

critique

A RANSOM FELLOWSHIP PUBLICATION

ISSUE THREE 2008

Emmylou Harris

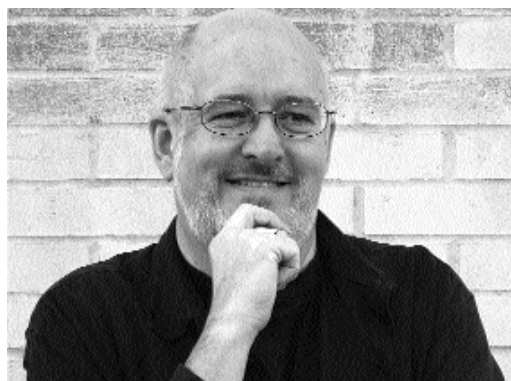
Material Boy: On Artifacts, Discernment, and Elites

Country Music, Cynicism, and Comfort Zones

A Place Of Safety - *Nanking* Documentary

Behind The Food We Eat

Helping Christians Develop Skill In Discernment



Impatience in Prayer

"Pray, v. To ask that the laws of the universe be annulled in behalf of a single petitioner confessedly unworthy." [Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary* (1911)]

God meets us unexpectedly, or so it seems to me. We were at Evensong, and I was looking forward to the homily, which was to be a reflection on a psalm of David. The order of service, however, interposed prayers of God's people before that, and I found myself wishing God's people had less to pray about.

Actually, that's not entirely accurate. I found myself wishing the prayer requests of God's people didn't include so much detail and so many tangents. Perhaps I'm the only one, but do we really need to hear your aunt's entire life story in order to pray for her hip surgery that's planned for next Wednesday? And though I'm happy to pray for your trip next weekend and agree that the story of the confiscated Swiss army knife was amusing to those members of the congregation who don't travel as much as I do, was all that detail about your flights and layovers entirely necessary?

So anyway, as the tangents and details droned on, I zoned out. I'm not proud of that, but there it is. Then we prayed--in great detail, I might add--and finally it was time for the homily.

Here's where the unexpected meeting with God comes in. After impatiently waiting for it, I didn't hear the homily. Nothing. Just as it begins, God meets me--interrupts me, actually--by letting me see how

my rabid impatience has shriveled my soul until it's like the dry cast-off skin of a molting cicada.

I know: I cannot prove this was a moment when God met me, and I know a secularist could plausibly claim to have had similar moments of self-awareness without making an appeal to divinity. All true--but not very compelling to me. Not compelling because first, I do believe God the Holy Spirit loves us enough to bother us about our lack of virtue, and because second, the moment had a distinctly personal resonance in my soul. My sense was of a Lover lifting a veil so I would face my self-righteousness, yet without walking away from me.

Then a couple weeks later, the homily was on another of David's psalms, in which these lines, spoken to God, appear:

You have kept count of my wanderings, put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book? [Psalm 56:8].

How patient is that? God not only listens and watches, he keeps track of our tangents, stores our tears, and journals our spiritual pilgrimage! The verse took my breath away. This homily I heard, and though I don't mean this in some weirdly mystical way, I swear I sensed that Lover chuckling at my wonder.

My morning prayer had read, "Give me today some clear vision of my life in time as it appears to Thy eternity. Show me my own smallness and Thy infinite greatness."

I think I might wait a bit before praying that again.

critique

ISSUE THREE 2008

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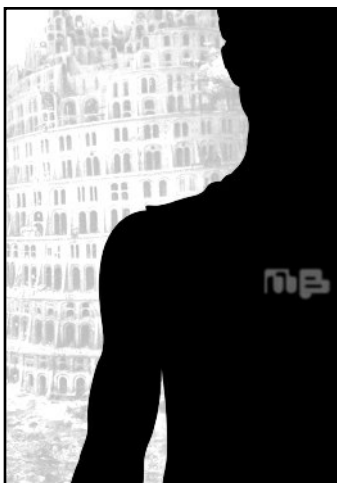


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Cynicism & Sentimentality

To the Editor:

Congratulations and thank you for the article, "Cynicism and Sentimentality" [*Critique* #1-2008]. You are right, as much as I love my cynicism and feel ordered and empowered by my sarcastic slant, they are symptoms of a failure to hope. Well done, you really made me think.

Jim Disney
Buffalo, MN

To the Editor:

I appreciated the articles by Mike Metzger [*Critique* #1-2008] and especially appreciated your thoughtful and on-target assessment of the two extremes to which humans in our postmodern world tend: cynicism and sentimentalism. Of course, the college students that I regularly see tend to the former. My self-assessment is that I may be in a small third group which is probably best known for its failures and its naiveté: the sincerely earnest--and yes, I can see that we are probably hangovers from modernity with a whiff of Victorian moralism (and a quixotic longing for Christ's Kingdom, as well).

With gratitude for *Critique*,
Bob Osburn
Minneapolis, MN

Country Music?

To the editor:

We hope this note finds you well and not too weary from travels and studies.

We look forward to the fruits of your labor in the form of *Critique* and *Notes from Toad Hall*. The fact that they don't come at regular intervals makes the day they do arrive even more exciting.

In Ransom's publications I find references to most genres of music except country. Is there a reason for that?

Best regards,
Jackie and Scott Barnes
Denver, CO.

Denis Haack responds:

Margie and I appreciate your kind words--it's the sort of encouragement that keeps us going. I'm especially grateful that you enjoy our irregular publishing schedule--because I think (as does Ransom's Board) that we need to be disciplined enough to be more regular.

Your question about country music is a good one, though my answer isn't very good: We tend to listen to other genres, and our writing reflects our listening. I did a piece on Johnny Cash a few years ago, and the Tuned In column in this issue is on Emmylou Harris.

Which, need I say, are the two country musicians I listen to...



Comfort Zones

To the Editor:

Thank you. Each time I receive *Critique* I am challenged out of my comfort zone and yet also more wonderfully aware of our God and his saving grace. I look forward to it each time it comes!

I thought of you all recently when I attended (2nd year) the D-Day Paintball event in Wyandotte, OK. Our 17 year-old son plays p-ball and was on the German team again. Our "tent neighbors" were two men, both 27. One had a double mohawk and the other a single mohawk. The single mohawk guy also had a ton of piercings, including below his lower lip and his tongue. Also sported a ton of tattoos everywhere. And he came over and introduced himself. So did the other. So we had two 27 year-old guys join my 17 year-old son and his 16 year-old friend. As the two older ones shared with me about their families, their parents, and how happy they were to see me as a MOM out here with my son ("Oh, so you home-school... that's Great! Wish I'd been home-schooled"). We talked about parents and discipline, about growing up and struggles one of them has with his mom ("Wish you were my mom, Mrs. Cheney").

I kept thinking what some of my home-school friends would think if they saw the mohawkers feasting at my table, and I chuckled. I felt Jesus very near and saying, "Look at their awesome hearts. Can you see how much I love them? Can you see they want to be with you? You are gracing them." They even wanted to accompany me to Wal-Mart to help me with my shopping.

Then I read the article about the kickboxing/fighting in the recent *Critique* ["Pushing Beyond Comfort Zones," #2-2008]. It has been exciting to see our own sons (19 and 17) walking in the culture via international sabre fencing, and meeting people I never would meet except for the grace of God.

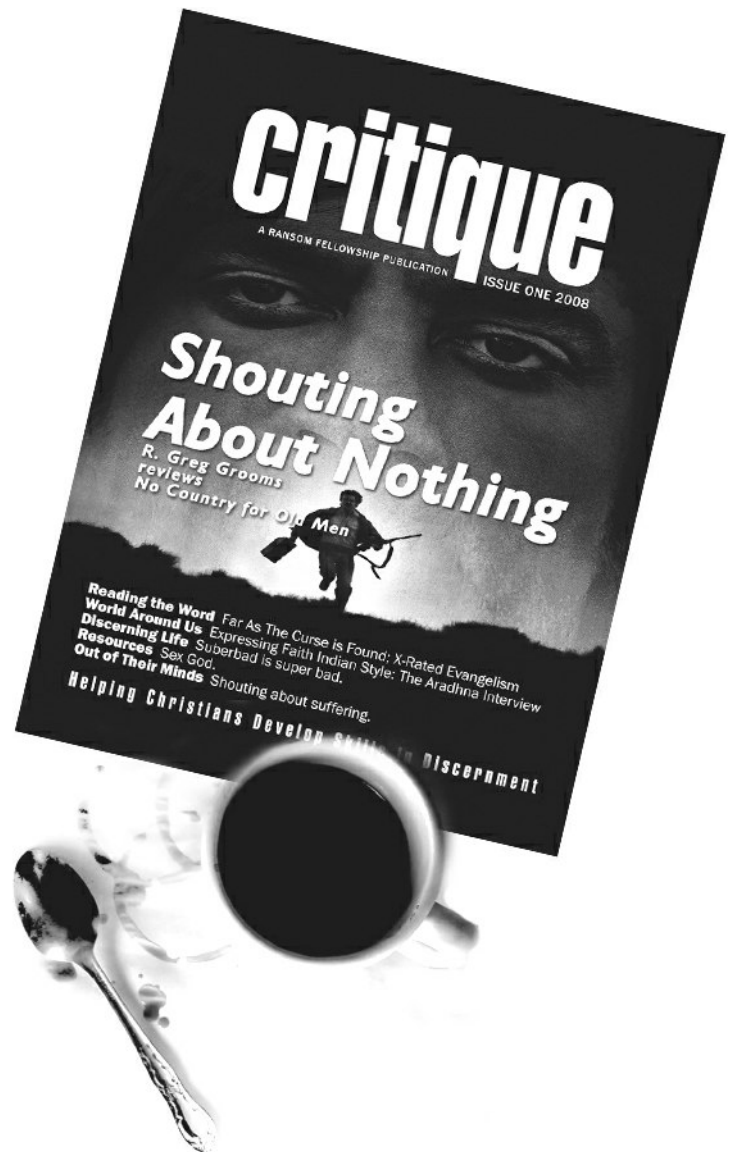
Sincerely,
Barbara Cheney
White Bluff, TN

Thanks

Dear Ones,

I love receiving *Critique*. Excuse my handwriting--I am 86 years old and my arthritis is bad. Please continue to send it to me. I read it from cover to cover, and share it too.

Thank you so much.
In Christ,
Lorraine Fleming Irons
Willow Street, PA



A change in Critique

A note from the editor:

In the past *Critique* has been published nine times each year, 16 pages per issue. As of this year, it will be published six times each year, 24 pages per issue. (That works out, if you do the math, to the same number of pages annually.)

As with all the changes we are making, let us know what you think.

As you know from your own budget, costs keep increasing. So far in 2008, income to Ransom has lagged rather substantially. We appreciate the generosity of those who give (donations to Ransom Fellowship are tax deductible), and covet your prayers--that *Critique* will be creative and stimulating, and will help readers develop discernment in our increasingly pluralistic world.

A Very Lovely, Sad Longing

John Calvin, in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, notes that God's call on our life is a deep grace--not a limitation. Rather than shut us off from numerous pursuits we'd prefer if we got our own way, God's calling provides direction and meaning in a world where almost endless possibilities can easily overwhelm us. God knows, Calvin says in classic 16th century prose, "with what great restlessness human nature flames, with what fickleness it is borne hither and thither, how its ambition longs to embrace various things at once." So, lest in our "rashness everything be turned topsy-turvy," God graces us with specific callings, so that we need "not heedlessly wander about throughout life." Somehow I've never imagined 16th century life as providing so much choice for the average person that dashing "hither and thither" would be a major problem--but I know that problem is with us very much today. Having a sense of your calling is a path to freedom, so that in a world of myriad opportunities and overwhelming needs we can have some confidence about the shape our life and vocation should take.

In the liner notes of her latest album, *All I Intended to Be*, Emmylou Harris writes that all she ever intended was to be "a singer of songs, a writer of songs, and a strummer of a few chords, in search of the truth." I'd say she's been faithful to that calling, and our lives are richer as a result. Harris has produced a legacy of music that reflects the glorious ruin of life in a fallen world, always expressing both deep sadness and poignant longing. Hers is the song that a broken Creation sings, waiting in hope for redemption.

To my ear, at least, Emmylou is an even better vocalist than songwriter, with an uncanny ability to cover songs with such conviction they seem to have been written especially for her. Now in her sixties, she has aged gracefully as a musician, continuing to explore the alt-country music deeply rooted in Americana and gospel that has always been her passion.

*We are aging soldiers in an ancient war
Seeking out some half-remembered shore
We drink our fill and still we thirst for more
Asking, "If there's no heaven, what is this hunger for?"*

*Our path is worn, our feet are poorly shod
We lift up our prayer against the odds
And fear the silence is the voice of God
And we cry Allelujah, Allelujah
We cry Allelujah*

*So there'll be no guiding light for you and me
We are not sailors lost out on the sea
We were always headed toward eternity
Hoping for a glimpse of Galilee*

*Like falling stars from the universe, we are hurled
Down through the long loneliness of the world
Until we behold the pain become the pearl
Cryin' Allelujah, Allelujah
We cry Allelujah*

["The Pearl" on *Red Dirt Girl*]

"Harris copes admirably with her changing vocal chords," music critic Jon Lusk notes, "by retreating into breathless whispers on some high notes--something of a trademark in recent years--and shows that having a great voice and being a great singer are not the same thing." Her range has narrowed a bit, but her voice remains strong and clear.

Emmylou Harris' recent recordings have been a satisfying continuation of what fans came to appreciate in her early work. *Red Dirt Girl* (2000) includes a marvelous duet with Dave Matthews ("My Antonia")--a love song so poignant it tears my heart. On the ballad, "Tragedy," Bruce Springsteen and Patti Scialfa join her to sing backup vocals. And she performs "The Pearl," a song she wrote that exhibits the grace-full balance she maintains between clear-eyed realism and an unconquerable hope in the promise of God in Christ. *Stumble into Grace* (2003) is an album entirely written (or co-written) by Emmylou Harris, and so provides a window into her the poetry of her soul. "Lost Unto This World" is a poignant cry for all the nameless little girls who across the globe are caught in the relentless pincers of injustice. And "Time in Babylon" peels back the slick self-congratulatory image of middle class America to remind us that all is not right.

All the Roadrunning (2006), with Mark Knopfler--ex-front man for Dire Straits, who wrote 10 of the 12 songs, the last two by Harris--is an album that was quietly produced as the two musicians found time in their busy schedules. Their voices blend wonderfully, both artists able to capture melancholy in song with quiet beauty. Serious Emmylou Harris fans will be interested in *Songbird: Rare Tracks & Forgotten Gems* (2007), a boxed set of 4 CDs and a DVD. Having seen her in concert last year, I find this collection, which includes a brief written reflection on each song, invaluable for appreciating her long, illustrious career in music. Her 21st studio album, *All I Intended to Be* (2008) achieves a good blend between self-penned numbers and covers, with Harris reuniting with a marvelous group of musicians to record the album.

"Harris possesses the voice of an angel." Tammy Genovese says. "She is one of the most revered song interpreters on the planet, and has been instrumental in preserving country music's past while expanding country music's horizons throughout her career." Whether in solo performance or harmonizing with fellow artists, her sound is unmistakable. There is a tender loveliness to Emmylou Harris' voice, an ability to wring pathos out of the simplest lyrics. She expresses a fragile vulnerability but never weakness, always painting musical images of the sad longing that infuses life for those who know that transcendence is not a passing dream but the final reality.

*In the land of the proud and free
You can sell your soul and your dignity
For fifteen minutes on TV
Doin' time in Babylon
Fill it up with silicone
So suck the fat, cut the bone
Everybody must get cloned
Doin' time in Babylon*

*Get results, get 'em fast
We're ready if you got the cash
Someone else will be laughin' last
Doin' time in Babylon
So put that conscience on the shelf
Keep the best stuff for yourself
Let the rest fight over what is left
Doin' time in Babylon*

["Time in Babylon"
on *Stumble into Grace*]

Sources

Jon Lusk online (June 5, 2008;
www.bbc.co.uk/music/release/8j4h/)

Country Music Association CEO
Tammy Genovese quoted online
www.pastemagazine.com/tag/emmylou_harris

I've been doing some reading on food--where it comes from and how it comes to us. In her book, *Animal Vegetable Miracle*, Barbara Kingsolver relates how she decided to grow her own food in their family garden or buy it from farmers locally. It's a great idea--and not a unique one. (See also, for example *This Organic Life: Confessions of a Suburban Homesteader*. By Joan Dye Gussow, a nutritionist, this memoir includes interesting points on establishing a new garden, tips on making compost and on growing fruits and vegetables successfully in a northern climate, and various recipes using the garden bounty.)

Kingsolver goes on to research how our food is grown, and the Big Business behind the farmers. She identifies the price we pay to get an abundance of low cost food in our grocery stores, and she outlines the consequences of bringing food here from all over the world so that we can have our favorite foods available, whether in season, or out. I won't get into her argument that transporting food thousands of miles is having an enormous affect on our environment, but I do recommend reading *Animal Vegetable Miracle*, and taking up her challenge. I share Kingsolver's concerns about the trends in our food consumption--though I didn't realize it at first.

I grew up in the midst of Southern culture, where gardening and farmers'

markets were like celebrations welcoming the arrival of summer, much as Thanksgiving and Christmas were celebrations hailing the arrival of winter. Each season brought a change in routine, temperature, and a different way to cook. My grandparents planted big gardens that produced most of their vegetables for the year, with some leftover for our family. My dad, from my earliest memory, planted at least a few tomato plants and hot peppers. So I know first hand what juice-running-down-my-mouth-still-warm-from-the-summer-sun-red-delicious-tomatoes taste like. And fresh, tender sweet corn. I know first hand the arduous job of tilling a garden and pulling weeds.

When we didn't have a big enough variety of vegetables from our garden my dad would get up early and be the first at the farmers' market. He knew the farmers by name and asked after their children and parents. Dad could enter in to the struggles of the farmer--too much rain or too little, an unexpected hailstorm--he knew what it is like to wait for vegetables to grow and mature. He would come home loaded with small bags of fresh, out-of-the-garden produce, and then would spend the day in the kitchen cooking. In all my memories of dad, that is where he was the happiest and most relaxed. Preparing good food was something that made sense to him in a deep way--resonated with him--bringing contentment and rest.

Behind The Food We Eat

My dad's familiar rhythms with all things food-related influenced my love of the culinary arts in a significant way. I absorbed the rhythm of eating and cooking seasonally, and of buying locally. So, quite honestly I've wondered at all the recent attention given to these simple ideas. I love the fresh light fare of summer, and when days start getting colder and shorter my mouth waters for braised meats and root vegetables. Even the herbs I use change with the seasons--basil, mint, and tarragon in summer; hearty rosemary in the harsh cold of winter. All this seems instinctive--thanks to my heritage.

But it is necessary to draw attention to these themes--such things are not instinctual for most people in America. So, many figures in the culinary world have raised them. Alice Waters, Darina Allen, Nigel Slater and one of my favorites, Jamie Oliver, (plus many other chefs) talk about how local food, in season, and organic when possible, is the best to bring to the table. More and more restaurants describe their offerings, identifying the grower or rancher or the waters from which the ingredients came. Chefs write their menus daily, according to what is fresh, seasonal and available. There is an international conversation in progress, and great strides are being made to change the way we, as a culture, think about food.

During my time in culinary school at Ballymaloe in County Cork, Ireland I was exposed to Darina Allen and her passion for food. She introduced us to the local fishmongers, cheese makers, butchers and farmers. They, in turn, had detailed knowledge about the environment and history of the particular item they produced. These men and women took a great deal of pride in making sure that the products that bore their name were of outstanding quality. If not, they would not sell it. One afternoon I went to the meat shop for some lamb chops.

Mr. Cuddigan was a butcher as his father, grandfather, and great grandfather had been before him. His small shop was on the edge of town and as I walked into the shop I noticed a huge chopping block where he trimmed and portioned his meats. One side of the block was so worn down that it looked like someone was making it into a bathtub--it was very old and well used. The shop was cold inside and you could see meat hanging in the back--definitely not what we are used to in America. Mr. Cuddigan had some lamb chops but he refused to sell them to me because he was not satisfied with the quality. He knew his animals, and also knew that the best thing for his reputation as a butcher was to offer top quality meat. Darina spoke passionately about having a relationship with your food producer and she gave us copious reasons. She stressed the fact that they are people who deserve our respect for their hard work and attentiveness to their craft so that they can bring to us top quality ingredients. Out of that relationship, she said, would come the benefit of having confidence in our food supply. It brings dignity into the way we live in community with the merchants where we live, shop, and work.

Another lesson at cooking school was how to appreciate the fresh produce that arrived each morning. Darina talked about the work that went into planting the seeds, weeding between the plants, checking for insects and finally harvesting the delicate produce. She insisted that we treat the lettuce with care as we washed it and tore it for our salad so it did not bruise. She taught her students to think about how things were grown, and to appreciate the people who labored to give us healthy, delicious food to eat. These lessons were eye opening to many of us who attended the school that term, as we learned to respect food, garden, cooking, and people.

In my opinion there is no better way to learn about a country than through its food. Stephen and I have had the privilege of traveling to a handful of countries during our marriage. One of our favorite things to do is to find the local markets and spend the morning seeing and smelling what each country has to offer. A few years ago we traveled to the Ukraine. On the way we spent two days in Vienna, and though the city is known for art and music, we bypassed the museums and concert halls, and went instead to the market. We tasted the food, chatting with the people who ran the stalls, learning about their culinary heritage and culture.

The markets in the Ukraine were quite different--not knowing the language, we had no words to exchange but we could show appreciation for the beautiful honey and fresh fall vegetables with smiles, nods and small purchases, connecting and celebrating. We experienced this time and again in Ireland, France, Spain and Mexico. How can you help but connect with someone if you value the fruits of their labor?

All this is great and I loved hearing about it at the cookery school. Organic food made perfect sense--food without chemicals--who could argue with that? Seasonal food--that is quite obvious. But then something struck me this week, as I started reading *Kitchen Diaries* by Nigel Slater. He says, "I have honestly never met anyone who wants to eat a slice of watermelon on a cold March evening, or a plate of asparagus in January." I disagree. Of course, he is English, so maybe things are different there. If that were true in the States though, why do the big grocery stores sell watermelon and asparagus--and all manner of other fruits and vegetables that come from all over the world--year 'round? There must be demand for them. That brings me to what struck me--maybe there are too many people who don't know what superb, in-season produce tastes like; maybe those of us who live in this great, big country don't give a thought to our food except to want it quick, easy, and cheap. So, we settle for mediocre flavor and nutrition. Maybe we need more people to write books and lay out the disturbing truth about what we have given up in order to gain the inexpensive variety that is now available in our grocery stores. Maybe we need to get to know the small family farmers in our community and hear what they have to say, and maybe we need to think about adjusting our budgets to allow for more nutritious food; to be more concerned with quality than quantity (there is another discussion we could have), and valuing individuals rather than avoiding inconveniences.

As I have pondered the people behind the food we eat, I have had another, deeper thought. The farmers have undeniable significance in the stewardship of the earth, as well as with the production of our food. Francis Schaeffer reminded us that everyone is created in the image of God--there are "no little people." Whose image is reflected in these food producers? And who is behind the amazing variety of colors, shapes, odors and tastes of food that they should be so beautiful and pleasing? He is the One who knows the things our body needs to be nourished. We don't get all the nutrients we need by eating one or two different foods--which would be boring. The two go hand-in-hand: eating is not merely about giving our bodies the chemical compounds needed to go on functioning, but also about enjoyment, and that amazes me. Think about the Designer and Creator who spent time over His world, taking pleasure in His own artistry, and I believe, in the knowledge that we would enjoy it as part of His creation. After He created it, God said it was good. So now the question is: how are we called to take care of this good world, as agents of redemption as we await His return? Some of the answer to that question involves the food we eat, how we get it, and how we prepare it. I can only hope my thoughts help you discern something of the truth of that.

Couscous Salad

with Farmer's Market Tomatoes

Ingredients

- ◆ 2/3 cup of couscous--*I use whole grain couscous*
- ◆ 1/2 teaspoon top quality olive oil--*organic if possible*
- ◆ 3/4 cup boiling water
- ◆ 1/2 cup fresh ripe tomatoes, diced 1/2" size--*organic if possible*
- ◆ 1/3 cup fresh flat leaf parsley, chopped coarsely
- ◆ sea salt and freshly ground pepper
- ◆ a glug of top quality olive oil--*organic if possible*
- ◆ 1/4 cup sliced almonds, lightly toasted

Instructions

Measure the couscous and put in a medium size ceramic bowl, add 1/2 teaspoon of olive oil, and stir with a fork until all the grains are coated. Pour in the boiling water and cover with a plate that fits over the top. Allow to set for about 5 minutes.

In another bowl mix the chopped tomatoes, salt and pepper, and the olive oil. Let set for a few minutes while you chop the parsley. Check the couscous to see if all the water has been absorbed, and fluff it with a fork. Set aside to cool. When the couscous is almost cool, add the parsley to the tomatoes, and then add the mixture to the couscous. Mix well, then cover with plastic wrap, and place in the refrigerator for an hour or so.

To serve cover the top with the toasted almonds.

Get creative--add a few chopped chives or green onions, vary the herbs depending on what you like, replace the almonds with toasted pine nuts, or add chopped fresh zucchini, top it with grilled chicken breast or better yet, grilled lamb chops. Balance is important and the highlight should be the tomatoes--even better if they come from your own backyard.

Karen Baldwin and her husband, Stephen are in the midst of launching a new season of ministry involving food and hospitality, caring for people and connecting with the community. While engaged in pastoral ministry in the US and church planting in Ireland and the US, Karen's knowledge of and fervor for food has opened doors for her to cook in local restaurants and teach cooking classes, most recently at Williams-Sonoma in North Carolina. Karen can be contacted at karenjcb@mac.com

A PLACE OF SAFETY

A Review
of the
Documentary

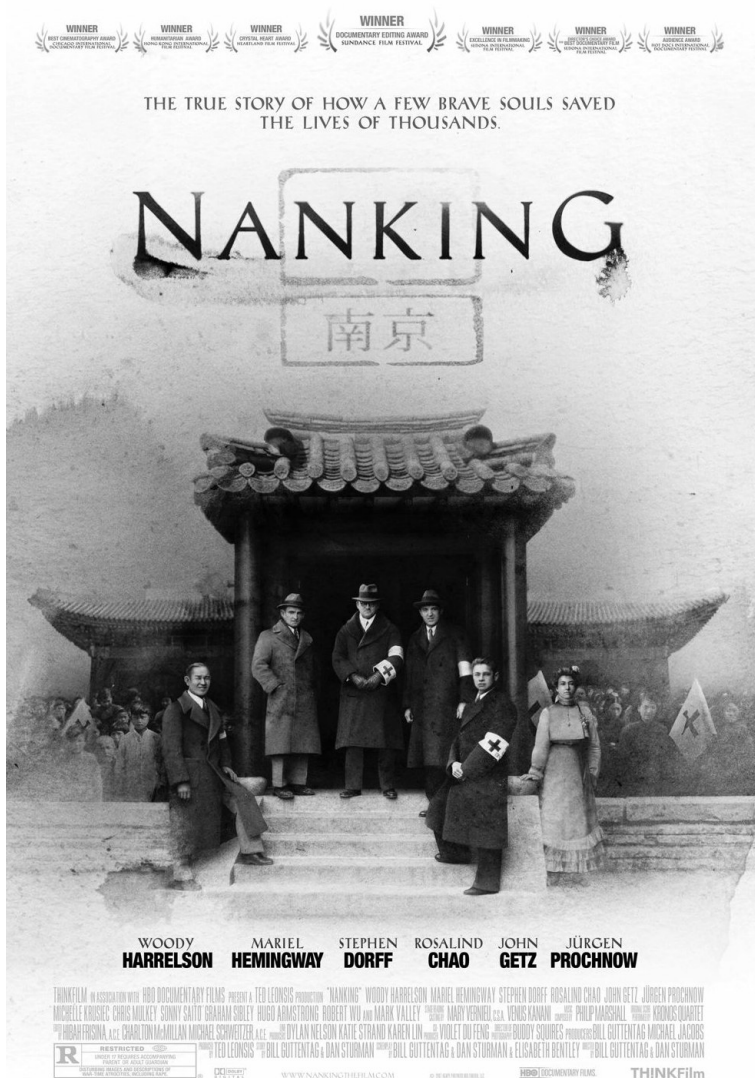
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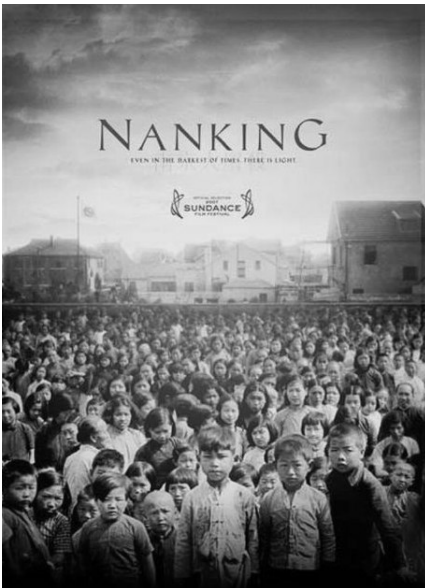
In 1937 while Hitler consolidated power in Germany, Stalin held show-trials in Moscow, and F.D.R. was sworn in for a second term as president of the United States, Japan was at war with China. In August of that year, the Japanese Imperial Army attacked the coastal city of Shanghai. Fighting was intense--the Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist) army put up such strong resistance that bloody hand-to-hand combat was required to take the city. About 190 miles NW of Shanghai was Nanking, China's capital, a prosperous center of trade with an estimated population of over 600,000. As the Japanese Army pushed towards Nanking, they launched massive, relentless aerial bombing runs that killed thousands of civilians and reduced much of the city to burning rubble. News quickly spread of atrocities being committed by the Japanese, the most infamous that of a contest among the soldiers of who could most quickly dispatch 100 Chinese with a sword.

On December 9, 1937, the Japanese Imperial Army reached Nanking, and three days later the commander of the Chinese army ordered his men to retreat. The result was chaos, with hundreds of soldiers stripping off their uniforms in an attempt to blend in among the thousands of civilians flooding into Nanking. The soldiers who did retreat burned and blew up everything they could find in a scorched earth attempt to leave nothing of value for the Japanese invaders.

A handful of Western citizens decided to remain in Nanking, declaring a Safety Zone where Chinese civilians could be sheltered from the worsening combat. The Zone leader was a German citizen John Rabe, in China as a businessman working for the Siemens Corporation. Joining him in the Zone was an American, Dr. Robert Wilson, a surgeon who soon was the only Western physician in the city trying to treat an ever-growing number of casualties. And there were also a handful of missionaries, individuals like John Magee,

Minnie Vautrin, and Lewis Smythe that are unknown to us, but who should be held in honor for their courageous, unstinting, and selfless service in a mostly forgotten corner of world history.





Nanking Credits

Starring:

Woody Harrelson (Dr. Bob Wilson)
 Mariel Hemingway (Minnie Vautrin)
 Jürgen Prochnow (John Rabe)
 John Getz (George Fitch)
 Stephen Dorff (Lewis Smythe)
 Rosalind Chao (Chang Yu Zheng)
 Chris Mulkey (Mills McCallum)
 Michelle Krusiec (Yang Shu Ling)
 Graham Sibley (Miner Searle Bates)
 Hugo Armstrong (Rev John Magee)
 Sonny Saito (Hiroshi Sakai)
 Robert Wu (Li Pu)

Directors:

Bill Guttentag & Dan Sturman

Screenplay:

Bill Guttentag, Dan Sturman, Elisabeth Bentley

Story by:

Bill Guttentag & Dan Sturman

Producers:

Ted Leonsis, Bill Guttentag,
 & Violet Du Feng

Director of Photography:

Buddy Squires

Music by:

Philip Marshall

Musical selections performed by

The Kronos Quartet

Rated R

(for disturbing images and descriptions of wartime atrocities, including rape)

On December 13, the Japanese Army entered Nanking, slaughtering hundreds of Chinese who were rushing to enter the boundaries of the Safety Zone. Although the Japanese never officially agreed to honor the Zone, their artillery did not shell it as they took the city. The rest of Nanking, however, became a scene of nonstop killing, rape, pillage, and destruction.

Japanese soldiers entered the Zone over the next few weeks, demanding the Westerners turn over to them the former Chinese soldiers hiding among the civilians. Every Chinese man who looked like he could have been a soldier was summarily executed, along with numerous boys and elderly men. The Imperial Army also demanded young women be turned over to them--thousands of Chinese woman in Nanking were gang raped, mutilated, then bayoneted and left to die in the streets.

Unarmed, cut off from the West and their own governments, unable to communicate with the outside world, the members of the Nanking International Safety Zone Committee stood their ground. Whenever Japanese soldiers entered the Zone they were closely shadowed by one of the Westerners. Repeatedly they refused to obey Japanese Army requests, placing themselves between Japanese soldiers and Chinese civilians. In the end it is estimated that they saved the lives of 250,000 men, women and children.

The documentary, *Nanking*, is their story. It consists of actual film footage taken during the invasion and destruction of Nanking interspersed with actors reading from the diaries and letters of the members of Zone Committee.



It is a horrible story to relate; I know not where to begin nor to end. Never have I heard or read of such brutality. Rape: We estimate at least 1,000 cases a night and many by day. In case of resistance or any thing that seems like disapproval there is a bayonet stab or a bullet.

[James McCallum, letter]

Nanking is not an entertaining film, though well made and utterly enthralling. It reminds us that the brokenness that plagues God's world is an evil that resides deep in the human heart. It reminds us that we prefer happy endings to the truth, but that sweeping historical injustices under the rug of forgetfulness dishonors the nameless victims who suffered. And it reminds us that true heroes do not set out to be heroic but simply chose, in the face of injustice to do what is right--and that such heroes need to be remembered and held in honor.

There probably is no crime that has not been committed in this city today. Thirty girls were taken from the language school last night, and today I have heard scores of heartbreaking stories of girls who were taken from their homes last night--one of the girls was but 12 years old... Tonight a truck passed in which there were eight or ten girls, and as it passed they called out "Jiu ming! Jiu ming!"--save our lives.

[Minnie Vautrin, diary]



NANKING TIMELINE

1931 Japanese occupy Manchuria, establish Manchukuo (puppet Japanese state)

1937

August 13 Japanese attack Shanghai
August 15 First air raid on Nanking
November 12 Shanghai falls
November 15 Chiang Kai Shek government begins leaving Nanking
November 16 Nanking International Committee for the Safety Zone conceived
November 22 Safety Zone proposal sent to the Japanese authorities, rejected weeks later
November 25 John Rabe wires Hitler for help establishing Safety Zone
December 8 Chiang Kai Shek and advisors flee city
December 10 Japanese forces wait for surrender flag at midday; none arrives.
Assault on city begins
December 14 -21 Rape, pillage, murder: first major wave of violence
December 21 Japanese military reorganized to complete "mop-up;" second major wave of violence begins

1938

Jan. 28 - Feb 3 Third major wave of violence
May Safety Zone dissolved; relief efforts continue

AFTER THE WAR

May 1946-Nov 1948 Tokyo Trials (International Military Tribunal for the Far East)
Aug 1946-Feb 1947 Nanking War Trials
November 1948 Matsui convicted by IMFTE
September 1972 Japan and China resume diplomatic relations

Source

Coco Masters from "Reevaluating the Rape of Nanking" in Time online, December 13, 2007
(www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1694101,00.html)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What emotions did you experience as you watched *Nanking*? Do you think the director unfairly manipulated viewer's emotions? Why or why not?

2. In what ways were the techniques of documentary film-making (casting of actors as readers, direction, script, music, sets, choice and editing of historical film footage, etc.) used to get the film's message(s) across, or to make the message plausible or compelling? In what ways were they ineffective or misused?

3. Were you surprised that John Rabe was sympathetic to the National Socialist Party in his native Germany? What does this suggest for people who might adhere to ideologies or beliefs that you might find incomprehensible or even reprehensible?

4. "According to Samuel Yamashita, a professor at Pomona College in the U.S.," says Coco Masters, "details of the massacre and other atrocities were swept under the rug in postwar Japan, because the U.S. needed a strong Japanese nation on their side to counterbalance the growing threat of Communist China. 'Execute a few heinous individuals and forget about everything else.' That's how Joshua Fogel, a modern Asian studies historian at York University in the U.S., describes the American response to the massacre. 'Just imagine if that had been the solution for postwar Germany rather than the Nuremberg Trials,' Fogel says." Do Christians in America have responsibility to urge the United States government make amends for this policy? Do we have responsibility to make certain nothing like this happens again? What practical steps should we consider taking as American citizens?

5. How is the heroism displayed in *Nanking* different--or similar--to that portrayed in super-hero stories?

6. Why is it important that stories like this are preserved and known by succeeding generations?

7. What lessons should we take from this story for our lives and choices today? What lessons should be applied to nations and to the prosecution of war?

8. Why did this group of Westerners take the stand they did? How might we order our lives so that if called upon by events overtaking us we would exhibit similar courage and selflessness?

9. At the conclusion of *Nanking*, we are told what happened to a number of the individuals who were a part of the Safety Zone. Were you surprised by their stories? Why or why not? Do the endings of their stories change in any way the significance of what they accomplished?

MATERIAL BOY



ON ARTIFACTS, DISCERNMENT, AND ELITES

A Review of Andy Crouch's
CULTURE MAKING: RECOVERING OUR CREATIVE CALLING

Andy Crouch's *Culture Making* is an important book written by an insightful writer. It warrants wide discussion. It is also strangely troubling. Perhaps this is by design: the sting of Socrates' gadfly. It got me irritated enough to get on a train and go visit the author in person. This review benefits greatly from our three-hour conversation.

Crouch is the editorial director of the Christian Vision Project at *Christianity Today* and sits on the editorial board of *Books & Culture*. He is a major voice in the future of the church.

Andy summarizes the core message in a recent interview:

Cultural transformation is something that a lot of Christians talk about and aspire to. We want to be a part of transforming culture. The question is, 'How is culture transformed?' Does it happen just because we think more about culture, or because we pay more attention to culture? As I was thinking about cultural transformation I became convinced that culture changes when people actually make more and better culture. If we want to transform culture, what we actually have to do is to get into the midst of the human cultural project and create some new cultural goods that reshape the way people imagine and experience their world. So culture-making answers the 'how' question rather than just 'what' we are about. We seek the transformation of every culture but how we do it is by actually making culture.

It would be hard to argue with him. Talk is cheap and thinking only the first step. Let's get after it and start being creative. As Andy puts it, we need more artists, fewer art critics. We need to stop wagging our fingers at a culture produced by others--no matter the brilliance or winsomeness of the wagging--and start getting dirt under our fingernails by being a part of the solution. This book is a clarion call to evangelicals to get busy in the process of culture making.

When I contacted Andy, I let him know that I had written a very negative review of his book--subsequently moderated by our conversation--but that I wanted to be fair in my assessment. We had never met, which is a bit of a coincidence with our overlapping interests and circle of friends. There is no substitute for face-to-face talking. Our visit reminded me that written words--



Cultural Artifacts shape the way we encounter the world.

Andy's or mine-- never fully express what we want to say. I am indebted to those who suggested that we meet; I learned a great deal from our conversation and made a new friend.

After hearing me out, Andy organized our discussion around three topics:

- 1) Culture as artifact,
- 2) The place of cultural discernment, and
- 3) The role of elites in culture making.

Culture as Artifact

Andy is critical of the Hegelian or Gnostic tendency among evangelicals, the tendency to see everything as an expression of ideas. A narrow focus on worldview often falls into this trap. Culture is more than philosophy writ large. Ideas lived are always mediated through things. It is cultural artifacts--like highway systems and iPods--that shape the way we encounter the world. Most evangelicals think nothing of the Pill and yet here is a technology that has had far reaching social implications. Few evangelicals are aware that until the 1930s all Christian traditions and Protestant denominations were uniformly against contraceptive technologies. We make culture and in turn culture makes us.

Andy's thinking is influenced by Catholic philosopher Albert Borgmann whose work explores the role of technology in modern life. Andy's essay, available on his website www.culture-makers.com, "Eating the Supper of the Lamb in a Cool Whip Society," provides a good overview of Borgmann's work. Technology changes the way we see and engage the world. Things we make, use, and consume shape our "horizons of possibility."

My concern with Andy's definition of culture is that he has made it too narrow. In leaning against the overly ideational, he has fallen off the horse on the other side, making culture too material. When I suggested that he was a cultural materialist, he acknowledged the emphasis.

Crouch quotes cultural analyst Ken Myers who states, "Culture is what we make of the world." The emphasis for Andy is on the word, *make*. For Myers, the emphasis is on the word, *world*. He is concerned that our culture making be conformed to God's creational order.

He writes, "Cultural institutions and forms are not to be arbitrarily or capriciously or willfully engineered and selected, but developed and approved in harmony, in faithful resonance with the order God has established in the cosmos. Culture is the cultivation of created nature. Healthy cultural forms are faithful to creation, and unhealthy cultural forms are the product of human desire suppressing or denying the created order." Myers never sees cultural artifacts in isolation from the stories they tell. "We cannot understand the meaning of this moment in our culture's life apart from some knowledge of the story that preceded it. Cultural phenomena are not static and frozen bundles of meaning. They carry momentum. They came from somewhere, and we can't be wise about where they are likely to be going if we are ignorant about the trajectories they are fulfilling."

Andy knows that cultural artifacts carry meaning, but his book focuses on the artifact as artifact not as a package of ideas and images. He gives us five questions to ask of any cultural artifact:

1. What does this cultural artifact assume about the way the world is?
2. What does this cultural artifact assume about the way the world should be?
3. What does this cultural artifact make possible?
4. What does this cultural artifact make impossible?
5. What new forms of culture are created in response to this artifact?

It is his second question where he intends to cover this aspect. But it is less than clear, because the question seems to conflate the function of an artifact with its culturally derived meaning.

When we make something, imagine a T-shirt, we make something to wear. But an artifact is more than its function. Most people don't buy T-shirts; they buy a certain kind of T-shirt. Products are always more than a product. A brand is a product telling a story. When we buy an Abercrombie & Fitch T-shirt, we identify with their story, not merely the threads. "Tell me what you buy and I'll tell you who you are, and who you want to be," writes James Twitchell in his book, *Lead Us Into Temptation: The Triumph of American Materialism*.

So when we make something, even a T-shirt, we do so in a larger social context of meaning. It is never value or worldview neutral--its "thingness" is suffused with an invisible "meaningfulness." It is the creation and constraint of these socially derived meaning systems that frame everything that we think, say, do, and make that we call "culture."

Culture making is a three-step process. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann write, "Society is a human product (externalization); society is an objective reality (objectification); and man is a social product (internalization)." Step One: We make our world. Step Two: The world creates and limits our horizons of possibilities. And finally Step Three: These horizons of possibilities shape our consciousness.

Generally speaking, when sociologists talk about culture and cultural production, they are normally referring to Step Three--the matrix of ideas and images as mediated by reality-defining institutions. Andy's definition of culture seems to limit the process to Step One and Two. The significance of artifacts is not merely their overt function, but their covert meaning--meanings that impinge themselves on our individual and collective consciousness. It is this matrix-like character--its ubiquitous taken-for-grantedness--that makes culture so powerful in shaping our lives.

Requirement of Discernment

If cultural artifacts from omelets to lattes are carriers of meaning ("Is this a 'heart-healthy' omelet made from range-free eggs high in Omega-3 fatty acids?" or "Does America run on Starbucks?"), then they require discernment both in their making and using. If we are to avoid the worldliness of being "squeezed into the world's mold" (*Romans* 12:2), then we must understand its contemporary contours and develop disciplines of cognitive and embodied resistance. Culture is always a mixed bag. Some of it reflects the good, true, and beautiful promoting human flourishing and some supports an idolatry of self and its inevitable deathwork. Sadly, the latter dominates our contemporary society. Craig Gay writes, "Although the temptation to worldliness is obviously not new, the extent to which modern societies provide structural and institutional support for a practically atheistic view of life is quite remarkable. Perhaps at no other time in history has the structural coherence of a social order depended less upon religion and/or theological understanding than it does today in modern societies." Ours is an unprecedented and unsustainable deathwork matrix.

Recently, I challenged a church youth group's use of video games to reach middle school boys. *New York Times* reporter Matt Richtel described how evangelical youth ministers use the notoriously realistic, violent, and wildly popular video game, Halo 3, as a way of attracting young teenage boys to hear the gospel ("*Thou Shalt Not Kill, Except in a Popular Video Game at Church*," October 7, 2007).

Because of its graphic violence, Halo 3 has an "M for mature audience" rating. One must be over 17 years old to purchase the game. But to reach young middle school boys, youth leaders are holding large multi-screen Halo 3 competitions in church basements.

Even more surprising to me was the ambivalent response of such cultural watchdogs as Focus on the Family who went ethically weak-kneed on the appropriateness of using Halo 3 for teen evangelism. "We're still trying to figure out what is our official view on it," said Lisa Anderson.

"It's just fun blowing people up," said Tim Foster, age 12, playing Halo 3 in front of the video screen provided for him at Colorado Community Church. Halo 3 composer Marty O'Donnel, a serious believer, wrote me claiming that organizing Halo 3 competitions at church was no different than organizing a game of Ultimate Frisbee. Something seemed lost in translation.

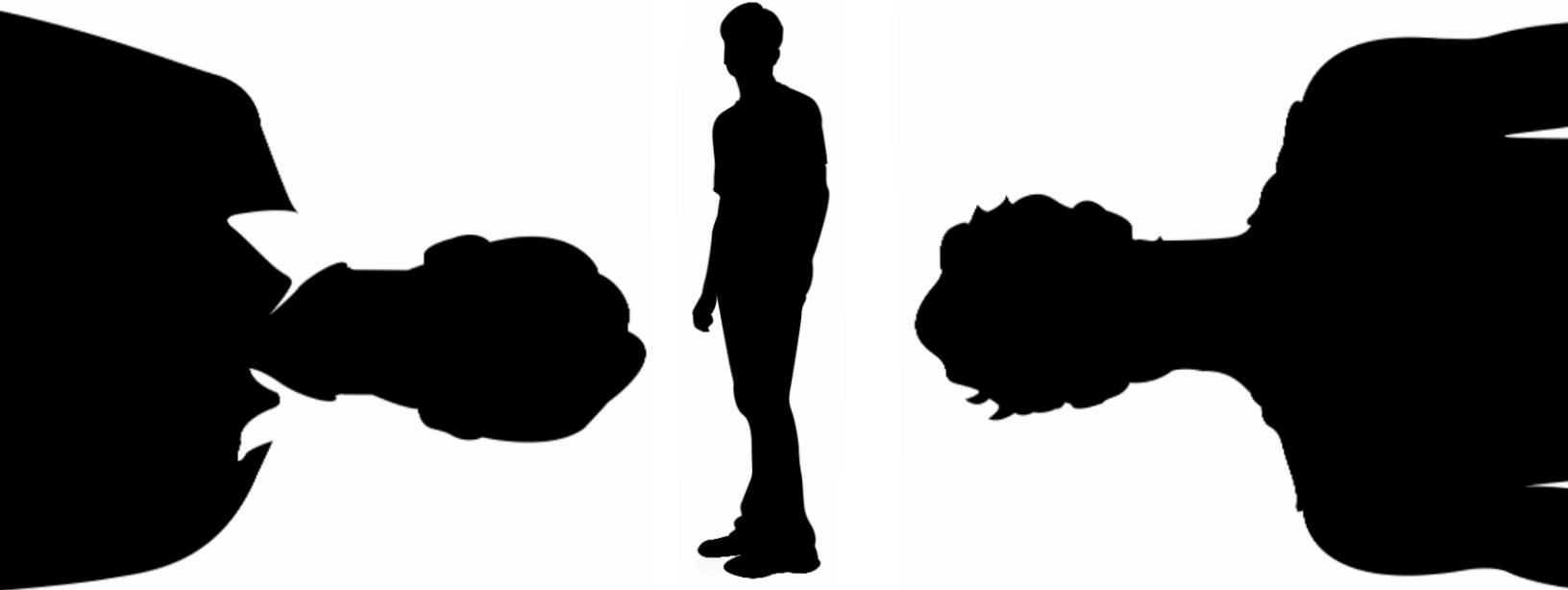
It is not just the violence involved in this particular video game that should raise concern, but the widespread tendency to blur the distinction between virtual and actual reality. Whether *Halo 3*, *Second Life*, Facebook, MySpace,



Grand Theft Auto IV, these artifacts and the attitudes they encourage, like the Pill, have enormous long-term consequences.

Likewise, Ken Myers recently commented about the dust up over Miley Cyrus' *Vanity Fair* photo. The problem is more than a sexualized pose by a family-friendly Disney icon, but as Myers points out, the overriding cult of celebrity that the Hannah Montana phenomenon promotes among young girls. To squawk about the pic is to miss the pattern.

In both cases, discernment is needed, not simply about the obvious issues of sex and violence, but about the wider cultural context in which these specific artifacts operate. Andy certainly agrees with the need for disciplined resistance to patterns of cultural idolatry. It is an evident characteristic of his family life as well as his other writing (see "Live More Musically"), but it doesn't come through as strongly in this book. Granted he wanted to make a statement about our positive role in culture making. But in criticizing those who are engaged in cultural critique, he fails to acknowledge that critique must go hand-in-hand with creativity. "Just do it" works as a slogan for Nike. It doesn't work for culture making. This is a reason why those in the business of making things must consider more than the bottom-line. Cultural discernment must be joined with cultural making.



Role of Elites

As we talked, Andy and I acknowledged a different emphasis on the first point and a general agreement on the second, though tactically underdeveloped in his book. On the third point, we acknowledged some disagreement. My suspicion is that he is biased by latent evangelical anti-institutional market populism. His suspicion is that I'm simply unbiblical, conforming to a sociological rather than a Scriptural paradigm. Neither of us would be happy with either characterization. So let's unpack the suspicions a bit further.

Andy argues that individuals make culture. It's our biblical responsibility to do so. We make culture by making things. We change culture by making new things. "Culture changes when new cultural goods, concrete, tangible artifacts, whether books or tools or buildings are introduced into the world." He claims that we cannot "change the world" because we cannot anticipate or dictate how any cultural artifact will be accepted by others. For him, cultural goods function largely according to the rules of market exchange. "Investing," he writes, "is basically a way of placing bets on which cultural goods will grow in world-changing importance." Society turns out to be merely a collection of individuals consuming a collection of cultural goods and thereby mutually influencing each other's horizons of possibilities.

Individuals Make Things + People Experience Things = Horizons of Possibilities

Here is how he describes the process:

Culture requires a public: a group of people who have been sufficiently affected by a cultural good that their horizon of possibility and impossibility have in fact been altered, and their own cultural activity has been spurred, by that good's experience.

Surprisingly, for a book entitled, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling*, Andy has a chapter entitled, "Why We Can't Change the World." "Changing the world is the one thing we cannot do," he writes. We can make things, but we cannot control the impact of the things we make on any other person and consequently on the culture at large. Consumer choice remains sacred for cultural goods cannot be forced. In effect, I can make an omelet, but I can't force it down your throat. Moreover, we can't change the world because the reach of any particular cultural good is limited and its impact unpredictable. Apparently, we have to leave such world changing to Adam Smith's "Invisible Hand."

The end of this thinking is a glaring paradox: God calls us to do what we cannot do. This should raise a question in the mind of the reader: Does God ever ask us to do what we cannot do?

So we are confronted with a paradox. Culture--making something of the world, moving the horizons of possibility and impossibility--is what human beings do and are meant to do. Transformed culture is at the heart of God's mission in the world, and it is the call of God's redeemed people. But changing the world is the one thing we cannot do. As it turns out, fully embracing this paradoxical reality is the very heart of what it means to be a Christian culture maker.

This apparent paradox stems from Andy's narrow understanding of culture as artifact. Whereas individuals make things, the meanings things carry are institutionally mediated. Artifacts are cultural only to the extent that they are carriers of ideas and images that are mediated by reality-defining institutions. The things we make are more than merely things; they are packages of carefully selected ideas and images. Dallas Willard writes, "Ideas and images are the primary focus of Satan's efforts to defeat God's purposes with and for mankind. When we are subject to his chosen ideas and images, he can take a nap or go on holiday." Herein lies the power of culture. One of the central lessons from Randall Collins' seminal book, *The Sociology of Philosophies*, is that the actor on the stage of cultural change is institutions, not individuals. So the big picture looks more like this:

Ideas

**Institutions + Images = Culture
Items**

In contrast, Andy's picture gets reduced to this:

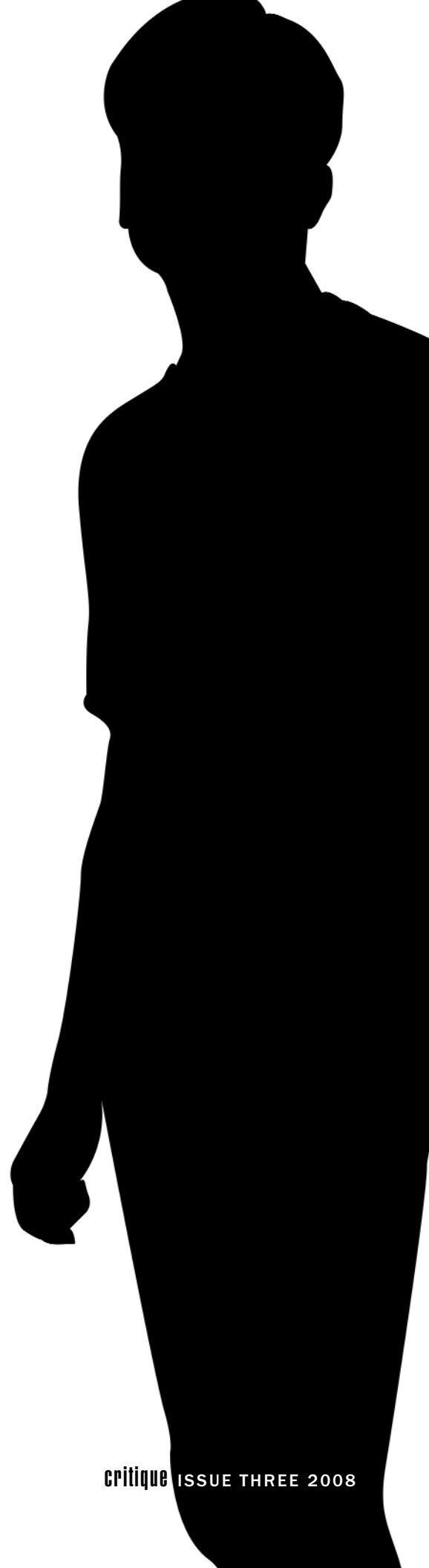
Individuals + Items = Culture

If cultural change is mediated through reality-defining institutions such as the academy, art, media, advertising, and entertainment, then those individuals who have the economic (wealth), social (networks), and cultural (intelligence) capital to serve as gatekeepers in these institutions--otherwise known as cultural elites--have a disproportionate influence in providing the meanings that are attached to this or that cultural item. They choose the stories that the cultural artifacts tell. If this is the case, then cultural change does not happen according to the rules of market exchange as Andy suggests, but on the basis of institutional access. Thus, cultural change does not happen from the bottom-up via mass markets, but top-down via gatekeeping elites. The tactical implications are enormous. For if a particular social group is not a part of the cultural gatekeeping conversation, then they are not a part of the conversation that shapes culture. Surely this is the obvious subtext to Michael Lindsay's recent book, *Faith in the Halls of Power*.

It is helpful to talk about scale. Not all of us are called to play the game on the national field. But the rules of the game are the same no matter what the scale. The basic principles for sailing a Laser are the same as sailing an America's Cup yacht. Little League plays by the same basic rules as Major League Baseball. In fact, it is only at the local level or at the smaller scale that a person can explore his or her abilities and be effectively apprenticed in becoming a winsome contributor to culture making. It is faithfulness in small places and little things that equips one to be faithful in bigger arenas and larger things. This is the lesson of Jesus' parable about the wise and faithful servant in *Matthew 24:45-51*.

Our personal role is shaped by ability, opportunity, and calling. But we'd be strategically wrong to assume that Little League is the same thing as Major League. As a teacher and coach, it is my responsibility to maximize the God-given potential of my students and athletes. To settle for anything less is to bury talent in the ground out of fear rather than investing it wisely with entrepreneurial initiative. We are spiritually accountable for our time and talents. World changing begins in our own backyards. We don't start in Darfur or Hollywood or Beijing. There is work to do, preparation required: serious study and bracing disciplines that maximize our potential. We may never play in Carnegie Hall, but every concert pianist begins by practicing the same scales as the novice. We practice with diligence and God opens the doors.

Andy is suspicious about this entire project. "Beware of world changers--they have not yet learned the true meaning of sin," he warns. There is a kind of hubris that often



aligns itself to these discussions. The subtlety of pride is manifold. But ambition is not wrong if it is zeal for the kingdom of God. One needs to be ambitious in one's calling. Ambition for self is a sin, ambition for God, a virtue. William Carey reminds us to "Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God." It is certainly true that some of the talk about cultural transformation ends up being about secondary agendas such as saving Western Civilization, America, the Republican Party, or the evangelical church. None of these things are the kingdom of God.

But to be agents of shalom in a deathwork culture, does not require being naive to the dynamics of culture. Suspicion of elites, negative rhetoric against individuals or groups with economic, cultural, and social capital, arose with the Second Great Awakening and has furthered an egalitarian envy that has marginalized the evangelical church ever since. George Steiner warns, "The egalitarian ideal seeks to domesticate excellence." Capital demands strategic stewardship, not self-righteous abdication. Poverty--absence of economic capital--is not spiritual. Dallas Willard writes, "The idealization of poverty is one of the most dangerous illusions of Christians in the contemporary world. Stewardship--which requires possession and includes giving--is the true spiritual discipline in relation to wealth." So too cultural and social capital. If evangelicals find themselves in the halls of power, then they are compelled to use their power wisely, which requires that they acquire theological and cultural discernment. And yet Andy counsels against being strategic. He writes, "The most important discipline here is to resist strategy--to avoid plotting our way into greater cultural influence." Neither the Clapham Sect in their fight against slavery nor the gay and lesbian alliance in their efforts to gain mainstream acceptance

of homosexuality followed this advice.

Andy recognizes this at some level, but wrestles with how to connect these observations to the patterns of God's actions in history--God's proclivity for the unexpected, the marginal, the small. The Incarnation, Mary, Bethlehem, twelve fishermen, two loaves and five fish all seem to stand in stark contrast. He writes, "God's intervention in human culture will be unmistakably marked by grace--it will not be the inevitable working out of the world's ways of cultural change, the logical unfolding of preexisting power and privilege. Whenever God steps into human history, the mountains will be leveled and the valleys will be raised up."

We must take seriously Paul's words in 1 *Corinthians* 1:26-29:

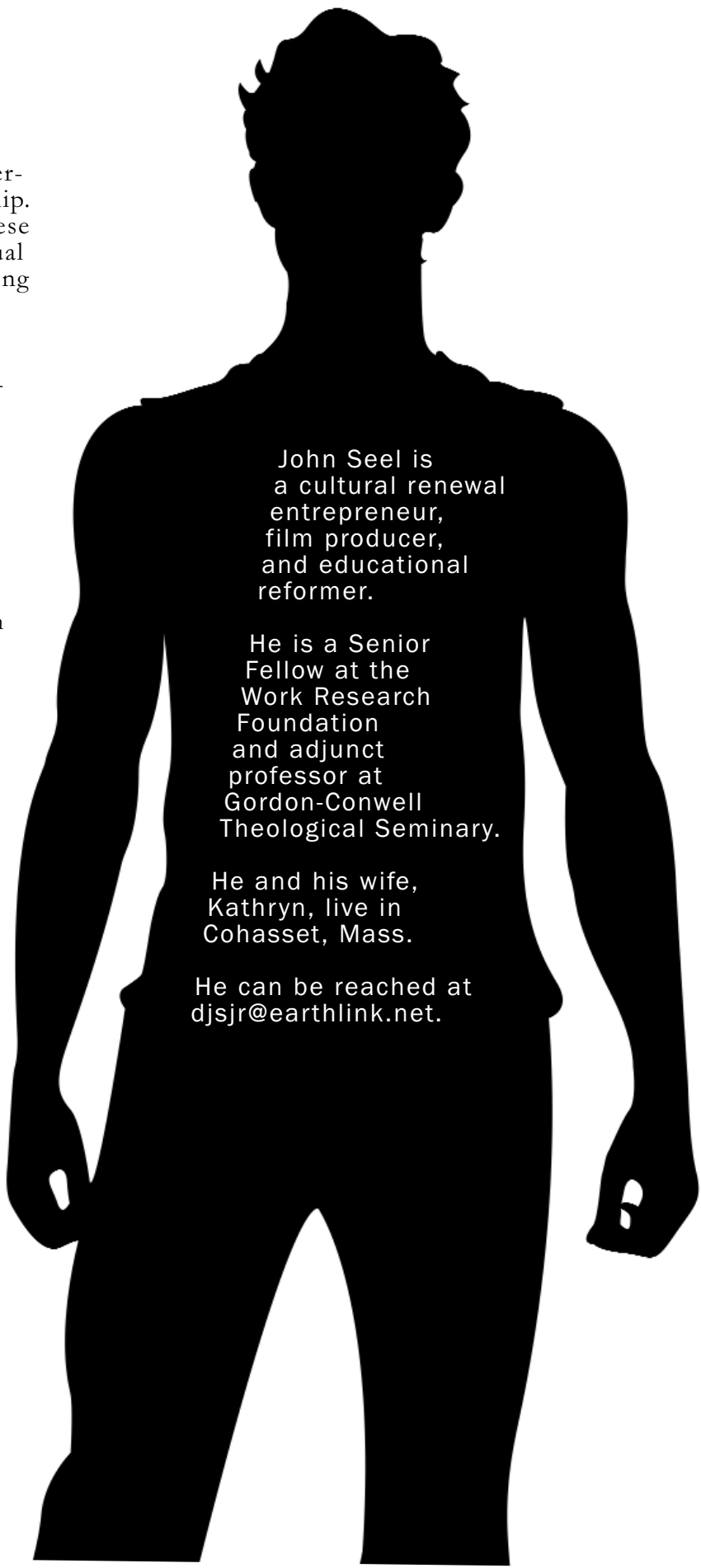
"Brothers, think of what you were and when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him." Clearly, the good news of the gospel is that its resources are available to all those who have no standing in human society. But this verse and other verses like them cannot be used to justify poverty, ignorance, or inaction. Moses was educated in the courts of

Pharaoh, but his preparation was useless to God until he was broken in the desert of Midian. At the burning bush we find a different Moses who God now calls into leadership. Evangelicals must be careful not to read these verses through the lens of an anti-intellectual egalitarian populism that justifies our growing public irrelevance.

My fear is that Andy's call to individual localism--gather a group of friends around you and make things--will only serve to further the evangelical church's proclivity for cultural cul-de-sacs. Surely this is not his intent, but it is how I fear his book will be embraced. His trumpet blast sounds more like retreat than advance.

Meanwhile, Ed Keller and Jon Berry argue in *The Influentials* that one in ten Americans are those who make society, culture and the marketplace run. While Crouch champions local populism, David Rothkopf describes in *Superclass: The Global Power Elite and the World They Are Making* how 6,000 people have the ability to regularly influence the lives of millions of people in multiple countries worldwide. While Crouch warns against being intentional about making a cultural difference, the authors of *Influencer: The Power to Change Anything* tell story after story of people who have made a huge difference in the lives of others by learning the best practices of social change. While Crouch is skeptical of strategic cultural thinking, every day we experience the foresight, savvy, and initiative of Jewish cultural creatives and gay social activists.

Among David's mighty men were the sons of Issachar who understood the times and knew what Israel should do. Not all of his men were called to this task or gifted for it, but some were. We need such men and women today. For the stakes are high and the implications lasting. The church needs the right people in the right places with the right stuff. Our task always begins wherever we are with whomever we are with. But we would be foolish not to strategically encourage those who have the gifts, opportunity, and calling to winsomely and wisely enter the institutions of cultural production. For the stories we tell soon become the lives we lead.



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