

THEOLOGY | CRITIQUE | REVIEW | ESSAY | CULTURE

salt & light

Fall Edition 2013

“HOWEVER IMPROBABLE”

The Nature of Man in Sherlock Holmes

Tim Lien

The Joyous Face Of Believers
TIME Is On My Side
The Wrath Of God Was Satisfied
There's No Place Like Home
Truth and Post-Modernism
On The Birth Of A Grandson

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FROM THE EDITOR

We missed our Summer issue because of other "issues," but here, finally, is the Fall issue. All the articles speak, after a fashion, to the idea of the truth of God. and we hope that you will find enlightenment, encouragement, and some small amount of entertainment as the *Salt & Light* considers the Lord and His world.

Our lead article, "*However Improbable*" is by our pastor, Tim Lien. Tim read the entire Sherlock Holmes oeuvre under rather unique circumstances and discovered that Arthur Conan Doyle, as does all men, had a particular world view regarding the nature of man. Tim examines this in his article and in Doyle's fictional creation we see again the work of God in His creation.

The Christian idea of "joy" is a little different from the secular one. The James epistle tells us to "count trials as joy," even though they seldom feel joyous by our definition. In *The Joyous Face of Christians*, Dana Miller speaks to Christ as the source of our joy and joy itself as a gift to the believer from the Holy Spirit.

Peggy Drinkard has favored us with another beautiful meditation in *Time is On My Side...or Maybe Not..* as she contemplates the remainder of life during "our eye blink" here on earth. All of Peggy's writing, as does her life, reflects her love and commitment to Jesus and because of this, both are both inspiring and comforting.

A recent attempt to rewrite certain hymns to accommodate postmodern sensibilities included writing out the term "the wrath of God" and substituting "the love of God" in the hymn *In Christ Alone*. Rob Looper, in his article, *The Wrath of God was Satisfied!*, describes how the Love of God is truly defined. Rob is a former pastor of some of our members and a friend of Riverwood. You will be inspired by his article.

Dr. Robert Thornton recently viewed a television news segment on being homesick, and as a result, he has written *There is No Place Like Home*, a beautiful meditation on Christians living in one world and dimension and having their true home in another. We all suffer to a degree from this "homesickness" and you will be moved by this look at the true home of Christians.

I have also had something brought to mind, in my case, by some recent reading regarding the changing aspects of Truth in our world. In *Truth and Post Modernism*, I have sought to explore both the culture of our times, and the concept of Truth rooted in an unchanging God. I hope that you, as did I, find a lot to think about in these things.

Our **FINALE** this month is about the birth of a grandson, an event that speaks in its own way to the truth of God.

“However Improbable”

The Nature of Man in Sherlock Holmes

By Tim Lien

“It is an old maxim of mine: that when you have excluded the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.”

—*Sherlock Holmes*

What pulled me into the Sherlock vortex for over a year? Was it the houndstooth hat? Possibly.

My Sherlock proficiency could never be called authoritative. I read *The Hound of Baskervilles* in early high school. Ninth grade literary criticism reads exactly like it sounds. After that, there was quite a Sherlock drought. Recently, I inhaled Downey Junior’s blockblustering rendition of Sherlock like a kid left alone with Halloween candy. Better yet, my wife and I blitzed through two seasons of Modern Masterpiece’s *Sherlock*, starring weasel look-alike Benedict Cumberbatch. I hate to admit it in print: they were slick, smart pieces of excitery. And...that’s it. That’s the total view I had of Baker Street and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle—hardly what one would call complete.

But what about the originals, I wondered? Were they any good? Could Sir Doyle write?

When Amazon had *The Complete Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* for a measly buck, I figured that impulsive buyer’s regret wouldn’t be able to cut that deeply. I clicked. I bought. I didn’t know what I was doing.

The problem was that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (SACD, hereafter) didn’t seem to have put his

pen down much. There is quite a lot of Sherlock, even for a devoted fan. So reading it would be a chore: I didn’t want to stop reading other good stuff just for Sherlock. And so I embarked on a gradual project: the reading of SACD during trips to the lavatory. This may strike you as rather unseemly, but my American efficiency and Puritan productivity assured me that I was ostensibly “redeeming the time.” A year and a half later my Sherlock journey has ended. I have to say that I’m kind of glad. It might be because it’s difficult to be enamored with living with someone in close-proximity; they lose any blockblustery mystery that might have grabbed you in the beginning. Or it could be with the Pavlovian associations with my “reading chair.” You be the judge. But I did it...yay. There had to be some sort of payoff for all that reading, though. So this is it: you don’t have to read all the Sherlock adventures, and you can keep your *Chicken Soup for the Soul* in your latrine/commode area. I’ve done the hard work for you.

Since I read it on my Kindle, I highlighted passages as I adventured with Sherlock. And then I forgot about them. My overall impression had been that SACD had landed upon a formula, a memorable stable of characters, and discovered the Eternal Fountain of Ink. When I finally downloaded them to my computer, I was surprised to see pages worth of quotes. To my greater surprise, they were pretty good. These quotes weren’t trite; they repeatedly landed on subjects of philosophy, sin/depravity in man,

and a guarded interaction with Providence. Naturally, the pastor in me liked this.

I have a few items you need to be aware of before you dare read on: 1) I didn't assume that Sherlock Holmes *was* SACD, but I also didn't want to make another reactive mistake by assuming that none of SACD was expressed through the Sherlock character. It might be safer to simply assert that there is great consistency in Holmes's worldview throughout the series, pointing us to the bare conclusion that SACD's conception of Holmes's *was* highly defined in his own mind. 2) I will use many quotes—hopefully, to give you an accurate sampling of first-hand SACD. 3) You have to keep in mind that I only highlighted the quotes that I thought were worth anything. After reading this you might get the impression that SACD's writings are chock-full of meaningful material. Not so. Tolkien he is not. Or Chesterton. Or Lewis. Or Banville. Or Mantel. You get the idea.

I sorted the quotes to reflect four common, reoccurring themes that appear in all the adventures: 1) the nature of man (his depravity and wonder), 2) how one arrives at truth, 3) existential or spiritual questioning, and 4) the antidote for the human condition. In this piece, I only cover the first category: **The Nature of Man in Sherlock Holmes**.

When I say that SACD seemed to have a grasp on humanity's deep and unending capacity for evil, I do not mean to say that SACD depicted or described depravity with literary flair or inventiveness. If that's the case, any book about naughty things could be said to "clearly show

the depravity of man." Well, yeah. What I mean is that SACD wrote his Sherlock Holmes's character as a person who understood this reality as a foundational starting point to, yes, solving crime, but also as a means of understanding the broader world.

In other words, if you cannot conceive that all individuals have the capacity for evil, then certain external variables will continually thwart you in seeing their full person. If you assume that education, wealth, sex, civil standing, notoriety, elocution, or ninja-like etiquettes are a sin retardant, then it is difficult to fully see humanity for what it is. Likewise, if certain external qualities like bad grammar, dishevelment, or poverty suggest a greater propensity for evil/sin, then it is no surprise that villainy always comes dressed as a shifty, toothless character.

SACD does not seem conflicted about saying two strikingly different things: that man is capable of great evil and also possesses marks of the marvelous. Holmes is often fond of quoting philosophers around the globe and here he quotes Goethe: "Nature alas, made only one being of you although there was material for a good man and a rogue" (*The Sign of Four*). This is not paradoxical as much as it is biblical. In recognizing rampant depravity, he continually notices that man bears the image of God—though broken, muted, and diminutive. Again, he attempts to understand the coexistence of corruption and wonder in man: "Dirty-looking rascals, but I suppose everyone has some little immortal spark concealed about him. You would not think it, to look at them. There is no *a priori* probability about it. A strange enigma is

...if certain external qualities like bad grammar, dishevelment, or poverty suggest a greater propensity for evil/sin, then it is no surprise that villainy always comes dressed as a shifty, toothless character.

We do not preach a depravity that denies the image of God in all men. There is great value in all humans because they bear the image of their Creator...

man!" ("A Study in Scarlet").

To see both corruption and the marks of the Maker is a difficult conundrum for Holmes. In fact, it is doubly horrifying to see evil from something that also possesses such incredibly beauty: "Ah, me! it's a wicked world, and when a clever man turns his brains to crime it is the worst of all" (*The Adventure of the Speckled Band*). In the same way, he is amazed that any creative production from man is inevitably warped: "Art in the blood is liable to take the strangest forms," a bemused Holmes says while pondering goodness gone askew (*The Greek Interpreter*).

In applying general rules to understand the specific (deduction), Holmes continually uses his belief on the whole of humanity to understand the individual. In *The Sign of the Four*, Holmes gives us one of his tools: "'Winwood Reade is good upon the subject,' said Holmes. 'He remarks that, while the individual man is an insoluble puzzle, in the aggregate he becomes a mathematical certainty. You can, for example, never foretell what any one man will do, but you can say with precision what an average number will be up to. Individuals vary, but percentages remain constant. So says the statistician.'"

But what of *every* individual's nature? Sherlock never seems to turn the magnifying glass upon himself. It is one of few mysteries that the great Holmes never quite unravels.

This is great reminder for staunch Calvinists. We do not preach a depravity that *denies* the image of God in all men. There is great value in *all* humans because they bear the image of their

Creator. At the same time we preach a depravity that is thorough in its scope. That is to say: we preach the immensity of our corruption is such that there is no man-made effort which can correct this corruption, because *all* men suffer from the same corruption.

With these basic premises of man (man's wickedness *and* man's mark of beauty), SCD gives Holmes a wider understanding and discernment of those around him. Instead of narrowing his view of the world, it only broadens it. Those very presuppositions allow him to see truth and in many cases, wisdom. Desperate individuals beat a well-worn path to Baker Street for his understanding, and as one character expresses: "But I have heard, Mr. Holmes, that you can see deeply into the manifold wickedness of the human heart. You may advise me how to walk amid the dangers which encompass me" (*The Adventure of the Speckled Band*) Instead of alienating men with a "doctrine of depravity," he is able to know, understand, and, ultimately, serve them. As a rule, people are not repulsed by Holmes's understanding of evil, but *attracted* to it.

Knowing the insatiable interest in crimes stories, SCD presents Holmes not as a man who finds evil interesting, but one who finds logic and truth simply more stimulating. In fact, Sherlock doesn't find anything sensational about crime—quite contrary to the populace, his friend Watson, and newspapers buzzing around him. Talking to Watson: "There is a strong family resemblance about misdeeds, and if you have all the details of a thousand at your finger ends, it is odd if you can't unravel the thousand and first." (*A Study in Scarlet*) Crime is virtually monochromatic and uninspiring; find the motive,

find the thief and the in-between is just another cardboard sandwich.

Much like being drawn to the grisly details of *true crime*!, you would think that after experiencing dozens of criminal capers, Holmes would have a fascination with evil misdeeds. But, in fact, he finds the actual crimes boring and blasé. Sherlock muses, “Man, or at least criminal man, has lost all enterprise and originality.” (*The Copper Beeches*) That sentiment is eerily similar to another Englishman’s (G.K. Chesterton) famous observation: “Sin is never inventive or creative. It is unoriginal, monotonous. It can never create; it can only pervert existing creation.”

Not only does Holmes find crime boring, but he also resists anyone trying to depict crime stories as entertaining. Sherlock chides Watson, his admiring chronicler, for misrepresenting their ventures as wildly interesting: “The cases which come to light in the papers are, as a rule, bald enough, and vulgar enough. We have in our police reports realism pushed to its extreme limits, and yet the result is, it must be confessed, neither fascinating nor artistic.” (*A Case of Identity*) This is not fatigue from the grizzled cop who’s seen it all; it is sheer boredom from the predictable boringness of evil.

Compatible with and flowing from his understanding of the corruption of humanity, SACD (via Holmes) applied his understanding of depravity to dispel a popular myth that flourished among urban and rural folk. The myth is this: cities are filled with more bad people and country folk have less corruption flowing through their veins. In truth, the myth still flourishes. And it persists (and will continue to persist) if

human corruption is not seen as thoroughly common to *all* humanity. Or, to quote the short-story writer Bret Harte, it persists if there are “easily established standards of evil”—often external, visual, or simplistic understandings of evil.

While Watson and others equate the idyllic country towns with moral rectitude, Holmes is almost repulsed by its false front. Watson gushes about a countryside scene while Holmes offers his own commentary: “You look at these scattered houses, and you are impressed by their beauty. I look at them, and the only thought which comes to me is a feeling of their isolation and of the impunity with which crime may be committed there” (*The Copper Beeches*). A question lingers: is this the speech of a jaded, cynical detective, or is it someone who simply knows that humanity’s claim to moral excellence is much too thin and much too loud? It is hard to tell, but in the same adventure Holmes elaborates his view: “It is my belief, Watson, founded upon my experience, that the lowest and vilest alleys in London do not present a more dreadful record of sin than does the smiling and beautiful countryside.” The quiet, well-trimmed burghs, though nice, do nothing to unhinge Holmes “doctrine of depravity.”

In fact, there seems to be a subtle favoring of the city for SACD, even though there is open admission of its capacity (by mere numbers) to display more concentrated, external evil. Watson describes Holmes apparent preference: “He loved to lie in the very centre of five millions of people, with his filaments stretching out and running through them, responsive to every little rumor or suspicion of unsolved crime. Apprecia-

Crime is virtually monochromatic and uninspiring; find the motive, find the thief and the in-between is just another cardboard sandwich.

“It is my belief, Watson, founded upon my experience, that the lowest and vilest alleys in London do not present a more dreadful record of sin than does the smiling and beautiful countryside.”

tion of Nature found no place among his many gifts, and his only change was when he turned his mind from the evil-doer of the town to track down his brother of the country” (*The Resident Patient*). This is a penetrating, stunning, and accurate observation for SACD to propose. Southern-fried family friendliness, moralism, manicured subdivisions, and quiet sensibilities hide the same evil that is endemic to both Urban Brother and Country Brother alike.

Surprisingly, however, Holmes makes the case that a high concentration of humanity (the City) produces a higher sense of communal justice than its rural counterpart. Holmes explains to Watson:

“The pressure of public opinion can do in the town what the law cannot accomplish. There is no lane so vile that the scream of a tortured child, or the thud of a drunkard’s blow, does not beget sympathy and indignation among the neighbours, and then the whole machinery of justice is ever so close that a word of complaint can set it going, and there is but a step between the crime and the dock. But look at these lonely houses, each in its own fields, filled for the most part with poor ignorant folk who know little of the law. Think of the deeds of hellish cruelty, the hidden wickedness which may go on, year in, year out, in such places, and none the wiser” (*The Copper Beeches*).

At the very least, SACD is consistent with his two reoccurring premises: humanity is corrupt and possesses marks of the marvelous. The very same concentration of evil doers in the City

is also a concentration of image-bearers who cumulatively police their community.

In all, SACD works a strange feat through Sherlock—who, curiously, is depicted as the sole dissenting opinion among popular theories and opinions. In persistently threading Holmes’s firm views on the nature of humanity, he demands that the reader consider this as bedrock for understanding man and his world. Sure, this ensures that the bad guys always get locked up, but SACD tirelessly reiterates that Sherlock does not have any special powers; it is shrewd observation alone that unlocks mysteries.

Perhaps, SACD felt the same way: to understand man’s corruption and marvelous capacities meant that man (and his world) could be demystified. Perhaps, Sherlock’s isolation from all other characters showed the rarity of his point of view compared to popular thought. It’s an ongoing mystery that seemed to be deeper than any of the Sherlockian adventures. Or maybe Sir Doyle saw it as quite elementary and the mystery remained for those who couldn’t see for themselves. Sherlock scolds a doubting Watson in *A Scandal in Bohemia*: “You see, but you do not observe. The distinction is clear.” ¶

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THE JOYOUS FACE OF BELIEVERS

On the Concept of Christian Joy

by Dana Miller

There are times when I wonder what God is up to in my life. I wonder what I am supposed to learn (or in my case, re-learn). As I have gotten older, more often than not it comes down to something very simple.

I recently read *Christ and His Rivals* and this quote from the author, Douglas Wilson, stopped me in my tracks:

“No creature can approach the happiness of the triune God. ‘The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; *he will rejoice over you with gladness*; he will quiet you by his love; *he will exult over you with loud singing*’ (Zephaniah 3:17). God is glad, and God is joyful. He rejoices over his people with gladness. Our response must not be mumbling our way through psalms and hymns. We have been saved by someone who does not do this. God through Christ wanted to save us, and rejoices in having done so.”

As I read this, I was struck with the fact that God rejoices over us—over our salvation, which He initiated, which He provided the sacrifice for—in short, He did it all. There was absolutely nothing that I did to cause Him to save me, and **He rejoices** in that fact.

That quote caused me to again think about something that I have been pondering for some time. There is a “Christian” word that circumstances often cause us not to understand: it’s a little three-letter word—joy.

I attended church camp almost every summer as I was growing up. For one week out of the year, I would go with several of my friends (and a few sometimes naive chaperones) to an out of the way camp. We would swim in a creek, swelter, swat mosquitoes the size of dragonflies, and try to choke down the food served in the cafeteria so that we would be allowed to buy snacks from the snack

shack. We also had a worship service every night. One of the favorite songs to sing was, “I’ve got joy, joy, joy down in my heart!” It was a catchy little ditty and just great for fourth and fifth graders.

As adults, we hopefully have realized that joy is far deeper than a catchy little ditty. Hopefully we have realized that it goes far beyond even Mr. Webster’s definition:

--the emotion evoked by well being, success, or good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires

--the expression or exhibition of such emotion

--a state of happiness

I would argue that for the believer, joy—true joy— isn’t even an emotion and that it can not be measured, at least by our standards. Joy is a gift. It is a deep, abiding gift. It is also a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Where does a fruit come from? It comes from a tree or vine that has been properly fed, watered, and nurtured. The actual fruit that we see did nothing for itself. Its very existence is totally dependent on something far greater than itself.

I began to think of times when I felt joy and, honestly, many of them were at times when the emotion of happiness was far away.

I knew joy as I watched my Granddaddy take his final breath on this earth. My heart hurt for Nanny, who wasn’t there when her beloved died. I was sad that he wouldn’t be with us anymore. All the while though, there was joy—the deep unshakeable truth that God was in this, that He was holding those of us left to grieve, and that He was welcoming Granddaddy into Heaven.

I knew joy that day 14 years ago when I lay alone on a table in a doctor’s office waiting, pleading, to hear the heartbeat of the child for whom we had prayed. Despite caffeine, she hadn’t moved in a day

No matter which, God's gift to me was that He would be there—and there was joy in that.

and a half. I was to come in for what would surely be a routine “hook up to the machine and hear the heartbeat just to be sure” visit. For an agonizing 45 minutes, through 3 technicians and 2 machines, no heartbeat was heard. Finally the doctor came in and found the heart beat of a little girl who would be born just a month later.

Sadness, paralyzing fear, and dread were all there on top of the foundation of joy and peace that had been given to me many years before. This child was God's, whether she would be born on this earth, or if would only know Heaven. No matter which, God's gift to me was that He would be there—and there was joy in that.

Joy has been an odd companion when things in life seemed to spiral completely out of control. Confusion, anxiety, and pain have been dealt with through the lens of joy and peace that is the sure foundation given to us by God. In these times, marriage and family has been strengthened, and growth has happened in spite of the storms of life.


I know joy during almost every worship service. Sometimes it is in the awesome realization that, for an hour on Sunday morning, something entirely different happens. Many times, I sit dealing with the conviction of my own deep sin. But, always, there is joy.

That joy should not be measured by the expression on my face. Sometimes I may look happy—joyful, you might say. When I've been convicted of sin, when I have been reminded of that which is most loathsome in my life, I'm sure that I don't look particularly joyful. But in actuality, that is when the truth of my joy is strongest in me because I know that it is only through Christ's sacrifice that I am forgiven.

A result of our joy is thankfulness. I have thankfulness to a God who has been faithful. Thankfulness to a God who values my tears so much that we are told in Psalm 56:8 that He puts them in a bottle. As much as the knowledge of our forgiveness, tears, sorrows, and questions are gifts from God. They are gifts from a God who is faithful to walk with His children through them.

God's people should be joyful. God's people are joyful. Why? Because joy is a gift from the Father. We are told to rejoice in all things. Let's face it: some of the things we meet in this life are far from joy-inducing as we understand joy. For the believer, though, joy is a good and perfect gift. It is given by Him. It is initiated, enabled, and sustained by Him. Our joy spills from a thankful heart that recognizes God's everlasting gift to us and that it is there in spite of difficult circumstances because **He** is there.

Our means of measuring our joy falls so incredibly short that it is laughable. The expression of that joy is exhibited in many different ways. It can be loudness, laughter, smiling faces and fellowship. Sometimes it comes on you suddenly in the midst of normal, ordinary life. Sometimes true joy is found in the quiet depths of reflection, with a bowed head and quiet psalms. It is always a gift of the Holy Spirit of God, unique to the person, the day and the circumstance.

What a wonderfully awesome God we serve. He not only rejoices in our salvation that only He provided; He also created within each of His children a heart that longs to worship Him, longs to thank Him for the salvation so freely given. In this is the joy that He also gifted to each of His children. 

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When I've been convicted of sin,...that is when the truth of my joy is strongest in me

T....I...M...E... IS ON MY SIDE ... or maybe not... A Meditation

by Peggy Drinkard

I turned 60 in March. A sobering notion needles me. At best two thirds of my life is probably spent.

I'm not actually worried about "growing old." The Bible honors age if it's accompanied with wisdom and spiritual maturity. Year upon year of living in a fallen world with fellow sinners while walking with Christ can help most of us acquire these to some extent. And too, I actually find more beauty in the crows' feet and laugh lines and worn hands of the elderly than I do in the natural physical beauty of youth. So, it's not cosmetics that worry me. I am more concerned with how well I can spend what's left of my eye-blink here. I need discernment about what's most important. Serious choices need to be made. The necessity for strategic planning overshadows me. What things should I say no to, and what things warrant a solid, open-armed YES? I'm also cognizant that the two-thirds calculation is hardly a given. I contracted a particularly strong strain of bacteria with resulting pneumonia recently, and my doctor said I was lucky it hadn't "taken me out." I felt terrible, but it never crossed my mind that I could be dying or anything, so that was pretty eye-opening too. You never know.

Mick Jagger can still sing "Time is on my Side" while gyrating and prancing and hopping around convincingly on the stage, even though he's in his 70's. I saw him doing that on TV not long ago. Pretty good for an old guy, but still, plastic surgeons and personal trainers can only do so much. I also saw a photo of him in the nude on a "private" beach in Hawaii. It wasn't pretty, and, no, "time is not really on his side," or yours, or mine either. So what shall we do with whatever amount we have left? The psalmist pleaded, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." "How

should we then live?" Francis Schaeffer asked.

"Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." I figure the Shema from Deuteronomy 6 is probably a good jumping off place for these deliberations. Like the plumb line, it gives us the right orientation before we consider the particulars of our calling. We can sum it up with our pastor's recent admonitions to "make much of Jesus." Whatever my choices are, they need to honor Christ, to center on Christ, to put Christ first, and to realize He IS first whether I put Him there or not.

I like to watch the house hunting shows on television, and I am amazed at the number of young couples who decide to become ex-pats of America and move to the warm climes of the Caribbean or some South American country to find the good life. Usually topping their list of "must haves" is to be on or near the beach, and close to the rain forest. I don't blame them for wanting to simplify and escape the rat race, and that usually seems to be what drives them. Pitiful really, to be thirty-something and burned out already from the national pursuit of mammon. But I have yet to hear a single one put "finding a good church to worship with" on that must-have list. Nor do they seem to consider how such a move might impact their aging parents, let alone their employers or their community of friends. It appears the driving factor for these transitions is basically one of carving out a little paradise for *self*. Now, I love the beach. I wouldn't protest if the Lord placed us near one, but placing my personal peace and comfort at the top of my decision-making list is a poor foundation for a life well-lived. In his latest book, *Death by Living*, N.D. Wilson, writing of his

godly, elderly grandfather who has habitually lived his life with “open hands,” exhorts us, “Drink your wine. Laugh from your gut. Burden your moments with thankfulness. Be as empty as you can be when that clock winds down. Spend your life. And if time is a river, may you leave a wake.” Yes, Nate, I’d love to leave a wake.

Jesus told his disciples that he, the Son of Man, had not come to be ministered to, but “to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” He further told them, “But whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.” This summer our children’s Bible study theme was “God Uses Broken Things.” The thrust of our studies was that God’s ways are not our ways, and we considered God’s “upside-downy” ways in a number of Bible passages. Among these upside-downy ways is the notion that we find our lives by losing them for God and others. We become rich by pouring ourselves out. Real wealth is created by giving, not accumulating. Life is not about us with a capitol U. Someone observed that in the 1950’s a popular magazine was “Life.” Some years later, “People” magazine was in vogue. Later in time came “Us” magazine and eventually “Self.” I take it a life spent well bucks this trend and puts Christ first, which manifests in putting others ahead of one’s self. The little Sunday School song about joy meaning Jesus and Others and You (in that order) might stand us in good stead when deciding what to do with our time.

That said, what will be the key elements for living a life that ends with the proclamation, “Well done, good and faithful servant”? I’ve become convinced it’s not necessarily a life of ceaseless effort and activity; not constant “busyness.” Busyness might play a part. Hard work is often a component of doing what’s right and good and pleasing in His sight. But that’s not the whole of it. I think of Jesus’ commendation of Mary’s choice to sit at his feet

while Martha was busily attempting to feed him and their other guest. They did, indeed, need to eat at some point, but that wasn’t the “better part” of the options at that moment. The pouring of the costly spikenard on Jesus’ feet by her or some other Mary (I’ve never been clear on who it was) looked wasteful to the disciples, but again, it was a particularly precious act in the eyes of Jesus, preparing Him for his burial, and that woman received eternal recognition for her “wasteful” gesture. Making much of Christ in my remaining years might mean less busyness and more resting at His feet.

Doug Wilson, in an essay on time management, says as Christians we should “want to be fruitful like a tree, not efficient like a machine.” That admonition has been fairly life-changing for me. I see more clearly now the principle “less blessed is more than more not blessed” is as relevant to time as it is to the tithe or most anything else for that matter. In the little devotional book, *Joy and Strength*, William Hay M.H. Aitken observes, “Whatever happens let us not be too busy to sit at Jesus’ feet. We shall not really lose time by enjoying this; nay, we shall redeem the time for there is usually much more time and strength forfeited by friction than by toil, and we shall gain in blessedness and enjoyment of our work, and gain in the quality of our work; and above all, we shall give Him pleasure where otherwise we might only grieve Him. And this is indeed the crown of all our endeavors. He who pleases Him does not live in vain.” I have always been intrigued by the economy of God. He does not have to do twenty separate acts to achieve twenty purposes. He is able to do one thing that ramifies to accomplish many things, and I think this quality can spill over into our lives as well when we devote our time and our all to Him.

James asks, “What is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time, and then vanishes

..it’s not cosmetics that worry me. I am more concerned with how well I can spend what’s left of my eye-blink here.

....in the 1950's a popular magazine was Life. Some years later, People magazine was in vogue. Later in time came Us magazine and eventually Self.

away.”

The older you get, the more you recognize just how short life is. Look at the children you know. One day they're tiny babes, the next thing you know they are young boys or girls, and before you know it they're headed off to college. Just ask any parent. But those few, short days are made up of many small minutes. I was reminded recently of a little poem that has been an encouragement to me in these contemplations. It is titled “*Little Things*,” and was written by one Ebenezer Cobham Brewer;

*Little drops of water,
Little grains of sand,
Make the mighty ocean
And the pleasant land.*


*Thus the little minutes,
Humble though they be,
Make the mighty ages
Of eternity.*

In a recent post on her blog, *Feminine Adventures*, Anna Christensen remarked on the “humble minute.” It was a good meditation, and I have been attempting to utilize as many of the humble minutes as best I can to the glory of God. A lot of things can actually be accomplished in tiny bits of time. I recognize I tend to spend more time stewing about some small task or the other than it actually takes to perform it. This has helped in my quest to redeem the time.

Paul exhorts us, in Ephesians 5, to “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children, and walk in

love as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor,” and then, “See that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”

So yes, the days are evil, and yes, our time here is short at best. But the Psalmist says, “Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”

It is comforting to know that our faithful God and Savior knows exactly when my life will end, and, in fact, orchestrated it from the very beginning, even BEFORE the beginning at that. In her book *To my Husband and other Poems*, Anne Bradstreet asks, “*Why should I live but to Thy praise? My life is hid with Thee; O Lord, no longer be my days, Than I may fruitful be.*” That’s a good summation of my own desire for the span of years he gives me. May He give each of us the grace and wisdom we need to recognize our days for what they are, to use them to His glory, and to spend them abiding in Him. Then, as Julian of Norwich said “All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.” 

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It is comforting to know that our faithful God... knows exactly when my life will end, and, in fact, orchestrated it from the very beginning....

The Wrath of God was Satisfied!

A Mediation on the Hymn In Christ Alone

by Rob Looper

Whenever I have the privilege of introducing myself as a Presbyterian pastor, more often than not it is usually with the caveat that I am pastor in “the other Presbyterian church.”

That, of course, is not strictly true, because there are several Presbyterian denominations in America: the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, the Bible Presbyterian Church and, my own denomination, the Presbyterian Church in America. There are, of course, still others not listed here, but what is significant is that most of these denominations (the venerable and historic ARP and RPCNA notably excepted) came into being because of the deadening grip of liberal, progressive theology in the two historic mainline Presbyterian denominations, the PCUSA (historically a Northern Church) and the PCUS (a Southern Church); the two joined as one national denomination in the 1980s as the PCUSA.

Though there are individual PCUSA congregations that are theologically conservative, at the General Assembly level this denomination essentially denies the evangelical and Reformed distinctives that have historically defined the Presbyterian Church: the verbal inspiration, inerrancy and authority of Scripture; the virgin birth, deity of and bodily resurrection of Christ; and the truth that faith “in Christ alone” is the one way of sinners to God.

In light of these things, the recent rejection in the PCUSA of the Townend-Getty hymn “In Christ Alone” because of the words “till on that cross as Jesus died/the wrath of God was satisfied” is not only no surprise, it is completely understandable. Once one denies the Bible truly and authoritatively is God’s word, all that is left is human spin. You don’t like the wrath of God? That’s okay—in our modern

enlightened state we “understand” that the writers of the New Testament had a hard time shaking the primitive, patriarchal view of God that their forbears possessed. Today we “know” that God is kinder and gentler—pure love.

It was just this kind of denial of biblical theological truth that ultimately led thousands of Bible-believing Presbyterians in 1973 to leave the then-PCUS to form the Presbyterian Church in America. The congregation I am privileged to serve as Pastor, McIlwain Memorial Presbyterian Church, was a leading congregation in this national movement; one of our congregants, the honorably retired evangelist-missionary Rev. Arnie Maves, boasts the honor of being the very first man to be defrocked by the Florida Presbytery (PCUS) for engaging in activity that led to the formation of what would become the first Presbytery of a denomination that had the audacity to believe the Bible was really the holy and inerrant Word of God. J. Gresham Machen would have been proud.

Biblically speaking, though, the love of God is actually *defined* by the reality of the wrath of God. From the Bible’s perspective, the reality of God’s wrath toward sin could not be clearer. That wrath arises from God’s moral and ethical perfection—that is, he is both good *and* just. Both of these attributes are in fact what establish God’s wrath as the good and just response against evil. Indeed, apart from the reality of the perfect wrath of a holy and just God we have no confidence that evil will be judged as evil.

But what is extraordinary about the biblical doctrine of the wrath of God is that it is always put alongside the love of God:

...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be

Once one denies the Bible truly and authoritatively is God's word, all that is left is human spin

saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. (Romans 5:6-10, ESV; emphasis added)

We will never appreciate the love of God until we have had a personal face-off with the wrath of God. Simply put, the Bible teaches that all have sinned and fall short of God's standard (see Romans 3:23). What this means is that, by the nature of that reality, we are liable to the just punishment that sinners deserve, which is God's wrath.

Because God is morally and ethically perfect—good and just—he must show his wrath against sin, which assaults goodness and justice. Indeed, if he God doesn't pour out his wrath on sin he is neither good nor just!

It is precisely at this point that the awesome love of God comes into magnificent focus. Romans 3 tells us that this very God, who is filled with just wrath toward sin, is the same

God who himself presented Jesus, who was and remains God incarnate, *"as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith..."* (Romans 3:25). The word "propitiation" is the key: it directly refers to the satisfaction of wrath.

The point is this: God's love is manifested in the fact that God was most definitely "not fair" toward sinners. Instead of giving us what we deserve—his just wrath—he gave us what we didn't deserve: grace! What is more, God himself, in the second person of the Trinity, is the very One who satisfied that wrath. That is the epitome of love—that he *"loved me and gave himself for me"* (Galatians 2:20) so that I might

escape what I deserve and instead be redeemed to glorify God and enjoy him forever!

What is sad about the *In Christ Alone* controversy in the PCUSA is that, in rejecting the biblical truth of the wrath of God, the leaders of that denomination have completely erased any context for defining how the cross could possibly magnify God's love, as they suggested the words be altered to say. What was Jesus dying for if the cross was not the place where God displayed his wrath against sin? What in fact is sin if it is not the moral assault of God's holy character and commands? More than that, why did Jesus even come? Yet all of this begs the question: the liberal, progressive theology the PCUSA has endorsed already denies the real fall of Adam that cast us into sin and rejects that Jesus is in fact God incarnate who died for sinners and was physically raised from the dead—so it really can't affirm the wrath of God because there is no need for such personal redemption in the first place.

That is a lie from one place: the pit of Hell.

So, as we worship God this Sunday at McIlwain Presbyterian Church we will be singing *In Christ Alone*—just as we have done many times before—as we celebrate the love of God, where *"the wrath of God was satisfied."*

That is indeed how the love of God is magnified. ¶

Rob Looper is the Senior Pastor at McIlwain Presbyterian Church in Pensacola, Florida. He is married to Lisa and has three children, Hannah, Bennett and Laura. This article was previously published on his web blog at roblooper.wordpress.com and is used with permission.

God's love is manifested in the fact that God was most definitely "not fair" toward sinners

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

A Glorious Citizenship in Another Country

by Robert Thornton

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ - Philippians 3:20

Recently, I was watching a TV news magazine program. As it was the start of summer, the topic was children going off to summer camp and how to prevent – or at least mitigate – homesickness. Homesickness is something that probably every adult has experienced at least once in his or her life. It might have been caused by the first days of summer camp (as discussed in the TV show), the beginning of college, or those first weeks as a recruit in the military.

I can recall the feelings of queasiness in the gut, sweaty palms, and generalized sadness, on any number of occasions when I was going to be away from home and family for an extended period of time. Regardless of the positivity of the experience away from home, there remained a nagging longing to be back in those familiar surroundings.

Just what is homesickness? A study in the *American Journal of Pediatrics* by Chris Thurber and Edward Walton describe homesickness as “distress and functional impairment caused by an actual or anticipated separation from home and attachment objects such as parents.” Josh Klapow, a clinical psychologist at the University of Alabama, describes it as “our instinctive need for love, protection and security—feelings and qualities usually associated with home.”

Even recently, I've experienced homesickness. I recall when working full time, during particularly stressful days, I would muse that I wish I were home. What was strange about this is that I recall times while at home thinking the same thoughts. Wait, you say, you're wishing you were home while sitting at home? Rather strange, isn't it?

I'd initially agree. But, listen further to what Klapow says about homesickness: “You're not literally just missing your house. You're missing what's normal, what is routine, the larger sense of social space, because these are the things that help us survive.”

Thurber goes on to say that we get homesick because

“there are things that we love. It's the by-product of the strength of our attachment.”

This is, of course, a human diagnosis, but on a deeper, more spiritual level, you and I as Christians should wish for a different kind of “normal”: an attachment we love that cannot be found in this world. In short, we all feel a homesickness for Heaven.

After all, Heaven is our real home. We are just sojourners on Earth. Passing through, if you will. In Philippians 3:20-21, Paul speaks of our citizenship being in Heaven where we will await the Lord Jesus Christ who will transform our earthly bodies to be like his. It's indeed a glorious prospect.

Not only are we just staying here for a limited time, but the earth itself is finite, destined at some point to pass away. According to the writer of Hebrews 1:10-12, the earth will be rolled up like a robe and wear out like a garment. In 2nd Corinthians 4:17-18, Paul also speaks of our difficult times now as only a momentary affliction; the things we now see are transient. What's the use of forming permanent attachments to temporary things when we have a greater outlook for attachments to things eternal?

We also have the example of the patriarchs from the Old Testament. Their outlook was, for the most part, heavenward. In 1st Chronicles 29:15, David in prayer describes himself and all assembled with him as “strangers” and “sojourners” and their time on earth “like a shadow”. The writer of Hebrews describes the patriarchs as “strangers and exiles on the earth” who “desire[d] a better country, that is, a heavenly one” (Hebrews 11:13-16). This is an example we should take to heart and live out daily.

So, if Heaven is our real home what should be our attitude about our temporary earthly home? Should we just isolate ourselves from non-Christians and live like hermits until Christ comes again? Or, is there a biblical way to engage the secular world, bringing the love of Christ to them?

I can recall the feelings of queasiness in the gut, sweaty palms, and generalized sadness....when I was going to be away from home

As we look Heavenward, earthly possessions fall from a place of preeminence in our lives. Our longing becomes for the eternal, the incorruptible. As Christ says on Matthew 6:19-21, we should, "...not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is there your heart will be also."

Along with possessions, earthly pleasures will also fade, thus making us examples to non-believers. We see this in 1st Peter 2:11-12, where it says: "Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation."

Generally, when foreigners come to work in the U.S. they live quietly; conduct themselves soberly, in an even-tempered manner, and they aren't disruptive to the community in which they live. But, at the same time, they continue in their own customs and traditions. We too are, in a very real sense, foreigners to this world. Our conduct should be no less circumspect and our "customs and traditions", i.e. our lives in Christ. We should not be influenced or compromised by the outside world. As Paul says in Romans 12:2: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." Also, Paul warns against being "unequally yoked with unbelievers" in 2nd Corinthians 6:14.


While we should live separately, we are to be salt and light to the world. This means interacting with the secular world, not as angry soothsayers predicting doom and gloom on those who reject Christ, or

as haughty know-it-alls who behave as if Christians are superior beings from another planet. Rather our conduct should reflect Christ in all our dealings. In Ephesians 5:1-2, Paul says, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

Lastly, we should fix our minds on the eternal. We should fix our minds on Jesus Christ. For in Him we have become new creatures, and as a result, have a new home. We know that, "...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." (2nd Corinthians 5:17)

We are indeed citizens of a different Kingdom - one not seen with human eyes. And we should conduct our lives as citizens of that kingdom in anticipation of one day going home to that Heavenly dwelling place. As it is written in Ephesians 2, 18-22:

"For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."

You know, there really is no place like home. 

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We are indeed citizens of a different Kingdom.... and we should conduct our lives as citizens of that kingdom...

TRUTH AND POST-MODERNISM

On Redeeming the Times

by Jimmy Hopper

After the terrible 20th Century, we live in strange and dangerous times. We see all around us personal freedom, unbelievable freedom. Freedom to do almost anything we wish. We see such freedom that we, as Reformed Christians, wonder if freedom hasn't left its so-called Constitutional base and wandered away into license. Few non-Christians seem to be concerned about this because, with this freedom, only personal preference matters. And if personal preference is all that matters, then the one who prefers (the individual) becomes, by default, the standard. So we can say, in matters of culture and conscience, individualism rules. This is true in the minutiae of culture: dress, language, sexuality, responsibility, social interaction and art. The Individual is everything. The Individual is all things. Things and ideas that are "right" for him may (or may not) be right for someone else. Only the "Him" or "Her" matters.

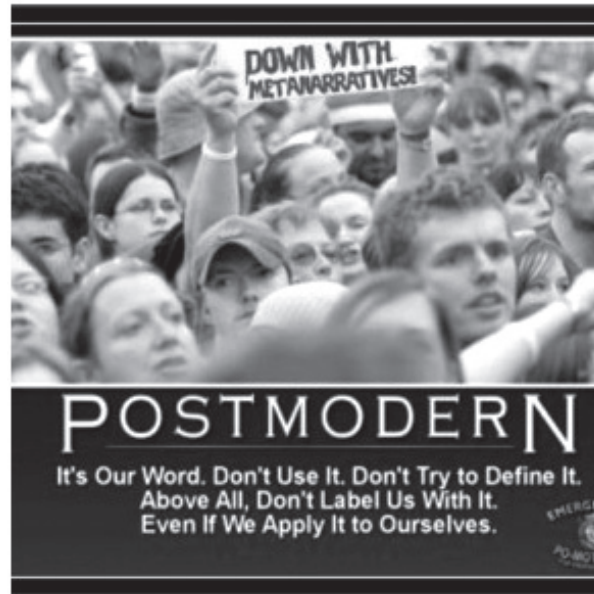
This is our world: the world of post-modernism. Post-modernism evolved (or maybe devolved is a better term) from Modernism, which was no great shakes of its own. The British and Christian historian, Paul Johnson, in his book, *Modern Times* writes that "The modern world began on the 29th May 1919 when photographs of a solar eclipse taken on the island of Principe off West Africa and at Sobral in Brazil, confirmed the truth of a new theory of the universe." The theory was, of course, Albert Einstein's theory of Relativity and the photographs demonstrated that the eclipse deviated by forty-three seconds of arc

each century from its predictable behavior. If something as rigid as Newtonian physics was relative, then everything became relative.

To show the evolution/devolution, this relativism, from modernism to post-modernism requires the idea of unshakeable Truth as the guidepost and as a point of reference. A concept of Truth is particularly important to understand post-modernism, since its characteristics are very proudly thought of as being inherently indefinable and can only be identified as what it is not. This can be demonstrated by a type of definition, an explanation, from the Stanford University School of Philosophy as follows: "*That postmodernism is indefinable is a truism. However, it **can** be described as a set of critical, strategic and rhetorical*

practices employing concepts such as difference, repetition, the trace, the simulacrum, and hyperreality to destabilize other concepts such as presence, identity, historical progress, epistemic certainty, and the univocity of meaning."

We can focus on this set of practices and concepts in detail but the essential part is that its philosophical purpose is one of the "destabilization" of reality in presence, history, absolute statement, and union of meaning. In brief, post-modernism declares that there is no Truth. So does the guidepost of Truth really exist? Is there anything that is real, that is a standard, that is structural, that can be depended upon? Post-modernism avers that it doesn't.



All of this philosophy needs to be placed in personal terms because there is incredible personal damage in this devolution. In modern thought, the mantra became “relativity can be what is relative to you, what is right for YOU or what it means to YOU.” There was suddenly moral “wiggle room” and in cultural terms in the sixties and seventies, the wiggle room was quickly and forcefully expanded. Mere “wiggle room” was great but it wasn’t enough. The end of the modern world led to the post-modern world which was the philosophical deconstruction of any remaining idea of Truth. It led to a descent into an individualism that is far from the Christian ideal of responsibility before God and man.

Here, in post-modernism, we have Relative Truth changed into Individual Truth. Truth was a target, fixed and moored. Relative Truth was a target tethered, with leeway. Post-modern truth is a Truth that is free-floating. It is whatever you think it is. What is true for you, or even works for you, is your truth.

When Truth as a concept existed as something concrete in culture, this unchanging Truth was anchored in an unchanging God. It still, and always will, exist in reality and as a concept in the Christian Faith. This concept is foreign in our culture today, so I was recently brought up short by a fictional account of this Truth in faith demonstrated. For the Riverwood Book Group, I re-read Evelyn Waugh’s great novel of redemption, *Brideshead Revisited*, and came to a tremendous scene for which I’ll lay a small amount of groundwork. In an upper class English Catholic family, the older brother, Brideshead (“Bridey”) has told his beautiful sister, Julia, and her lover, Charles Ryder, the narrator and an atheist, that he is engaged to be married. Julia immediately invites her brother and his fiancée to their house and the following conversation ensues, starting with Bridey making a declaration:

“I couldn’t possibly bring her here. It is a mat-

ter of indifference whether you choose to live in sin with Rex or Charles or both--I have always avoided enquiry into the details of your *ménage*--but in no case would Beryl consent to be your guest.”

Julia rose. “Why you pompous” she said, stopped and turned towards the door.

At first I thought she was overcome with laughter; then, as I opened the door to her, I saw with consternation that she was in tears. She slipped past me without a glance.

“Bridey, what a bloody offensive thing to say to Julia.”

“There was nothing she should object to. I was merely stating a fact well known to her.”

In this profound exchange, we see an insistence on a *fact*, and it is not a physical fact such as “there is a fountain in the courtyard,” but a fact based on the transcendent existence of God as an unshakeable reality and standard. Both he and Julia knew that *for a fact* and both knew that she had failed that standard. She was “living in sin,” and as her brother said, she knew it. This was an incontrovertible fact that must be dealt with in the course of the story.

Brideshead Revisited was written in 1945, so Waugh was well aware of relativism and even more aware of the ravages of two horrific world wars on the Christian ethos in Europe. Walker Percy, the Christian novelist, in his essay, *Diagnosing the Modern Malaise*, spoke of the early 20th century not as the beginning of the modern world but as the *beginning of the end* of the modern world. Percy wrote: “If one had to set a date of the beginning of the end of the modern world, 1914 would be as good as any, because it was then that the Western man, the beneficiary of precisely this scientific revolution and the Christian ethic, began with great skill and energy to destroy himself.” The unmooring and dismantling of

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Waugh was well aware of relativism and even more aware of the ravages of two horrific world wars on the Christian ethos in Europe

truth was legitimized in the name of science but its essence had to do with theology and anthropology. As Truth became unmoored, post-modernism began by dissecting all that was regarded as true and sacred.

As a way of looking at the change in concepts of truth, consider the situation set up by Waugh in *Brideshead Revisited* and look at it in post-modern terms. We've all seen this movie/television show/book. There is a beautiful young woman in a bad marriage who finds her true love. There is the priggish brother, or matron, or father, or minister, who looks with disdain and disapproval on her obvious happiness-to-be with her lover. Obviously they would be a "pompous" Can anyone doubt what the Hollywood take on this will be? This is how it will end: she escapes the bad marriage, leaves her husband, and runs across the airline terminal into her lover's arms in the very nick of time as the music rises to a crescendo. She has, after all, the right to a "pursuit of happiness," a "truth" that Thomas Jefferson said was self-evident.

In an issue of *Salt & Light* devoted to movies and their influence, Jen Venable wrote of a movie in which the audience actually cheered when the divorce was granted so that the "soul mates" could be together and how shocking it was in a theater in the so-called "Bible Belt" by an audience of mostly women who would probably be in church on Sunday. It simply doesn't happen today as it does in *Brideshead* as a situation where Truth exists and is recognized. Again, the difference is profound. This response is a post-modern deconstruction, and it is deconstruction in the most effective possible way: emotionalism wrapped up in a shining entertainment package. And once again we know that it is deconstruction of the idea of unshakeable, fixed Truth, which in the end is the First Cause of everything, the God of creation and history.

As we consider the ongoing deconstruction of Truth and its structure in all of society, we can find examples in almost any direction. One that quickly comes

to mind and one that is extremely important is that of the nuclear family, previously considered the bedrock basis of social and national life. For many years we despaired of the Soviet system in which children were taken from parents and raised by the state. Then came Hillary Clinton's "It takes a village to raise a child" and Christians cheered Bob Dole's reply, "No, it takes a family." Well, the family is disappearing. For the first time in United States history, there are more unmarried than married adults. The incidence of children to unwed mothers is reaching epidemic proportions. Millions of children grow to adulthood not only not living in a home without a father but without even knowing a father. The social and economic consequences of this are staggering and will continue to rise.

Much of this comes as a consequence of the sexual revolution of the 60's and 70's. This movement, fueled in part by the demystification of sex in various studies, first by Kinsey and then Masters and Johnson, made the sexual act one of appetite appeasement and in doing so made marriage superfluous to sexual satisfaction in post-modern culture. All cultural restraints regarding cohabitation disappear. This led to movie titles like *Friends with Benefits* and the college culture of "hooking-up" in which sex is simply what you end up doing on a date.

To relate this to the children of unwed mothers requires no great mental calisthenics. In the mid-nineties I attended a conference meeting on primary civic concerns and near the top of the list was teenage pregnancy. After hearing the rather staggering statistics and equal staggering costs to society, a young woman in the group asked in dismay, "What can be done about this?" The speaker simply looked at her, considered the background of the "sexual revolution," said that he didn't think we could get that genie back in the bottle. Freedom without structure, freedom without constraint, freedom without the Truth of God, is a dangerous thing.

We see deconstruction in the name of individual-

ism and freedom everywhere. There is the expansion of the legality of marriage to cover same-sex “marriages.” There is deconstruction in the fine arts; a deconstruction that led to the Jackson Pollack paint drippings and Andy Warhol’s “Campbell’s Soup Cans”, thirty-two soup cans of the exact size representing each variety of soup available at the time. The message was “there is no art,” and that art is without purpose and is thus no longer relevant.

There is the on-going deconstruction of education, initially based on American philosopher John Dewey’s ideas of pragmatism. The classical, liberal education has gradually been degraded to exaggerated vocational studies. This has been greatly aided by pervasive political correctness, by government school money being paid only for test scores, and the decrease of attention span conditioned by sound bytes and images. The Humanities have almost totally disappeared from some high school courses and are no longer requirements in any substantial way from college courses of study.

Within the post-modern idea of avoiding anything that might offend, education has not only been deconstructed but has been dehumanized. To quote another novel, Kurt Vonnegut in his satiric novel, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, speaks of his education:

I think about my education sometimes. I went to the University of Chicago for a while after the Second World War. I was a student in the Department of Anthropology. At that time they were teaching that there was absolutely no difference between anybody. They may be teaching that still.

Another thing they taught was that nobody was ridiculous or bad or disgusting. Shortly before my father died, he said to me, “You know—you never wrote a story with a villain in it.”

I told him that that was one of the things I learned in college after the war.

Consequently, the Western Canon, the best and

the most enduring of art, music and literature, has been deconstructed, mainly because it was based on a concept of Truth that is no longer valid but also because of political correctness and the short attention span phenomena. It has been challenged on the basis of politics, gender and race to the point that those who defend its value are themselves vilified for those reasons.

In this world, our freedom/license has led to a culture of death. The glaring example is millions on millions of deaths by abortion, perhaps the first cultural sanction for killing as an individual “right” in any “civilized” society. Suicide is on the rise everywhere. Our news stories are dominated by killings, even mass killings, many of which seem to have taken place so that the killer will be known by the public as an “individual,” someone whose existence must be recognized in a world of freedom without standards and values. Our “entertainment” oozes death. There are zombies and vampires. There are even zombie and vampire romances in which normal young women fall in “love” with these creatures. There are “slasher” films and television series about serial killers. Gangsters are admired because of their commitment to “family.” Death is everywhere in our world.

The human cost of this loss of Truth is devastating. Solomon’s words echo down the centuries: “Vanity, vanity. All is vanity.” We have the Nietzsche “abyss” looming before man who must eventually come to the knowledge that there is nothing worth living for, nothing in the world that lasts, nothing that even marks your passage. Everything is nothing. All is vanity. There is no truth, no structure, no purpose in human life. We are animals who will live, then die, sometimes by our own hand.

My friend Hunter Sims introduced me to David Foster Wallace, perhaps the ultimate observer *and* victim of post-modern culture. I read a couple of volumes of his essays and his first novel, *The Broom of the System*, and found it is one of the most fasci-

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(The) sexual revolution, fueled in part by the demystification of sex... made the sexual act one of appetite appeasement and in doing so made marriage superfluous to sexual satisfaction...

nating things I have ever read. It is both scathingly savage in its depictions of post-modern American culture, and unremittingly, hilariously funny. It is set in the 60's in the city of Cleveland, a bleak landscape in a time when the Cuyahoga River was so polluted it actually caught on fire. We follow the characters without purpose through their sad and funny misadventures. When I finished it and laid it down, I considered it the saddest novel I have ever read. The author, brilliant to a ridiculous point, could find no structure or purpose in his life; nothing that could bring anything more than scorn and derisive laughter. At the age of 49, David Foster Wallace was an *avant garde* prodigy of literature, a college professor with published novels and essay collections, and a writer for *Salon*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Rolling Stone*, and other magazines but, in despair, he hanged himself. This is "finding your own truth" in endless trivialities.

How are Christians to live in this culture? How are we to minister, to speak and live out the Gospel? Gene Edward Veith, in his book, *Postmodern Times*, very appropriately quotes Psalm 11:3 as he addressed this question: *...if the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?* For the world, the foundations are not there any longer; there is nothing to hang our hat on. So we, as believers in absolute Truth, believers in an unchanging God who existed before time and outside of time, what are we to do, how are we to operate in this ever-devolving atmosphere that is literally crossways to everything we believe? And also why, since we hold to the Truth of God, why are we not more of a factor in this world. How did it come to this?

The church in post-modern culture is another, and probably longer, article. Suffice it to say that this culture is seductive and the church has in many ways fallen before it in an attempt to appear "relevant," believing irrelevance to be a great sin of ministry. We (Christians) simply don't do postmodernism as

well as the world does. We can't offer endless personal freedoms because we have a King to whom we owe fealty. We cannot be purveyors of materialism. Materialism is contrary to the Gospel of Christ. We can't say that everything will be sweetness and light. The Word says that we will suffer. We can't organize political rallies and change people's hearts through politicians. We can't force feed Christianity to the masses through government - Babylon is Babylon. It is not the church.

The Psalmist answers his question of what the righteous can do in Psalm 11:5 when he says: *The Lord is in His holy temple. The Lord's throne is in Heaven.* God is in charge. We have been given our marching orders. We are to go about our ways and proclaim Him - always, always with love. We are to love the fallen so much that we are willing to proclaim the wonders of Jesus to them. We are to love the fallen as Jesus loved them. We are to bring them in, love them, preach and proclaim, tell them that there is Truth, and that in a very real history, something very real happened. God reconciled His people to Him and there is nothing remotely like it. Come with me, taste and see that the Lord is good.

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FINALE

On the Birth of a Grandson.....

In the summer night, we are in the waiting area of a large hospital for an event that is both singular to us, yet common to mankind: the birth of a child. It is singular because it will be the grandson of my wife and myself; the first child and perhaps the only child of our youngest daughter and her very fine husband. It is common because it will be replicated tonight, and every night of the year, thousands upon thousands of times. It is easy to see commonality in Piedmont Hospital in Atlanta. The maternity unit is filled to the top. Around us we see other family groups waiting in various stages of anticipation for their singular event to take place. They look up, as do we, when anyone enters the area to see if it is a nurse or husband with news. When it is not, our attention, save that small piece of consciousness that remains alert to a possible message, returns to magazine, conversation, tablet, whatever we were occupying our time with.

Finally, at midnight, the news comes. A son has been born to my daughter. There was a bit of difficulty but mother and son are healthy and doing well. I am glad in a way difficult to express. I am astonished in an even larger way because, not only has a new life entered the world, but I am tied to this child I've not seen yet with a bond of love and care that is indefinable and exists in an area of awareness that transcends and sharpens the amazement of being human.

Later, I hold my grandson in my arms. Tiny, rosy-cheeked, he sleeps with his head against my upper arm, his tiny, perfect hand folded against his cheek. I can relate to how his father and my daughter look

now; it's the same as when I looked at my newborn children. I held his mother in my arms when she was days old. The knowledge of the tie, the connection, the transcendence, reaches back to that, to other children, to other grandchildren. That knowledge, felt and almost unknowable, beats in one's very blood. I must think on this, I say to myself as I hold him.

More than that is his perfection. To see a newborn is to see something miraculous, huge in beauty and potentiality. The psalmist and king, considering the interaction of God with him, considered the wonder of his birth and prayed, "I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." Fearfully and wonderfully made are the words I remembered when I held my grandson that first time, thinking of the bond of blood and history and future I have with him.

In our age of scientism, Pulitzer-prize winning novelist and Christian thinker, Marilynne Robinson, in her volume of essays, *When I Was a Child, I Read Books*, spoke to the fearfulness and wonder of man, and more. She also considered the connection, the self-knowledge, the transcendence, that I feel so strongly in that moment – it is the same feeling that makes men and women so unlike (and so above) everything else. Ms. Robinson writes:

Having read recently that there are more neurons in the human brain than there are stars in the Milky Way, and having read any number of times that the human brain is the most complex thing in the universe and that the mind is not identical with the brain but is more mysterious still, it seems to me this astonishing nexus of the self, so uniquely elegant and capable, merits a

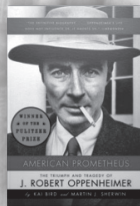
name that would indicate a difference in kind from the ontological run of things, and for my purposes, "soul" will do just fine. Perhaps I should pause here and clarify my meaning, since there are those who feel that the spiritual is diminished or denied when it is associated with the physical. I am not among them. In his Letter to the Romans, Paul says, "Ever since the creation of the world, [God's] invisible nature, namely His eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made." If we are to consider the heavens, how much more are we to consider the magnificent energies of consciousness that make whomever we pass on the street a far grander marvel than our galaxy? At this point of dynamic convergence, call it self or call it soul, questions of right or wrong are weighed, love is felt, guilt and loss are suffered. And, over time, formation occurs, for weal or woe, governed in large part by that unaccountable capacity for self-awareness.

The mysteriousness and beauty that so touched me at this child's birth is connected to this "dynamic convergence" that is above "mind" and falls under "soul" and makes us so much more than thinking animals. It is, as I instinctively knew, and, as King David and Ms. Robinson instinctively knew, connected to God, the One who bestows the soul and the giver of love. As I held my grandson (his name is Wade), I thought of another quotation, this time the old Apostle John, who said that "love is *from* God" and later in the sequence that "God *is* love."

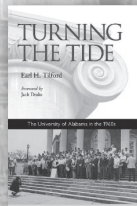
Wade is fearfully and wonderfully made. He will grow, formation will occur, and he will become a man. Holding him, I pray that God will be with him, will touch him, and will keep him.

INTERACT WITH CULTURE

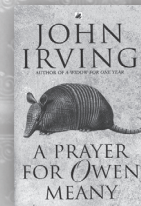
RIVERWOOD BOOK GROUP



**American
Prometheus**
Kai Bird



Turning the Tide
Earl Tilford



**A Prayer
for Owen Meany**
John Irving

The Riverwood Book Group meets each Monday evening at 7:00 PM in the home of Kay Kirkley, at 1745 Ridgemont Drive. We select the books we will read together, an eclectic combination of fiction, history, theology, biography, commentary and drama, then we meet to look at them through the lens of the Gospel, "sharpening each other" through discussion. If you enjoy books, ideas, fellowship, and coffee, join us. Everyone is welcome.



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