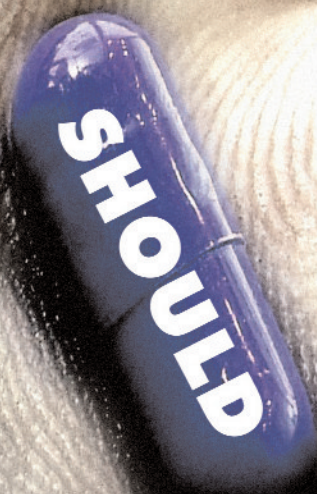


critique

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ISSUE TWO 2009





Moments Of Perfection ...Almost

Have you ever experienced this? Occasionally something occurs which seems to carry not a single flaw. Amidst all the brokenness of life an oasis appears that for the moment, at least, seems to have missed the inertia towards chaos and disappointment. Instead it hints at perfection.

It may be tiny, like a flower managing to blossom in some surprising spot, perhaps rooted in a smidgen of soil in a crack of a boulder. Delicate petals, perfect ellipses around a pale center, surround hair-like stamens colored with pollen. Or it may be as expansive as the northern lights, mysterious cosmic streaks of colored light dancing across a night sky littered with a million stars. Sometimes it can even be an evening with friends. Just the right number, sharing food and wine, or tea and coffee over conversation that ranges from the trivial to the profound, through laughter and poignancy, in an atmosphere of gracious safety. The time unfolds so naturally that no one is aware of time passing, except for a deepening sense that this is the way home is supposed to be.

Oh, I know the perfection is imperfect. That a magnifying glass will reveal some blemish in the flower, and that air and light pollution is reducing the brilliance of the aurora borealis even as we marvel at it. I know the meal is measured by my perception and that my companions might harbor memories quite different from my own. That I might have made some passing comment inadvertently reviving a painful memory secretly holed up in the heart of my friend.

But still, the moments that seem to hint at perfection are as precious as they are rare, a grace for which I seldom adequately express gratitude. Fool that I am, sometimes I even believe I can recreate them, plan for them, schedule them.

Such moments are profoundly satisfying, but the satisfaction isn't sufficient to make us feel we have arrived. Instead they trigger a deep yearning for more. As if the brokenness isn't how things were meant to be. As if the perfection we were made for isn't once-for-all static but ever-more refreshing in a pilgrimage in which there are always new ways to taste satisfaction.

In the documentary, *War Dance*, children in a sprawling Ugandan refugee camp near the front lines take part in a national music competition. All have suffered loss, their parents raped and slaughtered, and some of the children were forced to commit atrocities as kidnapped child-soldiers before escaping to the camp. And all find some measure of happiness, of quiet fulfillment, a few moments of blessed forgetfulness in the music.

We human beings are fallen, broken in a profound way that has rippled out to distort all of life, culture, and creation. I know of no one who claims to believe that everything is perfect as it is, and if I met such a person I would assume they are speaking ironically.

But I also believe that common grace is scattered across this fragmented sad world so that hints of perfection arise. Momentary and incomplete, these moments whisper of better things.

And for that, I wait.

critique

ISSUE TWO 2009

Editor

Denis Haack

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Bonnie Liefer
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Communications, Coalition for Christian
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Henry Tazelaar
Professor of Pathology,
Mayo Clinic College of Medicine

Submissions

critique considers unsolicited
manuscripts only for poetry:
submissions@ransomfellowship.org
or by mail (see below)

Correspondence

All other correspondence
and changes of address:

critique

1150 West Center
Rochester, MN 55902
info@ransomfellowship.org



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To the editor:

I can't thank you enough for running Wesley Hill's article ("A Few Like You," *Critique* #5-2008).

My wife and I have had opportunity to befriend and minister to a few in the gay community, but never to one who really committed his/her life to Jesus. We've opened up our home before to try and help fill that need for meaning and human affection. But alas, we have never been able to help enough.

This article gave me hope again. It reminded me of the need again.

We had decided that we would never open our home again because the help it gave just didn't last. This article reminded me that that isn't the point. So once again I will keep my eyes peeled for whomever God might send our way.

Again thanks. God bless.

Mike Sublett

Pastor, Hi-Land Christian Church
Pampa, Texas

To the editor:

I was so touched by Wes Hill's article (*Critique* #5-2008). Though I'm straight, I could feel what he means to be a Christian outsider. I live the life of a single, chaste, divorced Christian. Alone, occasionally lonely, mostly very grateful for a life of peace and safety. But still, I had expected to be sitting on the porch next to someone I had loved for decades.

I'm going to gently challenge my priest and

some old friends with your article, Wes. They have been so kind and supportive to me over these past years. But I wonder, as you do, if they would show the same warmth to you.

Wes, it is no consolation, but I would be glad if you were in my circle of friends, and I'd pour you a glass of wine, or brew you a cup of tea with no judgment.

Kristi (last name withheld by request)

Via email

To the editor:

My husband and I watched *There Will Be Blood* (reviewed in *Critique* #5-2008) last night. We were both so struck by the raw terror and the exposition of the human heart. Man!

Well, would you please give your assessment of the oil metaphor...

Thank you for your ministry,

Pat Walton

Oklahoma City, OK

To the editor:

Greetings. We've just returned from 9 weeks in Mexico; I love the Mexican word for "retired"--Jubilado--and wow do I jubilate! Being there restores our value system, as we see people struggling in difficult situations, yet with courage and good cheer. It is a privilege to give directly to people in need, even if it's a small amount.

Thanks for publishing "A Few Like You" (*Critique* #5-2008). I'm not gay but this issue can't be avoided today. I'm tempted to conclude that the traditional (rigid) literalist understanding of Scripture is the problem. I don't believe God made the world in 7 days, and I don't think Paul's analysis of the downward spiral of man is literal either, just as I think Paul is dead wrong when he claims "nature" teaches us that if a man has long hair, it's a shame to him. It's his particular culture that Paul was drawing on for that false universal insight. Are we ostracizing 10% of humanity on a mistaken understanding of God? I surely can't justify the evangelical response to gays on some rigid literalism!

In any case, keep asking good questions!

Dave Montague

St. Johnsbury, VT

Denis Haack responds:**Mike,**

I think I know how you feel. Sometimes it's so hard, as my spiritual mentor Francis Schaeffer was fond of saying, to keep on keeping on. To remember that Christian faithfulness is measured by God's pleasure, not by results that we can see or measure. It's all so counter-cultural, even to the reigning standards of the Christian community. Thanks for writing--the restoration of hope in this broken world is a wonderful grace.

Kristi,

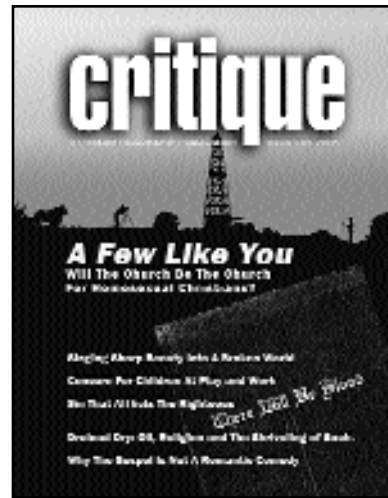
I am grateful you have found a safe Christian community. Several years ago I learned that one reason St Augustine was such a powerful witness of Christ's love in a pagan world was that he had been marginalized in life. His experience caused his heart to be tuned to those who were outside the so-called acceptable bounds of community. Since then I have wondered if in each generation God has his faithful band of marginalized believers, called to act as holy sheep dogs, alert to the strays never noticed by the religious elite.

Pat,

There Will be Blood is a very powerful film, a relentlessly honest look at the human condition in all its brokenness. You are correct, I think to see oil as a metaphor in the film. It's about oil, of course, and all that it means to modern American society, for blessing and for curse. Could it not also be about any commodity that acts idolatrously, capturing the hearts of heartless men and women who sell their souls for success? The film is really a character study in which an unholy trinity of religion, wealth, and marketing converge to undermine humanness and finally pour forth in cruelty, death, and an unsettling madness. We become what we worship.

Dave,

Glad your trip was refreshing, and glad too that you appreciated Wes' thoughtful essay. You are correct when you challenge Christians to consider not just their interpretation of Scripture but also how they go about the task of interpretation. Many approaches are indefensible both biblically



and in the light of orthodox Christian understanding over the past 2000 years of church teaching.

You are not alone in seeing Genesis 1 in terms other than a literal week of seven 24 hour days. For example, Tim Keller argues, "Genesis 1 has the earmarks of poetry and is therefore a 'song' about the wonder and meaning of God's creation. Genesis 2 is an account of how it happened... I think God guided some kind of process of natural selection, and yet I reject the concept of evolution as All-encompassing Theory." (*The Reason for God*, p. 94.) Keller's position is similar to my own, but I would also argue that neither this view nor the 7-day view is actually "literalist." Both approach the text with assumptions; the question is which set of assumptions better fit the text of Scripture.

On the other hand, I think you misread Paul's comment on "long hair" (1 Corinthians 11:14-15). The apostle's use of "nature" there is best understood as meaning the Corinthians' "natural sense" of what is appropriate. The definition of biblical inerrancy given by Millard Erickson is helpful here: "The Bible, when correctly interpreted in light of the level to which culture and the means of communication had developed at the time it was written, and in view of the purposes for which it was given, is fully truthful in all that it affirms."

I'm not certain how "literal" applies to your objection to Paul's description in Romans 1 of the process that unfolds when God's creatures suppress the truth of God. When we stop believing in God we don't believe in nothing, but in some false god whose myth and worship brings dehumanization, social fragmentation, falsehood, and ultimately death.

SHOULDs, WANTs and FAITHFULNESS

When I purchase a food item at the supermarket, I can be confident that the label will state how much riboflavin is in it. The United States government requires this, and for a good reason, which is: I have no idea. I don't even know what riboflavin is. I do know I eat a lot of it. For example, I often start the day with a hearty Kellogg's strawberry Pop-Tart, which has, according to the label, a riboflavin rating of 10 percent. I assume this means that 10 percent of the Pop-Tart is riboflavin. Maybe it's the red stuff in the middle. Anyway, I'm hoping riboflavin is a good thing; if it turns out that it's a bad thing, like 'riboflavin' is the Latin word for 'cockroach pus,' then I am definitely in trouble.

[Dave Barry]

In their *Fast Company* column Dan and Chip Heath report on some fascinating new research into the purchasing habits of consumers. That got my attention for two reasons. For one thing, we're all consumers. We can't help it. And second, though we are consumers by nature, not by choice, how we go about consuming can involve a lot of choice. Though it often doesn't.

Anyway, "Katherine Milkman, a doctoral student at Harvard Business School," the Heaths write, "has studied the way customers wrestle with two kinds of products: 'wants,' which are things they crave in the moment, and 'shoulds,' which are the things they know are good for them. For instance, Milkman studied the Australian equivalent of Netflix and found that when customers rent a 'should' film, such as *Schindler's List*, along with a 'want' film, such as *Die Hard 3*, they tend to watch (and return) the want film much faster."

The tendency apparently isn't limited to entertainment. "Milkman has found a similar pattern in the purchases of people who buy groceries online.

When people are purchasing for next-day delivery, they order many more want foods than when they're ordering for a more-distant delivery date. We are salad people in the future and Cheetos people in the moment."

The Heaths go on to suggest that Milkman's research suggests some opportunities for creative entrepreneurs.

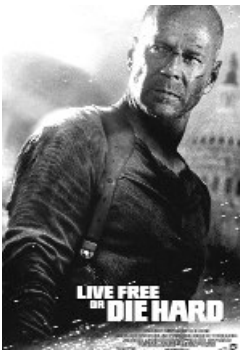
People need help saving themselves from themselves, and that presents a business opportunity. What if payroll companies offered 'contingent pay-checks,' dispersing your earnings only if you met the conditions you'd specified (e.g., taking four hours of Spanish lessons or watching *Schindler's List*)? Or imagine that someone set up a national Opt Out of Fat registry, and if you signed up, restaurants would deny your requests for nachos and grocery stores would refuse to scan your Oreos. Might people pay for that?

We admit these ideas are a bit far-fetched and perhaps likely to end in bloodshed. But Milkman has offered more practical suggestions, such as cleverly bundling wants and shoulds. For instance, exercising is a should, so what if your gym offered to receive your magazine subscriptions? That way, to read the new *Vanity Fair* (a want), you'd have to drop by the gym. Or what if Blockbuster offered you a free tub of popcorn (a want) for every documentary (a should) that you rented?

It's a compelling idea: Might the future of business lie in encouraging shoulds rather than indulging wants? Could corporations help us bring out our better selves? We hope so. But let's face it—our wants are powerful and stubborn.

All of which raises some great questions worth discussing for Christians living in a consumerist society.





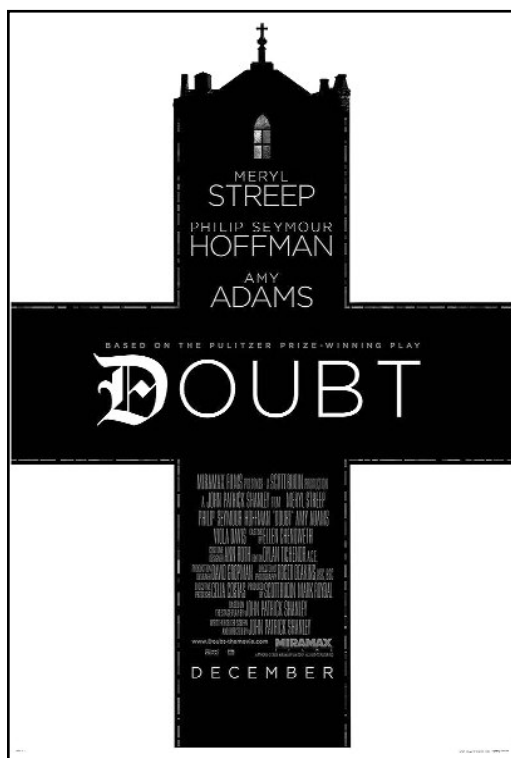
QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Take the various spheres of life in which you consume and compile a list of your top 'wants' and 'shoulds' in each category. Include such areas as groceries; entertainment; electronics; hobbies; sports; tools; appliances; gardens/lawns; interior design; furniture; automobiles; vacation; and music.
2. To what extent are your 'wants' and 'shoulds' similar to or different from the lists compiled by your friends? What does this suggest?
3. Do you believe Milkman's findings are true of you? Why or why not?
4. Discuss the various practical suggestions Milkman and the Heaths made in response to these findings. How do you respond to each?
5. Many conservatives would argue that the business suggestions made in this piece are inappropriate. A business should offer commodities or services its consumers want, not try to get involved in helping consumers determine what they should get instead. After all, as conservatives never tire of saying, private citizens know best how to spend their own money. How would you respond?
6. Many progressives would argue that it might be appropriate for government to get involved. Milkman's research proves that people often don't make wise choices, so using zoning laws to limit access to unhealthy fast food joints or to raise taxes on gasoline to decrease air pollution can produce a healthier nation. After all, as progressives never tire of saying, the smoking ban saves thousands of lives each year. How would you respond?
7. To what extent does Milkman's findings matter in the cosmic scheme of things? It could be argued that there is enough to worry about in life without adding 'wants' and 'shoulds' to the list. How would you respond?
8. How do 'wants' and 'shoulds' intersect with a biblical understanding of living faithfully as a Christian in a fallen world? What do the Scriptures say about consumption? How often is this topic thoughtfully addressed in the church?
9. At what point(s) do 'wants' become sinful or wrong? How do you know?
10. Would it be appropriate for Christians to find ways to be accountable to one another in their consumption of wants and shoulds? What must their community be like for such accountability to be biblically appropriate? How can this be kept from becoming a form of legalism or a subtly destructive 'measure' of spirituality?

SOURCES

Dave Barry online (http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Dave_Barry);

"Sell Handcuffs: Why customers will pay you to restrain them" by Dan Heath and Chip Heath in their "Made to Stick" column in *Fast Company* (April 2009) pp. 52-53.



Suspecting Clarity

A review of *Doubt* by Greg Grooms

Nothing is so firmly believed as what we least know.
—Montaigne

How do you feel about people who are certain? Do you find them attractive, admirable, encouraging? Or do you tend to suspect their character, their motives? How you answer the question may depend more on who you know than what you believe. Often the attractiveness of certainty depends on who embodies it.

In the opening scenes of his play-turned-film, *Doubt* writer/director John Patrick Shanley shows us two very different faces of certainty. Sister Aloysius Beauvier (Meryl Streep) is the very model of a fifties era conservative. "Every easy choice today will have its consequence tomorrow, mark my words," she tells us and we almost believe her. *Doubt* takes place in 1964, shortly after John Kennedy declared "all encompassing, explosive change" to be "the motif of our time." One imagines Sister Aloysius voted for Nixon. Ironically she is also a strong woman in an era in which strong women simply weren't welcome. As the principal of The St Nicholas Church School, she is lord of the fief, quick to make sure her underlings know it.

At first glance Father Brendan Flynn (Philip Seymour Hoffman) is Kennedy to Sister Aloysius' Nixon. He's young, progressive, easier to warm up to than the elderly nun, an agent of the change she hates. He uses a ballpoint pen; Sister Aloysius is wedded in principle to fountain pens only. She's "Ave Maria;" he's "Frosty, the Snowman." She's the Council of Trent; he's Vatican II.

Caught in the no man's land between these antagonists are two unsuspecting innocents: Donald Miller (Joseph Foster), a 12 year old boy and the school's first black student, and Sister James (wide-eyed Amy Adams), his 8th grade English teacher.

If you don't like movies driven by dialogue, you'll hate *Doubt*. It was made for the stage, not the screen, and its conversations are what are important, especially early conversations between Sister Aloysius and Sister James. In these dialogues the elder works the younger like a good attorney working a frightened witness, producing in her first insecurity, then suspicion, specifically the fear that Father Flynn is guilty of sexually abusing Donald Miller.

Why does Sister Aloysius suspect Father Flynn? We're never quite sure, but a few things become quite clear during the film. One is that she has no evidence to support her charges, to which she answers "But I have my certainty!" Another is that she resents the male-centered authority structure of the church. When Father Flynn attempts to bully her into silence—"You have no right to act on your own! You have taken vows, obedience being one! You answer to us! You have no right to step outside

Starring:
Meryl Streep (Sister Aloysius Beauvier)
Philip Seymour Hoffman (Father
Brendan Flynn)
Amy Adams (Sister James)
Viola Davis (Mrs. Miller)

Director:
John Patrick Shanley

Writer (screenplay & play):
John Patrick Shanley

Producers:
Celia Costas, Mark Rovbal,
Scott Rudin, Nora Skinner

Original Music:
Howard Shore

Cinematographer:
Roger Deakins

Runtime:
104 minutes

Release:
USA; 2008

MPAA Rating:
PG-13
(for thematic material)

the church!"--she is not cowed: "I will step outside the church if that's what needs to be done, till the door should shut behind me! I will do what needs to be done, though I'm damned to Hell! You should understand that, or you will mistake me."

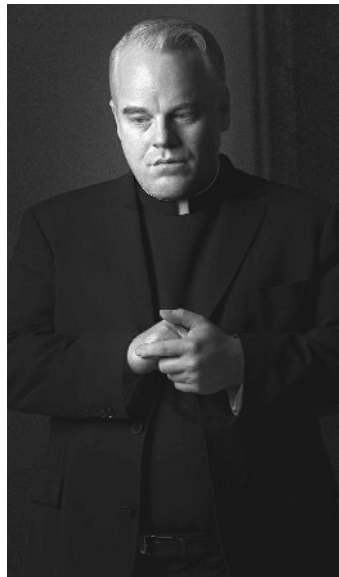
Lastly, and most important of all, we are given no definitive answer to the question of Father Flynn's guilt or innocence. But what if Sister Aloysius is right?

What the point of this parable is has been the subject of many discussions with friends. Some see it as a post-mortem on the scandals that have rocked the Roman church during the last decade, others as a post-modern fable of gender and power. John Patrick Shanley himself says it's a story of "the invasion of Iraq and the utter certainty that my government had about the weapons of mass destruction being there; and it turning out that they weren't; and how they dealt with that change in reality."

In his essay "In Defense of Certainty," Charles Krauthammer noted, "Doubt is in. Certainty is out." He concluded, "The campaign against certainty is merely the philosophical veneer for an attempt to politically marginalize and intellectually disenfranchise believers," i.e., our culture has soured on certainty because of an anti-religion bias. I agree with his analysis as far as it goes, but it doesn't go far enough. Shanley's film is the missing footnote to Krauthammer's essay: without a doubt, how and why we are certain is almost as important as what we are certain of.

SOURCE

Krauthammer in *Time* (June 1, 2005).



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What were you thinking about as this film ended?
2. Did you like any of the characters in the film? If so, did your personal feelings for this character change in the course of the story? Why?
3. Did you identify with any character in the film? If so, with whom and why? If not, why not?
4. Father Flynn said, "The truth makes for a bad sermon. It tends to be confusing and have no clear conclusion." What do you think he meant by this? Do you agree with him?
5. When Sister Aloysius shared her fears with Donald Miller's mother, she defended her decision to keep him at St Nicholas despite those fears. Do you agree with her decision? Were you surprised by her defense of her decision?
6. Sister Aloysius remarked to Sister James, "In the pursuit of wrongdoing, one steps away from God." What do you think she meant by this? Do you agree?
7. Do you think Father Flynn is guilty or innocent? Why? Would it surprise you to learn that many viewers of the film find it difficult to answer this question?
8. In the last scene of the film Sister Aloysius suddenly sobbed and told Sister James, "I have such doubts!" Why do you think she did this? Were you surprised by it?
9. *Doubt* writer/director John Patrick Shanley recently said, "We are living in an age of extreme advocacy, of confrontation, of judgment and verdict. Discussion has given way to debate. Communication has become a contest of wills. Public talking has become obnoxious and insincere. Why? It's because deep down under the chatter, we have come to a place where we don't know anything. But nobody's willing to say that." Discuss this quote.
10. What is doubt? The Scriptures (e.g. James 1:5-8) condemn doubt, but encourage questions. How are doubts different from questions?

Greg Grooms, a Contributing Editor for *Critique*, lives with his wife Mary Jane in a large home across the street from the University of Texas in Austin, where they welcome students to meals, to warm hospitality, to ask questions, and to seriously wrestle with the proposition that Jesus is actually Lord of all.



SATISFIED: A CONVERSATION ABOUT FULLNESS, SPIRITUALITY & FOOD

Karen:

I have been thinking about this idea of being *satisfied* for several months, which doesn't seem that long, now that I am in my fifties. I've mostly thought about why it takes so much to make me satisfied: Why do I eat so much before I feel full? Why do I love to shop and buy more?

There are so many things I do in excess. I have particularly been thinking about this in relation to food, which is no surprise to you who know me or have read anything I've written. I am passionate about food. Growing it, shopping for it, smelling it, cooking it and eating it. It seems it is hard for me to get enough of it.

A couple of years ago I read *Why French Women Don't Get Fat*. The author, Mireille Guiliano tells her story of loving to eat and gaining lots of extra weight eating fresh French pastries when she moved away from home. We follow her story as she loses her unwanted pounds by, first, eating leek soup for several days. She tells us she has kept weight off over the years by reducing the size of her portions, not by cutting out certain foods. She sits down to eat, and eats slowly, savoring every bite--including pieces of crusty French bread and a slice of tart. I thought, "Now there's a smart woman," But as I have tried to practice Guiliano's advice I keep circling around the idea, "Why do we think we need to eat so much to be satisfied?"

Kelsey:

It's all tied up in our brokenness. We are broken physically and emotionally as well as spiritually. As broken vessels, we never can be filled by natural means; we have a fractured experience of a likewise broken world. How can we have a more satisfying experience of this world? How do we enjoy this beauty, this artwork of the Lord's without becoming hedonistic?



Karen:

We are living in a flat just off the campus of Covenant Seminary in a big house that hosts pastors and others connected to the seminary. Sometimes we cook for the guests and sometimes just greet them when they arrive and help them to feel welcome.

Last autumn there was a group in for a conference that I cooked for during their stay. The leaves were turning and falling outside our door, mostly from the sycamore trees (the leaves are as big as dinner plates), along with other smaller brighter leaves giving contrast in both size and color. The mornings were frosty and we built a fire in the fireplace in the evenings.

I wanted the menu for the first evening to reflect the season; so off to the shops I went with my list. The grocery store where I love to shop fairly shouted that it was autumn. There was fresh apple cider with piles of apples, pumpkins of every size, greens and beets, sweet potatoes and Brussels sprouts, bins of pecans and walnuts, all of which had replaced the sights and smells of summer. With my ingredients purchased (and in my reusable environmentally friendly bags) I set off home to organize my food preparation for dinner.

My first task was to roast a couple of heads of garlic and dice the shallots for the pork loin. I pulled out my knife and went to work slicing through the top 1/4 of each head of garlic, just enough to see the fresh cloves and smell the pungent aroma they released. I put each garlic head in a ramekin (a small baking dish), coated them with olive oil and popped them in the oven. As the garlic was roasting I turned to the shallots, and then ran my fingers through the rosemary sprigs just to release their scent. I picked the fresh rosemary leaves to pile and chop. By then the garlic cloves were golden and mushy so I squeezed each one out and mixed the warm soft garlic with the diced shallots to form a paste that I rubbed all over the loin roast. Then I rolled it in the finely chopped rosemary. My hands were coated with garlic, shallots, salt and pepper and rosemary, and were cool from the uncooked pork. It all smells of good things to come. The whole day was spent moving from one set of ingredients to another with each having a feel and smell of its own. I love the sound my knife makes as I chopped 2 pound of pecans for the dessert bars. The dried fruit and port had a sweet warm smell; the Brussels sprouts and olive oil have a different smell altogether.

**Kelsey:**

There is so much to be experienced in this beautiful world that God himself pronounced, "Good." The creation can point us to our Creator, or we can elevate our physical experience to a place it was never meant to have. The root of the problem lies in our own hearts. We are "idol factories" as Calvin so aptly put it, allured by the beauty we can taste, smell, see, or touch. Focusing on our favorites, we try to "fill up our senses," but we are left with a deep craving for more. How do we have a more satisfying relationship with the Lord without overbalancing on the side of asceticism?

Karen:

At the end of the day when we sat down to dinner I was already well on my way to being full, to being satisfied. Don't misunderstand: I was ready to enjoy a meal, and I did savor every morsel. But something fulfilling, satisfying, comforting had been building in my soul as the day moved toward evening.



Karen:

Over the last several months I have asked friends what it takes to make them satisfied, and have been helped to think more broadly. Margie Haack talked about fellowship, sitting at the table with friends, Kelsey needs to see ideas come to fruition, another friend needs intimacy, and another said his heart needs to be touched in a mysterious and profound way.

Spiritual, sensual, practical, and profound--all are things that we long to have as part of our life in order to feel truly satisfied. My experiences with food and my lovely day of preparing a meal will need to be repeated over and over--I will lose the feeling of being satisfied; but I think that it was a foretaste of eternity, a foretaste of what Jesus has for us in our relationship with him.

Kelsey:

An understanding of Christ's fullness--of who we are in him, of the significance that all things acquire under his Lordship--brings deep satisfaction. The heavenly King who put on flesh and made himself accessible has both dignified our physical experience and put it in its place, silencing the dissonant voices of hedonist and ascetic alike. With our Redeemer as our ultimate reference point, the one who has brought all things to himself and who works to redeem this broken world, we can be satisfied in our work, in beauty, in Him.



RECIPE Roast Pork Loin with Fall Fruits

INGREDIENTS

4 lbs. (more or less) boneless pork loin
roast
sea salt and freshly ground pepper
1 head of garlic
olive oil
2 T finely chopped shallots
3 T finely chopped rosemary leaves
1/2 cup freshly squeezed orange juice
1/2 cup ruby port
8 oz of dried fruit (You can use a package
of mixed fruit or produce your own
using apricots, prunes, raisins,
and currents.)
1/2 cup chicken stock
1 T unsalted butter

From the kitchen of Karen Baldwin

DIRECTIONS

Cut the top 1/4 off the head of garlic to expose the flesh. Place the head in a ramekin (small baking dish) and cover with about 1 tablespoon of olive oil. Cover with foil and roast at 350° in the oven until the cloves are soft and lightly golden.

Squeeze out the soft garlic into a small bowl, and stir in the chopped shallots.

Salt and pepper the pork loin, and rub the garlic mixture on all sides and ends of the pork. Next, roll the pork in the chopped rosemary and put in a roasting pan. Place in the 350° oven and roast until the inside temperature of the roast is 145°. Remove from the pan to a warm platter and cover loosely with foil.

While the pork is roasting heat the orange juice, dried fruit, and port for about 10 minutes until the fruit is soft and the liquid is thickened. Set aside.

In the hot roasting pan pour in 1/2 cup of chicken stock to de-glaze the pan and stir to release all the crusty bits left from the roast. Cook until the stock is reduced. Add the fruit and port mixture, and stir until heated thoroughly. Turn off the heat and add a tablespoon of butter and stir until the butter has melted, then spoon around the sliced pork.

Karen Baldwin lives on edge of the campus of Covenant Theological Seminary in a flat on the ground floor of a large home used for ministry to students and pastors. Karen and her husband, Stephen, are serving the seminary community as mentors in hospitality and church planting. Karen studied culinary arts at the Ballymaloe Cookery School in Shanagarry, County Cork Ireland.

Kelsey Reed is Karen and Stephen's eldest daughter, married to Chip Reed, who is a Divinity student at Covenant Seminary. Kelsey is the mother of their two girls, four and two, the eldest of whom can, as a result of Kelsey's community gardening efforts, correctly identify basil, parsley, cilantro, rosemary, thyme and chives by sight and smell.

Understanding Scripture Correctly, Pt. II



Consider this thought experiment. You are attending a small group Bible study, and the discussion has been lively. Someone comments, "Jesus came into a broken, fallen world. The problem in this case is hunger, the need to eat, and as the Redeemer he solves the problem with a special supply of food. Won't it be great in heaven when we won't need food any more?"

Here is the thought experiment: *Is this a legitimate understanding of the text?*

My thought experiment would make more sense if I told you what text of Scripture the small group was studying. It's Mark 6:30-44. Jesus had sent the 12 apostles out on a mission to tell people the gospel of the Kingdom and to heal the sick and oppressed. Now, we pick up the narrative as Mark reports it:

³⁰ The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹ And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ³² And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. ³³ Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. ³⁴ When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. ³⁵ And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. ³⁶ Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." ³⁷ But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." And they said to him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?" ³⁸ And he said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they had found out, they said, "Five,

and two fish." ³⁹ Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. ⁴¹ And taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. ⁴² And they all ate and were satisfied. ⁴³ And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. ⁴⁴ And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.

When we read something--this Scripture or any other text, or even something outside of Scripture--we read it through some lens, some perspective that shapes our understanding. No one comes to any text as an infinitely neutral observer. It's impossible. We have been formed by our ideas, background, culture and experiences even if some or much of it is subconscious. Since that is the case, we would be wise to intentionally adopt a lens that fits with our world and life view. For Christians that will mean a lens that is itself shaped by God's word.

When I read the Scriptures I don't particularly want to be creative when I analyze or interpret what I read. I want to be orthodox, correctly understanding the meaning of the text. There is plenty of room for creativity when it comes to responding to the text, applying the truth of God's word to my life, world, and culture.

The lens I wish to commend here is the biblical story of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration (C, F, R & R). This four-part lens provides a perspective formed by God's revelation of himself in Scripture, the written word and in Christ, the living word. It's an approach to understanding Scripture that grows as we study so that the more we know the Bible, the better able we are to understand each section as part of one whole.



You have probably guessed that I think the person's comment about hunger is not an orthodox understanding of this text. You are correct. There is a problem in the story that Mark records, but it's not hunger. (More on that in a moment.)

Examining the Lens

There are several reasons why it makes sense to use C, F, R & R as a perspective to guide our understanding of Scripture.

First, it is biblical. We are not bringing something foreign in from the outside, but allowing the Story of Scripture to interpret Scripture.

Second, it is natural. If I don't understand a comment you have made, it's only natural to ask you what you meant. Or I can take what else you've said and allow it to make sense of your latest comment. I may still have trouble understanding you, but at least no one would argue I'm going about things wrongly.

Third, it is historical. Reading each part of the Bible in light of the whole is not a new idea, but one that resonates in the teaching of orthodox Christian belief and practice over the past 2000 years.

And finally, it is substantive. By that I mean it helps us get the heart of the biblical message, to the real content of God's revelation. It doesn't just skim the surface.

More specifically, the hermeneutic or interpretive lens of C, F, R & R provides us with two helpful and interconnected avenues for understanding the text of Scripture.

First, it provides us with a world & life view that is both profoundly satisfying and fully holistic. C, F, R & R is the Story as it unfolds from Genesis to Revelation. All of history, reality, culture, and life fit in this Story because it is God's

Story, the Story of how he is bringing all things to their appointed end in Christ.

Each of the four chapters or parts answer key questions that every worldview or truth claim or belief system (philosophical or religious) must address.

Creation: Where are we? Where did we come from? Who are we? What is the nature of the world, life, history, and reality? Is there a God? If so, what is this God like?

Fall: What is wrong? How did it come about? How is it manifested? Can we solve it by ourselves? Can we know right and wrong, truth and error? How can we know we know?

Redemption: What is the way out of the problem we face? Has humankind found a solution? Has God provided a solution? How extensive is the solution? How is the solution made available to us?

Restoration: How will the Story end? Is there meaning to human history? Is there significance to our individual lives? What happens at death? In the end will there be true justice and a fulfillment of our deepest yearnings?

The second avenue for understanding comes because C, F, R & R is Christ-focused. This allows us to read each text as revealing something, explicitly or implicitly, of Christ who as Prophet, Priest and King is the central focus of the entire biblical Story.

Creation: How does the text reveal, implicitly or explicitly, Jesus as Creator, Sustainer, Word (Prophet), and Wisdom of God?

Fall: How does the text reveal, implicitly or explicitly, Jesus as Judge?

Redemption: How does the text reveal, implicitly or explicitly, Jesus as Savior, Lord of all, and High Priest?



Restoration: How does the text reveal, implicitly or explicitly, Jesus as King?

This Christ-focused approach is vitally important because Christ taught his followers to see all of Scripture as revealing him (see Luke 24:27). The stories found in the Bible are not given to us so we can extract "morals" from them, as with Aesop's Fables, but to show us Christ. The point of Daniel 6 (Daniel in the lion's den) is not "to be courageous like Daniel," but that Daniel's God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is sovereign over all, over the ruler of the entire known world, over his followers, and over all creation (even lions).

So, C, F, R & R provides us with a series of questions we can bring to each text of Scripture as a guide to understand its meaning.

The Problem of Food

Now we can return to the small group discussion about Jesus' feeding the crowd of 5000 people. When we look at this story recorded by Mark, we can use the lens of C, F, R & R.

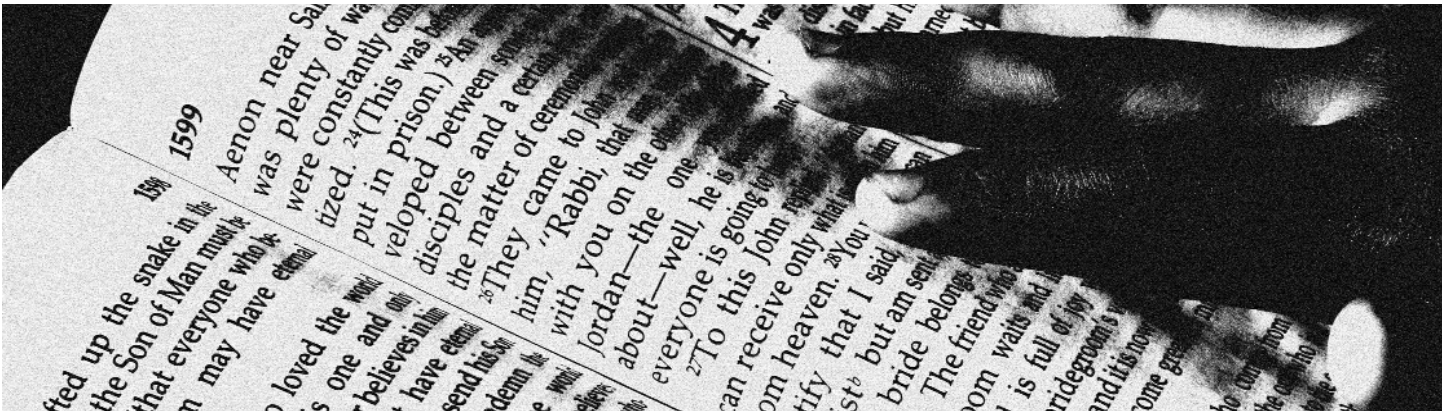
The story of Creation tells us that God created us as finite creatures. That means we are not, like God, self-sufficient. One way that manifests itself is in the need to eat. So, it is not surprising to discover that food was introduced in the Creation. (See, for example, Genesis 1:29-30 and 2:9, 15-16.) The need for food, in other words is not a result of the Fall, but a result of God's grace to us. This is why we find food and eating in the Restoration as well. The great hope we are

given for the return of the King and the consummation of his Kingdom involves feasting with him. We will continue to be finite for all eternity, need food, and have the delight of the culinary arts forever. (See, for example, Revelation 19:9.)

Hunger, as in the need for food, is not bad in itself, not a problem produced by the Fall. It comes from our finiteness, which God called "Good" in the Creation narrative. Still, the Fall perverts everything, even the good gifts of God. Needing food is part of being human, while the inequitable and inadequate distribution of food is one horrible result of the brokenness we suffer. This too is reflected in the Scriptures (see, for example, Isaiah 5:13-14 and 49:9-10).

So, in our reflection on the text in Mark 6:30-44, I would say the primary tension in the text is not the hunger of the people in the crowd. The primary tension or problem is in the response of the disciples to the Lord's challenge to feed them.

The crowd had been with Jesus all day, and needed to eat, just as the disciples had been tired and hungry after finishing the mission Jesus had assigned them. First the disciples suggest sending the people away to fend for themselves, an idea Jesus vetoes. After all, Jesus had chosen the spot because it was desolate, away from towns (though not, as it turned out, from crowds). Then the disciples ask whether Jesus expects them to go spend "200 denarii" for supplies. That is an exceedingly cynical question. 200 denarii is the equivalent of 7-8 months wages for the average working man in that day, a ridiculous amount of money to which the disciples had no access.



It could be the disciples were still weary, first from their mission and now after a long day listening to Jesus teach. They probably had rather low blood-sugar levels. And they may have been disappointed that their day away in a quiet place alone with Jesus had not only been interrupted by a crowd, but by a crowd of strangers they now needed to feed. If so, I can understand why they responded to Jesus as they did. "Feed them? You've got to be kidding. Oh, I know, let's just go spend \$30 grand and make a picnic! Great idea."

That is the primary tension or problem in the text. Not that the crowd was hungry, but that the disciples responded inappropriately to their Lord. They could have asked, simply, "What would you have us do, Lord? Command and we'll obey." But instead they were, as my grandchildren would put it, snotty to Jesus. They should have bowed. The mission Jesus equipped them for should have told them this was not an ordinary Rabbi. Jesus is revealed as Lord of all.

Eugene Peterson captures the narrative well in *The Message*:

The apostles then rendezvoused with Jesus and reported on all that they had done and taught. Jesus said, "Come off by yourselves; let's take a break and get a little rest." For there was constant coming and going. They didn't even have time to eat.

So they got in the boat and went off to a remote place by themselves. Someone saw them going and the word got around. From the surrounding towns people went out on foot, running, and got there ahead of them. When Jesus arrived, he saw this huge crowd. At the sight of them, his heart broke-like sheep with no shepherd they were. He went right to work teaching them.

When his disciples thought this had gone on long enough--it was now quite late in the day--they interrupted: "We are a long

way out in the country, and it's very late. Pronounce a benediction and send these folks off so they can get some supper."

Jesus said, "You do it. Fix supper for them."

They replied, "Are you serious? You want us to go spend a fortune on food for their supper?"

But he was quite serious. "How many loaves of bread do you have? Take an inventory."

That didn't take long. "Five," they said, "plus two fish."

Jesus got them all to sit down in groups of fifty or a hundred--they looked like a patchwork quilt of wildflowers spread out on the green grass! He took the five loaves and two fish, lifted his face to heaven in prayer, blessed, broke, and gave the bread to the disciples, and the disciples in turn gave it to the people. He did the same with the fish. They all ate their fill. The disciples gathered twelve baskets of leftovers. More than five thousand were at the supper.

In this text Christ reveals himself as Lord, providing a foretaste of the feast he will enjoy with his people in the coming Kingdom. He reveals himself as Lord, able to provide the grace needed for the obedience of his followers. And though he is able to meet all needs by himself, he chooses to work through the resources of his disciples. That is indeed, grace.

C, F, R & R dismembered

One of the problems the church faces in the 21st century is that too few Christians are conversant in the 4-part Story of Scripture. In fact, since the Enlightenment, two sections of the church have reduced the four-fold Story of C, F, R & R so that attention is paid to only two of the four chapters. In doing so, they have dismembered the gospel, reducing it to something far less than what the Bible proclaims.



The first reduction of the gospel involves concentrating just on the first and last chapters, Creation and Restoration. The attraction of this is that it skips the messy parts, like the idea that God's Son had to die in our place to appease the Father's anger, or that God is angry to begin with. Things like hell can be skipped, along with sin and judgment, so somehow the gospel seems more attractive. Although this reduction tends to be found primarily among those known as "theological liberals," it is the de facto position of many evangelicals who want desperately to be accepted and seen as relevant in a post-Christian pluralistic world. The problem, of course, is that C & R is not in itself the biblical gospel, has nothing distinctly Christian to say to a broken and suffering world, and ultimately provides no hope.

The other reduction of the gospel involves concentrating on the second and third chapters of The Story, Fall and Redemption. The attraction of this is that it concentrates on the primary issue, which is personal salvation. After all, why worry about trivia like vocation or politics or culture when souls are about to go to hell? Ignore all that and win souls, tell them a memorized, simplified outline of F & R and your Christian task is complete. Everything else is secondary, a distraction to this primary task. Although this reduction tends to be found primarily among those known as "fundamentalists," it is the de facto position of many evangelicals concerned to evangelize. The problem, of course, is that F & R is not in itself the biblical gospel, is ultimately dehumanizing, and proposes a solution to a problem that makes no sense.

The Christian gospel is the biblical Story, which is a 4-stanza drama of Creation, Fall,

Redemption & Restoration. All four chapters are essential; none are optional or expendable. If you are a Christian, embrace them all and rejoice in grace. If you are a non-Christian, please consider the claims this Story makes. Charlie Drew, pastor of Emmanuel Presbyterian Church (Manhattan), sums it up this way:

The promise of redemption is that, through the Messiah Jesus, God has worked, is at work, and will work to reverse everything that has gone wrong with life as a result of Adam's fall. When we sing at Christmas, "He comes to make his blessings flow / Far as the curse is found," we celebrate this great hope. The arts, the environment, worship, human relations at every level—all of these things are being renewed by the risen King. Certainly there is a future dimension to that renewal for which we must wait. But we must remember that Jesus has already sent his Spirit into the church, making us, even now, agents of all the good things that are to come. The believer who is content simply to improve his prayer life, and who otherwise waits passively for Jesus to come again and fix things, quenches the Spirit.

C, F, R & R is also a potent and practical lens through which to understand the Scriptures, a biblical hermeneutic which helps us interpret God's word correctly. We commend it to you.

SOURCE Charlie Drew Online, <http://www.westminsterbookstore.com/?p=99>

Christ, Cash and Contention

A review of *Johnny Cash and the Great American Contradiction: Christianity and the Battle for the Soul of a Nation* by Rodney Clapp

What do country music legend Johnny Cash, Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth, and George W. Bush have in common? By most reasonable estimates, little more than their common humanity. But here's another answer: They all feature prominently in Rodney Clapp's book *Johnny Cash and the Great American Contradiction: Christianity and the Battle for the Soul of a Nation*, a creative exploration of the tensions and ironies in the project called "America" through the lens of Cash's life and music.

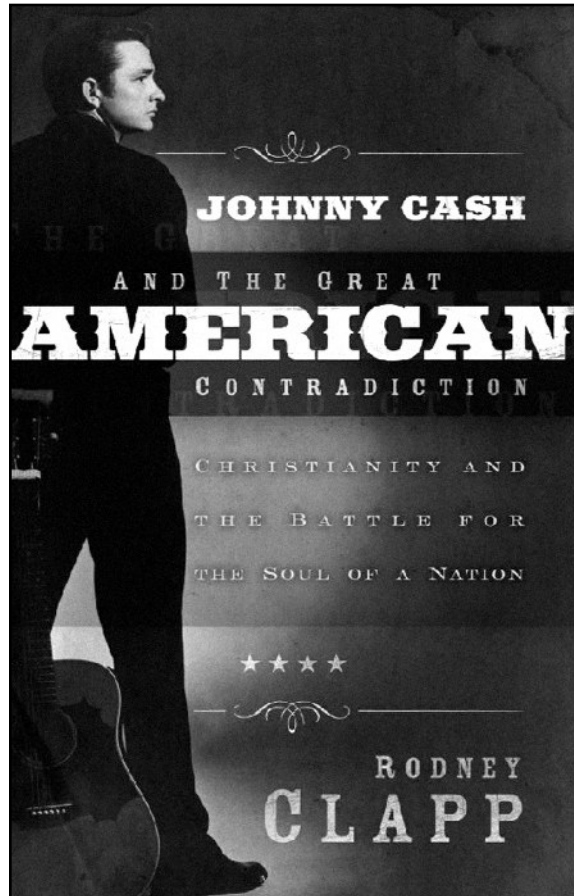
Clapp is currently the editorial director of Brazos Press, an imprint of the Baker Publishing Group. He has written extensively for *Christianity Today* and *The Christian Century* alike (being one of the few to traverse that divide!), as well as authored numerous books (most recently: *Tortured Wonders: Christian Spirituality for People, Not Angels* [2006] and *Border Crossings: Christian Trespasses on Popular Culture and Public Affairs* [2000]). Taking cues from a diverse cadre of Christian thinkers and writers including Henri Nouwen as well as Stanley Hauerwas,

Flannery O'Connor and Oliver O'Donovan, Clapp has contended over the years that the Christian Church must be a "peculiar people," refusing the choice between the politics of the "right" or the "left," embodying instead an alternative way of being human in the world--one that contradicts the world's own possibilities in a manner both hopeful and challenging. Johnny Cash gives Clapp

his latest platform to rearticulate his hopes for the Church.

Cash was a man of contradictions. Southern through and through, yet possessing a nationwide appeal; a tough-talkin', hard-drinkin', steely-jawed man's man who wouldn't bat an eye at giving you the finger, yet a practicing Christian who sang at Billy Graham evangelistic crusades and read his Bible and went to church--Cash was a kind of walking microcosm of the unique contradictions of America as a whole. If we can understand how such extremes coexisted in the life and music of one man, Clapp suggests, we might better understand how they coexist in our culture--and what that might entail for our struggle to live faithfully according to the gospel.

What does it mean to be both American and Christian, both patriotic yet ultimately devoted to the kingdom of God? "Christians, precisely as Christians, have something to say to and about America," Clapp contends. Johnny Cash understood something of the difficulties of that contention, and we can still learn much from him as we live with those difficulties ourselves.



BOOK REVIEWED: *Johnny Cash and the Great American Contradiction: Christianity and the Battle for the Soul of a Nation* by Rodney Clapp (Louisville, KY; Westminster/John Knox) 159 pages.

Wesley Hill is a graduate of Wheaton College (B.A.) and the University of Durham, U.K. (M.A.), where he will soon return to pursue a doctorate. His interests include hiking, camping, coffee, novels, unhurried conversation with good friends, and lived theology. He is currently at work on a book on Christianity and homosexuality.

Lumière v. Méliès: Cinematic Dichotomy

Cinema is about sharing not only *what* we see, but *how* we see it. For some directors of cinema the goal is re-presentation or documentation of reality presented before them; for others, reality is recast in light and shadow as a cinematic parable or fantasy. The “reality” and the “fantasy” each imbue their own unique conveyance of truth. Can there be true “truth” in cinema? That quest dates back to the inception of the film medium.



In the late 1800s, French film pioneers Auguste and Louis Lumière set out to document the marvels of the world with their film camera.

It's hard for us to believe--as our eyes have long been trained--but when the Lumières first projected the image of a train arriving at a station, it is said that the audience leapt from their seats and fled the building in fear. For the Lumière brothers the goal was to present snapshots of daily life--“realities”--which included films of workers leaving a factory, a couple and their baby eating, a gardener watering his flowers.

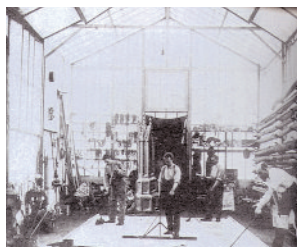


“In art we are once again able to do all the things we have forgotten...walk on water...speak to angels...move unfettered among the stars.”
--Madeline L'Engle (*Walking on Water*)

And then there was Méliès (1861-1938), the magician, casting child-like visions and fantastical journeys (inspired by Jules Verne) onto the screen. Méliès worked almost entirely in the studio. He was the first in the history of the film medium to contrive elaborate special effects and bring into play elaborate sets that were supposed to simulate

the surface of the moon or North Pole (complete with giant snow monster).

The tension created between these two approaches is known as the “Lumière/Méliès Dichotomy”. The lines between the two are often blurred today as filmmakers create “fantasies” so convincing as to be reality; or they document “realities” which are so bizarre that we would prefer them to be fantasies. There are many talented directors whose unique way of seeing and sharing their vision force us to re-train, if you will, our eyes how to see. Some of these talents are featured to the right.

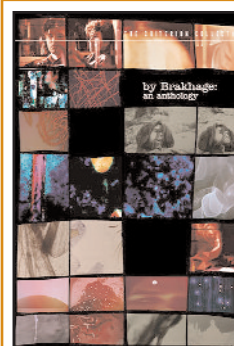


Lumière

- Focus = Actual
- Shot on location
- Document events
- Camera role = witness real event
- Truth = Surface

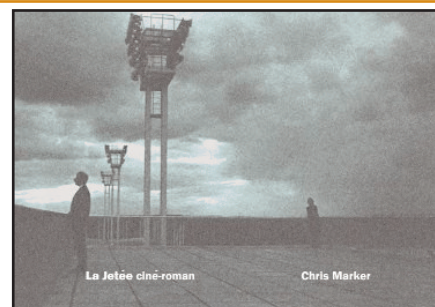
Méliès

- Focus = Fantastical
- Shot in studio
- Tell magical stories
- Camera role = make fantasy believable
- Truth = Embedded



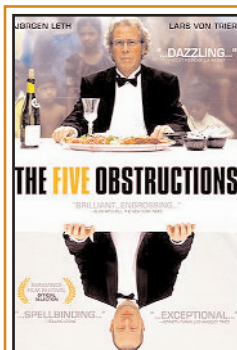
Stan Brakhage (1933-2003) used film as a means to share his vision--*not* of man's fallen condition--but of man's curiosity for creation. His films are *not* narratives, so viewers must learn how to watch these *shared visions*. Brakhage films are symphonies for the eyes--full of rich colors and textures. He exploits the medium in order to make it speak as no other filmmaker has ever done. Stan was fond of using organic particles and painting directly onto the negative. His most powerful and spiritual meditations are three films on marriage, birth and death.

DVD: *By Brakhage - An Anthology* (Criterion Collection, 2001).



The power behind Chris Marker's *La Jetée* is that it is a told almost entirely through narration and still photography. It is *not* a “movie” in that there is no motion in the film. So a book of all the film stills is a perfect way to study this masterpiece which inspired Terry Gilliam's *12 Monkeys*. The film was recently re-released on DVD by Criterion.

Book: *La Jetée-cine roman* (MIT Press, 1992)
DVD: *La Jetée/Sans Soleil* (Criterion Collection, 2007)
DVD: *12 Monkeys* (Universal Studios, 2005)



We've seen a number of directors revisiting their past work and providing us with updated “directors cuts.” In *The Five Obstructions* director Lars von Trier challenges his mentor, Jørgen Leth, to recreate his cinematic masterpiece *The Perfect Human* (1967) five different ways. He provides very precise instruction as to how each version is to be done. Reluctantly Leth gives in. The results are interesting to see, but ultimately it is the relationship between these two notable directors that captivates the viewer.

DVD: *The Five Obstructions (De fem bændspænd)* (Koch Lorber Films, 2003)