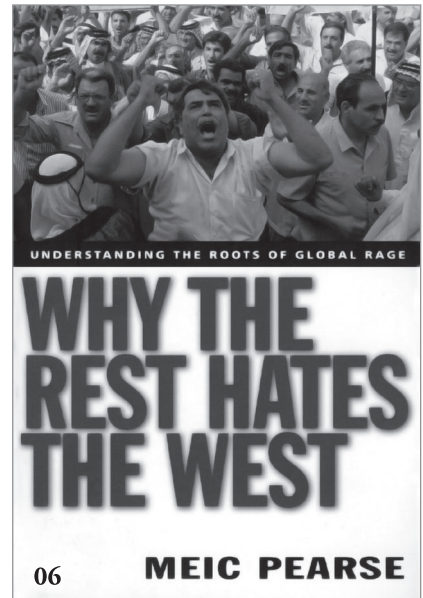


# Critique

Helping Christians Develop Skill in Discernment

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Editor

Denis Haack

Layout & Web

John Hake

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R. Greg Grooms, Donald Guthrie,  
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Henry Tazelaar MD  
*Professor of Pathology,*  
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Submissions

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manuscripts only for poetry.  
submissions@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



## Charity in disagreement

One of the things that impresses me as a student at Covenant Seminary is the care my professors take when discussing ideas with which they disagree. A case for relativism can be made to sound good

on paper, but where life is actually lived, every idea is not equally true. Ideas matter, and can matter so much that life and death may actually hang in the balance. I began my studies expecting that my professors would examine conflicting ideas in light of Scripture, which meant that some ideas would have to be rejected as incomplete, inadequate, or untrue. And since ideas are advocated by people, the various positions of different thinkers would be explored. What has impressed me is how the analysis—and disagreement, where needed—has been admirable for both clarity and charity.

In each case care has been taken to summarize and explain the alternative position with accuracy. They have allowed thinkers from other traditions to speak for themselves, using quotes, sometimes lengthy, whenever possible. The standard has been to give the alternative position so accurately and clearly that if the opposing thinker was present they would have no complaint as to how their ideas had been represented. Even the reasons for their position are carefully outlined.

In each case, rather than merely disagreeing, my professors are willing and eager to learn from the thinkers with whom they disagree. What can be appreciated, is appreciated. Wisdom is gratefully received as such. The conviction that all truth is God's truth is clearly demonstrated. We may need to dis-

agree with Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, or Eastern Orthodox theologians, but we can also learn from them.

In each case any disagreement is stated firmly and clearly, but without rancor or heightened rhetoric. This irenic spirit promotes peace, even when we are forced by conviction to conclude someone is mistaken.

In each case clear reasons are given for what is presented as the correct understanding. Common sense, natural revelation, logic, orthodox biblical tradition, the Christian world and life view, and supremely the Scriptures are shown to support it.

And in each case, any weaknesses or possible problems in the preferred position are admitted. Since human knowledge is always incomplete, no system of thought is perfect in every detail. We are finite as well as fallen, and so even our best efforts to know the truth will, sadly, fall short of being absolutely true in all details. The strengths and weaknesses of the preferred position are faced honestly. What we can't know is allowed to remain a mystery.

I think this is a model we need to adopt in our own lives in a pluralistic world. We need to disagree with mistaken ideas since the truth matters. But how we disagree also matters. The cynical asides and culture war rhetoric demonstrated by so many Christians in the public square neither honors the Lord nor commends the gospel in our pluralistic world.

One of the things that shook my faith as a young man was discovering that disinformation had been regularly dispensed in sermons. Those who did not share our particular theological convictions had been unfairly characterized, their positions inaccurately presented, their love of God and truth questioned.

Disagreeing with someone is easy; disagreeing charitably requires grace. ■

—Denis Haack



# Dialogue



## re: Sharpening minds and knowing Christ

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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1150 West Center Street  
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[letters@ransomfellowship.org](mailto: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.

**Y**our ministry is truly amazing. We live in a day and age when evangelicals do not know HOW to think, and I believe your ministry is at the forefront of changing that. I know for one thing that my thought-processes have been challenged and sharpened thanks to you.

Thank you and continue on in faithfulness.  
Blessings,

**Stacy Kim**  
Deerfield, IL

**M**y family and I were recently introduced to your ministry by Blake Mosher and Greg Grooms in Austin. My son is enrolled in a high school course that Mr. Mosher is teaching. One of the first things us parents had to read before the class began were your articles on "Living in Babylon." We had lots of good and lively discussions based around some of the ideas presented in the articles. Shortly after reading those, I emailed Mr. Mosher asking him how I might learn to ask better questions in my home school. He sent me to your Discernment 101 article, as well as sending me home with the *Notes from Toad Hall* sent out at Christmas. We have all been so challenged and encouraged by your ideas and the fact that you address our culture head-on, without shame, apology, or reservation but rather with confidence. We love how you always bring everything back to the Word of God. Thank you!

Sincerely,

**Lauren Buescher**  
Elgin, TX

**T**hanks for your work towards such a necessary cause. Developing discernment is not a comfortable endeavor, but without it the church will continue its slide into 'pop' Christianity.

Sincerely,

**Barb Holm**  
Minneapolis, MN

**Y**our work is *vital*—outreach that is the antithesis to hypocrisy. Seriously what my brilliant, questioning, classically educated teenagers *need*. Your perspectives shared in *Critique* and *Notes* always concern how *knowing* Christ is what it's all about.

**David and Andi Lemke**  
Coeur D'Alene, ID

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## A Palestinian Christian

In 1939 Elias Chacour was born in Biram, a small village in the hill country of Galilee. His parents were devout Christians, Palestinians who loved God and the land of their forefathers. Elias's father, a gentle loving man, worked long hours to provide for his family, and tended a small fig orchard he had planted near their simple house. The entire village gathered in church each Sunday, and traded goods with their Jewish neighbors in nearby villages. Far away from Biram change was underway on the world stage, however, as Zionism was birthed as a political movement, and negotiations were pursued by diplomats as to the future of Palestine. When Elias was eight, his village was appropriated by Zionist forces, the village bombarded by the army and then bulldozed. Elias's father had always insisted the Jews had suffered horribly and needed a land in which they were safe, but never imagined that those who had been so badly oppressed would oppress others.

The Chacour family were members of the Melkite Catholic Church, and as a young man Elias decided to study for the priesthood. The nearest seminary was in the Jordanian section of Jerusalem, but the Jordanian government refused entrance to "contaminated Palestinians from occupied territories," so Elias was sent to study in Paris. There he discovered how uninformed western Christians were of the reality of life in Palestine, and how inconsistently they interpreted

Scripture concerning Israel. Israel was supported regardless of its policies, and Palestinians were held in suspicion, if not contempt, since by now armed resistance against Israel had exploded into the news. Following his ordination, Chacour returned to the land of his birth, believing he was called of God to be the sort of person Jesus had described in the Beatitudes. There he has served as pastor, educator, and peace-maker, ministering the grace of God, even at cost, in the midst of what has turned out to be endless rounds of bitterness, bloodshed, and violence.

"I was standing at the customs line at the port in Haifa. I had just arrived from Europe, anxious to see my family. The doors to the outer waiting area opened for just a moment and in the throng I caught a glimpse of Mother and Father looking, though they were now in their early sixties, much grayer than I expected. In that moment, they smiled and pointed to the accompanying mob of family members, including my brothers and the families that had grown around them. Then the door slammed shut.

"When my turn came, I slid my passport across the counter to the customs agent. He glanced at it, then looked at me without expression. 'You must go to that room over there,' he said, pointing to a windowless door.

"Excuse me,' I fumbled,

'but why? My passport is current...'

"You are Palestinian?"

"Yes. But my family is waiting.

Can't you...'

"You must go to that room. I can't stamp your passport for entry.'

"In the small room, I sat nervously as a brusque young man questioned me at length. For half an hour he demanded to know the names of all the places I'd been to in Europe and the names of all my 'contacts.' He was obviously not satisfied that I was a returning seminary student.

I grew impatient with the questioning—and more than a little fearful—but I dared not become testy with him.

"Finally he said in a commanding voice: 'Strip.'

"Excuse me?"

"Strip,' he said more angrily. 'Take off all your clothes. You must be searched.'

"That was my limit. 'No,' I said firmly. 'I do not strip.'

"You *will* strip or you will not get back into the country.'

"Moistness soaked my shirt. It was entirely likely that he could carry out his threat and not admit me. With all the calmness I could muster, I dug through my bag.

"He looked at me warily. 'What are you doing?'

"You are not going to admit me. And I am not going to strip for you,' I replied. 'And so I am going to sit here and read a book.' With that I took out a book I had bought for the voyage and



***Blood Brothers is about what it means to be a Palestinian Christian who is a citizen of Israel, who loves Jews and Palestinians alike and yearns that both can live in justice and safety.***



*Chacour argues that our faulty hermeneutic of Scripture has made us captive to worldly ideologies that prevent us from being the instruments of shalom God intended.*

opened it to the first page.

"Our stalemate ended after eight nerve-wracking hours. I did not strip, and was finally admitted to my home country. Outside the customs building my family swarmed around—concerned, relieved, thankful. From them I learned that travel anywhere, even by taxi, was frighteningly uncertain for all Palestinians. At any moment, you were subject to search and interrogation."

*Blood Brothers* is a memoir, Elias Chacour's story from his childhood to the beginning of his ministry as a pastor in Galilee. It is also an extended reflection on what it means to be an agent of reconciliation in a violently fragmented world. Of what it means to be a Palestinian Christian who is a citizen of Israel, who loves Jews and Palestinians alike and yearns that both can live in justice and safety. Of what it is like to dedicate your life to that goal seeking to bring Palestinians and Jews together so that each can see the other as persons, not simply as ciphers defined by the media and by political ideologies. Of what Chacour experiences as a deeply committed Palestinian Christian when he is with his western brothers and sisters.

Chacour does not question the fact that the Jews have suffered; when he opened

a series of community centers for Palestinians, the celebration included a showing of *The Diary of Anne Frank* "so that Palestinian young people could understand the horrors Jews had suffered under the Nazis and forgive." He does not doubt that God promised through the prophets that Israel would be restored to the land; he insists, however, that the prophecies be read in their entirety, including the command that the restored Israel be characterized by justice and righteousness as a witness to the nations. He does not suggest that western Christians be silent or withdrawn from the Palestinian/Israeli conflict; he argues, on the contrary, that our lack of understanding and faulty hermeneutic have made us captive to worldly ideologies that prevent us from becoming the instruments of shalom God intended for all his people.

When Biram was destroyed, the soldiers loaded all the men of the village into trucks and drove them away. Elias's father and three brothers disappeared that night. They were driven to the border of Jordan, unloaded in the early dawn and told to run. When they hesitated, the soldiers began to shoot, spraying gunfire over their heads. The men ran in terror, many never to return. Elias's father led his sons into Jordan and then Syria, scraping for food and

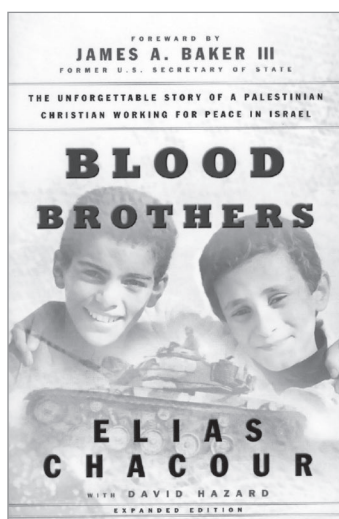
sleeping in the open, making a desperate, three-month trek back to their family. The

night they arrived, he led his family in prayer with words that were seared into the mind and heart of young Elias. "Father," Michael Chacour prayed, "they are treating us badly because we are children of Ishmael. But we are true sons of Abraham—and your children. You saved Ishmael from death in the wilderness, and you saved us. You brought justice for him and blessed him with a great nation. We thank you now, for we know that you will bring justice for us." Elias Chacour has been sacrificially working, preaching, loving, and praying for that justice ever since.

After Chacour finished seminary he drove out to the site of his childhood village. It had not been rebuilt or replaced, and the lonely remains of broken walls and collapsed buildings were all that remained. "I reached Biram just at sunup," he records, "parking at the edge of the open area that had once been the village square. As I stepped from the car into the cool air of dawn, a sign caught my attention. In English and Hebrew it said that these 'antiquities' were 'preserved and protected' by the government. The irony jarred me. Later, I learned that these 'antiquities' had become a popular site visited by tourists on guided coach trips."

*Blood Brothers* is a simple story, simply told. The writing will not win awards, but the story it tells and the challenge it provides is what counts—and they are far too important to miss. We recommend it to you. ■

~Denis Haack



**Book recommended:** *Blood Brothers: The Unforgettable Story of a Palestinian Christian Working for Peace in Israel* by Elias Chacour, with David Hazard (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, Baker; 1984, 2003) 239 pp.



## Terrorism: the true

**P**eople who regularly watch the news and read newspapers and news magazines do so because they want to be informed about what is happening around the world. They want to know what's transpiring, to and by whom, and most important, why. In one sense, of course, our fascination with "news" is just a fantasy. The media only touches on a tiny fraction of what is actually taking place around the globe—and may not include what, in the cosmic scheme of things, is actually of greatest importance. And if there is anything true of our post-9/11 world, it is the realization that being informed rarely translates into understanding why things take place. Most days, it seems, the media reports stories that are not only difficult to comprehend, they are frankly incomprehensible to us. So we are left with nagging questions. Why do Iraqi suicide bombers blow themselves up in ways guaranteed to kill and maim not just American soldiers, but fellow Iraqis, including innocent women and children and people trying to rebuild their shattered country? If poverty is the true breeding ground of global terrorism, why were the 9/11 hijackers all from prosperous backgrounds and Osama bin Laden from a wealthy Saudi family? If poverty is not the root cause of global terrorism, what is? What is the attraction of radical Islamist groups so that young people are willing to sacrifice their lives for the cause? And why would British citizens exploit the freedom they enjoy to plant bombs in the Underground and on buses?

Our lack of comprehension has two sides. On the one hand, though we imag-

ine ourselves to be well informed, we actually know very little of substance about the world outside our own borders. "Survey after survey," Meic Pearse notes in *Why the Rest Hates the West*, "shows the embarrassing ignorance of even educated Americans about the most fundamental features of the world outside their own culture." The other side of our incomprehension is even closer to home. Pearse argues we haven't reflected deeply enough on our own culture, the ways it has changed in the 20th century, and how that change is viewed by the rest of the world. A great deal of what we Westerners now take to be "commonsense"—about things like tolerance, honor, human rights, justice, and the place of religion in life—is viewed very differently by almost everyone else. Thus, Pearse says, it is "increasingly urgent for Westerners to obtain a clear view of what makes their own culture tick so that, seeing themselves, they can more clearly understand why the rest of the world considers them—as it most assuredly does—to be dangerously seductive, but domineering, barbarians."

Meic Pearse, associate professor of history at Houghton College (New York), explores both sides of our lack of understanding in *Why the Rest Hates the West*. I realize we recommend a lot of resources in these pages, but please consider reading this one—it is significant, for several reasons.

First, *Why the Rest Hates the West* is essentially a study in cultural discernment, and that, as we never tire of saying in these pages, is an essential part of Christian faithfulness. Seeking to understand what is incomprehensible in our world is a wit-

ness to our commitment to the truth, and most important, to our Lord. Related to that, our responsibilities as citizens include issues of foreign policy, which translate in practice into life and death for real people made in God's image. Who we vote for, what we write our leaders about, and how we explain our positions to our neighbors are all at stake. All this also touches quite directly on our Lord's call to bring his gospel to the world. It is possible in this fallen world that political decisions which are "best" for America's self-interest might be for the rest of the world a hindrance to the gospel. Will we know when that occurs, and have the courage of our faith when it does? For another thing, we must take the lead in humanizing the image of the "terrorists" and "radicals" that populate the news. Without for a moment defending their actions, they are still made in God's image, and we must demonstrate before a watching world what that means. And finally, if we fail to be discerning, we will be reactionary, adopting a conservative or liberal ideology—whatever happens to seem commonsensical at the moment. And far too much is at stake in all of this to settle for that. After all, our common sense is fallen, too.

Pearse begins *Why the Rest Hates the West* by noting the words of British Prime Minister Tony Blair in his speech to the U. S. Congress on July 17, 2003. Blair said that "the purpose of terrorism is... the elimination of tolerance," insisting that "our values" are "the universal values of the human spirit." Though hardly controversial in the West, Pearse argues that most of the world heard these statements in a far more sinister light.

"My contention," Pearse says, "is that the primary cause of most present conflicts in which the West

***If anything is true of our post-9/11 world, it is the realization that being informed rarely translates into understanding why many things take place.***



# culture war

*Pearse says it is “increasingly urgent for Westerners to obtain a clear view of what makes their own culture tick so that they can more clearly understand why the rest of the world considers them to be dangerously seductive, but domineering, barbarians.”*

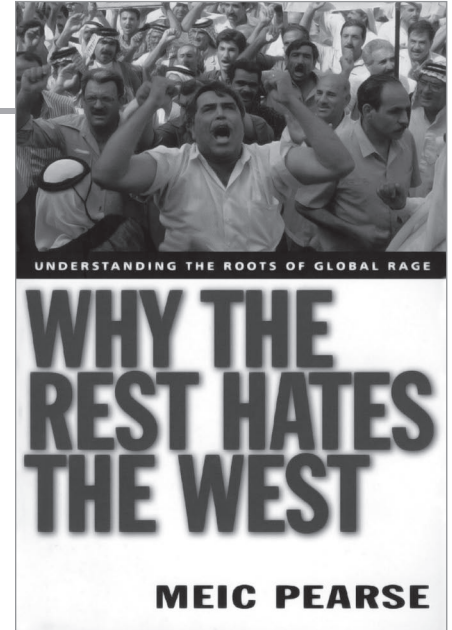
is now engaged is neither religion nor foreign policy, but culture. Culture is the *radix* of which the individual conflicts over specific aspects of Western policies are often enough merely symptomatic, and which lends them an aspect of bitterness and terror. It is this ‘clash of civilizations’ that makes the protagonists so implacable and the resultant conflicts potentially far more deadly. Mere interests can ‘cut a deal’; cultures, however, cannot compromise their key characteristics without ceasing to exist. So while the reasoning of Blair’s speech to Congress was sound enough in respect of short-term realities, his claim that ‘ours are not Western values; they are the universal values of the human spirit’ represents a dramatic ratcheting up of the rhetoric. Instead of being merely ‘Western distinctives,’ they are now the *only* values allowable. Nothing could be a clearer statement of cultural imperialism. The claim is, in fact, false, both historically—and as this book will demonstrate in some detail—and as an observation of the non-Western world in the present. Even more important, it is a recipe for war without end. For the rest of the world *knows* Blair’s words to be false as a description, since they are contradicted by every social fact around them. In consequence, they can be heard only as a statement of intent: our culture will supplant yours until it holds universal sway. As *The Times* of London echoed the following morning, ours are ‘fundamental values which should apply equally to all.’

“And ‘culture,’ of course, includes religion, but also much else. Non-Westerners are becoming understandably anxious about the future of their cultural space, which they feel

is being intolerably threatened by aliens—that is, by us. And to the non-West our culture appears not as a culture at all, but as an anti-culture. Our values appear not as an alternative to traditional values but as a negation of them—as anti-values, in fact.

“The truth is that we, in our hyperprosperity, may be able to live without meaning, faith or purpose, filling our threescore years and ten with a variety of entertainments—but most of the world cannot. If economics is implicated in the conflict, it is mostly in an ironic sense: only an abundance of riches such as no previous generation has known could possibly console us for the emptiness of our lives, the absence of stable families and relationships, and the lack of any overarching purpose. And even within us, the pampered babies who populate the West, something—a rather big something—keeps rebelling against the hollowness of it all. But then our next consumer goodie comes along and keeps us happy and distracted for the next five minutes. Normal people (that is, the rest of the world), however, cannot exist without real meaning, without religion anchored in something deeper than existentialism and bland niceness, without a culture rooted deep in the soil of the place where they live. Yet it is these things that globalization threatens to demolish. And we wonder that they are angry?”

The majority of *Why the Rest Hates the West* is a probing exploration of Western culture, how it has changed since the Enlightenment, and how it threatens the values of the traditional cultures of the rest of the world. The fact that Christians are



highly critical of American culture as well is significant, but not something in which we can take much comfort. The rest of the world does not distinguish between “Western” and “Christian,” and the cultural captivity of the church in the West only confirms their assumptions. Near the end of the book Pearse makes a series of proposals for us as Christians to consider. Though incomplete (because beyond the scope of the book), they are worth serious discussion.

Byron Borger, of Hearts & Minds Books, says *Why the Rest Hates the West* is a “book of immensely rich insight, written nicely by a learned and penetrating thinker, [and] may be the best Christian reflection on the deeper questions around globalization, global culture wars and the great clash of civilizations... a serious call to consider the impact of Western modernity on the Third World.” I agree.

Please read *Why the Rest Hates the West*. Though it (sadly) does not include discussion questions, it is worth discussing. ■

~Denis Haack

**Book recommended:** *Why the Rest Hates the West: Understanding the Roots of Global Rage* by Meic Pearse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; 2004) 181 pp. + notes + index.



## The Roots of Civilization

**F**or Westerners, the roots of civilization stretch back in time to the flourishing of Greek culture and thought, the greatness of the Roman empire, and the birth of Christianity. Ask an average Iraqi, or Iranian, or Egyptian, or Saudi to identify the roots of civilization, however, and it is probable that you will receive a different answer. They look back too, to a great empire which displayed military domination during a period of amazing commerce, artistic, cultural, and economic greatness, but they are referring to the Abbasid dynasty which ruled from Baghdad.

The Abbasid empire included all of north Africa, Egypt, Palestine and the Arabian peninsula, from Turkey to the edges of India and China, and north into the steppes of what is now Russia. The tax revenues flowing to the caliphs allowed them to maintain an impressive military and a huge bureaucracy, and build not just palaces but entire cities for their courts. The Abbasid caliphs ruled from the 8th to the 10th centuries, when the Western world was weak, fractious, and repeatedly launching armies to slaughter Muslims in the name of Christ. “From the revolution of 750 that brought the dynasty to power,” Hugh Kennedy writes, “until its collapse in the 930s and 940s the Abbasid caliphate was by far the greatest political power in the Islamic world. But it was more than that; it was the continuation of that universal caliphate which had been established by Abu Bakr and his supporters immediately after the

*“The memory of the caliphate survived to inspire later generations. The recollection of ancient greatness is a potent inspiration for Osama bin Laden and his followers.”*

death of the prophet Muhammad in 632, which was to continue in different guises and in different places down to the abdication of the last Ottoman caliph in 1925.”

If we are to understand our world, enter the world view of our Islamic neighbors, make sense of the news, and know the shape of faithfulness as citizens concerned for American foreign policy, it might be wise to learn something of the Abbasid caliphate. Hugh Kennedy, a professor of eastern history at the University of St. Andrews (Scotland), grants us a window into this world in *When Baghdad Ruled the World*. He does not—and cannot—recount the entire history of the

period, of course, because there is too much to tell. “This book,” he says, “is intended to tell the story of the Abbasid caliphs and their court in the two centuries that constituted their golden age.” Other books can be read to learn of the growth of Islamic law and the various religious traditions within Islam, or details of life for the ordinary person who lived outside the royal court.

Still, the story Kennedy tells is a vital one because it forms the heart of the heritage which the Islamic world looks back on with yearning. Just as Christians tend to believe that nations which live in accordance with biblical beliefs and values will prosper, so Muslims are equally convinced

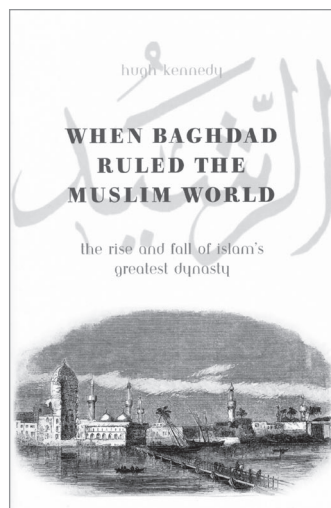
that following the Koran is necessary for a civilized life. Which is why many Muslims believe something is badly amiss today—the wrong civilization is ascendent.

“The memory of the caliphate survived to inspire later generations,” Kennedy writes. “Muslim revivalists throughout history have seen its greatness and sought to restore its power, prestige and unity. The recollection of ancient greatness is a potent inspiration for Osama bin Laden and his followers. The cultural legacy of the Abbasid court was immensely influential. The poets they patronized are still read and acknowledged as among the greatest in the Arabic language, and the translations they sponsored formed the basis of higher learning not only in the Islamic world but in the medieval West as well. The Abbasids defined the style and performance of Muslim monarchy: they showed how a caliph and vizier should behave, how to decorate a palace, how to compose a formal proclamation; the flowing elegant script itself was a product of the Abbasid chancery. For the descendants of the gentleman farmer of Humayma it was an astonishing achievement.”

*When Baghdad Ruled the World* is an accessible introduction to a world I know little about, but which I needed to know better. It helped me understand why many in the Islamic world look not to the West but to ancient Baghdad when they think about what “civilized” truly means. ■

~Denis Haack

**Book recommended:** *When Baghdad Ruled the World* by Hugh Kennedy (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press; 2004) 296 pp. + notes + bibliography + index.





# The "dark continent"

The "dark continent" was a term of prejudice and derision used by Western colonialists to refer to Africa's lack of enlightenment. Africans may be educable, they said, but it was a dark, backward place, bereft of the light of civilization, nobility, and learning that had advanced European society out of its own Dark Ages. I use the term very differently, to call attention to the dark effects of the Fall that has ravaged the peoples of Africa in our lifetimes; the ceaseless round of warfare, slavery, disease, famine, slaughter, broken promises, dashed hopes, and unspeakable political repression that have plagued the people of Africa.

I chose to read *The Fate of Africa* because of U2. Due to the generosity of dear friends we went to their concert in Chicago, and Bono's concern for Africa was much in evidence. I realized that all I knew of that land was the brief snatches of news I picked up in the media, and so felt I needed to learn more. Martin Meredith has spent his life as a journalist in Africa, and writes as a reporter, telling the story with surprising clarity given the plethora of countries, dictators, and shifting loyalties that he must address. My goal as I began was to learn the history and geography of Africa, but in that I have failed—there are too many details to remember in the press of all the rest that I must keep in mind. But I have learned a great deal, much in the heart, in a sensitivity to Africa and the suffering of its people, for which I will be forever grateful. I have also learned

***"In reality, fifty years after the beginning of the independence era, Africa's prospects are bleaker than ever before."***

to be more grateful for the freedom I enjoy, and for the culture in which I live, even with its glaring faults. I have long believed that American democracy is an unusual, fragile experiment, but this book reminds me of that truth. It has reminded me how easy it is to assume that the freedoms, rights, and comforts I enjoy are normal, to be expected, when in

fact they are not. And how such blessings come with responsibility. It may not be in the national self-interest of America

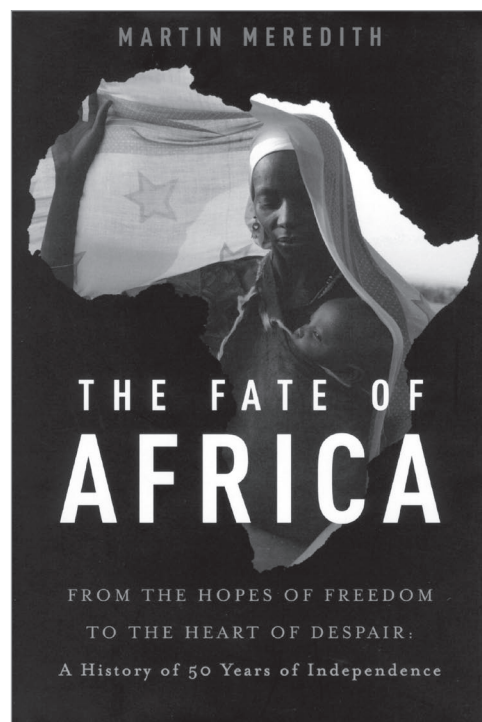
to care much about most of Africa, but as a Christian I do not have the luxury of such disengagement. People are made in God's image—and that includes the unnamed multitudes that suffer daily in Africa. If we are to be faithful as Christians at our moment in history we will have to go beyond the narrow bounds of liberal/conservative political ideology and take a stand for what is right.

"In reality," Meredith concludes, "fifty years after the beginning of the independence era, Africa's prospects are bleaker than ever before." Poverty is increasing, warfare and

political repression continues in many nations, famine and dislocation afflicts millions, and AIDS takes a toll that actually exceeds the devastation the Black Plague brought to Europe. The need is great, staggering, and as

my friend Steve Garber is fond of asking, why did it take a pop star to cause America to take Africa seriously?

*The Fate of Africa* tells only part of the story. This is not a criticism but a recognition



that no book can contain the entire story. During the fifty years since independence, for example, the church has grown in Africa in ways unknown in the West. In fact, in our lifetime the modern missionary movement may experience a shift, so that missionaries come from Africa to our shores. Be that as it may, we need to hear the story of *The Fate of Africa*. It is a story of real people, of real suffering, and of real responsibility that we have yet to fully face.

We recommend *The Fate of Africa* to you. ■

~Denis Haack



**Book recommended:** *The Fate of Africa: From the Hopes of Freedom to the Heart of Despair: A History of Fifty Years of Independence* by Martin Meredith (New York, NY: Public Affairs; 2005) 688 pp. + notes + bibliography + index.



## Cheating bureaucrats

**T**he conversation touched on foreign adoptions, and their difficulties. The group consisted of young professionals in finance and law. Each had friends and relatives who had tried to adopt children from outside the U.S., and had stories to tell about unreasonable demands made by Third World bureaucrats.

"One couple I know," said one, "was frustrated by the process; there always seemed to be 'one more form' to complete. Finally, after months of compliance, they were assured they were in the final stage of the process. Then, one more form arrived. They were informed that to be approved as 'competent parents' they needed to send photos showing the 'nursery, play, and sleeping areas' they had prepared for the baby. This was their first child, and they certainly didn't have anything that elaborate set up. It was simply unreasonable—and from a bureaucrat in a nation where most people live in mud huts!"

"I know what I would have done," said another. "Go to a friend's house who has children, arrange their children's room to my liking, take pictures of it, and send them in."

Everyone in the group agreed. It was an unreasonable, silly request, and should be treated accordingly. For one thing, the request did not reflect American society accurately. Couples can pull together what they need for a baby quickly, especially given the normal generos-

ity of their family and friends at baby showers. For another, given the economic realities of the nation from which the baby would come, the request was insulting, if not absurd. Taking such power plays seriously merely encouraged bureaucrats to continue to abuse their power.

"But wait a minute," I said. "The request may be all that you say it is, but does that justify our engaging in a lie? After all, the form we would sign (and perhaps have notarized) would claim something for the photos that is simply untrue."

"It doesn't matter," they replied. "For one thing, the couple's ability to be good parents is the real issue, not material possessions. The couple would provide all that their child needed, but shouldn't have to do it according to the bureaucrat's time-line. The photo would give a sense of what they'd provide, and that's sufficient. Getting too worried about such niceties is a form of legalism. We aren't talking about stealing babies to sell them into slavery, for goodness sake, but dealing with stupid requests from self-important bureaucrats. Take pictures at a friend's home and send them in—it's meeting the spirit of the law even if it isn't following the letter. If it's a law at all."

It was an interesting conversation—and one which raises a series of questions for those who want to be discerning.

~Denis Haack

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What is your response to this conversation? Do you agree with the position the group advocates? Why or why not?
2. Analyze the arguments and reasons the group put forward. Are there other reasons that could be raised to support their position? Are there weaknesses in their position?
3. Does it matter if the group having this conversation are all professing Christians? Why or why not? Should we hold fellow believers to higher standards than we would our non-Christian neighbors? Why or why not?
4. Some Christians would argue that this is a form of "lawlessness" (however seemingly benign) and that we are called to follow those whom God ordains to have authority over us, unless their demands conflict with our faith. "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities," Romans 13:1-2 states, "for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves." Does this apply to this situation? Why or why not?
5. What biblical texts, or biblical principles, or aspects of the Christian world view would you call attention to support your position?
6. If you were the friend whose children's room was to be photographed, would you allow it? Why or why not? If no, how would you explain your reasons to your friend?
7. Can Christians who decide differently on this co-exist happily in the same fellowship? Why or why not?



## The purpose of grace

**W**hat is the *purpose* of grace? Primarily, to restore our relationship with God. When God lays the foundation of this restored relationship, by forgiving our sins as we trust his Son, he does so in order that henceforth we and he may live in fellowship. And what he does in renewing our nature is intended to make us capable of, and actually to lead us into, the exercise of love, trust, delight, hope and obedience Godward—those acts which, from our side, make up the reality of fellowship with God, who is constantly making himself known to us. This is what all the work of grace aims at—an ever deeper knowledge of God, and an ever closer fellowship with him. Grace is God drawing us sinners closer and closer to himself.

How does God in grace prosecute this purpose? Not by shielding us from assault by the world, the flesh and the devil, nor by protecting us from burdensome and frustrating circumstances, nor yet by shielding us from troubles created by our own temperament and psychology; but rather by exposing us to all these things, so as to overwhelm us with a sense of our own inadequacy, and to drive us to cling to him more closely. This is the ultimate reason, from our standpoint, why God fills our lives with troubles and perplexities of one sort and another: it is *to ensure that we shall learn to hold him fast*. The reason why the Bible spends so much of its time reiterating that God is a strong rock, a firm defense, and a sure refuge and help for the weak, is that God spends so much of his time bringing home to us that we are weak, both mentally and morally, and dare not trust ourselves to find, or to follow, the right road.

When we walk along a clear road feeling fine, and someone takes our arm to help us, as likely as not we shall impatiently shake him off; but when we are caught in rough country in the dark, with a storm getting up and our strength spent, and someone takes our arm to help us, we shall thankfully lean on him. And God wants us to feel that our way through life is rough and perplexing, so that we may learn thankfully to lean on him. Therefore he takes steps to drive us out of self-confidence to trust in himself—in the classical scriptural phrase for the secret of the godly life, to “wait on the Lord.”

This truth has many applications. One of the most startling is that

God actually uses our sins and mistakes to this end. He employs the educative discipline of failures and mistakes very frequently. It is striking to see how much of the Bible deals with godly people making mistakes and God chastening them for it.

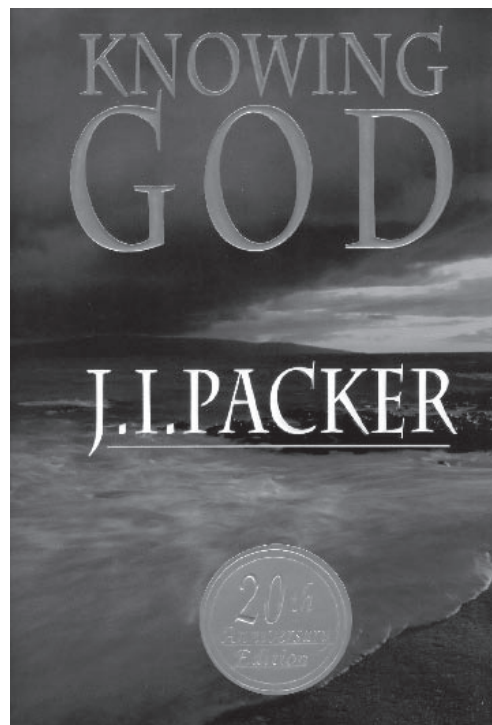
Abraham, promised a son, but made to wait for him, loses patience, makes the mistake of acting the amateur providence, and begets Ishmael—and is made to wait for thirteen more years before God speaks to him again (Gen 16:16-17:1). Moses makes the mistake of trying to save his people by acts of self-assertion, throwing his weight around, killing an Egyptian, insisting on sorting out the Israelites’ private problems for them—and finds himself banished for many decades to the back side of the desert, to bring him to a less vainglorious mind. David makes a run of mistakes—seducing Bathsheba and getting Uriah killed, neglecting his family, numbering the people for prestige—and in each case is chastened bitterly. Jonah makes the mistake of running away from God’s call—and finds himself inside a great fish.

So we might go on. But the point to stress is that the human mistake, and the immediate divine displeasure, were in no case the end of the story. Abraham learned to wait God’s time. Moses was cured of his selfconfidence (indeed, his subsequent diffidence was itself almost sinful!—see Ex 4:10-14). David found

repentance after each of his lapses and was closer to God at the end than at the beginning. Jonah prayed from the fish’s belly and lived to fulfill his mission to Nineveh.

God can bring good out of the extremes of our own folly; God can restore the years that the locust has eaten. It is said that those who never make mistakes never make anything; certainly, these men made mistakes, but through their mistakes God taught them to know his grace and to cleave to him in a way that would never have happened otherwise. Is your trouble a sense of failure? the knowledge of having made some ghastly mistake? Go back to God; his restoring grace waits for you. ■

—Excerpted, J. I. Packer



**Excerpted from:** *Knowing God* by J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; 1973) pp. 249-251.



# The Darkened Room

## Over continents



by Denis Haack

### A review of *Winged Migration* and *March of the Penguins*

This morning we began our day on the porch, bundled against a cool breeze blowing off the lake. We sipped hot coffee and watched the birds. The generosity of good friends allows us to spend a week in this cabin, remote in the woods of northern Wisconsin. Six loons slowly made their way across the lake, finally scooting across the water as they took off, their wings beating the surface until they lifted clear, their haunting calls echoing between the wooded shores. A bald eagle swooped down from a perch high in a majestic pine tree, dipped its talons into the water and retreated back to the tree to eat the fish it had snatched. Chickadees visit the feeder we have stocked, laboriously opening each black sunflower seed with their tiny beaks. Their calls are the first we hear as we awaken. A pair of pileated woodpeckers visited a downed tree, bigger than I imagined they'd be, and hammered at the dead wood. Two families of Canadian geese swim by the dock, honking, heads held high as if observing us with bemused condescension.

The birds did not interrupt our morning prayers, but deepened them. When the Hebrew prophet wants to astonish our imaginations at the outrage of war, he paints a word picture of horrible emptiness. "I looked," Jeremiah writes, "every bird in the sky had flown away" (4:25). The heavens reveal God's glory, the psalmist says (19:1), and anyone who has watched birds cavort effortlessly and sing exuberantly has little trouble believing it is so. Even those who do not believe in a transcendent Beauty can be moved to awe, touched by a glory that birds display.

Two recent documentary films celebrate birds, permitting us glimpses into their lives that

would be impossible except for the creativity and dogged hard work of the film makers. In *Winged Migration* we actually fly with flocks as they make their way across continents in their annual migration. And in *March of the Penguins* we plod along with lines of emperor penguins across 70 miles of Antarctic ice to the isolated spot where they brave the howling blizzards of winter to incubate a single egg.

To make *Winged Migration*, the film makers raised some of the migrating birds in order to acquaint them with the small engine-powered gliders the cinematographers would use to accompany the flocks in the air. Being—through the eye of the camera—in a V of geese crossing mountain peaks to land in a lake is an exhilarating experience. This is one of the glories of film as art—allowing us unique moments that we could never experience on our own.

To make *March of the Penguins* the film makers dragged sleds of equipment across sea ice strewn with breaks and crevasses to film in temperatures of 50 below zero in blizzards with gale force winds. Watching the penguins huddled together for warmth to stay alive makes the crew's determination all the more admirable. And since the penguins' trek is in the dead of winter, the sun never rises, so the film makers had to haul spot lights to flood the area with enough light to film.

One Christian critic, in an otherwise positive review of *March of the Penguins*, bemoaned the fact that not once did the film acknowledge the Creator. I found his comment jarring. The film had moved me deeply, a reminder that Creation speaks God's word as truly as does Scripture, and provides a point of contact between me and those who do not hold my world and life view. I do not expect the people of Babylonia to share the beliefs of Zion, and wonder if complaining about that fact is helpful. Complaining sounds like whining, and convinces no one. *March of the Penguins* moved me to worship, in wonder at the creativity expressed in nature that exceeds my imagination. Roger

#### Credits

##### *Winged Migration:*

Director: Jacques Perrin  
Narrator: Philippe Labro  
Producers: Christophe Barratier & Jacques Perrin  
Original Music: Bruno Coulais  
Cinematographers: Olli Barbé, Michel Benjamin, Slvie Carcedo-Dreujou, Laurent Chabonnier, Luc Drion, Laurent Fleutot, Philippe Garguil, Dominique Gentil, Bernard Lutic, Thierry Machado, Stéphane Martin, Fabrice Moindrot, Eric Sasse, Michel Terrasse, & Thierry Thomas.

2001; France; 89 minutes  
Rated G

##### *March of the Penguins:*

Director: Luc Jacquet  
Narrator: Morgan Freeman  
Writer: Jordan Roberts  
Producer: Yves Darondeau  
Original Music: Bruno Coulais & Alex Wurman  
Cinematographers: Laurent Chalet & Jérôme Maison.  
2005; France; 85 minutes  
Rated G

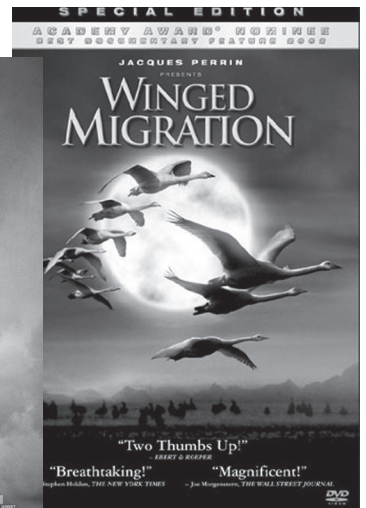
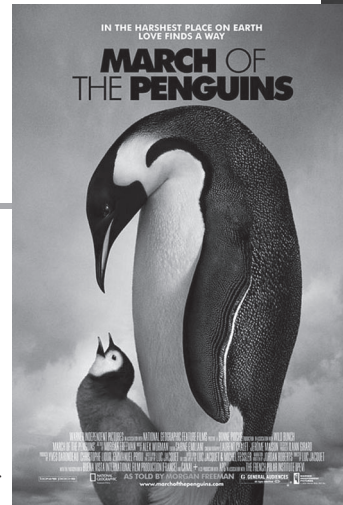


# and ice

Ebert, commenting on the barren, harsh landscape of the Antarctic noted its “ethereal beauty.” He is correct; it is breathtaking.

Both films capture something of the film maker’s sense of awe. In *Winged Migration* the beating of the wings sets the rhythm of the musical score. The music is mystical, providing an ambiguous spirituality that each viewer is free to interpret on their own. The lyrics hint at our oneness with the birds we are watching, and the score evokes a haunting transcendence. The narration in *March of the Penguins* both describes the action, and subtly interprets it. The penguins make their annual trek for “love,” we are told. Christy Lemire, writing in the *San Francisco Examiner* (June 30, 2005) objects. “[C]haracterizing what these penguins do as an act of love, as the film does, is a reach. How do we know it’s love? They’re penguins! They have to make more penguins. This is what they instinctively know to do.

Assigning human emotion to the process comes off as a feeble attempt at the warm fuzzies.” I disagree—it is more than “warm fuzzies.” What they were filming could not be adequately captured in a narration limited to the dry, academic, reductionist language of



science about raw instinct.

Both documentaries are splendidly filmed and worth watching. And just think: someday, when the King returns, this sad planet will be cleansed and redeemed from the curse. Then we can explore God’s awesome creation, caring for it as we should, relishing the glory it proclaims and adding our voices to the praise. World without end. ■

~Denis Haack

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What was your first impression upon watching the film? To what extent did you feel a sense of awe?
2. What was most surprising? Interesting? New? Awesome?
3. Take time to listen to the music track (available on CD) of *Winged Migration*. As you listen, follow along with the lyrics. What was it composed to convey? How did it make you feel as you watched the film? How aware were you of the score the first time you watched the movie?
4. Stephanie Zacharek, writing on Salon.com (June 24, 2005) made this comment: “Luc Jacque’s luminous, moving documentary *March of the Penguins* is enough to make you hope there’s no such thing as reincarnation: Human beings have it hard enough, but the life of the emperor penguin, one of strife, deprivation and against-all-odds adaptability in one of the most unforgiving corners of the earth, is far rougher.” If a friend made this comment after viewing the film, what creative, winsome comment might a Christian make to deepen their interest in the Christian faith?
5. Do you agree with my comments about the Christian critic’s comment on *March of the Penguins*? Why or why not? What should characterize our analysis of and attitudes to Babylonian films? How should we express points of disagreement so as to try to deepen and extend, rather than close, the conversation we are having with those who do not share our deepest convictions and values?
6. What questions might we ask non-Christians about the mysticism expressed in these films in order to hear something of their spiritual convictions?
7. What proper biblical mystery should characterize our talk about our faith? About the creation? How should we express this mystery in a way that is true to Scripture and attractive, or intriguing, to non-Christians?



## Beautiful intimacy



### The achingly lovely music of Over the Rhine

In 1990 a band began performing in small venues in Cincinnati; it took its name from a notorious neighborhood called Over the Rhine. It's a place where immigrants tend to congregate, a community where fragmentation and dislocation is tinged with hope.

artistry and soothe the soul. They are the sort of CDs where punching play always seems to be followed by punching repeat. One can't get enough. Together Karin and Linford invite, compel us to reflect on reality, on life, and whether the beauty of mercy is possible in such a broken world. These are musicians who have resisted the impulse to dumb things down. They respect the intelligence of their listeners and want to include them in the conversation. This is evident on all their albums, but is strikingly apparent in concert where the intimacy of their music especially shines.

*Slow down. Hold still.  
It's not as if it's a matter of will.  
Someone's circling. Someone's moving  
a little lower than the angels.  
And it's got nothing to do with me.  
The wind blows through the trees,  
but if I look for it, it won't come.  
I tense up. My mind goes numb.  
There's nothing harder than learning how to receive.  
—"All I Need is Everything" from Good Dog Bad Dog*

Place and a sense of community are important to Over the Rhine—they're a primary reason why the group hasn't relocated as their popularity has grown. They want to "be surrounded by people who are smarter than we are," they say, "who are deeper in." Much of their fan base has grown by word of mouth and through the band's web site ([www.overtherhine.com](http://www.overtherhine.com)), a very personal approach in what is often an impersonal, market-driven business.

Over the Rhine is composed of Linford Detweiler and Karin Berquist, a husband and wife whose music is marked by mature craftsmanship, deep reality and lovely grace. Karin has one of the finest voices in all of popular music—one reviewer calls it "sweetly aching"—powerfully poignant, passionately intimate. Her singing seems effortless, bigger than she is, expressive, full of meaning. Linford is a gifted composer and pianist, producing spell-binding instrumentals that match the expressiveness of Karin's vocals without overwhelming her voice. Linford's solo instrumental albums, *Unspoken Requests* and *Grey Ghost Stories*, showcase his

*I want to feel and then some  
I have five senses  
I need thousands more at least  
every day a page of paper  
every night a photograph  
a moveable feast*

*so fade to black and white now  
roll the movie of my life  
inside of my head  
'cause like all true believers  
I am truly skeptical  
of all that I have said*

*I wanna drink the water from your well  
I wanna tell you things i'll never tell  
the world can wait*

—"The World Can Wait" from *Films for Radio*





# from Ohio

Karin and Linford want their lives to be a work of art, so that there is depth behind their music. "Our work is not any more profound than we are," they say. Most of their songs are in the first person, an expression of authentic self-awareness which allows them—and through their music, us—to reflect on what all daughters of Eve and sons of Adam face in this dark world. So, for example, on their latest CD, *Drunkard's Prayer*, we hear echoes of the pain when their marriage was bent near the breaking point. There is blessing here and curse, both need and grace. In place of sentimentality *Over the Rhine* does not shy away from looking into the abyss of our sad, fallen world, but insists that against all odds there is a love which can shine light into our darkness.

"The band's albums are deep and wide, playful and serious, sad and joyful," *Paste* magazine says, "full of tiny experiments, rabbit trails and the wine-dark sparkle of inspired phrase. Many people within the music industry and without find it laughable that this gifted Ohio band has managed to stay more-or-less a best kept secret for so long." Making a living through music—or art of any kind—is a difficult road. "We let go from time to time to rediscover whether we need to keep doing this. We make peace with the fact the experiment might cease," they say.

Let's hope the experiment of *Over the Rhine* continues to flourish for a long, long time to come. Karin Berquist and Linford Detweiler make our lives richer, fuller, more complete with their many layered, creative, lovely music.

*I know I'm not a martyr  
I've never died for anyone but me  
The last frontier is only  
The stranger in the mirror that I see  
But when I least expect it  
Here and there I see my savior's face  
He's still my favorite loser  
Falling for the entire human race.*

—"Jesus in New Orleans" from *Ohio* ■

~Denis Haack

**CDs recommended:** all *Over the Rhine*, including:

*Drunkard's Prayer* (2005)  
*Unspoken Requests* (2004)  
*Ohio* (2003)  
*The Cutting Room Floor* (2002)  
*Grey Ghost Stories* (2001)  
*Good Dog Bad Dog* (2000)  
*Amateur Shortwave Radio* (1999)  
*Eve* (1994)  
*Films for Radio* (2001)



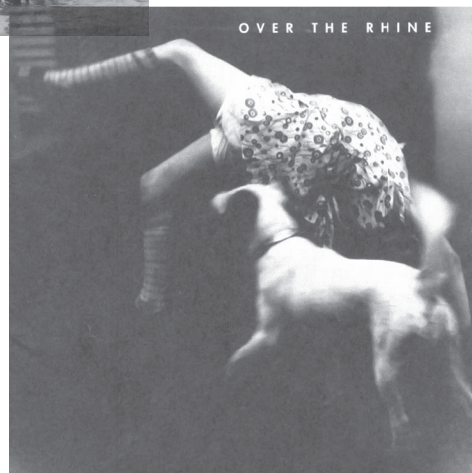
OVER THE RHINE



UNSPOKEN REQUESTS | Linford Detweiler



OVER THE RHINE



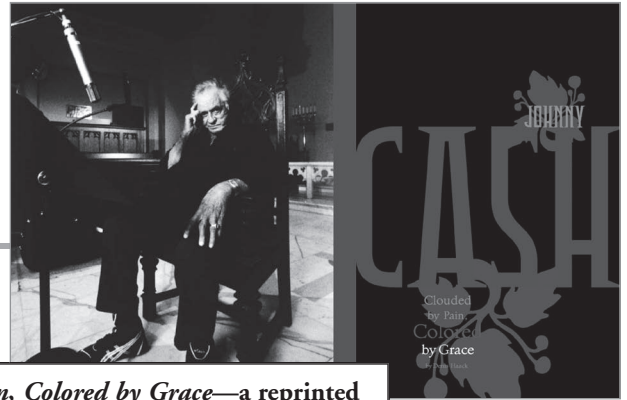
by

Denis

Haack

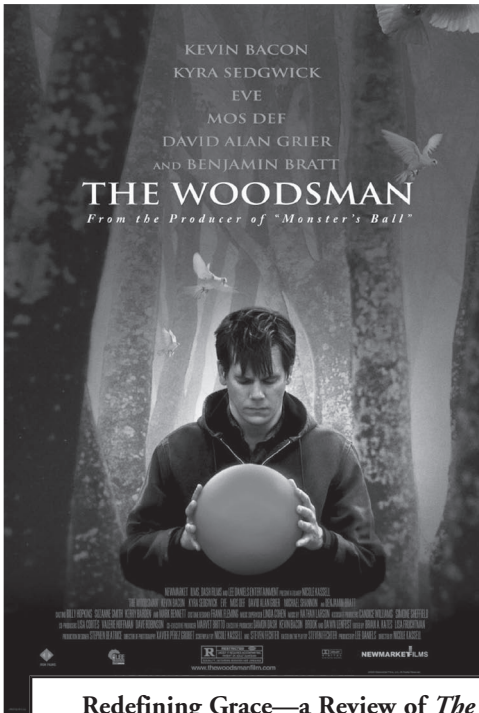


# On the Web



***Johnny Cash: Clouded by Pain, Colored by Grace*—a reprinted article from *by Faith* magazine by Denis Haack**

[http://www.ransomfellowship.org/haack\\_byfaith\\_JohnnyCash.pdf](http://www.ransomfellowship.org/haack_byfaith_JohnnyCash.pdf)



**Redefining Grace—a Review of *The Woodsman***

[http://www.ransomfellowship.org/M\\_Woodsman.html](http://www.ransomfellowship.org/M_Woodsman.html)



**How Much Reality Can You Stand?: A review of Bruce Springsteen's *Devils & Dust***

[http://www.ransomfellowship.org/music\\_SpringsteenDevils.html](http://www.ransomfellowship.org/music_SpringsteenDevils.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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