

E X P A N D E D E D I T I O N

critique

A RANSOM FELLOWSHIP PUBLICATION

ISSUES 4 & 5 2007

Rap, Reggae and Ragas

Global music expressions
for praise, preaching, prayer.

In Travis Scott's CD Changer

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Beauty and Redemption

...in the film "The Lives of Others."

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Will we pay the cost?

Cocoa Krispies Christianity

Putting God in a bowl.

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Seeing Beyond the Surface of Things

As a boy I loved superhero comic books. I loved the flamboyant graphics, the constantly shifting perspective, the stylized violence, the stories of adventure. I even loved the ads.

The ads look crude by today's standards. Usually there would be one for Charles Atlas, showing some poor kid being harassed by bullies. The ad promised to change any boy from skinny to muscled, which interested me for obvious reasons. You could order a "Genuine Two-way Dick Tracy Wrist Radio" which, in the days before

cell phones, seemed a really great deal at "only \$3.98 (plus s & h)."

"Amazing Live Sea Monkeys" always made me wonder exactly what would hatch from the eggs you dropped in a bowl of water. (The small print said the "creatures shown in the ad are not intended to depict Artemia"—which I now know are brine shrimp.) And then there was the ad for "X-Ray Glasses." Some guy would be depicted looking at the bones in his hand or the underwear of a girl. Seeing the bones of my hand didn't interest me all that much.

I had a secret hiding place, a shelter under the thick drooping branches of a pine tree. Life felt small, with so much (like comic books) identified as unimportant and dangerous. As often as I could I would push under the

boughs and sit, lost in a world of my own imagination. I wondered what I would see if I wore the X-Ray Glasses in my hideout. Life would look different.

I remember that now and see the ads for the cheap scams they were. But I also know that my desire wasn't wrong. Not my desire for the X-Ray Glasses, but the desire that my world be significant, full of life-affirming wonder. That is how God created the world. Only later I understood that if you look at the world from within the perspective of the biblical story, you will see more richly layered wonder than you can possibly imagine.

I was reminded of that when I came upon an entry in my journal that I had long forgotten; a quote from *Who is Man*, a book by Rabbi Abraham Heschel (1907-1972):

Praise is meaningful only as an act of joining in the endless song. We praise with the pebbles on the road which are like petrified amazement, with all the flowers and trees which look as if hypnotized in silent devotion.

Pebbles like petrified amazement; flowers and trees hypnotized in silent devotion; praise as joining in the endless song. This is seeing beyond the surface of things into the rich wonder of God's glory which is in the deeper meaning of creation and life. It's the sort of seeing I still desire.



critique

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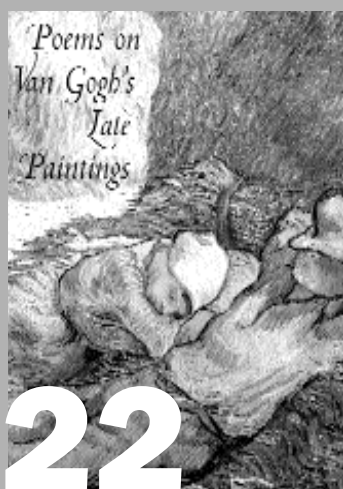


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To the editor:

Last night you mentioned the possibility of a church holding “the best baby shower ever” for a lesbian couple. [Editor’s note: *In my lecture I mentioned an opportunity which had appeared in Critique #8-2003 as an exercise in Christian discernment. It involved a church providing help to a pregnant couple who lived near the church who happened to be lesbians. Estranged from their families, they had no one to give them a baby shower, to provide meals, or to be with them during the birth of their child. The church decided to offer them these practical expressions of care and love.*] How can we as a church do this sort of thing--open our arms in situations like this so that we do not appear to be embracing their sin? How do we keep the integrity of God’s character in this? How do we be faithful without driving current members away who might be offended by the church’s choice? -- S. Drews

Denis Haack responds:

Thank you for these thoughtful questions; I appreciate the chance to respond to them.

Whenever we offer help to anyone we are offering help to sinners. There is no other type of person around in a fallen world. If we are to think about this issue faithfully as Christians, we must first be sure that we think in biblical categories. The Bible does not

divide people into us and sinners. There’s only one category of person: all have sinned. The Bible also tells us that every person is made in God’s likeness. So, whenever we offer help to anyone we are responding to their need as sinful image bearers of God.

If some person’s sin(s) is something we are too weak to be around, we should arrange for someone who is more mature spiritually to offer the help they need. Or we can arrange to be in a meaningfully accountable relationship with spiritually mature mentors so we’re not on our own as we offer the help that’s needed.

The Bible never teaches that helping sinners involves embracing their sin. Christ helped all sorts of sinners in all sorts of practical ways without ever endorsing or embracing their sin. If helping a fallen person means that we are endorsing or embracing their sin then we could help no one.

Since this is not understood by many Christians, as we seek to be faithful some of God’s people might object or be offended by our choices and actions. When Jesus ate with people many believers found undesirable, the Pharisees criticized him for it. The Pharisees are usually looked down on by Christians today but we should remember that they took Scripture seriously, wanted to obey God’s law, and aimed for personal holiness. But

Jesus was unmoved by their criticism, told them to study their Bibles more carefully, and said he had come into the world “not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matthew 9:13; see also Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:29-32). For many Bible believers of his day, Jesus’ reputation was less than stellar. “Look at him,” Jesus quotes them saying, “A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!” (Luke 7:34). What’s worth noticing is that not only did Jesus not change his behavior, he expressed sharp, strong disapproval of the critical believers, not the unbelievers with whom he was associating. I take this to mean that attempting to faithfully follow Jesus might offend some Christians who like the Pharisees think holiness means staying away from sinners. If so, then so be it. That would certainly be better than failing to be like Christ. We should not, of course, be callous about such things. We are called to love, not dismiss, easily offended brothers and sisters. Their desire for moral purity is admirable even though their understanding of holiness is far more pagan and Gnostic than it is biblical. The church needs to be faithful to teach the people of God what it means to truly follow Christ. Just as he was never aloof from fallen people in a broken, messy world, so we too must live in a way that incarnates grace.

When Jesus was talking with Nicodemus, who happened to be a Pharisee who later came to faith, he said something quite remarkable. The Father had not sent him into the world, Jesus said, to condemn people (John 3:17). Surely if anyone had the right to condemn the world it was Christ. But he didn't. "If anyone hears my words and does not keep them," Christ said another time, "I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world" (John 12:47). And Christ instructs his followers not to judge (Matthew 7:1). And in case we don't get the point, Paul spells it out in explicit detail:

I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people, not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. (1 Cor 5:9-13)

This is not a text that is difficult to understand, although one would not guess that by the attitude and choices of many Christians. Many live totally opposite to what the apostle instructs us here: they judge outsiders and refuse to associate with sinners. Should we hesitate to obey this clear instruction of Scripture because some biblically disobedient Christians might criticize us for it?

Sadly, some believers seem closed to this biblical understanding of holy faithfulness. In a way that is similar to the error of the Pharisees in Jesus's day, they prefer their own tradition to the truth of God's word. We must try our best to explain and teach, but my experience tells me that some in the end find following Christ to be too costly, too risky, too opposed to their pursuit of societal standards of reputation. Engaging the world with the gospel pushes them out of their comfort zone, and that is something they won't allow. We should never try to push them away, but if they choose a parting of the way, we must remain faithful to Christ. There is a story I have never been able to authenticate, but it's worth telling anyway. When John Wesley returned home from preaching his brother Charles asked him if there had been any "blessed additions" to the church. "No," John Wesley replied, "but there were a host of blessed subtractions."

God's character is not in any way contrary to the incarnation. When Jesus had dinner with disreputable people his holiness was not compromised. It was revealed; God had entered space and time with redemption. His sharpest criticism and most scathing rhetoric was leveled against those who imagined they would be contaminated by associating with fallen people. Jesus warned his disciples not to be corrupted by the ideas of the Pharisees (Matthew 16:5-12). The reason is that in a perverse way those ideas always seem to make sense. After all, what could possibly be wrong with having a good reputation, with not offending

fellow believers, with not hanging out with bad people? According to the example of Christ and the teaching of Scripture, everything.

For further discussion:

A copy of the discernment exercise referenced in this article is posted on the Ransom Fellowship web site:

<http://ransomfellowship.org/articledetail.asp?AID=369&B=Denis%20Haack&TID=8>



More Mail

To the editor:

Wowie, I've recently been reading your articles on Babylon and Winsomeness [posted on Ransom's web site]. The evening after I started, I went out to dinner with an agnostic colleague. Rather than searching for a way to steer the conversation towards faith, which is my usual practice, I took your advice, shut up, and listened as he explained his beliefs. I shared mine in the flow of the conversation in a much more natural way. This friend told a colleague the next day that this was one of the best conversations he'd had in a long time! So God gave me a chance to practice what you were writing about! Thanks for all you do!

In Christ,
Steve Baker
Via e-mail

To the editor:

Received the new issue of *Critique* and it looks fantastic! I like the use of color, the glossy cover...really draws the eye to the piece and compels one to instantly look inside. I'm so glad that you've had the opportunity to move to this, and so glad for your work.

God's peace to you,
Linda Leon
Coalition for Christian Outreach
Malone College

To the editor:

I always look forward to *Critique* and usually read articles the day it arrives. We appreciate the topics and issues raised in regards to our Christian community and the culture that we live in. There are many theaters of life and personal relationships which your ministry addresses that we seek to influence, as we journey with Christ.

Blessings
David P Holmes
Shoreline, WA
Via e-mail

The Nature of Morality

The basic moral axioms held by all people are not as different as we might think. I would suggest that there is agreement over basic moral axioms like the value of human life, love of neighbor, fairness and truth telling... the differences between cultures turn out to be enormous in practice, but these moral differences do not come from differences in the most basic moral convictions. They come in large part from the way each culture filters those moral axioms through its own worldview and practices. For example, one of the most important differences is in the way each society defines neighbor. How much of the human race is "my neighbor" and therefore within my circle of obligation to value and love? How much of it is not "my neighbor" and therefore outside my circle of obligation and who might therefore even be expendable?

Even cannibals do not kill and eat their family members. The over-the-top barbarity of the twentieth century did not come from a rejection of the ethic of "love your neighbor" or from a celebration of amorality. It came from different worldviews maintaining the "love your neighbor" axiom but reducing (from the biblical norm) who was defined as the neighbor I am obliged to love. Nazism restricted neighbor to race; Marxism restricts neighbor to class; nationalism restricts neighbor to ethnicity. The different moral practices still point to a single transcendent source. It was the same moral axioms that were there before they were filtered, distorted and radically limited by diverse worldviews and cultural applications.

[Excerpted from: *Seeing Through Cynicism: A Reconsideration of the Power of Suspicion* by Dick Keyes (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; 2006) p. 104-105.]

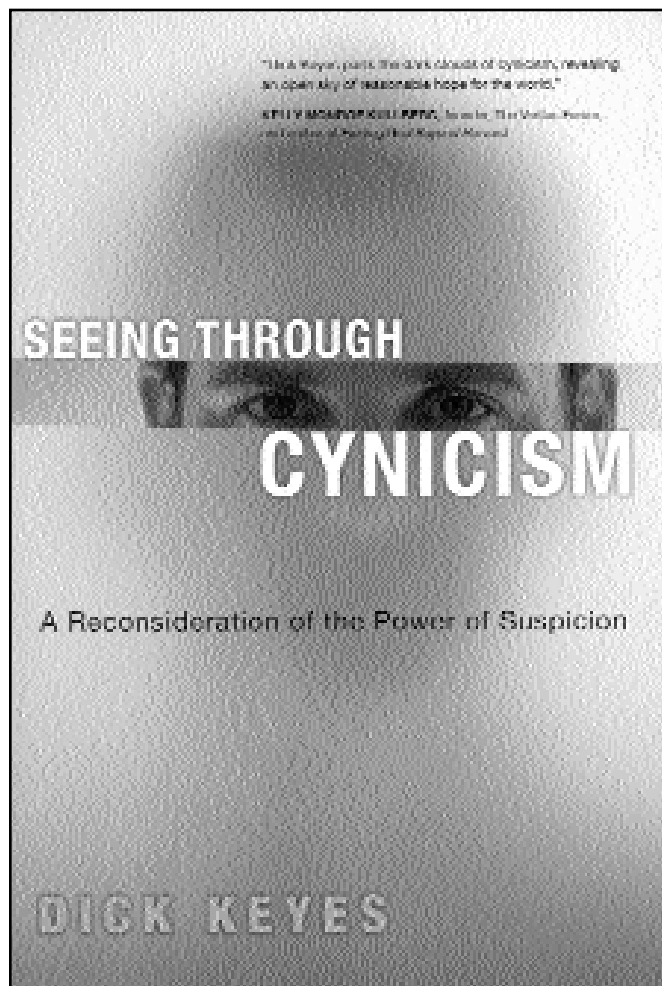
The Nature of Liberty

Some acts are unenforceable because they depend, by their very nature, on the motive animating them. Charity is an example. An act of charity is in essence an act done out of a charitable spirit. It is indefinable in terms merely

of outward form. Were a government to compel everyone to help the poor, then helping the poor would largely cease to be a charitable activity. It would lose its inner spirit and become merely enforced public service. Someone may of course carry out, in a spirit of charity, a compulsory act that helps others; for example, one might pay taxes in a welfare state in such a spirit. But if an act is compulsory, few will perform it as they would were it purely voluntary. Compulsion will normally change fundamentally the character of the act.

This may seem a rather obvious and colorless point. It pertains, however, to the deepest grounds of liberty. To say "unenforceable" is to say "essentially free." The ideal of liberty is based on the conviction that freedom, the ability to choose, belongs to the core of our humanity, and that an indispensable feature of a good society is the allowance, to every human being, of as much room as possible in which to choose. It follows that only those acts can be

justifiably coerced that both are necessary to liberty and fulfill this function regardless of the motive from which they are done. In other words, coercion must be limited to acts that retain their value-in this case their contribution to the maintenance of liberty-even though they are done under threat. Acts that lose their value when coerced must be left in the area of personal choice. Thus the protection of private property is essential to liberty. That end is served so long as people refrain from theft and burglary, even if from fear of punishment rather than out of respect for persons. In short, observance of property rights is enforceable. An example on the other side is civility. Liberty may depend on courtesy and mutual consideration in personal relations. These qualities, however,



do depend on respect for persons. They are too complex and nuanced, and too variable in varying circumstances, to be enforceable. To be civil because you might otherwise find yourself in trouble with the police is not to be civil. The rule, then, is that coercion can be justified only so far as it is heedful of the essential unenforceability of some acts.

Further examples of acts that are unenforceable, or essentially free, come readily to mind... One of my main arguments in behalf of liberty, stated in various ways, is that the act of faith is essentially free. A compulsory faith is a contradiction in terms. Christians have been partially aware of this truth, with Augustine a dramatic case in point, although it was well along in modern times before they awakened to it fully. Another example of things essentially free, one of particular interest to the humanist mind, is political activity. Participation in public life depends on a spirit of public responsibility and thus is unenforceable. A civic spirit and an intelligent assessment of common problems cannot be exacted through force. It is true that some nations compel people to vote. But mere voting does not constitute participation in politics, and even that bare requirement is dubious. If voting is compulsory, it will not ordinarily be done with the kind of care that characterizes the acts of a conscientious citizen...

The rule of enforceability thus is centered on the fact that some acts are done either voluntarily or not at all. Charity and religious worship are perfect examples. The rule lends itself, however, to being broadened. There are acts that can be enforced, yet enforcing them involves consequences so destructive, perhaps of liberty itself, that it is prudent to leave them free. The best examples are acts of abstinence. It is possible, for example, to outlaw pornography. Indeed, it is no doubt normal for societies to do so. And there are good reasons for this... Pornography is always evil, for it reduces persons to

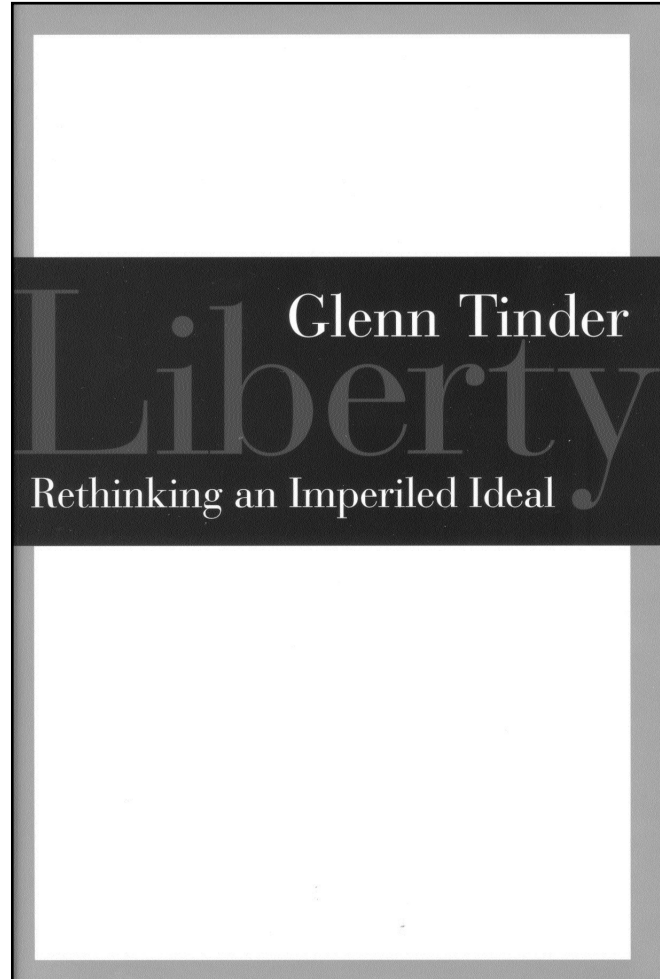
objects of lust, thus violating human dignity. Where it is outlawed, however, the liberty in which literature flourishes is seriously narrowed. This at least can be argued. Writers of exceptional merit have made it obvious that sexual candor is not necessarily pornographic. Yet to distinguish between sexual candor with an artistic purpose and that designed to appeal to prurient interests is almost

always beyond the abilities of people of the sort who are willing to serve as censors. It is better to leave pornography for the most part free in order that literary creativity may also be free.

A like example concerns that tormented issue of the late twentieth century, abortion. It is possible to have a visceral distaste for abortion and to feel that abortion in most circumstances is akin to murder, hence profoundly wrong, yet to feel that it ought to be allowed, at least within limits. Laws prohibiting abortion are highly intrusive into private life, and in that way offensive to the liberal spirit. Also there are those cases of fetuses known to be severely malformed, or pregnancies endangering the health and lives of mothers. It can be argued that fetuses are persons and thus should be protected in all circumstances whatever. But to compel a woman to have a severely malformed child or to die in childbirth is compelling an act of heroism that should surely be left to personal choice. But even in

the case of a normal pregnancy the sentinel of personal choice may issue a challenge. If only a free act can be a moral act, then perhaps abortions in many circumstances should be allowed simply in order that not having an abortion can remain a moral act.

Excerpted from: *Liberty: Rethinking an Imperiled Ideal* by Glenn Tinder (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; 2007) pp. 331-332, 334-335



Rap, Reggae and Ragas

How Global Beats Are Being Used for Praise, Prayer and Preaching



To limit ourselves in the realm of worship music to a safe repertoire of familiar hymns and choruses is to restrict the access of Christian worshippers to the rich palettes of music which have emerged for the glory of serving God. In this article we'll examine three musical forms that seek to expand our worship palette. I hope to show: how Christian rap can serve as an ideal conduit for preaching and teaching; how Gospel Reggae can help celebrate and glorify God; and, how Indian ragas, more specifically Yeshe Bhajan style music, can provide worshipful melodies for contemplation, meditation and prayer.

Serving as the backdrop for this discussion are conversations I've had with St. Louis Christian Rapper Dishon Knox, who performs under the name Born 2 Di; Los Angeles Reggae Musician Mark Mohr, best known for his work with the band Christafari; and lastly, Chris Hale of the group Aradhna, who has toured the globe performing Yeshe Bhajan style music.

Christian Rap and Holy Hip Hop

Christian rap and hip-hop styles have been around for quite some time. In CCM (Christian Contemporary Music) circles people might think of artists like DC Talk, The Grits and Toby Mac along with other artists on labels like Gotee Records. There has also been a major underground movement of Christian rap with flavors which vary based on geography. Thus the West Coast has Christian rap which sounds very different from the East. Some hot pockets where individuals are forging new ground with Holy Hip Hop include Detroit, Chicago and Saint Louis.

I have been blessed to get to know and work with one of the individuals using Christian rap as a ministry tool. Dishon Knox, a Covenant Seminary student, performs Christian rap under the name Born 2 Di. He is now winding up the recording and mixing of his first studio album, *Apologia*.

Not every Christian rap artist has seminary training, however there are several who do. Many in Christian rap recognize the importance of the theology behind their music. I asked Di about his approach to writing songs, "I make it a point to study the scriptures concerning that particular topic, making sure that I consider the full context of those scriptures to keep from giving them an isolated arbitrary meaning. Sometimes I will research certain Christian articles or books to dig deeper into the topic, usually these articles are from the Reformed perspective. Once all of that is said and done, my lyrics are always evaluated by my brothers in the faith as the final step of the process."

There has been some controversy in the Hip Hop community on the role of faith and how this extends into the musical sphere. When I spoke with Dishon about this he told me, "there is no place for Christianity within Hip-Hop, but there is room for Hip-Hop in Christianity. So long as

the elements of a culture can be submitted to the lordship of Christ, there is room for it within Christianity"

Di explained to me that while all of us share the fallen condition, he sees that "the goodness of the Lord, just His character in general makes me desire to better understand Him and how our lives should relate, in light of knowing Him. So from my desire I want to help others to understand the character and goodness of God so that they too may be drawn to Him"

The music of Born 2 Di speaks to its intended audience like a sermon:



Chronicles

Born 2 Di

This ain't Narnia or Riddick/But like the two books in the Bible, I got a Chronicle to be specific/ It's bout the LORD of the lords, the King of the kings/And it comes in three parts, kinda like the movie "Lord of the Rings"/Immanuel was unnaturally born/It was GOD and He came down in a natural form/He contradicted the natural norm/Then He said "peace be still" and He stopped the storm/Walked water, no skis, just heel and toe/Fed five thousand men with a snack like a Lunchable.

In another song he talks about how being a Christian is not about being cool. Probably the only rap song I know to speak of recidivism, Yeshua and "handlin' heat":



Outcasts

Born 2 Di

Seekin' to be popular Christians is non-sense/Cause sinners shouldn't be feelin' us (liking us) like chaste nuns in a convent/Cause Christians who love the world is contradictory symbolism/Like constant progression with concurrent recidivism/ Lemme be honest, I know it's a struggle man/Desires to be included will get you in trouble man/But don't be ashamed/[Baruch Ashem]/Bless the name/Yeshua Ha Meshiach, He'll see us through the pain/ In the era where braggarts boast of how they handlin' heat/They gamble and cheat/This the gospel they hand to the streets/So we gotta grow in grace and truth/Rep' Christ as the Way and Truth/ From workhouse to your workout/So they see Christ when they look at you/Do all things with excellence/Despise moral decadence/Live the gospel in every aspect, and if you need to speak then represent/I ain't suggestin' we at war with unbelievers/ Show them love/But the truth should make them love us or make them leave us.

The music of Born 2 Di and others recording in this vein (see holycultureradio.com for more samples) is not music I would take to the congregation for the sake of praising God. This music is message music. Its aim is to be the sermon. As we approach Christian rap as a legitimate worship style, we need to understand it in its ripest context.

Gospel Reggae



For many the word Reggae brings about the stereotypical image of a dread-locked-Jamaican-Rasta smoking "da' 'erb" and talking about "Jah-maica 'mon". What most people don't know is that Reggae's roots are intrinsically linked to Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. Rastafarianism, the religion most associated with Reggae music, utilizes the Bible as its key source-book of their faith. The music by nature is meant for praising "Jah." It is not too far of a stretch to

adapt these Caribbean flavored rhythms for the praise of "Jah"-sus Christ.

There are a number of Christian musicians who utilize Reggae as a means of worship and praise of Jesus (many are on the Lion of Zion record label or can be found on the website gospelreggae.com); also, a number of Rastafarian converts to Christianity, have recorded critical albums featuring very scripturally rooted tracks. Among these, Yabby Yoo (aka Jesus Dread) and Judy Mowatt (formerly a back-up singer for Bob Marley). There is also a movement called "Fulfilled Rastafari" which seeks to minister to those who were in the Rastafarian movement who have found saving faith in Jesus Christ.

An interesting sidebar that's worthy of much more exploration than I can offer here is that there is much evidence to support that Bob Marley himself made a profession of faith to Jesus Christ through the witness of his family's Ethiopian Orthodox Priest shortly before his death--a fact the Rastafarian community would prefer was kept quiet. If you track through the collective recordings of Bob Marley you can hear firsthand his wrestling with faith issues and with the place of Christ in his own life.

One of the key bands that has brought reggae to light in Christian circles is Christafari. The band rose up in the mid-1990s to enjoy success in CCM circles before record label problems and personality issues forced a messy break up upon the band. Later, Christafari's lead singer Mark Mohr resurrected the band and started his own label, Lion of Zion, for the purpose of supporting Christian reggae, hip hop and other ethnic music styles.

Mohr is an ordained pastor, a global church planter and a strong mouthpiece for Gospel Reggae, "music is the common language. The styles of music are the language. It's like that with all these different genres of music. There are so many genres that aren't being used for Christ." On the Christafari website (christafari.com) he writes, "There

are many that say that some musical styles are of Satan. But God is the Creator of all music, and there is nothing new under the sun. Satan can't create all that he can do is twist and distort. I believe that music is neutral and that what counts is the message, the messenger and their lifestyle. I believe that we should embrace any musical style that is done for the Messiah regardless of the genre's supposed origin or its similarities to other's artwork. However, don't get me wrong, I am not suggesting to imitate the world, but rather to set the standard."

Mark's approach to each concert is to give it up to the Lord. He typically terms a show as being "reggae worship" with a portion of each concert "dedicated to preaching the Gospel clearly and giving people the opportunity to accept Christ." The songs of Christafari range from praise...



Can't Stop

Christafari (from Valley of Decision)

You know I can't stop praising you Lord, You know I won't stop praising You Lord What a Joy it is to see; All the things He's done for me; I am singing alleluiah, Giving out thanks and praises to the Father.

to prophecy...



Modern Day Pharisee

Christafari (from Valley of Decision)

Look the way that you live your righteousness worn on your sleeve. You're working so hard to be good to convince that you've done your duty. You are a pillar of society. A righteous man you claim to be. So well respected in your church, you know it's by grace you've been saved and that not of your works Modern Day Pharisee.

to preaching...



Warriors

Christafari (from Word, Sound, Power)

For we no wrestle against flesh and blood, but spiritual wickedness in high and low places (Eph 6:12). You see we have an enemy; his name is Satan, and he will tempt us with his lies and his deception (1 Pet 5:8 & 1 Cor 10:3). But no weapon formed against us shall prosper (Isaiah 54:17). And it is through Jesus Christ that we will conquer (Rom 8:37). So soldiers, take your sword (2 Cor 10:4), the living Word of God (Heb 4:12 & Eph 6:17)- read it, memorized it and quote it (Josh 1:8), and use it to battle against the enemy (Matt 4:1-11). For if God is for us, then who can be against? (Rom 8:31) Christians... Fight the good fight. Don't give up the faith (1 Tim 4:1-11).

Mohr's record label, Lion of Zion, features music from Africa, the Caribbean, and across the globe.

[Continued on page 16]

In The Changer

I'm a bit old school.

I prefer listening to actual CD's on the disc changer in my car instead of hooking up the iPod with my entire music library.

Maybe it's a variation on the nostalgia some folks have for vinyl records, but I just prefer popping CD's in while I'm driving.

At any rate, here are some thoughts on what's been playing lately.



Emotionalism The Avett Brothers

I bought this album when it came out last May and haven't stopped listening to it. Trying to describe the music of The Avett Brothers is difficult. While they are firmly rooted in bluegrass this trio also demonstrates influences as far from bluegrass as the Violent Femmes. On iTunes their genre is listed as "Unclassifiable," which is probably just how the band wants it. *Emotionalism* is a bold declaration of their willingness to embrace (you guessed it) emotions. A quick glance at track titles such as "Shame," "Living of Love," and "I Would Be Sad" make this embrace quite obvious. Many bands would fail miserably with this task by falling into sappy sentimentalism, but The Avett Brothers manage to pull it off with near perfection. In "The Ballad of Love and Hate" they make their final conclusion about emotionalism clear: Love conquers. The songwriting is superb and while their lyrics range between seriously contemplative and lighthearted, they are always meaningful. Go buy this CD; in fact, go buy every album these guys have put out. You won't regret it.

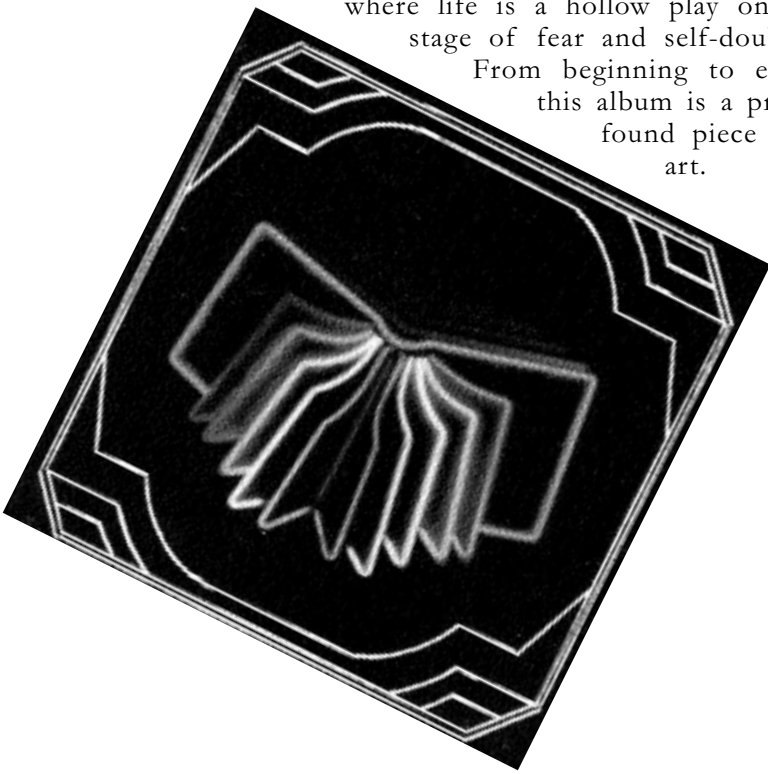
Graduation Kanye West

I bought this CD more out of a sense of duty than desire. In the past few years I have found it increasingly hard to listen to Kanye's music due to his ever-increasing ego. However, as someone who at least attempts to keep up with what's happening in music I knew I had to get this album. Kanye continues to lead the Hip-Hop world through masterful layering and production; *Graduation* is a finely tuned and polished piece of craftsmanship. Musically he continues to bend and break hip-hop, reshaping it into something better. With that said, the lyrical base of the album is extremely disappointing. Where West has ample opportunity to shine he continues to fall into the cliché's and moral pitfalls of his genre. An example is the track "Stronger." With its catchy hooks and stellar sampling this song has the most potential on the album. Unfortunately it suffers from non-stop juvenile lyrics like, "Heard they'd do anything for a Klondike / Well, I'll do anything for a blonde dike." Kanye is indisputably a musical genius and my hope is that when he matures a bit as a person he will begin making music that has more depth behind its shine. If you're a student of culture this album is a must. If you're not, I'd recommend spending your money on something else.

Neon Bible The Arcade Fire

One of my former youth group students turned me onto this album and band and I'm so glad he did. This is one of those albums that just grows on you and gets better each time you listen to it. By my third time through I was completely hooked and still keep it on regular rotation. *Neon Bible* is Arcade Fire's follow up to the 2004 LP *Funeral*, and boasts a richly textured sound with a wide range of instrumentation. Another strong feature of the album is its thoughtful and often haunting lyrics. On *Neon Bible* the band wrestles with questions of faith, doubt, fear, longing and loss. In "Windowsill" the band rejects the fragmentation and rampant materialism of Western culture while simultaneously lamenting how much of it they have imbibed. "My Body is a Cage" closes the album with a painful longing for the redemption of body and soul from an age that calls darkness light, and where life is a hollow play on a stage of fear and self-doubt.

From beginning to end this album is a profound piece of art.



Icky Thump The White Stripes

Icky Thump is the sixth full-length studio album by The White Stripes. In ways I can't fully express, this rock duo continues to prove that sometimes less is more. As usual their minimalist, garage rock has a surprisingly full sound quality. This CD is perfect for cranking the volume up to 11 and rocking out as you cruise down the highway. Jack White has always brought a blues flavor to his previous works but that flavor is more fully fleshed out on this album, and unquestionably makes itself known through straightforward, up-tempo, blues-rock songs like "Rag & Bone" and

"Catch Hell Blues." The White Stripes also branch out a bit from their usual fare with Celtic and Spanish influences on "Prickly Thorn, But Sweetly Worn" and "Conquest." This album is able to come out as good ol' rock 'n' roll while probing big questions at the same time. Take the following lyrics from "Little Cream Soda" as an example:

*Well every beautiful thing I come across
tells me to stop moving and shake this riddle off.
Oh Well. And there was a time when all
I wanted was my ice cream colder, and a little cream soda.
Oh Well, Oh Well. And a wooden box,
and an alley full of rocks was all I had to care about.
Oh Well, Oh Well, Oh Well.
Now my mind is filled with rubber tires,
and forest fires, and whether I'm a liar,
and lots of other situations where I don't know
what to do at which time God screams to me,
"There's nothing left for me to tell you."
Oh Well, Oh Well, Oh Well.*

If this album is any indication of things to come, The White Stripes will be putting out quality music for years to come.



Travis is a graduate of Covenant Theological Seminary and a Contributing Editor for *Critique*. He and his wife Brooke are currently raising support to do church planting and theological education in Auckland New Zealand. In the meantime Travis is serving as lackey for Ransom Board member Donald Guthrie.

BEAUTY AND REDEMPTION

A review of the film

Das Leben Der Anderen *The Lives of Others*



Credits

Starring:
Martina Gedeck (Christa-Maria Sieland)
Ulrich Mühle (Hauptmann Gerd Wiesler)
Sebastian Koch (Georg Dreyman)
Ulrich Tukur (Obersleutnant Anton Grubitz)
Thomas Thieme (Minister Bruno Hempf)
Hans-Uwe Bauer (Paul Hauser)
Volkmar Kleinert (Albert Jerska)
Matthias Brenner (Karl Wallner)
Charly Hübner (Udo)
Herbert Knaup (Gregor Hessenstein)

Director:
Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck

Writer:
Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck

Producers:
Quirin Berg, Claudia Gladziejewski

Delegate producer:
Bayerischer Rundfunk,
Dirk Hamm,
Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck,
Max Wiedemann

Original Music: Stéphane Moucha,
Gabriel Yared

Cinematographer: Hagen Bogdanski

Runtime: 137 minutes
Release: USA; 2007 (Germany 2006)
Rated R (for some sexuality/ nudity)

How do you feel when you see or hear something beautiful? Not a leaf-in-the-wind kind of beauty, but extraordinary beauty? In *The Architecture of Happiness*, Alain de Botton makes an intriguing suggestion:

While a common reaction to seeing a thing of beauty is to want to buy it, our real desire may be not so much to own what we find beautiful as to lay permanent claim to the inner qualities it embodies... What we seek, at the deepest level, is inwardly to resemble, rather than physically to possess, the objects and places that touch us through their beauty.

If he's right, then I am attracted to my wife not only because I long to be with her. I think that in so doing I may become like her in visible ways. By being with someone or owning something beautiful, I may become beautiful.

The transformative power of beauty is at the heart of an urban legend of the old Soviet Union. After a concert Lenin remarked to Maxim Gorky that Beethoven's *Appassionata* sonata was the most beautiful piece of music he'd ever heard, but that he was going to stop listening to it. He said Beethoven:

...makes me want to pat the heads of people... But now one must not pat anyone's head... one has to beat their heads, beat mercilessly, although ideally we're against any sort of force against people. Hmm... it's a devilishly difficult task.

In *The Lives of Others* writer/director Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck explores what might have happened if Lenin had kept listening.

The Lives of Others won last year's Oscar for Best Foreign Language Picture. It should have won Best Picture, period. (Compared to it *The Departed* feels like a bad day spent in Boston traffic.) In it,

first time director von Donnersmarck has crafted the most satisfying and deeply human film I've seen in years.

Set in East Germany before the wall came down, *The Lives of Others* is the story of Gerd Wiesler, a Stasi agent (short for *Ministerium für Staatsicherheit*, i.e. the East German secret police, whose stated goal was "To know everything") who specializes in and teaches interrogation techniques. He wears the same outfit everyday (gray, of course), lives in a tidy but Spartan apartment, and has only one friend: ex-classmate Anton Grubitz, who owes his academic success to Wiesler's tutoring and who ironically is now his boss. His only other human contact, as far as we can see, comes in the form of a liaison with a prostitute. (After sex when he asks her to stay for awhile, she says: "Next time hire me longer.") Above all, he is a true believer in the state-dominated system. (When one of his students questions the inhumane nature of the interrogation techniques Wiesler is teaching, he's reminded that the people they're dealing with are "all enemies of the state.") All things considered he's not so much an evil little man as a terribly efficient one.

In the course of the film we observe his transformation from efficient state servant to human being. It's not a fast change or a dramatic one. (In a recent interview Herr von Donnersmarck remarked that no one changes quickly "without divine intervention.") Nor is the transformation primarily political in nature. *The Lives of Others* is not yet another tired tale of the triumph of capitalism. It is instead a story of the power of beauty and the sacrifices necessary to create it.

The catalyst of Wiesler's metamorphosis at first seems unlikely: he's assigned the task of spying on playwright Georg Dreyman and his girlfriend Christa-Maria Sieland. Their lives are

the antithesis of his. Their apartment is full of people; his is empty. In the evening they read Brecht, listen to music, and discuss the world with their friends; he watches TV alone. They are trying, quietly and subversively, to be human in a horribly inhuman setting, and as Wiesler vicariously participates in their lives, he becomes more like them. He becomes more human.

I can't describe the details of this process without ruining the film for you and that would be a crime, but I will offer one bad analogy. When was the last time you fell in love? Poet Christian Wiman describes the experience like this:

the sense I have is of color slowly aching into things, the world coming brilliantly, abradingly alive. I remember tiny Albert's Café on Elm Street in Chicago where we first met, a pastry case like a Pollock in the corner of my eye, sunlight suddenly more itself on an empty plate, a piece of silver. I think of walking together along Lake Michigan a couple of months later talking about a particular poem of Dickinson's ("A loss of something ever felt I"), clouds finding and failing to keep one form after another, the lake booming its blue into everything; of lying in bed in my highrise apartment downtown watching the little blazes in the distance that were the planes at Midway, so numerous and endless that all those safe departures and homecomings seemed a kind of secular miracle.

In a way Wiesler's change is like this: his second-hand world is more beautiful and more significant. But it is more painful, too, as de Botton acknowledges:

A perplexing consequence of fixing our lives on an ideal is that it may make us sad... Our sadness won't be of the searing kind but more like a blend of joy and melancholy: joy at the perfection we see before us, melancholy at an awareness of how seldom we are sufficiently blessed to encounter anything of its kind. The flawless object throws into perspective the mediocrity that surrounds it. We are reminded of the way we would wish things always to be and of how incomplete our lives remain.

Edith Schaeffer used to be fond of saying, "In a fallen world nothing of beauty is ever created without someone making a sacrifice." It's certainly true in von Donnersmarck's story. In the end both Wiesler and Dreyman make sacrifices. Their sacrifices cost them a great deal, produce great beauty, but the world around them goes on unchanged.

It's true in our story, too. According to the Scriptures Christ sacrificed himself to make us beautiful, as in Philippians 2:15:

... so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe.

Ironically often the opposite seems to be true. My friend Ellis Potter often asks, "If someone you know becomes a Christian, would you expect him to become more creative or less? More interesting or less? More beautiful or less?"

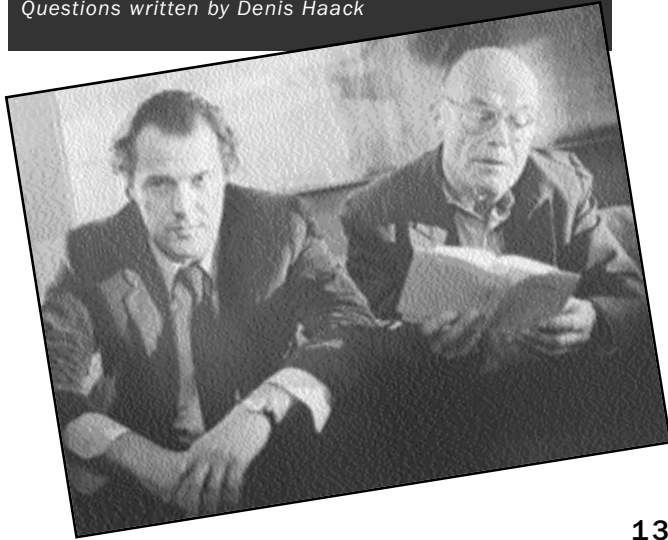
How our lives answer this question may have less to do with our soteriology than it does with our anthropology. What does it mean to be human? What should it look like? Our lives will either move the Wieslers of the world to seek to lay permanent claim to the inner qualities we embody or turn them to the lives of others.

Greg and Mary Jane Grooms are co-directors of Hill House, a ministry to students and faculty at the University of Texas at Austin. Their work a natural extension of the years they spent working with Francis and Edith Schaeffer at L'Abri Fellowship. Greg also serves as assistant pastor at All Saints Church (PCA) in Austin. Some of the happiest years of their lives were spent living just around the corner from Toad Hall. To them Minnesota will always mean good wine, good food, good hunting and fishing, and above all good company.

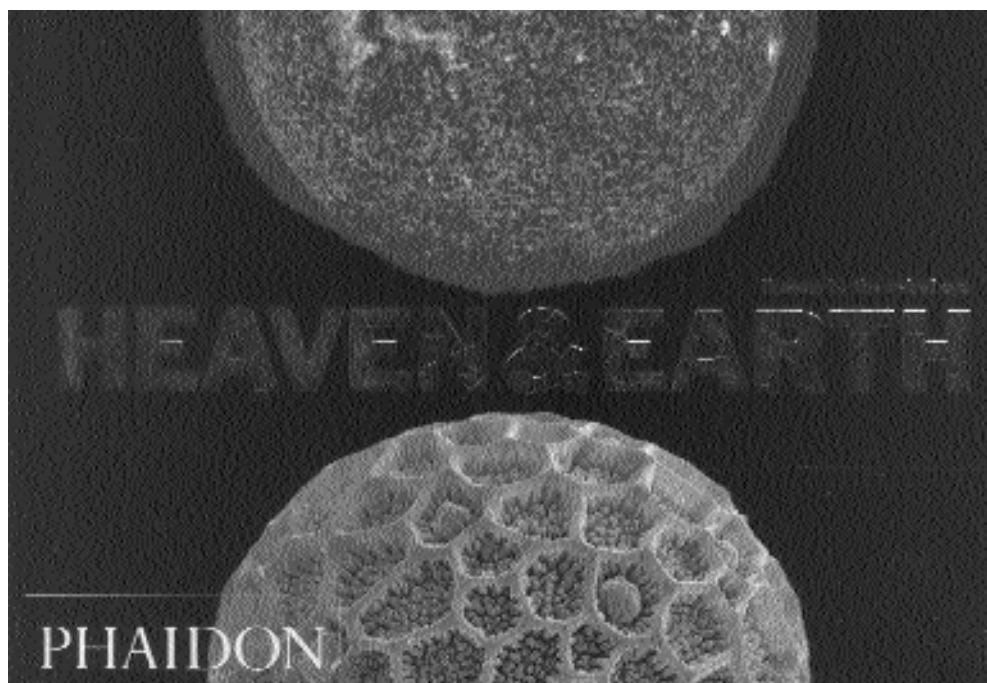
Questions for reflection and discussion:

1. What was your initial or immediate response to *The Lives of Others*? Why do you think you reacted that way?
2. To the extent that life in Communist East Germany is something you never experienced, how did the film depict it so that as viewers we were drawn into its reality? How would you describe that reality?
3. In what ways were the techniques of film-making (casting, direction, lighting, script, music, sets and backgrounds, action, cinematography, editing, etc.) used to get the film's message(s) across, or to make the message plausible or compelling? In what ways were they ineffective or misused?
4. Identify and describe, as objectively as possible, each of the main characters in the story. What is their role and significance? With whom do you identify? With whom are we meant to identify? How do you know?
5. Are there any clear heroes in the film? What makes them heroic?
6. Are there any clear villains in the film? What makes them so? Did you sympathize with any of these characters? If so, how was the director able to arouse your sympathy?
7. Stories are only as captivating as they are plausible. To what extent did you find the film plausible?
8. Read aloud and discuss each of the quotations included in the review
9. What specific scenes in the film stand out as particularly impressive? What makes them so?
10. This story unfolds without the presence of explicitly religious or Christian characters. Assume you were asked to write a minor Christian character into the screenplay without changing the trajectory of the basic plot. What would they be like? Where would they appear? What might they say?
11. What sacrifices were made in the film? By whom? Which sacrifices were worth it? Why?
12. If a sympathetic but unobtrusive stranger followed you around for an entire month, would they conclude you are living a life characterized by beauty--might they say you "shine like a star?" Why or why not? How is that beauty (or its lack) expressed? What would this stranger point to as concrete evidence for their conclusion? What plans should you make?

Questions written by Denis Haack



Hidden Pictures of Glory



One evening in the dead of winter when our children were young we roused them out of bed and drove to a park 20 miles outside of town. Margie had prepared a thermos of hot chocolate and we sat on a foot bridge spanning a frozen river, in winter coats and mittens and wrapped in quilts, looking at the stars. The sky was clear, the stars glistened like diamonds, and we sipped our steaming chocolate, arguing over whether we were seeing the Little Dipper. Since we couldn't agree, but agreed it was in the shape of a dipper, we christened it Dip Junior. I don't how our children remember that evening, but I remember it fondly, as a sweet time of being together as family. As a little glimpse of God's glory in the sky he had made and sustains to his glory.

One of the things that can be easily lost in our busy lives is the opportunity to simply see something of the wonder of creation. Of the grace that is expressed in the handiwork of God, and which shines out, if we have eyes to see and the time to look. Since "the heavens declare the glory of God," we would be foolish not to be sure we are in on that declaration regularly (Psalm

19:1). The wise man, we are told, took time to study a field (Proverbs 24:30-34) and people from all over the world came to listen to Solomon speak "of beasts, and of birds, and of reptiles, and of fish" (1 Kings 4:33). God's word is graciously given in both special revelation (Scripture) and general revelation (creation).

One way we can gain a renewed sense of wonder is to take advantage of the technology which makes photographs of nature easily available. And sometimes that technology even allows us to see things that would otherwise be invisible to the naked eye. Things so far away in space or so small that they can only be made visible with telescope or microscope.

One fine example of this is *Heaven and Earth: Unseen by the naked eye*, a book of photos and simple captions that describe what we are seeing.

We recommend it to you.

BOOK RECOMMENDED

Heaven and Earth: Unseen by the naked eye
edited by David Malin and Katherine Roucoux (New York, NY: Phaidon Press; 2002) 371 pp. + glossary + index.
1025 pp. + indices.



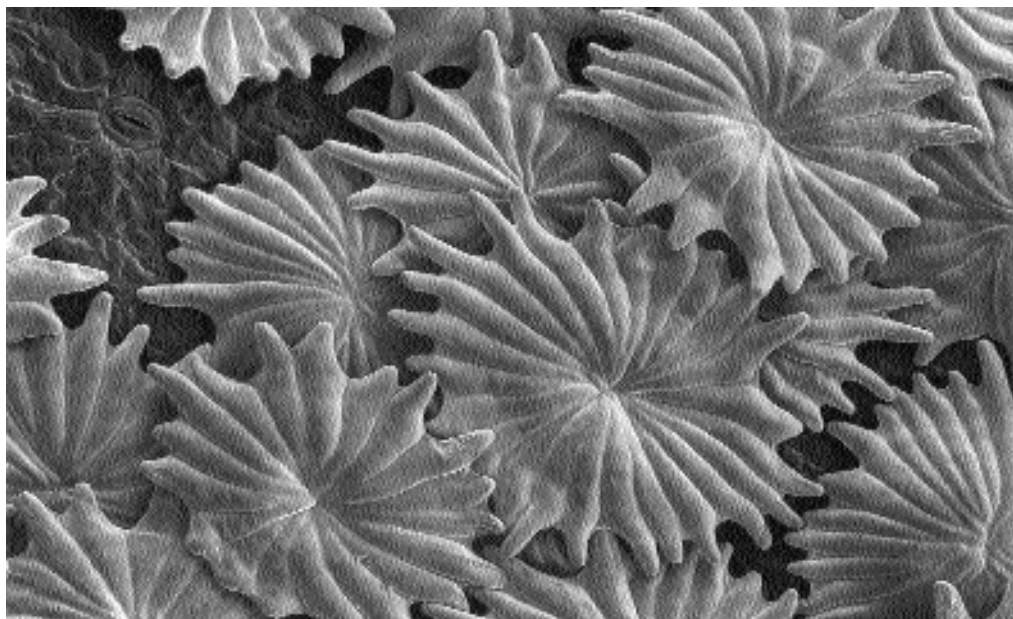
Moth Wing

The wings of the Spanish Moon moth (*Graellsia isabellae*) bear patterns that look strikingly like eyes. This rare and protected moth, found in Spain and the French Alps, normally rests with its wings folded. When alarmed it spreads them out, revealing a single 5 millimetre wide eyespot on each wing and startling any attacker by its apparent transformation from a moth to the head of a much larger creature. Eyespots are a common defensive device throughout the animal kingdom. [p. 120]

Olive Leaf Scales

The umbrella-like scales on the surface of an olive tree leaf are magnified 560 times in this coloured scanning electron micrograph. Olive trees flourish in semiarid conditions that other trees cannot tolerate, in part because of these scales. They trap still, moist air close to the leaf's surface, slowing the rate of water loss. The leaf contains pores called stomata (one can be seen upper left) that allow the leaf to breathe.

[p. 74]

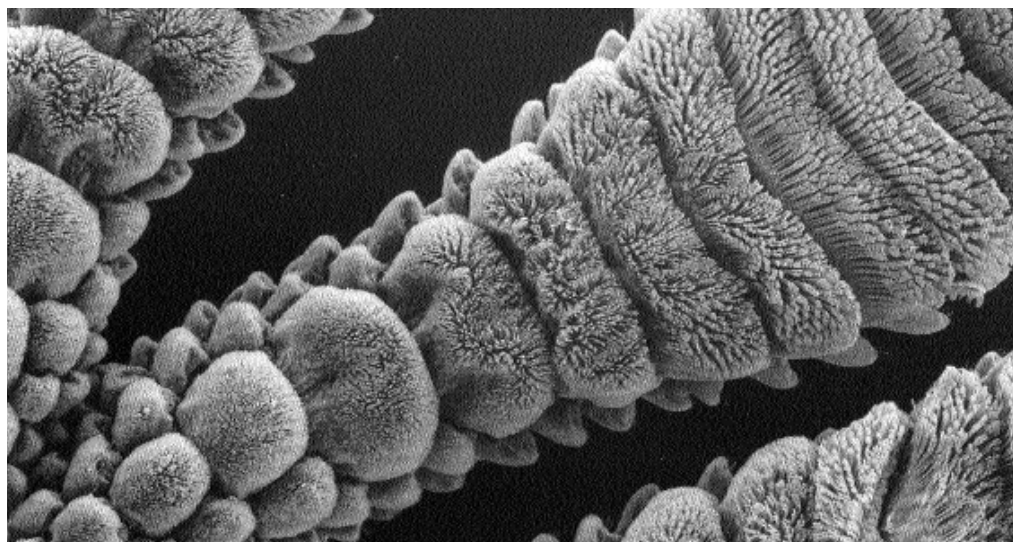


Richat Structure

The Richat Structure, Mauritania – often referred to as the Bull's Eye after its shape – is one of the most striking landmarks in the Sahara to have been photographed from space (in this case from the Space Shuttle Columbia). The 39 kilometre wide structure resembles a meteorite crater but is actually a dome of rock, probably pushed up from beneath by volcanic activity, whose top has been eroded. Hard bands of quartzite are left exposed as upstanding circular ridges 100 metres high. In the lower part of the picture, a sea of sand can be seen encroaching on the Bull's Eye. [p. 174]

Deforestation in Brazil

Dense vegetation, the remnants of the rainforest, show up red in this infrared satellite image of deforested areas in the Amazon basin of Brazil. The geometrical shapes are areas of cleared land. In 1970, about 99 per cent of the Amazon rainforest was still standing; 30 years later, only 85 per cent remained. The main cause of deforestation here is slash-and-burn clearance for agriculture. Rainforest soils are usually poor in nutrients and can only be farmed for a few years before more clearance is necessary. [p. 196]



Gecko Foot Pads

Geckos (family *Gekkonidae*) are night-hunting lizards found in a wide variety of habitats. This false-coloured scanning electron micrograph, taken at a magnification of 130 times, shows the complex pattern of ridges and minute hairs that covers the gecko's foot. These tiny structures give geckos an amazing ability to climb, enabling them to walk up and across ceilings and even cling to glass, finding footholds in the microscopic imperfections of the smoothest surfaces. [p. 90-91]

Rap, Reggae and Ragas

(continued from page 9)



Raga and Yesu Bhajan: Worship Music of India



Last on our tour of musical styles that are being utilized for worship is that of Yesu or Krista Bhajan which incorporates traditional musical styles of India into the context of high praise for Jesus Christ.

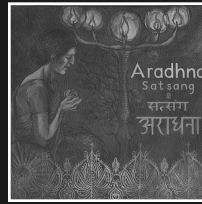
A few years back I stumbled upon the site of Chris Hale, a musician who attended Berklee College of Music about the same time that I did. Hale had grown up the son of missionaries to India. While at Berklee he put together a band the fused jazz, rock

and Indian rhythms. They released a couple CDs and toured India. This led him to further study Krista Bhajan with musicians in India; he used his research and field recordings as part of his doctoral thesis. Today Chris records and performs Yesu Bhajans around the world with the band Aradhna.

On the Aradhna website (aradhnamusic.com) it states: "the path (marga) of Bhakti is one of loving devotion and complete surrender to God. In this ancient tradition, music and worship play a fundamental role in the expressions of the bhakta (devotee). These devotees might be a few people gathered around a dholak drum player in a camphor-lit temple, professional singers in a concert hall, or simply a family gathered in the home. Their songs are called Bhajans (songs of devotion). Bhajans can be heard sung late into the night or in early morning hours all over the world wherever there are bhaktas. Over the last few centuries some poet-singers of the Bhakti tradition in India have become followers of Yesu. In keeping with their cultural heritage, they began to compose bhajans to Sri Yesu."

In a conversation we had a few years back Chris stated that "all over India there are multiple expressions of Christian faith, from Santa Claus and Christmas Cake, to saffron robes and shaved heads, from villagers singing in a mud hut with no ornaments, to organ playing what a friend we have in Jesus in Hindi, to a Dolak drummer playing as loud as he can to a rousing song of praise to Christ in a folk rhythm."

In the lyrics that follow you will get a sense of the psalm-like craft involved in creating the poetry and beauty of each lyrical form:

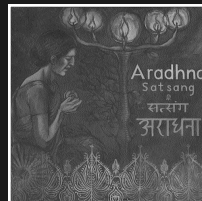


He He Prabhu

Words and Music by Peter John
(appears on Aradhna Satsang CD)
*You are the incarnation of God, the sacrifice for sinners
Put your Spirit over me, O Lord of mercy
You are the Lord of all, the Lord of the World*

*If there is anything displeasing within me
Cleanse me from it, all-knowing Father
O Lord, Master of all things, fill me with your love
Mold me in your likeness; fill me with your love
O Lord, Master of all things, fill me with your love
You left your throne in heaven because of your love for me
You became a man; you are the True Incarnation
O Lord, Master of all things, fill me with your love
You healed eyes of the blind; the shadow of the leper you made whole
You even raised the dead; Your ways are too great for me to understand
O Lord, Master of all things, fill me with your love
Teach us how to love, teach us to walk in these ways
I always pray, O Lord, Master of all things, fill me with your love.*

Lyrics of the bhajans focus in on the person of Jesus and what he has done for those who believe.



Naam Leo Re

Words and Music by Anil Dev
(appears on Aradhna Satsang CD)
*Take the name of Jesus,
Sing the name of Jesus
The blessed name of Jesus,
Sing the name of Jesus
You are my shield from sin,*

*You have taken my punishment
Holy, attractive, and beautiful is the name of my Jesus
Grant me peace, give me strength
Holy, attractive, and beautiful is the name of my Jesus
You give me a heart of devotion and the gift of salvation
Holy, attractive, and beautiful is the name of my Jesus*

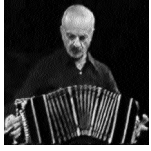
The Yesu Bhajan leads the listener on a worshipful path; the Caribbean rhythms of Gospel Reggae fill the heart with joy and praise; and Holy Hip Hop seeks to reach the heart of a culture that is looking for answers in consumerism, sex and violence. There is a hope that through a sharp lyrical sermon hearts and minds will change. All of these musical styles seek advancement in the Kingdom of God. What we can learn from these musical brethren is that all this music, when offered up to God, can be worshipful, it can change our hearts, and it can teach us critical lessons to get people on the path to Christ.

Matthew Hundley studied recording production and jazz guitar at Berklee College of Music in Boston; he holds degrees in Critical Film Studies and Broadcast Management from the University of Colorado. After college he worked in television stations in Ohio and Iowa. He also taught at Wartburg College. Hundley is working on his Masters in Theological Studies at Covenant Seminary in St. Louis where he lives with his wife and their four children.

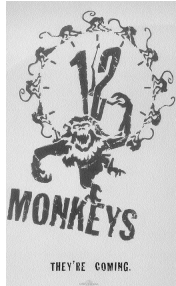
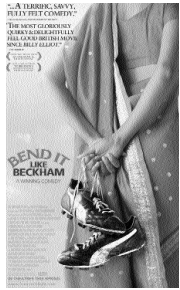
Where Have I Heard That Before?

WORLD RHYTHMS ADD SPICE TO MOVIES

Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992)

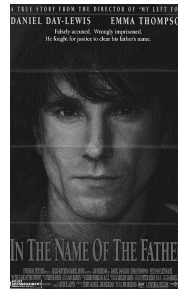


Referred to as "The Master of the Nuevo Tango" his life story reads like a suspense novel. Piazzolla revolutionized tango by blending classical and jazz elements with traditional tango melodies of Buenos Aires. His music can be heard in films like: *Frantic* (1988), *Sur* (1988), *12 Monkeys* (1995).



Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan (1948 - 1997)

Pakistani musician known as the "Emperor of Qawwali"--a devotional music of the Sufis, a mystical offshoot of Islam. His soul stirring vocals are featured in: *Natural Born Killers* (1994), *Dead Man Walking* (1995), *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002), *Blood Diamond* (2006).



Bob Marley (1945-1981)



Jamaican Ska & Reggae rhythms which still resonate in films such as: *Club Paradise* (1986), *Cool Runnings* (1993), *In the Name of the Father* (1993), *Black and White* (1999), *Shark Tale* (2004), *Perfect Stranger* (2007).

Rachid Taha

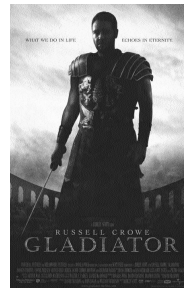
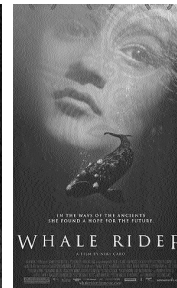
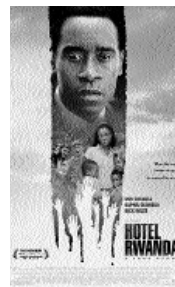


Algerian Rai rocker Rachid Taha was the subject of a recent documentary "Khaled and Rachid Taha." His music is featured in films like: *Lionheart* (1990), *Alice et Martin* (1998), *Black Hawk Down* (2001), *The Good Thief* (2002), *Something New* (2006).

You may not be up on the latest world music, but chances are you have heard a wide selection of global grooves in an unlikely place...the cinema. With the increased emphasis on global issues in movies like *Children of Men* (2006), *The Last King of Scotland* (2006), and *The Constant Gardener* (2005)--world rhythms play an important role in establishing the context of a film. Here are some key musicians from around the globe whose talents have been tapped for soundtracks, scores and appearances.

Afro Celt Sound System

They have worked with Peter Gabriel, Robert Plant and Sinéad O'Connor to blend Irish and African rhythms. Their unique rhythms are featured in: *Stigmata* (1999), *Gangs of New York* (2002), *Hotel Rwanda* (2004), *Tristan & Isolde* (2006).



Lisa Gerrard



This Australian's otherworldly voice and stunning compositions have set the tone for numerous films including: *The Insider* (1999), *Gladiator* (2000), *Mission Impossible II* (2000), *Ali* (2001), *Whale Rider* (2002), *Black Hawk Down* (2001).

Yousou N'Dour

Yousou N'Dour helped develop popular music in Senegal. His recordings have been included in the soundtracks such as: *Bulworth* (1998), *The Wild Thornberrys Movie* (2002), *Alone in the Dark* (2005).



Missions in a Risk-Averse Age



At times I've wondered whether the advent of bike-safety helmets for children will mark the beginning of the end of the modern missionary movement. Don't misunderstand, this is not to suggest that a concern for children's safety is misplaced. Rather, I want us to reflect carefully on whether missions, especially in high-risk situations, can remain robust in an age as risk-averse as ours.

The Scriptures promise that mission in a fallen world always involves risk. "If the world hates you," Jesus told his disciples, "know that it has hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18). He reminded them that the prophets of old were persecuted, so his followers should expect to be treated similarly. Jesus told them that being reviled and persecuted for his sake is reason to know they are "blessed" (Matthew 5:11). And yet his expectation for them was, and for us is, that regardless of cost his followers bring his message of reconciliation to a horribly fragmented world (2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

A series of events in Afghanistan bring this issue into sharp relief. The episode provides our case study which should challenge Western Christians to reflect biblically on the possible cost of obeying Christ's call to engage parts of the Muslim world with the gospel.

The Case Study

On July 19, 2007 Taliban forces in Afghanistan kidnapped 23 South Korean Christians who were in the country on a short-term mission. The Taliban issued a statement threatening to kill the hostages unless prisoners held by the Afghan government were released. The Afghan government refused. One week later a male hostage was killed, his bullet-riddled body dumped by the side of a road. A few days later, a second male hostage was shot and killed. On

August 1 appeals were made to the international community to work for the safe release of the remaining hostages. "We appeal for support from the people of the United States and around the world," Kim Jung-ja, the mother of one of the hostages said. "Especially the families want the United States to disregard political interests and give more active support to save the 21 innocent lives." Soon after the appeal the UN began to provide security for negotiations between Taliban and South Korean officials. On August 13 the Taliban released two female hostages to the Red Cross. Negotiations continued until on August 29 the Taliban began handing over the remaining hostages. Finally, on September 1, all remaining 19 South Koreans arrived back in their homeland. "We apologize to the people for causing trouble and thank everyone who helped us return home safely," former hostage Yu Kyeong'Sik, said. "We owe the country and the people a great debt."

Christians should be grateful for their safe release; it is a good gift of God. We should also pray for the families of the hostages that were killed. And though we need to be sensitive to all those involved in this drama, the deal negotiated between the Taliban and the South Korean government raises serious questions for Christians. Early reports claimed that South Korea agreed to pay a \$20 million ransom for the hostages, but this has been denied by both the Taliban and South Korea. An "official" in South Korea's presidential office is quoted as saying that the "two conditions for the release are that we pull out our troops and stop Korean missionary work in Afghanistan by the end of the year." South Korean troops were already scheduled to leave Afghanistan by the end of 2007, so that part of the agreement simply confirms a decision already made. The promise by the South Korean government to stop its Christian citizens from doing missions work in Afghanistan, however, is significant and worth some thoughtful discussion and reflection.

Gospel Perspective

Engaging the Islamic world, including Afghanistan, with the Gospel is not optional for the church. The glory of God's Kingdom is reflected in the redeemed diversity of "every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9). The commission to make disciples of every nation under Jesus' authority remains, and the gospel has not lost its power (Matthew 28:16-20; Romans 1:16). The idea that the Muslim world is "closed" to the gospel is not true. Operation World, for example, reports that persecution of Christians in Nigeria by Muslims "between 1991 and 2000 led to the death of thousands of believers." Yet, the reports continues, many Muslims are "appalled by the behavior of their co-religionists. There have been many won to Christ over recent years." Though we rightly mourn

the sad story of the South Korean hostages, God is able to bring grace to bear in Afghanistan. Operation World estimates that only between 1,000 and 3,000 Afghans are Christians in a country that is 97.89% Muslim, with 48,000 mosques and not a single church. Operation World says that in decades of warfare in Afghanistan an “estimated 1 million lost their lives, 2 million were maimed and 4 million children orphaned... The result is ecological disaster, a shattered infrastructure, over 12 million uncleared anti-personnel mines... Though there is no visible church in Afghanistan, the number of Afghan believers is increasing in urban and some remote rural areas.”

This case study is not merely a media news story. A Western government has agreed to ban missionary activity by its citizens in a nation of the world. The thinking of Christian scholars will be important if the church is to respond in a thoughtfully biblical fashion. For example, the fact that the hostages were involved in a short-term mission in such a dangerous land is surely significant. Perhaps sponsoring short-term aid missions by lay believers in a land where active warfare is raging is less than wise. Surely they might have found some other needy place to serve. Nevertheless, this episode also raises questions that each Christian should reflect on with care. Like it or not, we are a risk-averse generation of believers called to engage even high-risk places in a lost world with the gospel. It's an opportunity to be discerning about God's call on our lives. The invitation to reflect on this case study needs to be seen as an effort to apply biblical truth to life instead of merely reacting to the news or simply going with the flow of the surrounding culture. Without for a moment being sentimental about the sad reality of suffering, Christians must wrestle with the biblical call to a risk-averse generation to engage a high-risk world with the gospel. This is not merely an intellectual exercise, but a spiritual one in which the meaning of Christ's Lordship is faced humbly.

Sources

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<http://english.aljazeera.net/English>
 All the factual details of the events in Afghanistan are from a series of reports on.

Global Mapping International
<http://www.gmi.org/ow/country/nigr/owtext.html#3?2>
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Global Mapping International
<http://www.gmi.org/ow/country/afgh/owtext.html#2?1>
 Information on Afghanistan is from Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk, Operation World, August 22, 2007.

Digby Jones, “Cotton Wool Kids: Releasing the potential for children to take risks and innovate” (HTI issues paper #7; Coventry; 2007), p. 4.

Justin Martyr from Dr. David Calhoun's Class syllabus for Ancient & Medieval Church History, a class at Covenant Theological Seminary (St. Louis, MO), 1999, lecture 7.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. In what ways does Christian faithfulness require believers to see risk in different terms than their non-Christian neighbors? What limits does the Bible seem to set for being risk-averse? “Overprotecting our children,” Sir Digby Jones says in a report on education in the UK, “is bad for society, the economy and young people's preparation for adulthood in a world full of uncertainties.” How can Christian parents responsibly define “overprotection”?

2. Should Christian missionary-hostages ask their governments to negotiate their release? Being sensitive to their grief, should the Christian families of hostages make this request?

3. Where does the willingness to suffer and die for Christ and the gospel come in?

4. Christians are commanded to obey those in authority over them (Romans 13:1-7). Yet, the apostles refused to obey when commanded to cease preaching about Jesus (Acts 3-4:31). Are South Korean Christians who believe they are called to Afghanistan in a similar situation? Why or why not? If no, what possible situation would require such civil disobedience today?

5. Do we see martyrdom as noble and glorifying to God? Is a balanced biblical view of martyrdom being taught in our families? In our church? What plans should we make?

6. A 4th century hymn reads: “The apostles' glorious company / and prophets crowned with light / with all the martyrs noble host / Thy constant praise recite.” Compare these ideas with those commonly expressed in contemporary praise songs. How foreign is the category of “martyr” to contemporary Christian worship? Call to commitment? Conversation?

7. Justin Martyr's (100-165 AD) words to the Roman prefect about to execute him sounds foreign, almost heretical. “We desire nothing more than to suffer for our Lord Jesus Christ; for this gives us salvation and joyfulness before His dreadful judgment seat.” Should it, or should it not be a sentiment we share?

8. At what cost are we willing to engage the Islamic world with the gospel? Are we willing to encourage our friends, children, and grandchildren to pray about going to places like Afghanistan? Knowing that evangelizing Muslims requires diligent study, hard listening, and perseverance over many years are we faithfully befriending Muslims in meaningful long-term relationships?

COCOA KRISPIES CHRISTIANITY

God in a bowl

When told that nature reveals the glory of God, Woody Allen replied that he only saw a giant restaurant. Fair enough. If someone can't see God in the grandeur, try the granular. Rather than scraping the heavens, suggest that God can be found in a bowl of Cocoa Krispies.

Really. When I was 16, I ate seven bowls of Cocoa Krispies at summer camp one evening. If anyone had asked me why, the answer was simple. I wanted to. And that is exactly how God originally made us to live. Everyday in every way. I didn't appreciate it then, but doing what we take pleasure in is a pointer toward God.

Psalm 115:3 says, "Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever pleases him."¹ At the core of God's character is this central idea: he does whatever makes him happy. At the core of human character is this central idea: we're made in God's image.² So we do whatever makes us happy. Right here, right now. All day, everyday. Psalm 115:16 says: "The highest heavens belong to the Lord, but the earth he has given to man." Given our present limitations of finances, freedom and physical abilities, we do as we please. In the ancient "four-chapter" gospel, we're designed this way. It's Chapter One, creation.

Doing whatever we please spooks many Christians. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) said if we do something for pleasure or enjoyment, the action becomes impure. Ayn Rand interpreted Kant to mean this: "An action is moral only if one has no desire to perform it, but performs it out of a sense of duty and derives no benefit from it of any sort, neither material nor spiritual."³ Kant sounds pious, but he's actually impractical. He denies the very way we act day in and day out.

"It is a Christian duty, as you know, for everyone to be as happy as he can," wrote C. S. Lewis.⁴ Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) believed, "All men seek happiness without exception. They all aim at this goal however different the means they use to attain it. They will never make the smallest move but with this as its goal."⁵ We do what we please because God does as he pleases. Those who stifle this core characteristic

deny their humanness and holiness.

I'm walking us to the rim of the canyon so that we get a broader view. Too many well-meaning Christians subscribe to Kant and are fairly joyless souls. They remind me of H. L. Mencken's critique of Puritanism: "the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy." God made us to be happy. He made us to do what we want to do. Of course, we can drop over the edge. We have to remember, as Paul Harvey put it, the rest of the story.

If we're designed to do as we please, our default follows the same path: we sin because we like it. Remember, Moses forsook the "passing pleasures of sin."⁶ This is Chapter Two (the fall). Chapter Three (redemption) tells us what we can do: "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart."⁷ Martin Luther understood this verse to mean love God and do what you want to do. If we love the things God loves in the order that he loves them, we can pretty much do what our heart desires

as long as we keep in mind: "Your word I have treasured in my heart that I may not sin against you."⁸

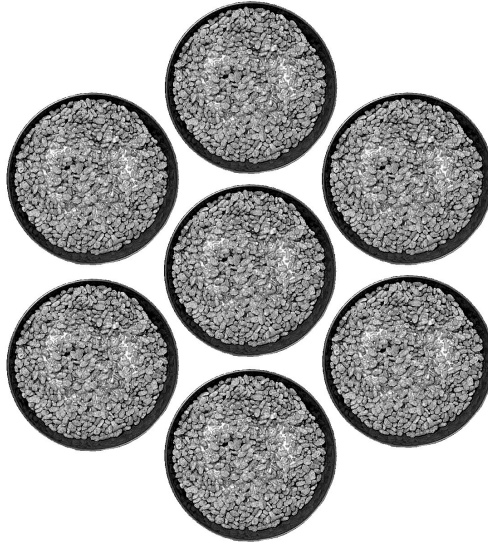
It is the destiny of those who follow God to spend eternity indulging the desires of our hearts. This is Chapter Four, when we love what God loves and do what we want to do forever. "God will let everyone into heaven who, in his considered opinion, can stand it," writes Dallas Willard.⁹

Woody Allen once asked God to give him some clear sign "like making a large deposit in my name at a Swiss bank." While an extraordinary dollop of dollars might convince many that God exists, a better case can be made pointing to the ordinary decisions we

make everyday. Like eating seven bowls of Cocoa Krispies at summer camp for the sheer pleasure of it. I wasn't too far from the way God acts and made us to live. So the next time friends object to the evidence for God in nature, invite them out for breakfast instead and watch what they select. I'll bet they'll choose what they enjoy eating.

Endnotes

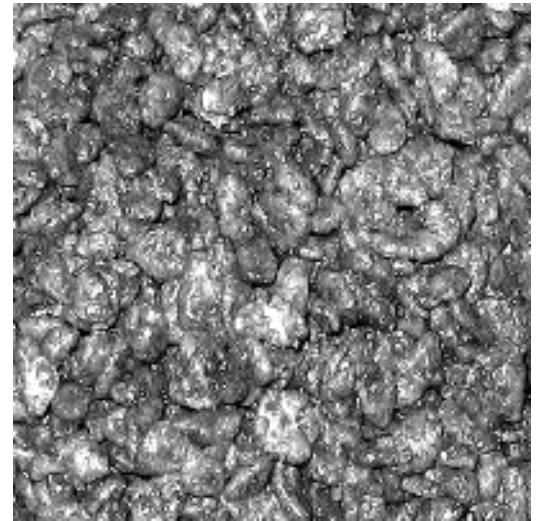
1. The same point is made in Psalm 135:6: "Whatever the Lord pleases, he does."
2. Genesis 1:26-28
3. Ayn Rand, *For the Intellectual* (New York: Signet, 1961), p.32
4. From a letter to Sheldon Vanauken in Vanauken's book, *A Severe Mercy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 189
5. Blaise Pascal, *Pascal's Pensées*, trans. by W. F. Trotter (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1958), p. 113 (thought #425)
6. "By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin" (Hebrews 11:24-25).
7. Psalm 37:4
8. Psalm 119:11
9. Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*, (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998), p.302



Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What was your first impression upon reading “Cocoa Krispies Christianity”? Why do you think you responded as you did?
2. As objectively as possible, identify every idea and/or statement in “Cocoa Krispies Christianity” that upon first reading it seemed new or questionable or wrong or something you’d have to think about for awhile.
3. Is this the impression of Christian faith that is usually heard in churches? If not, what is usually heard? Is this the impression that most postmodern non-Christians have of the Christian message? Why or why not?
4. Metzger says that “Doing whatever we please spooks many Christians.” Do you agree? Why do you think so many Christians find this idea threatening?
5. Metzger quotes C. S. Lewis saying, “It is a Christian duty, as you know, for everyone to be as happy as he can.” If you were told the quote and asked to name who said it, would you have guessed Lewis? Why or why not?
6. “We do what we please because God does as he pleases,” Metzger says. “Those who stifle this core characteristic deny their humanness and holiness.” Do you agree? Why or why not? If you disagree, what argument would you make against this claim? What biblical texts would you offer as evidence for your position?
7. Metzger quotes philosopher Dallas Willard as saying, “God will let everyone into heaven who, in his considered opinion, can stand it.” How does this change our view of heaven? What is Willard getting at? Does this make heaven more or less appealing?
8. “Too many well-meaning Christians,” Metzger says, “are fairly joyless souls.” Do you agree? Why or why not? Someone has commented that today’s evangelical churches seem to be divided into two basic, joyless groups: those which are solemn (quietly unhappy), and those which are entertained (noisily giddy). Do you think this is fair? What should true joy, true delight look like? How do you know?
9. Metzger suggest that “the next time friends object to the evidence for God in nature, invite them out for breakfast instead and watch what they select. I’ll bet they’ll choose what they enjoy eating... doing what we take pleasure in is a pointer toward God.” Do you think non-Christians will find this evidence for God convincing? Why or why not?
10. Do your non-Christian friends see you as someone who delights in the good things of life? In God? In delight? If not, why not? As someone who does what they please--and who explicitly links this with their Christian faith? If not, why not? If they did, how might their view of Christianity change?
11. How should this exercise change your life?
12. Write a letter to *Critique*’s editor in response to Metzger’s piece.

Questions written by Denis Haack



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“Cocoa Krispies Christianity” first appeared as a Clapham Commentary (September 10, 2007).

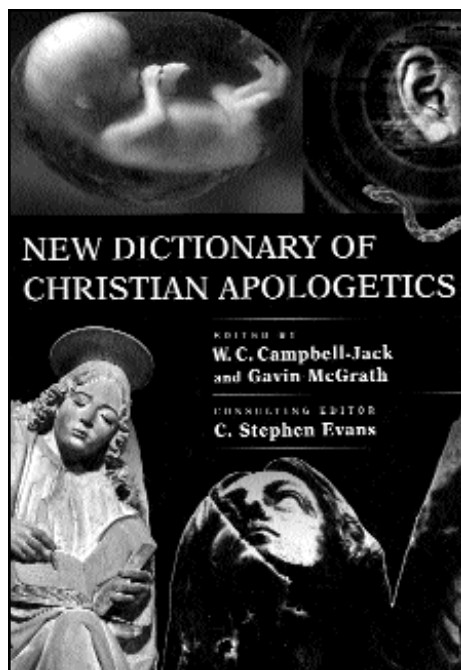
For more information or to sign up to receive free email commentaries visit their website: claphaminstitute.org

Michael W. Metzger is the President and Senior Fellow of The Clapham Institute. He is a graduate of Western Michigan University, Dallas Theological Seminary, and Trinity International University. He and his wife Kathy live in Severna Park, Maryland; they have two sons and a daughter.

The Clapham Institute

Based in Annapolis, Maryland, the Institute mentors leaders, helping people and organizations connect Sunday to Monday, to advance faith-centered cultural reform. They emphasize reframing conversations as the first step, assuming we live in a post-Christian age.

Honest Answers To Honest Questions



In every age Christians will be asked reasons for their faith. The questions change over time, and different challenges are raised in succeeding generations, so the need to listen with care and to think prayerfully is always an essential part of Christian faithfulness. "This dictionary," the editors write, "aims to provide resources for Christian apologetics in our contemporary contexts. The various articles aim not so much to provide a single 'answer' as to introduce theological, historical, philosophical, and pastoral insights which, in turn, all contribute to create an apologia."

The authors are both thoughtful scholars and Anglican ministers (McGrath also served as a L'Abri Worker). Still, the *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics* is intended not for dusty academic seminars but to equip ordinary believers to make sense of their faith and to provide substantial answers to the questions of their non-Christian neighbors. Contributors to the *New Dictionary* that readers of Critique might recognize include Wade Bradshaw, J. Budziszewski, William Edgar, John Frame, Douglas Groothuis, Dick Keyes, Jock McGregor, J. P. Moreland, J. I. Packer, and Richard Winter.

We recommend it to you.

Book Recommended

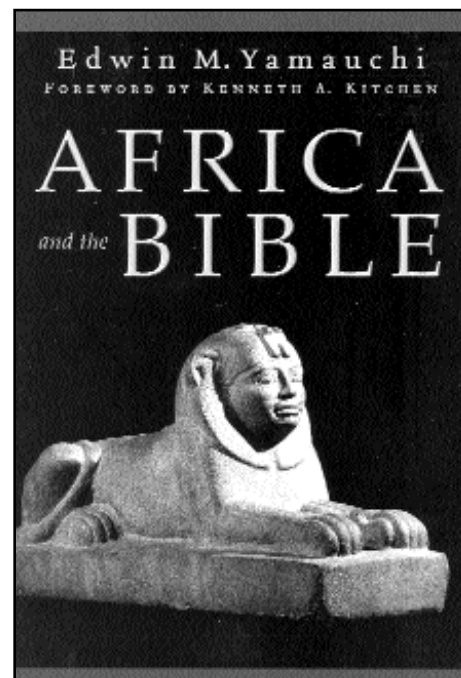
New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics edited by W. C. Campbell-Jack and Gavin McGrath (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; 2006) 763 pp. + indices.

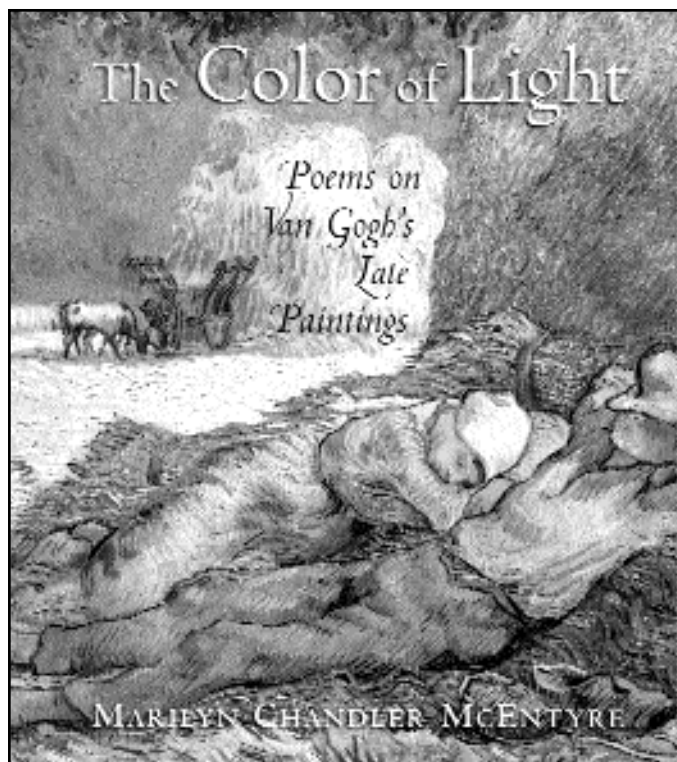
Africa and the Bible

The continent of Africa is much in the news, and much of the news from there is tragic. Though the growth of the church in Africa is astonishing, the devastation brought about through warfare, wholesale slaughter, famine, disease, corruption, and mismanagement is simply appalling. Bono is quite correct in saying Africa is a continent which should be much on the minds, consciences, and hearts of Christians. That will probably require some reading, and one book that Christians will want to include in their list is Dr Yamauchi's *Africa and the Bible*. Scholarly yet accessible, this book helps us to appreciate the relationship of Scripture and Africa from the far ancient past to the time of the Romans. In the process he corrects some common distortions (e.g. the meaning of the curse on Noah's son, Ham) and broadens our understanding (why the Ethiopian eunuch wasn't from what we think of as Ethiopia). History, archeology, and biblical study are woven together in a way that makes *Africa and the Bible* both a good read and a useful reference. Not everyone will need a copy, but having access to one is wise: get a copy for your church library.

BOOK RECOMMENDED:

Africa and the Bible by Edwin Yamauchi (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Press; 2004) 220 pp. + bibliography + notes + indices.





Colorful Artistic Expressions

Van Gogh produced some of the most expressive, gloriously colorful paintings in the history of western art. With bold brush strokes, his canvases seem to pulse with movement. In this slim volume, 20 of Van Gogh's works are reproduced (in color) accompanied by a poem by Westmont College professor Marilyn McEntyre. The result is a simple but stunningly beautiful book that rewards repeated readings. Readings when one is all alone, or even better in a quiet room with good friends, good wine, and an eagerness to have one's soul refreshed.

The poem accompanying "Noon Rest" (the painting by Van Gogh on the book's cover) has lines which reveal McEntyre has a poetic imagination informed by a biblical understanding of work and rest:

*while the brightest hour burns an arc
across its stretch of sky:
this is the body's prayer...
this is the prayer of trust:
what's left undone will wait...
All shall be well. Little depends on us.
The turning world is held and borne in love.*

The Color of Light is a wonderful gift book; be sure not to give all your copies away.

BOOK RECOMMENDED:

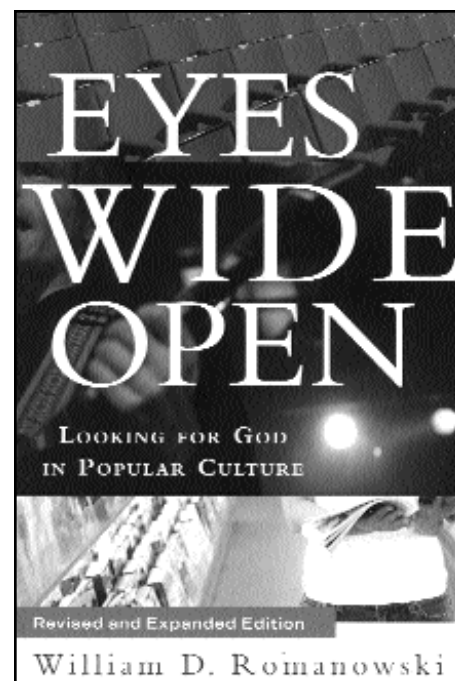
The Color of Light: Poems on Van Gogh's Late Paintings by Marilyn Chandler McEntyre (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing; 2007) 57 pp.

I Can See Clearly Now

In 2001, William Romanowski, professor of communication arts and sciences at Calvin College published a remarkable book which we heralded in these pages. Now he has released a revised and expanded version which is even better. *Eyes Wide Open: Looking for God in Popular Culture* is one of the best introductions to thinking and living Christianly in the world of popular culture. A world which Christians must not ignore, which we can not escape, and which we must engage with the gospel.

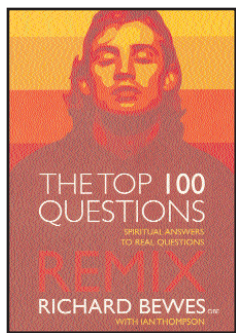
"Artists live in and find inspiration from the real world," Romanowski says. "They give us maps of reality--symbolic representations (i.e. representations) of life in sounds, stories, and images--that suggest the meaning of things. Determining meaning is a matter of perspective and interpretation. There is a close relationship, then, between the arts and life perspectives: the latter shape the former as much as if not more than the other way around."

We recommend *Eyes Wide Open* to you. Must reading, actually.



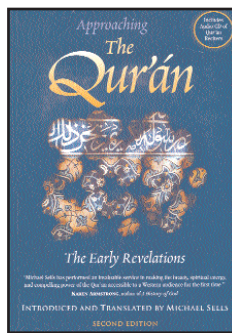
BOOK RECOMMENDED

Eyes Wide Open: Looking for God in Popular Culture (revised and expanded) by William D. Romanowski (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press; 2007) 242 pp. + index.



For 21 years Richard Bewes was Rector of All Souls Church in London; he is a pastor who has listened carefully to the questions being raised by the postmodern generation. His answers are brief, thoughtful, biblical, and expressed in language that speaks to those outside the church as well as those within. The questions are wide ranging, including: Were the Magi astrologers? Who authorized the Bible? What about atrocities in the Bible? Where is the Bible's power? Why are Christians such a pain? How is Christ coming back? This simple thoughtful book would be ideal for Sunday school classes, family devotions, or for parents to leave in the bathroom.

The Top 100 Questions REMIX: Spiritual Answers to Real Questions by Richard Bewes (Christian Focus; 2006) 217 pages.

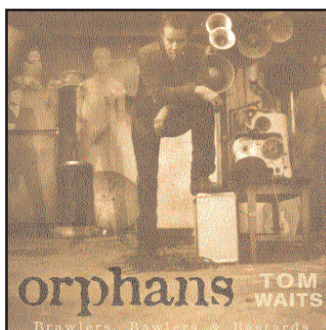


Recommended to me by a Muslim friend, this book is a thoughtful, accessible introduction to understanding the Qur'an. Sells introduces the Islamic holy book to non-Islamic readers, includes a helpful glossary of terms, and provides a commentary for a number of the essential Suras (chapters). Since Islam emphasizes the recitation of the Arabic text, the book comes with a CD of 33 tracks with a variety of famous readers reciting various Suras. Sells' goal, he says, is to try to communicate first, "some sense of that particular combination of majesty and intimacy that makes the Qur'anic voice distinctive," and second, "an appreciation of its distinctive literary character."

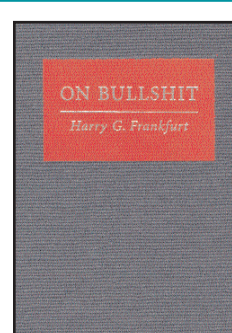
Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations introduced and translated by Michael Sells (White Cloud Press; 2007) 236 pages plus CD.



Martha is a famous chef whose sister's sudden death brings Lina, her 8-year-old niece into her orderly, solitary, efficient life. Lina is so traumatized by the tragedy she refuses to eat. Then Mario, a recently hired chef at the restaurant enters the mix, bringing with him a love of people, food, and life that becomes a rich grace for both Martha and Lina. Sometimes a film takes your breath away because it brings us into a story that is so true, so real, so deeply human that we can no longer be the same. Beauty and truth both reveal God's glory, and when they touch one another in finely crafted art the result is powerful. *Mostly Martha* is that sort of film. (106 minutes. Rated PG. German, English subtitles; 2002.)

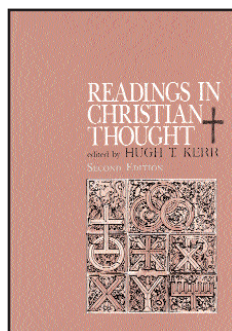


For years Tom Waits has used his distinctive gravelly voice to produce music that is intimate, earthy, and deceptively simple. He is the sort of musician you either love or hate. Waits refuses to hide from reality, so his music is as rough-edged as his sound. "As always," *Paste* says, "there is a push-and-pull between Waits' romanticism and his skepticism, between his hope that people's better instincts will prevail and all the evidence to the contrary." This 3-CD set, *Brawlers, Bawlers & Bastards*, consists of new material, divided into the three styles of his music: rocking, crooning, and weirdness. "I've hurt the ones who loved me," Waits sings, "and I'm still raising Cain. I've taken the low road and if you've done the same, meet me down there by the train."



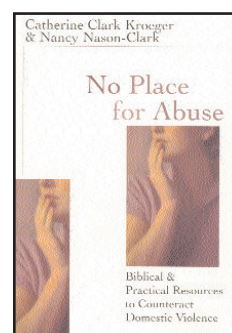
A moral philosopher (Princeton) helps us understand something that is an intimate part of our daily lives. (The book is a great conversation starter when left on a coffee table.)

On Bullshit by Harry G. Frankfurt (Princeton University Press; 2005) 67 pages.



A professor of theology presents brief introductions to and excerpts from the writings of 55 major Christian thinkers from Justin Martyr (100-165) to Martin Luther King (1929-1968).

Readings in Christian Thought edited by Hugh T. Kerr (Abingdon Press; 1966) 403 pages.



Domestic abuse is a wide-spread effect of the fall that has been largely ignored by the church, a tragedy we must not allow to continue.

No Place for Abuse: Biblical & Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence by Catherine Kroeger & Nancy Nason-Clark (InterVarsity Press; 2001) 200 pp.