

# Critique

Helping Christians Develop Skill in Discernment

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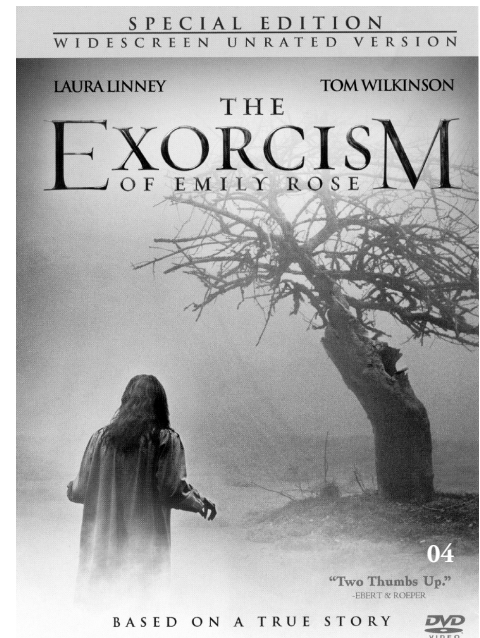
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# Editor's Note



## Two new

**L**ong time readers of *Critique* might notice something new in this issue. Two new things important enough to mention here: a new genre and a new column.

The new genre appears in

*The Darkened Room*, our column on film. Movies have had a prominent emphasis in *Critique*. Film is a lively creative art, and seems to be the visual art which has the greatest reach in, and the greatest impact on, our globalized world. Some films are merely escapist entertainment, many are carefully crafted, thoughtful art. Nevertheless, films both reflect and shape our world. Movies contain the stories of the postmodern generation, and thus are central to an ongoing conversation in our culture about the hopes, fears, ideas, and values that matter most. We want to be part of that conversation.

The thing that is new is that for the first time we review a horror film. John Seel asks us to reflect on Scott Derrickson's *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*. He argues that the film identifies an important aspect of the Christian world view that most Christians have ceased to believe. That we have been so molded by our culture that, contrary to what we claim in our creeds, we tend to see and live life from a secular rather than a supernatural perspective. Seel's challenge is one I hope every reader will take to heart.

The new column we have decided to call *Table Grace*. It's about food, the delight of cooking, meals, and hospitality. It's where we will reflect on these essential aspects of community, family, and life, and provide practical insight—like recipes, menus, and cooking

tips—so we can get past theory and into everyday faithfulness. I thought of beginning this column when Margie and I were speaking in Concord, NC, hosted by our dear friends, Karen and Stephen Baldwin. They don't just eat for nutrition, but because food is a good grace of God and because hospitality is a form of radical Christian faithfulness in our fragmented world. They demonstrate how our table can be a grace extended to people who live fast-food lives and often come from broken families where cooking together and eating together rarely occurs.

Rachel, Stephen and Karen's daughter, mentioned that when she was in highschool her friends loved to hang out at the Baldwin home. Often they just happened to show up in time for dinner. They were made welcome, swept into the meal preparation and a lively conversation which would be allowed to unfold naturally, often touching on what was in the hearts of those who were there. The Baldwin's continue that same practice with those God naturally brings into their lives, their table and kitchen made into a place where people meet grace. Not everyone can live like that, day by day, and since we have different callings to pursue, we should not try. But meals are a part of everyone's life, and hospitality is a gift we can all offer to friends, co-workers, and neighbors who may not share our deepest values and convictions. So, I hope that *Table Grace* will help us all to seriously consider how we can grow ever more faithful in offering the grace of food, unhurried time, and conversation to a hungry and lonely world. The postmodern generation will not come to church, but it will come to our table. I'm delighted Steve and Karen have consented to become Contributing Editors. ■

—Denis Haack

# Dialogue



## Re: It wasn't Chesterton, breaths of fresh air, & Narnia

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

### To the editor:

I noticed in *Critique* #3-2006 ("Life, Love, Lust & Love: a review of *Match Point*") that you attributed the quote, "Every man who knocks on the door of a brothel is looking for God" to G. K. Chesterton. However, he didn't write it. It is from the author Bruce Marshall in the book *The World, the Flesh, and Father Smith* published in 1945. The actual line is: "I still prefer to believe that sex is a substitute for religion and that the young man who rings the bell at the brothel is unconsciously looking for God." I don't share this to nitpick. I know you are concerned for accuracy and when I was doing research for one of my books I had planned to use the same quote but the President of The Chesterton Society was kind enough to correct me.

Peace and Prayers,

Steven James  
via email

### Denis Haack responds:

Thanks for the correction. I suppose one of the reasons this has so often been attributed to Chesterton is that it sounds like something he could have said, complete with wit and a level of insight into life that comes only with deeply honed wisdom. I'm glad to get it right in the future.

### To the editor:

I will graduate from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School next week with an MDiv, the fruit of 3+ years of laboring in God's word. As I face graduation and my first full-time children's ministry position I realized how Ransom Fellowship has been an important part of this season of my life. Every time I received *Critique* it was like a breath of fresh air—a reality check in the midst of exegetical and ultra-technical academia. The

music you have guided me to has been a wonderful experience that has helped me get in touch with my humanity. It is so encouraging to know that you and others have committed your lives to faithful, thoughtful, and refreshing cultural engagement. I look forward to your ministry in my life and in the lives of those I meet in the next chapter of my life. Thank you for everything, and may God bless you.

Stacy Kim  
Fairfax, VA

### To the editor:

For the past year, I have received issues of *Critique* and *Notes from Toad Hall* and have enjoyed them thoroughly. I particularly find the book and movie reviews helpful, especially as I am going off to UNC-CH next year. My friends and I will get together, watch a recommended movie (last week we watched *Match Point*) and usually discuss the movie afterwards.

In *Critique* #9-2005, the Editor's Note (titled "An Unseemly Cheer") talked about reactions to the film, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. I cannot help but heartily agree with you in letting the film, book, (and gospel) stand on its own. As a little girl, my mother would read the Narnia books to us, and at the end I would always ask if Aslan was Jesus—just to be sure. But she would never answer me directly, which was very wise. At that time, I could not reconcile the God I found in church to the God of these (and in these) stories. Years later, He delighted me with Himself, but only after that point could I love Aslan as I did Jesus.

Thank you for your refreshing and winsome articles. They are a delight.

Natalie J. Moore  
via email

# The Darkened Room

## Not with Flesh



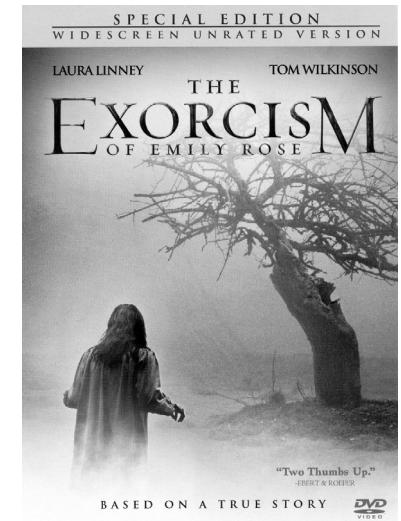
### A review of *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*

by David John Seel, Jr.

#### Confronting the Paradigms of Plausibility

**W**hen Jesus says to his disciples, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear,” he is pointing out the simple but sobering fact that we tend to see what we want to see, hear what we want to hear, understand what we want to understand. Facts don’t speak for themselves. They are only meaningful within a given framework and the choice of an interpretive framework will determine which facts are important and what they mean. More often than not, interpretive frameworks are culturally derived. The *zeitgeist* dictates the boundaries of cognitive plausibility—what is thinkable, say-able, and doable.

For example, to be modern is to accept the premise that public life is to be governed by science and reason, not by religion or revelation. Religion and revelation is the province of a supposedly backward medievalism—or worse, Islamic fundamentalism. Really? We may decry the inherent violence of Islamic fundamentalism, but we must respect their commitment to viewing all of life from within the dictates of theism. The Islamic critique of the West should resonate with reflective orthodox Christians who should also decry the global crusade of individualistic, hedonistic, nihilistic



consumerism. They have a point worth acknowledging, even if we disagree with their means and ends. To the extent that we accept the modern dualism that limits religious conviction to the private and personal, we have made religious conviction subjective and irrelevant—a harmless sideshow to things that really matter.

This divide between a modern and pre-modern outlook on life is powerfully depicted in the 2005 film, *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*. This is a deeply challenging film adapted from an equal-



#### Credits: *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*

##### Starring:

Laura Linney (Erin Bruner)  
Tom Wilkinson (Father Moore)  
Campbell Scott (Ethan Thomas)  
Jennifer Carpenter (Emily Rose)  
Colm Feore (Karl Gunderson)  
Joshua Close (Jason)  
Kenneth Welsh (Dr. Mueller)  
Duncan Fraser (Dr. Cartwright)  
Mary Beth Hurt (Judge Brewster)  
Henry Czerny (Dr. Briggs)  
Shohreh Aghdashloo (Dr. Adani)

##### Director:

Scott Derrickson

##### Producers:

Paul Harris Boardman, Beau Flynn.

##### Writers:

Paul Harris Boardman &  
Scott Derrickson.

##### Cinematographer:

Tom Stern

##### Original Music:

Christopher Young

##### Runtime: 119 minutes

(122 minutes unrated version)

##### Release: Sony Pictures, U. S. A., 2005.

Rated: PG-13 (for intense disturbing scenes.)



# and Blood

ly troubling true story. Few films more successfully pit a modern naturalistic explanation of reality against its ancient supernatural alternative. Few raise honest questions about both more fairly.

The film is an adaptation of the book, *The Exorcism of Anneliese Michel*, written by religious anthropologist and Denison University professor Felicitas Goodman. The story is about a 19-year-old pious Catholic German girl who is allegedly possessed by demons. After prolonged medical and psychiatric intervention, Anneliese and her parents turn to their local church for help. After receiving permission from the Catholic bishop, a local priest conducted exorcisms from September 1975 to July 1, 1976, the day Anneliese died. Local authorities then arrested the priest and parents and put them on trial for negligent homicide.

Thirty years later, writer Paul Boardman and writer/director Scott Derrickson took the essence of this true story and turned it into a compelling courtroom drama. The philosophical divide is further heightened in the film by the juxtaposition of a reluctant agnostic defense attorney and a determined Protestant churchgoing prosecutor. Mick LaSalle writes in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, "Based on a true story, *Emily Rose* is the thinking person's demon possession movie, which presents a chilling case history that's hard to explain away."

Scott Derrickson is an open, articulate Christian, a graduate of Biola University's film program. *Emily Rose* cost \$19 million and as of July 2006 has grossed \$144 million worldwide. At a time when the average film costs \$96 million and is deemed a success if it makes a three-fold return, *Emily Rose* is a triumph. The release of Derrickson's next film, *Paradise Lost*, is due next year.

In an interview with *Response*, Derrickson explained the purpose of *Emily Rose*, "A lot of Hollywood films are escapist in their nature. They offer the audience a temporary denial of the difficult realities of life and the darkness that exists in the world. In the horror genre, the great potential of it is that it forces us to reckon with what we are afraid of. It forces us to admit an experience—that there is evil in the world, and in ourselves. There's evil in nature. We're not in con-

***Few films more successfully pit a modern naturalistic explanation of reality against its ancient supernatural alternative. Few raise honest questions about both more fairly.***

***For many moderns, the first step toward biblical belief is a renewed openness to spiritual reality of whatever kind. Such "re-enchantment" is a step in the right direction.***

trol. I think it's the genre of non-denial....

I didn't want to make a morally instructive movie, and I didn't want to make a movie that was bent on providing religious answers for the audience, because I am so resistant to that kind of propaganda myself. But I felt that this was the opportunity to help provoke the audience into asking the right spiritual questions."

Some have questioned the film's preoccupation with demons. In the film, Father Moore states, "People say God is dead, but how can they think that if I show them the Devil?" While it is true that belief in demons is a long way from belief in God, it is even a longer way from belief in naturalism. For many moderns, the first step toward biblical belief is a renewed openness to spiritual reality of whatever kind—New Age, Gnostic Gospels, pop Kabala or Neo-paganism. Such "re-enchantment" is a step in the right direction. For nothing is deader than the stilted mind that reduces reality to scientific proof. Science has its place, but not as the ultimate arbiter of all reality. Scientism is not science anymore than pornography is sexuality.

In the modern world, seeing is believing and believing is dependent on empirical proof. Anything that does not meet these criteria is deemed irrational or non-existent. This creates, in the words of Peter Berger, "a world without windows."

Not so the ancient world. In the medieval mind, the taken-for-granted assumptions were just the reverse of the modern mind. The incorporeal was more real than the corporeal, the soul of greater importance than the body, the unseen more significant than the seen. Historian Carolly Erickson writes, "Medieval perception was characterized by an all-inclusive awareness of simultaneous realities. The bounds of reality were bent to embrace—and often to localize—the unseen, and determining all perception was a mutually held world view which found in religious truths the ultimate logic of existence." It was, in effect, a "windowed world."



# Darkened Room cont.



Which perspective is more biblical? Which is the richer understanding of reality?

Many Christians are quasi-naturalists in practice. The unseen world has little impact on their daily lives. Heaven is a distant place, not their immediate environment. Demons are a metaphor for whatever they dislike, not a personal presence as real as their neighbor. Possession is mental illness, the soul an illusion of DNA. Naturalism has become the lens through which they filter all of life. Dallas Willard warns, “We have heard of psychological ‘projections,’ and our heads are full of pseudoscientific views that reject a spiritual world and insist that space is empty and matter the only reality. So we are prepared to treat all of this long historical record as a matter of ‘visions’ that are ‘only imagination,’ or as outright delusions, not as perceptions



of reality. And we slump back into those materialistic mythologies of our culture that are automatically imparted to us by ‘normal’ life as what ‘everyone knows.’”

The priest in *Emily Rose* warns his wary defense attorney, “Demons exist whether you believe in them or not.” Film critic Roger Ebert counters in

his skeptical review, “Yes, and you could also say that demons do not exist whether you believe in them or not because ‘belief’ by definition stands outside of proof. If you can prove it, you don’t need to believe it.”

The prosecuting attorney in *Emily Rose* challenges a defense witness, the professor who plays the role of the religious anthropologist who later wrote the book on which the film is based, “I’m looking at your list of published articles doctor. You’ve been quite busy, prolific. So, based on your time spent with holy rollers, snake handlers, Voodoo priestesses and Indians tripping on peyote buds, based on your observing these bizarre individuals you’ve concluded that possession is a basic typical human experience?”

She retorts, “I must say counselor, that’s quite a

laundry list of disdain and one that thoroughly mischaracterizes my research.”

This sarcastic critique comes from the Protestant churchgoing prosecutor. For him and for many Christians like him, God is relegated to Sunday school, but strictly quarantined by naive secularism from the boardroom, classroom, or courtroom. In *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, Michel Foucault suggests that madness is a social rather than a medical diagnosis merely reflecting the

boundaries of social plausibility. No doubt, Foucault would see demon possession in the same light.

When Christians allow social plausibility to become the perspective by which we interpret reality, we

have become blinded by these assumptions and are no longer biblically minded. (This is the adult version of “peer pressure.”) If a film like *Emily Rose* can serve to remind us that “We wrestle not with flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against

***When Christians allow social plausibility to become the perspective by which we interpret reality, we have become blinded by these assumptions and are no longer biblically minded.***





the powers of this dark world and against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm” (Ephesians 6:12), then it has provided a valuable service in awakening us to the Unseen Real. As Christians we are called to challenge the paradigms of plausibility—least we be taken “captive through hollow and deceptive philosophies, which depend

on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than Christ” (Colossians 1:8). Some may think about demons today, but rarely with godly seriousness. They are domesticated by J. K. Rowling and used as a marketing ploy by Pirelli Tires (see [www.pirellifilm.com/thefilm/index.html](http://www.pirellifilm.com/thefilm/index.html)). We would be wise to heed the priest’s warning, “Demons exist whether you believe in them or not.” ■

~David John Seel, Jr.

John Seel is a writer, educator, and cultural analyst. He is currently working as a consultant to Walden Media. He lives in Cohasset, Massachusetts with his wife, Kathryn. He can be reached at [djsjr@earthlink.net](mailto:djsjr@earthlink.net).

#### Further Reading

Amorth, G. *An Exorcist Tells His Story*. (Ignatius Press; 1999).

Chattaway, P. “Horror: The Perfect Christian Genre.” *Christianity Today* (August 30, 2005).

Foucault, M. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. (Vintage; 1988).

Goodman, F. *The Exorcism of Anneliese Michel*. (Resource Publications; 1981).

Overstreet, J. “Do You Believe in Demons? *Response* (Summer 2005).

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### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

1. Seel suggests that “The *zeitgeist* dictates the boundaries of cognitive plausibility.” What is cognitive plausibility? Does plausibility make something true? Does majority opinion make something true? Does majority opinion make something more believable? How does this work in day-to-day life?
2. What are the two world views depicted in *Emily Rose*? How are they reinforced throughout the film?
3. Derrickson is a Christian, but the other screenwriter, Paul Boardman is not. Is the film successful in maintaining a fair depiction of the two world views portrayed?
4. Does the film successfully raise questions about the possibility of a spiritual world without preaching?
5. What questions were you left with at the end of the film?

## The Gift

**M**y daughter, Rachel and I sat down the other night to watch TV. She had been following *The Next Top Chef*, so we flipped to the channel to see who was still hanging on.

The challenge for the day involved black truffles and a Schafer wine. The ingredients were introduced as “the food at the top of the food chain;” expensive truffles to go with a wine that is “untouchable at any price.” The competing chefs were to prepare a dish that used the truffles and complemented the wine. Each was given \$250 to prepare the dish, which would be judged by world class chefs and Mr. Schafer himself. They would evaluate on taste, presentation, creativity, and compatibility with the wine.

Drama and stress followed as the show unfolded. I turned to Rachel at a commercial and told her that I would hate that kind of pressure in the kitchen.

We live in a community where fast food is abundant. There are few fast food chains not represented within a 5 mile radius around our house. The lines at drive-through windows are backed up each day. I wonder what children are growing up thinking as they fuel up with paper wrapped food often eaten in the car on the way somewhere.

These two images of food—*The Next Top Chef* and fast-food chains—and the purpose food serves, are a sad reflection of where we are as a society today. They fail to reflect what I love so much, and gain so much joy from,

when I am cooking and feeding people.

I can appreciate the skill and gifts of the person who is able to prepare food in such a dramatic way in such a stressful setting. It tantalizes and wows the senses but it reduces eating to a sensual self-serving experience in which only a few can participate. One leaves the table unsatisfied, looking for the next, grander experience. Food in this instance has become like a drug, and only a very small percentage of the population will ever participate in this level of gourmandize.

And most of us have spent time in that line for fast food for all kinds of good reasons. We’re

traveling, rushing to or from work, or we’re just too tired to prepare a meal. But when mealtime becomes a throw-away experience, we lose touch with a whole host of meaningful encounters that seem at first to have little to do with the basic act of eating.

We have come to believe that there is infinite value in moving quickly through every task with as little effort

***We should bless the God who created the food, rather than asking God to bless the food we cooked.***

and time as we possibly can. We have one-stop supermarkets; internet/online bill payments; drive through everything-under-the-sun. Meal time, too, has become for many just one more thing to get through with as little trouble as possible; another task in an already hectic life.

I want to challenge this trend in our culture about how we think about food.

And yet we are always hungry. Hungry to be full, to be satisfied. Just filling our stomachs doesn’t completely do it for us. We want more, we need something else—comfort, community, fulfillment, and we often trade one for another. We think we are cutting corners for all the right reasons, but what are we sacrificing in the process?

When we don’t understand the care, for example, that goes into the growing of produce, the crafting of wines, beers, and cheeses, the raising of livestock, we fail to appreciate that

there is a person, a craftsperson or artisan, or a wise earthy farmer who has put so much into what

we only see as a final product. We lose sight of the fact that there is an individual whose life and life’s work are all wrapped up in what we so quickly consume. Even in losing sight of such simple things as setting the table, and teaching our little ones how to do it, we lose touch with something of our humanity.

Where and how we eat is important, as well. The back seat of a car, the couch in front of the TV, a table stacked with papers, books, and bags, each speaks of chaos and confusion. Our children’s first job around the house focused on the proper way to prepare the table for dinner. A table carefully set speaks of thoughtful preparation, anticipation of a time of shared enjoyment and connecting. They learned that mealtime was a time that required effort and planning and which created an environment where something real and authentic occurred. Scraped knees, name-calling by neigh-



# of Food

borhood kids, and broken toys were rehearsed, laughed over, comfort was given, perspective gained—we created a safe environment where our kids could begin to slough-off the burdens of the day. We rediscovered our center as a family. As our children became teenagers this was a vital time and helped them navigate those dangerous years.

Preparing food can and should be looked at as a gift we can give to others. God made us to need food and need it several times each and every day. And if you think about it, not only has he given us the ability to taste different flavors but he has created for us a countless variety of foods to eat and enjoy. What a gift. He also made us for fellowship; made us connoisseurs of one another, enjoying one another's gifts, cultures, facial expressions. All this requires intentionality. It takes care and thought to feed others, it takes interest and time to pursue relationships.

When our children were born I thought a lot about what and how I was going to feed them. Breast milk... yeah. That seemed healthy and natural. When it came to solid food, Stephen and I resonated with the fact that what we prepared ourselves was best for our growing babies, so I took care to buy the best we could afford, seasoned it appropriately, mashed it for them, and that was how they learned to eat. It was work; it took time and lots of planning and a commitment from us—but our children were worth it, and they (eventually) knew it. ■

## An addendum (#1): Blessing the God of the food

**W**e have a tendency to elevate the food rather than the Giver of food. But reflect on Psalm 104: 1, 14-15:

*Bless the Lord O my soul  
O Lord my God you are very great*



*Karen makes bread*

*You cause the grass to grow for the  
livestock  
and plants for man to cultivate,  
that he may bring forth food from  
the earth  
and wine to gladden the heart of man,  
oil to make his face shine  
and bread to strengthen man's heart.*

The traditional Hebrew blessing for food and wine are based on language such as is found in the Psalm: "Blessed are You, God, King of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine." (Others respond: "Amen")

Even if we avoid making an idol of food, we can err in another, subtler way by asking God to "bless the food" and us and the missionaries, rather than blessing God—the giver of food and of every grace, and of every good. We are not suggesting that we cease to pray God's blessing upon missionaries, or

upon ourselves. But we are drawn to the God-centeredness of this ancient attitude of blessing God, as the psalmist did. So, it is good to think about varying our habit by blessing the God who created the food, rather than asking God to bless the food we cooked. ■

— Karen Baldwin

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## An addendum (#2): an alluring effect

**W**hen Karen was nineteen, she told me one night that she would cook for me. She invited me to her mother's house and prepared a meal. Until then I had only observed her briefly in my own mother's kitchen when we had a group of high school students out for the day in the country. Even that glimpse afforded an alluring realization that Karen was confident and at home in the kitchen. My mother was an excellent cook,

# Table Grace cont.

and of the three brothers I guess I showed the most interest in food, so I was given jobs in the kitchen from a young age. My big debut was as a teenager being given the job of preparing the Caesar Salad for a dinner party my parents gave for their friends. And I loved it. Thus my heightened interest when I realized that this young woman with the long wavy brown hair liked to cook, too.

But I was not prepared for the effect that her cooking would have on me. The fare was simple, but it spoke eloquently of the gift and blessing that making a meal can be. She made a simple meal of potato soup and southern cornbread—both from scratch. It was not fancy, but the care that went into its preparation, our enjoyment of the tastes and textures was more than just an experience of the senses. The food was the medium of a greater thing: a personal, human interaction. It was also one of the first in a long succession of times when we, and our children and friends connect at a table over food. ■

— Stephen Baldwin

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Stephen and Karen Baldwin and daughter Rachel are living in Concord, North Carolina where they cook together often and where Stephen is involved in planting a church that aims to encourage and recover artistry of all kinds, including food, as an act of worship. After years as a pastor/church planter's wife, Karen received her culinary training from the Ballymaloe Cookery School in County Cork, Ireland. She currently teaches cooking classes for Williams-Sonoma in Huntersville, NC.

***“If you can learn to make soup and bread, you will never starve.”***

Most people have potatoes and onions in the house, so this is a simple and delicious soup that doesn't require expensive ingredients or a lot of time to prepare. While the vegetables are “sweating” there is time to mix up a pan of cornbread.

#### **Potato Soup (Serves 4)**

1/2 stick butter  
3 cups peeled diced potatoes  
(Yukon Gold)  
1 cup diced onions  
1/2 cup diced celery (optional)  
1 teaspoon salt  
freshly ground pepper  
3 1/2 cups chicken stock  
1/2 cup half & half or cream  
2 tablespoons chopped parsley  
or thyme

Melt the butter in a medium sized heavy saucepan. When the butter foams, add the potatoes, onions and celery. Toss them in the butter until well coated. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Cover and sweat on a gentle heat for 10 minutes (do not allow the vegetables to color), add the stock and cook until the vegetables are soft. Puree the soup with a stick blender, or mash with a potato masher. Next add the chopped herbs. Taste and adjust the seasoning. Thin with half & half or cream to desired consistency. Serve topped with grated cheddar cheese.

#### **Old Fashion Southern Cornbread**

1 cup of cornmeal  
1 teaspoon baking powder  
1 teaspoon salt  
1/4 teaspoon baking soda  
1 cup buttermilk  
1 egg  
1-2 tablespoons of bacon  
grease or olive oil

Preheat oven to 450°. When the oven is up to temperature place a 7 to 8 inch iron skillet in the oven to heat.

Mix the dry ingredients together in a medium sized bowl. Mix the buttermilk and the egg together in small bowl, then add this mixture to the dry cornmeal mixture and beat well with a wooden spoon.

Add the grease or oil to the hot pan and swirl to coat the bottom—use a pot holder—the skillet will be really hot. Pour the cornbread batter into the hot pan and return to the oven.

Bake for 20 minutes until nicely browned on top and no longer soft in the center.

Invert on a warm plate, cut into wedges and serve warm. Serve with honey and butter if desired.

## Knowing where you are

**T**he revelation of God in Scripture is not merely a collection of holy sayings, it is a story set in history, in real space and time. So, when we read the story of Abraham, for example, we are not face-to-face with the figment of someone's imagination, but a real man who as a nomad traveled to real places. Places like Ur (which God called him to leave, which he did), a city called Haran and then, after a brief unsatisfying visit to Egypt, eventually to a place called Kiriath Arba, where his beloved wife, Sarah, died. This story—and the Bible—is full of such detail, which means that unless you know the geography of the ancient world far better than most people, you will want access to a good atlas.

Thankfully, a good atlas is available. *The IVP Atlas of Bible History* traces in brief narrative form an overview of the biblical story, providing a rich set of resources to help us make sense of the geographical, chronological, cultural, climatic, commercial, historical, and archeological details that are embedded in the Bible's pages.

*The IVP Atlas includes:*

3 Photographs of archeological artifacts, such as the image on this page, of the Chester Beatty Papyrus (dated AD 200) which is the opening pages of St Paul's letter to Ephesus (though the words, "in Ephesus" are not included, leading scholars to conclude the letter was intended to be sent to a number of churches).

3 Chronological charts, including one for the various kings of Israel and Judah, and another charting out the major events of Scripture and the ancient Near East (stretch-

ing from 3100 BC with the beginning of writing to the persecution of the church under the Roman emperor Domitian in 96 AD).

3 Almost 100 maps, including the one reproduced on this page, which traces the geography covered by Abraham in his wandering as a nomad.

3 Insight into the latest findings and theories of historians and archeologists in relation to the biblical story.

3 Numerous instructive charts, such as the one included here which compares the average annual rainfall for four sites in Canaan important in the biblical story.

3 Information on trade, languages, and campaigns of warfare.

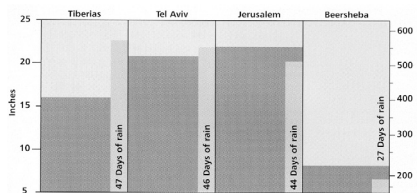
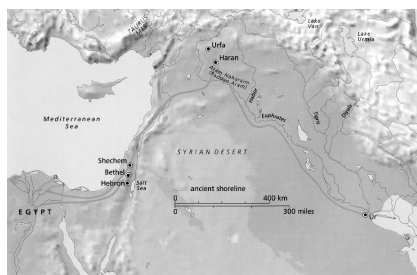
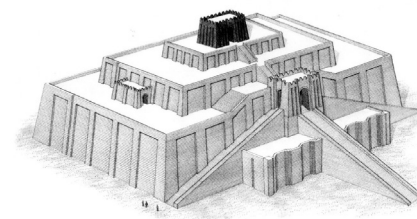
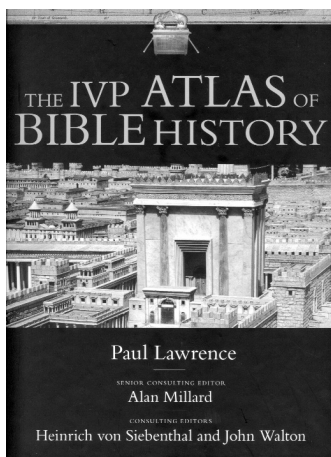
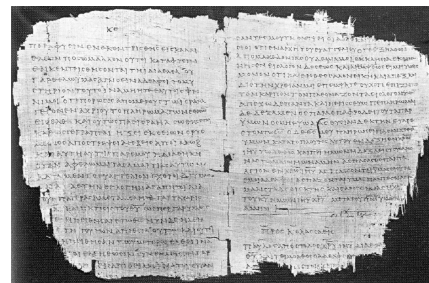
3 Artist's reconstructions of such things as the city of Babylon when Daniel lived there, the city of Capernaum in Jesus' day, the Israelite Tabernacle and Temple, and

the one reproduced here, of a ziggurat or temple-tower found in Mesopotamia (dating to 2113-2096 BC). By the way, this ziggurat was a famous landmark in Ur in Abraham's day.

Most resource books are good as resources, for looking up data when you need it, but dry to read. *The IVP Atlas of Bible History* is an excellent resource, but it is more than that. When my copy first arrived, I found myself reading it, fascinated by what I was learning.

So, it shouldn't be a surprise that we recommend *The IVP Atlas of Bible History* to you. ■

**Source:** *The IVP Atlas of Bible History*, pp. 23, 25, 52, 165.





## Reflecting on

I have a confession to make: I'm not a fan of Donald Miller. Many people told me I had to read his book *Blue Like Jazz*. They told me it was a new and refreshing approach to the subject of Christian spirituality. I don't know if it was because of all the hype surrounding *Blue Like Jazz*, but I was decidedly underwhelmed by it. It's not that the book wasn't good, it was. It just wasn't as great as I had been told. While Miller put forth some interesting insights and appealing human stories, it didn't seem that the book was really saying anything truly new, and so I didn't find it particularly refreshing.

When several friends discovered that I wasn't impressed with *Blue Like Jazz* they told me I needed to read Miller's follow up book, *Searching for God Knows What*. They assured me it was much better than *Blue Like Jazz*. So I tried to read it. Maybe I had a

bad attitude, or maybe I suffered from a focused flare up of ADD, but I could not get into *Searching for God* and put it down after the first few chapters. I haven't picked it up since. When people ask me what I think of Donald Miller's writing and I answer honestly, sometimes

I receive subdued agreement, but more often people have been mildly outraged.

I don't make this confession to bias you against the works of Donald Miller. I make it so that when I

tell you his latest book, *To Own a Dragon*, is one of the best books I've read in recent years, you'll know I'm not just speaking as a member of the Donald Miller fan club. *To Own a Dragon* was

***Deep relationships with fathers in the faith is the salve that God will use to heal the insult and wound of the fatherless.***

written with John MacMurray, a friend and mentor of Miller's who also served as an inspiration for the book. *Dragon* is a collection of Miller's reflections on growing up without a father. While Miller touches on the subject of his absentee father in some of his earlier books, this work deals exclusively with the impact growing up without his dad has had on his life. He spends time

exploring the relational, psychological, emotional, social and spiritual implications the lack of a father creates in the life of an adult male.

My prior disappointment with Miller's work made me a bit reluctant to spend time and money on *Dragon*. The

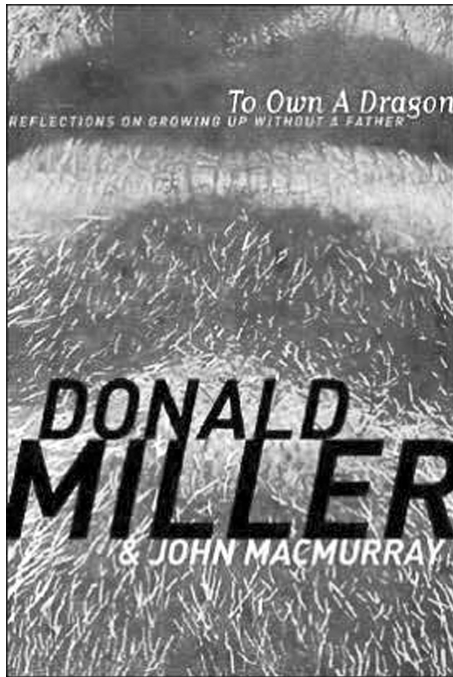
topic is what finally made me read it.

My parents divorced before I was a year old and my father has been pretty much a ghost ever since. I was curious to find out whether Miller's experi-

ence was anything like my own. What I found was that while situations surrounding the absence of our fathers were different, our experience was shockingly similar. I say shockingly because there were times while reading through *Dragon* that Miller's words were almost the exact words I have used to describe my experience of fatherlessness. Through his prose Miller taps into the heart of abandonment. The appeal of the book isn't limited to guys whose dads left them. A friend whose father died when he was a boy told me that he also connected with much in the book despite the different circumstances. Whether Miller is discussing the inherent sense of inferiority many fatherless men feel when they see other sons with their fathers, and exploring the feeling of being an outsider to the world of men with their father-son clubs; or whether he is exploring the sometimes unknowing search of the fatherless for a surrogate father and discussing their unsurprising frustration that those surrogates can only ever be surrogates who don't completely make up for the real thing; Miller broaches the subject with a rare blend of painful honesty and gentle tactfulness.

Miller encourages young men who have lost a father not take it out on the men around them:

*Here is the real truth I am stammering*





# fatherlessness

*toward. John MacMurray isn't my father. My boss isn't my father. The cop on the street isn't my father. My father split, and that stinks, and none of these guys are going to replace him. And what that means is that they aren't responsible to love me unconditionally, and they aren't responsible to tell me I am a man. Any love or affirmation they give is a gift, but holding them responsible for the insult my father cast down is inappropriate. The wound I have isn't there because of them.*

Miller calls those of us whose fathers have left us to move beyond cynicism and bitterness while at the same time revealing the truth that our society often hides: growing up without a father is an insult and a wound. These two words encapsulate the experience of the fatherless.

One of the sections where I heard my own voice in Miller's words was in his explanation of the title of the book. Miller talks about how the librarian at his elementary school used to read stories to his class. These stories would include imaginary creatures such as trolls and fairies. Sometimes the librarian would show the children pictures in the books. One of the pictures that stood out to young Donald Miller was one of a little boy riding on the back of a dragon. This picture caused him to wonder what it would be like to have your very own dragon and fly through the clouds on the back of such a wonderful and powerful creature. Miller then tells us the point of this trip down memory lane:

*I bring this up because in writing some thoughts about a father, or not having a father, I feel as though I am writing a book about a dragon or a troll under a bridge. For me a father is nothing more than a character in a fairy tale. And I know*

*fathers are not like dragons in that fathers actually exist, but I don't remember feeling that a father existed for me. I know they are real people. I have seen them on television, and sliding their arms around their women in grocery stores, and I have seen them in malls and in coffee shops, but these were characters in other people's stories, and I never stopped to question why one of these characters wasn't living in our house. I don't say this out of self-pity, because in a way I don't miss having a father any more than I miss having a dragon. But in another way, I find myself wondering if I missed out on something important.*

These words are on the second page of the second chapter, but have been etched across the pages of my life for the past thirty years. From that point on Miller had me hooked.

A strength of Miller's book is that he doesn't waste the reader's time by wallowing in self-pity, which is a flaw of many works dealing with this topic on a personal level. While much of *Dragon* is a lament, it isn't a sentimentalized complaint. Miller is more focused on wrestling through the realities of life without a father and the effects it has even on his adult life. His views on work, education, women, sex, integrity, authority and even basic decision-making are realistically connected to his experience of

***Conservative Christians decry the poor state of the family in our society. I wonder how many of these same Christians are actively stepping into the midst of the brokenness to be redemptive agents.***

not having a father. Instead of spending his time belaboring how much he's missed out on in life he takes the time to critique himself. Miller analyzes his skewed perspective on life developed partly due to the absence of his father. He spends the bulk of the book

identifying and correcting his own erroneous beliefs and practices.

Another strength of Miller's work is that he moves past the superficial Christian responses that are often heaped upon those who experience loss of any kind. As one who

has had clichés handed to him instead of real answers, Miller attempts to deal with these issues in a sensitive, winsome and straightforward manner. One of the superficial responses often heard by people in Miller's and my situation is, "Even though your dad left you have a heavenly father who cares for you more than you can even imagine." The problem isn't with the truthfulness of such a statement, but rather what it conveys to the person on the receiving end. The person making

***Miller calls those of us whose fathers have left us to move beyond cynicism and bitterness while at the same time revealing the truth that our society often hides: growing up without a father is an insult and a wound.***

the statement isn't interested in entering into our life or walking with us through our pain. It is absolutely true that God is a father to

the fatherless, but this in itself does not remove the insult and wound of abandonment.

Miller gives another reason why such a formulaic response, while technically true, is not ultimately helpful. Trying to grasp the

# Resources cont.

concept of God as father is nearly impossible when you have no proper paradigm to put that term into. Obviously, everybody knows what a father is, but, as mentioned above, the lived reality of a father for many of us is about as real as the presence of a dragon. When this is the case it influences the way we view God in his fatherhood.

## ***To Own a Dragon is one of the best books I've read in recent years.***

Miller writes that people whose earthly fathers have been interested in anything but them find it hard to believe that God is truly interested in their life, even though they may cognitively know it is true. When you grow up experiencing everybody else's father at a distance it is hard to imagine God as a father of your very own. "There are times when I don't see God as much different from my friends' fathers when I was a kid," Miller says. "In the end, He has a family of His own to deal with. He's like a good mentor, and I see Him at church." These words are true to my own experience and, I think, to the experience of a large number of men living all around us.

There is a sore need for a better answer to this situation. Throughout *Dragon* Miller gives some statistics concerning fatherless men. These statistics are compiled in short form at the back of the book. The stats are as follows:

**63%** of youth suicides are from fatherless homes—5 times the average.

**85%** of all children who show behavior disorders come from father-

less homes—20 times the average.

**80%** of rapists with anger problems come from fatherless homes—14 times the average.

**71%** of all high school dropouts come from fatherless homes—9 times the average.

**75%** of all adolescent patients in chemical abuse centers come from fatherless homes—10 times the average.

**70%** of youth in state-operated institutions come from fatherless homes—9 times the average.

**85%** of all youths in prison come from fatherless homes—20 times the average.

These statistics are sobering. I think they also painfully reveal a failure on the part of the church of Jesus Christ. Many conservative Christians decry the poor state of the family in our society. I wonder how many of these same Christians are actively stepping into the midst of this brokenness to be redemptive agents. The numbers seem to suggest that such action is not taking place.

Miller dedicates *Dragon* to men who are mentoring younger men. His book tells the story of several men like John MacMurray who have been faithful in discipling him. This is the answer that a fatherless generation needs. We don't need more empty statements, no matter how true they are. We need men in the church to step up and embody the truth of those statements. Proactive discipleship, older men seeking out younger men, is a better answer to the situation. Deep relationship with fathers in the faith is the salve that God will use to heal the insult and wound of the fatherless. ■

## **To Learn More See the Following:**

<http://www.donaldmillerwords.com/>  
<http://www.donaldmillerwords.com/ownadrdragon.php>

The Belmont Foundation is a not-for-profit organization founded by Donald Miller that "exists to provide role models for children growing up without fathers." Visit them at [www.belmont-foundation.org](http://www.belmont-foundation.org).

—Travis Scott

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**Book Recommended:** *To Own a Dragon: Reflections on Growing Up Without a Father* by Donald Miller and John MacMurray (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress; 2006) 201 pp.

Travis Scott is a contributing editor to *Critique*. He is a graduate of Covenant Theological Seminary and a former intern at the Francis Schaeffer Institute. He and his wife Brooke are currently pursuing full-time Christian service in New Zealand.

## Kingdom lives, naps, tsunami

### Evangelism's purpose

"Our concern in evangelizing people is not just to 'save their souls,' but to restore the image of God to its proper functioning in all of life, to the greater glory of God."

**Excerpted from** *Created in God's Image* by Anthony A. Hoekema (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; 1986) p. 99.

### Demonstrating God

Q: Do you have concerns about the church in the West?

A: My main concern for the church everywhere is that we often do not look like what we are talking about. We make great claims for Christ, but there is often a credibility gap between our words and our actions.

For example, consider the implications of 1 John 4:12: "No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." The invisibility of God is a great problem. It was already a problem to God's people in Old Testament days. Their pagan neighbors would taunt them, saying, "where is now your God?" Their gods were visible and tangible, but Israel's God was neither. Today in our scientific culture young people are taught not to believe in anything which is not open to empirical investigation.

How then has God solved the problem of his own invisibility? The first answer is of course "in Christ." Jesus Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. John 1:18: "No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son has made him known."

"That's wonderful," people say, "but it was 2,000 years ago. Is there no way by which the invisible God makes himself visible today?"

There is. We return to 1 John 4:12: "No one has ever seen God." It is precisely the

same introductory statement. But instead of continuing with reference to the Son of God, it continues: "If we love one another, God dwells in us." In other words, the invisible God, who once made himself visible in Christ, now makes himself visible in Christians, *if* we love one another. It is a breathtaking claim. The local church cannot evangelize, proclaiming the gospel of love, if it is not itself a community of love.

**Excerpted from** "Why Don't They Listen?" an interview with John R. W. Stott by Gary Barnes in *Christianity Today* (September 2003) p. 52.

### Napping in paradise

I count it as an absolute certainty that in paradise, everyone naps. A nap is a perfect pleasure and it's useful, too. It splits the day into two halves, making each half more manageable and enjoyable. How much easier it is to work in the morning if we know we have a nap to look forward to after lunch; and how much more pleasant the late afternoon and evening become after a little sleep. If you know there is a nap to come later in the day, then you can banish for ever that terrible sense of doom one feels at 9 A.M. with eight hours of straight toil ahead.

**Excerpted from** *How to be Idle* by Tom Hodgkinson (HarperCollins; 2005).

### Thinking Jewishly about tsunami

Earthquakes and tidal waves were known to the ancients. They spoke of them in awe. Job himself said: "The pillars of the heavens quake, aghast at his rebuke; by His power he churned up the sea." David used them as a metaphor for fear itself: "The waves of death swirled about me... The Earth trembled and quaked, the foundations of the heavens shook... The valleys of the sea were exposed, and the foundations of the Earth laid bare."

In the midst of a storm at sea, Jonah prayed: "Your wrath lies heavily upon me; You have overwhelmed me with all Your waves." Yet God taught Elijah that He was not in the earthquake or the whirlwind that destroys, but in the still, small voice that heals.

What distinguished the biblical prophets from their pagan predecessors was their refusal to see natural catastrophe as an independent force of evil, proof that at least some of the gods are hostile to mankind. In the ancient Babylonian creation myth, the *Enuma Elish*, for example, the goddess of the oceans Tiamat declares war on the rest of creation and is only defeated after prolonged struggle by the younger god, Marduk. Essential to monotheism is that conflict is not written into the fabric of the Universe. That is what redeems tragedy and creates hope.

The simplest explanation is that of the 12th-century sage, Moses Maimonides. Natural disasters, he said, have no explanation other than that God, by placing us in a physical world, set life within the parameters of the physical. Planets are formed, tectonic plates shift, earthquakes occur, and sometimes innocent people die. To wish it were otherwise is in essence to wish that we were not physical beings at all. Then we would not know pleasure, desire, achievement, freedom, virtue, creativity, vulnerability and love. We would be angels—God's computers, programmed to sing His praise.

The religious question is, therefore, not: "Why did this happen?" But "What then shall we do?"

**Excerpted from** "Why does God allow terrible things to happen to His people?" in *The (London) Times* (January 1, 2005) by Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth of Nations.



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1. To call attention to resources of interest to thinking Christians.
2. To model Christian discernment.
3. To stimulate believers to think biblically about all of life.

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