played by Joaquin Phoenix, sneaks out of the hotel and in the dangerous streets videotapes glimpses of the

horrific killing. Paul is overjoyed when he sees the footage, believing that this will finally bring help from the West. "I think

if people see this footage they'll say 'Oh, my God, that's horrible,'" Jack replies. "And then

they'll go on eating their dinners."

The story told in *Hotel Rwanda* is shaped to some extent by Philip Gourevitch's book on Rwanda, *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We will be Killed with Our Families*. Christians have a number of reasons to be better informed about the often ignored continent of Africa. The African church is growing there at a rate unknown in Western countries. A large number of the Christian martyrs who died for their faith in the last century were Africans. And we have a responsibility before God to work for justice for Africa, on a whole host of issues, including the AIDS epidemic, Third World debt, famine, and civil violence.

Please see *Hotel Rwanda*. It's a fine example of cinematic art, and the story it tells is one we must be sure not to forget. It is both profoundly sad and deeply redemptive, the story of one man who opened his arms when the world turned its back. ■

—Denis Haack



Director Terry George (standing), Don Cheadle, and Sophie Okonedo with the real heroes they portrayed, Paul and Tatiana Rusesabagina (front row).

## ...QUESTIONS CONTINUED

6. With whom did you identify in the film? Why? With whom were we meant to identify? Discuss each main character in the film and their significance to the story.
7. How might you have reacted in Paul Rusesabagina's position? Though it is impossible to imagine what such horrors are actually like, how might we prepare ourselves to be the sort of person who can make right choices in such terrifying moments?
8. How does one believe in a good God in a world in which such cruel horrors exist? How would you talk about this to a non-Christian?

## Margie Haack's Favorites

*I listen to a lot of stuff, but telling Critique readers what I like makes me nervous. So I don't want to hear about, like, how could you? As though I drink instant coffee and eat canned asparagus for breakfast.*

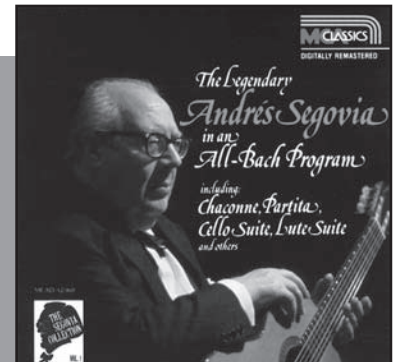
~Margie Haack

Over The Rhine, *Ohio*. Double CD. I've always been a fan of Linford and Karin, husband and wife team who deliver earth-connected music influenced by Rock 'n Roll, Southern Gospel, Country Western. Jesus shows up sometimes, but not often, as in the sad "The last time I saw Jesus, I was drinking bloody Mary's in the south..." As Karin sings,

"when I least expect it, I see my Savior's face."



Andrés Segovia in an *All-Bach Program*. A classical guitarist plays Bach. Both dead, both legendary. Beautiful and timeless. This music bears intense scrutiny from the sophisticated listener, but I love these two while working, napping, or eating. Give them to me any time.



Leonard Cohen, *More Best of*. Writes/performs stuff that penetrates the heart with painful, beautiful lyrics and music. The surprise is his strange, captivating voice and the shards of hope coming from this Zen Buddhist monk. The CD is superbly, artistically engineered to blend from

background vocals to accompanying musicians.

Soniadada, *Barefoot Soul*. A Chicago group with a finely honed but diverse fusion of rock and soul. You can hear Motown influences along with R&B and alt-rock. Their harmonies are so powerful, sometimes I can't tear myself away. Not as well known as they should be. (My opinion.)



*Kill Bill, Vol 1*, Original Soundtrack. A lot of surprisingly great tracks here. It was worth getting just to download my favorites. Santa Esmeralda's "Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood" always makes me want to dance and drink Margueritas, and The 5.6.7.8's still make me laugh with their whoo-hoos. They're so bad.

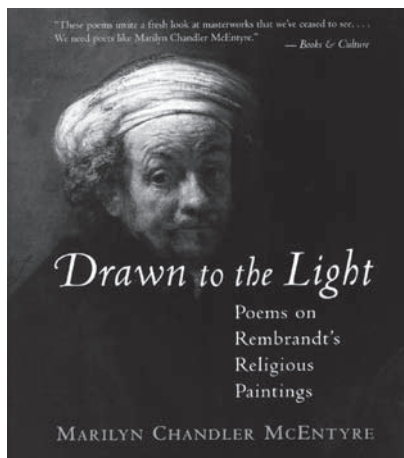


## Light in the Darkness

One of the metaphors which is woven throughout the Scriptures is light. The Creation narrative opens with God calling it into being (Genesis 1:3). The Fall is described as darkness, so that the promise of the prophet that a great light would burst upon those living in darkness (Isaiah 9:2) was fulfilled when the Redeemer identified himself as the “Light of the world” (John 8:12). That Light commissioned his people to exhibit light (Matthew 5:14) as we live awaiting the Consummation of his Kingdom where his glory will be its illumination (Revelation 22:5).

Now two artists use their gifts to help us reflect on light in our dark world.

In *Drawn to the Light*, poet and Westmont College literature professor



Marilyn McEntyre meditates on 18 of Rembrandt's paintings with a poem to accompany each illustration. “The fact

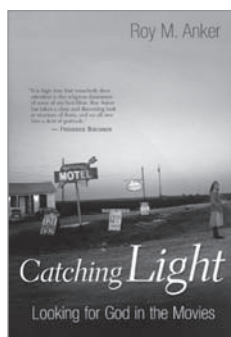
that so many of Rembrandt's subjects are biblical certainly attests to his recognition of the power of biblical stories to speak to us,” she writes, “but it is his light shining in darkness that convinces me even more powerfully of a mind and sensibility that dwelt long and longingly on the mystery of divine presence—and absence.”

Accompanying Rembrandt's painting “Christ at Emmaus” (1628) McEntyre helps us imagine the shock of the disciples at the resurrected Lord:

*What would you do  
if, mid-meal, light suddenly broke  
from a body rather like your own  
and a stranger suddenly became  
in very flesh the friend you mourned?*

## Briefly Noted: Learning to see in the dark

by Denis Haack



Roy Anker is a sensitive and thoughtful guide for Christians who want to be discerning in the movies. Anker writes film reviews for *Books & Culture*, teaches a course on film at Calvin College, where he is professor of English, and most importantly, allows both Scripture and a love of art, creativity, and story to inform and shape his film viewing.

In *Catching Light*, Dr Anker allows us to listen in as he reflects on a series of 19 films. He divides the book into four sections defined by the gospel, and the films he covers in each section are good ones, well-crafted as art and powerful in their impact, worth seeing and discussing:

Darkness visible (*Godfather*, *Chinatown* & *The Deer Hunter*);

Light shines in the darkness (*Tender Mercies*, *Places in the Heart*, *The Mission*, & *Babette's Feast*);

Fables of light (*Star Wars*, *Superman*, *Close Encounters*, *ET* & *AI*); and

Found (*Grand Canyon*, *American Beauty*, & *Blue*).

“Storytelling of all kinds,” Anker writes, “cinematic and otherwise, stimulates people with

the vital questions of what the world is like, what is likely to happen next, and why what happens does happen. Everyone wants to know the answers to those questions, from prime ministers to street-sweepers. A good story told well—or, in the case of film, ‘shown well’—can envelop, surprise, and transfix its audience as it reveals something about life.”

*Catching Light* is a very good book. Lovers of good films will want to read it to share Anker's delight and insight. Those who want to learn how better to see film as Christians will find Anker's reflections a helpful case study in discernment. And even if we disagree at points, reading *Catching Light* will help us see our world more clearly in light of the gospel.

We recommend *Catching Light* to you. ■

**Book Recommended:** *Catching Light: Looking for God in the Movies* by Roy Anker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; 2004) 402 pp.

# & Light at Ground Zero

McEntyre's poetry is direct, warm, and accessible. The accompanying full-color illustrations of Rembrandt's paintings make this slim volume a wonderful gift, and a book that will deepen our devotional life. We recommend *Drawn to the Light* to you.

In *Light at Ground Zero*, photographer Krystyna Sanderson tells a story about 9/11 that seemed to have been missed by the media. At the very edge of Ground Zero, unscathed except for a layer of soot, St Paul's Chapel (an 18th century Episcopal church) stood literally a few yards from the horrible devastation of the World Trade Center. For the next 9 months, the staff

and people of St Paul's gave their church, time, and lives to provide a place of shelter, 24/7, for all those who toiled at sifting through the rubble. Over time, more than 5,000 volunteers gave of their money, gifts, and time to serve the workers, providing food, back rubs, medical care, live music, a place of quiet to sleep, and all the encouragement they could muster.

During this period tourists and the media were turned away, and only Sanderson was allowed to use her camera to record the ministry of St Paul's. She took over 2,500 pictures, and has provided 88 for us in *Light at Ground Zero*, along with brief explanations of what we are observing. The

texts accompanying the photos themselves are Scripture or selections from the liturgy, so that this picture essay is transformed from a media report into a meditation on what the light of ordinary Christian faithfulness looks like in a dark world.

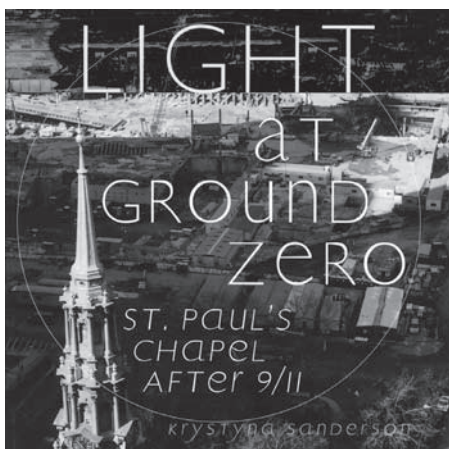
*Light at Ground Zero* is a reminder that even when we do not see it at times, God's grace is at work in ways that we can not imagine. It tells a story that must be part of the Christian memory of 9/11. We recommend *Light at Ground Zero* to you. ■

~Denis Haack

#### Books recommended:

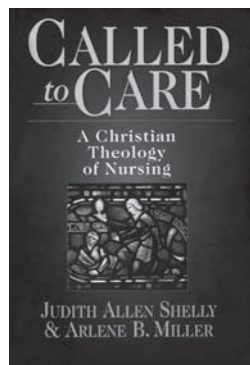
*Drawn to the Light: Poems on Rembrandt's Religious Paintings* by Marilyn Chandler McEntyre (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; 2003) 67 pp. + list of illustrations.

*Light at Ground Zero: St Paul's Chapel After 9/11* by Krystyna Sanderson (Baltimore, MD: Square Halo Books; 2003) 99 pp. + descriptions of photographs.



## Briefly Noted: The heart of nursing

by Sandra Oster



In my less-than-glorious early days of nursing I recall a 1-page paper I wrote for the Director of Nursing of the hospital. My thesis was that nursing should no longer be defined as a "caring profession." I wrote something along the lines of "If we continue to be defined as only a caring profession, we will never achieve our status as a 'real' profession. Caring for patients is worthy and good, but don't we also want to be known as competent and scientific? If we continue to define ourselves by only caring, we will not achieve any status." My manager to whom I submitted the paper threw it away instead of passing it along. It is my real hope that she did.

I was under the impression that caring equaled weakness and that science equaled strength. Both assumptions were inaccurate. Thankfully, I believe I have gained some wisdom since preparing that treatise. Caring is central to the nursing profession. Many modern nurses would disagree. While I am a firm believer in science—there is truth to be discovered and nursing has benefitted from these discoveries over the past century—we have also lost something which I think is equally essential. What has been lost is found in the true roots of nursing—Christianity.

In *Called to Care*, Shelley and Miller write about why and how nursing finds its roots in Christian faith. The book is an excellent resource to nurses—as well as to all other health care professionals. ■

**Book recommended:** *Called to Care: A Christian Theology of Nursing* by Judith Allen Shelley and Arlene B. Miller (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; 1999) 259 pp. + appendix + notes + index.

Sandra Oster is a Nurse Practitioner at the Mayo Clinic (Rochester, MN) with a special interest in medical ethics.

## The Unending Quest

**P**erfectionism is a slippery topic. When does a healthy desire to strive for excellence slip over into an unhealthy self-centeredness where no one else quite measures up? At what point does a highly organized person become controlling? When do high standards become unrealistic, so that life takes on a frantic, driven quality? How do we determine whether we value ourselves primarily for what we accomplish rather than for who we are?

Perfectionism is slippery for another reason. Many perfectionists deny their problem, and fear facing it because letting down even a little seems like accepting mediocrity. The trouble is, perfectionism can easily become an prescription for failure. Some people are paralyzed by it, even defeated, others become domineering and self-centered, and still others are caught in eating disorders. Unchecked, perfectionism can become a cancer, while the perfectionist is, sadly, the last to recognize they have a problem.

In *Perfecting Ourselves to Death*, psychiatrist Richard Winter invites us to think through perfectionism, so that our lives can be marked by the healthy, not the

unhealthy variety. The book is informed by the latest research yet never burdened by technical jargon. It is intensely practical, with discussion questions at the end of each chapter and a final section which explores strategies for growth and change. And though Dr Winter has

a distinctly Christian perspective on his topic, he has written the book in a way that will appeal to non-Christians as well. When he explains freedom from the bondage of an unhealthy perfectionism, Winter shows how more than do-it-yourself-strategies are necessary to achieve liberation, and how this can only be found in the transforming grace of God.

**It's usually far easier for us to see the perfectionism in other people than the variety wrecking havoc in ourselves.**

Throughout *Perfecting Ourselves to Death*, Winter is helping us see more clearly, to look again at things we usually so take for granted that we seldom examine them closely. People who find themselves in the strangle-hold of unhealthy perfectionism didn't intentionally adopt that as a goal for their lives. Rather, through the myriad influences of

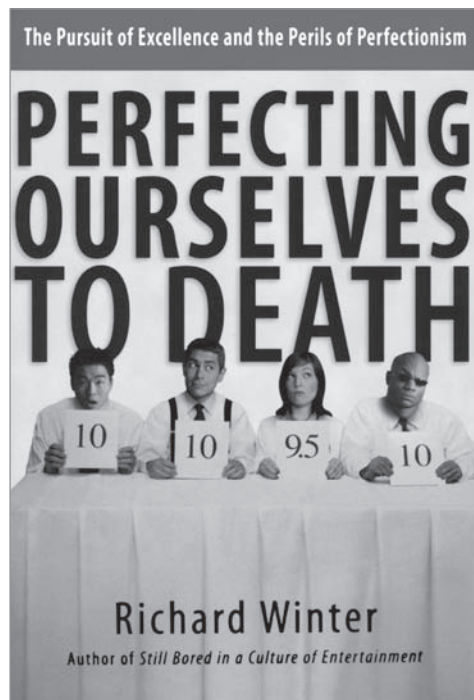
societal views of success, genetic tendencies, parental modeling, false values, and so much more, we find ourselves subtly

shoved into a mold that is unrealistic, but which feels natural. It's usually far easier for us to see the perfectionism in other people than in ourselves. So, we

get impatient with them, and dismissive, or expect they will see their problem clearly the first time we point it out.

Perhaps a place to begin is to recognize how easily our perspective can be unrealistic, even dishonorable. Dr Winter reflects, for example, on how the Christian perspective of people is shaped by the biblical story. In Creation we know each person is made in the image of God, but because of the Fall we know each is less than they were meant to be—what Francis Schaeffer referred to as a “glorious ruins.” Winter asks us to pause and consider how we see the people who are closest to us. To remember how quickly we notice faults, take those we love for granted, and get impatient with their mistakes and imperfections. Winter doesn't just challenge us to do this, but uses his relationship with his wife as an example, admitting that he so often tends “to notice her defects and shortcomings rather than her gifts and dignity.” He then quotes Dan Allender and Tremper Longman: “To view our spouses from the perspective of glory is to be overwhelmed by the privilege of being face to face with creatures who mirrors God.” The power of this insight comes from its simplicity, and from how often we fail to allow it to shape our perspective.

In the end, the yearning for perfection we feel is not a defect, but a hint of what we were meant to be, what we have fallen away from, and what we hope for



# for Better

**“At the deepest level, understanding and experiencing God’s grace is the key to unlocking the prison of perfectionism.”**

in the future. As Dr Winter explains:

“Just as looking forward to a good vacation keeps me going in the difficulties of day-to-day life so, in the bigger picture, we remember with Paul that ‘our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.’ The whole creation, including us, he says, is groaning for the day when it will be liberated from its ‘bondage to decay’ and imperfection. For now we wait eagerly for ‘the glorious freedom of the children of God’ (Rom 8: 18-25). When Christ returns, we will not have to struggle with the imperfections of a fallen world anymore. The creation will be renewed and restored. Our old nature will be completely gone, so we will no longer have to deal with pride, self-centeredness or the desire to be in control. We will, for sure, still be finite creatures of our Creator, but we will be able to accept this limitation without rebellion and fighting.

“C. S. Lewis says it well: ‘The command Be ye perfect is not idealistic gas. Nor is it a command to do the impossible. He is going to make us into creatures

that can obey that command... He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly (though, of course, on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and in parts very painful; but that is what we are in for. Nothing less. He meant what He said.’

“It may be difficult for perfectionists to hear that there is no shortcut to perfection. They want the change completed immediately or not at all. And the fact that it is painful—painful because sin

is deeply embedded and the process of God teaching us is slow—is hard to endure. But he will never let us go. We can rest in that deep security and know that we have significance in being made in his image and in being a child of God, saved by his grace, not by anything we have done or earned. At the deepest level, understanding and experiencing God’s grace is the key to unlocking the prison of perfectionism.”

Dr Winter often lectures on perfectionism, and if you have the chance to attend those lectures, be sure to do so. *Perfecting Ourselves to Death* is written clearly with good illustrations, careful explanations, and a thoroughly helpful grasp of the topic, but Winter is an even better lecturer than a writer. He uses PowerPoint creatively, using images and film clips to help his listeners learn. It’s worth traveling out of your way to hear him.

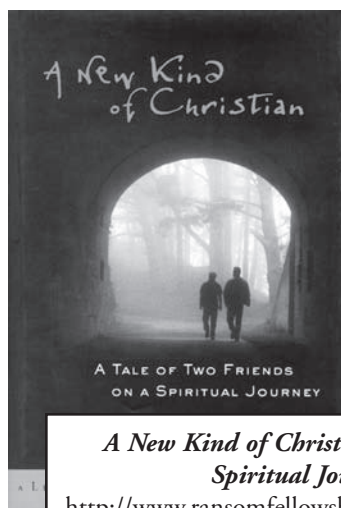
Please read *Perfecting Ourselves to Death*. It can help us understand the difference between healthy and unhealthy perfectionism, examine ourselves afresh, and map out practical strategies to help us

grow to maturity. Consider working through it together with a group of friends. The discussion questions with each chapter will prompt good conversation, and our hearts are deceitful enough that we all probably need the unflinching love, gentle

probing, and gracious safety of dear friends to face the perfectionism that lurks within our souls. ■

~Denis Haack

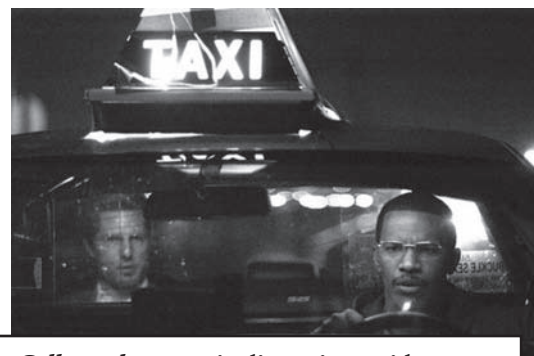
**Book recommended:** *Perfecting Ourselves to Death: The Pursuit of Excellence and the Perils of Perfectionism* by Richard Winter (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; 2005) 177 pp. + appendix + notes + indices.



*A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey*—a book review  
[http://www.ransomfellowship.org/B\\_NewKindOfChristian.htm](http://www.ransomfellowship.org/B_NewKindOfChristian.htm)



The Ghost of a Good Thing: A Review of Dashboard Confessional's *A Mark, A Mission, A Brand, A Scar*  
[http://www.ransomfellowship.org/Music\\_DashboardConfessional\\_Mark.htm](http://www.ransomfellowship.org/Music_DashboardConfessional_Mark.htm)



*Collateral*—a movie discussion guide  
[http://www.ransomfellowship.org/M\\_Collateral.html](http://www.ransomfellowship.org/M_Collateral.html)

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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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