

Critique

Helping Christians Develop Skill in Discernment

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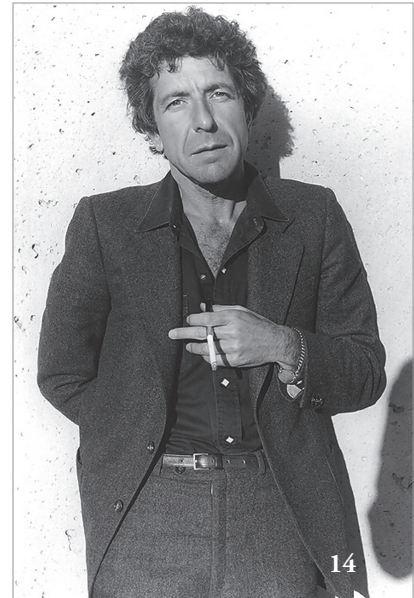
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Editor's Note



Good art—and bad

A lot is confusing in life, and one of the most confusing, it seems, is how to think about art. Since I recommend an art book in these pages (see Paper & Canvas) that some might find offensive and

that will stretch the thinking of many others, I thought I should say something in this column about art from a Christian perspective. But then I realized Dorothy Sayers says so many things about art so much better than I can that it seemed wise to let her words fill this page:

Art that is the true image of experience is true art, even though the experience is ugly or immoral (as the image of God is still the image of God, even in a wicked man); but you can't make untrue, or venal, or incompetent art into good art, by putting it in church or extracting morals from it, any more than you can get the Holy Spirit out of a tin of petrol. If you want a more conventional symbol as a reminder that God was crucified, two lines scratched in the wood are better than a tawdry and sentimental crucifix: they don't pretend to be art, and they don't tell lies. You can get a good crucifix from a good artist who, without being a Christian, has some experience in his soul which can express itself in the form of a crucified man; you can get a better crucifix from an equally good artist with the same experience, who is also a Christian; but you can't get a good crucifix either from the Christian who is not an artist, or from the artist who is merely doing for money something that

doesn't express his experience. The worst frame of mind in which to make crucifixes is the one in which one says, "I will now make a crucifix for the express purpose of correcting and improving other people"; the best is when one says: "I share with my fellow-men a passionate experience which is expressing itself in this crucifix for myself, and also for them, because they, though inarticulate, will know their own experience in the expression which I am giving it." The error into which moralists fall lies in saying to the artists, "It would do people good to have this or that feeling; make them have it." That is not art but propaganda, and whatever its immediate success, it falsified the art and degrades, in the end, both the artist and the people. And the error the people fall into is to say to the artist: "We want to have this nice feeling; make us have it." That is not art but trade ("fulfilling a public demand"), and it debauches both the artist (because he is then not knowing his own experience in its image, but merely making an idol) and the people (because what they then recognize in the idol is not the expression of their experience but only a projection of their own desires). What most people ask for when they think they are asking for art (apart from mere entertainment) is usually either propaganda or idols.

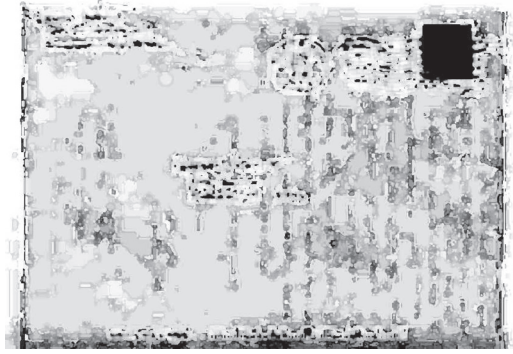
That doesn't address all we need to think about concerning art, of course, but it's a great start.

—Denis Haack

Source: Excerpted from a letter by Dorothy Sayers quoted in *Creed Without Chaos: Exploring Theology in the Writings of Dorothy L. Sayers* by Laura K. Simmons (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books; 2005) pp. 141-142.

Dialogue

re: On knowing God personally



Send e-mail to:
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Unfortunately, we are unable to respond personally to all correspondence received, but each one is greatly appreciated. We reserve the right to edit letters for length.

I have thanked God with all my heart for leading me to the article (and to Ransom Fellowship) "Knowing the Invisible, Inaudible, Untouchable God" by Richard Winter [http://ransomfellowship.org/R_Winter_Knowing.html].

For the last (at least) 10 years or so I have not had any lasting peace because I keep falling short of "truly" having this "intimate, personal, relationship" with God that I keep hearing about, reading about, and seeing others seeming to have it... at least they say they do and there is no reason to believe anyone would lie about anything like this.

It's not that I haven't admitted and asked (other Christians, God Himself) for help, but somehow, I've not been able to "receive" it. I have "begged" Him over and over to "make me" know Him, and/or to forgive me for unbelief, or to please help me accept it if walking by faith is enough; since no matter what, I could not seem to have or sustain an "intimate, personal relationship." There has been answered prayer and times of joy and feeling secure, but always sliding back into that "hell on earth" of doubt and confusion because I couldn't stay "connected"—you name it, I've been there done that. I've read so many books on this subject of knowing God, and some of them have helped, but invariably I can't "break through" to a total peace that I do know Him enough. I've hated myself for being "double minded"—for not appreciating God and the sacrifice of His precious Son, "enough;" for not having "pure" motives for anything given or done (by me) in His name. The only thing I've had going for me is that I keep on keeping on.

Then yesterday, one more time I was grieving over "Does (how can) God really love me?" or some version thereof... and was on the Internet, this article by Richard Winter "came up" and as I read it, it really was as if God

Himself was laying it out before me and saying "I know, I know, I know."

I just cannot put into words the deep hurt and distress this issue has caused me over and over again... and how can you really talk to those who seem not to have any problems with "it", (the intimate relationship that just grows and grows)? When you try, they may just see you as walking in unbelief; and you are already hating yourself because you think the same thing about yourself, too. But, no matter how hard you (I) try to, you (I) can't get God to respond; to take away the "unbelief" or sin, or whatever it is that keeps you from having and seeing Him "face to face" on this earth.

I have printed this article out and will read it many times, I know.

I want to say thank you; know how grateful to God I am for this article. It already has ministered life and truth.

May God bless you,

Barbara A. Booker
via email

Richard Winter responds:

Many thanks for your kind and encouraging letter. I am so glad my article helped you in your struggle to know what it means to have a relationship with God. I want to recommend two other books that I have found particularly helpful. Philip Yancey's *Reaching for the Invisible God* is a more eloquent and longer version of much that I said in my article, and Dallas Willard's *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God* explores more fully what it means to listen to God's voice. I pray that you will know the reality of God's deep love for you until the day when we meet him face to face.

The Discerning Life

Grandma's a real gem

If this were a joke," *USA Today* quipped, "the punch line would 'the family jewels.'" The joke is about LifeGem, which offers a new service to the bereaved. Before LifeGem was formed in 2001, there were two options when a loved one died—burial or cremation. Now LifeGem provides a third option: have some of their remains made into a diamond.

The process is simple. Ship eight ounces of your loved one's ashes to LifeGem, and six to nine months later you will receive a diamond. LifeGem assigns a unique 16-figure tracking number to each set of ashes, which is later etched onto the diamond to assure that the diamond you receive does contain your loved one's ashes. The diamonds are either yellow or blue (clear/colorless is not yet available), the blue gems taking longer to form. The exact shade is not guaranteed, but LifeGem notes that since "your loved one was a completely unique personality, the LifeGem diamond made from their carbon will be a completely unique shade." The cost ranges from \$2,699 for a 0.2 carat yellow diamond to \$19,999 for a 0.99 carat blue diamond.

"If you desire an everlasting connection to the one you have lost," LifeGem's web site says, "the LifeGem is right for you. Each LifeGem, as a celebration of

life, tells a unique story and represents a new beginning. With the closeness offered only by a LifeGem, you will have your loved one with you and in your life at all times. And of course, as the LifeGem is a one-of-a-kind diamond, it will be a treasured heirloom in your family for generations to come."

LifeGem offers its service for departed pets as well.

Though most people probably think deciding between burial and cremation to be merely a matter of taste or custom, that has not always been the case. Traditionally, burial has had strong Jewish and Christian roots while cremation was rooted in paganism.

"The science of cremation," Thomas Long says in *The Christian Century*, "is relatively simple: when elevated to a temperature of between 1,500 and 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit, a human body is reduced in a matter of hours to a sanitary mixture of ash and bone fragments. But the meaning of cremation, the symbolic power of yielding human remains to fire, has generated controversy at least since the beginning of the Christian era. Early Christian funeral practices, both because they were based on the Jewish precedent of earth burial (including Jesus' own

entombment) and because they were forged in combat with Greek notions of the liberation of the soul from the body, generally avoided cremation as an affront to the hope of the resurrection of the body. This anti-cremation stance hardened into doctrine and was enshrined in liturgy and canon law. Thus, by the fourth century, cremation was quite rare in the West, and in the eighth century Charlemagne declared it a capital offense."

This all gets rather complicated in the pluralistic, post-Christian West. For one thing, the growth of neo-paganism means that Christians need to take into consideration ancient beliefs that have been long ignored. For another, wanting Scripture to be our guide means we might need to do some Bible study on the subject.

Is cremation forbidden? Is burial commanded? Is a LifeGem a prudent choice for the discerning Christian? It's worth some serious discussion. ■

~Denis Haack



Sources: LifeGem online (<http://www.lifegem.com/>); *USA Today* online ; and "Why Cremation? As values change, so do funeral practices" by Thomas G. Long in *The Christian Century* (Volume 119 #3, 2002) pp. 30-33.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What was your first reaction to LifeGem? Why do you think you reacted that way?
2. What do you think might be attractive for people in LifeGem's services?
3. What was your response to the idea that cremation was rooted in pagan thought? Have you heard this before?
4. Study cremation and burial in the Scriptures. Numerous texts are worth considering, including: burial was the practice of the patriarchs, Abraham (Genesis 25:8-10), Isaac (Genesis 35:29), Jacob (Genesis 49:33), Sarah (Genesis 23:1-4); after Joseph's

Questions continued on page 5...

Luther's table talk

...QUESTIONS CONTINUED

body had been embalmed in Egypt, at his request centuries later the Israelites carried it through the wilderness to be buried in the Promised Land (Genesis 50:26); though God is revealed as a consuming fire, he buried Moses (Deuteronomy 34:6); Jeremiah twice voiced God's judgment against sin which included remaining unburied (Jeremiah 16:6, 22:19); a case of cremation recorded in 1 Samuel 31:11-13; and the prophetic curse against Moab because of having cremated the king of Edom (Amos 2:1). For more texts, use a concordance, Bible dictionary, or search online (e.g., <http://www.religioustolerance.org/crematio.htm>).

5. Is cremation forbidden in Scripture? Is burial commanded? What is permitted? To what extent should the rising interest in neo-paganism today effect our practice as Christians? How much freedom should we grant one another in this area?
6. For those opposed to a LifeGem, is there any real difference between a gem as a memorial and a granite memorial at a grave?
7. Some might argue that a LifeGem puts too much emphasis on the past, when we should concentrate on the hope of the resurrection to come. How would you respond?
8. What is your response to LifeGem in the case of a pet?

Of God's Word

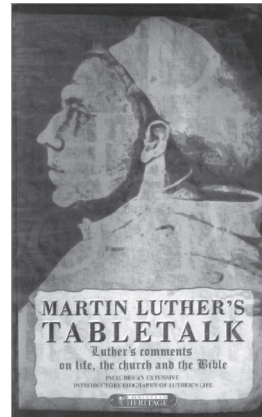
"We must make a great difference between God's Word and the word of man. A man's word is a little sound, that flies into the air, and soon vanishes; but the Word of God is greater than heaven and earth, yea, greater than death and hell, for it forms part of the power of God, and endures everlastingly; we should, therefore, diligently study God's Word, and know and assuredly believe that God himself speaks unto us." [p. 110]

Of God's Works

"Our loving Lord God wills that we eat, drink, and be merry, making use of his creatures, for therefore he created them. He wills not that we complain, as if he had not given sufficient, or that he could not maintain our poor carcases; he asks only that we acknowledge him for our God, and thank him for his gifts." [p. 133]

Of Jesus Christ

"It is, indeed, a great and a glorious comfort (which every good and godly Christian would not miss, or be without, for all the honor and wealth in the world) that we know and believe that Christ, our high-priest, sits on the right hand of God, praying and mediating for us without ceasing—the true pastor and bishop of our souls, which the devil cannot tear out of his hands. But then what a crafty and mighty spirit the devil must be, who can affright, and with his fiery darts draw the hearts of good and godly people from this excelling comfort, and make them entertain other cogitations of Christ; that he is not their high-priest, but complains of them to God; that he is not the bishop of their souls, but a stern and an angry judge." [p. 169]



Of Preachers & Preaching

"The defects in a preacher are soon spied; let a preacher be endowed with ten virtues, and but one fault, yet this one fault will eclipse and darken all his virtues and gifts, so evil is the world in these times. Dr Justus Jonas has all the good virtues and qualities a man may have; yet merely because he hums and spits, people cannot bear that good and honest man." [p. 274]

Of Preachers & Preaching

"When a man first comes into the pulpit, he is much perplexed to see so many heads before him. When I stand there I look upon none, but imagine they are all blocks that are before me." [p. 276]

Of Sickness & Of the Causes Thereof

"Experience has proved the toad to be endowed with valuable qualities. If you run a stick through three toads, and, after having dried them in the sun, apply them to any pestilent tumor, they draw out all the poison, and the malady will disappear." [pp. 409-410]

Of Spiritual & Church Livings

"Cannons and fire-arms are cruel and damnable machines, I believe them to have been the direct suggestion of the devil. Against a flying ball no valor avails; the soldier is dead, ere he sees the means of his destruction. If Adam had seen in a vision the horrible instruments his children were to invent, he would have died of grief." [p. 428]

Excerpted from: *Martin Luther's Tabletalk: Luther's comments on life, the church and the Bible* translated and edited by William Hazlitt (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications; 2003) 482 pp.

The Lost Art of Listening

Part five in the *What Does Winsome Look Like* series

There are two types of people—those who come into a room and say, “Well, here I am!” and those who come in and say, “Ah, there you are.”

[Frederick L. Collins]

To talk to someone who does not listen is enough to tense the devil.

[Pearl Bailey]

Many attempts to communicate are nullified by saying too much.

[Robert Greenleaf]

Over the past two weeks, moments of wonder have been tainted with moments of regret in my soul. Outside the window of my office I have watched a tree go through its autumn change. I think it's called an Accolade Elm, resistant to the disease that plagued the Dutch Elm tree it replaced. Each fall its leaves turn a glorious yellow, coloring the light that falls across my desk. And then, most wondrous of all, it drops its leaves all at once, as if one day they simply decide to let go together. They floated down, blanketing the boulevard and sidewalk, collecting in a layer on a car someone had parked beneath it. Now it is bare, silent, waiting for spring. As I watched this visual feast, I thought about listening, and wished I could listen as well as I can see. I regretted several recent conversations with people I don't know well, in which I talked far too much. Almost the entire time, in fact. I had things of significance to say, and since

each encounter was brief I filled the time with talking—about things that were significant to me, but possibly not to them. I don't know what I communicated to them, beyond my preference for talking over listening. That much was clear.

If Christians are to represent Christ winsomely before a watching world, we must learn to listen. “Listen is such a little, ordinary word. Yet we all know the pain of not being listened to, of not being heard,” Margaret Guenther notes. “In a way, not to be heard is not to exist.”

Why listening matters

We have been graced with friends who know how to listen. During hard times, when it felt like the darkness would finally overwhelm us, they have been content to listen. To listen in silence, in fact. And, as anyone knows who has suffered dark nights of the soul, being given advice at such times only increases the pain. So many Christians are captive to the myth of modernity which says that if we just do the right thing,

say the right thing, anything can be fixed. But not everything can be fixed in this fallen world. What is needed are not fixes, but grace, which is a far different, deeper, and more beautiful

thing. “The most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen” Rachel Ruth Remen says. “Just listen. Perhaps the most important thing we ever

give each other is our attention. A loving silence often has more power to heal and connect than the most well-intentioned words.”

In *The Lost Art of Listening*, Michael Nichols, professor of psychology (College of William & Mary) and family therapist

has some helpful insights on listening. “Listening is so basic that we take it for granted,” he notes early in the book. “Unfortunately,

most of us think of ourselves as better listeners than we really are.”

I've come to believe that this needs to be a regular part of confession for me. Each week, when my pastor calls upon us as God's people to confess our sins before God, I need to admit that my heart is deceitful, I imagine myself a good listener, but I am not. And my deceit runs deeper. Even when I am quiet and looking at someone who is talking to me doesn't mean my mind isn't wandering. Sometimes I'm not at all interested in what they have to say; instead of truly listening, I'm figuring out what to say next (if they ever stop talking). “When listening is genuine,” Nichols insists correctly, “the emphasis is on the speaker, not the listener” (p. 69).

Listening is essential to Christian faithfulness. Consider, for example, what the Gospels tell us about Jesus. He had extraordinary insight into people (Matthew 9:4; John 2:25), which isn't surprising since he was fully God as well as fully man. Yet he listened to people. He didn't just proclaim God's message, but asked questions, engaged in conversa-

tion, and listened to what people said to him. Faithfulness means following Christ, being transformed by grace to be like him. His listening was a gracious gift, demonstrating that he accepted every person, both leaders and the wealthy, as well as the unlovely, the powerless, the poor, and the marginalized, each and every one as created in God's image. Each person was worthy of his time, his attention, his love.

Winsome Christianity

"It isn't exuberance or any other emotion that conveys loving appreciation," Dr Nichols notes, "it's being noticed, understood, and taken seriously" (p. 29). I hear a lot about what non-Christians think about Christians in our pluralistic culture, but being attentive listeners never appears in the description. To the extent we are failing here, we are failing to be faithful.

I'm not recommending a technique, something we practice so that our agenda for the conversation can be achieved. That turns the relationship into a program, and the interaction into manipulation. "There's a big difference," Nichols says, "between showing interest and really taking interest" (p. 53). Really taking interest requires grace, for none of us are sufficient to the task on our own.

As our world grows ever more pluralistic, we increasingly find ourselves interacting with neighbors and

co-workers who do not necessarily accept our deepest convictions and values. And as the pluralism increases—and it certainly shows no sign of slackening—the importance of listening increases for the

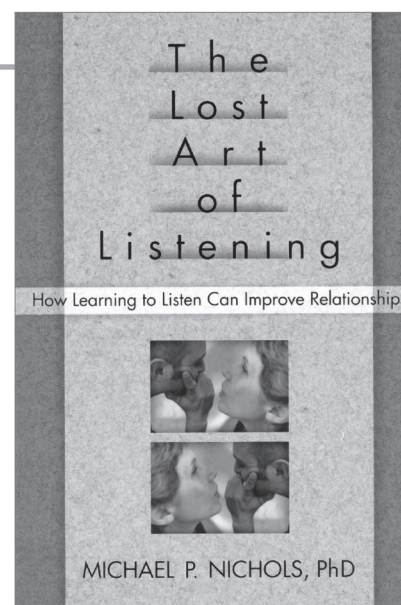
Christian. "Most people won't really listen or pay attention to your point of view," Nichols argues, "until they become convinced that you've heard and appreciated theirs" (p. 111).

Most people won't really listen or pay attention to your point of view until they become convinced that you've heard and appreciated theirs.

Francis Schaeffer used to talk a lot about pre-evangelism, the work that needs to be done before non-Christians are ready to hear and understand the gospel. What they believe will determine how they hear our message, and so to make our message comprehensible we need to listen before we talk. "If one gives an answer before he hears," Proverbs 18:13 reminds us, "it is his folly and shame." The heart of the gospel is that they are loved, which is something we are called to demonstrate, not just talk about.

One of the reasons I prefer talking to listening is that I feel better when my agenda runs the conversation. "Listening is hard because it involves a loss of control," Dr Nichols writes, "and if you're afraid of what you might hear, it feels unsafe to relinquish control" (p. 118). Such fear reveals my lack of trust in God. If God is truly at work, if the Holy Spirit actually lives in me, if the gospel truly is the power of God unto salvation, why do I have to worry about where the conversation goes? If a question is raised that I can't answer, I can say so, and see it as a chance for further discussion. If they bring up beliefs which seem incredible to me, I can ask questions and learn. And if they point out something that is true, I can embrace it gratefully, since I know that both of us live in the world God has made. Besides, as Dr Nichols points out, "You don't have to agree to acknowledge that the other person has a point" (p. 191).

One of the things we pray for regularly is that our home would be one of the safest places in all of Rochester. That it would be welcoming to people, that they would feel that welcome, and that they might sense that nothing they say will make us turn away. "The ability to listen," Nichols writes, "rests on how successfully we resist the impulse to



react emotionally to the position of the other" (p. 95). Dr Schaeffer used to say that one test of whether we really believed the biblical message that every person is fallen is that we would be shock-proof. We wouldn't be surprised by what people said, offended by their choices, nor would we act superior since we would know we are equally fallen. "If we want the truth" from people, Nichols says, "we must make it safe for them to tell it" (p. 193). For the Christian, that comes at a cost. Since the gospel we wish to commend involves repentance, never an easy task even in the best of situations, we must be willing to first demonstrate a lifestyle of repentance. Such authenticity should not be so rare in the Christian community.

To be faithful I must also learn to listen to myself. Or be in accountable relationships with sisters and brothers who love me enough to tell me the truth. The more I believe something the more intense I tend to become when it's challenged, the more someone resists what I think is true, the more pressured I become. I know persuasion doesn't work that way, but between the passion of the moment and my love for debate, things can easily ratchet up a notch or two. Or more. "The pressured speaker may not

Reading the World cont.

know how he comes across,” Nichols says, “but his urgent, anxious manner of speaking, emphatic hand gestures, or conclusion of every other statement with ‘Right?’ (apparently demanding agreement) makes us feel backed into a corner” (p. 98). I need help

hearing myself, because how I seem to myself is not always how I come across to a listener. “Some people have no idea how pressured and provoking their tone of voice is,” Nichols comments, “but they come at you like a bad dentist” (p. 99). Note to myself: bad dentists are not win-some. “If you don’t listen to yourself,” Nichols says, “it’s unlikely that anyone

else will” (p. 145).

It is relatively common to hear that some people find some of the stories in the Scriptures difficult to believe. How

Some people have no idea how pressured and provoking their tone of voice is, but they come at you like a bad dentist.

could Jonah be swallowed by a fish and emerge three days later alive? How could the sun stand still

at Joshua’s request? Usually it involves some miracle, which never strikes me as all that difficult. If the God revealed in Scripture actually exists, miracles would hardly be much of a hurdle for him. The stories that strain my credibility are of a different sort. One that comes to mind is the time Abraham was visited by three men (Genesis 18). He invited

them to eat with him, which they did, and then as they began to continue on to the city of Sodom, they paused to talk with Abraham. Six times Abraham interceded for the town, and six times the Lord listened and responded. Six times Abraham said virtually the same thing, and six times the Lord patiently allowed the conversation to continue. And then, when the conversation ended, the Lord continued on his way (vs. 33). Imagine: a God who listens.

If that is true, God’s people should be listeners, too. ■

~Denis Haack

Source: *The Lost Art of Listening: How Learning to Listen Can Improve Relationships* by Michael P. Nichols (New York, NY: The Guilford Press; 1995) 251 pp.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What was your initial or immediate reaction to this piece? Why do you think you reacted this way?
2. Who is the best listener you know? What makes them so?
3. What are some common hurdles to listening? Many would argue that Christians today are, by and large, not known for their ability or willingness to listen. Why did this reputation develop? How fair is it?
4. Describe a situation in which someone truly listened to you. What were they like? How did you know they were truly listening? How did it make you feel?
5. Go through this article, read aloud each quote from Dr Nichols’ book, and discuss it.
6. Is there anything in this article with which you disagree? Why?
7. What texts in the Scriptures reveal God as listening? Record Jesus as listening? What can we learn from them?
8. How good a listener are you? How do you know? What plans should you make?

Brave new world

I not only think that we will tamper with Mother Nature, I think Mother wants us to.

[Willard Gaylin, Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons]

Most parents want what is best for their children. But sometimes choosing what is best for them isn't easy.

In Andrew Niccol's 1998 film *Gattaca*, Vincent is born with a heart defect that is predicted will substantially shorten his life. Unfortunately, this isn't an extraordinary occurrence in the real world. According to the Center for Disease Control heart defects are a factor in about 5,800 deaths per year in the United States, so it's not an exaggeration to say that children like Vincent are born everyday.

But in *Gattaca* technology gives tragedy an odd twist and in so doing sets the stage for a fascinating film. In Niccol's fictional world biotechnology offered Vincent's parents the power to correct his biological flaws before he was conceived. Instead, they made him the old fashioned way, passing up both the chance to fix his heart and to enhance socially desirable traits such as height, intelligence, and appearance. As a result, Vincent not only faces a shorter life, he is doomed to a new social underclass. As a genetic have-not—a "de-gene-erate" or "invalid"—he is expected to spend his life cleaning windows and emptying garbage bins.

Put yourself in his parents' shoes. Could you avoid feeling that his problems are the product of your failings? If only you had acted differently, *more responsibly*, your child's life would have been better.

In *Gattaca*, Vincent's parents learn this lesson well. They take care to give Vincent's brother all the advantages technology can provide.

Niccol once remarked that he likes to set

his films "about five minutes in the future." According to Gregory Stock, your five minutes are almost up.

Stock is the director of the Program on Medicine, Technology, and Society at the UCLA School of Medicine.

He is also the author of *Redesigning Humans: Our Inevitable Genetic Future*, which is about the science behind Andrew Niccol's fiction. In it Stock promotes the benefits of "germinal choice technology" (GCT). If he is right, in the near future GCT will confront us with a *Gattaca*-like array of choices and dilemmas.

In one of the early scenes in *Gattaca* Vincent's mother and father meet with a counselor to discuss their options for Anton, his brother-to-be. After choosing Anton's sex, eye and hair color, and correcting genetic flaws that might lead to premature baldness, myopia, alcoholism and addictive susceptibility, and propensity for violence and obesity, they become uneasy. Mom says, "We didn't want—diseases, yes..." And Dad continues, "We were wondering if we should leave some things to chance." The geneticist's reply reminds them that chance—unlike choice—is unreliable: "You could conceive naturally a thousand times and never get such a result."

Stock's version of GCT would function a bit differently. Step one would involve genetic screening of human embryos. Those with detectable major genetic

defects would simply never be implanted in their mothers. Step two comes closer to *Gattaca*. In germline manipulation, the genes of human sperm and eggs cells would be cleaned

up before conception. The potential advantages of such technology are obvious; for example, no more insulin injections for diabetics, since we can cure their problem before birth. Of course this would mean taking conception out of the bedroom and into the lab via *in vitro* fertilization. But what parents would dare take the risk of conceiving on their own when their own children might lose their bet?

James Watson, co-winner of the Nobel Prize for his work on DNA, captures the bottom line here quite well: "No one really has the guts to say it, but if *we could make better human beings* [emphasis added] by knowing how to add genes, why shouldn't we?"

It's a question Christians should begin thinking about now, before the geneticists present us with us options we haven't considered and feel we can't turn down. Where do we begin?

When Lewis Carroll's Alice asked the Cheshire Cat, "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" he answered, "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to." "I don't much care where—" said Alice. "Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.

Carroll's warning is noteworthy. Before we jump into the gene pool, we should consider what we are trying to achieve through our medical efforts, and why. It's especially important now, because according to Leon Kass our view of medicine is undergoing a paradigm shift.

Kass is the Addie Clark Harding Professor in the Committee on Social Thought and the College, at the University of Chicago, and Hertog Fellow in Social Thought at the American Enterprise Institute. He was also chairman of the President's Council on Bioethics from 2001 to 2005. The council's 2003



No one really has the guts to say it, but if we could make better human beings by knowing how to add genes, why shouldn't we?

Reading the World cont.

report, *Beyond Therapy* is worth reading.

Traditionally the goal of medicine from a Christian perspective has been redemptive. Disease isn't simply a biological problem; it is a moral one, the result of sin. So, for the same reason we preach the gospel, we also fight the Asian Bird Flu epidemic, recognizing in it yet another facet of the curse sin has brought on the world. In secular circles this is described as "therapeutic"—i.e., "relating to the treatment of disease"—rather than "redemptive," but the concept is similar. However you say it, under the old paradigm the goal of medicine was to fix what is broken.

Three factors are changing this: technology, social pressures, and the loss of a Christian theological framework. Technology long ago made us capable of more than merely repairing what is broken. We've had the power to dispose of the deformed (e.g., the amnio-centesis test enables us to detect Downs Syndrome in an unborn child and to dispose of him via abortion before birth) and the unwanted (e.g., in India the same test is used to detect and dispose of fetuses whose only fault is that they are girls) since the 1970s. And we've used it.

Our society's heroes embody our values. We idolize the attractive, the athletic, and the intelligent, and reward them with riches, and positions of power and responsibility. So each year parents spend billions of dollars on cosmetic surgery, coaches, and tutors for their children in hopes of enhancing these qualities in them. In market terms this constitutes a demand looking for what biotechnology promises to supply. In medicine this creates the demand for a new paradigm. We want medicine to do more than merely

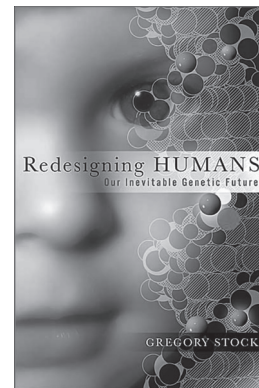
repair what's broken. We want it to make us better.

The line between therapy and enhancement has also been blurred by the loss of a Christian theological framework. The therapy/enhancement distinction, long the centerpiece of the old paradigm, has fallen into disfavor simply because we aren't satisfied with it anymore. In chapter one of *Beyond Therapy*, entitled "Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Happiness," we read:

Before we jump into the gene pool, we should consider what we are trying to achieve through our medical efforts, and why.

The distinction rests on the assumption that there is a natural human "whole" whose healthy functioning is the goal of therapeutic medicine... Yet this observation points to the deepest reason why the distinction between healing and enhancing is, finally, of insufficient ethical, and even less practical, value. For the human being whose wholeness or healing is sought or accomplished by biomedical therapy is finite and frail, medicine or no medicine. The healthy body declines and its parts wear out. The sound mind slows down and has trouble remembering things. The soul has aspirations beyond what even a healthy body can realize, and it becomes weary from frustration. Even at its fittest, the fatigable and limited human body rarely carries out flawlessly even the ordinary desires of the soul. For this reason (among others) the desires of many human beings—for more, for better, for the

unlimited, or even for the merely different—will not be satisfied with the average, nor will they take their bearings from the distinction between normal and abnormal, or even between the healthy and the better-than-healthy.



There's more that should be responded to in this statement than I can address here, but for the moment I'll say this: The final argument in the minds of many against the old medical paradigm is that it is both artificial and unsatisfying. Artificial in that we have no idea of what "wholeness" looks like. Unsatisfying,

because even physical near-perfection isn't enough. It's here, I think, that we feel the loss of a biblical framework most keenly.

In Genesis 1 we're told the story of how God created Adam and Eve in the beginning, in his image. Pronouncing them good meant more than that they were morally acceptable—he meant that they were exactly as human beings should be.

In Genesis 3 sin enters the picture and with it disease, death, and the need for modern medicine. In the debate on bioethics God rarely appears, and when he does it's often only to take the blame for the mess. (Niccol begins *Gattaca* with a quote from Ecclesiastes 7:3: "Consider Gods' handiwork: who can straighten what he hath made crooked?") But the Bible teaches that our problems, and those of our world, are not the result of less-than-intelligent design on God's part. They are the consequences of an historical act: the Fall.

The work of Christ is to redeem and restore that which is lost and broken by

sin. For us this means becoming like Christ and in so doing, more like Adam and Eve were before the Fall. Wholeness—theologically and biologically—is personified in Jesus.

In light of this Christians have long understood that part of the purpose of science is to provide a kind of medical/theological therapy for the results of the Fall, as in Francis Bacon's oft-quoted line: "Man by the Fall fell at the same time from his innocence and from his dominion over creation. Both of these losses, however, can even in this life be in some parts repaired: the former by religion and faith, the latter by the arts and sciences." In a fallen world substituting ignorance and fatalism for science is practically and biblically unthinkable. The old complaint about scientists "playing God" when they exercise their power simply has no theological warrant, for it is God himself who calls us to wield it.

However, Christians have long realized

that there are things science should not and cannot do. The case against biotechnology like Stock's GCT is firmly rooted in this understanding. We should not engage in science that destroys rather than redeems human beings. I was born in Montgomery, Alabama in 1954, in the 22nd year of the Tuskegee Experiment in which a group of poor black men were deliberately allowed to die of syphilis, in the hope of advancing scientific knowledge on the disease. Stock's suggestion that we improve people by disposing of genetically inferior fetuses is poor science for the same reason the Tuskegee Experiment was poor science: it heals nothing, rights no wrongs, and destroys the very people it should serve.

The old complaint about scientists "playing God" when they exercise their power simply has no theological warrant, for it is God himself who calls us to wield it.

At the same time, we must realize that biotechnology cannot make good on the promises some make in its name. James Watson's question—"if we could make better humans, why shouldn't we?"—implies something that the Scriptures contradict: that modern science can improve on the creator's original design and in so doing make us happier, perhaps even "satisfy the desires of

the soul." This isn't merely wrong, it's impossible.

So which way ought we to go from here? Back to the old therapeutic model, and away from biotechnology's vain offers to redefine science, and to redefine us.

Any time one raises questions about not doing what science gives us the power to do,

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What was your initial response to the ideas in this piece? Why do you think you responded this way?
2. Did you find the argument in the piece convincing? Compelling? Is there more information you need before coming to a conclusion? Where, if anywhere, might you disagree? Why?
3. Some Christians might argue that this technology is probably not going to be widely used, since its high cost will probably limit it to the most wealthy members of society. To begin to agitate against it will merely require us to take one more "anti-science" stance in society. Since it is unlikely we can win the political battle anyway, it would be better to concentrate on issues we might have a chance of winning. How would you respond?
4. How might you respond winsomely and creatively when someone at the cafeteria at work quotes Nobel Prize winner James Watson positively: "No one really has the guts to say it, but if we could make better human beings by knowing how to add genes, why shouldn't we?"
5. Is the paradigm shift in modern medicine from a "therapeutic/redemptive" model to an "enhancement" model all that significant (especially for the majority of us whose vocations are not in that field)? Why or why not? Could it not be argued that this shift is merely the natural result of the advance of medical knowledge?
6. "The old complaint about scientists 'playing God' when they exercise their power simply has no theological warrant," Grooms argues, "for it is God himself who calls us to wield it." Do you agree? Why or why not?

Questions continued on page 12...

Reading the World cont.

some will wonder “Are you opposed to science?” I’ve tried to anticipate and answer this question with a few strongly worded pro-science comments. Nevertheless I can see why some might still wonder after reading them, “Are you merely opposed to all biotechnology?” I am not. So I originally thought to include a section in this article on what qualifies as therapy (and is therefore OK) and what ventures into enhancement and should be off limits. I didn’t do so for lots of reasons, most important of which is the fact that I haven’t clearly figured that out myself. Is baldness a result of the Fall? (A purely hypothetical question, mind you.) Would I pre-engineer my son to give him a full head of hair? The answer is to me unclear and trivial. I have two concerns about biotechnology: 1) the destruction of human embryos in the research and implementation of this technology, and 2) the use of biotechnol-

ogy for enhancement rather than therapy. Removing #1 (protecting embryos) doesn’t remove #2, and in my mind #2 is at least as great a concern as #1. In this article I’ve spent more time on #2 because it’s a harder problem to recognize and because the promise it offers will be harder for believers to turn down. To put it simply, we already know (most of us) that killing babies is wrong, but we may have a hard time turning down the chance to make my baby a tall, blond Olympic hero.

If Niccol and Stock’s predictions are at all accurate, not taking this chance will be difficult. The consequences of saying no to this kind of biotechnology could range from the merely awkward—e.g., refraining from choosing the sex of our children (a capability we already have)—to the quite costly: making the same choices Vincent’s parents made for their son in *Gattaca*. While our standing before God

isn’t dependent upon our appearance, our athletic abilities, or our intelligence, our standing in society might be. Foreswearing the control biotechnology may one day offer us over these things may also one day be socially and economically expensive to us and our children. In *Gattaca* Vincent’s parents said no in the name of romance, and he paid the price.

Are we ready to say no in the name of Christ? ■

~Greg Grooms

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Sources: *Redesigning Humans: Our Inevitable Genetic Future* by Gregory Stock (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company; 2002) 201 pp. + appendices + notes.

The President’s Council on Bioethics 2003 Report, *Beyond Therapy* is available online (<http://www.bioethics.gov/reports/beyondtherapy/>).

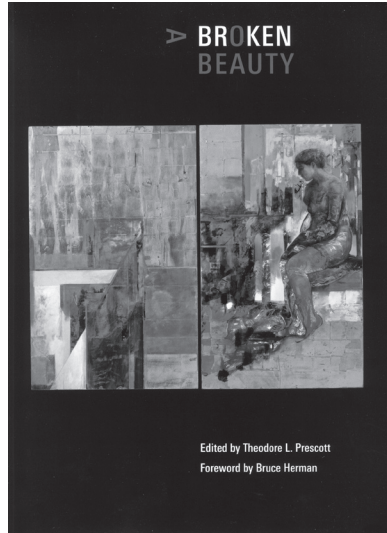
...QUESTIONS CONT.

7. Discuss what Grooms says here: “I originally thought to include a section in this article on what qualifies as therapy (and is therefore OK) and what ventures into enhancement and should be off limits. I didn’t do so for lots of reasons, most important of which is the fact that I haven’t clearly figured that out myself. Is baldness a result of the Fall? (A purely hypothetical question, mind you.) Would I pre-engineer my son to give him a full head of hair? The answer is to me unclear and trivial.” Would it be worth the church getting some of its best minds to work on such issues?
8. Assuming it becomes readily available, do you agree with Groom’s conclusion that Christians should resist this technology, even at cost to themselves and their children? How much freedom can we grant one another here? Will Christians who resist the technology freely fellowship in the same church with Christians who embrace it for their children?
9. If I buy Grooms’ argument that genetically enhancing my children to improve their appearance, athletic abilities, and intelligence is inappropriate for believers, would it follow that I should also keep them away from cosmetic surgery, coaches, and teachers? Are all attempts to improve my looks, speed and smarts wrong? If not, what makes genetically enhancing these qualities different from merely working to improve them?
10. Do you think this is something we really need to worry about? Grooms suggests that the powers biotech offers may confront us with difficult choices. However, in his testimony before Congress, Harvard’s Steven Pinker opined that this probably won’t be the case: “Would you opt for a traumatic and expensive procedure that might give you a very slightly happier and more talented child, might give you a less happy, less talented child, might give you a deformed child, and probably would do nothing?”

The figure in art, redeemed

In the West, as the Christian world view has receded, art has lost its moorings. This can be demonstrated in a number of ways, but perhaps one of the clearest involves the human figure. It's difficult to exaggerate what is lost for art when the biblical understanding of creation is set aside. Think about it: what kind of art will be produced if we cease to believe either that people are created in God's image or that the physical body is good?

"Now we must say, straight away, and without possibility of misunderstanding," Dorothy Sayers stated in a talk she gave on the



BBC, "that any doctrine which maintains that matter is evil in itself is entirely heretical and entirely un-Christian. The Church does *not* say that matter is evil, nor that the body is evil. For her very life, she dare not. For her whole life is bound up in the doctrine that God Himself took human nature upon Him and went about this material

Fifteen artists of faith who are committed to the biblical notion that depicting the human figure in art is to depict a broken beauty: made in God's image, but fallen and in need of redemption.

world as a living man, with a human body and a human brain, and that he was perfect and sinless in the body as out of the body, in time as in eternity, in earth as in heaven. That is her creed; that is her dogma; that is the opinion to which she stands committed. If she were for one moment to admit that matter and body were in themselves evil things, she would blast away the very foundations of her existence and utterly destroy herself. For her, matter is so good that God could make Himself a part of it, and take no hurt to His perfection, nor to His holiness."

Sadly, it is not just the post-Christian world that has set aside the richness of the biblical view of the body; Christians have tended to do the same. While the secular world has tended to bring either a technical sterility or fragmented ugliness to its rendering of the human figure, the Christian world has tended in the opposite direction, towards sentimental and prudish renderings. Both are equally bankrupt.

For those willing to reflect on this issue in a fresh, thoughtful way, there is a book worth reading: *A Broken Beauty*. It is a luscious book, as good art books should be: a large format (12.6 x 9.3 inches) volume with full color illustrations throughout. It helps us think rightly, with

five accessible, clearly written essays by thinkers who believe that the Christian view of the human figure needs to be recovered. It helps us appreciate and understand art, because the art-works in *A Broken Beauty* are explained so that non-artists can enter the creative conversation begun by the artists. And perhaps best of all, it introduces us to works by fifteen artists of faith who are committed to the biblical notion that depicting the human figure in art is to depict a broken beauty: made in God's image, but fallen and in need of redemption. The works are presently on tour in a show with the same title as the book: *A Broken Beauty*. How I would love to see this show.

The five essays in this book are like guided tours, led by people of faith who want non-artists to see and understand. Messiah College professor Theodore Prescott helps us see what has happened to the depiction of the human figure in modern art. Art historian Timothy Verdon lets us see the Roman Catholic tradition. Lisa DeBoer, art historian at Westmont College introduces us to how Protestant theology worked its way into art. And Curator Gordon Fuglie gives us a tour first of figurative painting over the past several decades and then a work by work exposition of the pieces in *A Broken Beauty*.

"*A Broken Beauty* strives to show the mystery and mess of a *story* that is far from over," says Gordon College professor Bruce Herman, "one that is ever more complex and problematic, yet moving toward a sense of resolution. Like the Bible, itself a tragicomic story that begins with a cosmic problem and ends in a wedding feast, *A Broken Beauty* suggests possible ways out of the angst-ridden *miserific* vision toward a recovery of the *beatific* vision of hope—something that is badly needed in our troubled times."

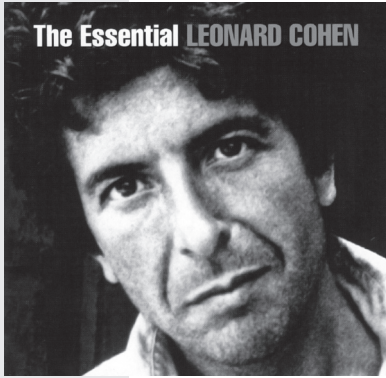
This is a good book, worth reading with care and going back to look again and again at the art work in its pages. We recommend *A Broken Beauty* to you.

Sources: Sayers quote excerpted from a BBC radio address by Dorothy Sayers quoted in *Creed Without Chaos: Exploring Theology in the Writings of Dorothy L. Sayers* by Laura K. Simmons (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books; 2005) p. 80.

Recommended: *A Broken Beauty* edited by Theodore L. Prescott (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; 2005) 124 pp. + notes + index.

Poet of Love, yearning

The Essential LEONARD COHEN



**The
exquisitely
melancholy
love songs
of Leonard
Cohen.**

The first song I heard by Leonard Cohen was “Suzanne,” a song that brilliantly captured the spirit of the Sixties.

*Suzanne takes you down to her place near the river
You can hear the boats go by
You can spend the night beside her
And you know that she's half crazy
But that's why you want to be there
And she feeds you tea and oranges
That come all the way from China...
And you know that she will trust you
For you've touched her perfect body with your mind.*

The lyrics hint at but don't quite tell a story, drawing us inexorably into a world of sensuality and beauty. The second verse, where

*Jesus was a sailor
when he walked upon the water...
And you think maybe you'll trust him
For he's touched your perfect body with his mind*

parallels the images drawn of Suzanne. The world is not just sensual and beautiful, Cohen seems to insist, but spiritual in a way that is beyond our imagining. It is also a world of deep sadness, of unfulfilled yearning, which the haunting melody reinforces. Cohen wrote the lines in celebration of a friendship with a young dancer named Suzanne Verdal, but the song transcends the reality of that relationship. “Suzanne” captured both the essence of an era, and a darkly attractive world view where intimacy, mysticism, and melancholy are forever fused.

When “Suzanne” hit the charts, however, it wasn't sung by Cohen but by Judy Collins. Collins and Cohen met through a mutual friend; that first evening in Collin's living room Cohen sang several of his newly written songs. “He sang ‘Suzanne’ and ‘Dress Rehearsal Rag,’” Collins recalls, “sitting on the couch, holding the guitar on his knee. I was moved by his singing voice, and by the songs, and by his whole presence. There was something very ethereal and at the same time earthy about his voice.” Collins not only used his songs on her next album,

she coaxed him to sing “Suzanne” at one of her concerts. Cohen's career as a songwriter and singer was launched.

Leonard Cohen hadn't set out to be a musician, but “aspired to be a minor poet,” to use his words. His first collection of poetry, *Let Us Compare Mythologies*, was published in 1956 when he was still an undergraduate. Poetry has remained a passion, and Cohen's thoughtful and finely crafted lyrics is one reason why his music is so powerful.

The other reason Cohen's music is so powerful is the profound sense of yearning which infuses it—and which is echoed across the entire fabric of his life. As one critic notes, Cohen has from the beginning kept “one eye firmly on the times and one eye on the timeless.”

*I greet you from the other side
Of sorrow and despair
With a love so vast and shattered
It will reach you everywhere
And I sing this for the captain
Whose ship has not been built
For the mother in confusion
Her cradle still unfilled
For the heart with no companion
For the soul without a king
For the prima ballerina
Who cannot dance to anything
Through the days of shame that are coming
Through the nights of wild distress
Tho' your promise count for nothing
You must keep it nonetheless*

[From “Heart with No Companion”]

Long interested in Buddhism, in 1994 Leonard Cohen moved to a cabin at the Zen Center on Mt Baldy in California. There he lived under the spiritual guidance of Joshu Sasaki Roshi, twenty-first in a long line of Japanese Zen masters, in a community dedicated to the study and practice of Rinzai Zen Buddhism. It is an austere setting, the daily schedule is rigorous (students must rise between 3 and 4 AM to begin their day), and for extended periods Cohen has cared for the aging Roshi. “This sort of practice

and sadness

will never become trendy,” Cohen says. “It’s too hard. It’s not exactly religion. Men need religion, because man needs something to hang on to. So if you consider the canon of the sutras or the image of God as a separate, objective thing, so much the better if it works for you. In any event, I feel that the great religions have reached their capacity of believers and that a great many people are searching for alternate forms of worship. Here, there’s no worship.” (If that statement seems somehow incomplete, or paradoxical, or even self-contradictory, realize it is very Zen.) In 1996, in an ancient Buddhist ritual, Leonard Cohen was ordained a Zen monk, taking the name, Jikan. In 1999, Cohen left Mt Baldy for Los Angeles, and in 2004 released his 13th album, *Dear Heather*. Now 71 years old, still writing songs, there is talk of Cohen planning another world tour.

Buddhism is attractive in our post-Christian society, and for many, more attractive than what they understand as historic Christianity. For a generation which is keenly aware of the sad brokenness of the world, it offers enlightenment without rules. Cohen does not write “Buddhist songs,” but if you have ears to hear, a Zen consciousness permeates his music. A Buddhist reviewer said that Cohen “is still focused on the sad, the poignant, and the deeply confusing aspects of life... We Buddhists see this life as short, and subject to many discomforts, but we also see that developing a clear view of reality points us directly to love.” Which is why Cohen has written some of the most gorgeous love songs ever recorded.

*I built my house beside the wood
So I could hear you singing
And it was sweet and it was good
And love was all beginning
Fare thee well my nightingale
'Twas long ago I found you
Now all your songs of beauty fail
The forest closes 'round you
The sun goes down behind a veil
'Tis now that you would call me
So rest in peace my nightingale
Beneath your branch of holly
Fare thee well my nightingale*

*I lived but to be near you
Tho' you are singing somewhere still
I can no longer hear you*
[From “Nightingale”]

Listen to Cohen’s exquisitely beautiful music and you will hear all that: a deep yearning for a glimpse of light, a profound sadness at the fragmentation of life in this fallen world, and always the hope of love.

*The birds they sang
at the break of day
Start again / I heard them say
Don't dwell on what
has passed away
or what is yet to be.
Ah the wars they will
be fought again
The holy dove
She will be caught again
bought and sold
and bought again
the dove is never free.
Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.*

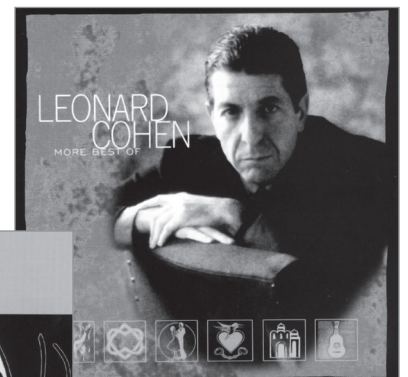
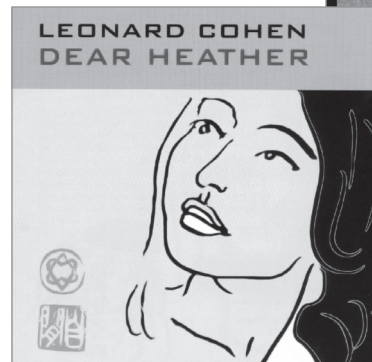
[From “Anthem”]

Recommended albums:

Leonard Cohen: More Best Of (Columbia; 1997)
The Essential Leonard Cohen (Columbia; 2002)
Leonard Cohen: Dear Heather (Columbia; 2004)



by
**Denis
Haack**

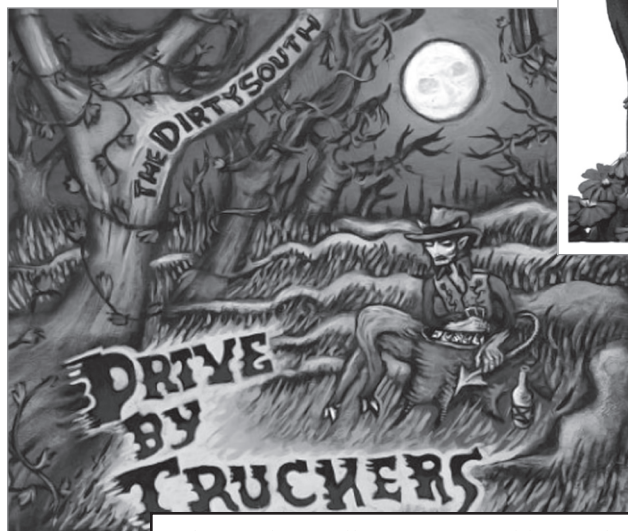


On the Web

"It's not who votes that counts.
It's who counts the votes."



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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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