

BOOKS

INSIGHTS

The Faculty Journal of Austin Seminary



FALL 2000

LINCOLN • RIGBY • MILES • BLACK JOHNSTON
ALSUP • FOX • BLAIR • DEARMAN • MILES • JINKINS

INSIGHTS

The Faculty Journal of Austin Seminary

Fall 2000

Volume 116 Number 1

Editor: Michael Jenkins

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Michael Miller, and Randal Whittington

The editorial board of Insights wishes to express its gratitude for the work Terry Muck did as editor (1991-2000); for the energy, intelligence, imagination, humor, and grace with which he engaged in this work.

Insights: The Faculty Journal of Austin Seminary is published each spring and fall by Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 100 East 27th Street, Austin, TX 78705-5797
e-mail: mjinkins@austinseminary.edu <http://www.austinseminary.edu/>

Entered as non-profit class bulk mail at Austin, Texas, under Permit No. 2473. POSTMASTER: Address service requested. Send to *Insights*, 100 East 27th Street, Austin, TX 78705-5797.

Printing runs are limited. When available, additional copies may be obtained for \$1 per copy. Permission to copy articles from *Insights: The Faculty Journal of Austin Seminary* for educational purposes will be given by the editor upon receipt of a written request.

Some previous issues of *Insights: The Faculty Journal of Austin Seminary*, are available on microfilm through University Microfilms International, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106 (16 mm microfilm, 105 mm microfiche, and article copies are available). This periodical is indexed in *Religion Index One: Periodicals*, *Index to Book Reviews in Religion*, *Religion Indexes: RIO/RIT/IBRR 1975- on CD-ROM* and the *ATLA Religion Database on CD-ROM*, published by the American Theological Library Association, 820 Church Street, Evanston, IL 60201-5613; e-mail: atla@atla.com; <http://www.atla.library.vanderbilt.edu/atla/home.html/>; ISSN 1056-0548.

COVER: "Job Lot Cheap," by William Harnett, 1878. Reproduced with permission from Reynolda House, Museum of American Art.

Never judge a book by its cover—nor an issue of Insights. William Harnett's enigmatically titled "Job Lot Cheap" exemplifies 19th-century trompe l'oeil (trick of the eye) painting; this edition of Insights is dedicated to a century of books that, in one way or another, have illuminated or illustrated the truth of the gospel. Harnett's work is a masterpiece of surfaces; this journal urges readers to lose themselves in deep landscapes of fiction, theological inquiry, cultural critique, and personal reflection. Paying homage to 17th-century Dutch still lifes, Harnett's painting is a meditation on the theme of memento mori (transitory symbols of death); Insights is dedicated to those works of recent years that will endure and bring life and imagination to future generations. Perhaps one analogy rings true: "Job Lot Cheap" heaps twenty-two volumes together on one common table; we pray that this issue of Insights—replete with offerings from our twenty-two contributors—will nourish and sustain you with food for thought.

CONTENTS

2

INTRODUCTION

Robert M. Shelton

BOOKS

- 3 OF THE MAKING OF BOOKS
Timothy Lincoln
- 9 TIMOTHY LINCOLN: DO BOOKS STILL MATTER?
An Interview
- 14 JUST BE IT: THE PASTOR AS THEOLOGICAL READER
Cynthia Rigby
- 15 MY READING LIFE: THE ROLE OF BOOKS
IN THE LIFE OF A PASTOR
David Miles

24

AND MORE BOOKS

WILL IT PREACH? *by Scott Black Johnston*; TRANSLATION AS HABITUS *by John Alsup*; A PASSION FOR BOOKS *by E. Quinn Fox*; WOMEN'S WRITES *by Christine E. Blair*; VIEWS ON REVIEWS *by J. Andrew Dearman*; THE PREACHER AS MATCHMAKER *by Carol Antablin Miles*

BOOKS OF THE FUTURE

RECENT IMPORTANT BOOKS

THE TOP TEN THEOLOGICAL BOOKS OF THE 20TH CENTURY

43

CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE

BANNED BOOKS: THE COST OF CENSORSHIP

Michael Jenkins

Why devote an entire issue of our faculty journal to the subject of books? Is it because we fear for the future of books? Is it because we believe we need to advocate the practice of reading books, fearful that the present and oncoming generations will not be avid readers of books; that they will turn more and more to other media for education, enrichment, and enjoyment? Whatever our conscious or unconscious motivations, this volume presents a variety of testimonies to the values books have and have had for the writers and for others.

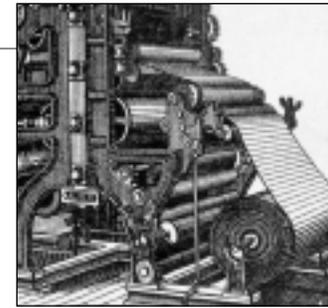
The lead article is written by Timothy Lincoln, the director of the Seminary's Stitt Library. He highlights the important role books, and particularly the publication of books, has played in the Christian movement from the 15th century until our day. As has been our recent practice, this article is followed by an informative interview with the article's writer.

Several brief articles by our faculty and administrators ensue on assorted book-related topics. The subjects vary widely: from banning books to writing book reviews; from being obsessed with books to reading women authors; from learning how to read a theology book to books that enrich preaching; from matching books with people to reading disciplines for pastors to translating books into another language.

Also included in this edition are lists of books professors value as the "Top Ten" theological volumes published in the 20th century. These lists may well evoke a number of responses from you, among them being the compiling of your own list of the most significant books in the last 100 years from your perspective. Even more useful would be for you to think through why the books are on your list. At least that was a valuable exercise for me as I made my list. And I admit that the criteria for my list were far more personal and subjective than objective and critical.

The world of books! What a fascinating world it is! Now, which book shall I take to read on my next flight?

Robert M. Shelton
President



OF THE MAKING OF BOOKS

TIMOTHY LINCOLN



In his 1539 preface to the Wittenburg Edition of his writings, Martin Luther wrote: "The Holy Scriptures constitute a book which turns the wisdom of all other books into foolishness, because not one teaches about eternal life except this one alone."¹ Luther restates a fundamental Christian conviction: In a world full of books, there is only one to which Christians can reliably turn for instruction in the things of God. The Bible is the book par excellence. Yet virtually no Christian group has remained content with the Bible alone. Even the most "Bible-believing" Christians write tracts and entire books to help believers grasp ever more tightly the Word of God as revealed in the Bible. Paradoxically, the Christian conviction that the Bible alone is a reliable guide for faith and life has led Christians to continue to express themselves in books.

In this article I want to talk about these books and readers. Although I will be selective, I will look backward to ways in which books have helped to embody Christian faith, examine current trends and issues in publishing, and muse about the future of the book.

A WHIRLWIND HISTORY OF THE BOOK



Today Americans tend to take books for granted, since they are found everywhere from airport specialty stores to the gift shops of zoos. It has not always been so. The earliest texts that Christians used were all hand copied. Generations of Christian copyists, mostly monks, devoted their lives to the careful transcription of the Bible, prayer books, and books of theology.

Books are functional objects. The ancient scroll was a continuous roll of writing

Timothy Lincoln has directed the David L. and Jane Stitt Library at Austin Seminary since 1994. A graduate of Concordia College, Simmons College, and Yale University Divinity School, Lincoln is an ordained minister in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

surface, written on one side. It is still the shape of the Bible used in Jewish synagogues. Eventually the scroll gave way to the codex. The codex book used sheets of parchment (and later paper) that could be written on both front and back and placed between boards. One could make a codex in many sizes. The codex became the dominant form of the book in the Mediterranean world by AD 400. Why? Alberto Manguel argues that it succeeded because it “allowed the reader to flip almost instantly to other pages, and thereby retain a sense of the whole.”² To put it in the language of computer science, the book is a high density storage device that employs superior display technology and provides for speedy searching of its data.

Many hand-copied books, such as monastic psalters, seem bulky today. But when we realize that all the monks in the choir were looking at a single text, we see the logic of the monumental sized book.³ At the same time, a book for individual use could be made to fit the reader’s hand comfortably. The individual prayer book, or book of hours, became a traditional wedding gift for European Christian nobility and later the wealthy bourgeoisie.⁴

One of the great technological revolutions in Western history occurred when Johann Gutenberg, engraver and gem-cutter for the Archbishop of Mainz, succeeded in producing reusable metal type for each letter of the alphabet. With his type he produced a printed Bible, which he took to the Frankfurt Trade Fair in 1455. It caused a sensation. His technology spread quickly throughout Europe. Movable type allowed large quantities of books to be printed with remarkable speed.

The Gutenberg revolution had significant impact on reading and communication. First, books became cheaper, spreading book ownership to more and more people. Second, the speed of the printing press led to a communications revolution not unlike the Internet of the 1990s. Because of movable type, Luther and Calvin could distribute their opinions far and wide much more quickly than earlier critics like Englishman John Wycliffe (ca. 1330-1384) and Bohemian Jan Hus (ca. 1372-1415). Many historians argue that the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation may not have swept throughout Europe without printing technology.⁵

Since Gutenberg, books have been pervasive in Western culture and crucial to the embodiment of the Christian faith. The divided Christian churches of post-Reformation Europe were diligent in producing not only Bibles, but catechisms, hymnals, prayer books, and other works articulating their distinctive understandings of Christian faith.

The nineteenth-century missionary movement relied heavily on books. Missionaries often created written languages for the cultures they contacted, so that the saving message of the Bible could be written in all the languages under heaven. According to the Wycliffe Bible Translators, portions of the Bible have been translated into more than 918 distinct languages—a complete Bible exists in 366 languages.⁶

The Sunday school movement, which began in the late 1700s, initially focused on basic literacy—teaching persons to read so that they could read the book of books, the Bible. The movement presupposed that new readers would have access to Bibles. Increased prosperity and literacy in Europe and North America in the nineteenth century spread book ownership to what we now call the middle class.

MICROFILM AND COMPUTER CHALLENGES



In the 1930s, a new technology began to catch on in the publishing world: microfilm. Using the technology of photography, the contents of entire books could be shrunk down to a single reel of microfilm. It was a stunning development, and some visionaries suggested that printed books would go the way of cuneiform tablets.

Books, however, are very much with us, which seems to confirm one of the lessons of the history of information technology: new technology supplements older forms of preserving written information, but seldom completely replaces them.

Currently the hot information technology is the computer. A relatively inexpensive computer can store, retrieve, and display vast quantities of text. Virtually every book now published in North America and Europe begins as computer word processing files. Authors send the files to publishers, who import them into programs that layout the design of the book down to the precise page count. The actual printing is no longer accomplished with Gutenberg’s movable type. Rather, plates for entire pages are created using photographic processes. One can start one’s own press by using desktop publishing software, good quality paper, and laser printers. There is a paradox at work here: computer technology has made it easier to print documents. Thus, the newest information technology is the servant of that tremendous storage and display technology of late antiquity, the book.

Why have books survived? Two reasons: accessibility and durability. If you are in a modern library looking at microfilm on a microfilm reader or looking at World Wide Web sites on a computer, and the power goes out, you have to wait until it comes back on. On the other hand, you can take your copy of *Lonesome Dove* to a window or light a candle and continue reading. Further, a well-made book is durable.⁷ Scholars and librarians have long favored acid-free paper for books, since its fibers are stable. In contrast, paper containing acid is always breaking down. We see this as the yellowing (and eventual browning) of pages.⁸ Many books from academic presses now contain an infinity symbol on the reverse side of the title page, or have a statement about meeting a standard on the permanence of paper. The symbol indicates that the paper is acid-free. If stored properly, the paper will last several hundred years.⁹

EXPENSE



Well-made books are a joy for readers—if readers can afford them. How expensive are books? Many Bible commentaries seem rather expensive. The most recent title in the scholarly *Hermeneia* series (Fortress Press), for instance, had a list price of more than \$50.

Many factors affect book prices. The factors include the royalties paid to authors (more to Stephen King than to a young scholar publishing her first academic book), the reputation of the press, and the projected market for a given title. Many costs for moving a book from an author’s manuscript to book distributors are the same whether the print run is 500 or 50,000 copies. So, the start-up costs for a sure-fire best seller and a scholarly volume may be the same. Remember, publishers are out to make money, or at least to break even. Until recently, church publishing houses would price books for

pastors and scholars relatively low, because profits from popular items (including Sunday school curriculum) offset the losses from a scholarly title that sold 500 copies to seminary libraries. As church bodies (including the Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.]) have mandated that their publishing houses be self-sufficient, book prices for scholarly texts have risen.¹⁰ The Bible itself, in a broad array of translations and editions, continues to be highly profitable for publishers. Table 1 gives some examples of recent versions of the Bible in English marketed to diverse audiences.

Table 1
Recent English Bibles

The Wesley Bible, New King James Version	Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990
Spirit Filled Bible, New King James Version	Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991
The Original African Heritage Study Bible	James C. Winston Pub. Co., 1993
NIV Couples Devotional Bible	Zondervan Publishing House, 1994
Seniors' Devotional Bible	Zondervan Publishing House, 1995

The kinds of books interesting to many Christian readers sit at the lower end of the price spectrum for books. They are “trade” books produced in high quantity for a relatively large market. Academic theological books, through which scholars communicate with other scholars, are usually more expensive. For instance, books in the *Vetus Testamentum Supplements* series (scholarly works on the Old Testament) cost about \$100 per volume. Books in the *Cambridge Studies in Religious Traditions* series cost about \$55-\$70 per volume. But these prices are modest compared to books on computing, engineering, or the ‘hard’ sciences of chemistry and physics.¹¹

WHAT NEXT FOR THE BOOK?



Given the advances in computing technology, does the book have a future? Some believe that the generation raised on MTV and video games will virtually abandon pages for computer screens.¹² However, I think that the book has a healthy future, for two reasons. First, the book still wins high marks as a medium for archiving knowledge. A well-made book using acid-free paper will be usable by my grandchildren's grandchildren. There is no worry about the compatibility of its format with any other viewing technology, since the book contains both data and the appliance used to view the data. The texts and pictures in books stay on the page, available for constant or occasional use.¹³ We have no such certainty about our ability to read electronic information two decades in the future. As one librarian put it, “No one wants a floppy disk for a headstone.”¹⁴

A second reason that the printed book has a future is the superiority of physical pages over scrolls, whether the scroll is a literal scroll of paper or the scrolling that happens on a computer screen. I know of very few persons who will read twenty pages in a row on a computer monitor. Research shows that the ergonomics of looking at a computer display is more taxing on the human body than reading a book. In fact, the

American Optometric Association recognizes vision difficulties associated with prolonged exposure to computer screens as a discrete medical problem, Computer Vision Syndrome (CVS).¹⁵ Some interesting research is underway, in fact, to create computer display technology that mimics the ‘touch and feel’ of the printed page and thus make digital display more comfortable for readers.¹⁶

I do not think that the evolution of information technology is going to slow down in the near future. Libraries will devote a significant proportion of their resources to information technology. But books, as physical objects with words on pages, will continue to be valued as the preferred way for thoughtful readers of all sorts (not just scholars) to engage in the careful reading of a text. Careful reading sometimes includes argument. Books allow you to carry on a battle with the author in the margin, to make cross references, and to underline significant passages. Careful reading is an active process by which readers read, reflect, and wrestle with an author's ideas. Through such reading, a copy of a book becomes *my* copy, with a unique relationship to its reader/owner.

There are cases in which an electronic text offers advantages over the printed book. A directory of names and addresses, or a set of technical specifications, may be kept up-to-date very easily in electronic form. The audience for such information needs accurate, timely information. There is little worry about stockpiling that information for future use. In another case, a scholar will benefit from searching the entire collected writings of a theologian with the speed of a computer. However, the scholar will probably then use the older display technology—the printed book—to read carefully. Thus, the electronic text is used for what it does best (speedy searching), and the book is used for its strength (display of text).

“Of the making of books,” the Bible says (Ecclesiastes 12:12), “there is no end.” In the twenty-first century, too, books will endure, much to the delight of the next generation of readers.

NOTES

¹ “Preface to the Wittenberg Edition of Luther's German Writings,” in Martin Luther's *Basic Theological Writings* (ed. Timothy F. Lull, Fortress Press, 1989), 65.

² Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading* (Viking, 1996), 127.

³ David Diringner notes that some of the largest service books “were laid upon rollers” for easier movement. *The Hand-produced Book* (London: Hutchinson's Scientific and Technical Publications, 1953), 205.

⁴ Manguel, p. 129.

⁵ See Mark U. Edwards, *Printing, Propaganda, and Luther* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

⁶ <http://www.wycliffe.org/wbt-usa/TranGoal.htm> downloaded October 25, 1999.

⁷ Information scientists, scholars, and librarians worry a lot about the durability of information stored on computers. Part of the reason is that computer technology changes so quickly that there is no guarantee that the software and hardware used in 2000 to create a file will be usable in 2020. Millions of dollars are being spent to solve the problem of “data refreshment,” prevention of the degradation of electronic data sitting inside a computer, and “infinite migration,” the notion that electronic data needs to exist in a form that allows new computing equipment to

upload data from older equipment without losing a single byte of the original.

⁸ Most academic libraries have many books made brittle by acid-caused breakdown of paper. The problem is especially acute for books published from the mid-1850s through the early part of the twentieth century. In order to preserve books like these, researchers have attempted to find ways to treat large quantities of books at once to stabilize the structure of the paper. Other preservation attempts include systematic microfilming of books, or reprinting the books on acid-free paper.

⁹ ANSI Z39.48-1992, the American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials defines permanence as “The ability of paper to last at least several hundred years without significant deterioration under normal use and storage conditions in libraries and archives.” As cited by Ellen McCrady in *North American Permanent Papers* (Austin: Abbey Publications, 1998), 37.

¹⁰ One standard library publication that keeps track of book prices found that the average price for a North American academic book in religion or philosophy was \$41.87 in 1998 (*Bowker Annual Library and Book Trade Almanac*, 1999 ed.).

¹¹ For example, a typical academic book in chemistry cost \$159.37 in 1997, and a book in physics or astronomy costs, on average, \$92.21 (*Bowker Annual Library and Book Trade Almanac*, 1999 ed., pp. 508-509).

¹² See, for instance, Sven Birkets, *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994).

¹³ Silver halide microfilm is also a stable medium for preserving information. It suffers from the disadvantage of requiring readers to use some sort of machinery (at least a magnifying lens) to view documents.

¹⁴ Michael Gorman, Dean of Library Services, California State University-Fresno, in a speech at the American Theological Library Association (Denver, June 24, 1996).

¹⁵ *Computer Eyestrain Journal* October 1999 issue (<http://www.eye2eye.com/> downloaded October 19, 1999). Ironically, the *Computer Eyestrain Journal* is an on-line journal read, in the first instance, on a computer screen.

¹⁶ Nuvo-Media Inc.’s Rocket eBook™, already on the market, is a 22-ounce, small computer. It looks like a small book and can hold the text of ten novels at once. Readers delete texts that they have read and download new ones (for a fee) from the Internet. For details see: <http://www.rock-etbook.com/>. On the technological, legal, and conceptual issues involved with electronic books, see Clifford Lynch, “Electrifying the Book,” *Library Journal Net Connect*, October 15, 1999, pp. 3-6.

TIMOTHY LINCOLN: DO BOOKS STILL MATTER?



Would it really be so awful if libraries became totally electronic?

Librarians would cringe. Many enter the profession because of a tactile love of books. On a more substantive level, though, it raises the issue of the preservation of knowledge.

ONE OF THE GREAT THINGS ABOUT PAPER IS WE HAVE DOCUMENTED ITS DURABILITY. THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS ARE NOT THE DEAD SEA FLOPPY DISKS.

How?

Most people think libraries exist to provide information. On that level, electronic libraries are as good as, and in some cases better than, “books-only” libraries because microfiche, CD-Roms, and computers also provide information. Computers, however, are new. Librarians and archivists wonder about the long-term ramifications of only storing information in electronic formats. One of the great things about paper is we have documented its durability. The Dead Sea Scrolls are not the Dead Sea Floppy Disks. Under proper storage conditions, paper lasts a very long time. As far as I know, no one who manufactures CD-Rom disks, for example, makes bold statements about your ability to use them more than ten years in the future.

So what will a library look like in ten years?

The main purpose of the library isn’t going to change. Libraries will continue to be information centers. More and more of the library’s resources, however, will shift toward electronic databases. Libraries will get even better by providing access to remote databases and other kinds of computer files that are not physically present in the library itself.

Can’t I just access all this material through my personal computer?

You can if you are an accomplished researcher. Most of us aren’t. Library people also talk about the loss of serendipity in a completely electronic environment. I can remem-

ber working on seminary research papers, going to the shelves to get what I thought was the right book, only to discover right next to it another book—and when I opened that book, I discovered it was the right book.

What's your definition of a good library?

A good library fits its context. Although that might sound like a postmodern dodge, libraries serve different sectors of society. Often they serve the mission of an institution. Austin Seminary's library, for example, exists to fulfill the information needs of the students and faculty of Austin Seminary. Thus, we don't provide accelerated readers for kids. We don't provide coffee table books. Our library has a focus, and we collect resources in keeping with that focus.

How do you maintain a sharp focus?

By throwing books away that don't fit.

How do you decide what books to keep and what books to throw away?

That's inside information.

I thought I could count on my librarian to provide me with inside information.

Well, some librarians never throw anything away. They are afraid to. In public libraries, taxpayers sometimes get outraged when they discover that the library is throwing anything away, because "We paid money for these books, how can you throw them away?"

So what's your strategy?

My strategy in deciding what to keep and what to throw away is based on three factors. First is the physical condition of the book. If I see a book on the shelf in any discipline that is yellow and brittle, I may take the book off the shelf. Second, I make weeding choices based on the importance of not just that particular book but of the discipline that the book represents to our collection. For instance, we do not offer a degree in world history. It's important that we have some books in the library about world history to support our church history course offerings, but we don't need an exhaustive collection. We do, on the other hand, require students to use a lot of books about the Bible. I will think long and hard before I get rid of a Bible commentary, even if it's older and the pages are a little bit yellow, because the teaching of the Bible is central to what we do at Austin Seminary. Third is use. If a book is being used, that tells me that it's a needed book. Conversely, even books in good physical condition that haven't been checked out since the 1950s or '60s are good candidates for weeding.

Do you replace heavily used books that are falling apart?

Yes. We often receive gift book collections from retiring ministers. (I always try to guess what year they went to seminary on the basis of the books that they give us.) Often we will swap out a gift copy for a stack copy that we know is not in good shape. Around here, we're always on the lookout for Barth's *Dogmatics* or Calvin's *Institutes*, because students just use and use and use all those copies that we have. We routinely try to refresh them when possible.

It's good that you are able to refresh Calvin.

Yes.

What's the purpose of a church library?

That depends on what the local community of faith says the library is for. Too many church libraries are started because the retiring pastor leaves a bunch of books. The problem with that is no one has intentionally said, "Let's have a church library that does the following two or three things." The result? You have a ragtag collection of books, but it's hard to promote its use because it has no purpose and thus no audience.

What are some common purposes?

Many church libraries buy reference books for use by Sunday school teachers. Others, and I'm thinking of a church library in a rural community that has a tiny public library or none at all, decide that their mission to the community is to provide children's books, and they invite families from the community to come and use them. That's a wonderful mission for a church library. Those things will only happen, of course, if church members sit down and clearly articulate their mission for the church library.

Is a church library an expensive operation?

Yes, if the library is growing its collection. Yet there are many ways to finance them. One good way is to publicize the library's mission statement, describe what kind of books are needed, and invite people to make donations. The tricky part with that approach, however, is to make it clear that not everything given will necessarily end up on the shelf. The people in charge need to be almost fanatical about not shelving books, no matter how beautiful, that don't fit the collection. Of course, having someone in the congregation with an interest in starting a library who wants to make a large financial donation is always a wonderful way to start. Also, it's essential to persuade your session or church council to provide a budgeted amount every year for the church library.

Do you look at church libraries when you visit churches?

Yes. Some are not so good: no discernible collection focus, unordered, dusty. Others are good: clear purpose, permanent location, lovely cabinetry—it's obvious someone is taking care of it. Not too many, however, have a library that is classified, with a catalog. So, my suspicion is that most congregations have libraries that may have good books in them, but they're not heavily used.

Do churches ever call you for library consulting?

Not exactly. I occasionally get calls from people who want to start a church library. I give them some things to think about. There is a group called The Church and Synagogue Library Association whose purpose is to help people who are involved in libraries for communities of faith—small-scale libraries with modest budgets. The organization puts out a newsletter that provides tips about running a library as well as providing brief reviews of the kinds of books that might be appropriate in a church library.

Do we have anything to learn from Christian Science reading rooms?

That daily, disciplined reading of religious materials is important.

Why?

Christian Scientists, who are probably the most literate religious group in the United States, can remind Presbyterians of their heritage of emphasizing the written word. Protestants do not value the regular, devotional reading of the Bible and Bible studies the way we once did. We say that we live by the Word. That should translate into regular reading of the Word—and books about the Word.

Why do you think we spend less time reading?

I think it's part of a larger cultural trend away from reading toward watching or listening. Maybe this is a cranky, middle-aged comment, but I think there's a loss in that.

Why did you become a librarian?

One Sunday, after I had been serving congregations as a pastor for probably four years, my wife, Laura, was reading a newspaper article which predicted in almost apocalyptic tones that there was going to be a terrible shortage of librarians in the United States and that the world probably would end because of this. She stuck the article under my eyes and said, "You'd be good at this." I read the article. It explained that librarians didn't have to wear their hair in a bun, didn't have to go around telling people to be quiet. Because of computers, many of the routine aspects of library work had been taken over by technology, freeing librarians to do intellectual work—helping people find information, making decisions about what a library collection should look like, and so on.

And you were intrigued?

Yes. The orderliness of library work was something that appealed to me. And I really missed the intellectual engagement with theology that I experienced at Yale Divinity School. To be sure, I cherished meeting with thoughtful pastors for text study, and I cherished the questions that parishioners ask. Still, those pastoral engagements simply do not go into the same detail as theological conversations at a seminary do. You don't say "theodicy" when you're dealing with someone asking why their child was killed in a car accident. You're thinking "theodicy" but you're not directly talking about it. So, I went to library school, told them I wanted to be a seminary librarian, and spent the next two-and-a-half years explaining what a seminary was to largely secular people who had no contact with Christian faith. By 1991, I was a seminary librarian.

How has library work changed over the past nine years?

Two words: computers and the Internet. My first job was at the Maryknoll School of Theology. When I arrived there, I didn't have a computer on my desk. By the time I left there, only a couple of years later, there was a local area (computer) network on campus. Similarly, when I came to Austin Seminary, we had one library computer—a 386 computer—to run the ATLA Religion database. If you did a complex search, you could type in what you were looking for, hit return, and then wander over to the new acquisitions shelf and browse for five minutes, because it took that long for the machine to find anything. Now we've got computers everywhere. Fast computers.

And the Internet?

I finished library school in December 1991. I never took a course that had "Internet" in the title. If you go to The University of Texas Graduate School of Library and Infor-

mation Science today, a third to half of the courses will have "Internet" in the title. It's become a working presupposition.

What's the least favorite thing that you do as a librarian?

Deal with irate patrons who feel ill-used by library policies or ill-treated by a staff member. I don't do much of it, but I'm sort of the "court of last appeal" on library fines and things of that sort. Sometimes we have patrons whose behavior and demeanor create a threatening environment to other library users and they need to be asked to leave. That's not fun, either.

Kind of a library bouncer.

Kind of.

What do you spend most of your time doing?

Budget preparation. Book purchasing. I spend probably a fifth or more of my time looking at book catalogs, making decisions about what materials to buy, conferring with professors if I have a question about whether a given book would be something that would be helpful to them. I also am involved in training people to use the library. General administration.

How can you tell if a library is well-administered?

If you look in the online catalog, find a book, write down its call number, go to the shelf, and it's in the right place. If the staff are helpful to you. If it's clean.

Do you get too much of books? Do you still enjoy sitting down at home when you go home at night and reading a book?

The joke in library school is that real librarians don't read books, they read book reviews. The relationship that librarians often have with books is sort of like the one between a wholesale beer distributor and beer—you're not concerned about a particularly fine bottle of beer, you just want to move a lot of cases. I fight that. One of my perks is browsing through the new book cart before it rolls out to the shelves.

What's the most frequently asked question of a librarian?

"Can you recommend a good book?"

Can you recommend a good book?

My wife started a book club recently in part because she wanted to be challenged to read things that she wouldn't normally read. Recently we read, *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families: Stories from Rwanda*. It is a moving book, well-written and provocative, because it deals with issues of genocide and theodicy and our complicity in both. Now we're reading, *Life Is So Good*, the memoir of a 100-year-old African American man from Marshall, Texas, who learned how to read when he was 98. He's already written his memoirs, and his name is George Dawson. The best recent theological book I've read is *Friends of God and Prophets* by Elizabeth Johnson. It's a very powerful statement about the communion of saints from a feminist perspective. 

JUST BE IT

The pastor as theological reader

CYNTHIA L. RIGBY

Last spring, one of the graduating M.Div. seniors at Austin Seminary asked us professors for a list of books he should read “sometime in his life.” A heartening request, but it got even better. In the last few months, John has made it clear that he does not understand “sometime” to mean an ever-receding future in which he *will* (he hopes) have the time to read. On the contrary, John seems to think that “sometime” began the day after graduation. Last week, in fact, I received an e-mail which revealed that John is on schedule to complete five classics—by à Kempis, Bonhoeffer, Dillard, H. R. Niebuhr, and Moltmann—by this December. Inspiring, isn’t it? But here’s the catch: he has not yet taken a call. Will he be able to keep on reading, once he becomes a pastor?

Pastors commonly lament that they aren’t able to keep up with the biblical languages. But in my conversations with pastors, frustration with keeping up with the theological literature is also conveyed. Frequent comments include: “There are just so many books out there—how do I know what to read?” “Why don’t theologians write shorter books? When I do have time to work through one, I feel like the author could have gotten to the main point a lot sooner,” and “Why don’t theologians ever write books *for pastors?*” My sense is that pastors yearn to participate in the wider theological conversation, but do not want to have to fight their way in.

Any of us could generate a dozen ideas for how pastors can be helped with their theological reading. Seminaries could provide bibliographies—and, possibly, “book reports” on specific theological works—on-line. Pastors could form reading groups that meet weekly to discuss and encourage one another. Churches could include a weekly “reading day” in pastors’ job descriptions (try not to laugh).

continued on page 16

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MY READING LIFE

The role of books in the life of a pastor

DAVID D. MILES

I don’t remember the moment it happened. It was, after all, a subtle shift, nothing dramatic. But the change was real and irreversible, like looking at a picture and suddenly seeing a hidden image in it, after which you can never look at the picture again without seeing it. It was a change in the way I looked at books. No, actually it was a change in the way books looked at me.

My life as a pastor began after having been a student for as long as I could remember. And being in school meant that there were books to be read. It’s not that I didn’t enjoy reading them, though reading was, for me, painfully slow. Nor was it that I did not greatly benefit from all the books that were assigned to me throughout my years of education. Rather, the trouble came from the way that the books looked at me all those years.

Even when I got to seminary where the books waiting to be read were of more interest to me than any others in all my years of schooling, they still looked at me in a way that I found a little threatening. There was Walker’s huge volume on church history that looked at me and said, “Read me and don’t skip a single fact or you’re going to fail the midterm exam.” There were books by Kierkegaard that dared me to read them, saying, “Go ahead and read me, try to understand me, and then figure out whether I mean what I am saying, or just the opposite.” Then there were the two-and-a-half feet of Barth’s *Dogmatics* I acquired during a book-buying binge which always stared at me from my bookshelf whispering with a Swiss accent, “Read me, . . . all of me.”

I read. I bought books that began filling my shelves. But the books continued to look at me in a slightly menacing way, as if they were challenges to be met, hills to be climbed, assignments to be fulfilled. This feeling carried over into the parish in the

continued on page 20

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READING THEOLOGY

continued from page 14

Theology professors might help pastors strategize on how to read particular theologians, given their different emphases, styles, and contexts. For example, a professor might advise: (1) Be sure to keep a pocket dictionary of philosophical terms on your desk while reading Tillich; or (2) Don't worry, when reading Barth, if your mind wanders, here and there. Let his words wash over you like a piece of music by Mozart . . . eventually, he'll come back to whatever point you missed; or (3) Don't immediately assume Gutiérrez is wrong, just because you don't resonate with his argument. Allow him to let you "see" what theology looks like from a Latin American context.

While any of these strategies might be helpful in managing symptoms of the problem, I wonder if there is not also a need to address what underlies feelings of being overwhelmed, concerns about having too little time, and fears about wasting time on words that don't have immediate application to the "real world" work of ministry. As helpful as "how-to" advice can be, I have come to believe that the fundamental problem pastors have with reading theology is not a dearth of information regarding what and how to read, but an absence of the conviction that the theological conversation is *their* conversation.

In the remainder of this brief essay I will propose four points for reflecting on "how to read a theology book" that focus less on the *doing* of the reading and more on our *being* as readers. Instead of pushing you to "just do it" (read theology), I reflect on what it means to "really be it" (a reader of theology). The theology of the Reformation, in contrast to our cultural wisdom, teaches us that we don't create ourselves by doing. Nor does what we do (or not do) always reveal who we are, for we are sinful. Rather, what we do is to proceed from who we are: beloved children of God; brothers and sisters of Christ.

With this in mind, I suggest that the fundamental strategy for reading a theology book is to engage it as those who: *remember* who we are; *revel* in the richness of our inheritance; *converse* with our fellow heirs; and *create* with Christ as partners in the ministry of reconciliation. Let me explore the four facets of this strategy in greater detail.

REMEMBER.

"TO SIT ALONE IN THE LAMPLIGHT WITH A BOOK SPREAD OUT BEFORE YOU, AND HOLD INTIMATE CONVERSE WITH [PEOPLE] OF UNSEEN GENERATIONS—SUCH IS A PLEASURE BEYOND COMPARE."

—Kenko Yoshida

Week after week, pastors remind members of their congregations of who they are. "You are children of God," we tell them. "You are joined, at this Table, with Christians all around the world—from every time and place."

But how do these affirmations come into play—practically speaking—when we pick up a theology book and steal an hour to read? If we think of reading theology as something we do outside of community, as a kind of hunting for provisions to bring "home" to our congregations, it is no wonder we're frustrated when the hunt seems unsuccessful! In actuality, to spend an afternoon with a text like Calvin's *Institutes* is not to close ourselves off from the community in order to "study." Rather, it is to be intentional about creating a space to develop an intimate relationship with a fellow seeker of understanding, a crucial member of the community of faith. As we read, we hold in our hands a tangible link to brothers and sisters in Christ from "unseen generations." Like the bread that joins us to those who partake in different times and places, so the theology book has a sacramental quality—participating in a reality larger than the sum of the meanings of the words inside.

I wonder if pastors neglect their theological reading because, on some level, they understand it to be in tension with their calling to be with people. If reading a theology book means leaving the community behind or sitting in the proverbial "ivory tower," it's no wonder that ministers—and their congregations—are hesitant to make it a priority. But what if we were convinced that to read theology was to sit in the midst of the community, inviting the saints separated from us by time and space to enter into the circle with us? When we read as rememberers of who we are in relationship to others, our communal life is enriched by the physically absent who are really made present.

REVEL.

"BOOKS, BOOKS, BOOKS. . . LIKE SOME SMALL NIMBLE MOUSE BETWEEN THE RIBS OF A MASTODON, I NIBBLED HERE AND THERE AT THIS OR THAT BOX . . . THE FIRST BOOK FIRST. AND HOW I FELT IT BEAT UNDER MY PILLOW, IN THE MORNING'S DARK. AN HOUR BEFORE THE SUN WOULD LET ME READ! MY BOOKS!"

—Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Theological books abound, it seems. Many pastors, like Browning, have inherited box after box of dusty old books. But how many of us have heard them beating under our pillows?

We might approach our theology books with dread, rather than joy-full anticipation, because we are afraid they might defeat us in our struggle to read. With no intention to "nibble here and there"—but only to succeed in our mission to conquer—we are back on the hunt. And who can fault us, in our competitive context, for setting our sights high? For wanting to master the material?

Recognizing that it is impossible to read every word of every book, students sometimes ask me to help them formulate an attack plan. Perhaps seminaries should offer courses in speed reading, some have suggested. That way, graduates would have some hope of keeping up once they leave seminary and take a church.

Drawn by Browning's curious and playful spirit, I suggest that the "divide and conquer" approach to reading theology should be resisted. I wonder, instead, if "remem-

bering” who we are as members of the Christian community can inspire us to approach our books with a spirit of revelry—*knowing* that the point isn’t to learn it all; *loving* how much theology there is; *immersing* ourselves in it. When we pick up a theology book, we might imagine ourselves sitting in a room full of the treasures that are our inheritance, basking in the wonder that we can’t begin to count how much there is. When we engage in our theological reading, we might envision ourselves encircled by colorful friends we can spend a lifetime getting to know. The goal of our reading, then, is not to master, control, or conquer, pleading for understanding whenever we haven’t done what we know we *should* do. Rather, it is to live into our identity as members of the body of Christ: to enter into relationship; to revel in the possibilities; to open ourselves up to the great cloud of witnesses that surrounds us; to hear the pulse.

CONVERSE.

“READING FURNISHES THE MIND ONLY WITH MATERIALS OF KNOWLEDGE; IT IS THINKING THAT MAKES WHAT WE READ OURS.”

—John Locke

As rememberers who sit in the center of the circle and revel in the riches that surround us, one of our greatest joys is to enter into the conversation. To read theology books is not like entering a museum, where we might work our way around from display to display without feeling the need to announce our presence or opinions. On the contrary, if reading a theology book is about developing a relationship with a brother or sister in Christ, our active participation is required and desired. When we read a theology book, we are being called upon to make a thoughtful contribution to the circle itself.

Eager to engage the circle of witnesses who surround us, we should avoid reading theology books Siskel-and-Ebert style. The “thinking” which Locke advocates would shrivel from self-centered declarations about whether we agree or disagree with the author, or whether the book “works” for us. To offer a simple “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” in response to our theological reading is, again, to fall into a “hunt and conquer” rather than a “remember and revel” mentality.

Remembering who we are in relation to the authors of the theology books who surround us, we make theological ideas our own in the context of conversation. “Talking with” our theology books, then, requires committed attempts to understand what the other is saying, even when we disagree. It involves asking questions (OK . . . a bit difficult to do when you are reading a book and not talking to a “live” person . . . but try writing them in the margins and see if the author addresses them later). It respects the other enough to argue, rather than conveniently dismissing.

As we think about what we are reading, conversing with the witnesses who surround us, we will find that we are being shaped and molded in our Christian convictions. We begin, then, to read theology not only with the hope that we will find ideas for our next sermon or lecture series, but with the expectation that we will, indeed, be changed.

CREATE.

“YOU ARE THE SAME TODAY THAT YOU ARE GOING TO BE IN FIVE YEARS FROM NOW EXCEPT FOR TWO THINGS: THE PEOPLE WITH WHOM YOU ASSOCIATE AND THE BOOKS YOU READ.”

—Charles Jones

We read theology as creatures called to participate in God’s work of creation; as partners in the ministry of reconciliation and as ministers charged to tend the sheep of God.

But the charge to join in God’s ongoing creative work comes with a reminder: We are creators not as God is Creator, for we create only as creatures. Our creative ministerial acts flow not from omnipotence or a never-ending store of Wisdom, but from the reality of our own ongoing creation. The replenishing of our resources that we seek when reading theology will not translate into effective ministry unless we *ourselves* are replenished. For theology books to get our creative theological juices flowing, we have to be created by them. And if we ask the reasonable question—how can we be *created* by a mere *book*?—it’s time to go back to remembering. Theology books are not only books, but vehicles through which we enter into relationship with the communion of saints. Theology books are not to be attacked, and finished, and evaluated, but participated in, and conversed with, and nibbled again and again.

When we read theology in this way, our reading becomes less a matter of “something I work into my schedule because it’s important” and more a reflection of who we are. Reading theology doesn’t *make us* theologians; we read theology because we *are* theologians. As those who are called to speak words about God, how can we do otherwise than remember our relationship to the saints, revel in our inheritance, converse openly with one another, and create out of our ongoing re-creation in Christ? However we go about the logistics of our reading, let us seek to live into the truth that theology books are God’s open-ended invitation to join in communion. 

BOOKS IN THE LIFE OF A PASTOR

continued from page 15

years after seminary as a stack of commentaries would glare at me saying, “Read every one of us or you’ll be missing something for your sermon.” Or the books found in the *New York Times Book Review* warning me, “Read every one of us or you will be woefully out-of-step with the culture.” While books were a huge part of my life, my relationship with them was somewhat uneasy, as with a critical parent that could never quite be satisfied.

But then, somewhere along the line, something changed. It happened several years into my first full-time pastorate. Suddenly as I looked up at my shelves, instead of seeing the eyes of critical judgment, I began to see these books as friends, companions with something to give to me if I was willing to give something to them.

C. S. Lewis once said, “Friendship is the greatest of worldly goods,” and when the change took place I began to see what wonderful friends I had. Looking down on me from my shelves were all different kinds of friends with whom I related in a number of different ways. There were some that I was inclined to meet with over morning coffee to discuss personal matters. There were others that I thought of as colleagues to consult during the workday. And then there were others with whom I desired to socialize at night or take with me as traveling companions. Understanding the value of each of these different literary friends has led to a particular rhythm of reading in my life.

BOOKS THAT HELP ME PRAY

There is always a stack of books on the table next to the big brown leather chair in our study at home. These are books I meet with in the early morning hours that I think of as friends who serve as spiritual guides. For me it is important to begin the day with books that have nothing to do with my work, but rather with books that help me to pray. I have found that it is critical for my own life of faith to begin the day by simply listening for God’s word to me, whether or not that word ever gets passed on in a sermon or used in a class.

The place to begin, of course, is with Scripture itself. But this is also the time of day that I read something by Henri Nouwen or Kathleen Norris, by Frederick Buechner or Anne Lamott. Sometimes I have even taken to reading systematic theology devotionally during this time, for instance working through Calvin’s *Institutes* or a volume of Barth’s *Dogmatics* one section at a time. Nothing like a cup of serious Reformed theology to get you going first thing in the morning.

The single most helpful author for my early morning reading has been Eugene Peterson. In fact, his four books on the pastoral life (*The Contemplative Pastor*, *Working the Angles*, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work*, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*) have been the most influential books I have read to foster my growth and clarify my sense of call as a pastor. In these volumes, as well as in many other books and articles, Peterson plumbs the depths of what it means to be a minister, the nature of the pastoral call,

and how one listens for God in the midst of daily ministry. Ever biblically grounded and theologically creative, I believe that Eugene Peterson is one of the most trustworthy spiritual guides for pastors of the present generation.

READING WITH, ABOUT, AND ON BEHALF OF A CONGREGATION

The books that I read during the workday hours are books that I think of as conversation partners in the process of preparing to preach and teach. These books, found on my office desk and bookshelves, comprise the most obvious reading that any pastor does—the assigned reading, if you will. This is the time to read the Scripture I am preaching on with an ear for the word that will emerge in the sermon. It is the time for opening biblical commentaries that provide new angles and insights on the text. It is the time for reading other books, essays, or articles that I have previously set aside for that particular sermon or class. This is not necessarily the time when things get read cover to cover, but rather are gleaned for insights, ideas, and images which will go into the pot where the sermon gets cooked. I think of this as reading I do on behalf of the congregation as I listen for a word from God and then tell them what I have heard.

In the last parish I served, a member of the pastor nominating committee gave me a copy of a book on the history of the church. The congregation had recently celebrated its 250th anniversary and had commissioned a book chronicling its life all the way back to its pre-Revolutionary War roots. I read the book in one sitting the very next day and I found it to be invaluable for getting to know the congregation and a wonderful source for preaching in the years to come. Not all pastors entering a new call have the luxury of being able to read a book on the history of their church, but there are often books of local history to be found, as well as novels set in that particular part of the country.

One of the greatest pleasures in my last call was reading the novels of a writer who happened to be a member of our congregation. Most of his works took place in, or had some connection with, the area where we lived, and I learned much about the history and ethos of the area from reading his books. Though not every congregation will have published authors in its membership, there are almost always people who write. As a fellow writer, a preacher will usually find wonderful conversation partners with others in the congregation who are in the business of expressing themselves with the written word.

It seems to me that it is also important for pastors to be reading, not only *about* a congregation, but also *with* them. While the preacher may often be the one who is in the position to recommend books to parishioners, I have greatly benefited from the books and recommendations given to me by parishioners. Now, I say this acknowledging a certain caveat. All of us in ministry know that getting books from church members can sometimes result in volumes ending up on our shelves that we find, well, embarrassing. I admit that thanks to some well-meaning members a few books I found hard to stomach like *The Celestine Prophecy* and *Embraced by the Light* can be found on my shelves. But I have found that even these books can serve to help pastors understand what is capturing the imagination of the culture, and even some of the people in our pews. Reading with the congregation, in all the forms that can take, provides common ground to discuss life in this world and our lives of faith.

JUST FOR THE LOVE OF WORDS

There is a stack of books on my bedside table. I may only have a few minutes for them before I fall asleep, or I may take them with me on vacation, on an airplane, or wherever I think I may find myself with some time to read. These books represent the part of my reading life that was the last to develop, but is now the one I look forward to the most. It is the time, usually at the end of the day, when I simply read for the pure pleasure of reading.

I have to confess that, much to my chagrin, I was not raised as a reader. I was the kind of person who, if I had some extra time on my hands, would sooner take a run, shoot some hoops, call a friend, listen to some music, or turn on the T.V. than pick up a book to read. But it has actually happened that during my years in pastoral ministry I have become a reader. I suppose this has happened largely because, as someone who is in the business of words, I now find that my soul is fed by others who have a gift with words.

I once asked a mentor who is an accomplished preacher what I could do that would most help my preaching and he simply responded, "Read." Though I did not fully understand the implications of his response, I believe that I am beginning to understand. It does not have to do with reading simply to find new sermon illustrations, but with reading in order to be shaped by the power of the word. It has less to do with reading simply to be informed, but rather with reading in order to expand my vision of the world, my understanding of human nature, not to mention my own imagination. It is about swimming in the deep waters of words that matter so that I, as one who is charged with speaking about the most profound and mysterious matters, can draw upon the depths of language rather than merely skimming words from the surface.

It was just this realization that sent me searching for words that mattered, to classic works of literature and poetry by authors like Dostoevsky and Rilke, Flannery O'Connor and Graham Greene, T. S. Eliot and John Donne; to contemporary writers like John Updike and Mary Gordon, Anne Tyler and Walker Percy, John Irving and Wendell Berry; to authors who care deeply for words and how they are put together.

My soul has been fed by books that have taken me to places my wife would never let me go, like to the top of Mt. Everest with Jon Krakour or to the South Pole with Sir John Shackleford; to introduce me to people that I might not have met otherwise like Lance Armstrong or former restaurant critic of the *New York Times*, Ruth Reichl; to the mysteries and wonders of Quantum Theory and modern cosmologies from authors like Timothy Ferris and John Polkinghorne.

I have also come to love reading about writing itself. I have found that books like Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird*, and Annie Dillard's *The Writing Life*, as well as a recent series of essays in the *New York Times* titled "Writers on Writing," have all helped me better understand what it means to be in the business of words, to create by putting words together, to take the risk of putting words on paper and see where it takes me.

NOT A PASTORAL LUXURY, BUT A NECESSITY

A pastor's life is very busy. There are so many facets to our work, so many people who need us for so many different things, and our work is—by definition—never done. There is always more to do, more to say, more people to care for. Because of this, pastors often find themselves in a perpetual crisis of priorities. Unfortunately, reading is often the first to go. Sure, we may glance at a few books while preparing for a sermon, but many pastors find it hard to justify taking hours all to themselves, away from the hospital visits, the committee meetings, the sermon preparation, simply to read.

If books are like friends, it is easy for most of us to end up thinking that the books on our shelves will always be there for us when we need them. But, as with any friendship, when we take others for granted the relationship suffers or may be lost somewhere along the way. The tragedy is not that we fail to fulfill our obligation to books that have some kind of expectation on us; rather, that we fail to see the enormous gift that these literary friends are to our lives.

In her wonderful little book, *When God is Silent*, Barbara Brown Taylor talks about the famine in our culture of words that matter, that are life-giving. She recognizes that preachers, of all people, may be the people most in need of words that truly fulfill:

We are people too, after all. We get hungry too, and some of us are starving. The problem is that nourishing words are so hard to find—words with no razor blades in them, words with no chemical additives. Most of the words offered to us have been chewed so many times there are no nutrients left in them, or else they have been left uncovered on some shelf until they are too hard to bite into. Meanwhile, people look at us with hungry eyes. . . . They do not know how many of us are down to our last handful of meal, our last tablespoon of oil. They do not know that we cannot give them more than we get.¹

When I think back on that time when the shift took place in the way books looked at me, I now see that it came at the busiest time of my pastoral ministry. It also came at a time when I realized that my soul was drying up. While I may have been doing the required reading in order to produce a sermon each week, I knew that my ministry, let alone my own life of faith, would soon become shallow and empty if I was not drinking from deeper waters.

I came to see that my soul required words that would give life, words that still had nutrients left in them, words that would reach me as "deep calls unto deep." I came to see that reading was, in no way, a luxury for the pastoral life, but a necessity. I came to see that books would help teach me how to pray, converse with me about my work, stretch the bounds of my imagination. I came to see the books on my shelves smiling down upon me, gifts like that of a great friend. 📖

NOTE

¹ Barbara Brown Taylor, *When God is Silent* (Boston: Cowley Publications, 1998), 23-24.

WILL IT PREACH?

SCOTT BLACK JOHNSTON
Associate Professor of Homiletics

A doctor of ministry candidate recently asked me, “What have you read lately that is really good?” I love that question. Still, before responding, I am typically cautious. Employing that annoying (cowardly?) maneuver that professors use to glean more information before airing their own perspective, I turn the question around: “What have *you* read lately that is really good?” “Well,” he said a little sheepishly, “on the plane, on the way down, I read Salinger’s *A Catcher in the Rye* for the first time. That was really good.” I smiled. This was my kind of reader. Don’t get me wrong. As a professor of homiletics I do my duty. I read most of the new preaching books that come out each year so that I can commend worthy selections to pastors who do not have the time to read as deeply in the discipline. I also try to keep up with the new books that my colleagues say are important in their respective fields. It really is essential to the health of the Church that we all peruse and ponder the latest offerings by Elizabeth Johnson, Robert Jenson, and other first-class contemporary thinkers. So, if you answer, “Brueggemann’s *Theology of the Old Testament*” when I ask what you have been reading that is “really good” do not worry, I’ll have a few suggestions for you. But for all the suitable importance attached to these books, I must admit that I do not enjoy recommending academic titles nearly as much as I relish steering people toward a really good novel.

I keep multiple copies of my absolute favorite fiction in my office. That way, like the Gideons, I am ready to evangelize any impoverished soul who happens by and has the misfortune of not having encountered John Irving’s *A Prayer for Owen Meany*. Please do not say that you *have* seen the movie, but *not* read the book. It breaks my heart. On one level, my apostolic fervor toward certain literature is a natural outgrowth of the scholar’s conviction that reading is good for you—in much the same way that oat bran is good for you. Yet, beyond advocating for good literary nutrition, I (along with many of my colleagues) share an intuition about novels and short stories that is a bit more vaporous in character, but is at least as significant. We urge people to read a particular book because something unique happened to us in the reading encounter. At the risk of fumbling with the ineffable, I am referring to that moment when, tear in the eye or chuckle on the breath, a person turns the page muttering, “This is true . . . this is so true.”

My first time through Irving’s novel, I began to slow as I neared the end. Ten pages at a sitting was my limit. I did not want the story to stop. As with many good novels, I had been effectively plunged into the lives of the characters, and I wanted to prolong

my time with these quirky New Englanders. Still, something more was compelling me to delay completion. Page after page, the holy was unfolding. Reading Irving’s novel was a religious experience. St. Augustine reported that he had such a brush with the divine while reading Paul’s letter to the Romans. I have had such experiences with fiction. Every time I read Flannery O’Connor, I find myself sitting a little less comfortably with my religiosity. Her fiction blasts at the plaque on my soul. It hurts, but it cleanses. I read Graham Greene’s *The Power and the Glory* on an annual basis. There is something about his tale of human finitude and sin, the grace of God, and the vocation of clergy that refreshes my sense of call. In such readings, I am seized by God’s word. In other words, some fiction strikes me as proclamation.

Perhaps that is why preachers are so thirsty for a “really good” religious novel. We who preach are also those most eager to hear. We ache for someone to preach to us. Given that our Sunday mornings are usually spent in the pulpit, often that opportunity to listen for the voice of God occurs on Sunday afternoons in the armchair with a book. There we immerse ourselves in felicitous words, stunning scenery, and haunting plot twists. We read stories that capture the human condition, that uncover grace at work, that disturb the mundane and discover the holy. In so doing, we are reminded that the work of the preacher and the Christian writer is so very similar. As Flannery O’Connor put it “[Fiction] should reinforce our sense of the supernatural by grounding it in concrete observable reality.” So too, the best proclamation has always risked concrete assertions that, in fact, God is at work in the world.

Occasionally, a pastor will hand me a photocopied story or a scrap of paper inscribed with a novel’s title. The paper comes with the simple promise, “It’ll preach.” I have long understood that particular remark to be a comment on a story’s ability to transfer to a sermon. In other words, “It’ll preach” means much the same thing as “Here’s some good illustrative material.” Lately, I have come to understand that phrase a bit differently. So, if you are looking for something really good to read, stop by my office. I have extra copies of *Owen Meany*. It will preach. ☛

TRANSLATION AS HABITUS

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*The First Presbyterian Church Shreveport
D. Thomason Professor of New Testament Studies*

It happened in Hamburg on a soccer field in 1966 . . . my first failed attempt at translating. A six-year-old wanted to know what time it was and I had not a clue what he was asking. My friend Ingo told him and he ran off homeward, late for supper. This incident would be followed by others—like the time I announced in a *Deutsch fuer Auslaender* class in my “best” German that “my wife is very efficient and she has ruined my morals!”—but in general things improved. By the time the Munich Olympic Games came around in 1972, I could tell a six-year-old what time it was and report live over Tellstar to an American audience watching ABC Wide World of Sports what the German negotiators were saying to the hostage-taking “Black September” terrorists at the Israeli compound in the Olympic village.

For me, literary translation work began about the same time as my encounter with the six-year-old. You see I had gone to Germany to work on a doctor’s degree. My mentor—“Doktorvater”—knew little English and it was clearly a matter of learn German or go home! Lectures and seminars and doctoral evening presentations—not to mention buying a loaf of bread—were all exercises in the “deutsche Sprache.” So, translating was a study in motivation and, really, survival. I needed to get to know Leonhard Goppelt and his approach to the New Testament; what better way (besides watching him work), thought I, than translating his articles while riding back and forth between home and the University on the S-Bahn. Now, some years later, I am still translating his works and those of others in the field. I look back now over four or five books and a fair number of articles of the published variety, so I guess that makes me a professional translator.

I have learned a few things about the enterprise along the way. For one thing, the axiom is true, The way of the translator is hard. What most translators have in mind when they sing this lament is that it takes so much time, the pay is so low, and the appreciation level is a notch below the pay. It is not uncommon to be confronted by the query after a year or so of work on a manuscript: “Fine, but when are you going to write your own book?” In a sense a good translation is your own book. The “way is hard” angle is more telling, indeed, when one considers the task itself. It is “hard” because rendering the content from one language into another is far more complex than wearing out your fingers turning the pages of a dictionary! Accuracy and readability in the new language require a familiarity with the subject matter, the author and his or her peculiar ways of stating things (that is to say, how they think!), and with the diction of your own language culture to be able to “say it” again with understanding. I

find it a formidable—if not an impossible—task to translate accurately in both directions. I am always uncomfortable—even after years of doing this—translating from English into German. In casual settings I suppose I “speak German” about as well as most foreigners, but when it comes to confidence in precision I would never risk it. A good friend in Germany Hans Bald and I recently collaborated on a New Testament article I wrote for a German-language publication. Our transatlantic telephone conversations and e-mails were in both languages, but the final product was the one that “rang true” to his ears and not mine. Our task was to “say it” the way a German would say it; finally, he is a German and I am not.

The second thing I have learned about this task is that engaging in it changes your life. The horizons of your way of thinking and expressing yourself are lifted and you can never go back to a time you did not think and speak this way. In my estimation, it is the greatest benefit and—moving to the context of translating ancient languages in the contexts of seminary and church—the best reason I can think of for devoting so much time and energy to teaching students to learn Greek and Hebrew. With these languages one is the recipient of the worlds of lived life that speak in these languages. It has been my experience that the diction of a given text challenges and reshapes the way that one thinks about the subject matter. In a recent *Book of Revelation* seminar, a student looked at an aorist tense of the verb “he reigned”; then she asked why it was not a present tense since after all—she reasoned—God has not ceased to reign. She then answered her own question with the proposal that this was an “ingressive” aorist, God’s reign “began” in connection with this unveiling of history’s destiny. Such nuances are often the starting point of a great firsthand discovery for our students. In addition to translational Greek in this class, the contributions of participants from otherwise untranslated works in French, German, and Spanish have been an enrichment of the seminar.

Finally, I have come to appreciate that language is more like music than it is like anything else I could compare it to. James Barr was right that the smallest unit of meaning is not the individual word, but the small paragraph and connected linguistic expressions. This disqualifies the dictionary in the quest for meaning beyond a starting point for possibilities of translation. Translators talk about a field of meaning and that context is the final arbiter. What an author means to say is, in fact, what the author has shown he or she meant by what he or she has said (written). The whole realm of interpretive signals comes into play at this point and that is where music comes into the picture. The inflections of the verbs and nouns, the genre guidance systems, and the subtleties of word-play and nuance are like the complex signs on the musical score. Learning to sing and to play an instrument takes time and requires touch. The analogy has the additional benefit in that just as music appreciation makes one a better listener so, too, attention to translation may in fact deliver one from jabber and make one into a better conversation partner. In a world of endless jabber a good listener is a friend indeed. May God gift us all with a friendly interest in translating! 🎵

A PASSION FOR BOOKS

E. QUINN FOX

Director of Vocation and Admissions

To paraphrase Will Rogers's famous aphorism, I never met a book I didn't like... Even then, I probably bought it. It's hard not to notice. Anyone walking through the doorway of my Austin Seminary office sees hundreds, no thousands, of volumes (many hundred more line the walls of the living room in my home). Opposite my office door stands a wall, twenty-five-feet long and ten feet high; 2500 bindings, most of them with dustjackets, stare out, situated on ten uniform rows of shelves, each one 11½ inches higher than the next. There is a rolling ladder suspended on a brass pole that spans the twenty-five-foot length of the wall. On an adjacent nine-foot-wide wall, the twentieth-century theology section climbs not quite to the ten-foot ceiling. At any given point in time, several dozen tomes are piled on my desk. Books are everywhere. It is not much of a jump to the conclusion of my friend Liz Johnson: "Man, you need a twelve-step program for books!"

There is a well-known saying of the sixteenth-century humanist Erasmus that appears on the give-away bookmarks from a number of bookstores, including Amazon.com. It reads: "When I get a little money, I buy books; if there is anything left over, I buy food." I can relate. In 1978 my very first credit card had a \$500 limit. I was working at a church with a take-home pay of less than \$750 per month. Yet I purchased a steeply discounted set of commentaries for \$299 and paid the monthly finance charge when I couldn't afford to pay off the balance. During my first year at seminary, dirt poor and without access to either tuition assistance or educational loans, I bought Kittel's ten-volume *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* on an installment plan. I didn't know Greek yet; an exegesis class was several months away. But I gladly committed to mail eleven dollars per month to *Minister's Personal Library* for a year.

Recklessly incurring debt to buy theological reference works made sense to me when I was twenty-four. To wit, I still own and use those two sets, whereas the car I was making payments on at the time was sold seventeen years ago for a fraction of the accumulated expense and no doubt has long ago been converted into scrap metal and spare parts. Ever since those early impulsive discount purchases I am happy to say that I have a strong track record of acquiring books at a discount. Long before the existence of mega-discount web sites I wheeled and dealt with publishers and distributors at booksellers' conventions to get the lowest prices possible. I have poured over remainder lists and visited countless used bookstores. I have compiled lists of great books I'd read and wanted to own. It became a two-fold challenge: How many great books could I find and how little could I pay for them?

Overseas on a fellowship in England and Scotland following my M.Div. degree, I spent weekends traveling to Britain's great cities. The cathedrals and museums were interesting enough and the countryside was lovely, but I was able to hunt for used bargains at Blackwell's in Oxford, at Charles Higham in London, at University S.P.C.K. in Durham, and at my favorite discovery, Ken Spelman Books in York. The dollar was strong against the pound, and I shipped home a large wooden crate of books at the end of my year abroad. Indeed, I regularly used to plan extra time on trips to enable stops at used bookstores, always hoping to find a dealer ignorant of theological titles and their prices. Finding such bargains is increasingly rare these days. But search engines like abe-books.com and bookfinder.com enable one to comparison shop, searching thousands of secondhand and out-of-print shops simultaneously with a few quick keystrokes. I spend a lot less time these days physically browsing in bookstores, allowing Internet searches and automatic e-mail notification to do the work for me.

My interest in books began at age eighteen, shortly after I claimed Christian faith for my own, when a seminarian who was very influential in my formation suggested that books would aid my spiritual life. By the time I was far enough along in my study of theology to read Augustine and Anselm, I discovered in these two giants a concise description of my own pilgrimage: "faith seeking understanding." Mine is a faith that seeks to understand—as much as I can—and for the past twenty-seven years books have been for me an important means of grace. They are signs and symbols to me of the life of faith. Perhaps I acquire them as an expression of my desire to know God in the fullness of truth. Four graduate theological degrees with concentrations in Bible, spiritual formation, systematic theology, historical theology, and homiletics have given significant breadth to the focus of my quest for understanding and have, no doubt, fanned the flames of my search for understanding.

Having recently turned forty-five, I have arrived at what I have long considered to be "middle-age." I am beginning to appreciate the adage, So many books, so little time. Every now and again a visitor will come into my office, gawk at the walls of books, and unguardedly exclaim: "Have you read them all?" My standard reply: "Read them all? Why, some of them I've read several times!"

WOMEN'S WRITES

CHRISTINE E. BLAIR

Associate Professor of Practical Theology

When I was eleven years old, I wondered if something mysterious happened to girls when they grew up. At that age I loved reading biographies, but the books were usually about men: explorers, scientists, political leaders, artists, musicians, and composers. What happened to women, I wondered, that they could not do any of these great things?

In high school I was introduced to a few women writers—Jane Austen, the Brontës, George Sand. These authors were too few to reassure me that I would not be mysteriously transformed at womanhood into a non-creative adult. Many years have passed and I have discovered the hidden stories of many women: explorers, scientists, political leaders, artists, musicians, and composers. I delight, therefore, in reading women authors.

In my young adult years, I plunged into reading science fiction and fantasy as compensation for difficult and dry graduate studies. Although I have enjoyed the classic male writers such as Edgar Rice Burroughs, Robert Heinlein, and Isaac Asimov, many of their works are centered on action rather than character. Their plots are often based on warfare, and are heavy with descriptions of new technologies which deal with invasions and other conflicts. Character development is sometimes shallow. In women science-fiction writers, I have discovered an elegance of prose and a nuance of plot and character seen only in the giants of male fantasy writers. Writers such as Ursula LeGuin, Patricia McKillip, Marion Zimmer Bradley, and Andre Norton create complex cultural worlds that lead the reader to confront the large questions about the nature of human life and culture, questions which ultimately are theological.¹ Through these works (and those of others such as Robin McKinley, Joy Chant, and Anne McCaffrey) shines a deep sense of the fragile beauty and joy inherent in life. Reading these books stirs in me wonder and longing for the Source of all beauty and truth.

I have had a similar experience with the plunge into mysteries which began after I had finished my Ph.D. work. When I cleared off bookshelves a few years ago to make room for the new baby in my life, I was surprised at my collection. I seemed to own the complete works of Dorothy Sayers, Ngaio Marsh, Agatha Christie, Josephine Tey, Martha Grimes, P. D. James, Ellis Peters, Amanda Cross, and Elizabeth George, along with some volumes by others such as Susan Albert Whiting and Ruth Rendell. As I boxed these up, I reflected on the pleasure they had given me: Sayers's understanding of small towns and the role of the church, interwoven with the literary cleverness of her detective and later on of his wife; James's and George's exploration of the evil and good sparked by love in human relationships.

In many female-authored mysteries, details of ordinary life so often handled by women, such as food and bedding, gardening and social teas, are often treated with attention and given value. Women characters are not used as stereotyped foils for major male characters but are placed in important roles with complex characterizations. The threads of relationships are carefully picked out and woven into an historical, socio-cultural, and economic context to form a rich and intricate tapestry. As a reader, I am pushed beyond the question of Who did it? to ask questions about the nature of love, of male and female, and finally, to ask questions about being human.

In the last few years I have been concentrating on reading works by African-American, Asian-American, and Hispanic women writers. My favorites are the novels, poetry, and short stories of Alice Walker. Her ability to lead the reader into the layers of human feelings; the ways in which she links the present generations with those of the ancient past; her delicate painting of the many indelicate ways racism harms persons and societies—all make her one of the great writers of this century. Her works, and those of my other favorites, Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, and Zora Neale Hurston, confront us with the harm of slavery, racism, and poverty in a non-simplistic, multidimensional manner. At the same time, in the presence of these profound evils, the human ability for courage, love, and goodness illumines for the reader the nature of life and, at times, of God.

I have also been stretched by the writings of non-American women. *The God of Small Things*, by Arundhati Roy, is a painful, moving novel set in South India. *L'Interdite (The Forbidden Woman)*, by Malika Mokeddem, winner of a prestigious French literary award, recounts the return of a woman doctor to her native Algerian village and the violent reaction of the patriarchal fundamentalists to her presence. Both these works are beautifully crafted and elegantly written, leading the reader into the profound and painful violence caused by patriarchal systems.

Feminists have often asked who is engaged in doing theology.² I read women authors because they are among the most interesting ones engaged in the theological enterprise today. Women's writings push me to stretch my narrow understandings of what it means to be human. In reading the works by women of color and women of other nations, I can hear voices which provide great insights into the large questions about human nature and God. These writings demand that I acknowledge the fragile beauty of life that can grow even among the evils of this world, and goad me to continue that eternal human quest of being open and responsive to the Holy Source of life, the One we call God. And besides, they are great fun! ☘

NOTES

¹ This description is less true of more recent male writers. Orson Scott Card, for example, creates extremely interesting characters and worlds, and pushes similar questions about human nature. And, of course, there are also women writers whose prose is awkward and characters are shallow. Ursula LeGuin is the most gifted in creating imaginary cultures which challenge the way we see the world. Her work, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, for example, makes us entirely rethink male-female roles.

² When feminist theologians first asked, Who is doing theology? they meant to point to the domination of theological disciplines by men, usually European and North American-North Atlantic clergy.

VIEWS ON REVIEWS

J. ANDREW DEARMAN

Academic Dean and Professor of Old Testament

I wrote my first book review twenty-two years ago. I reviewed two books on Egyptian Archaeology in a couple of paragraphs each for *Religious Studies Review*. They were more like a book notice than a review. Since then I have averaged approximately five reviews a year and published some sixty reviews or so. I like to review books. I think book reviews are useful. Let me summarize why.

First, book reviews matter because people read them and are influenced by them. I am myself an illustration of this. Often when I read a review I check immediately to see if the Stitt Library has the book. If not, I go over to the library to see if it is on order. Because I am frugal, I less often go out and purchase the volume. After all, what is a library for?

Second, book reviews are a primary way for professors and pastors to keep up with work and thinking being done in a number of areas. They help these church leaders decide whether to buy the book and/or to read it, as well as to gain an initial impression of the book's value. I read book reviews regularly in *Old Testament Abstracts*, the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, *Interpretation*, *First Things*, and *Books & Culture*.

Third, book reviews also benefit the authors of the book and the guild in which that author works. Reviews are a significant way for authors to become known in their chosen fields. A negative review, therefore, can be the occasion of heated and extended exchange through letters to editors and in professional meetings. Writing these reviews can be an exciting (or harrowing) experience. My direct experience in this matter is mild, but I have observed heated exchanges. I did once receive a letter from an author of a book I reviewed who took exception to my comparison of his Marxist world view with that of a Freudian world view, where in both cases I suggested that it was very difficult for people holding these views to question the basis of the view itself and more typical for them to proceed uncritically as if the view was fact rather than theory.

A positive review, on the other hand, can give a reviewer the warm glow of satisfaction over having exposed a good piece of work to a wider audience. It can lead to friendship and cooperative research projects and just plain good discussion. I once received an affirmative response from a Dutch professor who appreciated my review of a book by a German professor. The three of us have kept up with each other's works since then.

Fourth, reviewing a book is good for the reviewer. Obviously, we get a free book out of the deal. More than that, however, it forces us to think intentionally and deeply

about another person's work and can lead to either a new research direction in our own work, or a deepening and enriching of that work. I once reviewed a book with a section on the use of the term "Baal" in early Israel. The author later told me that I did not understand his point fully, but it led me to do some thinking and writing about the subject, and the polemic in the Old Testament against Baal is something that I continue to research and to think about.

Are there basic principles of writing a good review? Perhaps. Although a good review, like a good sermon, usually takes a form dictated by the text itself, several general principles can be isolated.

First, read the book. Don't laugh. The old joke of two academics talking at a reception—First Scholar: "Have you read Dr. Austin's latest book?" Second Scholar: "Read it? I haven't even reviewed it yet."—is surely an exaggeration, but, like all good humor unfortunately contains a nugget of truth.

Second, somewhere in the review give an overview of the book's contents, its basic thesis, and the audience addressed. Usually this is in the first few paragraphs, but sometimes it can go elsewhere. For example, you could start with a provocative judgment on a book, and then ask and answer the question, Just what is the argument this author uses to support this thesis?

Third, summarize this book's contributions to understanding the topic(s) being treated. This summary is often approached by situating the book in the context of the history of investigations of the topic(s) and then giving an evaluation of what this book contributes to that ongoing investigation. If you are lucky, you have been given a book to review that makes a great contribution—it is exciting to recognize and report that. Unfortunately, sometimes you have been assigned a book that contributes little or nothing. It is your scholarly duty to report that. Beware at this point, however. A book review is not a letter to the editor where you give your point of view or a term paper where you report on your research. A book review is about someone else's work and must stick to that. It is actually a good example of the basic task of exegesis: taking a text seriously and seeking to report your understanding through summary formulation. The reviewer's primary task is not to expound his or her own viewpoints, but to assist readers in gaining an accurate impression of the book.

Finally, submit your review to the editor on time. This should go without saying, but ask any editor and he or she will tell you that, Timeliness is next to godliness (or something like that). Before I became Austin Seminary's academic dean I used to get all my reviews in on time. ☛

THE PREACHER AS MATCHMAKER

CAROL ANTABLIN MILES
Assistant Professor of Homiletics

It is a little-known fact, but I am a hopeless matchmaker. No two people I have ever set up have gotten married, but that has not deterred me from trying. My impulse is rooted, I like to believe, in a genuine love of people. I find people interesting, and the ones I enjoy I simply assume will enjoy each other. This trait of mine is transferrable to many situations. For instance, I have always understood my primary function at all-church coffee hours to be helping members of the congregation make connections.

I recommend books for the same reasons I introduce people to each other. Sometimes it's because I detect a common interest or a shared sense of humor. Often I recommend books because I think they might be of help to someone in some way. For example, soon after the editor of *Insights* announced to the faculty that the next issue would be devoted to books, I placed a copy of Anna Quindlen's *How Reading Changed My Life* in his campus mailbox. A few weeks later I was asked to contribute this essay to the volume. Moments such as these make me think I've hit my mark. Other times I'm not so sure.

When I was a graduate student living in New Jersey, an awful tragedy befell a man from the Episcopal church in our community. His two college-aged daughters were killed when the convertible they were driving in hit the center divider of the highway and flipped over into oncoming traffic. They had all been returning from a Father's Day brunch in New York City, the girls in one car, their dad following in another not far behind. He was one of the first to arrive at the scene of the accident. It is a scene I can barely bring myself to imagine even now. What made it all the more unbearable was that four years earlier his wife, their mother, had died after a long battle with breast cancer.

Although I'd never met the man, I somehow felt I knew him. I had visited his house on a garden tour earlier that spring, and had seen the pictures of his beautiful wife and young adult daughters on his mantle and end tables. I was haunted by the thought of the empty chasm I knew had once been his home.

In the days before the funeral as friends, neighbors, church members, and storekeepers shared with me every detail of the event and family history, all I could think of was how desperately I wanted to put this bereft father in touch with Nicholas Wolterstorff. I was certain that the personal reflections shared in *Lament for a Son*, Wolterstorff's journal for the year following his twenty-five-year-old son's death in a mountain climbing accident, would help to put words to what was surely unspeakable grief. And, I felt, if there is anything that could be said theologically in a situation such as this it is "Instead of explaining our suffering, God shares it," the point Wolterstorff makes so compellingly.¹

So I took a chance. I sent the book in a padded envelope together with a note that began, "Dear Mr. ———, We have never met, but . . ." and closed with something like, "Please don't feel you need to acknowledge this gesture in any way. It is my only hope that somehow, at some time, this book might be of help to you. Sincerely yours, Carol Miles." I never heard anything from him, and I have no idea how my unsolicited book recommendation was received. I do know that, given how flushed my cheeks became while standing behind him at the dry cleaners one day, praying that no one would speak my name and reveal my identity as "the book lady," I doubt that I would have done it this way again.

So what can I conclude about why, how, and when to recommend a book? First, while there are no hard and fast rules for what is appropriate, it is probably best to recommend books to people whom you know. Second, take care when recommending books to people; the act itself speaks volumes. Depending on the selection (Deepak Chopra, Danielle Steele, *Reader's Digest* Large Print Edition) you may cause your intended audience to wonder, what does this say about me? (Am I over-stressed? Over-sexed? Over the hill?) Finally, don't be offended if you recommend a book and it's not read immediately, or is never read. People are quirky, and books are received differently at different times in our lives. But, by all means, spread the word when you've encountered a good read, and don't hesitate to pass it on. You may help form a lasting friendship between an author and a reader, or you may deepen a relationship of your own. For, as Abraham Lincoln once remarked, "My best friend is a person who will give me a book I have not read."²

NOTES

¹Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 81.

²Quoted without citation in Anna Quindlen, *How Reading Changed My Life* (New York: The Ballantine Publishing Group, 1998), 10.

WORKS IN PROGRESS?

A lighter look at publishing trends

As people of faith in the twenty-first century, we seem to inhabit Madeleine L'Engle's *Swiftly Tilting Planet*. Political, economic, technological, and philosophical movements shape and reshape the cultural landscape with such fury and frequency that even the most thoughtful and progressive among us must constantly check our bearings. Doubtless, even now, scores of scholars and authors of religion are hunched over their laptops and palm pilots, composing brave new works of theological inquiry and conjecture to assist us in navigating this *terra incognita*.

In that light, here are a few titles we might expect to encounter on the shelves of a well-stocked seminary library in the not-too-distant future:

Homiletics and Liturgy

Power Point Preaching for the Dot. Community

Performing the Sacraments in Zero Gravity Environments

A New Rite for the Resuscitation of the Cryogenically Frozen

Biblical Studies

Jeremiah was a Bullfrog: Prophecy as Performance Art

A Commentary on the E-pistles of Paul to the Church@Corinth

Watch Where You Point that Thing: The Canon as Concealed Weapon

Mission and Evangelism

Onward Christian Spaceships: Mission and Evangelism with Extra-terrestrial Life Forms

First Avenue Nike© Church: Securing Corporate Sponsorship for New Church Developments

Church History

Time Traveling in Ancient Palestine on Twelve Euros a Day

Theology

AOLy, AOLy, AOLy: Seeking the Virtual Presence of God

Hell-fire and Humidity: How Global Warming Made the Devil Obsolete

What are Androids that You are Mindful of Them? Reprogramming Christian Anthropology

Christian Education

The Confirmation Chip: A Step-by-Step Guide to Surgical Faith Implants

The Giving Gene: Engineering Good Stewardship

Pastoral Care

Your Sins have been Deleted: The Promise of a Virtual Confessional

Chicken Soup for your Personal Computer

Ethics

*Relativity and the Nuclear Family
Finding an H.M.O. for the Body of Christ
Hello Dolly! Christianity, Cloning, and the Good Shepherd*

RECENT IMPORTANT BOOKS

Insights asked some members of the faculty to tell us one or two of the most important books published in their field during the past five years.

HOMILETICS & LITURGICS

Barbara Brown Taylor, *Bread of Angels*

If there is a better writer penning sermons today, I have not found her. Barbara Brown Taylor's sermons spring to life with vivid language and evocative images that stir the soul. This new sermon collection is no exception. Put it on your bed-side table . . . this is devotional reading at its best.

Cleophus J. LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching*

This book marks a milestone in the study of African American preaching. Dr. LaRue grounds his understanding of "black preaching" not in particular delivery styles (e.g., "call and response" which characterizes some, but certainly not all of the tradition), but in the lived experience of African Americans and the willingness of those in the black church to bring that experience to the interpretation of the biblical text. This top-notch study breaks new ground in our contemporary understanding of the homiletical treasury that is black preaching.

—Scott Black Johnston

Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things, A Liturgical Theology and Holy People, A Liturgical Ecclesiology*

Gordon Lathrop is a Lutheran seminary professor who works in the field of liturgical theology. He is a senior member of the guild, and an ecumenically committed "catholic." In the "Holy" books, he moves from Alexander Schmemmann's notion of the *ordo* of Christian worship to introduce a model of juxtaposition, a poesis exemplified in biblical and liturgical texts, which has (in his use) the capacity to ground the discussion of the essentials of common worship in concrete practice without privileging a particular tradition as normative of the Christian liturgy. From his discussion of *ordo* and the practice of worship, Lathrop develops both secondary reflection and pastoral criticism of practice. The second volume assumes the liturgical work of the first, but here he focuses on ecclesiology. These volumes, genuinely parts of one work, are the most helpful books recently published in English for liturgical scholars, pastors, and practical ecumenists.

—Stanley Hall

BIBLICAL STUDIES

Susan Niditch, *Ancient Israelite Religion*

This deceptively small, but well-stocked book reconstructs and explicates some of the more elusive aspects of ancient Israelite religion. It can be a vital companion for any serious student of the Bible, whether lay, student, or professional.

Steven McKenzie, *King David: A Biography*

McKenzie combines recent scholarship in the area of the period of the United Monarchy with his own close interpretation of the text, which results in a delightful reading on a biblical figure who is too often plasticized and put on a pious pedestal. This "biography" allows King David to be more of the shrewd and political man he probably was in the 10th century B.C.

—Kathryn Roberts

John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*

Although this book is almost ten years old, it is still at the center of all discussions of the historical Jesus. Irritation over this book has spawned literally dozens of books by other scholars. Although Crossan has convinced few people of the accuracy of his portrait of Jesus, the striking character of both his methodology and his results have inspired a re-thinking of the modern attempt to discover the historical Jesus. His unflinching use of the old criteria of dissimilarity and multiple attestation have, with some iron, thrown those criteria into disrepute. In fact, Crossan's "overuse" of these methods may mark the end of those methods. By pushing the accepted methods for historical Jesus research to their limits, Crossan is forcing many scholars to admit those methods do not work. If we want to hunt for the historical Jesus, we must find some new ways.

Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*

Brown's voluminous introduction is biblical scholarship at its balanced and public best. (For more details, see Professor Donelson's review, *Insights*, Vol. 115, No. 1, Fall 1999.)

—*Lewis Donelson*

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION**Richard Osmer, *Confirmation: Presbyterian Practices in Ecumenical Perspective***

This is an important book because of its comprehensive focus both on the history of confirmation and its contemporary practice in Protestant denominations. Osmer provides a carefully researched history of confirmation which explores the variety of forms and purposes this practice has assumed over time. He also proposes a comprehensive, constructive model for a confirmation process appropriate to the church's contemporary context.

Dorothy Bass, editor, *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for Searching People*

This is an important book for Christian education because it underscores the significance of Christian practices which educate Christians in the life of faith. The volume offers essays on twelve practices which shape the Christian life, including practices of hospitality, keeping Sabbath, forgiving, singing, and testimony, to name a few. A discussion guide, *Practicing Our Faith: A Guide for Conversation, Learning, and Growth*, is available for use with adult study groups.

—*Laura Lewis*

PASTORAL CARE**Don S. Browning, et. al., *From Culture Wars to Common Ground***

This book carefully examines the debates around the American family and sets forth a practical theology of families with new directions for church and society.

Leroy Howe, *The Image of God: A Theology for Pastoral Care and Counseling*

This is a carefully argued and substantive discussion of theology and pastoral care that helps readers, whether they agree or disagree, to think theologically and concretely about pastoral ministry.

—*Ralph Underwood*

THE CHURCH AND HIGHER EDUCATION**George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University***

An account of how the institutional world of higher education, a world central to the formation of critical elements of nation-building, went from being overwhelmingly Christian to an estrangement from that heritage and without substantial discourse with its Christian roots.

Douglas Sloan, *Faith and Knowledge*

Sloan suggests that mainline Protestantism has totally failed to develop a theology that has been adequate for the rise of the modern world and hints that we enter the postmodern era without an adequate approach to epistemology.

—*Michael Miller*

CHURCH HISTORY**Bernard McGinn, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, vol. III, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism—1200-1350***

In the first two volumes (*Foundations* and *Growth*) McGinn offers the reader firm grounding in what might be called the "basics" in the study of the history of mysticism. The third volume outlines in masterful precision the proliferation of mystical writing in its dazzling diversity of styles and approaches. Here McGinn delineates what I view as a major development in the 13th century, namely the crucial contribution of women, in cooperation with men, in the writing of "vernacular theology." This weighty tome (319 pages plus another 200 in endnotes and bibliography) is a ground-breaking overview of the variety of ways medieval women and men of western Europe understood themselves to be faithful Christians.

—*Ellen Babinsky*

MISSION AND EVANGELISM**Gerald Anderson, editor, *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions***

This is the first reference tool which includes missionaries from "all of the Church in all of the world during all of her history." (For more details, see Professor George's review, *Insights*, Vol. 115, No. 1, Fall 1999.)

Darrell L. Guder, editor, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*

This text is the result of a study project of scholars participating in the Gospel and Our Culture Network in North America which has applied the teachings of Bishop Lessie Newbigin to our context. It takes seriously the fact that the U.S.A. and Canada are mission fields and presents an ecclesiology based on *missio Dei* which sees the church not as "sending" but as "being sent into the world."

—*Sherron George*

THEOLOGY**William Stacy Johnson, *The Mystery of God* and William C. Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence***

In different ways, each author reflects on the sovereignty of God in light of postmodern resistance and insights.

—*Cynthia Rigby*

J. Legrand, J. Manzanera, and A. Garcia y Garcia, editors, *La Reception y La Communion entre Las Iglesias. Actas del Coloquio Internacional De Salamanca, 8-14 Abril, 1996.*

In ecumenism, a key problem today is the reception of the results of dialogue, i.e., their existential digestion into the lives of churches. The literature about ecumenical reception is often found in articles. This volume is helpful because it brings together in a monograph current thinking of European and North American scholars about ecumenical reception.

—*Timothy Lincoln*

continued on page 48

TOP TEN BOOKS

What are the top ten books for theology published in the 20th century? Inquiring minds want to know . . .

John Alsup**D. Thomason Professor of New Testament Studies**

Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*

Leonard Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament*

Jürgen Roloff, *Die Kirche im Neuen Testament*

Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*

H. Grass, *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte*

A. Schlatter, *Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament*

Gerhard von Rad, *Theology of the Old Testament*

Ernst Kaesemann, *Commentary on Romans*

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*

Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*

Ellen Babinsky**Associate Professor of Church History**

Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*

Robert Handy, *A Christian America:*

Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities

The Classics of Western Spirituality series from Paulist Press

Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*

Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand*

Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The*

"Invisible Institution" in the American South

Martin Marty, *Pilgrims in Their Own Land*

Jay Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*

George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*

Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be*

Scott Black Johnston**Associate Professor of Homiletics**

Karl Barth, *Word of God, Word of Man*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*

Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*

Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*

Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*

Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*

H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*

Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*

Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*

C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

Christine E. Blair**Associate Professor of Practical Theology**

John Dewey, *Experience and Education*

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

Thomas Groome, *Christian Religious Education*

Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow, eds., *Womanspirit Rising*

Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*

Mary Field Belenky, Blyth McVicker Clinch,

Nancy Rule Goldberger Jill Mattuck

Tarule, *Women's Ways of Knowing: Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*

Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*

Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror*

Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*

Lewis Donelson**Professor of New Testament**

William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*

Elie Wiesel, *Night*

Edmond Jabes, *The Book of Questions*

Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*

Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*

Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths*

Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*

Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*

John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*

Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon*

Sherron George**Associate Professor of Evangelism and Missions**

David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*

Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*

Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*
Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*

H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogia do Oprimido*

Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*

Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*

Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*

William Greenway**Assistant Professor of Philosophical Theology**

Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, The Doctrine of God*, II.1

Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth And Method*

Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*

Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*

Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*

Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*

Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*

Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*

Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol 1

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*

Stanley Hall**Associate Professor of Liturgics**

Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*

Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*

Romano Guardini, *The Spirit of Liturgy*

Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath, Its Meaning for Modern Man*

Martin Buber, *I and Thou*

Josef Jungmann, S.J., *The Mass of the Roman Rite, Its Origins and Development*

(Missarum Sollemnia)

Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*

Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*

Ernst Troeltsch, *The Absoluteness of*

Christianity and the History of Religions

Michael Jenkins**Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology**

Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*

Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is*

Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*

Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*

Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*

Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*

William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*

Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*

Laura Lewis**Professor of Christian Education**

Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*

Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*

Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*

H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* and/or *The Responsible Self*

Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*

Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for a Social Gospel*

Paul Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*

Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*

Timothy Lincoln**Director, David L. and Jane Stitt Library**

Orate Fratres (now Worship)

Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*

Patriarchate of Constantinople, "Unto the Churches of Christ Everywhere"

Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*. Encyclical Letter on the Most Opportune Way to Promote Biblical Studies

Drumbeats from Kampala: Report of the First Assembly of the All Africa Conference of Churches

Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*

David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*

Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is*

Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*

Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*

Mike Miller**Research Professor in the Church and Higher Education**

- Denise Lardner Carmody, *Organizing a Christian Mind: A Theology of Higher Education*
 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells*
 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*
 Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*
 Emil Brunner, *Truth as Encounter*
 Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*
 D. M. Baillie, *God Was in Christ*
 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*
 Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*
 Peter Hodgson, *God's Wisdom: Toward a Theology of Education*

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- Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*
 Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*
 Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*
 H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*
 John Macquarrie, *In Search of Humanity*
 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*
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- Karl Barth, *The Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4: "The Doctrine of Reconciliation."
 Russell Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis*
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 Seward Hiltner, *Preface to Pastoral Theology*
 Jürgen Moltman, *Theology of Hope*
 Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom*
 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*

THE COST
OF
CENSORSHIP

MICHAEL JINKINS

"And I thought, it's interesting because the best thing that is in us is also the thing that makes us sabotage ourselves"

—Toni Morrison'



Perhaps the only book-related activity that remains as popular today as reading and collecting books is banning them. There's something about the printed word that seems to provoke fundamental visceral reactions.

Most of us will remember arguably the most notorious case of censorship in recent

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memory, that of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. Rushdie became the literary world's favorite recluse after the Ayatollah Khomeini issued his famous *fatwa*: "I inform the proud Muslim people of the world that the author of *The Satanic Verses*, which is against Islam, the prophet, and the Koran, and all those involved in its publication who were aware of its content, have been sentenced to death."

Rushdie in 1989 joined the scores of authors who have been threatened with a fate worse than bad reviews. His compeers include the Protestant Reformer and Bible translator William Tyndale, burned at the stake in October of 1536, and the Syrian novelist Haidar Haidar, whose 1983 book, *A Banquet of Seaweed*, provoked riots at Cairo's Al-Azhar University in May of 2000 when the book was included in a collection of great works of modern Arabic literature sponsored by the Egyptian Ministry of Culture.²

Censorship enjoys a long if not illustrious history. In 8 A.D., Augustus Caesar, offended by the sexually frank rhymes of Ovid, whose *Amores* and *The Art of Love* were apparently doing very well in Roman bookshops, banished the cosmopolitan poet to the colonial backwater of Tomis on the Black Sea. Ovid's poignant poems of exile tried in vain to win the emperor's pardon. Ovid died ten years later still in exile.

The tradition of censorship lives on. Indeed it has only increased in popularity.³ Peggy Orenstein, whose own book *Schoolgirls* was banned in 1996 from a school in Cortland, Ohio, observed that in a single year there were 300 attempts to censor books in American schools, 120 of which were successful.⁴ Some of the titles that appear on the list of most frequently banned books (the list before me runs to over 1,100 titles⁵) are not particularly surprising.

Henry Miller's scandalous *Tropic of Cancer*, first published in France in 1934, was quickly banned in every English-speaking country in the world.⁶ D. H. Lawrence's novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was still causing legal mischief in 1960 in the widely publicized obscenity trial in Britain (Regina v. Penguin Books Limited) some thirty years after its first American banning in 1929.⁷ James Joyce's *Ulysses* has managed to get itself torched in the United States (1918) and Canada (1922), as well as being legally banned in England (1929), despite the fact that no one I know has ever actually read past the first 115 pages.⁸ J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* has been banned so often and in so many places that the *Banned Books Resource Guide* can only provide a small selection of the most recent actions against it.

Again, it is not really all that surprising that these novels have been banned. Each in its own way challenges the boundaries of conventional social, especially sexual, respectability. What is more surprising is that revered classics like Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, and contemporary masterpieces like Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* and John Irving's *A Prayer for Owen Meany*, have suffered the same fate.

In a sense, attempts to ban these and other books pay them a back-handed compliment, affirming the power of ideas and the force of language to critique, to threaten, even to transform our minds as well as our ethical codes. Censorship represents, at some level, something vital and important about human society, i.e. a society's desire to protect and defend that which it holds precious, what we might call our moral self-image. We see this, for example, in the way in which Germany has outlawed the publication

of Neo-Nazi propaganda. The ease with which individuals and hate groups can publish anti-Semitic and other racist materials on the Internet raises new questions about the limits of toleration of those who are rabidly intolerant. Yet, there is also something pernicious about censorship, and something truly sad about our attempts to ban books and to censor those people whose ideas offend us, because censorship, as Justice Potter Stewart once said, "reflects a society's lack of confidence in itself." It is no surprise, then, that the banning of books historically has gone hand in hand with the banning of ideas, and so frequently has culminated in the banning of persons.

There is a well-proven connection between tyranny and censorship. But even the most vicious, naked exhibition of power finds it necessary to cloak its violence against books in terms of public morality. In his fascinating study, *A History of Reading*, Alberto Manguel reminds us that the first Chinese Emperor, Shih Huang-ti, tried to consolidate his control in 213 B.C. "by burning all the books in his realm." And on the night of "May 10, 1933, in Berlin, as the cameras rolled," Hitler's propaganda chief set ablaze more than twenty thousand books.⁹ In each case, the banning of books was defended (though, perhaps, unconvincingly) in terms of liberating society from the shackles of the past and protecting it from the morally corrupting influences of literature.

Our desire to protect our children from the dangers of morally corrupting influences has led to some of the more bizarre examples of censorship. In 1990, for example, a school district in Maryland banned C. S. Lewis's classic children's story, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, because the book "depicts 'graphic violence, mysticism, and gore.'" *A Wrinkle in Time*, by Madeleine L'Engle has been attacked by parents' groups in Florida and Alabama because it "promotes witchcraft, crystal balls, and demons" and "sends a mixed signal to children about good and evil." Both of Shel Silverstein's magical collections of poetry for children, *A Light in the Attic* and *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, have been removed from shelves in public schools across the United States because the books are said to suggest "drug use, the occult, suicide, death, violence, disrespect for truth, disrespect for legitimate authority, rebellion against parents." Some adult readers were even persuaded that the poems encouraged cannibalism, though it is hard to imagine how an attentive reader could have arrived at such an idea.

Presbyterian writer Katherine Paterson's Newbery Award-winning, *Bridge to Terabithia* (which ranks as one of the most powerful and moving novels I have ever read) has been challenged in school districts in Nebraska, California, Kansas, Pennsylvania, and Texas (Texas, as it happens, ranks third in the nation in the censorship of books in schools¹⁰), "because it contains 'profanity' including the phrase 'Oh, Lord' and 'Lord' used as an expletive," because "it contains language and subject matter that set bad examples and give students negative views of life," and because of "references to witchcraft." Another of Paterson's books, *The Great Gilly Hopkins*, was challenged in Colorado because it reputedly portrays Christians "as being dumb and stupid." I don't know if all her Christians strike these critics as dumb and stupid or just us Presbyterians.

The only writer of children's books who has apparently been banned more than Katherine Paterson is my children's favorite writer, Roald Dahl. Dahl's book *The BFG* was challenged in Iowa as "too sophisticated," and because it doesn't teach moral val-

ues. A librarian in Colorado locked away *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* because it was thought to “espouse a poor philosophy of life.” Dahl’s *Matilda* was banned from elementary reading because it was “appalling in its disrespect for adult figures.” And *The Witches* was roundly attacked from coast to coast because it is about (... well ...) witches, and allegedly “desensitizes children to crimes related to witchcraft.” And all this time my children just thought the books were funny and scary. Indeed, sometimes reading some of the critiques of children’s books becomes pretty surreal, like those hours we spent in high school playing The Beatles’ “White Album” backwards looking for encrypted messages: “Paul is dead.” As it turned out, he wasn’t.

The three books that, as a child, made a reader of me, Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (first banned in 1885 because it was “trash,” the book was refused admittance to the children’s room of the Brooklyn Public Library in 1905 because, “Huck not only itched but scratched, and . . . said sweat when he should have said perspiration”),¹¹ Daniel Defoe’s *Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (placed on the Spanish Index of banned books in 1720), and Jack London’s *The Call of the Wild* (burned by the Nazis in 1932) have all been the object of the censor’s scorn from time to time.

Recently, the publishing sensation *Harry Potter* stoked the fear of a lot of people about the dangers wizardry poses to the moral lives of our children. While in England last year on sabbatical I came across a story carried by *The [London] Times*. Once again the British were puzzled at the behavior of their American cousins. “Harry Potter,” the story begins, “has a new adversary. Parents in the Bible Belt and beyond are trying to ban the best-selling children’s books by the British author J. K. Rowling because they feature witchcraft and ‘sheer evil.’”¹² The story observes that school districts in South Carolina, Georgia, and New York (New York?!) have attempted to remove the books from reading lists and libraries. A librarian friend in Michigan recently e-mailed me to say that her school district was in a tailspin over the books.

From a theological perspective, the banning of books like *Harry Potter* is especially interesting. There seems to be a lot of concern among some Christian folks about the power that evil exerts through children’s books. In one recent essay in *Charisma and Christian Life*, a columnist prescribed specific steps to take if you believe your child has been exposed to questionable books and games: “Determine if the game involves supernatural power. Teach your child a biblical attitude about evil with comments such as: Who would want to play with that bad monster? Let’s instead find something that makes us happy.”¹³ What is theologically puzzling (at least to me) is not parents’ concern for the well-being of their children and their commitment to guide their children’s reading. This is normal, natural, legitimate, and good. Parents should want to protect their children and ought to be involved in their selection of and reflection on literature. What is puzzling to me is the extraordinary degree of power these parents attribute to evil as a sort of independent threatening entity in the world. If we can imagine Reformed theologian Karl Barth as standing at the most extreme end of a polarity which believes evil has no real independent power of its own (Barth said he enjoyed not paying too much attention to evil because it really annoyed the devil) then these parents stand at the opposite end. Evil has a lot more power in their view than Reformed theology has cared to give it.

Of course, it’s not only the powers of darkness that frighten some parents. I started the Banned Book Club here at Austin Seminary several years ago after a very different kind of threat led parents in an Austin area school district to try to remove Maya Angelou’s book, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, from the senior high reading list. A group of seminary students and I read the book together to find out why it threatened the moral constitutions of America’s youth. The book was described by the Austin parents as “pornographic.” After reading the book, not only did our book club decide it was anything but pornography, we found it to be a beautiful and moving real life story about redemption and forgiveness, the story of a young woman’s struggle to come to terms with personal identity and racial injustice in the home of the brave. I immediately went out and bought a copy for my daughter.

Perhaps, it is the real-life quality of certain books that we often find so difficult to bear. Easier, some may think, to silence the voices of Flannery O’Connor, James Baldwin, and Walker Percy; better to lock away the writings of William Faulkner, Toni Morrison, Thomas Hardy, and Harper Lee than to let them touch us, question us, and challenge our understanding of the world. But if this is true, I often wonder why it is that we hear so little about the banning of that other perennial target of censors, The Bible (opposed for its Jewishness by the Nazis, banned from publication in the Soviet Union until 1956, and challenged in 1993 as “obscene and pornographic” in Fairbanks, Alaska).

Several years ago, the session of a congregation I served asked that we read, as a worshiping community, the Bible straight through, *lectio continua* style. We began with Genesis. A month or so into the project, the clerk of the session approached me after worship and said: “If Jacob goes into and out of one more woman, I’m out of here. We have children in the room, for Pete’s sake. We shouldn’t be reading this stuff out loud in worship.” The clerk said all of this tongue in cheek, and we continued reading the Bible right there in church on Sunday mornings with God and everybody else looking on. But it did raise a red flag: I suppose we can stand just so much reality, even in the name of God. ☛

NOTES

¹ This quote is abstracted from its proper context: a 1985 conversation between Gloria Naylor and Toni Morrison. They were speaking not of censorship, but of the way some people love, even to their own detriment, but the comment highlights an important aspect of the problem of censorship. Danille Taylor-Guthrie, ed., *Conversations with Toni Morrison* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1994), 208.

² “Islamists find another book to hate,” *The Economist*, May 13, 2000.

³ Sissela Bok’s study, *Mayhem: Violence as Public Entertainment* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison Wesley Long, 1998), provides an especially trenchant analysis of censorship, 93-125.

⁴ Peggy Orenstein, “Censorship Follies, Town by Town,” *New York Times*, December 7, 1996, Op/Ed pages. The source of Ms. Orenstein’s figures is “People for the American Way, a First Amendment watchdog group.”

⁵ *Banned Books Resource Guide*, published by the American Library Association (1995). Direct quotations in this essay from various challenges to books in community libraries and school districts are drawn from this source, unless otherwise noted.

⁶ Karl Shapiro, "The Greatest Living Author," (New York: Grove Press, 1961).

⁷ C. H. Rolph, editor, *The Trial of Lady Chatterley*, Geoffrey Robertson, QC, foreword to thirtieth anniversary edition (London: Penguin Books, new edition, 1990).

⁸ James Joyce, *Ulysses*, Morris L. Ernst, foreword (New York: Random House, new edition, 1961), note especially the foreword and accompanying documents from the United States District Court case, Southern District of New York, United States of America v. One Book called "Ulysses" Random House, Inc., (December 6, 1933), and letter from James Joyce to Bennett A. Cerf, Random House, v-xv.

⁹ Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading* (New York: Viking, 1996), 283-284.

¹⁰ According to research by Bob Dart of the Cox News Service, September 1993.

¹¹ A more recent battle over *Huckleberry Finn* made it to the pages of the *New York Times Book Review* in Justin Kaplan's article, "Selling 'Huck Finn' Down the River," 27. March 10, 1996.

¹² Damian Whitworth, "Harry Potter and the U.S. Peril," *The [London] Times*, October 14, 1999, 18.

¹³ Nancy Justice, "Teaching Third Graders to be Wizards: The *Harry Potter* book series—which encourages kids to explore sorcery—has triggered protests across the country," *Charisma and the Christian Life* 25, no. 7 (February 2000), 61.

RECENT BOOKS

continued from page 39

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*

The most important book written on the relationship between Christian faith and culture since H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*. Clearly written, with keen theological insights throughout, the book is quite simply a "must read" both for pastors and academic theologians.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*

One of the best new books in the study of the church was originally published in 1930. It was the Ph.D. dissertation by a promising young German theologian. This fresh new translation, based on the critical German edition (edited by Joachim von Soosten) offers us an extraordinary opportunity to raise fundamental questions as to the identity and mission of the church.

—Michael Jinkins

Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*

Dan Kindlon, Ph.D., and Michael Thompson, Ph.D., *Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys*

The authors of this work—experienced child psychologists—address the myth that "biology is destiny," and investigate the role that cultural environment plays in shaping boys. They maintain that boys in American culture today have been miseducated for toughness, emotional distance, and violence, with a resulting rise in depression, suicide, and drugs use. They offer keen insights and concrete suggestions for raising boys into psychologically healthy adults. This book is a "must" for parents, pastors, teachers, and youth workers.

—Christine Blair

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