

critique

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2020 Issue 2

**FAITH'S FRAGILITY, POETRY, BOOKS FOR
ISOLATION, A HIDDEN LIFE, AND KOREAN
DRAMAS AS SPIRITUAL SOUL THERAPY**



CRITIQUE



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Except where noted, all articles are by Denis Haack.

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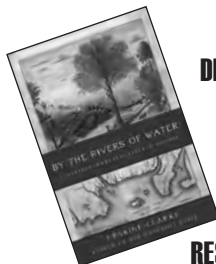
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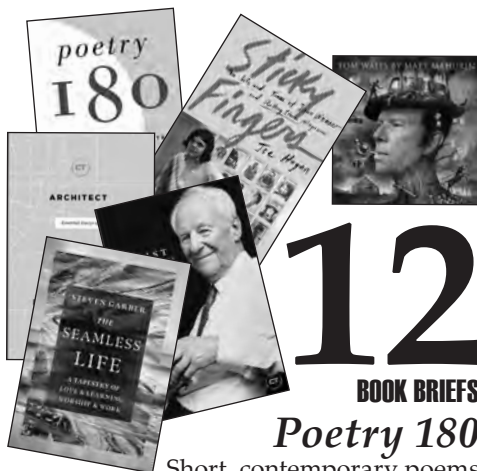
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Faith's Fragility



Over the last few months I've found myself in multiple conversations about the fragility of faith. That's a phrase coined by philosopher Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age* (2007) to describe how cultural pluralism tends to make the faith of believers fragile, or easier to walk away from and somehow less unassailable.

The reason for the fragility is this: in a pluralistic world, believers are surrounded by admirable people who do not share their faith, and may even be hostile to it, and who yet seem to flourish as persons. They may even seem more admirable than we are—in sacrificial sharing, loving the stranger, caring for the earth, giving of their time to charitable causes, being involved in their neighborhood. On top of that, we meet believers who have walked away from the church and the faith, and their testimony is unsettling: they report their life is better, not worse, since they walked away. So naturally the faith of believers seems less essential than they imagined, less compelling, less necessary—in a word, more fragile.

It is a myth to imagine we can escape such susceptibilities. Even exclusive groups of believers are not immune, if for no other reason than that they unconsciously shape the closed nature of their community in reaction to the

cultural forces they are attempting to avoid. An example is the American Christian fundamentalism of the late 19th and early 20th century. Concerned to escape the corrosive effects of modern theological liberalism, fundamentalists defined their concerns by the attacks against scripture and doctrine that the liberals were waging. Their agenda, in other words, was not set by historic biblical orthodoxy—which should have been their primary focus—but by the academic agenda of liberal theologians. If it wasn't so tragic, it would be funny.

The point I wish to make is this: we live in a pluralized world and so as believers find our faith is fragilized. This is simply an existential fact, a sociological reality. If you find yourself doubting this, I recommend you face reality. And if you find yourself trying to isolate yourself and your loved ones from the pluralistic culture that fragilizes faith, stop it. We are called to follow Christ into a fallen world, even at cost, not escape out of it into some supposedly safe ghetto of right belief, worship, and practice.

This doesn't mean we should be complacent. St. Paul instructs the people of God to resist being "conformed to the world," to refuse to be molded by its ideologies and subtle pressures. We must think through what our world is like; reflect on its attractions, effects, and values; and set our own course for life defined by the truth of God's word.

I have no easy answer to the fragilization of faith and believe there is none. Responding to it will require us to think deeply about the nature of Christian worship, Christian discipleship, and the development of maturity. Of one thing I am certain: this challenge to the Faith and the Church by the world should not frighten us. The

promise of our Lord remains: not even the gates of hell can prevail against Christ's Church. This isn't to suggest that it will not take a great deal of hard work (it will), or that there won't be some casualties along the way (sadly, they will occur), or that we'll find an easy solution (there isn't one). It is to affirm that Christ's death and resurrection are definitive, so that the gospel will prevail. The end of things is not in doubt, people, though the path between here and there will be filled with all sorts of surprises and an assortment of landmines.

So, beloved of God, hear his comforting promise: "Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you. ... It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed" (Deuteronomy 31:6, 8). ■

RESOURCE

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DIALOGUE



To the editor:
Denis and Margie—

When it comes to letter writing for the sole purpose of paying a compliment, I can no longer say I don't do that as that is what this brief letter is. I just wanted to acknowledge the great encouragement both of you are to me as I read Letters from *The House Between and Critique*.

First off, Margie, I really appreciated your perspective in "Sudden Death" [Letters 2019:1]. I'm a little younger than you guys, but as I experience the aging of my parents, and myself, it struck a chord with me. I especially appreciated the Palmer quote: "I no longer ask, 'What do I want to let go of, and what do I want to hang on to?' Instead I ask 'What do I want to give myself to?' The desire to 'hang on' comes from a sense of scarcity and fear. The desire to 'give myself' comes from a sense of abundance and generosity." After that, you stated that such questions call you to reconsider and be patient at whatever stage of life, to see it as a chance to reevaluate and to challenge yourself with new things in new ways as you continue to follow Jesus into whatever is next. I'm considering what's next and those words and your whole article resonate with wisdom to me.

And Denis, I meant to write earlier, but in *Critique* 2018:6, I have discussed with and sent countless people this quote from your review of *An Inspector Calls*:

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 the believer 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 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.

It is such an insightful perspective when it comes to our faith, and our politics which hopefully are led by our faith. The fact that there is a third way, that we can balance our concern for the individual and community is so simple but so often overlooked in our politically charged world. Excellent.

I have also referred a number of people to "Building Wells in a Spiritual Desert" [Critique 2018:5]. What a great picture of how to view our faith. So much of my upbringing was about the wall and being on one

side or the other on many issues vs. being drawn to Jesus on a journey as one is drawn to a well. I love the picture of our spiritual journey that David John Seel painted in that article. I could provide quote after quote to back up my appreciation for the article, as many things said were brilliant.

Two final quick comments:

(1) Although I am far from being a Millennial, so much of the New Copernicans article resonated with me. (2) Even more impactful than the New Copernicans article was discovering *Believe Me* by John Fea through your review [available online at <https://ransomfellowship.org/believe-me-john-fea-2018>]. I am one of the 19 percent, and that book was so helpful to me in what is often a baffling "politics over faith" world.

Thank you for your faithfulness in speaking truth with wisdom and honesty.

Dan McMaster
Omaha, Nebraska

Denis Haack responds:

Dan, I'm grateful you mentioned both publications. Margie does not feature letters she receives in Letters, and so I'm especially glad to be able to include your comments about what she has written. And I agree that Seel's perspective in *The New Copernicans* is indeed rich and needs to be more widely considered. Finally, thank you for your encouragement about a third way. The politicization of the church today will be remembered in history as a time of widespread idolatry when God's people tried to divide their allegiance between God's kingdom and secular ideology only to discover that no one can serve two masters. ■

Stretching

I've been working on doing the splits
both ways
side splits and scissor splits
I started Friday and now it's Wednesday
and I think I'm making progress
I'm sore, but not pulled muscle sore
and I might even be longer than last Thursday
I've been hearing about cognitive enhancers too
in powder for your coffee
and I think they make a good companion
to splits training: stretching, thinking, reaching
and fasting
16 hours fasting, 8 hours not fasting
and the 8 hours are of course the best part
not because you get to eat,
but because you deserve to eat
and this is all to say I'm improving myself
maybe for once or like always
and the spiritual piece is important or everything
and wellness is important or more than you think
I mean Jackie had a stroke
and Don Gjevre died
and we got another notice of strep and influenza
in Mrs. Lemon's kindergarten class
and I can't prevent any of that any more than the next woman
but I can be more flexible
and drink nootropic infused coffee
and listen to awakening podcasts
and none of it is a waste of effort or hope
and none of it is mumbo jumbo or delusional expectation
or some of it is
and even if most of it falls away in another time
and I feel again a bit like I did before I was longer
part of it lasts
in my muscles my reflexes my shape my thoughts
and the thoughts are not vain or cruel but love
because if I'm gonna be more cognitive about anything
it better be love. ■

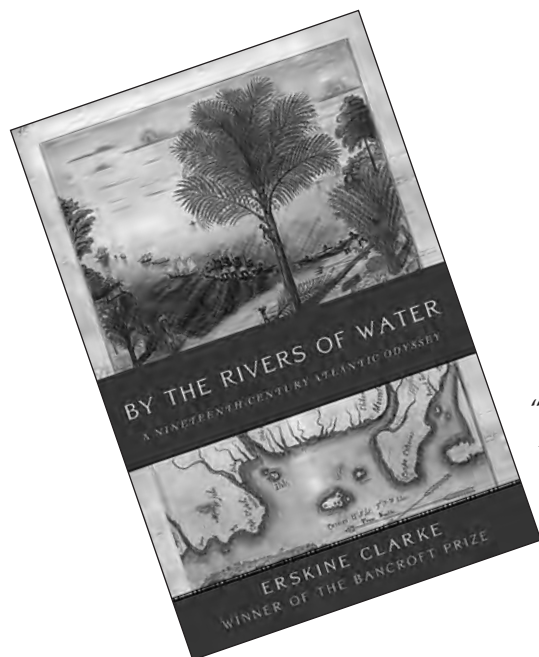


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Emily Awes Anderson is a poet, wife and mom from Minneapolis, Minnesota. Her love of writing is life-long and she hopes this given gladness can serve God's goodness and glory. Her joys include her crazy kids, heroic husband, and weather best suited for jeans and a sweater but no jacket. Her poetry and other writings on scripture, God's blessings and timing. The day-by-day of this beautiful, difficult, funny, imperfect life can be found on her blog, Silver Pennies: Brief Writings on Riches; emily.awes@gmail.com.

Needing the Gospel



By the Rivers of Water is far and away the best missionary biography I have ever read. In fact, it is one of the best biographies of any sort I've read in the past several years. Set in the geographical heart of the international slave trade in Africa and America just prior to, during, and immediately following the American Civil War, we see the power of the gospel to change lives and the power of racism to corrupt hearts and societies. Life is messy even when we have the best of intentions and, as *By the Rivers of Water* demonstrates, the messiness infests and perverts even those parts of life we wish were immune.

The author, Erskine Clarke, is professor emeritus of American religious history at Columbia Theological Seminary. This means he brings a believer's understanding of theology, faith, and the biblical call to missions to telling the story. Clarke couples this with a scholar's insistence on careful research, accuracy, and an admirable

refusal to produce an adulatory and idealized hagiography. As a result, I not only read a truthful story; the story was able to probe into the hidden recesses of my heart to reveal the messiness I harbor there. "Clarke won the Bancroft Prize, the most prestigious of history awards, in 2006 for his *Dwelling Place*, a chronicle of three generations of slave-owning families in pre-Civil War Georgia," notes *The Dallas Morning News*. "He deserves another Bancroft for *By the Rivers of Water*, a memorable book."

Although there was a growing enthusiasm for Christian missions as the nineteenth century proceeded, many whites regarded the missionary effort as ridiculous, as an act of religious hubris. And in regard to Africa, many thought mission efforts doomed to failure. They asserted—especially as a new scientific racism began to develop in the nineteenth century—that Africans were unable to comprehend the Christian gospel or to adopt the "civilized ways" of Christian people.

Such nineteenth-century ideas, when added to the widespread distrust and often disdain of missionaries in our day, make it difficult to enter the Wilsons' world and travel with them on their odyssey. The perceived presumption, and all too often, the obvious arrogance of missionaries—and indeed, of the mission movement itself—make the world of Leighton and Jane Wilson seem distant and uninviting. Yet, to begin to understand the stunning religious transformation of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, in particular the development of a truly global Christianity, requires we try to cross the distances that separate us from these early Protestant missionaries. We must try to peer as deeply as we can into their

world with its commitments and sorrows, its adventures and failures, its travels and homecomings, and to listen as carefully as we can to their often surprising voices. [p. xx-xxi]

Clarke tells the story well, with prose that captures places, events, and peoples as well as beliefs, dreams, and disappointments so that the story comes alive in my imagination. Unlike many missionary biographies, he is careful to set the story in its wider cultural context so that we are brought into the very disparate societies involved, both in America and in Africa. We learn of the daily life not just of the missionaries but also of the people in their lives and among whom they lived, first in America before they left for the mission field, in West Africa where they served, and then back in America after they returned home. As a result, *By the Rivers of Water* is a richly layered book, but Clarke's skill as a storyteller/historian keeps us from getting lost in the details.

The year is 1834. The modern missionary movement has begun. In November of that year, Leighton and Jane Wilson, from wealthy plantation families in South Carolina and Georgia, set sail for West Africa where they would work as missionaries for 17 years.

It was a courageous choice. Significant numbers of missionaries died of disease within their first year in Africa, many more were incapacitated, and the equatorial heat and humidity were unrelenting. New languages had to be learned, new foods and patterns of life adopted, and new relationships developed. Still, the Wilsons' pioneering approaches to evangelism and education and their energetic reporting to the church at home helped shape Protestant missionary efforts around the world.

They established schools in numerous villages and traded and shared meals with their African neighbors. Seeking to demonstrate the love the Christ, they became proficient in the native languages so that they could share the gospel. They also brought Western cultural values with them—including furniture, dishes, and silverware—and found that the people living on the West African coast were already attracted to these trappings of “civilization” that the visiting trading ships and slavers had introduced. The Wilsons did not fully enter the African’s world so much as invite the Africans into theirs.

Meanwhile, in America the tension between slave and free states was increasing. Many who hated slavery yet did not want free African Americans to be part of American society actively supported the creation of Liberia in West Africa where newly freed slaves could immigrate. Within a few years it became clear this misguided and ultimately racist effort at colonialization was doomed to failure, but initially even the Wilsons hoped the experiment would work. Ironically, when they left for Africa, the Wilsons owned slaves. They would have freed them before leaving, but southern states had passed draconian laws that made that choice legally difficult. So, as slave owners leaving southern plantations worked by slaves, they landed on the shore of West Africa where the horrific trade originated. Along the coast where they made their new home were fortresses where Portuguese, Dutch, French, and Spanish ships—most of the ships built in America—landed to take on supplies and load their lower decks with “stunned, struggling cargo” for the long, often deadly trip to slave markets in the Americas.

After almost two decades in West Africa, ill health caused the Wilsons to return to New York where Leighton worked tirelessly to encourage missions in American Protestant churches. Then when the Civil War broke out, they were drawn back to family and home in Georgia, one of the earliest states to join the Confederacy. Now well-known leaders in the new Southern Presbyterian Church, the Wilsons continued to encourage missions and simultaneously helped with efforts in the southern church and society to make certain that, as the saying went, free blacks “knew their place” in a dominant white society.

Clarke ends his tale noting that, after the Wilsons worked hard to develop indigenous churches in Africa, providence turned the tables on the church in an America where racism remains deeply embedded. As the heart of worldwide Christianity has shifted from America and the West to Africa and the global south, missionary efforts have switched direction. Now, in the heart of Georgia and South Carolina are Anglican churches under African bishops, as part of what they call their Mission in the Americas. “Perhaps Leighton would have wondered,” Clarke speculates, “if these new Christians were being called, in the words of the old missionary hymn, to deliver his beloved homeland and his long-reunited country ‘from error’s chain.’”

There is no triumphalism when Clarke recounts the Wilson’s successes, and there is a proper soberness when truthfully recounting their failures and sins. As I read, I realized that here was a historian who took Jesus’s words with consummate seriousness, that only those who are without sin should cast

the first stone (John 8:7).

It is true the Wilson’s story ends tragically, for they settled into a pattern of cultural and ecclesiastical wickedness to which they were, sadly, blind. I am not from the American South, and so the temptations that assail me are different from that of Jane and Leighton Wilson. *By the Rivers of Water* did not make me feel superior, however, but instead made me aware that I, too, am a sinner who has known failure. So, as I finished the book, I wondered before the Lord what sinful patterns of life and thinking, what wicked prejudices and worldly values shape my heart and behavior to which I too am blind. I do not want to be conformed to the world, but it turns out it is impossible to miss being shaped to some extent by our culture. We do not escape our social context when we are baptized—that will occur only at the return of the King. ■

Sources: A book review by Dale L. Walker in *The Dallas Morning News* online, October 26, 2013 (www.dallasnews.com/arts-entertainment/books/2013/10/26/book-review-by-the-rivers-of-water-a-nineteenth-century-atlantic-odyssey-by-erskine-clark)

Book recommended: *By the Rivers of Water: A Nineteenth Century Atlantic Odyssey* by Erskine Clarke (New York, NY: Basic Books; 2013) 378 pages + notes + indices

Korean Dramas as Spirituality

by John Seel

Our modern problem is not that we are too romantic, but that we are not romantic enough.

Our longing for love and romance tell us something essential about ourselves and the nature of reality. It is a backhanded proof that we were made for this. In spite of our cynicism that these longings are only the addled aspirations of romantic unstable naiveté, for those most open to others the longing remains. We even prize the gut-wrenching experience of “being in love” over the actual complexity of maintaining love. In loves most acute form, it is an emotion that borders pain and is often watered with tears. Before we get overly adult, male, and shutdown, we should first honor this romantic sensibility. Our Puritan heritage has besmirched the need for eros in our lives. Our Enlightenment biases have replaced the heart with the head. This is to our loss. We need to rekindle an affective theology, to embrace heaven over hell.¹ C. S. Lewis warns,

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will all change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside of heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is hell.²

So, if keeping one’s heart open to the longing for love and romance is a spiritual benefit and if our modern world discounts or distorts this longing, then we should look for ways to rekindle these suppressed emotions. Those who are academically inclined might start by reading Boethius’ *The Consolation of Philosophy* or Jonathan Edwards’ *Religious Affections*. For the rest of us, we might start with Hallmark Christmas movies or better yet acquaint ourselves with Korean dramas. It is always better to experience romance affectively through story than read about it abstractly in a book. It is better to actually cry at the end of a moving television episode or romance novel.

Korean dramas, or “K-dramas” as they are called, are television series in the Korean language made in South Korea. They are a part of the global media phenomena of hallyu, which is a Chinese term that literally means “Korean Wave.” Since the turn of the 21st century, South Korea has emerged as a major exporter of popular culture. It is a conscious strategy of the Korean government’s assertion of soft power. It aims at becoming one of the world’s leading exporters of culture along with Japan and Britain, a position that the United States has dominated for nearly a century. This is a pretty ambitious global goal for a country the size of Indiana. *Hallyu* has propelled Korea and caused it to reign in East Asian nations. To many Americans, globalization may mean Americanization but, in China, globalization is Koreanization. In 2014, the South Korean government allocated one percent of its annual budget to their cultural industries and it raised \$1 billion to fund popular culture. This effort has been heightened by the development of social networking services

and online video sharing platforms, which have allowed Korean entertainment to reach a sizable overseas audience. In November 2008, Netflix began offering several Korean dramas as part of its video selection.

K-dramas are Hallmark romance films on steroids. They are more intense, more emotional, and more traditional. Consider two scenes from Jane Austen-based novels turned into films, the 1995 film *Sense and Sensibility* and the 2005 film *Pride and Prejudice*. First is the scene where Elinor Dashwood (played by Emma Thompson) realizes that her love interest, Edward Ferrars, is not married as she thought and burst into tears. The second scene from *Pride and Prejudice* is when Mr. Darcy walks across the moor toward Elizabeth Bennet at the end of the film to ask for her hand in marriage. Both of these scenes are emotional high points in the drama—gut-wrenching for the involved viewer. If one were to take the emotions elicited by these two scenes, stir and compound them by ten, one is just approaching the typical emotional arc of K-dramas. At their best this is achieved without becoming maudlin.

This is not to say that there are not a lot of tears. The ability to cry on cue and express emotion on one’s face is a given for K-drama actors. But there are two other reasons for this.

First is that K-dramas are steeped in a tragic sensibility. Certainly, they portray a highly idealized vision of Korean culture, but the *mise en scène* of a K-drama story is the pervasive expectation of tragedy. This expectation is what is largely missing from Hallmark romances.

ritual Soul Therapy



South Korea has often been compared to Ireland. There are some superficial similarities, though most Koreans bristle at the comparison as it discounts the central role of Confucianism in Korean culture. But what Daniel Patrick Moynihan said of the Irish is also true of Koreans, “To be Irish is to know that in the end the world will break your heart.” The Irish poet Yeats adds, “Being Irish, he had an abiding sense of tragedy, which sustained him through temporary periods of joy.”

Like the Irish, Koreans have a long

history of tragedy and oppression that is now part of their psychological habitus. Caught between the invading forces of Japan and China, Korea is sometimes referred to as the “sore thumb of Asia.” Woven into the Korean psyche is the emotion described in Korean as *han*. There is no adequate English translation of the term. It emerged out of the experience of Japanese occupation and was coined by Japanese art critic Yanagi Soetsu. He called it the “beauty of sorrow.” Others describe it as “a sadness, a sadness so deep no tears will come. And yet, still, there is hope.” Having

been derived from a Japanese theorist, it is not a term without scholarly controversy in Korea. Yet for all the criticism of the theory, Yanagi Soetsu was awarded the *Bogwan* Order of Cultural Merit in 1984, the first to be awarded to a non-Korean. *Han* gives K-dramas’ central characters a kind of grit and tenacity as seen in the series *Romance is a Bonus Book*. In these stories, tragedy is layered on tragedy, making unrequited love the norm, and loss the expectation. This same sensibility is captured in Emily Dickenson’s poem, “Success is Counted Sweetest,” where defeat makes

victory a heightened, if now unattainable, longing.

Success is counted sweetest

*By those who ne'er succeed.
To comprehend a nectar
Requires sorest need.*

*Not one of all the purple Host
Who took the Flag today
Can tell the definition
So clear of victory*

*As he defeated—dying—
On whose forbidden ear
The distant strains of triumph
Burst agonized and clear!*³

My wife counsels never trust anyone who doesn't walk with a limp. Look for those with a tragic sense of life, who embrace life with a conscious awareness of brokenness, like one might find at a typical A.A. meeting. It is this tragic longing for love in the midst of loss that makes the pathos of K-dramas so powerful. Where else would one find a love story set in a hospice as is the case with the current K-drama series, *Chocolate*. American Hallmark films lack *han*.

A second feature of K-dramas is their overwhelming traditionalism. When moderns use the word *eros*, they immediately go to the sexual, and in most film this means explicit depictions. For most of Western history prior to Freud, sex was understood as a sublime mystical yearning for and connection with God and not the other way around. K-dramas maintain this earlier sensibility, because of their overlay of Confucian values. They are erotic without being sexual.

Korea is both very modern and very traditional. The Internet speeds in Korea are twice as fast as in the United States. Social media and online gaming are much more prevalent in Korean society than in the U.S. Their educational and technical abilities are among the best in the world. The technical production value and acting chops of these K-drama television shows are on par with the best filmmaking in the world.

At the same time, Korea is steeped in tradition and places great value on it. Respect for elders, filial piety, family-orientedness, and a display of perceived "Asian moral values" play a critical role in these Korean dramas. K-dramas have much of the traditional relational restraint that one sees in Jane Austen's novels. It is this prolonged restraint that serves to heighten the sense of longing and the emotional tension in these stories.

One recalls that, in Lewis' inaugural address at Cambridge University, he observes, "Between Jane Austen and us comes the birth of the machines.... This is parallel to the great changes by which we divide pre-history. This is on a level with the change from stone to bronze, or from a pastoral to an agricultural economy. It alters Man's place in nature.... I conclude that it is really the greatest change in the history of Western Man."⁴ With traditional Confucianism as a stand in for Jane Austen, K-dramas explore the impact of modernity on ancient tradition.

Essential in understanding these dramas is some appreciation of Confucianism. The teachings of Confucius (551–479 BCE) were never intended to be a religion. It has no sacred writings, no priesthood, and no doctrine of the afterlife. However, it did establish the parameters for social

relationships and social decorum. Confucianism is family-centric and aggressively hierarchical. There are five basic relationships to be respected in the following order: king-subject, father-son, husband-wife, elder-younger, and friend-friend. Traditionally, cultures and countries in the Chinese cultural sphere were all strongly influenced by Confucianism. In practice this means that age matters as elders are respected (including ancestor worship), social standing matters including one's class or where one is from, and indirection matters because of the danger of causing someone to "lose face."

These Confucian dynamics are especially important in Korea as these hierarchical relationships are woven into the very structure of the language. It is not uncommon in Korea for a stranger to ask, "What is your age?" This is because they do not know how to talk to you without knowing first your social standing and whether you are elder to them. The ending of every sentence reflects these five basic relationships. One can put someone down just by changing the endings of the sentence—literally "talking down" to them. Now it is certainly true that modernity has challenged the rigidity of these hierarchies. Much of the humor in these K-dramas plays on this.

For example, in the drama *Crash Landing on You*, a very wealthy and modern businessman in Seoul complains to his wife to say what she means rather than continue to play the game of constant verbal indirection. In doing so, it indicates how his thinking has been influenced by the West. A further contrast in the impact of modernity is seen when the K-drama storylines takes one into North Korea and the contrast between the North

Korea and the South Korea become central. (Watching a K-drama in North Korea is punishable by death.) It is also explored when the storyline contrasts modern storylines with ancient history as in *Live Up to Your Name*, which contrast a modern medical doctor with an ancient Korean traditional acupuncturist of the Joseon Dynasty. This is also shown through nostalgia for older rural life. In *Crash Landing on You*, a wealthy South Korean businesswoman learns from her North Korean captors the values of rural simplicity—most often reflected in food. In every case, the tradition of Confucian social decorum is respected making these very conservative dramas.

So, the contrasting tension between modernity and traditional Confucian society played out relationally, sets up the humor and dramatic tension in these stories. In almost every story there is a comic figure whose role is to expose the cultural taboos—that is, to say what everyone is thinking but would never dare to say aloud by strict cultural protocol.

Almost 90 percent of the scriptwriters for K-dramas are women, which is significant in a male-dominated industry and a largely misogynistic society. This is interesting because the ancient ways are decidedly less sympathetic to women and the female protagonists almost always start as modern breakers of Confucian protocol or feminists only to find their way back to the traditional norm by the conclusion of the story. It is this conservative bias that has given these dramas their broad appeal across Asia today.

I am certainly not an expert on K-dramas, but I have immersed myself into two series available on Netflix: *Crash Landing on You* and *Chocolate*.

Earlier K-dramas tend to be set in the ancient historical setting of Korea (*sageuk* or historical dramas), which was characterized by warring dynastic city-states. *Live Up to Your Name* is a fusion *sageuk*, blending through fantasy the ancient and the modern. Among the most successful of these *sageuk* dramas is *Dae Jang Geum* (Jewel in the Palace) (2003). It was sold to 91 different countries. Starring Lee Young-ae in the title role, it tells the tale of an orphaned kitchen cook who became the king's first female physician. In a time when women held little influence in society, the young apprentice cook, Jang-geum, strives to learn the secrets of Korean cooking and traditional Korean medicine to cure the king of his various ailments. It is based on the true story of Jang-geum, the first female royal physician of the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1897).

Other notable K-drama series include:

Winter Sonata (2002)

Stairway to Heaven (2003–04)

49 Days (2011)

My Love from the Stars (2014).

Winter Sonata is considered to be the series that launched the Korean Wave throughout Asia and worldwide. Among the values in watching these dramas is learning the social dynamics of another culture. One can learn a lot about how the Koreans, Japanese, and Chinese view North Korea through films like *Steel Rain* (2017). In this film, a coup in North Korea forces a North Korean agent to defect to South Korea with an unconscious "Number One." While agents from the North hunt for them, the defected North Korean agent has to work with the South Koreans to stop a nuclear war. It was actually this military action film that first got me watching Korean subtitled television

dramas.

With North Korea in the nightly news, these dramas provide Western observers insights into the Korean mind. While the viewpoint is decidedly from a South Korean perspective, one finds that the geo-political reality is viewed very differently than through the lens of latent American imperialism. While these dramas are romanticized versions of reality that have all been given the "Hollywood touch," there is much that can be learned from them short of visiting the countries themselves.

Let me conclude by commenting on the two series with which I am currently engaged. Both are ongoing and unfolding week-to-week.

The series *Crash Landing on You* is about a wealthy South Korean heiress of a Korean conglomerate who has a paragliding accident that takes her into North Korea. She literally falls into the arms of a high-ranking North Korean officer who is serving his mandatory 10 years of compulsory military service. Prior to his service, he was a concert pianist who studied in Switzerland. Yoon Se-ri, the heiress, is spoiled, demanding, and fairly Westernized. She is also the oldest and favorite bastard child of the father, which puts her in great tension with her other siblings and stepmother. The North Korean officer, Ri Jung-Hyuk, tries to protect her and find a way to return her to South Korea without gaining the attention of the State Security Service, in effect the DPRK's KGB. Gradually they fall in love and this ill-fated romance places the traditional Romeo and Juliet story in the midst of contrasting cultures and geo-political intrigue. It has a historical parallel in the ancient Korean folk tale of *Ch'unhyang*, another

story of ill-conceived love, a similarity that is reference in the script as an ominous warning.

Crash Landing on You keeps the emotion tensions at bay for the viewer through a storyline that emphasize cross-cultural humor and life-and-death political intrigue. In this sense it is more than just a romance. Se-ri's difficulty in getting out of the country is only matched by her inability to come to terms with her feelings for Captain Ri. Will she go or will she stay? Will she be able to voice her feelings for Captain Ri? And against this personal struggle is the question of whether the State Security Service will find her out before she has made up her mind on the other questions? What is certain is that the experience of being immersed with a group of North Korean soldiers and their rural lifestyle has profoundly changed her for the better—that is more traditional.

The film's depiction of North Korea is highly idealized. The reality is much closer to Auschwitz than what is shown. The actual reality is dirtier, smellier, and poorer than what is depicted here. But the existing contrasts between the two Koreas makes for entertaining television.

The series *Chocolate* is the story of a Korean man who became a neurosurgeon though he dreamt of becoming a chef, and a woman who became a chef because of him. Central to this story is the emotional impact of Korean cuisine in all of its sensory and aesthetic glory. Entire episodes turn on the significance of Korean black bean sauce noodles (*jajangmyeon*) and Kimchi soup (*kimchi jigae*). This series took a little longer to grip me as it didn't have the North Korean military intrigue of *Steel Rain* or *Crash Landing on You*, but this series

is K-drama in its purist form. Set in a hospice among the terminally ill, this is a love story that calls one to reflect on what is genuinely important in life and death. Pathos, tragedy layered upon tragedy, death, tears, and unacknowledged and unrequited love fill this drama. All the while it makes one hungry for Korean food. This series is about as tactile and sensory and affective as television can get.

Western audiences may be put off by the extreme emotional outbursts or the cheesy pop songs that summarize each episode. Expressions of extreme emotion are common in Korea, as illustrated by professional mourners at funerals. This is depicted in *Crash Landing on You* and is culturally a mark of social standing and status. What seems odd to buttoned up Westerners—professional wailers—was actually a common biblical practice. "Therefore thus says the Lord, the Lord God Almighty, says, 'There will be wailing in all the streets, and cries of anguish in every public square. The farmers will be summoned to weep and the mourners to wail'" (Amos 5:16). So, these displays of strong emotion are all part of the K-drama cake and my advice is to simply give oneself license to enter into the Korean wave. You will be better for it however odd it may seem at first.

It may seem like a stretch to suggest that K-dramas are a tonic for the withered and cynical Western soul. The Puritan in us wants to suppress emotion and desire. Lewis counters that we do not desire strongly enough, that we are "too easily pleased." To grasp the full significance of grace, one must first have a broken heart. Protecting it from harm is a recipe for a truncated life, one that will never appreciate the risks and price of love.

I have a bias for all things Korean, as I grew up there. But I did not fully appreciate these aspects of Korean culture until now. There is a saying, attributed to Buddha, that goes: "When the student is ready, the teacher will appear." K-dramas are my teacher now. They are a needed haven for a Type-A, Germanic, left-brained, male heart.

When I was a prep school rowing coach, several of my oarsmen later attended the U.S. Naval Academy. On a visit to the Academy, one of them said, "Coach, my roommates do not know how to connect. Their idea of connection is getting drunk and playing video games. How do I avoid becoming such a person?" I suggested he read Jane Austen and poetry. I would now add K-dramas.

This is not to suggest that every Korean male is a paragon of emotional connection. This is certainly not the case. K-dramas are an idealized vision of love and romance written largely by Korean women, who on the whole are treated pretty badly in Korean society.

But there is an ongoing legacy of Korean culture and Confucian traditionalism that has captured the modern imagination through K-dramas. It is decidedly not modern, regularly questioning the premises of modernity. Yet it very well may be more biblical in the same way that Lewis called us back to the value of pre-modern sensibilities of Jane Austen's novels in "De Descriptione Temporum."

So, it is not surprising to me that my father, the Korea missionary cancer surgeon, medical director, and violinist found great solace in these lines from English Victorian poet Robert Browning,

*All we have willed or hoped or dreamed
of good shall exist;*

Not its semblance, but itself; no beauty,
nor good, nor power
Whose voice has gone forth, but each
survives for the melodist
When eternity affirms the conception of
an hour.
The high that proved too high, the heroic
for earth too hard,
The passion that left the ground to lose
itself in the sky;
Are music sent up to heaven by the lover
and the bard;
Enough that he heard it once: we shall
hear it by and by.⁵

The heightened longings for love and romance found in K-dramas are actually signposts of heaven. This is a path worth following. ■

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David John Seel Jr., PhD (University of Maryland), is a cultural-renewal entrepreneur and social-impact consultant with expertise in the dynamics of cultural change. He lives with his wife on a historic farm in Pennsylvania.

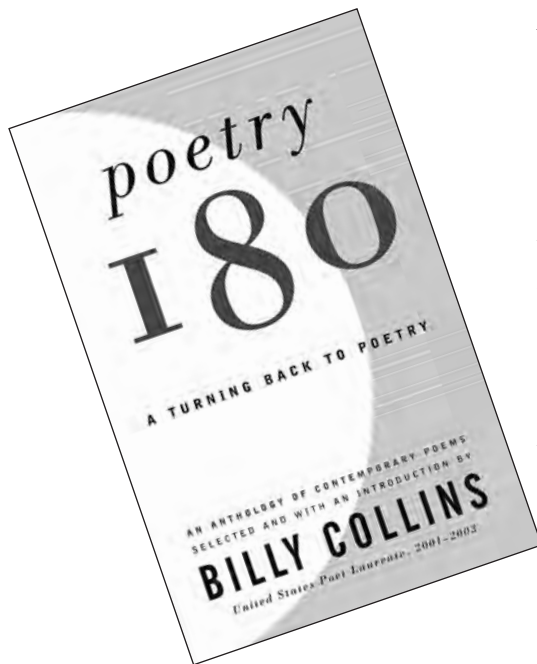
For further reading: "Crash Landing on You: The defector who brought North-South Korean romance to life," (February 22, 2020) BBC online (www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-51526625).

Endnotes

1. See Chris Armstrong's "Getting Passionate," *Medieval Wisdom for Modern Christians* (Brazos, 2016), pp. 165–190.
2. C. S. Lewis. *The Four Loves*, p. 170.
3. Emily Dickinson, *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, p. 9.
4. C. S. Lewis, "Concerning a Description of the Times."
5. Myra Reynolds. "Abt Vogler," *The Poems and Plays of Robert Browning*, p. 251.



Good Reads for this Season of



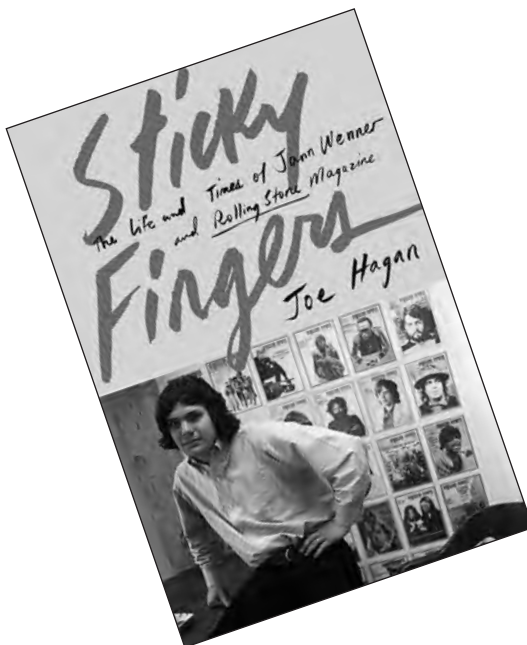
Poetry 180

While Billy Collins was United States Poet Laureate, he launched a series of efforts to bring poetry into the lives of ordinary people, including those who normally dislike or ignore poetry altogether. Collins' objective in *Poetry 180* is "to assemble a generous selection of short, contemporary poems which any listener could basically 'get' on first hearing—poems whose injection of pleasure is immediate" [p. xvi]. Intended specifically for high school teachers to read aloud to their classes, *Poetry 180* is too delightful a collection to be limited to that setting.

The lovely thing about reading poems aloud with friends, during

a shared meal or over cups of coffee or glasses of wine, is that poetry, an ancient artform, helps expand our hearts, our loves, our ability to see and hear and understand with clarity. It does so not by telling us we need help but by granting a portal into a wider experience of life and then inviting us to enter. This simple act of sharing beauty and hospitality is radically countercultural and may be one of the most courageous acts we dare commit. ■

Book recommended: *Poetry 180: A Turning Back to Poetry* edited by Billy Collins (New York, NY: Random House; 2003) 272 pages + contributors + indices



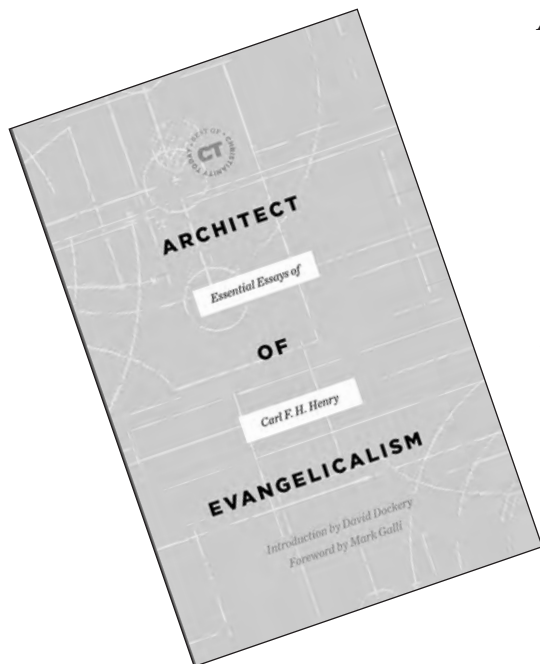
Sticky Fingers

Rolling Stone magazine has always ranked high on my reading list. The reason is that, from its beginning in 1967, the magazine took the world of popular culture with the seriousness it deserved. "For the first time in the history of man," Tom Wolfe says, in the sixties "young people had the money, the personal freedom, and the free time to build monuments and pleasure palaces to their own tastes" [p. 13]. And that changed everything. *Rolling Stone* has provided me a window of insight into bands, albums, songs, and genres that don't appear in my iTunes listening list. I have also found thinking through the liberal/libertarian political opinion in its pages to be stimulating and helpful.

"Jann Wenner's oldest and dearest friends," Hagan notes in *Sticky Fingers*, "could not help but notice the likeness between Trump and the Jann Wenner they knew. The crude egotism, the neediness, the total devotion to celebrity and power" [p. 503]. For all the vaunted idealism of the magazine's original vision, Wenner, a narcissistic and mercurial editor, used *Rolling Stone* primarily as his personal ticket to wealth and fame. ■

Book recommended: *Sticky Fingers: The Life and Times of Jann Wenner and Rolling Stone Magazine* by Joe Hagan (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf; 2017) 511 pages + notes + index

Isolation



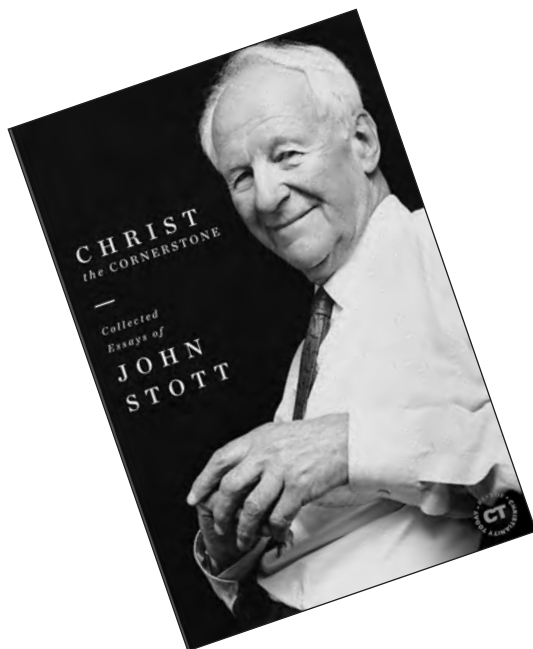
Architect of Evangelicalism

If biblically orthodox Christians are not to be merely reactionary about evangelicalism now that it is in some turmoil, it is essential to remember the history of the movement. Only then can we determine what are its strengths, what went wrong, what needs to be salvaged, what needs to be jettisoned, and where we wish to position ourselves confessionally. And we will not know that history if we do not consider the groundbreaking work of theologian Carl F. H. Henry (1913–2003).

Architect of Evangelicalism collects 33 articles Henry published in *Christianity Today* between 1956 and 1989. They reveal his commitment to a high view of scripture and historic orthodoxy

and his desire to call the church to embrace and apply the truth of God's word in an increasingly secular society. The specific sociological, cultural, political, and doctrinal issues Christians face in the opening decades of the 21st century have shifted some since Henry's day, but we must never lose his insistence that the faith has something important and substantial to say to every issue, challenge, and question that confronts us. ■

Book recommended: *Architect of Evangelicalism: Essential Essays of Carl F. H. Henry* (Bellingham, WA, Lexham Press, *Best of Christianity Today*; 2019) 383 pages + indices contributors + indices



Christ the Cornerstone

Between 1971 and 1981, the Rev. Dr. John R. W. Stott (1921–2011) wrote a regular column in *Christianity Today*. In it he reflected on the global church, on Christian belief and challenges to it, and what it looks like to be faithful to the gospel in a rapidly changing world. *Christ the Cornerstone* collects 49 of Stott's columns, and, though they are obviously dated in the details they cover, they are timeless in the way he applies the gospel to whatever he is considering. Because he reflects on things that arose naturally as he traveled in a worldwide teaching ministry, the book is an overview of a crucial decade of the modern evangelical movement.

"Hassan Dehqani-Tafti," Stott writes in "Christians and Muslims,"

"himself a convert from Islam and now Anglican Bishop in Iran, has expressed it admirably in his autobiography *Design of My World* (1959): "Words alone cannot bring the Muslim to the foot of the Cross. ... Christians must show in their lives how Christianity is in truth the incarnation of the love of God." Though Stott had a worldwide ministry and worldwide renown, he lived a quiet life, humbly seeking to listen to and lovingly serve those around him. ■

Book recommended: *Christ the Cornerstone: Collected Essays of John Stott* (Bellingham, WA, Lexham Press, *Best of Christianity Today*; 2019) 325 pages + indices



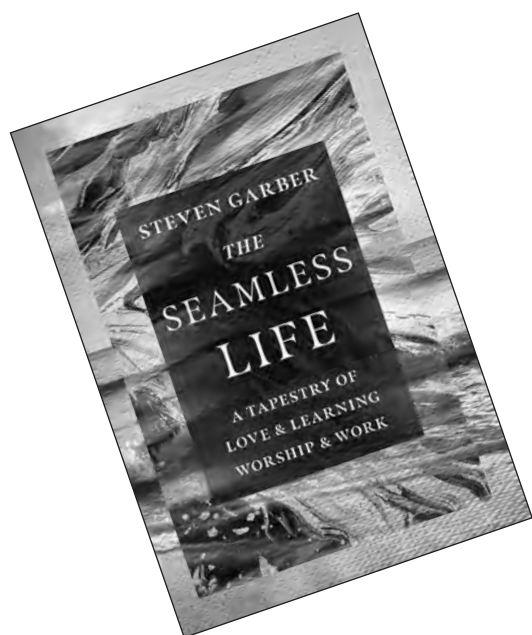
Tom Waits by Matt Mahurin

This large format, coffee-table art book will be of interest to people who love music album cover art, collaborations between visual artists and musicians, and, of course, the many fans of Tom Waits. For over three decades photographer and illustrator Matt Mahurin has worked with Waits to produce images to go with his music—to accompany magazine articles and grace album covers or performance posters. This book collects images that were never published but are too arresting to simply languish unseen in Mahurin's archives.

Included are illustrations made for 20 of Waits' songs, each produced as Mahurin listened to the piece

repeatedly. Those familiar with Waits' music and performances know that he is unpredictable, a storyteller with a sense of the absurd, an intense singer-songwriter whose rough, gravelly voice pushes the boundaries so that we don't lose touch with broken reality. The same ragged edge is reflected in the visuals. "Tom's body language," Mahurin says, "part-ape, part-ballerina. His facial expressions part-prankster, part-monster—all whispering or wailing what they wanted to be. A huffing bull, a puffing tractor, a suffering clown." ■

Book recommended: *Tom Waits by Matt Mahurin by Matt Mahurin* (New York, NY: Abrams; 2019) 224 pages



The Seamless Life

Over many years of mentoring and teaching, Steve Garber has rightly insisted that the lordship of Christ should transform our view of work. Instead of the constricting categories of career, occupation, and job, God's grace allows us to embrace the robust, life-giving categories of calling, vocation, and glory. This frees us to know that what we do is part of what God is doing, so that whether we be carpenter or educator, stay-at-home parent or physician, truck driver or fisherman, each serves the Creator as significantly as does a missionary or pastor or martyr.

In *The Seamless Life*, a small-format book, Garber gives us 37 brief, wise meditations divided into two main

topics: "At Work in the World" and "Making Sense of Life." Each is worth a slow reading, either alone or with friends, with time for unhurried reflection. Garber is gifted in weaving together insights from scripture, popular music and film, works of classic literature, and surprising, ordinary moments of life. As a result, we see more clearly, love more deeply, and grow in wisdom in the things that matter most. ■

Book recommended: *The Seamless Life: A Tapestry of Love and Learning, Worship and Work by Steven Garber* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; 2020) 126 pages

A Hidden Life Should Not Be Hidden

by Daniel Miller



“A darker time is coming,” we hear in Terrence Malick’s new film *A Hidden Life*. “Men will be more clever. They won’t fight the truth. They’ll just ignore it.”

Malick’s powerhouse film, which appeared in theaters just before Christmas 2019, has been called by several Christian critics one of the best cinematic depictions of the Gospel. It tells the story of Franz Jägerstätter, an Austrian farmer who was ordered to military duty during WWII but refused to swear an oath of allegiance to Hitler. Between the beauty of the story and the brilliance of the filmmaking, *A Hidden Life* may well become what some consider one of our most treasured pieces of Christian art. In the wider culture, however, this movie might also be seen as a piece of art that won’t be so much challenged or ridiculed—it will just be ignored.

In 2011, Malick’s much less linear film but still infused with Christian

themes, *Tree of Life*, was nominated for several Oscars. *A Hidden Life* was not only snubbed by the Oscars, but it appears to have confused and frustrated many critics and audiences. To date (the end of February 2020), the film has grossed \$3.4 million dollars in a limited theater release. (To put that in perspective, *Frozen II*, which came out about the same time has made \$1.43 billion in ticket sales.)

My hope is to convince you that this movie should not be ignored. *A Hidden Life* is certainly different—it’s like watching an I-Max nature film while listening to epic poetry, classical music, and sacred hymns. It’s nearly three hours long and uses lots of intimate wide-angle shots that shove you, often rather uncomfortably, into the personal space of the characters. It also brings up some pretty tough questions:

Is one justified to let their family suffer if it’s for a just cause?

At what point do you publicly protest against something in society you believe is unjust?

How do you discern whether it’s time to go down a path that could lead to martyrdom?

Just a bit of lite dinner table conversation. The film will challenge you, but if you allow yourself into its world, *A Hidden Life* will reward you with one of the most beautiful and inspiring stories of what it looks like to follow Jesus.

A Contrast

It is easier to understand what Malick is doing in *A Hidden Life* if we see this film as the third, final part of a series that include his last two movies, *Knight of Cups* (2015) and *Song to Song* (2017). Both stories are filmed in a twirling, stream-of-consciousness style, and attempt to give verisimilitude

to the modern bourgeois lifestyle of wandering from “one desire to the next.” In one of his rare interviews, Malick described what he was depicting in these movies: “...you can live in this world just moment to moment, song to song, kiss to kiss... and try to create these different moods for yourself and go through the world... living one desire to the next, and where does that lead, what happens to you in that sort of [life]?”

The outwardly beautiful characters mingle with the rich and famous at the most chic and extravagant Los Angeles house parties, trying to spark excitement. The romantic leads are always brushing their hands together in ephemeral touches and twirling around one another aimlessly in giant modern houses made of glass. They seem as if they are just floating around one another like out-of-body spirits. Both movies get a little extreme in trying to capture this mood (one critic described it as “excessive, soft-core twirling”), but Malick shows how depressing it can be to try to find meaning in self-fulfillment. It would be sad if Malick’s message ended there. But like any good preacher, he is setting us up to hear the good news.

Compared to the modern urban despair of *Knight of Cups* and *Song to Song*, seeing the opening scenes of *A Hidden Life* is like ascending to an Alpine version of Eden. We meet Franz and his wife Fani Jägerstätter on their breathtakingly beautiful farm in the mountains playing with their children. Their hands—wedding bands prominent—mingle in the loamy earth as they bury seed potatoes. They roll together in the pasture and play “blind man’s bluff” with their little girls. Instead of the uncommitted, wispy touches that

we see in the other two films, Franz and Fani linger in strong, full embraces, their bodies wrapped together as one.

It's almost too perfect, but Malick wants us to see how the Jägerstätters' life is beautifully rooted in their faith, land, and community. By their visible sweat and dirty faces, we see that things aren't easy, but there is an undeniable harmony to their natural, earthy life compared to the ephemeral fogginess of the characters in *Knight of Cups* and *Song to Song*. And whereas those characters wander around aimlessly with no purpose, we quickly realize in *A Hidden Life* that the Jägerstätters not only have a clear purpose in life as followers of Jesus, but they will be called upon to live it out—no matter the cost. And as we watch the simple agrarian beauty of the couple's life—the hard but satisfying manual labor, their tightly-knit village and church, their happy marriage and home—Malick shows us that the cost they will pay is so very high.

The Cost of Discipleship

"I thought we could build our nest high up, in the trees, fly away like birds to the mountains," Franz whispers as the camera flies over their lusciously green valley. In his community, he is known for his outspoken contempt for the Nazis, but he is alone in his stand and is increasingly ostracized by his fellow villagers. "You are worse than the enemy," the mayor of the town tells Franz. "You are a traitor!" Eventually Franz is summoned for military duty, and he knows it is only a matter of time before he will be forced to swear that Hitler is his highest authority. He can't do it. His conscience won't allow it. All his church and community leaders tell him to just keep his resistance in his heart, hidden away. "I cannot do what I

believe is wrong," he says.

At every step everyone keeps pressing him: *You are only doing this out of pride. How can you know for sure what you are doing is right? Your sacrifice will benefit no one. You think you are so innocent? We all have blood on our hands.* Even the bishop tells him, "Your duty is to your fatherland," and recites Romans 13:1. But Franz is convinced that his ultimate allegiance is to Christ and he sees Hitler's war as unjust. He sees himself as the rich young man in Matthew 10 who must decide whether or not to leave his great wealth behind and follow God's call. "Go," Jesus says to him, "sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." Franz' wealth may not be exactly like the young man's in the Gospel but in his agrarian and marital bliss, it is equally great.

If Franz was to listen to everyone telling him to take an easier way, he may have settled into a similar position as the Jesuit priest in the 2018 film *Silence*. He renounces Christ in a public ritual, accepting that what he believes hidden in his heart is more important than what he does on the outside. After seeing that movie, Malick apparently wrote a letter to the director, Martin Scorsese and asked, "What does Christ want from us?" With the story of Franz and Fani, Malick urges us back to the position of the apostle Paul and the martyrs who would not compromise. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer (who was in the same prison as Franz) wrote, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."

One of the most striking scenes in *A Hidden Life* is Franz listening to an old church painter pontificating as he works on the frescoes in the local church. "I paint their comfortable Christ, with

a halo on his head," he says. "What we do is just create sympathy, create admirers.... We don't create followers."

Franz and Fani certainly struggle to follow their Lord's calling, and in their suffering, we see their connection and submission to God's incarnate Word won't allow them to be merely admirers. Unlike the Gnostic epistle of *Silence*, where the admirer is held up as the example, what we see in *A Hidden Life* is an ode to the profound obedience of committed followers.

This film will likely be ignored by many, but for those with ears to hear and eyes to see it is an unforgettable experience. It's especially powerful because non-Christians have to acknowledge it is good art and believers have to wrestle with its high calling. So, find someone with a video projector or giant television and start planning the viewing party. The silver lining in the film's lack of success in theaters is that hopefully we won't have to wait long for the DVD release. ■

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Daniel W. Miller, with his wife Hannah, run Easy Yoke farm, an organic vegetable operation near Zumbro Falls, Minnesota. Daniel's writing has appeared previously in

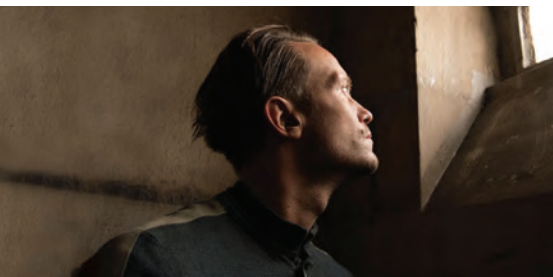
Minnesota Daily, Hospitality, and Green Blade. The Millers have three children: Paul, Anders, and Ruth

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION by Denis Haack

1. What was your initial or immediate reaction to the film? Why do you think you reacted that way?
2. What emotions did you experience as you watched *A Hidden Life*? What scenes were most poignant to you? Why?
3. In what ways were the techniques of filmmaking (casting, direction, lighting, script, music, sets, action, cinematography, editing, etc.) used to get the film's message(s) across, or to make the message plausible or compelling? In what ways were they ineffective or misused?
4. With whom did you identify in the film? Why? With whom were we meant to identify? Discuss each main character in the film and their significance to the story.
6. Do you agree with Daniel Miller that *A Hidden Life* contains distinctly Christian themes? Under what conditions should we be willing to speak of a film like this being a "Christian film"? Is it helpful in today's pluralistic world to talk about it in such terms? Why or why not?
7. Miller is concerned that *A Hidden Life* is being hidden or ignored compared to other more popular movies. What other reasons, besides its Christian themes, might non-Christian or nominal Christian movie viewers have for not being drawn to see *A Hidden Life*?
8. *A Hidden Life* tells a story that depicts what Christ was referring to when he spoke of the cost involved in following him. Consider, for example, Matthew 16:24–26: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?" (This teaching of Jesus is repeated in Mark 8:34 and Luke 9:23.) The Lord states the issue in even starker terms in Matthew 10:38: "... whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me..." and in Luke 14:27: "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."

This isn't a particularly popular theme and is often assumed to apply primarily to people in other eras (like those living under the Babylonians, Nazis, or Soviets) or in non-Western countries (like Saudi Arabia or the Sudan) or in extreme circumstances (like warfare, terrorism, or massive natural disasters). Or sometimes it is reduced to meaning that we must remain cheerful in hard times, like illness or the aftermath of some tragedy. A minority of believers commit civil disobedience by withholding some of their taxes that would go towards defense (in the name of pacifism) or in order to protest against abortion.

With all this in mind, consider these questions: To what extent is your faith comfortable rather than costly? In what specific ways do you deny yourself and take up your cross in order to follow Christ? To what extent is this daily, as Christ said it should be? In this time of political uncertainty, rapid change and polarization what issues might require Christians to engage in civil disobedience, even at cost?



Movie credits: *A Hidden Life*

Director: Terrence Malick

Writer: Terrence Malick

Music: James Newton Howard

Cinematography: Jörg Widmer

Starring:

August Diehl (Franz Jägerstätter)

Valerie Pachner (Fani Jägerstätter)

Karl Markovics (Mayor Kraus)

Bruno Ganz (Judge Lueben)

Michael Nyqvist (Bishop Fliesser)

Matthias Schoenaerts (Herder)

Jürgen Prochnow (Major Schlegel)

Bruno Ganz (Richter)

Alexander Fehling (Fredrich Feldmann)

Ulrich Matthes (Lorenz Schwaninger)

Fox Searchlight Pictures; 2019

2 hours 54 minutes (174 minutes)

PG-13 (for thematic material including violent images)