

critique

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ISN'T ENOUGH**

CRITIQUE



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ABOUT CRITIQUE: Critique is part of the work of Ransom Fellowship founded by Denis and Margie Haack in 1982. Together, they have created a ministry that includes lecturing, mentoring, writing, teaching, hospitality, feeding, and encouraging those who want to know more about what it means to be a Christian in the everyday life of the twenty-first century.

Except where noted, all articles are by Denis Haack.

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Everyone on Ransom's mailing list also receives *Letters from The House Between* (formerly *Notes from Toad Hall*), a newsletter by Margie Haack in which she reflects on what it means to be faithful in the ordinary and routine of daily life and gives news about Ransom's ministry.

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Busy, Fast, and Distracted



Last month I sat in a coffee shop in Portsmouth, New Hampshire—if you are ever in that lovely coastal city, do have coffee at Cup of Joe, a delightful spot—and watched. I had a book with me but never opened it. I had chosen a seat in the window overlooking the street and cobblestone sidewalk and just sat quietly, sipping my latte and watching. People came and went, walking by on their way somewhere, perhaps to work or shop or to visit one of the many galleries that line the downtown street, or to meet someone. It was a lovely hour and a half.

When I look at life I see layers of meaning, knowing that reality has both a natural and a supernatural realm. Some natural things, like art and music and persons and sweet corn and wine and fresh bread and goldfinches, hint of transcendence, shimmering with glimpses of glory, pregnant with metaphorical purpose beyond themselves. These brief hints are always in shadow in this broken world, of course, and do not easily reveal themselves. And in the brokenness that so shatters reality, the spirit of the age acts to squelch them, like smog that we get used to but that blinds us to the truth.

The smog that morning, it seemed to me, has a name: Busy, Fast,

and Distracted.

I'm not being critical of the good people of Portsmouth. There are good reasons to be busy, to move fast, and because multi-tasking is a hoax we finite creatures are easily distracted. But then like all smog it can start to seem normal and then we never know what we aren't seeing.

As Much As You Can

And if you can't shape your life the way you want,

at least try as much as you can

not to degrade it

by too much contact with the world,

by too much activity and talk.

Try not to degrade it by dragging it along, taking it around and exposing it so often

to the daily silliness

of social events and parties

until it comes to seem a boring

hanger-on.

[C. P. Cavafy, transl.,
Keeley/Sherrard]

I'm also not implying that I am better than the busy, fast, and distracted people who moved past Cup of Joe that morning. I was on vacation and so could be expected to slow down and smell the sweet aroma of freshly ground beans. But now I am home and piles of accumulated mail, a full inbox, and postponed tasks beckon furiously for my attention.

What I want to avoid is to be a Christian that sees reality and lives life as if Naturalism is true. To see the here and now and mistake it for all that is. To see a goldfinch and imagine, if only for a moment, that it does not offer a glimpse into the something more that, though unseen, is as real as what is seen. To think that productivity defines

my worth; to forget that speed, so vital in ping pong competition, is fatal in relationships; to fail to push back against the creeping addiction of media and screens; to be so busy, fast, and distracted that unhurried conversations are unknown to me.

"We are always," Ellis Potter notes, "in the presence of the supernatural, God and eternity, and are encouraged by the Bible to be aware of that all the time." The spirit of the age aims to make me less aware, and as smog it smears the glass through which I peer so that I see less and thus live and love less.

I cannot escape the spirit of the age—it permeated even into the quiet respite of Cup of Joe. It sifts into my office like a fine dust as I write this and, though it takes various forms in various ages, it will always hover in the air we breathe until the King returns.

But it need not define how I see. ■

Source: Pome by Matthew Ogle; short modern poems for your inbox from pome@mattogle.com. The Cloud of Knowing by Ellis Potter (*Destinée S. A.*; 2018). 19.

DIALOGUE

To the Editor:

Denis and Margie:

After more than two decades, we are still enjoying and learning from your discerning essays and reviews. Thanks for introducing us to so many authors and musical artists.

Blessings

Steve and Brenda Briggs

Rome, Georgia

To the Editor:

Dear Denis and Margie:

We have been blessed by the publications you have sent us through your ministry! The writing is incredible and we have taken them on many dates to read aloud and discuss. It's not often that Carl and I find reading material that we both enjoy and then get to discuss. Many deep conversations about faith and our life have started because of these writings, and we are so grateful. Carl just returned from a three-week trip to Africa and he brought next to nothing, but he made sure to bring some of the material you sent for him and his dad to enjoy (and did they ever!).

Emily and Carl Hawkinson

Chanhassen, Minnesota

To the Editor:

Dear Denis, Margie, Anita, or whoever reads the Ransom e-mails:

Oh no! How long has your mailing "It's that time again" been sitting in my pile? Today I am determined to respond, to let you know how much my husband, Jim, and I appreciate *Critique and Letters from The House Between*. You challenge us and prod us to think deeper. Those Ransom envelopes are a gift in our mailbox. We pray for you and send funds when possible. We have a relationship, though perhaps a somewhat detached one.

Please, oh please, keep our names on your mailing list!

With deepest respect and gratitude,

Lynn (and Jim) Adams

Howell, Michigan

The Editor Responds:

We are always so grateful for letters from readers, so thank you Steve and Brenda, Emily and Carl, and Lynn and Jim.

It's so nice to know that what we've written is actually being read and thought about, that people are praying for us, and that *Critique and Letters* are publications that people enjoy receiving. We even like the letters that include disagreements or probing questions—we have always aimed primarily to enhance conversation and reflection not try to give some sort of final word on everything we write about.

We are under no illusion that our work with Ransom will change the world. Changing the world is a job God has kept for himself. Still, I do hope our publications might prompt careful listening and unhurried conversation about the things that matter most. We realize that can be a scary proposition. "Dialogue is dangerous," Nicholas Denysenko says, "the fear of the unknown outcome of irreconcilable differences opens the door to opting for division instead. But withdrawal from dialogue enhances fear because it prohibits us from seeing and encountering the other, so the images we conjure of others are distorted." It seems to us that Christians must be willing to step into this ever-widening gap to bring some measure of healing since our society is so polarized.

May we be faithful, pray fervently and trust God's work in the world even when we are unable to see what he is accomplishing. ■

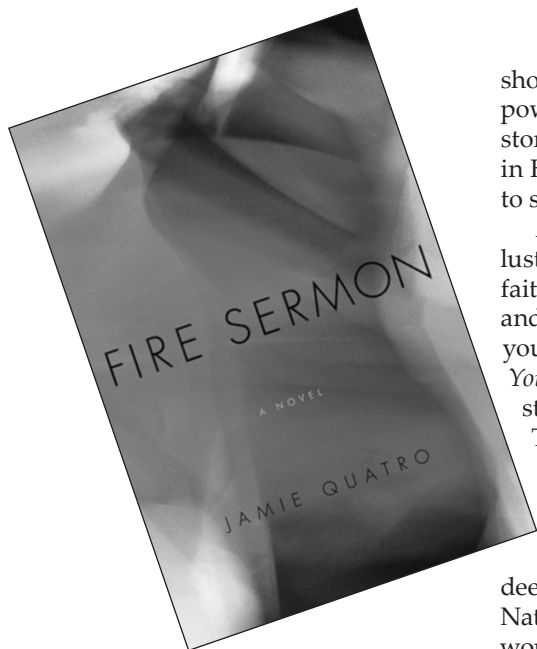
RESOURCE

Hearts and Minds bookstore is a well-stocked haven for serious, reflective readers. When ordering resources, mention Ransom Fellowship and they will contribute 10 per cent of the total back to us. ■

Resource: Hearts and Minds bookstore,
www.heartsandmindsbooks.com



The Depths of Desire



I have read a lot of good novels over the years, stories that captured my imagination, drawing me into a fictional world that became so real I regretted leaving it when I reached the final page. Such novels always change me though the changes may be so subtle I don't notice them at the time. Perhaps my perspective is broadened just a bit, or my emotions deepened, or my thinking expanded. Occasionally, very rarely but very wonderfully, a novel draws me in so deeply I am wrenched apart by the tension in the narrative, and in the end must pause and seek recovery. A story birthed in the imagination of a writer that so entranced my imagination that I was swept into a deeper understanding of being human. Such was my experience in reading *Fire Sermon* by Jamie Quatro.

The plot is simple, almost mundane. Maggie loves her family and God, and then meets James, with whom a platonic friendship blossoms into more than it

should. It is a deeply human story, its power the reason there are so many stories of sexual misadventure recorded in Holy Scripture. Sadly, Christians tend to skim over and moralize such texts.

Fire Sermon is about desire and lust, love and temptation, faith and sin, faithfulness and infidelity, theology and sexuality, forgiveness and guilt. If you read her first book, *I Want to Show You More* (2013), a collection of short stories, you will recognize the themes. There is much to discuss woven into the *Fire Sermon* narrative, including a powerful understanding of the inner relationship between marriage and the object of our deepest desire. Jamie Quatro is like Nathan who told David a story so he would face the sad reality of his own life and choices. She is telling us a story and, in hearing it, we face the reality of our desires.

*Shut it down, says Head.
Continue on, says Heart.
Deluded Heart, you'll only make a mess.
Deluded Head, any mess, will be worth it.
You will watch fire consume everything
you care about. You will be left
with ash—the proper and only end
of any burning.
Think of Moses. His vision in the desert.
A bush on fire yet unconsumed.
Think of Letters of John Newton: the
burning bush is an emblem
applicable to the state of a
Christian when she is in the fire
of temptation. Think of Job, the
true cause of his uncommon
sufferings. Think how the
experiment played upon him
answered many good purposes: Job
was humbled yet approved; his
friends were instructed; the
wisdom and mercy of the Lord,*

*in his darkest dispensations, were
gloriously—
Job is bullshit. Job lost everything.
Who are we to question God's ways, says
Head. Who are you—
I want what I want, says Heart. [p. 37]*

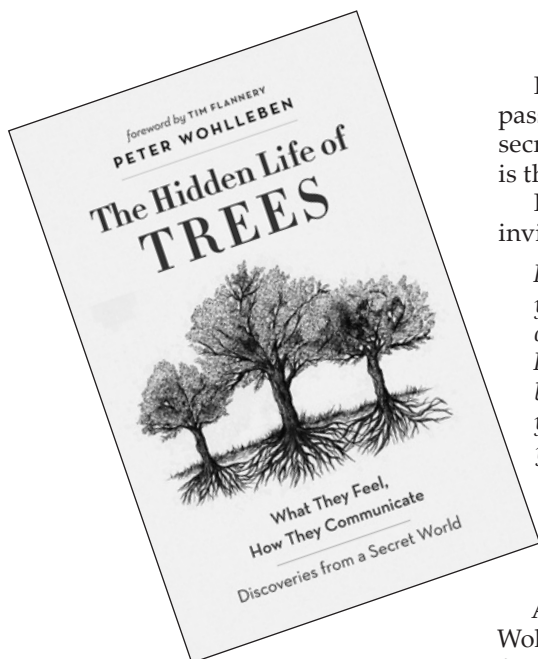
Reading *Fire Sermon* is to be drawn into a world we know well, because it is the world into which we were born, the world that we still inhabit. A world where internal conversations for the believer reference C. S. Lewis and scripture and then too easily morph into both prayer and rationalization, where finding the thin, invisible line dividing desire from sin is a heart-wrenching quest for righteousness. As I read *Fire Sermon* I received new clarity about my own heart and head, about my own desire and devotion, and about why it is impossible to separate them for easy management.

At a couple of spots in *Fire Sermon* I wondered about some of Quatro's prose, but not enough to be deflected in my reading. And I am uncertain whether the novel or the short story should be her preferred form for her writing. This much is certain: whatever she publishes next I will eagerly purchase and read.

I recommend *Fire Sermon*. Not just because it is a good story but also because reading it will be good for your soul. ■

Recommended: *Fire Sermon: A Novel* by Jamie Quatro (New York, N.Y.: Grove Press; 2018) 205 pages.

Trees Aren't Just Things



When the ancient trees spoke wisely and moved slowly, heroically in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, I found it entirely plausible. My own love for trees goes back to the spruce in our backyard under which I found a hiding place as a child, a place safe from criticism, a shelter of solitude where my imagination could soar. Trees aren't just disposable things—they are creatures of God alive in the purpose for which he made them. Holy Scripture provides very little detail about the new earth and heaven that is yet to come, but we are told to expect trees (Revelation 22:2).

Peter Wohlleben, a forester who manages a woodland in Germany, also loves trees and, after years of caring for them and studying them, tells us what he has discovered in *The Hidden Life of Trees*. What he says may surprise you—the latest studies of trees, he tells us, indicate that trees communicate with one another, feel things, and live in intentional community.

I appreciate and share Wohlleben's passion for trees and forests, their secrets, beauty, and potential—the earth is the Lord's.

I also appreciate the way Wohlleben invites us to be better observers.

I encourage you to look around where you live. What dramas are being played out in wooded areas you can explore? How are commerce and survival balanced in the forests and woodlands you know? This book is a lens to help you take a closer look at what you might have taken for granted. Slow down, breathe deep, and look around. What can you hear? What do you see? How do you feel? [p. x-xi]

And I appreciate all that Wohlleben teaches us from the latest forestry research.

According to the dictionary definition, language is what people use when we talk to each other. Looked at this way, we are the only beings who can use language, because the concept is limited to our species. But wouldn't it be interesting to know whether trees can also talk to each other? But how? They definitely don't produce sounds, so there's nothing we can hear. Branches creak as they rub against one another and leaves rustle, but these sounds are caused by the wind and the tree has no control over them. Trees, it turns out, have a completely different way of communicating: they use scent...

For example, four decades ago, scientists noticed something on the African savannah. The giraffes there were feeding on umbrella thorn acacias, and the trees didn't like this one bit. It took the acacias mere minutes to start pumping toxic substances into their leaves to rid themselves of the large herbivores. The giraffes got the message and moved on to

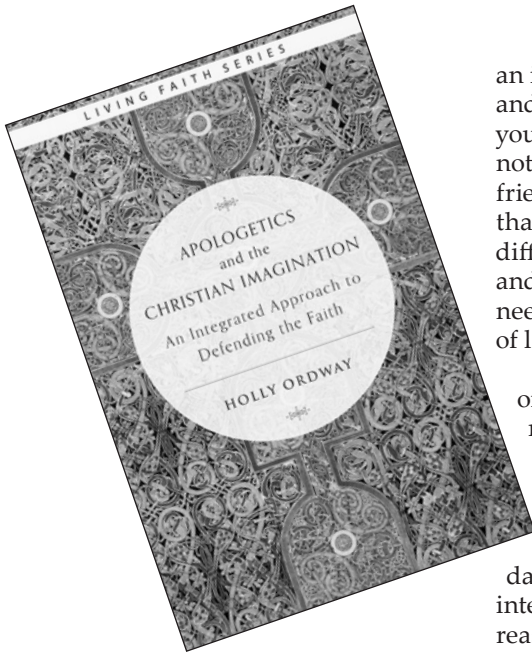
other trees in the vicinity. But did they move on to trees close by? No, for the time being, they walked right by a few trees and resumed their meal only when they had moved about 100 yards away.

The reason for this behavior is astonishing. The acacia trees that were being eaten gave off a warning gas (specifically, ethylene) that signaled to neighboring trees of the same species that a crisis was at hand. Right away, all the forewarned trees also pumped toxins into their leaves to prepare themselves. The giraffes were wise to this game and therefore moved farther away to a part of the savannah where they could find trees that were oblivious to what was going on. Or else they moved upwind. For the scent messages are carried to nearby trees on the breeze, and if the animals walked upwind, they could find acacias close by that had no idea the giraffes were there. [p. 6-7]

As a Christian, I also appreciate how *The Hidden Life of Trees* reveals the sad leveling of creation that comes from the presuppositions of naturalism. I do not agree, and believe the Christian perspective to be richer and more realistic, even though Christians have, by and large, sadly failed to take it seriously enough to consistently demonstrate a proper care of God's creation. ■

Book recommended: *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate* by Peter Wohlleben, translated by Jane Billingham (Berkeley, California: Greystone Books; 2015) 245 pages + notes + index.

Apologetics, Both Reasonable and Imaginative



Imagination and reason turn out to be intimately related. If you doubt that consider this common experience: You are at the airport to meet a friend whom you haven't seen in several years. Waiting near the luggage carousels, you watch the doors from the arrival gates swing open and a mass of people surge in your direction. You scan the crowd searching for your friend, and there she is—you smile and begin to wave and then notice no that isn't her. It looks like her, but a second's thought confirms it, it isn't her. Then you spot her, and have to look and consider a bit more—she's dyed her hair since you were together last, and is wearing glasses now but yes, it's definitely her.

Now consider: what just transpired was a seamless interplay between your imagination and your reason. Both were equally necessary to accomplish your mission of meeting your friend, and neither acting alone would have been sufficient. Your imagination provided

an image of the person you were seeing and remembering from the past and your reason determined whether or not the person in the crowd was the friend you had come to meet. Rather than being at odds, or working in vastly different realms of thought, imagination and reason not only work together, they need each other if we are to make sense of life, truth and reality.

This common airport experience is one way Holly Ordway explains the relationship between imagination and reason in her book, *Apologetics and the Christian Imagination*.

"Imagination is the human faculty," she says, "that assimilates sensory data into images, upon which the intellect can then act; it is the basis of all reasoned thought as well as all artistic, or what we would call 'imaginative' exercise." In this she is building on the thought of C. S. Lewis who argued that, "reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning" [p. 16].

Ordway is Professor of English at Houston Baptist University with a scholarly interest in Tolkien and Lewis. They demonstrated a compelling defense of Christianity by developing both answers and stories, arguments and images. In other words they used reason and imagination together in order to show that the faith is both credible and plausible. Ordway believes too much of Christian apologetics depends on reason while ignoring the crucial role of the imagination. And now, she argues, as our world has become increasingly post-Christian our defense of the faith must once again embrace both.

One specific way this works out is in the area of ideas and what they mean. When we talk about the Christian gospel and mention, for example, God,

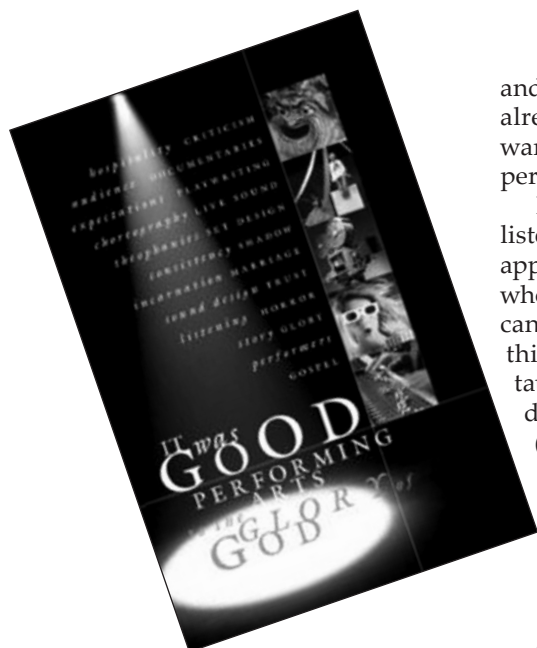
guilt, justice or redemption, we must not assume that our non-Christian friends mean the same thing we do when they use the same terms. What a secular friend means when he speaks movingly of personal guilt is most likely not what the Bible means when it teaches we are sinners in need of divine forgiveness. "A significant part of the apologist's work," Ordway says, "involves discerning what preconceptions, difficulties, and context the audience is likely to have, so as to write or speak in such a way as to increase the likelihood that the ideas are understood as intended" [p. 31].

Imagination allows us to see into another person's world and life view to understand what they mean and why. Imagination allows us to use metaphor and story to make ideas, arguments and doctrines vivid, alive and meaningful. Reason allows us to ask probing questions so we get past the surface of things and uncover what's really at stake. Reason provides critical tools to examine claims and counterclaims, to seek definitions that clarify and to find answers that satisfy. Together a holy spirited imagination and reason provide us with what we need "to give an answer to everyone who asks [us] to give the reason for the hope that [we] have" (1 Peter 3:15).

I recommend *Apologetics and the Christian Imagination* to you. ■

Book recommended: *Apologetics and the Christian Imagination: An Integrated Approach to Defending the Faith* by Holly Ordway (Steubenville, Ohio: Emmaus Road; 2017) 178 pages + recommended reading + index.

Performing to God's Glory



I do not mean to be peremptory or presumptuous, but there is a series of three books you really should own and read and reflect on and discuss with friends. If it seems bold for me to say this, so be it. Each is a compendium of essays, so each chapter is by a different author, someone carefully chosen because they have something to say to the topic they were assigned. All three books are about the arts, and explore human creativity and imagination so that artists can be encouraged to embrace their calling with excellence and so that non-artists can better understand the creative process and so see past the surface of things in order to better appreciate what makes art.

- *It Was Good: Making Art to the Glory of God* (2006)
- *It Was Good: Making Music to the Glory of God* (2013)
- *It Was Good: Performing Arts to the Glory of God* (2018)

The series is from Square Halo Books,

and I hope you'll read all three. I've already reviewed the first two, and want to recommend the third, on the performing arts, here.

In each volume I've learned by listening to artists whose expertise I appreciate as a viewer or listener but whose skill and work is something I can barely fathom. One essay in this third volume that both charmed and taught me is the chapter on abstract dance by Elizabeth Dishman (www.dishmanandco.org).

In Him we live and move and have our being

Dear Reader,

I think it's time we got this out in the open... the part about me being an abstract choreographer. I know, what I do is weird. It's okay that you didn't "get" my latest dance—when I asked how you liked it, your eyes seemed to freeze a little bit in their sockets. It's not that you have a weak aesthetic sense—you're reading this book, right? But you always say you're so challenged, so mystified by abstract dance, so I thought I'd do us both a favor and start the conversation...

"But God spoke all things into creation," you protest. You remind me that Adam's first job was giving names to things, that the words and decrees of God are constantly being lifted up in Scripture. And you're right—as Psalm 19 says:

*The law of the Lord is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure,
making wise the simple;
the precepts of the Lord are right,
rejoicing the heart:
the commandment of the Lord is pure,
enlightening the eyes.*

*But remember the beginning of this psalm?
The heavens declare the glory of God,*

*and the sky above proclaims
his handiwork.*

*Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.*

*There is no speech, nor are
there words,*

whose voice is not heard.

*Their voice goes out through all
the earth,*

*and their words to the end of
the world.*

*In them he has set a tent for the sun,
which comes out like a bridegroom
leaving his chamber,*

*and, like a strong man, runs its
course with joy.*

*Its rising is from the end of
the heavens,*

*and its circuit to the end of them,
and there is nothing hidden from
its heat.*

The heavens declare, proclaim, reveal knowledge, without any words at all. And how do they do this? Heavenly bodies move across the sky, rising and setting in an amazing cosmic dance. How simple, how glorious! The psalmist knows that some things cannot exist fully in verbal form, and the apostle Paul agrees: "The Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words." [p. 173-174]

The first time I read Dishman's chapter I was so delighted—and challenged from Scripture on the topic—that I interrupted my reading to search for dance performances I could attend.

I recommend *It Was Good: Performing Arts to the Glory of God* to you. And yes, I contributed the chapter on Story. I recommend that, too. ■

Book recommended: *It Was Good: Performing Arts to the Glory of God* edited by Ned Bustard (Baltimore, Maryland: Square Halo Books; 2018) 199 pages + suggested resources.

A Very Determined Person



I've been trying to think which of C. S. Lewis's books I read first, but can't remember. Unlike many who were introduced to him as children with *The Chronicles of Narnia*, those tales were unavailable in my home. I suspect it was *Mere Christianity*, probably in my first year in college. It stunned me with its clear, vigorous discussion of Christian belief, and gave me a glimpse of a depth and breadth of the faith I had never imagined possible.

Later I learned Lewis had married when he was older, and I wondered what this woman, Joy Davidman, was like. I heard Davidman, a poet and former Communist, had fled an unhappy marriage in America to live in England, where she met Lewis, was diagnosed with cancer, married Jack (as Lewis was known to his friends), briefly recovered, and all too quickly died. A depiction of that narrative is in the film, *Shadowlands*, in which Anthony Hopkins plays Lewis and Debra Winger

plays Davidman.

The real story, it turns out, is far more interesting.

The April holiday was merely a sweet prelude to an extended "belated honeymoon" to Ireland they began planning for July. Arranging a major event more than a month in advance was risky, but Jack was eager to introduce his bride to his homeland. A nurse still came to help her bathe, but for the most part Joy was self-sufficient. A new hobby—shooting pigeons (or, rather, "shoot[ing] at" pigeons, Jack joked)—had her limping around the woods behind the Kilns

that summer, nine-millimeter Webley & Scott shotgun in hand, attempting to augment the supper pot. "Though the pot is not noticeably fuller," Jack told a friend, "it is wonderful that she should be able to make such a strenuous attempt to fill it." She also wielded the gun to run off "hooligans" who had been trespassing on the grounds for years, carving graffiti into tree bark, robbing the orchard, and generally making a noisy nuisance. When Joy was bedridden, she once looked up to see them peering through the window at her. Jack, enraged, scared them away. She suggested installing a fence. "It's no use, my love. They'll only cut the wire," he said, voice laden with defeat. "Well," she replied, "if they cut the wire, I'll buy a shotgun." Cradling the gun on a walk in the woods with Jack one day she glimpsed one of the young troublemakers carrying a longbow and a quiver full of arrows. Jack sharply informed him that he was trespassing on private property and must leave at once. The intruder mockingly nocked an arrow. Jack stepped protectively in front of Joy, who, having raised her shotgun, called out in frustration, "God damn it, Jack, get out of my line of fire!" The

neighborhood children believed she would pull the trigger. When the Walsh family visited with their daughters, a boy ran up to the girls in the woods, warning that they'd better leave "or Mrs. Lewis will shoot you." [p. 328]

The story told by Abigail Santamaria in *Joy*, a new biography of Davidman, is fascinating, carefully researched, and well written. It's worth reading, both because it's a great story and because it is a poignant reminder that God's grace is at work in ways that stagger the imagination. Just when I think I have God figured out, something like *Joy* lets me know I haven't got much of a clue.

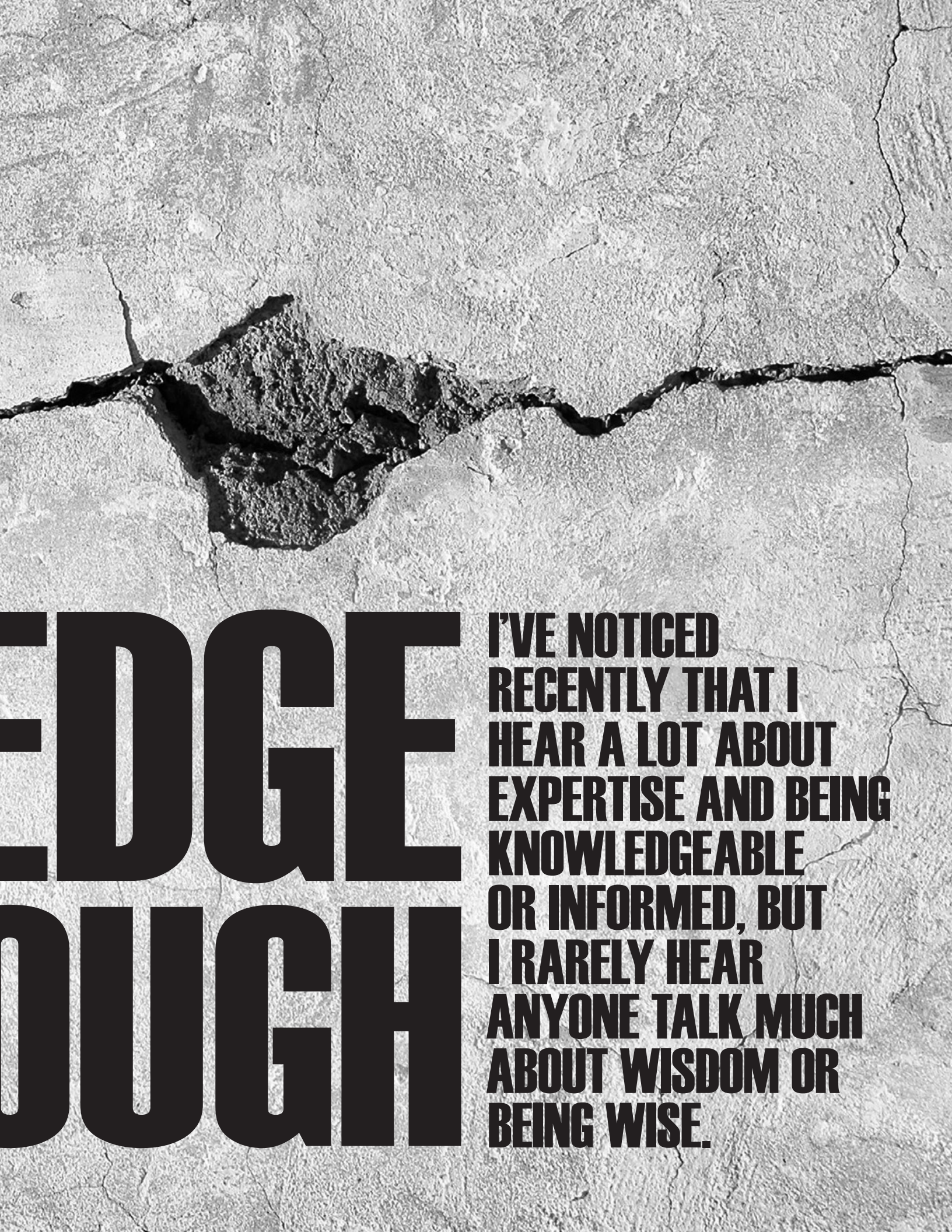
If you appreciate the writing of Lewis, you need to read this book because it will help you see him more accurately. Much of the myth that is built up around his memory turns out to be false. And if you know someone about whom you despair they will ever be touched by the gospel, you need to read *Joy* as well. The story of Davidman's conversion is deeply compelling. And if you find some friend's choices about love and marriage questionable, you have another reason to read it.

Joy: Poet, Seeker, and the Woman Who Captivated C. S. Lewis is a story of love, passion, and two people determined to find and live the truth. I recommend it to you warmly. ■

Book recommended: *Joy: Poet, Seeker, and the Woman Who Captivated C. S. Lewis* by Abigail Santamaria (New York, N.Y.: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt; 2015) 343 pages + notes + bibliography plus index.

READING THE WORLD: EXPERTISE V. WISDOM

**KNOWLEDGE
ISN'T ENOUGH**



**EDGE
OUGH**

**I'VE NOTICED
RECENTLY THAT I
HEAR A LOT ABOUT
EXPERTISE AND BEING
KNOWLEDGEABLE
OR INFORMED, BUT
I RARELY HEAR
ANYONE TALK MUCH
ABOUT WISDOM OR
BEING WISE.**

expertise knowledge

I have no research data to back up this observation, so it could be a fluke. Perhaps you hear things differently. But I doubt it. It could be an issue of terminology, I suppose, people talking about being informed when they actually mean being wise. I doubt that, too. We live, it seems to me, in a world infatuated with experts, overwhelmed with knowledge and data, and glad it is all only a click or two away. Wisdom, on the other hand, seems to have receded into the background. Someone could argue they are interchangeable—someone who is wise has expertise and an expert has wisdom—but I'd argue they are different and that the difference matters.

For most of human history when people had serious questions about serious things, they sought out someone who was known to be wise. Today we tend to try to find an expert. In the past, people believed that wisdom was necessary if they were to find true answers to the big questions. Today we tend to believe that better and more knowledge will allow us to find the way forward, regardless of the issue or question we happen to be facing.

Now knowledge and wisdom are very closely related, of course, so I need to be careful not to overstate things. Still, they are not identical. Not too long ago people were willing to trek miles to visit a hermit living in isolation far from human habitation. She will have proven herself to be wise, with keen insight into people and life, though she might not know or care much about the latest unsavory scheming in the royal court that everyone is talking about. Today we want quick access to information, knowledge, research, data, and facts, and so seek experts who make it their business to collate and present

such things in clear, unambiguous, easy steps.

The shift from wisdom to knowledge began in the eighteenth century in a period called The Enlightenment. This was a radical period for thinkers in the West when the astonishing advances of the industrial and scientific revolutions made them optimistic about the possibility of human progress. The name itself expressed their optimism and their elitism, believing they were in the vanguard of those who had finally reached enlightenment after millennia of superstition and intellectual darkness.

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), for example, a seminal philosopher of the movement, wrote, “What is Enlightenment” in 1784. “Enlightenment,” he said, “is man’s emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one’s understanding without guidance from another.” For human beings to be fully mature, in other words, Kant argued we must free ourselves from the old traditions and dogmas of the past. We need not be guided by claims of revelation or by those whose voices have long been deemed authoritative. Instead, by using pure reason based on careful sense perception and experimentation, we can come to know all that needs to be known. As a result, we can solve all humankind’s problems, answer all its perennial questions, and provide for progress, economically, politically, personally, and socially.

In contrast, wise women and men had steeped themselves over a lifetime in the ideas, metaphors, writings, stories,

“THE SADDEST ASPECT OF LIFE RIGHT NOW IS THAT SCIENCE GATHERS KNOWLEDGE FASTER THAN SOCIETY GATHERS WISDOM.”

— ISAAC ASIMOV

proverbs, rituals, and poetry that had been faithfully handed down over many centuries. They sought to indwell and embody the rich wisdom of an ancient tradition

in a new, up to date setting. It was a long, slow, often painful discipleship. Now, however, with the advent of modernity, this arduous path is no longer needed. Instead, an expert specializes, summarizing the best findings of the best studies, developing an expansive expertise in a narrow slice of life. In fact, the old traditions are considered out of touch with the present moment, a narrow set of beliefs that are best set aside as doctrinaire and unscientific.

The wise person answers your question by saying something that invites quiet reflection; the expert answers by outlining knowledge that solves your problem. The expert’s preferred tool for communication is PowerPoint; those who are wise tend to tell a story, a proverb, and send you away with the suggestion that you learn to live in them. Wisdom is always relationally centered, so that being with those who are wise, and spending time with them is essential to becoming wise. Knowledge can be emailed. Wisdom insists that things are convoluted, interrelated, and very richly textured, that reality is messy, and that answers always lead to more questions. Expertise insists that when things are reduced to their basic essentials, the solutions and proposals will be precise, straightforward, and easy to comprehend. Wisdom suggests that life is best lived in the company of the faithful; expertise argues that

enough studies will present a solution.

I should clarify: I am not anti-expertise; I am pro-wisdom.

Life in the world of advanced modernity requires all sorts of expertise, and no one—no one—is capable of mastering more than a fraction of it. We might be up on the latest technology but uncertain about which flowers will do best in a hanging pot on our porch. I may be able to build a deck that is the envy of the neighborhood but be baffled by the electronic locks on my car. Even the most handy, knowledgeable, and highly skilled people usually have some aspect of modern existence for which they need the help of an expert.

Recently a component in our entertainment center went out. I am proud to say I figured this out on my own. I concluded it had gone out because it not only stopped working, but the lights on the front blinked wildly in strange patterns and then went dark. I tried unplugging and then plugging it in again and, with that effort, utterly exhausted my technical ability. I watched several videos online, each of which assured me that solving the problem was simple enough that anyone could do it. The only thing I learned from them was that anyone can most certainly *not* do it. I watched more videos. After several frustrating and fruitless evenings of experimentation, I tried to order a new component online, but couldn't make heads or tails of the variety available, and mine was old enough that the new products didn't even seem remotely related to it.

I watched several more videos. Finally I drove to a tech store, explained my problem, and humbly bought whatever the salesperson pointed at. He assured me that putting it all together was, and this is a direct quote, "Simple, no problem, anyone can do it."

Anyone, I should report, could not.

After several more frustrating evenings, I hired a tech guy who came to our house, said, "Oh, simple," and within twenty minutes had everything working. We chatted a few minutes and I asked him what he had planned for the weekend. "I'll help some friends who just bought some new electronics. Unbelievable how often people confuse HDMI and DVI."

I agreed—unbelievable.

I paid him happily and am grateful for his expertise. And he is an expert, garnering facts and knowledge in a field that I know little about—and have absolutely no desire to learn—yet find is a part of my life. He is an expert that has made my life better with his knowledge.

We need experts for those parts of life that require knowledge. They are important parts of life and, when we ignore the experts and their knowledge, we pay a price for our arrogance. The problem is that, though it's almost never mentioned,

it is assumed that this sort of knowledge is all we need—that every human problem and question can be adequately

addressed by research, studies, and the results of experimentation. A legacy of the Enlightenment, this is an assumption that might seem natural and obvious today but is actually a novel

and untested hypothesis.

I would suggest, instead, that what we need to flourish as human beings is knowledge in those areas of daily existence that resolve easily into routine issues, as well as wisdom deeply rooted in story, tradition, and revelation for the bigger questions of life and reality. Only someone who is wise can tell us whether to go to war, after which the experts can inform the generals which armaments are needed to neutralize the enemy's attacks. Only someone who is wise can help us identify our calling, after which a vocational expert can help us land an appropriate job. Only someone who is wise can provide the story necessary to define the story of my life, after which a real estate expert can help us find a house in which we can live out our story before a watching world.

For Christians this distinction between expertise and wisdom is of significance in several ways. One is how we read the Scriptures. Some believers seem to think they should be able to find a specific verse for every issue. There are even lists you can find that tell you what text to read if you need peace, or feel lonely, or doubt, or whatever. And the texts on the list may

"HONESTY IS THE FIRST CHAPTER OF THE BOOK WISDOM."

— THOMAS JEFFERSON

"WE CAN KNOW ONLY THAT WE KNOW NOTHING. AND THAT IS THE HIGHEST DEGREE OF HUMAN WISDOM."

— LEO TOLSTOY, *WAR AND PEACE*

speaking of that topic. Still, the Bible is not constructed like an appliance handbook and shouldn't be treated as such. It has a great deal to say about peace and loneliness and doubt, but it speaks to them within a great tradition of wisdom about life and faith and God.

Another way this is significant is where we seek guidance in life. Expertise can be helpful, but if we are really to flourish we will need wisdom. Over the years our living room has been graced with numerous people who told us they had received answers—usually complete with proof texts—that in the end answered nothing. Some of them didn't need to hear anything from us; what they yearned for was that we listen to them and, in doing so, affirm the significance of their existence, their struggle, their pain. Some just needed a safe place to rant and, like the psalmists, bring their complaints against God to God without being chided for forgetting that everything works together for good. Many of them had read the books of experts but needed to hear the poetry of prophets and the fiction of the Redeemer.

And this distinction is also significant in how we respond to Jesus. Sometimes Jesus could be excruciatingly opaque in what he said to people. Our desire for expertise tends to make us want to unpack it all and make it simple, clear, and unambiguous. But I would suggest that the opacity is intentional.

For example, near the end of his life, as the time of his crucifixion approached, Jesus spoke to his closest friends about what would transpire. "A little while," he told them in John 16:16, "and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me." Now, I don't know about how you would have heard that, but the disciples were confused.

So some of his disciples said to one another, "What is this that he says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me'; and, 'because I am going to the Father'?" So they were saying, "What does he mean by 'a little while'?" We do not know what he is talking about. (16:17-18).

Jesus told them he knew they wanted to ask him about it, and then responded to their confusion.

Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour

has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has

been born into the world. So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you' (16:20-22).

Here's the question: Would you have found that helpful? Or would you have remained somewhat confused? And here's

my point: Jesus could be very clear when he wanted to, and here is it possible that he wanted to be opaque for a reason?

Yes, in hindsight we can see that Jesus in John 16 was telling the disciples that he would leave them during his arrest, trial, and death, and then be with them again after his resurrection. And then would come his ascension and he would again leave them, and us, until his return to consummate his kingdom. And could it be that rather than spell out a timeline (which he could have done) he wanted to give them—and us—a saying that could reside in the imagination, a fragment of a story in which we can live in faith?

Jesus lived in an ancient wisdom tradition and spoke out of that tradition. He didn't just come to provide necessary expertise, but came to invite us into the very wisdom of God. This is why St. Paul could refer to him as "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24). He came to provide a richly layered gospel that we can learn to indwell and find, as we do, that we come to know and love God in ways that can be only partially expressed in words. Jesus' parables are not to be merely reduced to catchy

KNOWLEDGE COMES, BUT WISDOM LINGERS. IT MAY NOT BE DIFFICULT TO STORE UP IN THE MIND A VAST QUANTITY OF FACTS WITHIN A COMPARATIVELY SHORT TIME, BUT THE ABILITY TO FORM JUDGMENTS REQUIRES THE SEVERE DISCIPLINE OF HARD WORK AND THE TEMPERING HEAT OF EXPERIENCE AND MATURITY.

— CALVIN COOLIDGE

lessons, but are stories meant to slowly transform our way of seeing and being and loving. Jesus' words about "a little while" provided his disciples with a new way of waiting under his lordship so that their search for the joy of his presence was rooted not in their present reality but in the anticipation of God's fulfilled promises.

Perhaps the most famous biblical quotation about wisdom is that found in Proverbs 9:10: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," the Scripture says, "and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight." It's well known but viewed with some suspicion, since the fear of God is hardly a popular notion. Non-Christians think it's a dangerous idea and Christians prefer to emphasize the peace they have with God. Yet there is health in knowing the fear of God because, without it, hubris and self-sufficiency quickly become deadly. A fear of the Lord reminds me that I am responsible to someone higher than my own desires, or my fondest ideology, or the pressure of my peers. It allows me to be content when I don't know, and to believe that the answers that really count are always costly.

Rather than acting as if the knowledge attained is neutral, wisdom always is concerned with righteousness and the glory of God. Theologian J. I. Packer summarizes it this way:

In Scripture, wisdom is a moral as well as an intellectual quality, more than mere intelligence or knowledge, just as it is more than mere cleverness or cunning. For us to be truly wise, in the Bible sense, our intelligence and cleverness must be harnessed to a right end. Wisdom is the power to see, and the inclination to choose, the best and highest goal, together with the surest means of attaining it.

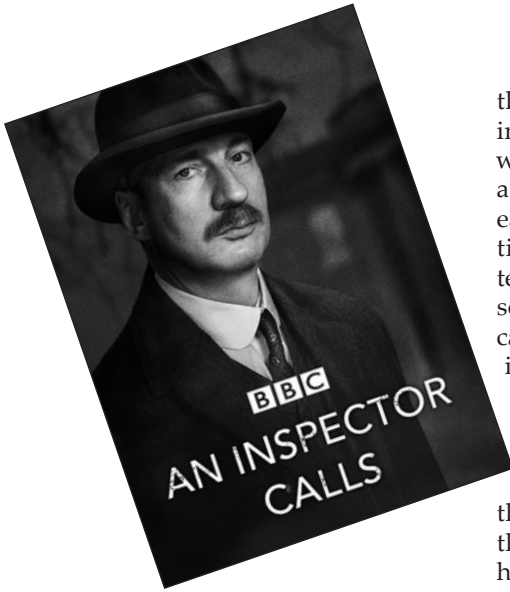
Wisdom is, in fact, the practical side of moral goodness.

We can hope that over the years we've developed a measure of expertise, a store of knowledge that proves useful. Whatever mine is, it isn't in electronics, and the next time part of our entertainment system crashes I'm skipping the videos and the self-help brochures and going to call in a tech person. But more than that, we can hope, by God's grace, to grow to be wise. To be the sort of person it's worth being with, because doing so seems to deepen the things that matter and makes the things that matter less recede into the background. ■

Source: "God Only Wise" in Knowing God by J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; 1973) p. 90.

THE DARKENED ROOM: *AN INSPECTOR CALLS*

I Am Responsible for What I Know



The story of *An Inspector Calls* occurs in April 1912, and the action takes place in a single evening. The Birlings have gathered to celebrate the engagement of the family's daughter Sheila to a promising young suitor named Gerald Croft. He happens to be the son of another successful businessman, one of Birling and Company's main commercial competitors. Arthur Birling, a confident and rather pompous man hopeful of soon obtaining a knighthood, and his snobbish wife Sybil are pleased with their success, even though younger son Eric is moody, not entirely dependable, and struggles with a drinking problem. The Birlings have achieved the upper middle class dream. They are enjoying their personal peace and affluence in a beautiful, richly decorated house in a fictional British industrial city filled with dreary factories in which workers toil long hours in meaningless jobs for wages set as low as the market will allow, far below a living wage. From the Birlings' perspective, prospects look good all around.

To their surprise, the maid informs them they have a visitor, a police inspector who is insistent on speaking with them. Not to worry, Mr. Birling assures them, this is something he can easily handle—he knows the authorities personally and is on excellent terms with them. The inspector will soon be sent away so their celebration can continue. The inspector, however, informs them that a young woman has committed suicide and that he intends to question them about her. This is met with first, surprise, and then with outrage. They do not know her, they insist, she is not numbered among their friends but, even if they did know her, surely her decision to end her life cannot be considered their responsibility. The idea is preposterous. People make their own choices and must bear the consequences of those choices. It's the way life is and the only way a well ordered society can function. But still the inspector is not put off, and he insists that they submit to his interview. Slowly, as the evening progresses under the unrelenting, disquieting gaze and increasingly probing questioning of the inspector, all four family members are revealed to have directly contributed to the dead young woman's poverty, despair, and hopelessness.

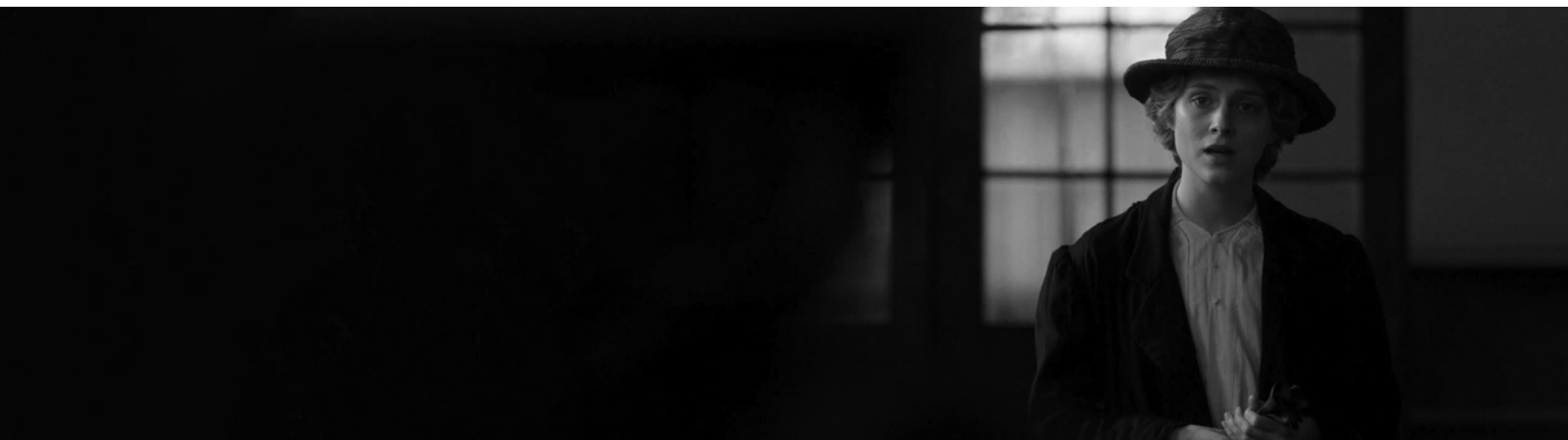
The evening turns dark as consciences are aroused and then vigorously suppressed, as uncomfortable issues are raised, as past decisions are rationalized as honorable regardless of consequences, and as people face guilt in a setting in which they believe they cannot possibly be held responsible for wrong doing. And throughout the film, the identity of the inspector remains mysterious and at times mystical. Who is this Inspector Goole and what is the source of his strangely compelling

power to extract the truth and reveal the shallowness of rationalizations for decisions that are legal, economically prudent, and socially respectable?

An Inspector Calls was originally written as a stage play by British playwright and socialist J. B. Priestly. The fact that it is written for the stage is clear in the film, and makes for an intimacy with the action on the screen so we are drawn into the story as it unfolds.

The play was originally understood as revealing both the shallowness of the British upper middle class and the dark underbelly of a capitalist ideology that stays within the letter of the law while treating workers as less than persons deserving of dignity and a living wage. If you hear the film dismissed as "socialist" or "anti-free market," do not believe it, for it is not. *An Inspector Calls* instead makes a case for justice in a market economy in a fallen world. Priestly might have meant it as an argument for socialism—I do not know enough about him to know—but the story and dialogue raises issues entirely relevant to our modern free market society.

From a biblical perspective, both the individual and the community are of significance, so that neither can be slighted. Christianity is Trinitarian, meaning we believe in one God in three persons, something that refers not to an obscure dogma but to the definition of what is really real. The nature of reality embraces both the individual (one God) and the community (three persons), and so believers cannot commit themselves to either an ideology of the Right or the Left, to either individualism (whether Conservatism or Libertarianism) or communitarianism (whether Progressivism or Socialism). It is not that we are moderates, uncomfortably



spanning both extremes, but that we would argue for a third way. We will agree with both at times and disagree at other times, but always we will insist that neither holds a monopoly on the truth. At each point, in every aspect of life and reality (including economics), we will seek to balance a concern for both the individual and the community.

Primarily, however, I see *An Inspector Calls* as about human responsibility. Economics is merely one part of that, as it is in daily life. Those of us who are eager to speak of our love for the truth must remember that there is a responsibility that comes with knowledge. If I know my neighbor is suffering, that knowledge is not neutral but demands a response. In a fallen world, it is sometimes best not to know.

I know of no one who has written more clearly on the Christian responsibility of knowledge than my friend, Os Guinness. And so I will let him speak rather than try to reword what he has said so well:

Modern knowledge is characteristically noncommittal. Much is known, but all is consequence-free. What we know and what we do about it are two different things. Various roots of this noncommittal style of knowing could be explored. Philosophically, for example, the Anglo-Saxon world in the twentieth century has been dominated by what John Dewey described well as "the spectator theory of knowledge." Owing to the triumph of such forces as empiricism and science, the myth is prevalent that knowledge is objective, universal, and certain—and therefore neutral, detached, impersonal, noninvolving and nonresponsible. What we do with what we know has nothing to do with knowing itself.

Other factors have reinforced the noncommittal character of modern knowledge. An obvious one is the impossible overload of modern information. Another is the essentially detached style of the media—epitomized by Christopher Isherwood's famous but absurd line in A Berlin Diary, "I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking..."

The Christian idea of the responsibility of knowledge is rooted in the notion that God is there and that he speaks. He is therefore the one with both the first decisive word on life—in creation—and the last decisive word—in judgment. Thus human life is essentially responsible, answerable, and accountable. Such responsibility of knowledge is the silent assumption in many basic doctrines. Sin, for example, is a deliberate violation of the responsibility of knowledge—human beings become responsible where they should not be (playing God) and refuse to be responsible where they should be (denying guilt).

This responsibility of knowledge is also embedded in the root meaning of many of the biblical words. For example, the Hebrew word "to know" includes the meaning "to care for." The idea is that "knowledge of" something is "power over" it, "responsibility to" it, and "care for" it. Thus when the Proverbs say that "A righteous man cares for his beast, but a wicked man is cruel at heart," the Hebrew word "cares" is actually "knows." It signifies that a righteous person has a caring knowledge that responsibly treats his animal with integrity—that is, true to the truth of what it is before God. The wicked person, by contrast, understands all knowledge in relation only to himself or herself rather than to God and therefore "understands no such concern."

We can see the biblical understanding of the responsibility of knowledge supremely in Jesus. For where the first man, Adam, severed the link between knowledge and responsibility, the second Adam reunited them. Refusing the devil's temptations to make claims that had no consequences, Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem and the cross. The responsibility of his knowing who he was and what he had come to do marked his way to his death...

Possible applications are myriad—in our attitudes to education, careers, specialization, elitism, cynicism, resistance to evil, and a score of different areas. But the recurring motif is the costly obedience of Christian knowing. Knowledge for the Christian is never noncommittal nor consequence-free. Knowledge carries responsibility. Knowing means doing. What we do with what we know is what Christian knowing is all about.

An Inspector Calls was not made primarily to be entertaining—though I find it so—but to prompt thoughtfulness. As a result, it will probably not win awards or draw large audiences. It doesn't invite reflection as much as demand it. With an ensemble of veteran actors, the film asks us to take another closer look at life and in doing so helps us to be better stewards of our humanness.

Don't watch it unless you are serious about life and faithfulness. But please do watch and discuss. ■

Sources: *Fit Bodies Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What To Do About It* by Os Guinness (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books; 1994) pages 146-148; *Inspector Goole* quote online (www.imdb.com/title/tt4271918/quotes/?tab=qt&ref_=tt_trv_qu).



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What was your initial or immediate reaction(s) to the film? Why do you think you reacted that way?
2. In what ways were the techniques of film-making (casting, direction, lighting, script, music, sets, sound, action, cinematography, editing, etc.) used to get the film's message(s) across, or to make the message plausible or compelling? In what ways were they ineffective or misused?
3. What ideas or values are made attractive in the story? How is this done?
4. Some want to dismiss *An Inspector Calls* by saying it is merely a story designed to make viewers dislike the free market and be open to socialism. How would you respond? Does the free market in a broken world—and the players in it—ever serve injustice rather than promote the common good?
5. Are there ideas or values promoted by the story with which you would disagree? What are they, how were they presented in the film, and why do you disagree?
6. With whom did you identify in the film? Why? With whom were we meant to identify? How do you know? Discuss the main characters in the film and their significance to the story.
7. Who is Inspector Goole? Why is the character made mysterious, even mystical, in the film? What does this element in the story bring to the impact of the narrative?
8. Do you agree that a primary theme in *An Inspector Calls* is the responsibility of knowledge? Why or why not?
9. At one point in *An Inspector Calls*, Inspector Goole says this about the young woman who took her own life: "But just remember this: There are millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us with their lives, and hopes, and fears. Their suffering, and chance of happiness all intertwined with what we think, and say, and do. We don't live alone upon this earth. We are responsible for each other. And if mankind will not learn that lesson, then the time will soon come when he will be taught it in fire, and blood, and anguish." Do you agree? Why or why not?
10. To what extent does the world of advanced modernity agree with the notion of the responsibility of knowledge? Where do you see this? To what extent has this infiltrated the church? How do you know? To what extent has it infiltrated your own heart and mind? What plans should you make?



Movie Credits: *An Inspector Calls*

Starring:

Sophie Rundel (Eva)
Miranda Richardson (Sybil Birling)
Ken Stott (Arthur Birling)
Finn Cole (Eric Birling)
Chloe Pirrie (Sheila Birling)
Kyle Soller (Gerald Croft)
David Thewlis (Inspector Goole)
Gary Davis (Alderman Meggarty)

Director: Aisling Walsh

Writers: J. B. Priestley (original play), Helen Edmundson (adaptation)

Producers: Roanna Benn, Greg Brenman, Lucy Richer, Howard Ella

Music: Dominik Scherrer

Cinematography: Martin Fuhrer

UK, 2015, 87 minutes

Rated PG