


critique

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2020 Issue 6

FINAL
ISSUE

A red arrow with a hand-drawn, slightly irregular texture. It starts near the bottom of the letter 'F' in 'FINAL' and curves upwards and to the right, ending near the top of the letter 'E' in 'ISSUE'.

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.

RECEIVE CRITIQUE: *Critique* is not available by subscription. Rather, interested readers can request to be added to Ransom's mailing list, which is updated frequently. Donors to Ransom Fellowship, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, tax-deductible ministry, are added to the mailing list automatically unless requesting otherwise.

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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READING THE WORLD

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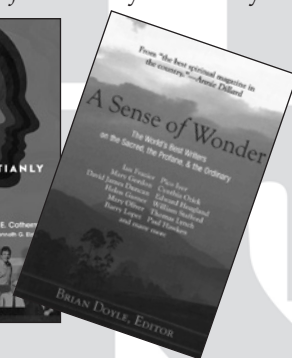
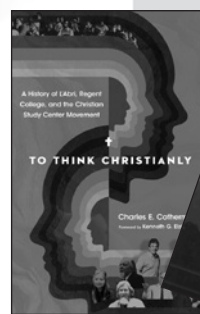
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Margie Haack

When the Ordinary Overwhelms



The only miracle performed by Jesus that is repeated by all four gospel writers is the one usually referred to as “The Feeding of the 5000” (Matthew 14:13–21; Mark 6:30–43; Luke 9:10–17; John 6:1–12). The story is simple, though there are a few differences in the four reports; not surprising given the number of people and disciples involved over the course of a busy day.

A huge crowd gathered to listen to Jesus, time passed, it had grown late, and everyone was hungry. Jesus told the disciples they should feed everyone, a suggestion that was met with skepticism since none of them had the money to purchase that much food, even if it had been available. Jesus asked what they had on hand. Five loaves of bread and two small fish, he was told, which he took, blessed, and distributed until everyone was fed, and the leftovers collected.

Usually, this story is told so that the miracle is the primary emphasis. Which is fine, since the pivotal character in the story is Jesus. Still, I don’t think that’s the only take-away from the text. St. John notes that Jesus intentionally raised the issue of the disciples feeding the crowd as a “test” because “he knew what he was going to do” (6:6). So, we have reason to reflect on what the disciples might have felt and thought as

the event unfolded. Besides, they are the ones in this narrative with whom I tend to identify.

They were disciples of Jesus, the followers of a provincial rabbi, not an uncommon thing in that culture, though the things Jesus was doing and teaching were certainly extraordinary. He was attracting crowds and, as on this day, the crowds even followed him into deserted areas in order to hear more. So for the disciples, their ordinary included crowds and, in this case, a crowd that grew hungry as the day passed. “When it was evening,” Matthew says, “the disciples came to [Jesus] and said, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowd away so they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves” (14:15). It was an eminently practical suggestion.

And it is here that the divine test commenced. “They need not go away,” Jesus said, “you give them something to eat” (14:16). Jesus was unwilling to let the disciples excuse themselves from involvement just because they seemed inconsequential in the face of overwhelming need.

It’s a divine test that I face too.

I am surrounded by overwhelming need. The coronavirus pandemic. A society riven with outrage, a failure to listen, and a refusal to learn to live together despite our differences. Systemic racism that continues to oppress our neighbors. A public square divided by political agendas and ideologies that threaten unity in families, churches, communities, and our nation. An economy in tatters, with unemployment and lack of prospects bedeviling the younger generation. And so much more.

My resources are limited and insufficient, utterly inconsequential. Add

yours to mine, and they are still limited and insufficient, utterly inconsequential. I can share a meal or drop off groceries to some of my neighbors, but what is that? I can listen to colleagues who hold radically different political views, but is that enough?

And so, because the need is so great and my resources are so limited, I find ways to send it all away and hope some solution appears before everything collapses. I can’t do much, certainly can’t do enough, so I do not engage with the need and assume I’m not part of the solution.

Just as Jesus was unwilling to let the disciples sidestep the need, so he calls me to faithfulness in my ordinary. Right now, my ordinary has exploded with overwhelming need, and so I must see what I have available, bring it to Jesus for his blessing, and begin passing it out. If he wants to do something extraordinary with it, that’s his concern, not mine. And if not, my faithfulness remains the same.

“I believe that very small and local acts,” Killer Mike says, “are the foundation of effective activism.” ■

Source: Killer Mike in Vanity Fair (September 2020) p. 99

SEE YOU IN THE CLOUD!

If you've appreciated reading *Critique* and *Letters from the House Between* over the years, note that we are putting those publications to rest. We're going digital!

This month we will begin publishing brand new content regularly—the kind of writing you've come to expect as you exercise your Christian faith in the here and now.

Find it all at our new website, critique-letters.com.

Of course we look forward to receiving your thoughts and feedback at critique-letters.com. Please continue to raise questions or let us know what's been helpful to you.

And make sure you've added your email address to our update form on either critique-letters.com or ransomfellowship.org. ■

DIALOGUE



To the editor:

Denis, yesterday I finally finished the entire *Critique* piece, "No More of This" [2020:4]. It was excellent in every way. Thank you for your faithfulness to pour in so much scholarship and heart, as well as practical stuff at the end. We feel the same as you—weary of the pandemic, heartsick over the racism, division, and polarization in our country.

Bless you two, your children and grandchildren, their coming and going.
Your friend,
Andi Ashworth
Nashville, Tennessee

To the editor:

As a college math major going on to study medicine, I had little appreciation or understanding of written words or literature. Only in the last few years of my life have I stopped to take time to read (and hopefully think), now recognizing the incredible beauty that comes from thoughtful words that speak to God's redemptive power breaking the enslavement of sin and brokenness. My husband and I have been reading *Critique* on morning coffee dates for the past several years. We find the articles to be timely, bringing needed hope and encouragement in how we might consider living today as lovers of Christ. We often seem to take many weeks to get through a single article because what we read sparks questions and the need to go deeper before we proceed. Your recent article addressing BLM put a voice to our feelings of anger, extreme sadness,

and desire for awareness and change. I couldn't actually watch the George Floyd video. Well, I watched about five seconds, and that alone continues to haunt me. I know the Lord is calling for real change but particularly change in my life. This email is written because I was saddened but not surprised that you have had mixed reactions. I pray that you hear our gratefulness for your faithful writing and our pledge to continue to pray for you and Margie in the work to which He has called you (yes, an entirely selfish prayer).

Marynelle Klumpe
Murfreesboro, Tennessee

To the editor:

Hi Denis and Margie—

I just wanted to thank you, Denis, for your courage in addressing the Black Lives Matter movement and white privilege in America. You did a wonderful job of outlining the problem from a faith perspective, the stark reality of racism in our society, and some important strategies we can implement to do our part in creating change. Too few in the faith community have called out the sin of racism and, even more importantly, called us to ACT and be part of the solution. We put ourselves in a Christian "bubble" and refuse to look at the ugly reality around us. Your words and wisdom on this subject are so important, Denis—keep speaking out until we're no longer afraid to hear, confess, repent, and embrace our part in the solution. And thank you for reminding us to be people of hope. "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Keep pressing on,
Kristin Davis
Boerne, Texas ■

POETRY BY SAM HAMER

Guitar Practice

I try to sound this old, familiar tune.
The starting measures state a simple line
That I can softly pick in time but must
Confess a mess in the middle. I stretch
And slip, then resume, but have missed the beat
And have to hope the hearer fills the notes
I fail to find. Then as the finish nears
The strain instructs, da capo—from the head—
Return, repeat again where it began,
And glad to hear the line I thought I knew
But now with something more from all between
I listen closer here and feel a choke
This time that hurts but hones the heart to hear
And hold the value of a chord that's true.

Skiing

At dusk I skied behind our youngest son
Along a double track with grooves to guide,
In air so still so clear so thin I thought
At last we must begin to float or fly.
With him ahead afraid if left behind
I'd be glad to follow fast, but these legs
Can't keep with his, born to this winter play—
I've been before and know how we are led.
He pauses, hands outstretched atop his poles,
To face a brilliant moon we both can see
Now, just beyond the crowded, tangled trees.
Too far passed to hear the prayer or promise,
I'm sad I'll miss what then he might have said,
Wond'ring, of blessing, bane or Great Amen. ■

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Samuel Hamer is a practicing attorney in Minnesota. He earned degrees in physics from Wheaton College and in law from Harvard Law School. His

occasional poetry considers themes of faith, doubt, and family. Sam lives with his wife, Naomi, and three boys near Minneapolis.



Checking Our Foundations

Margie and I discovered early in our marriage that we couldn't go too long without taking time to evaluate how things were going. For some reason life kept spiraling out of control. Time and again we would talk about what was most essential to us and what we believed God was calling us to do, and we would set priorities and boundaries— and within six months it would all be out of whack. Actually, six months was the longest it took; usually we sensed things beginning to slip far sooner than that. It was often our calendar that signaled the problem—for some reason we couldn't fathom it would be full of commitments neither of us could remember agreeing to accept. We developed a theory that, in some dimension hidden from us and from science, little creatures existed whose only known characteristic was that they flawlessly mimicked our handwriting. Appearing at night, they would add things to our calendar, giggle, and disappear back where they came from. This was obviously during the years when we kept a paper calendar—I think it's actually far easier to believe such demonic creatures haunt our devices—and it would explain a lot.

Anyway, our calendar would be too full, we'd be stressed and irritated at each other, and so we'd plan a day to talk and pray and evaluate. It was always hard to find the time but essential before the stress and busyness and frustration got too far out of hand.

Central to that day together would be the need to go back to basics, to the proverbial square one. To make certain that the foundational ideas and values on which we were basing our lives and setting our priorities were sound. It was impossible to set proper boundaries if we didn't have a sense of our calling, a

vision—even though incomplete and partial—of how to best use our gifts in the ordinary unfolding of our lives and work. If we were to know what to say No to, we needed to first know what we needed to say Yes to.

There are lots of reasons to check ones' foundations, the basic convictions and values by which we are living, the story that we are seeking to indwell as our own story develops. In the preface to *True Spirituality* (1971), Francis Schaeffer relates how in 1951–52 he faced a spiritual crisis. It was, he said, a “problem of reality.”

This had two parts: first, it seemed to me that among many of those who held the orthodox position one saw little reality in the things that the Bible so clearly said should be the result of Christianity. Second, it gradually grew on me that my own reality was less than it had been in the early days after I had become a Christian. I realized that in honesty I had to go back and rethink my whole position.

That's a tall order. It took Schaeffer time and energy, but the effort was worth it. He not only affirmed his faith in the Lord Christ but gained a renewed vision of the ministry of L'Abri that he and his wife Edith had begun. Going back to basics provided a clearer sense of the way forward, of their primary priorities and values, of what they needed to say No to so they could say Yes to the things that mattered most.

Times of doubt, or stress, or transition, or unexpected change and interruption, or a sudden feeling of being lost in busyness, or a lack of reality—all these and more can be the quiet whispers that tell us it might be wise to pause and check our foundations and reassess. The impulse can be external, a global pandemic, say, or

civil unrest, political uncertainty, or social polarization, or the need to face injustice and racism to which we have been blind and deaf. Or the impulse can be internal, arising in discontent about how life and relationships are unfolding, of questions that challenge what we previously took for granted, a growing recognition that we are extruded from where we are without being sure where we should head next, or the feeling that life has once again gotten too busy and out of control.

Whatever the source, such quiet whispers should be taken seriously. The reason is that, because we are both fallen and finite, we need to check our foundations periodically and consider resetting our priorities. Living in a broken world demands it.

It's a quiet whisper Margie and I have taken seriously in 2020, a year we will all likely remember as a time when so much was so unceremoniously upended. Since 1983, we have tried to stand together as Ransom Fellowship for a series of convictions and values that we believe are practical and loving expressions of the gospel. But 2020 is markedly different than 1983. So, we have gone back to basics, and reviewed our foundations—are they valid in the new abnormal world of masks and social distancing? Do they matter when some Christians consider fellow Christians “enemies” if they vote for the wrong political party? Are our ideas deeply enough rooted in historic orthodox faith that they are applicable in our changing social, political, and cultural circumstances? And as we bring Ransom to an end as a nonprofit to go on to other writing, speaking and ministry opportunities, are the principles we have commended worthy to be championed in whatever days we

have left ahead of us? The things we have stood for are easily summarized:

- That we are not called to the extraordinary and the spectacular but to be faithful in the ordinary and the routine of our lives. God may choose to do something extraordinary with our faithfulness, but that is his concern, not ours.
- Related to that, we should heed St. Paul's instruction "to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life" (1 Thessalonians 4:11). Contentment is a virtue.
- We should provide warm hospitality and the sharing of lives, stories, and ideas over simple meals with neighbors and colleagues, including those very different from ourselves. As an expression of love, we should give the gift of unhurried conversation.
- That honest answers should be provided for honest questions, including saying "I don't know," when we don't know.
- We are called to follow St. James' counsel to be "quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger," which is far from automatic in an age when outrage is multiplied and cheered on social media.
- We can learn to speak of the faith creatively, winsomely, seeking to persuade rather than using formulas or verbal bullying about guilt to get people to believe in Christ.
- In all of this, we are to live intentionally as exiles, resident aliens in a broken pluralistic world that is far more like ancient Babylon than ancient Jerusalem.
- We believe Bible study, taking

seriously both the details of the text and the story of redemption, can work by the power of God's Spirit to renew our minds and imaginations so that we can increasingly live transformed.

- That we must find common ground with non-Christians, seeking windows of insight and points of contact in the art, music, stories, and films of our shared culture in order to talk about the things that matter most.
- Culture is not something to be fought over but a garden to be cultivated with care.

And there is more but, if you have been walking with us, this list is sufficient to mark out the shape of Ransom's foundational ideas and values.

Spending the energy to think about all this has taken some time, but it's been worth it. It's been good to evaluate these ideas in light of both experience and scripture, especially given the changes 2020 has produced. Our conclusion is that we would not change or jettison any of them, even though they will obviously need to be creatively reshaped to fit the new abnormal of 2020 and beyond. In every sense they are simple, basic, humanizing and life-giving, ancient truths brought into our post-Christian and pluralistic world, naturally growing out of our conviction that Christ is Lord over all of life and culture.

And so, we will take them with us. In how we live in our little corner of reality at the House Between. And in our thinking and writing at *Critique/Letters* (www.critique-letters.com). I hope you will join us there where the conversation can continue. ■



Be of Good Courage

Journalist George Packer points out in *The Atlantic* that some forms of courage (moral courage) are harder than others (physical courage). When I first read that, I confess I was a bit dubious. I've always assumed that if someone is courageous in, say, rescuing a baby from a burning house, they will be equally courageous speaking up about injustice at the office. After all, since they put their life at risk saving the child, wouldn't they be equally quick to risk their job, which is worth far less than their life, by taking a stand against misogyny by a supervisor? Both instances require courage, and the second (moral courage) should be easier than the first (physical courage) because the risk is substantially less (job or advancement vs. life and limb). But Packer insists I have it backwards.

'I believe moral courage is more difficult than physical courage,' Ronald Neumann, the retired ambassador, told me. 'I was an infantry officer in Vietnam. Some courageous officers on the battlefield became very cautious bureaucrats.' Physical courage in battle is made easier by speed, adrenaline, comrades. 'Moral courage—you have, in many cases, lots of time, it's a solitary act,' he said. 'You are fully aware of potential repercussions to your career, and it's harder. It shouldn't be harder—you're not going to get killed—but that's the way it is.'

This observation suggests a host of interesting issues worth reflection.

For one thing, it isn't a new issue. When Joshua was about to assume the leadership of Israel after the death of Moses, God spoke to him about the task ahead of him. He made promises (no enemy will prevail against you, Israel will receive a land, I will be with you) and gave instructions (cross the Jordan

River, follow and meditate on my law). In this conversation God repeats himself three times: "Be strong," he tells Joshua, "and courageous" (Joshua 1:6,7,9).

Knowing what Moses went through as leader of Israel, the three-fold instruction to be courageous would have made me nervous. I would wonder, for example, whether God knew I might hesitate at the crucial moment. Apparently John Calvin saw the same thing implied in God's three-fold command. "From this passage," Calvin writes in his commentary on Joshua 1:6, "let us learn that we can never be fit for executing difficult and arduous matters unless we exert our utmost endeavors, both because our abilities are weak, and Satan rudely assails us, and there is nothing we

are more inclined to than to relax our efforts." Calvin is suggesting, to use George Packer's terminology, that moral courage is more difficult than we might imagine. We will need to be intentional and "exert our utmost endeavors."

Another implication of Packer's insight is that it might explain why so many national political and media leaders have been willing to sacrifice principle in order to achieve and maintain power, wealth, or fame. Or why so many Christians have been willing, even eager, to support candidates who violate their norms of virtue, goodness, and civility in order to achieve some political end but refuse to stand with members of Black Lives Matter for racial equality and justice because

the organization promotes values with which they disagree. Jesus referred to such ethical quibbling as straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel (Matthew 23:24).

Another implication of Packer's insight is personal and practical. Intensely personal and practical, in fact, because it suggests we need to consider whether we are people of moral courage and whether we are helping our children (both physical and spiritual) to grow into people of moral courage as well. There should be no question that

God requires us "to do justice, and to love kindness" (Micah 6:8). The ancient Hebrew proverb sums up our responsibility well: "Do not withhold good from those who need it, when you have the ability to help."

COURAGE IS NOT SIMPLY ONE OF THE VIRTUES, BUT THE FORM OF EVERY VIRTUE AT THE TESTING POINT.

— C. S. Lewis

In 1722–23 Jonathan Edwards wrote a series of "Resolutions" for himself that he determined to read once a week to remind himself of what he considered important for his life. The first one, in part, reads, "Resolved to do whatever I think to be my duty, and most for the good and advantage of mankind in general. Resolved to do this, whatever difficulties I meet with, how ever so many and how ever so great." And the writer to the Hebrews warns that things can turn difficult when we are going through hard times ordained by our heavenly Father to cause us to grow in righteousness. "Therefore, lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees" (12:12). The metaphor is a good one and conjures up images of

exactly what we feel when our courage flags because of the risk involved.

Moral courage always involves risk and, if most of us are anything, we are risk adverse. Young believers will need, in community with wise, more experienced people in their field, to think through what issues they will face, when and how to try to push back or fight, when to remain silent, and how to determine which battles are worth fighting. In multiple places and multiple ways, God calls us to “Be strong and courageous.” It’s our job to figure out what that means in our world and lives. And if we need some added motivation, it’s interesting to note that “the cowardly” are actually included with murderers, sorcerers, and liars as worthy of damnation (Revelation 21:8).

One reason moral courage is difficult is because we tend to be alone and isolated when it is required—“it’s a solitary act,” Neumann says. Here Christians should have an advantage, if we can shed the pernicious individualism and notion of libertarian freedom our world holds dear. As the community of God’s people, we can make certain that if one suffers for taking a stand against injustice or inequality, the rest will have their back. This will require a reassessment of resources and, given the ideological captivity of so many, might be a difficult challenge to even convince them this is part of the calling of the church. And of course, we may not all agree on when to take a stand and how—one more issue to work through compassionately, with much prayer and a willingness to listen.

This is also a reminder to me of my need for what used to be called forbearance, patience with those who fail to measure up to the standard I have set. I may want you to take a firm

public stand quickly for something I think important. And it may actually be important. But I do not walk in your shoes, and I do not know the turmoil in your heart and conscience, or the fear you feel for the risks involved. I may not know that you are already standing firm in another arena and simply cannot take on a second front in the battle for goodness. The courage you need will always be easier in my imagination than in your life.

The situation requiring courage in you will always require forbearance in me. And who knows which will turn out to be the most difficult?

Almighty God, who created us in your own image: Grant us grace fearlessly to contend against evil and to make no peace with oppression; and, that we may reverently use our freedom, help us to employ it in the maintenance of justice in our communities and among the nations, to the glory of your holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. ■

Sources: “How to Destroy a Government: The President is Winning His War on American Institutions by George Packer in *The Atlantic* (April 2020; pp 54-74) p. 72. Jonathan Edwards’ *Resolutions and Advice to Young Converts* edited by Stephen J. Nichols (Phillipsburg, PA: P&R Publishing; 2001) p. 17. Book of Common Prayer “Collects: Contemporary, 21. For Social Justice.”

For further reading on how leaders fail to take a stand against policies or practices that are contrary to their values see “Collaborators: What causes people to abandon their principles in support of a corrupt regime? And how do they find their way back?” in *The Atlantic* (July / August 2020) pp. 48-62.

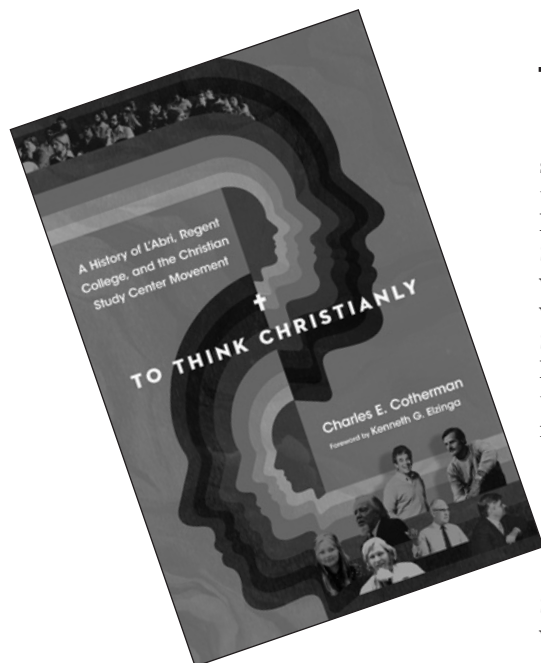
RESOURCE

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



Cotherman and Doyle



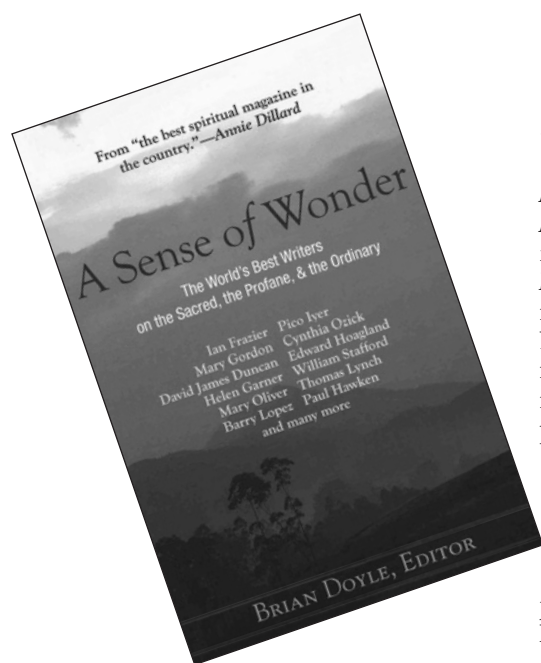
TO THINK CHRISTIANLY

The subtitle of Charles Cotherman's superb historical study summarizes the story he tells: A History of L'Abri, Regent College, and the Christian Study Center Movement. It's a story well worth telling. Growing out of the vision embodied by Francis and Edith Schaeffer in Switzerland and James Houston's dream of theological education for lay believers in Vancouver, a movement was birthed to establish Christian study communities on college campuses. They are a bright spot in the world of historically orthodox faith in a secular world.

The story begins with the Schaeffers and Cotherman captures well the distinctives of L'Abri that

attracted and challenged so many young adults searching for truth and beauty in an uncertain world. The same distinctives that gave rise to the Study Center movement were what prompted Margie and I to launch Ransom Fellowship in 1983. Our vision was different—not a study center but a way to help Christians be discerning, hospitable, persuasive and winsome in their corner of ordinary life. And we still stand by those distinctives as life-giving and deeply biblical. ■

Book Recommended: *To Think Christianly: A History of L'Abri, Regent College, and the Christian Study Center Movement* by Charles E. Cotherman (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; 2020) 270 pp. + bibliography + index.



A SENSE OF WONDER

Novelist Brian Boyle, author of *Mink River* (2010), was editor of *Portland Magazine* (University of Portland) from 1991-2018. Annie Dillard called *Portland* "the best spiritual magazine in the country." In *A Sense of Wonder*, Doyle collects 36 of the best articles by nationally known writers that appeared in the magazine. Beautifully crafted prose, full of insight and deeply human, this slender volume of short essays touches on the big questions of life and meaning. It begs to be read aloud to friends and discussed.

David James Duncan rediscovers joy in a hotel elevator in Utah. Patrick Madden reflects on laughter. William

Stafford praises non-violence in a world full of war. Helen Garner tells about her trouble reading the Bible. John Daniel sees and hears wonder walking and praying along a river. Thomas Lynch explores hate and love and possibility. Steve Duin visits the Holocaust Museum with his son. Paul Myers tells of the time he went fly-fishing with his brother-in-law, only to watch him drown. Ian Frazier... there is more—read it for yourself. ■

Book recommended: *A Sense of Wonder: The World's Best Writers on the Sacred, the Profane, and the Ordinary* edited by Brian Doyle (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books; 2016) 192 pages.

Final Words in a Final *Critique*

Over the years a small group of friends have graced these pages with reviews, essays and reflections. They are all kindred spirits, sharing our perspective summarized admirably by C. S. Lewis in *The Weight of Glory*: “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it but because by it, I see everything else.” Like Francis Schaeffer they are convinced that honest questions deserve honest answers and are prone—even eager—to raise hard questions themselves. They love art, culture and the public square as good gifts of God, the arena in which we are called to pursue our various callings and vocations as kingdom work. They actively lean against the pernicious doctrine that God will annihilate his creation rather than renew it for his glory. They have different tastes in music and film, different backgrounds and gifts but all bow before Christ as Lord, acknowledging that his kingdom demands their highest allegiance.

They have made *Critique* richer for their appearance in these pages, and I am grateful.

So, when it came time to put together this final issue of this little magazine, I contacted some of them with this invitation:

Would you please consider writing a one-page piece for the final issue of Critique? What would you like to say to its readers? Given our emphasis on hospitality, Christian discernment, faithfulness in the ordinary, living in exile, biblical literacy, embracing the arts, and the need for winsome apologetics, what would you like the readers of Critique to be certain to hear and remember? What is your final word to them? What do you think should be said as Critique comes to an end as a print publication?

Not all could participate, which is understandable, and I am pleased to allow them a chance to say one last thing to you here.

APPRECIATION COMMENTS — BY DAVID JOHN SEEL

The legacy of Francis A. Schaeffer is largely divided by those who attended L'Abri before the film, *How Then Should We Live*, and those who attended afterwards. The earlier students of Schaeffer headed in a cultural direction, whereas those afterwards in a decidedly more political one. Ingmar Bergman films were replaced by pro-life protests.

I owe much to the cultural legacy of Schaeffer and his example of intellectually informed compassionate cultural reflection. It is this legacy and example that has been championed so faithfully by Denis and Margie Haack. They have shown that one can be culturally engaged without becoming a cultural warrior. And for them it is never just about the ideas as much as the incarnational presence of Jesus. Margie's regular depiction of their home as "a safe place for unhurried conversations with others" is an inspiring demonstration of hospitality in the spirit of *Babette's Feast*. We all have mixed emotions about the forthcoming changes to *Critique*. But if it means a greater freedom to these two great exemplars of faithful presence to show us more of how to become like Jesus in the midst of our changing post-Christian world, then it will be a change for which Christ and his kingdom will benefit. For you have taught us to number our days aright, so that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Our lives are far richer for the shared pilgrimage we have shared. We will continue to walk with you in this new chapter in your lives.

With deep affection and appreciation,
David John Seel Jr.

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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.

FAITHFULNESS IN THE ORDINARY — BY ANDI ASHWORTH

Twenty years ago, in a class at my church, I was given an article written by Denis Haack, "A Stick Becomes the Staff of God: Reflections on Faithfulness in the Ordinary and the Routine." The subtitle caught my attention right away. It was a topic I'd been thinking and writing about for some time. In a nutshell, I wanted to know if my daily life mattered to God. I was sure the answer was a resounding, "Yes!" But I needed companions along the way, friends to reinforce life-giving truths. Denis and Margie have been those friends.

I took the essay home and marked passages with a yellow highlighter. In one simple sentence, Denis captured something essential. "Christian faithfulness works itself out in the ordinary of everyday life, even though your ordinary may be far different from mine." His words were like water to my soul.

From 1993 to 2015, my husband and I made our home in a renovated country church called the Art House in Nashville, Tennessee. It was also Chuck's recording studio

and a gathering place for our family and community. On this one property, all the parts of our lives came together, with hospitality at the center of everything.

In our work, we often lingered at the dinner table, talking to young artists about the meaning of vocation—a whole life lived before God. In doing so, I had to understand the value of my own days. I was feeding everyone, changing their beds, pulling weeds in the garden, and spending hours in long conversations. I had writing deadlines and speaking engagements and slowly worked on a master's degree. But absolutely everything I did had to be repeated or pieced together one small bit at a time. In that regard, things were no different for me than anyone else. It was just my version of ordinary, a life given to me by God.

As the years collected from then to now, this has been the most important thing to get straight. I've needed the language of "faithfulness in the ordinary" to help me along the way. For anyone, it's easy to recognize the importance of big, splashy moments. It's harder to do the quiet work, stay the course, believe that God is with us as we put together our bits and pieces day after day and year after year. At any stage of life, we live by his grace in a mosaic of details.

Just yesterday, I sat at my desk all morning to work on a piece of writing. I deleted and revised, building on what I'd done the day before. I got up periodically to do laundry and clean the kitchen. In the afternoon, my niece came to visit. We took a walk around the neighborhood, talking as we moved from block to block. When she left, a friend dropped by. We had a ten-minute chat on the porch. I did some light bookkeeping, answered emails, and cut

flowers from my garden to arrange in a vase.

When it was time to cook dinner, I rubbed olive oil, salt, and pepper on two salmon pieces, chopped fresh okra, and shucked corn on the cob. We ate while watching an episode of *Foyle's War* on TV. Before going to sleep, we prayed for our children and grandchildren. They are always the last ones on our mind as we drift off.

Every Saturday, I write details like this in my journal about the week that just passed, keeping a record of the days. It's a practice that helps me see and remember the longer stories and the ones unfolding now.

I've come to love the details and rhythms of ordinary life. I find my deepest gratitude when I see them as gifts, not unlike the gratitude I feel for Denis and Margie's fidelity to this theme over many years.

"Christian faithfulness works itself out in the ordinary of everyday life, even though your ordinary may be far different from mine."

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Andi Ashworth is the author of *Real Love for Real Life: The Art and Work of Caring*. She is co-founder of Art House America, a non-profit created to inspire a seamless life of Christian discipleship and imaginative living. Andi is also co-founder of the blog, *thewriterthehusband.com*, where she writes with her husband, Charlie Peacock. Andi and Charlie live in Nashville, Tennessee, not far from their two grown, married children and four grandchildren. This makes them very happy.

BECAUSE A GRAPHIC DESIGNER MATTERS — BY DENIS HAACK

I'm looking forward to being relieved of the administrative aspects of directing a nonprofit. I've loved Ransom Fellowship and all it's stood for, and still believe its vision and purpose is a viable and significant expression of what it means to think and live under Christ's Lordship across all of life and culture.

I'm not looking forward, however, to ending *Critique*. Writing and editing this little publication has been a delight, and I will miss not doing it six times each year. It's true I plan to do more writing than could fit in this paper publication, but it still won't be the same. Call me old-fashioned, but there is something about paper that is more tangible, more satisfying than digital. Holding a little magazine in one's hand is different from reading words on a screen, even if the content is identical. Not publishing *Critique* is the main thing I regret in our decision to dissolve Ransom as a nonprofit.

I've like doing *Critique* for all sorts of reasons: publishing guest authors who are kindred spirits; stimulating the people of God to be discerning rather than reactionary; calling attention to books, films, and music that provide windows of insight into our world or points of contact for conversation about the things that matter most; learning that the articles and discussion guides I publish are used in all sorts of settings by all sorts of people.

One of my greatest regrets will be no longer collaborating with *Critique's* art director, Karen Coulter Perkins. Each month I send a collection of files, electronic documents full of words and

ideas to her, and then I wait. For two weeks or so I hear nothing, and then one morning, usually on a Monday, I find a pdf file, *Critique* Draft A, in my inbox. Opening it is always a delight because, though I know the ideas and words that I sent, I never have an inkling what Karen will do with them, how she will translate them into images and layout that together with my words and ideas express something more of truth and life in a broken world than the words and ideas do on their own.

Margie and I had the privilege of visiting Karen at her home in Pittsburgh several years ago. We shared a lovely supper and unhurried conversation and met Eartha Kit, a black kitty that has since grown up. Karen has not always agreed with all I have published, but never have I had reason to believe that she hasn't dedicated all her considerable gifts of creativity to the task for which I hired her. And each time I opened that pdf file and looked at her work, I've been surprised and pleased. A very few times—only once or twice over many years—I've questioned an image or asked for some change. Usually it was about some image that she had reservations about to begin with. And her change has always been better than I had hoped.

If this sounds too good to be true, it is because it has been. Karen Coulter Perkins has been a delight to work with, and her creativity has made *Critique* a far better publication than I could ever accomplish on my own. In the days and months ahead, I will be writing more than would fit in these pages, but it is possible that it will have less impact because it will not be done in collaboration with her as art director.

Truth without beauty is like food without flavor—still nutritious but less

satisfying, and so less consumed and hardly ever appreciated.

Working with Karen has taught me that a visual artist can breathe freshness and life into ideas, so that they are not merely more accessible but grasped more holistically. If the artistry is fine, the image does not merely illustrate the proposition but rather illuminates it. It is not for nothing that the God of all truth is also the God of all glory, and only in the fallen imagination of fallen creatures can the two attributes be separated.

So please join me with a glass of wine and a toast to Karen Coulter Perkins, friend, art director par excellence, and roommate of the inestimable Eartha Kit.



Denis Haack is co-director of Ransom Fellowship and editor of Critique magazine. But you all know that.



An unsolicited note from Karen Coulter Perkins: The feeling of gratitude is oh-so-shared, Denis. It's amazing how mutual respect can turn a business collaboration into a life delight. Thank you for the years of inspiration and encouragement, my friend.

“SPEAK EVIL OF NO ONE”: USING WISE WORDS IN CULTURAL EXILE — BY BILLY BOYCE

Caricature: (the art of making) a drawing or written or spoken description of

someone that usually makes them look silly by making part of their appearance or character more noticeable than it really is.

— Cambridge English Dictionary

Place yourself in St. Paul's shoes. Called by God and commissioned to grow the fledgling Christian movement in a hostile culture, one of his tasks was to establish leadership. We're privileged to have a few of his letters directly to church leaders, which give insight into Paul's message to church leaders and members. What would you include, if tasked with shepherding the faith through a time of cultural exile? Perhaps surprisingly, in spite of all the pressing needs of a church in infancy, Paul repeatedly comes back to the theme of wise, restrained speech.

Church leaders are to be gentle, respectable, and able to use words to edify, correct, and rebuke, while maintaining an outward example of humility, so that no accusation could rightly be launched at the church. Paul's words for congregants are equally rigorous: “Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.”¹

Without the eyes of faith, this advice seems ridiculous. How can we win the day with such tempered language? Yet Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire in spite of, and because of, the church's commitment to wise, gentle, humble speech. In a world that excels in imprudent, harsh, disrespectful speech, Christians must embody the opposite.

Part of Ransom Fellowship's enduring legacy is a commitment to

a judicious use of words. While not shying away from publishing harsh language (curse words do serve a purpose, after all), Denis and Margie avoid ungracious language, language of attack that minimizes another human person. Specifically, they refuse to engage in caricature. Through personal correspondence, I have come to understand why: caricature invites people to stop listening. Ransom Fellowship models wise speech as a piece of Christian apologetics—it's not simply about truth, but truth well said.

But will tempered words be powerful enough to convince people? This question exposes the Achilles heel of American evangelicalism: a thirst for power. We worry that a posture of humility is mere weakness; to overcome opposition we need outward signs of strength, a strong man with swagger who's unafraid to take the gloves off. But Paul's speech was, in content and form, Christ crucified. Let's remember that “the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”²

This posture of humility requires faith that God will judge those who oppose Christ. It is not up to us to change hearts and minds. “Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes,” the Proverbs counsel.³ If we entrust even our enemies to God, we can afford to be silent in the face of slander. Taunts and mocking can go unanswered. Let the fools be the ones to waste words. After all, as Eric Ortland observes, “the fool talks so much because he is someone who has to be right.”⁴

Wise speech is good apologetics. Many will respect restrained speech as

a breath of fresh air in a culture clogged with social media belligerence. And even if our weakness does not end our exile, it is what God commands. Our presence in society is to be a visible reenactment of the Gospel story, where victory is obtained through death, and suffering is the path to glory. By resisting caricature and the temptation to score cheap points through cheap shots, Denis and Margie Haack have modeled faithfulness in speech throughout their ministry. Let the church heed their example as we face the challenges ahead.

Footnotes

1. Titus 3:1–2
2. 1 Corinthians 1:25
3. Proverbs 26:4–5
4. Ortlund, Eric, “The Pastoral Implications of Wise and Foolish Speech in the Book of Proverbs,” *Themelios* 38.1 (April 2013), 8.

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School for Ministry, studying the intersection of race, theology, and experience among Black pastors in the PCA.

GOOD FILMS ARE LIKE GOOD LITERATURE — BY LUKE BOBO

“Good films tell good stories!” And “Most good films are echoes of the True Story found on the pages of the Old and New Testaments!” I routinely, and excitedly, cited these two statements on the first day of my theology and film course

at Lindenwood University (St. Charles, Missouri). Years prior, I enrolled in a theology and film class taught by Denis Haack while I was a Master of Divinity student and executive director of the Francis Schaeffer Institute at Covenant Theological Seminary. Denis’ infectious love and measured excitement for films and his thoughtful insight and commentary about films inspired me to design and launch this class at Lindenwood University years later. Film consumption has remained a normal part of my cultural hermeneutical diet. If you want to know what your neighbor is thinking, view films, as films indeed inform our behavior and thinking.

But why use your discretionary time viewing films? Why bother?

God, our Creator wired us for stories, even cinematic stories. *In Imagining the Kingdom*, James K. A. Smith, brilliantly explains, “Our hearts traffic in stories. We are narrative animals whose very orientation to the world is fundamentally shaped by stories” (italics mine).¹ Second, films are ubiquitous. This ubiquity creates a path of least resistance for discussion in our highly cynical, postmodern, and polarized culture. Films easily ignite spirited discussion. Third, someone said that a “picture is worth a thousand words.” Well, Dr. Luke says, “An animated picture serves up an abundance of topics to explore.” Films open up a plethora of topics to discuss because of a film’s inherent interdisciplinary constitution. Unlike academia that often separates the disciplines into silos, films expose surprising and logical connections between disciplines such as art, sociology, literature, psychology, and language, for example. Fourth, “From the funniest comedy to the saddest tragedy, movies capture [our] imagination.”² Films not

only arrest our imaginations but films, like the psalter, tickle the full gamut of our emotions. Good films demand and receive our undivided and rapt attention like nothing else can. Films also beckon us wrestle with our own morality or character. This might be less obvious so let’s consider literature an illustration.

Literary pieces have primary and incidental characters. Literary pieces often feature an antagonist and protagonist. Serious Bible students know that the Holy Scriptures are replete with such characters, with King Jesus, of course, as the supreme protagonist. These “Literary characters,” writes Karen Swallow Prior in her book, *On Reading Well*, “have a lot to teach us about character.”³ In the same way, characters projected on the big screen or on the screens in our living rooms have a lot to teach us about character. Literature offers us “images of virtue [and vice] in action” explains Prior.⁴ Similarly, motion pictures offer us images of virtue and vice in action. Films have a plot as literature has a plot. “The plot [of a literary work],” writes Prior, “reveals character. And the act of judging the character of a character shapes the reader’s own character. Through the imagination, readers identify with the character, learning about human nature and their own nature through their reactions to the vicarious experience.”⁵

As we view cinematic stories, we are unconsciously judging the characters through our moral imagination as we experience vicariously, the film’s introduction, rising action, climax, falling action, and finally, the denouement. As we gaze at a projected animated film, we are engaged in a wrestling match with our own morality or character. In this way, film watching is a not benign

exercise; rather, film watching is formative, film watching is shaping us—either into virtuous beings or the opposite. That’s why William Romanowski can declare unequivocally, “As representations of life, the popular arts can influence [our] behavior, shape attitudes, and opinions, and inform [our] perspectives.”⁶

So, the next time you view a cinematic picture do not check your mind at the proverbial theater door. Rather, do as my kindergarten teacher was fond of saying, “Put your thinking cap on.” Bring your heart, yes; and your whole being to this film viewing enterprise, because the filmmaker desires to engage every millimeter of our humanness.

Thank you, Denis and Margie Haack, for your indelible influence on me and your faithful service to the body of Christ. Growing in discernment rocks!

Footnotes

1. James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom* (Baker: Grand Rapids, 2013), 108.
2. Brian Godawa, *Hollywood Worldviews* (InterVarsity: Downers Grove, IL, 2002), 11.
3. Karen Swallow Prior, *On Reading Well* (Brazos: Grand Rapids, MI, 2018), 18.
4. Prior, 15.
5. Prior, 20–21.
6. William Romanowski, *Eyes Wide Open: Looking for God in Popular Culture* (Brazos: Grand Rapids, MI, 2007), 19.

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and wrote curriculum for a workplace ministry. Bobo is a visiting instructor of contemporary culture at Covenant Seminary, and is author of *Living Salty and Light Filled Lives in the Workplace*, *A Layperson’s Guide to Biblical Interpretation: A Means to Know the Personal God*, and *Race, Economics and Apologetics: Is There a Connection? He is the co-author of Discipleship with Monday in Mind (second edition) and Worked Up: Navigating Calling After College. Follow him on Twitter at @lukebbobo1.*

FIGHTING, RUNNING, KEEPING — BY PRESTON JONES

As of now, I’ve been able to run fifty-one marathons. I started running as a kid because I grew up in a place where running long distances at a good clip could save you from getting gang jumped.

One time, I ran a marathon with *plantar fasciitis*, an inflammation of tissue on the bottom of the foot. I felt it a month before what was to be my twelfth marathon, and I didn’t run in those weeks, assuming it would heal. A few hundred yards into the race, I felt a small pinch. By mile three there was discomfort. By mile six, sharp pain. After mile 10, each strike on the pavement felt like a knife being driven into the bottom of my foot. With sixteen miles to go, I wanted the thing over with. And it could have been over. A phone call would have brought the marathon’s assistance people.

I weighed the benefit of stopping the pain now versus accepting it for a couple hours in exchange for the benefit

of the life-long memory of finishing the race. The marathon would end; the memory of what I had done with it would endure. True, maybe I was bringing on myself long-term injury, but I was willing to risk a longer recovery for the certainty of crossing the finish line.

I spent part of those 16 miles counting to 100 and then starting over. At about mile 23 a former student, and runner, was waiting to cheer me on. He was in his church clothes. I told him to run with me and talk. I didn’t care what he talked about. “Just give me something else to focus on.” Wearing dress shoes and saying whatever popped into his head, he took me to within fifty yards of the finish line.

At that time, the thought of qualifying for the Boston Marathon hadn’t crossed my mind.

The response to the coronavirus has derailed marathons as much as it has derailed everything else, but training continues. Marathons ahead.

But someday it will end. Someday, perhaps while training or even running a race, I will come to a prominent signpost saying, “You’re done.” It will be hard to let go.

As I’ve written these words, scenes have passed through my mind—of myself as a kid running home from school to avoid trouble; of John, my former student, jogging next to me in dress pants and a button-up shirt; the incredible feeling that came with qualifying for Boston for the first time; the disappointment of missing qualification another time by thirty seconds; the second-place finish for which I never received a medal; the marathon in Quebec City and being cheered on in French; the endearing disorder of the run in Saigon, Vietnam; the moose

along the race route near Anchorage, Alaska; the sense of purpose that shapes the Oklahoma City Marathon, run in memory of the 1995 terrorist attack there; the great feeling, as a pacer, of helping others get to the finish line.

Whenever it ends, someone can say, literally, “you’ve had a good run.”

And this is what we want to say about life generally. There’s no better epitaph than St. Paul’s: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (II Timothy 4:7). Only, since most of us aren’t quite at the end, we want to change the verb tense. *I know what fights I should be fighting, and I am fighting them. I know what races I should be running, and I am running them. I know what I believe, and I am holding to it.*

I don’t offer these thoughts in the spirit of the motivational speaker. Like many, I am discouraged. I’m not able to see how this society of ours can be glued together again. But Jesus says, “What is that to you? You must follow me” (John 21:22). I have to continue doing what I can—fighting, running, and keeping.

And so do you.

Denis Haack has been so kind to me for—it’s hard to believe—nearly twenty years. He has inspired me from afar. He has fought, he has run, he has kept.

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Preston Jones teaches ninth grade homeschooleders and provides content for the website “War & Life: Discussions with Veterans.”

DEVELOPING DISCERNMENT, DEEPENING DISCIPLESHIP — BY STEVEN GARBER

Sometimes, along the way of life, we meet people we think we have known; that somehow they are already old friends, folk we have listened to and talked with, even though it may be that we have never ever seen them before. That was my experience in meeting Denis Haack forty years ago at Bear Trap Ranch in the mountains of Colorado, standing in line to enter the dining hall.

But then, as must be, over time we realize that there is more to be known, and the years of life become that pilgrimage.

When Denis and Margie left New Mexico, returning home to Minnesota, I was intrigued, even if a little sad, as I had loved that they were embedded in the American Southwest. But it was not too long before it became apparent to all that the land of the loons was theirs, generationally theirs. And as Ransom Fellowship took root, I was one of the first board members, and for years entered their frozen tundra for the January meeting—before I even boarded the plane, I was shivering.

I still remember sitting in the living room of their house in Rochester, thinking together one day about a new credo for the work. We tried many ideas and words, trying to capture the unfolding reality of Ransom’s mission. What about this? What about that?

Developing discernment, deepening discipleship—those four words seemed to say what we thought was important to say. From the very beginning, Denis and Margie wanted to help people learn

to think carefully and critically—to think Christianly—about anything and everything. Why have we all read books we wouldn’t have read, and seen films we wouldn’t have seen? Because the Haacks were sure that they mattered, if we were going to develop discernment about what is being said about God, the human condition, the universe, yes, about the whole of reality. And so, even from afar, all over America and the world, people began to listen to the conversations at Toad Hall, as if they mattered for everyone everywhere. That theology become life in your life and mine, that beliefs become behavior in the lives of ordinary people in ordinary places, was central to their *raison d’être*. It was never enough to think for the sake of thinking, to know for the sake of knowing; rather there had to be a deepening discipleship twined together with developing discernment—always both.

But to press this point of incarnation, and why it matters so much. It is impossible to write about the years of this work without saying as plainly as possible that it was a life together, open to others, that was the heart and soul of Ransom Fellowship. All of the small groups, all of the *Critiques*, all of the speaking, only made sense if the ideas were embodied, if the words were made flesh in the life of Toad Hall, the playful name of their house on Center Street. Margie’s wisdom for the ages in *Notes from Toad Hall*, as well as her culinary creativity at the table of Toad Hall, gave gloriously wonderful life to the vision, all together offering a true hospitality of hearth and home, year after year.

And now this work has come to an end; their vocation to think and live a certain way continues, but the occupation of these years will no longer be. The

Haacks are like us, of course, every one of us, hoping and hoping again that our lives can be signposts of the world that someday will be—and by grace, Ransom has been that. The watching world is grateful.

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A CULTURAL CRITIC WORTH EMULATING — BY WESLEY HILL

One evening in conversation with a troubled soul, the pastor protagonist of Marilynne Robinson's novel *Gilead* recommends that his counselee read the theologian Karl Barth: "I have found Barth's work to be full of comfort." As someone who reads theology not only professionally but also for personal consolation, I understand this sentiment completely.

Lately, as the months of COVID anxiety and ennui have dragged on, my comfort reading has been to return to the work of Robert Jenson (1930–2017), an intellectual heir of Karl Barth (with whom he studied) and one of the great American Lutheran theologians of the past—or indeed any—generation. I spent my early twenties reading him assiduously but hadn't revisited him much since then. Now I can report that absence from a writer whom one loved in youth does indeed, apparently, make

the heart grow fonder.

A large part of the joy of reading Jenson is watching what he does with sentences. Consider this, from the first volume of his *Systematic Theology*, as he discusses what we need to know in order to be able to pick the true God out from among the crowd of his competitors: "God is whoever raised Jesus from the dead, having before raised Israel from Egypt."

The famous theological ethicist Stanley Hauerwas—whom *Time* magazine once called America's best theologian—has commented on how fruitfully unsettling that sentence from Jenson is. He zeroes in on Jenson's choice of the word "whoever" as the significant bit: "'Whoever' calls into question the reader's presumption that they know who God is prior to how God makes Himself known."¹ Jenson's arresting way of framing the matter, while perhaps initially sounding flippantly avant garde, in fact aims to translate a historic truth of the faith into an idiom that will help safeguard it.

Readers of *Critique* will be interested in the fact that Jenson spent a chunk of his career as a theologian of culture and a cultural critic. The second volume of his *Systematic Theology*, in addition to discussing everything from angels to icons, includes incisive commentary on politics, sex, and money. Jenson not only read and assimilated Augustine and Aquinas, but also McLuhan, Ellul, and Postman, and offered his own highly creative interventions in the same conversation.

One of the chief challenges for those of us who appreciate the way of being and witnessing that *Critique* has sought to foster over the years is not to shift from talking about God's act in Jesus when we talk about film, social media,

art, and political witness. Or, to put it the other way around, when we talk about, critique, and make culture, we should do so as a way of passing along the news about Jesus, not in crassly proselytizing ways this magazine has always warned us away from but simply because that news is relevant in every sphere.

The evangelical theologian Fred Sanders has talked about how reading Jenson can help us because we will be able to watch a theologian trying to speak the good news about Jesus whenever he talks about any subject at all: "As Jenson worked this out in *Systematic Theology*, it seemed to me that he was trying to handle every single doctrine and sub-doctrine in such a way that he was saying the gospel in the very act of saying that doctrine, no matter what it was."² To watch Jenson perform this task, as I have been doing in book after book, is not only to receive an education in cultural criticism but to have one's own faith in what God has done in raising the dead Israelite Jesus from the grave rekindled and renewed.

Endnotes:

1. Stanley Hauerwas, "How to Write a Theological Sentence," *ABC Religion and Ethics*, September 26, 2013, www.abc.net.au/religion/how-to-write-a-theological-sentence/10099600.
2. Fred Sanders, "Two Rules for Theological Work," *The Scriptorium Daily*, May 15, 2018, <http://scriptoriumdaily.com/two-rules-for-theological-work>

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2019). A contributing editor for *Comment magazine*, he writes regularly for *Christianity Today*, *The Living Church*, and other publications.

WHY ME?

— BY MARGIE HAACK

I don't think I've ever written for *Critique*. So why did Denis ask me to join this troupe of authors who have contributed over the years? He said, "In this final issue, what would you like my readers to know?" "About you?" I teased, rubbing my hands together. I could tell you things.

Seriously.

You might not know he considers me a silent partner to his writing. Silent, meaning I give feedback, but you don't get to hear it. (Lucky you.) Likewise, I consider him a first-rate responder to all my writing. As a couple, we collaborate in many ways but remain quite different in style, personality, and major interests. Being different is not necessarily a hindrance to being complementary to one another, although it can be a challenge. Together, we comprise a more complete portrait of life and work that is evident in our publications.

Critique has been a resource for books, films, cultural issues, and ideas we need to think about and try to understand as Christians. From 1982 to 2013 I published *Notes from Toad Hall* until we moved, when it became *Letters from the House Between*. My emphasis was more about what it means to be faithful in our everyday lives. Personally, I needed to find those sacred spaces in my ordinary life where I encountered God, so my writing ended

up being more personal and practical. Together, we've been doing this now for 38 years.

It has been our desire to help people consider how to live in a world that no longer shares our deepest values. And more than just considering these things, how to live and share our faith in such a way that our lives demonstrate a more complete, winsome, and loving gospel. We saw each of these quite different publications as important in fleshing out these ideas and yet be perfectly complementary to one another.

This was a reason to keep our two publications on one mailing list because we wanted readers to know that without both of these ways of looking at and living life, we were in danger of becoming a one trick pony. To this end Denis has helped keep my brain oiled and I raise his emotional quotient (EQ) from time to time.

Our differences can be challenging, but also enriching if we can set them aside in an effort to listen to one another. Denis needs checklists and advance planning. I love spontaneity and surprise. From time to time this has led to clashes over scheduling, and we learned to account for the other's preferences. He has a head full of ideas at all times, they even keep him awake at night. Ideas are great and help us imagine, but they need to be connected to practical life.

There are important ways in which we complete and fill in one another's chinks. He needs me to remain grounded in everyday matters. You can't have a head boiling with ideas and no connection to practical life.

I challenged Denis to reveal more of who he was. In the first years you wouldn't have known he was married with a family. There was zero reference

to me, which of course, was your loss.

Over the years, Denis' editor's notes became much more personal. I think a lot of writers are afraid of revealing who they are, but readers are pleased when they hear you like to smoke a stinky cigar once in a while. Or love to feed the birds but hate squirrels. I was glad to see this change in his writing. I believe that even serious writing can be enhanced when the reader catches a glimpse of who the writer really is.

So if you are a reader who lives with a spouse, a partner, a roommate—look to one another to see how God might use your differences to enhance and enrich one another. It will make you far more interesting. It will challenge you.

Whatever endeavors you are involved in—your work, creativity, relationships—the challenge is to learn, listen, and be open to change.

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