



PROFILES IN FAITH

Susanna Wesley (1669–1742) *Mother of Methodism*

by Dr. Arthur Dicken Thomas, Jr.



During the year 2003 when Christians all over the world are celebrating the three hundredth anniversary of the birth of John Wesley, attention is also being given to his remarkable mother, Susanna Annesley Wesley. As women in our century have turned their attention to notable females as role models, Protestants have recognized Susanna Wesley as one of the greatest women in Christ as well as the Mother of Methodism.

Susanna faithfully tried to live within the confines of the domestic sphere prescribed for women of her time, but she also succeeded in making a mark in history not only through her two sons, John and Charles Wesley, but also for the bold things she attempted as a woman. Despite the limitations on women in her day, Susanna exercised an independence of conscience as she followed the truths of Scripture, served in a pastoral role while yet a housewife, and wrote as a lay theologian and guide to members of her family.

Independence of Conscience

On January 20, 1669 (Old Style), Susanna Annesley was born as the 25th child of Puritan parents who were part of a movement

which sought to purify the Church of England of what it saw as unbiblical practices and to inject a vital piety into the slumbering national church. Her father was the Rev. Dr. Samuel Annesley (c. 1620-1699). Later called the St. Paul of the Non-conformists, Rev. Annesley previously served as Anglican priest at St. Giles' Cripplegate, London, until he was ejected from this parish since he could not, for conscience sake, adhere to the Act of Uniformity of 1662 (which required the use of the Book of Common Prayer in the Anglican Church) due to his Presbyterian beliefs. He became pastor of the Meeting House in Little Saint Helens, a Nonconformist congregation in London. Susanna was born at her father's home at Spital Yard, Bishopsgate, London, which can still be seen today. The name of her mother is unknown.

During Susanna's childhood the Annesley home was visited by several great Puritan writers: Richard Baxter, John Owen, and Thomas Manton—who baptized Susanna. Here Susanna got to hear the discussions of the Puritan leaders and their arguments against the Church of England and in favor of Puritan dissent. In her father's home she also met a member of

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through personal and
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Editor's Note



Some time ago I heard the story of a pastor who received a phone call telling him that an elderly woman in the congregation was in the hospital and very close to death. While the pastor did not recognize the woman's name (one of the unfortunate consequences he battled as pastor of a very large congregation), he nevertheless determined to visit her right away.

When he entered the hospital room, he recognized the woman's face from having seen her on Sunday mornings – usually slumbering in the pew. As they began to talk, the woman told him, "I just don't know who will take over my ministry when I am gone." The pastor, embarrassed because he did not know the woman's ministry in the church, requested, "Would you tell me, please, what your ministry is?" "Oh, it's not much," the woman replied. "I just pray for you all Saturday night and ask the Lord to bless your sermon on Sunday."

The pastor – whose name is nationally recognized – left the visit wondering if this dear woman's prayers were not more responsible for his ministry's success than his own learning and efforts.

I strongly suspect this story is not unique. Heaven alone will tell the real truth behind many other ministries and works done in Christ's name: there are seemingly insignificant people who are, in fact, more responsible for the growth and blessing of people and ministries than other very visible persons. Susanna Wesley is just such a case; her impact on the lives of her sons John and Charles – to name only two people – has rippled through the centuries, touching countless lives for Christ. I believe, in time, Michelle Knott will prove to be another example.

May we continue, in God's strength, to do the work he has given us to do, even if it does not seem important. You can never tell what God will bring about from the most insignificant-seeming people in obscure places – like a little baby born to a poor, young couple in an unremarkable town in Palestine two millennia ago.

Faithfully,



The Problem of Evil

C.S. Lewis speaks to life's most difficult questions

by Art Lindsley, Ph.D.

Senior Fellow, C.S. Lewis Institute

Evil, pain, and suffering—three human experiences which countless authors have attempted to address throughout history. Unlike other topics, books and articles on evil, pain, and suffering produce strong reactions toward those who write about them and try to explain them. C.S. Lewis was well aware of this phenomenon:

All arguments in justification of suffering provoke bitter resentment against the author. You would like to know how I behave when I am experiencing pain, not writing books about it.

Nevertheless, it is important to address this issue because some believers and many unbelievers are caused to doubt God's goodness, power, or even His existence because of particular evils they encounter in their lives. As I have talked to many people about this issue, I have found it important to distinguish between the intellectual problem of evil and the emotional responses to particular evils we face in our experience. Having the intellectual answer helps, but it does not make you immune from the emotional struggle, as we will see in Lewis's agony over the death of his wife, Joy.

The Importance of Evil

Every worldview or philosophy has to try and deal with the problem of evil. In atheism, Hinduism, and Buddhism there is no clear basis to call anything evil, and that is an immense problem, particularly because we inherently know better. G. K. Chesterton said, "People reject the idea of original sin when it is the only doctrine of Christianity that can be empirically proven." The reality of evil, then, is something we know in our experience. In many ways the reality of evil

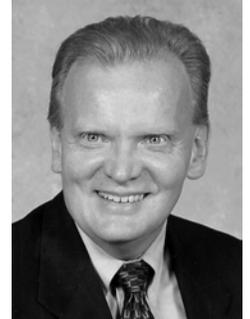
is a clue to the cosmos that excludes some worldviews and points toward reality.

Once when asked to speak at a series of seminars on C. S. Lewis, I submitted a few possible topics for the host's choice. Among the topics were "The Importance of Imagination" and "The Problem of Evil." When I received the publicity for the lecture series, my talk was titled the "Importance of Evil." While I could have just corrected the jumbling of words, this mistake made me think. I decided to talk on the importance of evil from C. S. Lewis's perspective.

Evil is important because it can be used as an argument for God's existence as well as a clue to the nature of created reality. In C. S. Lewis's life, the problem of evil was perhaps the greatest of all obstacles to his coming to faith. He remembered the quote from the Roman Epicurean poet Lucretius: "Had God designed the world, it would not be/A world so frail and faulty as we see." When Lewis met Christians, he would pose this problem to them. He felt that their attempts to provide an answer were attempts to avoid the obvious difficulty. However, it gradually dawned on him that his argument depended on the idea that there was, in fact, real evil in the world. Evil was not an illusion or just a feeling or emotive response to an unpleasing event. But, where had he gotten this idea of evil? He realized that his atheism provided no basis for it. Lewis could have said that his idea of evil was just his own private affair, but then his argument against God collapsed, too. Yet, if evil was real, then there must be an absolute standard by which it was known to be evil and an absolute good by which evil could be distinguished from good. Where could we get this infinite reference point, this fixed point above all our personal and cultural bias? Did that not demand a God as an adequate basis for absolute good?

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C.S. Lewis Feature Article



Dr. Art Lindsley

Dr. Art Lindsley is a Senior Fellow with the C.S. Lewis Institute where he has served since 1987. Formerly, he was Director of Educational Ministries of the Ligonier Valley Study Center and Staff Specialist with Coalition for Christian Outreach, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He received his B.S. (Chemistry) from Seattle Pacific University, an M.Div. from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, and his Ph.D. (Religious Studies) from the University of Pittsburgh. He is co-author with R.C. Sproul and John Gerstner of Classical Apologetics and author of numerous articles. Art, his wife, Connie, and their two boys, Trey and Jonathan, make their home in Arlington, Virginia.

The Problem of Evil

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This was a first clue to the cosmos: evil was real.

As Lewis thought further, he noticed that many other worldviews had “evil” just as part of things. In atheism or naturalism (nature is all there is), “evil” is just pain in a world of pain. It is just survival of the fittest—nature red in tooth and claw. In Eastern religious perspectives, the All is One (pantheism) view held that somehow all distinctions were illusory or “maya.” This principle of “non-distinction” makes even the distinction between good and evil part of the illusion. Yet, do we not feel that there are many things in this world that ought not to be that way? Is this world just pain in a world of pain, is pain an illusion, or is this a good world gone wrong?

Lewis felt that there were many clues that this was a good world gone wrong. In one passage, he said that he could argue for the Christian worldview from two things: humor and a horror over dead bodies. I think what he meant was that both these aspects of life show that there were things that ought not to be as they are. Consider the nature of humor. One type of humor is mere surprise, like playing peek-a-boo with a baby. Some visual gags, too, might cause you to laugh just from surprise. A great deal of humor, though, is dependent on a mild unpleasantness—but only a *mild* unpleasantness, because the greater the unpleasantness and the more it is revolting, it ceases to be funny. When that fine line is

crossed between mild unpleasantness and not-so-mild unpleasantness, people no longer laugh but are offended. Careers in politics and in the media have been lost by an insensitivity to this line. It was not sufficient to say, “I was just joking.”

In any case, humor points to something in life that ought not to be that way. For instance, Rodney Dangerfield has made a living predominantly from his one line, “I don’t get no respect.” We all know what it is to be taken lightly or to be disrespected, and we all know it ought not to be that way. Humor playfully exposes the difference between “is” and “ought,” between reality as it is and reality as it ought to be. The very fact that we can legitimately make this distinction points back to a good world where such indignities were not present and perhaps gives hope that a future may come where such a distinction is not necessary, where, for instance, we are treated with the respect we deserve.

The horror that we experience in the presence of dead bodies is difficult to erase. Many horror films have created fear by using images of the living dead, zombies, or people crawling out of the grave. C. S. Lewis had a particular fear of dead bodies, cemeteries, or encounters with things that have died. Why do we have a horror of the natural process of death? Could it be that it ought not to be this way? Lewis said that when his friend Charles Williams, always so fully

alive, died, it forever changed his view of death. Was such a vibrant personality lost forever? It ought not be this way!

For three summers I worked in a geriatrics hospital where I had many duties: making beds, shaving patients, giving baths, and cleaning. But, the strangest duty was wrapping the body of a person who had just died, taking it to the hospital morgue, putting it onto a tray, sliding the body into the refrigerated unit, and closing the door. Some of the aides used to joke about “rigor mortis” while wrapping the body, but their humor always seemed forced. It was especially strange to be wrapping the body of someone with whom you had become close and had gotten to know well. If death were merely part of the natural process, would it be so horrifying as it is? Is death an interloper, an intruder on God’s good creation caused by sin, or is death just the other end of life? Lewis argued that death is unnatural, and therefore its unnaturalness is the source of its horror. Death ought not to be. It is a clue that this is a good world gone wrong.

In a particularly illustrative scene in *The Silver Chair* (one of *The Chronicles of Narnia*) Puddleglum, the Marsh-wiggle, and Prince Caspian and the children are held captive by the Green Witch. She has cast an enchanting spell on them and tells them that there is no Narnia, no trees, no sun, and no Aslan. They begin to believe her, but Puddleglum sticks his paw into the fire, and

the smell of burnt Marsh-wiggle fills the air. His mind is cleared, and he says to the witch:

Suppose we *have* only dreamed, or made up, all those things—trees and grass and sun and moon and stars and Aslan himself. Suppose we have. Then all I can say is that, in that case, the made-up things seem a good deal more important than the real ones. Suppose this black pit of a kingdom of yours *is* the only world. Well, it strikes me as a pretty poor one. And that's a funny thing, when you come to think of it. We're just babies making up a game, if you're right. But four babies playing a game can make a play-world which licks your real world hollow.

People often deny that they know what they in fact know. That is part of the captivity of evil and the blindness it causes. Evil is important because it points to the existence of God and towards the idea that this is a good world gone wrong.

The Intellectual Problem

Okay, so Lewis made the existence of evil into an argument for God's existence—but could you not turn it around and make the problem of evil into an internal contradiction within theism? In other words, some have argued that there is a contradiction in the set of ideas that Christianity believes. That would indeed be a problem; however, I believe that such attempts have

failed. Even more, the philosopher Alvin Plantinga has shown that the existence of evil in theism can never again be charged to be a necessary contradiction. In summary, the argument goes as follows:

The all-powerful, all-good God created the universe.

God has permitted evil *and has a good reason for doing so.*

Therefore, there is no contradiction in theism.

There is no explicit contradiction in this set of ideas. Christianity does not say, "God is all-powerful," *and* "God is not all-powerful," or "God is good," *and* "God is not good." While some, such as John Mackie, have charged that the contradiction is implicit, Plantinga's answer to all such attempts is that if God has permitted evil and "*has a good reason for doing so,*" then there is no necessary contradiction. If this statement is merely logically possible—and it seems that it is, because there is no necessary contradiction—then this set of ideas is forever shown to be consistent.

But, what are God's reasons for permitting evil to be present in the world? This is where we could be unwise and pretend to be God. The attempt at theodicy (justification of God's ways) might be rejected by God with a "no, no, no—that will never do." Certainly many people are unimpressed by Christians' answers on evil, as was C. S. Lewis in his unbelieving years. Plantinga advises caution in

attempting to provide God's answers for permitting evil, yet because this is such a universal issue, we normally feel compelled to at least indicate some reasons. Lewis does this in his book, *The Problem of Pain*. The classic lines of defense, though by no means exhaustive, are free will, natural law, and soul making.

Free Will

Early in *The Problem of Pain*, Lewis states, "that we used our free wills to become very bad is so well known that it hardly needs to be stated." Although there are widely different views about what the term "free will" means between various Christian traditions, everyone appeals to "free will." For instance, in the Westminster Confession the answer as to how sin entered the world is "man by the freedom of his will sinned." God did not create evil, but He did create within human beings the capacity to choose evil. While that capacity to choose evil is not evil itself, it nevertheless provides the possibility for evil to be chosen. God could have created a world in which evil choices could not be made, but it is possible, as many believers have argued, that such a world would not be the best world. Norman Geisler of Southern Evangelical Seminary has argued that God's way is the "best of all possible ways to the best of all possible worlds."

Natural Law

Lewis also argues that in order for our choices to have real consequences, there must

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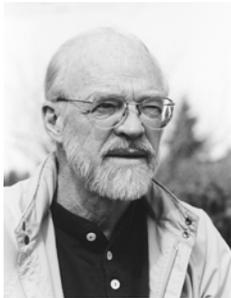


Eat This Book

The Holy Community at Table with the Holy Scripture

by EUGENE PETERSON

Retired Professor of Spirituality, Regent College



Eugene Peterson

Eugene H. Peterson, now retired, was for many years James M. Houston Professor of Spiritual Theology at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia. He also served as founding pastor of Christ Our King Presbyterian Church in Bel Air, Maryland. He is author of numerous books including, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, *Perseverance* and *Run With the Horses*. He is also the translator of the widely acclaimed, contemporary translation of the Bible, *The Message*.

Eugene and his wife Jan make their home in Kalispell, Montana.

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The Christian scriptures are the primary text for Christian spirituality. Christian spirituality is, in its entirety, rooted in and shaped by the scriptural text. We do not form our personal spiritual lives from a random assemblage of favorite texts in combination with individual circumstances; we are formed by the Holy Spirit following the text of the Holy Scriptures. God does not put us in charge of forming our personal spiritualities. We grow in accordance with the revealed Word implanted in us by the Spirit.

A friend told me recently of an acquaintance, a life-long reader of the Bible, who one day realized that his life was not turning out as he thought the Bible said it would; he decided then and there to "make my life my authority instead of the Bible." Most of our culture, both secular and religious, supports the man's decision. Characteristically, contemporary spirituality takes the sovereign self as text. But the groundswell of interest in spirituality as our millennium draws to a close, does not seem to have produced any discernible outpouring of energetic justice and faithful love, two of the more obvious accompaniments of a healthy and holy Christian spirituality. In fact, we are at the point now that the term "spirituality" is more apt to call to mind dabblers in transcendence than the lives of rigor, exuberance, and goodness so long associated with the Word.

I am interested in pulling the Christian scriptures from the margins back to the center as the text for living the Christian life deeply and well and in recovering what Austin Farrer once named in his Bampton Lectures as the "forbidding discipline of spiritual reading" that ordinary people have characteristically brought to this text that forms their souls.¹ Forbidding because of the endless dodges we devise in avoiding the risk of faith in God; forbidding because of our restless

inventiveness in using whatever knowledge of "spirituality" that we acquire to set ourselves up as gods. Forbidding, indeed. Our ancestors set this "forbidding discipline," (their phrase for it was *lectio divina*),² as the core curriculum in this most demanding of all schools, the School of the Spirit, established by Jesus when he told his disciples, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth...he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (John 16:13-14; also 14:16; 15:26; 16:7-8).

Feeding on Scripture

Christians feed on Scripture. Holy Scripture nurtures the Holy Community as food nurtures the human body. Christians do not simply learn or study or use Scripture; we assimilate it, take it into our lives in such a way that it gets metabolized into acts of love, cups of cold water, missions into all the world, healing and evangelism and justice in Jesus' name, hands raised in adoration of the Father.

The image given prominence by St. John the Theologian is a good place to start:

... I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll; and he said to me, 'Take it, and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth.' So I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it; it was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter (Rev 10:9-10).

The book (scroll) that John received and ate was the Word of God, that is, intelligible revelation; "book" suggests that the message that God gives us to live has meaning, plot, and purpose. We do not come to God by guesswork. The image of eating the book is set in opposition to an aloof objectivity that attempts to preserve scientific or theological truth by eliminating as far as possible personal participation. Eating a book takes it all in, assimilating it into the tissues of our lives. Readers become

what they read. If Holy Scripture is to be something other than mere gossip about God, it must be internalized. Most of us have opinions about God that we are not hesitant to voice. But just because a conversation (or sermon or lecture) has the word *God* in it, does not qualify it as true. St. John is not instructed to pass on information about God, he is commanded to assimilate the word of God so that when he does speak it will express itself artlessly in his syntax just as the food we eat, when we are healthy, is unconsciously assimilated into our nerves and muscles and put to work in speech and action.

St. John borrowed his image from Ezekiel, who had also been given a book and commanded to eat it (Ezek 2:8-3:3). Jeremiah also “ate” God’s revelation (Jer 15:16), a diet that issued in sentences of tensile strength, metaphors of blazing clarity, and a prophetic life of courageous suffering. If we are in danger (which we certainly are) of succumbing to the widespread intellectualizing and marginalizing of the Scriptures in regard to our actual day-by-day living, these three rough-and-tumble prophets — John, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah — responsible for the spiritual formation of God’s people in the worst of times (Babylonian exile and Roman persecution), can convince us of this gut-level necessity: Yes, eat this book.

The Christian community has expended an enormous amount of energy and intelligence and prayer in learning how to “eat this book” after the manner of John on Patmos, Jeremiah in Jerusalem, and Ezekiel in Babylon. We do not have to know all of it to come to the Table, but it helps to know some of it, especially since so many of our contemporaries treat it as a mere aperitif.

Scripture as Text: Learning What God Reveals

Our lives are important in spiritual formation — they are, after all, the stuff that is being formed — but they are not the text for directing the formation itself. Spirituality means, among other things, taking ourselves seriously. It means going against the cultural stream in which we are incessantly trivialized to the slave status of producers and performers, constantly depersonalized behind the labels of our degrees or salaries. But there is far more to us than our usefulness and our reputation, where we have been and who we know; there is the unique, irreproducible, eternal, image-of-God *me*. A vigorous assertion of personal dignity is foundational to spirituality.

There is a sense in which we can never take ourselves too seriously. We are serious business, indeed. We are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps 139:14). But it is possible to conceive of ourselves too narrowly for there is far more to us than our genes and hormones, our emotions and aspirations, our jobs and ideals; there is God. Most, if not all, of what and who we are has to do with God. If we try to understand and form ourselves by ourselves, we leave out most of ourselves.

So the Christian community has always insisted that the Holy Scripture that reveals God’s ways to us is the basic text for our formation as human beings. As we read this book, we come to realize that it is not primarily informational, telling us things about God and ourselves, but formational, shaping us into our true being.

It is the very nature of language to form rather than inform. When language is personal, which it is at its best, it reveals; and revelation is always formative — we don’t know more, we become more. Our best users of language, poets and lovers and children and saints, use words to *make*: make intimacies, make character, make beauty, make truth.

So we begin by attending to this text, attending to both the language and the spirit infusing the language. Words are never mere words — they convey spirit, meaning, energy, and truth. Exegesis is the discipline of attending to the text and listening to it rightly and well.

But exegesis is rigorous, disciplined, intellectual work. It rarely feels “spiritual.” Men and women who are “into” spirituality, frequently give exegesis short shrift, preferring to rely on inspiration and intuition. But the long and broad consensus in the community of God’s people has always insisted on a vigorous and meticulous exegesis: Give long and close and learned attention to this text! All our masters in spirituality were and are master exegetes.

A word, or sentence of words, is a marvelous thing. Words reveal. We are presented with reality, with truth that makes our world larger, our relations richer. Words get us out of ourselves and into a responsive relation with a large world of time and space, things and people.

A word, or sentence of words, is also a most mysterious thing. Words conceal. Words can be used to falsify and mislead. All of our

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As we read
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into our
true being.”



The Abolition of Man, One More Time

by Steven Garber

Fellow & Lilly Faculty Scholar, Calvin College



Steven Garber

*Steven Garber has lived his life among students, asking questions which explore the relation of life to learning. The author of *The Fabric of Faithfulness: Weaving Together Belief and Behavior During the University Years*, he spends considerable time with college faculties reflecting on the nature of pedagogy in a pluralizing world. Fellow and Lilly Faculty Scholar at Calvin College, he also serves as Senior Fellow for both the C.S. Lewis Institute and the Clapham Institute, and as a Fellow of the Wilberforce Forum, a branch of Prison Fellowship. He lives in Burke, Virginia, with his wife and five children where they grow many flowers and a few chickens. The Garbers are members of The Falls Church (Episcopal), Falls Church, Virginia.*

Not so many years ago I went with a good friend to see an Australian film, *Bliss*. Overall not the greatest film ever made, but it has its points.

The opening scenes are set in a home, with a family at table together. The father walks out into the backyard, and with terror in his eyes clutches his chest. *A heart attack*. And the camera slowly begins to take us up into the sky, looking down upon the body. As the seconds pass, the images of earth are less and less clear, until finally we begin to see something else.

Wonderful and beautiful and good, and then awful and ugly and evil—in stark contrast.

But then those images also become less clear, and through the murk we begin to see earth again. No longer a lone body, but now an ambulance with lights flashing, and family and caregivers are surrounding the stricken man. And with a shock—a literal shock to his system—the man comes back to life.

Rushed to the hospital, he has an operation to address his wounded heart. The next minutes in the film are the strongest in the story, as the man knows that he has come close to death and wants to know what the images he saw mean—for his life.

An Anglican clergyman comes to visit him in the hospital, offering pastoral care. But it is the man with the mended heart who asks the most important questions. He wonders what he has seen, the images of good and evil so plain before him as he wandered up and out of his body. And so he asks the clergyman about something he has read in the Thirty-nine Articles—the historic doctrines of the Anglican Church—in particular about its statements on the reality of hell. He is certain that he was very close to its gates.

The clergyman takes the book from the man, reads the words himself, and says, “1571.... It’s a bit out-of-date, don’t you think?”

Over the last months I have thought of this film and its conversation many times, as I

have listened to the debates in the press, online, and among friends about the present and future of the Anglican Communion. At heart, of course, it is historical hubris and theological naïveté of a malicious sort that makes it possible to say with seeming seriousness, “It’s a bit out-of-date, don’t you think?”

And yet to read the reports from the less-than-orthodox bishops in the Episcopal Church USA, in no uncertain terms that is what they are saying to themselves and the watching world. The deposit of faith prized over time is “a bit out-of-date.” What true Christians in the third century and the thirteenth century believed about God, human nature, and history, about heaven, hell, and salvation, is no longer acceptable in our so-sophisticated post-Enlightenment world. In words very much like that, the American bishops overwhelmingly thumbed their noses at history and the Anglican Communion worldwide—with special scorn for the theological and moral out-of-dateness in the two-thirds world churches—in their decisions this summer to rewrite the creed and confession of the Church with regard to human sexuality. All in the name of making it more “up-to-date,” I am sure they would say.

This all came home to me with painful poignancy this fall when one afternoon I stopped at the Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria, VA, a seminary of the Episcopal Church USA. Some say it is the best-endowed seminary in America; its beautiful campus reflects the history and wealth of that possibility. The seminary’s library is a great resource to many from across the city, and they generously allow people in to read and study. On many days over many years I have been graced by that kindness.

After I found what I was looking for, and was making my way out, I saw a row of used books for sale, a temptation I rarely resist. On the bottom shelf, there it was: a real find. When I opened it up, I saw that in fact it really was a first edition of C.S. Lewis’s *The Abolition of Man*.

With a hidden smile, I paid my quarter, and walked out, thinking with some sadness that that book's wisdom—written 60 years ago—was at the heart of the crisis in the Anglican world today. And the VTS library was letting the book go for a quarter, apparently not having any idea what they were losing— which was a mooring in meaning and reality and truth. Lewis called it the abolition of man.

[I assume no malice on the part of the librarians, for a moment. The library may have all it needs of Lewis's work, even first editions. And so their decision could have been simple generosity.]

Lewis wrote the book as a public square argument, an apologetic for the wider world. In it he takes up a text in use in British schools in the 1940s; he calls it *The Green Book*, written by authors he names Gaius and Titius. His unwillingness to name names gives us an important window into Lewis; he was not out to pick a fight with particular people so much as he wanted to raise the flag of concern about the spirit of the age, and its meaning for human life under the sun.

The heart of his critique is that the book in question is emblematic of a worldview being argued across British society, and in fact the Enlightenment-shaped world beyond Britain. Because there is nothing new under the sun— philosophically, politically, psychologically— the debates and positions sound so fresh, so cutting-edge, and yet they are the perennial conversations that sons of Adam and daughters of Eve have generation by generation. And that is true here as well. Mind vs. heart, thinking vs. feeling, rationalism vs. romanticism, the cerebral vs. the visceral; in every age they come to us with new faces and new force, and must be answered once again.

In our day we hear the argument run this way: it is facts not values that run the world. Facts, not values. The bifurcation itself is troubling, as it reflects a fragmented universe of learning and life that is foreign to the coherence of the Christian worldview, of the world that really is there. But it is the way we talk if we have been educated in the right places, if we have learned the rules of the game as it is played in polite society. That split has shaped the public square as we know it—in politics, economics, the media, and education.

Two generations later, as I have listened to students making their way through Washington, it is that issue that is the line in the sand, that is at the core of sustainable Christian faith in a secularizing, pluralizing world. Do we have trustworthy access to truth and meaning, or not? Or are we stuck, floundering in the facts/values morass, with a fragmented, incoherent, and compartmentalized faith as the only possibility? If students are not able to work their way through that conundrum, with its philosophical and sociological complexities, my judgment— sorrowful as it is— is that they will not make it into the maturity of faith, with belief and behavior twined together over a lifetime. The stakes are that high.

Not surprisingly, Lewis understood this. In the first chapter he sets forth his famous "Men Without Chests" argument: if contemporary learning addresses only the head—the seat of reason, the source of "facts"—and in so doing creates educational expectations about what really matters that in due course then shape society, we will find ourselves in cultural crisis because we will have lost crucial dimensions of what it means to be human, of what moral meaning can and must mean.

I had sooner play cards against a man who was quite skeptical about ethics, but bred to believe that 'a gentleman does not cheat,' than against an irreproachable moral philosopher who has been brought up among sharpers. In battle it is not syllogisms that will keep the reluctant nerves and muscles to their post in the third hour of the bombardment. The crudest sentimentalism (such as Gaius and Titius would wince at) about a flag or a country or a regiment will be of more use....The head rules the belly through the chest—the seat, as Alanus tells us, of Magnanimity, of emotions organized by trained habit into stable sentiments. The Chest—Magnanimity—Sentiment—these are the indispensable liaison officers between cerebral man and visceral man. It may even be said that it is by this middle element that man is man: for by his intellect he is mere spirit and by his appetite mere animal.

It may even be said that it is by this middle element that man is man. The stakes are that high.

(continued on page 10)

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The Abolition of Man, One More Time

(continued from page 9)

In Lewis's terms, the visceral or the "guts" can be just as overwhelming as the "brain," and so the need for a chest — character rightly formed — to mediate.

Lewis was wise enough to know that the weight of the world is never one-dimensional. His critique is more nuanced, as he is as concerned about "feelings" becoming dominant, as he is about "thinking" holding sway. And in the realm of ethics, even as the Church debates moral questions such as the meaning of sexuality, that lens shapes so much of what is heard, in conversations among friends, in the press, and even in the highest of ecclesiastical courts, viz. my "feelings" tell me, I "feel" that this is right. In Lewis's terms, the visceral or the "guts" can be just as overwhelming as the "brain," and so the need for a chest — character rightly formed — to mediate.

Creatively engaging his time, Lewis knew that the more didactic argument would only go so far, and so he wrote a more imaginative account of the same dilemma, calling it *That Hideous Strength*. (He actually saw these as companion volumes, to be read together.) The third in his "space trilogy," the story is set in the world of the university, full of itself and its ideas, spiritual temptations each one.

At the center of his story is an effort to control the world by "enlightened" people. The sort that are so sure of their brilliance, so certain of their schools and traditions and beliefs — unmediated as they are by Chests — that they are able to decide for the rest of us the nature of the good life, the path to human enlightenment.

Deliciously, Lewis calls them N.I.C.E. — the National Institute for Coordinated Experiments. In the perversity of the human heart, they in fact believe they are, nice, that is. They are the best and the brightest of their day, and it is that that is the temptation to Lewis's character, Professor Mark Studdock. Simply, sadly, he wants in, he wants to be part of "the inner ring" of the most highly educated and influential thinkers in society. After all, their plans will make a better world for everyone — if only those not-so-bright and not-so-highly-educated ones will just cooperate.

As he tells his tale, Lewis connects ideas with life, showing that ideas do in fact have legs. The intellectual arrogance of the N.I.C.E. crowd is its undoing, eventually, after much sadness and horror. Their beliefs about reality, meaning, and truth have consequences, for

themselves and for others. And the consequences are for curse, and not for blessing.

Lewis calls it "a fairy tale for grown-ups." If it only were. But, I suppose that is the best of a fairy tale, in every century and every culture. If we have ears to hear, we can hear the truth about ourselves and about the universe in which we live. Shakespeare was right, as usual: "The play's the thing to catch the conscience of the king" — as well as ordinary people like you and me, folk who are all too prone to think more highly of ourselves than we ought.

How can we eschew the pride of the *Bliss* clergyman, sure as he is that the core convictions of Christian faith and the moral life that flows out of it, are "a bit out-of-date" — without falling into the hole of our own hubris?

I think it is all in the Chest, so to speak. The "chest" was Lewis's metaphor for an understanding of character that is formed by what is real and true and right; and that assumes we have access to what is real and true and right, that we are not forlorn in the universe wondering who we are and how we are to live.

In *The Abolition of Man* he calls it the "tao," a universal vision of human flourishing, with real rights and real wrongs as the center of the good life for everyone everywhere. And it is that possibility which is obliterated in *That Hideous Strength*. N.I.C.E. is not "nice," in any morally meaningful sense of the word. With horror in his heart, Studdock begins to understand.

He saw clearly that the motives on which most men act, and which they dignify by the names of patriotism or duty to humanity, were mere products of the animal organism, varying according to the behavior pattern of different communities. But he did not yet see what was to be substituted for these irrational motives. On what ground henceforward were actions to be justified or condemned?

His question echoes across time and through every human heart. Without "chests" we lose our humanity, in Lewis's words, what makes man man.

Without a mooring in "mere Christianity" — the mainstream of historic orthodoxy, with settled convictions about moral meaning

shaped by Scripture and affirmed and interpreted in the creeds and confessions of the Church over time—we find ourselves asking Mark Studdock’s question, “On what ground henceforward were actions to be justified or condemned?” In the end are there other options than group-think or personal preference? the position that has the most votes wins or I-do-what-I-want-to-do-when-I-want-to-do-it?

Milan Kundera writes about this tension so tellingly in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, lamenting our century’s “profound moral perversity...everything is pardoned in advance, and so everything is cynically permitted.” If God has not spoken in a way that can be trusted, if the Bible is not true to the way the world really is, then we are left with the need for an updated faith, a brave new faith for a brave new world. And Bishop Spong was right, after all, in his audacious title, *Why Christianity Must Change or Die*.

But he wasn’t, and Lewis was. Writing fifty years before the notorious bishop, Lewis was amazingly prescient, able to see what ideas would mean for the generations that followed. Is the crisis in the Church today reflective of an abolition of man, and woman? Is mere Christianity and the vision of moral meaning which it both reflects and promotes “a bit out-of-date”? Are the beliefs and behaviors shaped by centuries of Christian commitment in need of review?

Years ago I dropped by to talk to the head of a school under the oversight of the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia. Our soon-to-be-freshman daughter was either going there or to our local public high school. With a long history and vaunted traditions, its size was a major draw to us. Rather than thousands in the classrooms and hallways, there would be a few hundred. But I wanted to talk to someone in charge, to take the pulse of its nature and direction, beyond what the brochures promised and the admissions officers promoted.

I had my conversation, and was satisfied that I knew what we were getting into—if we went forward and enrolled our daughter. All the way home I kept thinking to myself, “Yes, there is a cross on the building, yes there is required chapel... but at its heart the school is

at best sympathetic to transcendence—but it does not believe in truth.”

Then it seemed a fair reading on both the school and the Diocese of Virginia. Three children and years later, I am sad but sure that I had it right.

In this very fallen world, we live our lives in the now-but-the-not-yet of the kingdom, and so there is always something provisional and proximate about the choices we make. We use the word “trade-offs.” The hard questions for me as a father were: given the trade-offs, will it be worth it? can I live with the trade-offs, and still love God and my daughter with integrity—knowing that she will be exposed to a hollowed-out faith? Or is there something so damnable about the ethos of a school “sympathetic to transcendence—but that does not believe in truth” that should make me turn tail and run, taking my children with me? All of us make choices like that all the time, individually and corporately, in the church and in every other dimension of life.

And yet, and yet.

Whatever did happen to the man in *Bliss*? The one whose question about heaven and hell stumped his rector? When he heard that the Church believed it was all bunk anyway, that the beliefs embraced and embodied over time were “a bit out-of-date,” and not to be believed by serious people in serious trouble, he walked away.

With no mooring in mere Christianity, with no tethering to truths tested over time, all that is left is to step into the darkness—for the leaders of the wandering Episcopal Church and for any of us—hoping against hope that we will find our bliss.

Lewis called it the abolition of man. ■

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The Problem of Evil

(continued from page 5)

be a common nature that surrounds us:

As soon as we attempt to introduce the mutual knowledge of fellow creatures, we run up against the necessity of "Nature." People often talk as if nothing were easier than for two naked minds to meet and be aware of each other. But I can see no possibility of their doing so except in a common medium which forms their "external" world or environment.

The structure of the world provides the context for real moral decisions to be made. God could constantly intervene so that no evil consequences could follow from evil choices, but that would make the formation of character impossible. Lewis says that God could make it so that:

A wooden beam became as soft as grass when it was used as a weapon, and the air refused to obey me if I attempted to set it up in the sound waves that carry lies or insults. But such a world would be one in which wrong actions were impossible and in which therefore, freedom of will would be void.

Another writer, Gilbert Tennant, made a similar observation:

It cannot be too strongly insisted that a world which is to be a moral order must be a physical order characterized by law and regularity. The theist is only concerned to invoke the fact that law abidingness is an essential condition of the world being a theater of moral life. Without such regularity in physical phenomenon, there could be no probability to guide us: no prediction, no prudence, no accumulation of ordered experience, no pursuit of premeditated ends, no formation of habit, no possibility of character or culture. Our intellectual faculties could not have been developed...and without rationality, morality is impossible.

God could turn wooden beams into grass, turn bullets into marshmallows, and thus eliminate evil consequences, but then

what would that do to the seriousness of moral choices?

But couldn't God have created another kind of nature where things do not have the capacity to hurt us? I suppose we might conceive of such a world, but it would be hard to imagine. In this world, all good things have a potential for evil use or harm. Fire can be used for light, for cooking, for warmth, but it can also burn our bodies or possessions. Lewis points out "fire comforts that body at a certain distance, it will destroy it when the distance is reduced." Water can be used for drinking, swimming, boating, water-skiing, but it can also drown a person. Wood could be used, Lewis says, as a building beam or to hit a neighbor on the head. The same nature that can cause pain can cause pleasure. Our sexuality can bring great pleasure or cause great physical and emotional pain. Evil twists God's divinely intended uses of good creation into abuses that cause pain. Lewis writes in *The Screwtape Letters* (from a demon's point of view):

He's [God] a hedonist at heart. ... He makes no secret of it; at His right hand are 'pleasures forevermore.' ... He's vulgar, Wormwood. He has a bourgeois mind. He has filled His world full of pleasures. There are things for humans to do all day long... sleeping, washing, eating, drinking, making love, playing, praying, working. Everything has to be *twisted* before it's any use to us.

Could God create a world that had only the possibility of pleasure but not for pain? Perhaps so, but at that point we are in over our heads.

Soul Making

Paul Tournier in his book *Creative Suffering* argues that all great human leaders have had to overcome painful experiences in order to rise to their prominent leadership positions. To be without pain tends to keep your life on the surface of things. With pain you have the choice of how to face it—be overcome by it or rise above it. Pain presents an opportunity for victory or defeat. Above all, it wakes us up and makes us ask very basic questions that we

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might not ask otherwise. Lewis says in *The Problem of Pain*:

...pain insists on being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.... It plants the flag of truth within the fortress of a rebel soul.

Pain not only gets our attention, but it shatters the illusion that whatever things we have are enough to satisfy us. It is so very easy for us to divert or distract ourselves from looking at what is most important in life.

When we experience even relatively minor pain, say of a toothache, we cannot do much else till we get it relieved. And, many types of pain are far greater than a toothache. However, when we are in over our heads, in the depths of despair we cry out to God in a way that we seldom, perhaps never, do otherwise. Lewis quotes Augustine to the effect that: "God wants to give us something but cannot because our hands are full – there's nowhere for Him to put it."

Pain and suffering provide opportunities for heroism and for great good as we saw in the events surrounding September 11, 2001. Not only policemen and firemen but also many ordinary people gave their lives or worked to alleviate the pain of those involved. But, pain can also crush someone to the point of despair. There is in suffering the possibility of real gain or real loss. Lewis maintains that in this world we live in the "vale of soul-making" where we have serious choices and consequences over how we respond to evil.

Free will, natural law, and soul making are three lines along which believers have developed reasons why God may have permitted evil to be present in this world. However, even though we may be persuaded that the problem of evil is not a contradiction within theism, and that free will, natural law, and soul making give us some glimpse into those reasons, that does not solve once and for all our struggle with evil. Lewis wrote *The Problem of Pain* but also later wrote *A Grief Observed* where he wrestled with the emotional pain of the loss of his wife. Having intellectual answers does not prevent pain from intruding into our lives.

We have seen, then, the importance of evil as a clue to the cosmos, and a sketch of how Lewis addressed the intellectual problem of evil. This will provide a helpful framework for dealing with the problem of evil, pain, and suffering, but can never give specific reasons about why particular evils we encounter are permitted. In the Bible, Job never does get an answer as to why he suffered, only a series of questions from God that showed Job how little he understood. There were reasons, which the reader learns in the beginning of the saga, but which are never revealed to Job. Job learns to trust in God who knows why.

Corrie Ten Boom, the Dutch Christian who with her family helped Jews escape Nazi-occupied Holland in WWII, spent ten months in German prison camps. Four of the seven imprisoned family members died, including Corrie's father and sister Betsie. After her release, Corrie shared her message of Jesus' love being greater than all suffering and evil. She often used "The Weaver" poem in her messages:

*My life is but a weaving between my Lord and me.
I cannot choose the colors, He worketh steadily.
Oft times he weaveth sorrow, and I in foolish pride,
Forget He sees the upper, and I the underside.*

*Not till the looms are silent and the shuttles cease to fly,
Will God unroll the carvans and explain the reason why
The dark threads are as needful in the Weaver's skillful hand
As the threads of gold and silver in the pattern He has planned.*

Author Unknown

In the end, all analogies fall short, because we find it impossible to think of any redeeming value of some particular evils. When we all experience pain, a little courage helps more (Lewis observes) than much knowledge, a little sympathy more than much courage, and the least amount of the love of God more than all. ■

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Heaven

by Richard Foster
Founder & Chair of RENOVARÉ



Richard Foster

Richard J. Foster is the founder and chair of Renovaré and author of six books including *Celebration of Discipline*, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, and *Streams of Living Water*, which effectively promote personal spiritual renewal. From his base in Denver, Colorado, where he and his wife Carolyn live, Richard travels throughout the world, speaking and teaching on the spiritual life.

*We are unceasing spiritual beings
with an eternal destiny in
God's great universe.*

The following article is reprinted by permission from the Renovaré publication *Perspective*.

Heaven is, I believe, the heart's deepest longing! First, let me remind you of our touchstone concept: "We are unceasing spiritual beings with an eternal destiny in God's great universe."

The Absolute Realities

Some day in some obscure magazine you will read that I have died. But, of course, nothing will be further from the truth. At that moment I will be more alive than ever. To be sure, my physical body that is so much a part of who I am right now will die—it will have served its purpose. But my spirit will live on...forever. This is the reality of who I am as an unceasing spiritual being. This is what is true about me. You too. Ten thousand years from now we will continue living. You better get accustomed to the fact that you cannot cease to exist. So, deal with it. And plan for it. Let's get beyond our petty one-year...five-year...ten-year plan for life and start working on our ten-thousand-year plan!

God and life in the kingdom of God are the absolute realities that we can bank on. Really. Nothing in our universe is more real, more absolute, more certain. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the signpost of our future. And the indwelling and empowering Holy Spirit is "the earnest of our inheritance" to use the phrase of St. Paul (Eph. 1:14). We have the down payment now of the life that is coming in its fullness in heaven.

And even here on earth heaven has its outposts, preeminently in the presence of the living Christ in the Eucharist.

Life in the kingdom of God then begins here, now, and continues in completed form in the age to come. Hence, what we call death is, for the disciple of Jesus, merely a minor transition from this life to greater LIFE. John the Beloved writes, "And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3). Eternal life is knowing by experience the triune God, and so eternal life begins here, now. We can know God right where we are and enter into life in the kingdom of God. Here. Now. Through Jesus.

Training for Reigning

What we are engaged in here and now is a disciplined training for reigning. A time is coming when we will see his face and his name will be written on our foreheads, "And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever" (Rev. 22:4-5 italics added). With Christ as our sovereign head we will one day be reigning "forever and ever." Now, "forever and ever" is a long time. Don't you think a little training is in order for such reigning? I'm afraid that as the situation now stands I just might make a real mess of things if I were put in charge of even a very small kingdom! So you and I are now training for reigning, learning from our ever-living Teacher Jesus how this reigning business is done properly. This reigning, you see, is our destiny.

I hope you immediately recognize what a stark contrast this vision of heaven is to the other major world-view contenders. For Hinduism our destiny is to merge ourselves with the One, as a drop of water would be absorbed into the ocean. For Buddhism our destiny is to extinguish desire as you might

blow out the flame of a candle. For Atheism our destiny is death; we arise out of the cosmic slime, go around once, and then die which is the end of it all. In contrast, for disciples of Jesus our destiny is reigning in the new heaven and the new earth . . . reigning in such a way that there is an ever deepening extension of individual, personal relationship of love with God and others. Forever.

The Resurrection Body

Now, this stress upon our individuality and personhood is important. We will not be unrecognizable, disembodied spirits. Nor will we go through an endless series of reincarnations which obliterate our personhood. No, there will be a personal and individual continuation of ourselves after death. This is the incarnational reality of the resurrection body. Our wise teacher Paul puts it this way:

There are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another....So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15: 39-44).

This resurrection body will be recognizable and consistent with who we are here and now, just as Jesus's resurrection body was recognizable and consistent with who he was in the flesh. Listen to Paul once again:

we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: "Death has been swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:51-54).

Heaven Proper

As to heaven proper my tendency is to defer

to the wise biblical observation, "no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor. 2:9, Isa. 64:4). Personally, I am content to leave it at that. However, since many would like more I will make a few educated guesses.

- ◆ Heaven will be brimming full of interesting people and landscape and creatures of many kinds.
- ◆ Learning and working and developing all manner of skills will be part of the joy of heaven.
- ◆ "Boring" will be the domain and experience of hell, not heaven.
- ◆ "Fellowship" and "community" will be experienced realities in heaven which will take on multi-dimensional meanings and ever richer complexity.
- ◆ We will learn to receive and give love in ways unimaginable to us right now. As Jonathan Edwards put it; "They shall see every thing in God that gratifies love. They shall see in him all that love desires...God will make ineffable manifestations of his love to them. They shall see as much love in God towards them as they desire; they neither will nor can crave any more."
- ◆ The "beatific vision" will be both wonderfully approachable and all-consuming. To borrow the words of Carol Zaleski commenting on Dante's vision of paradise:

...what we have...is a complex trinitarian dance of lights, a luminous and effervescent assembly, rather than a single searing radiance.

See you in heaven!



This resurrection body will be recognizable and consistent with who we are here and now, just as Jesus's resurrection body was recognizable and consistent with who he was in the flesh.

Eat This Book

(continued from page 7)

experience with language is “after Babel.” Much of our experience with language is with its misuse. We cannot assume that any word that we assume we know is identical with that same word when it occurs in the text. And it is disconcerting to find that a word that is used one way on page 26 is used in quite a different way on page 72.

Language is also constantly changing, in constant flux. If a word was used one way last week, it cannot be depended upon to be used the same way next week. And we have two and three thousand years of “weeks” separating us from the biblical text.

Because of all this, exegesis must not be slighted. The scriptural text is complex and demanding. The primary witnesses to God’s revelation are the Old and New Testaments: Torah and Prophets and Writings from the Old Testament; Gospels, Letters, and Apocalypse in the New. Written in Hebrew and Aramaic and Greek, languages that have, as all languages do, their own peculiar way of inflecting nouns, conjugating verbs, inserting prepositions in odd places, and arranging words in a sentence. Written on parchment and papyri. Written with pen and ink. Written in Palestine and Egypt and Syria and Greece and Italy.

Not all of us have to know all of this in order to read Holy Scripture formationally. Exegesis is not in the first place a specialist activity of scholars, although we very much need these scholars working on our behalf. We are not, after all, deciphering hieroglyphics as some would have it. Exegesis is simply responding adequately (which is not simple!) to the demand that words make on us, that *language* makes on us. The Reformers insisted on what they called the “perspicacity” of Scripture, that the Bible is substantially intelligible. It is essentially open to our understanding without recourse to academic specialists or a privileged priesthood:

...those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due course of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them (*The Westminster Confession* I. vii).

But that doesn’t mean that much care is not required. Each book has its own way about it, and generally a careful reader begins to learn how to read a book by slowly and carefully poking around in it for a very long time until a

way is found. A careful reader (an exegete!) will proceed with caution, allowing the book itself to teach us how to read it. For it soon becomes obvious that our Holy Scriptures are not composed in a timeless, deathless prose, a hyperspiritual angel language with all the quirks and idiosyncracies of local history and peasant dialect expunged. There are verbs that must be accurately parsed, cities and valleys to be located on a map, and long-forgotten customs to be recovered.

This is an enormous inconvenience, particularly to those of us who feel an inclination and aptitude towards the spiritual. It is almost impossible for those of us who have picked up the word spiritual from hanging around church parking lots or off the internet not to feel that our attraction to the spiritual confers a slight edge of privilege to us, exempting us from the bother of exegesis. We sense that we are insiders to the ways of God; we get intuitions that confirm our ideas and insights. After that happens a few times, we feel we’ve graduated from tedious recourse to lexicons and grammars. We are, after all, initiates to the text who cultivate the art of listening to God whisper between the lines. It isn’t long, as newspaper columnist Ellen Goodman once put it, before we’re using the Bible more as a Rorschach test than a religious text, reading more into the ink than we read out of it.³ It isn’t long before we’re using the word spiritual to refer primarily to ourselves and our ideas, and only incidentally and by the way to God.

Inconvenient or not, we are stuck with the necessity of exegesis. We have a written word to read and to attend to. It is God’s Word, or so we believe, and we had better get it right. Exegesis is the care we give to getting the words right. Exegesis is foundational to Christian spirituality. Foundations disappear from view as a building is constructed but when builders don’t build a solid foundation, their building doesn’t last long.

Because we speak our language so casually, it is easy to fall into the habit of treating it casually. But language is persistently difficult to understand. We spend our early lives learning the language, and just when we think we have it mastered, our spouse says, “You don’t understand a thing I’m saying, do you?” We teach our children to talk and just about the time we think they might be getting it, they quit talking to us; and when we overhear them talking to their friends, we find we can’t understand more than one out of every eight or nine words they say. A close relationship doesn’t guarantee understanding. A long affection doesn’t guarantee understanding. In fact, the

It isn’t long, as newspaper columnist Ellen Goodman once put it, before we’re using the Bible more as a Rorschach test than a religious text, reading more into the ink than we read out of it.

closer we are to another and the more intimate our relations, the more care we must exercise to hear accurately, to understand thoroughly, to answer appropriately.

Which is to say, the more “spiritual” we become, the more care we must give to exegesis. The more mature we become in the Christian faith, the more exegetically rigorous we must become. This is not a task from which we graduate. These words given to us in our Scriptures are constantly becoming overlaid with personal preferences, cultural assumptions, sin distortions, and ignorant guesses that pollute the text. The pollutants are always in the air, gathering dust on our Bibles, corroding our use of the language, especially the language of faith. Exegesis is a dustcloth or, better, a scrub brush scouring the words clean.

Exegesis is the farthest thing from pedantry; exegesis is an act of love. It means loving the one who speaks the words enough to want to get the words right. It is respecting the words enough to use every means we have to get the words right. Exegesis is loving God enough to stop and listen carefully. It follows that we bring the leisure and attentiveness of lovers to this text, cherishing every comma and semicolon, relishing the oddness of this preposition, delighting in the surprising placement of this noun. Lovers don’t take a quick look, get a “message” or a “meaning” and then run off and talk endlessly with their friends about how they feel.

Not that there are not so-called exegetes who do just that – treat the Bible as if it were a warehouse of information, oblivious to the obvious – that it is given to us as a text intended to form a whole life to the glory of God. A hundred and fifty years ago when such arid and depersonalized knowledge was a pall on the spiritual life of England, George Eliot created the character of Causubon (in her novel *Middlemarch*) to pillory this sacrilege of intellect. Her contemporary Robert Browning trumped her in his poem “A Grammarian’s Funeral,” mocking the pretentious but lifeless old exegete who “decided not to Live but Know.”

He “settled *Hoti’s* business – let it be! –
Properly based *Oun* –
Gave us the doctrine of the enclitic *De*,
Dead from the waist down.”⁴

In our own century, Marianne Moore used the metaphor of a steamroller (in her poem, “To A Steamroller”) to expose this heavy-handed and spiritless violation of text:

*Exegesis is the
farthest thing
from pedantry;
exegesis is an act
of love. It means
loving the one
who speaks the
words enough to
want to get the
words right.*

The illustration is nothing to you without the application. You lack half wit. You crush all the particles down into close conformity, and then walk back and forth on them.

Sparkling chips of rock
are crushed down to the level of the parent block.

Were not “impersonal judgment in aesthetic matters, a metaphysical impossibility,” you

might fairly achieve it. As for butterflies, I can hardly conceive of one’s attending upon you, but to question the congruence of the complement is vain, if it exists.⁵

Exegesis does not mean mastering the text, it means submitting to it; not taking charge of it and imposing my knowledge on it, but entering the world of the text and letting the text “read” me. Exegesis is an act of sustained humility: There is so much about this text that I don’t know, that I will never know. Christians keep returning to it, with all the help they can get from grammarians and archaeologists and historians and theologians, letting themselves be formed by it.

Spirituality without exegesis gets sappy and soupy. Spirituality without exegesis becomes self-indulgent. Without disciplined exegesis, spirituality develops into an idiolect in which I define all the key verbs and nouns out of my own experience. And prayer ends up limping along in sighs and stutters. ■

¹ Austin Farrer, *The Glass of Vision* (Westminster: Dacre, 1948), p. 36.

² See my reworking of the classic discipline in “Caveat Lector,” *Crux* 32 (March 1996), pp 2-12.

³ Ellen Goodman, *The Baltimore Sun*, June 15, 1979.

⁴ Robert Browning, *The Poems and Plays* (New York: The Modern Library, 1934), p. 169.

⁵ Marianne Moore, *The Complete Poems* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967), p. 84.

Profiles in Faith: Susanna Wesley

(continued from page 1)



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her father's congregation, Daniel Defoe, who later wrote *Robinson Crusoe*.

Both Protestant Reformation and Puritanism emphasized the importance of conscience as arbiter of an individual's actions. Susanna's Puritan father often preached on freedom of conscience, and she certainly inherited his independence of mind and his willingness to dissent from religious practices when conscience dictated.

The mind and conscience of the young Susanna were informed by careful Puritan education. Susanna described the religious practice she observed growing up:

I will tell you what rule I observed...when I was young, and too much addicted to childish diversions, which was this—never to spend more time in mere recreation in one day than I spent in private religious devotions.

The exact nature of her education is not known, but Susanna used the English language with great precision and had a theological knowledge superior to that of many pastors of that day. The Annesley household provided, in Susanna's words, "the foundations of solid piety...in sound principles and virtuous dispositions."

Susanna exercised an independence of conscience that would take her from Puritan Nonconformity into the Church of England. She made this decision when "not full thirteen" even though her father was a prominent Presbyterian pastor. This teenager demonstrated a strength of decision relatively unheard of in so young a child.

On November 12, 1688, at St. Marylebone Church, London, Susanna married Samuel Wesley, who had previously renounced his Puritan Nonconformist background to become an Anglican priest. Samuel became Anglican curate of two small parishes, rector at one other, and chaplain of a Man-of-War ship, but he spent most of his years as rector at Epworth in Lincolnshire, England. The rectory and St. Andrew's Parish Church in Epworth are places of Methodist pilgrimage today.

Samuel and Susanna had 17—some accounts say 19—children, but only 10 survived infancy. Both Samuel and Susanna

were attracted to the sense of Christian continuity in the Church of England, and they wanted to avoid the religious controversies that had sprung forth from Puritanism and other dissenting bodies.

Susanna was not afraid to stand by her convictions no matter the cost. This led to marriage difficulties for a time, when for conscience sake, she could not say "Amen" to the prayers her husband offered on behalf of the king. This had to do with the exile of James II and the Glorious Revolution under King William and Queen Mary. George Hicks, a non-juring Bishop, urged her, "Wherefore good Madam stick to God and your conscience which are your best friends, whatever you may suffer for adhering to them." Samuel's response was, "If we have two kings, we must have two beds."

Susanna claimed that a husband "has no power over the conscience of his wife," and "I value neither reputation, friends, or anything, in comparison of the singular satisfaction of preserving a conscience void of offence towards God and man." These are remarkable statements of a woman who wanted to apply views on Christian liberty to women. Her convictions on the freedom of conscience may have influenced her son John to undertake reforms in the Church of England. Eventually Susanna and Samuel were reconciled, and, in time, John Wesley, the future leader of the Evangelical movement in England, was born in 1703.

Susanna in a Pastoral Role

As a mother and the wife of an Anglican rector, Susanna exercised a strong pastoral role in her home. To help her children learn the faith, she wrote a detailed and lengthy exposition of the Apostles' Creed. She started "the custom of singing psalms at beginning and leaving school, morning and evening." She had her older children instruct the younger children in Bible study and prayers before breakfast and in the evening. Every evening she provided an hour or so to discuss with each of her sons and daughters their "principal concerns," providing them her spiritual direction.

In 1712 Susanna wrote her husband of her pastoral concerns for his parishioners:

At last it came into my mind, though I am not a man, nor a minister of the gospel, and so cannot be engaged in such a worthy employment ...yet...I might do somewhat more than I do...I might pray more for the people, and speak with more warmth to those with whom I have an opportunity of conversing.

A more pronounced pastoral dimension of ministry developed when Samuel was away at the Convocation of the Church of England in London for several months at a time. Susanna for some time had regularly gathered her household, including the children and servants, to sing psalms and listen to printed sermons, after which she would read the service for Evening Prayer from the Book of Common Prayer. During the winter of 1710-1711 some of the Wesleys' neighbors joined in these times as well. She wrote that one local boy

...told his parents; they first desired to be admitted. Then others who heard of it begged leave also [requested admittance]. So our company increased to about thirty...

In his absence, Samuel paid curates to perform his priestly duties. In the winter of 1711-1712, an ineffective curate was in charge, and people began to flock to Susanna's kitchen prayer meeting. Samuel's associate, Godfrey Inman, wrote to him relaying the fact that his wife was drawing more townspeople to the Sunday night meetings in her home than were coming to the services which Godfrey led in church on Sunday morning.

Susanna explained in a letter to her husband:

With those few neighbours who then came to me I discoursed more freely and affectionately than before; I chose the best and most awakening sermons we had, and I spent more time with them in such exercises.... Since this, our company has increased every night; for I dare deny none who ask admittance. Last Sunday I believe we had above two hundred, and many went away for want of room.

Although not an ordained priest, Susanna was offering the parishioners a complete Anglican service by reading prayers and a sermon of her husband. When her husband wrote her voicing the objections of Inman, Susanna wrote back to him:

If you do, after all, think fit to dissolve this assembly, do not tell me that you desire me to do it, for that will not satisfy my conscience: but send me your positive command, in such full and express terms as may absolve me from all guilt and punishment for neglecting this opportunity of doing good when you and I shall appear before the great and awful tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In response to this letter, Samuel allowed his wife's meetings to continue until his return home.

Susanna was not trying to become a priest, rather she was attempting to engage in the evangelism of her neighbors at a time when families who seldom went to church were willing to attend her home services. Only 20 or 25 would attend the curate's service, but as many as three hundred came to her kitchen meetings. The kitchen meetings came to an end when her husband returned to resume his duties as rector of the parish. Her reasons for creating a house meeting were the salvation of souls, her care of her children's spiritual development, and a desire to observe the Sabbath strictly. Later John Wesley wrote that his mother "had been in her measure and degree a preacher of righteousness."

Although discontinued, Susanna's kitchen meetings made a lasting impression on young John. One can find in her rectory kitchen meetings the genesis of Methodist class meetings. Both her meetings and the later Methodist classes were not conducted in place of the official services of the Church of England. Rather, they were what we might today call para-church groups to encourage the spiritual growth of faithful Anglicans without being in competition with established services. Susanna had referred to the people who composed these meetings as "our Society," a reference later reflected in her sons'

(continued on page 20)

In the winter of 1711-1712, an ineffective curate was in charge, and people began to flock to Susanna's kitchen prayer meeting.

Profiles in Faith: Susanna Wesley

(continued from page 19)

organization of Methodists into societies, classes, and bands.

Her sons John and Charles also witnessed their mother's effectiveness as a lay person in leading worship and teaching. Interestingly, after John had been ordained and, in time, commenced preaching in the open fields like the Evangelicals, he was horrified over allowing lay people to preach. Susanna herself was blessed by the preaching of a Methodist layman named Thomas Maxfield, probably in 1740, when she lived at the Foundry in London. When John seemed determined to stop Maxfield's unauthorized preaching, Susanna warned,

My son, I charge you before God, beware what you do; for Thomas Maxfield is as much called to preach the gospel as ever you were.

John followed her advice. His subsequent use of lay preachers was the genius of Methodism. This movement produced more lay preachers than denominations that required university-trained clergy. The lay people often spoke on the level of miners and farmers in ways that erudite clergy found difficult.

John Wesley also remembered his mother's success during her kitchen prayer meetings as a female religious leader. Some scholars believe this may have influenced him to allow female lay preachers in Methodist societies even though he did not advocate the ordination of women to the Anglican priesthood. He allowed women to exercise leadership roles in Methodist class and band meetings. Female lay preachers had Wesley's support, encouragement, and approval to travel and preach. However, John Wesley's support for women was not shared by other male leaders of Methodism. In fact, after his death, female preachers were censured.

A Female Theologian of Practical Divinity

Within the domestic sphere of her home Susanna tried to be a lay theologian and educator of her many children. Adam Clarke (c. 1760-1832) in his *Memoirs of the Wesley Family* noted: "If it were not unusual to apply

such an epithet to a woman, I would not hesitate to say she was an able divine." Her writings now fill a published volume. As a spiritual guide Susanna composed letters filled with wisdom for her children. Seventy-three of these letters still exist and attest to her brilliant mind and insight as a counselor. She wrote three theological compositions for her children to use in their religious instruction: an exposition of the Apostles' Creed, a commentary on the Decalogue, and a dialogue on natural and revealed religion. Copies of all three have survived. She taught her children each day from morning until noon and from two until five in the afternoon and used these occasions to teach theology. In a 1709 letter to her son Samuel Wesley, Jr., Susanna mentioned a manual of theology that she was writing in which she described her reasons for believing in God, her motives for embracing the truth of Jesus Christ, and an account of why she had left the Puritan Dissenters for the Church of England. Unfortunately, these were destroyed in the Epworth rectory fire.

Coming from Puritan and Anglican backgrounds, Susanna was extremely well read. While growing up, she had access to her father's large library of English divinity (Anglican, Catholic, and Puritan). Her devotional journals during her Anglican years reveal the writers that influenced her: Blaise Pascal, Anglican theologians William Beveridge and George Bull, philosophers Plato, Aristotle, John Locke, George Berkeley, and Seneca, and spiritual writers such as Thomas à Kempis, Jeremy Taylor, Richard Baxter, and Juan de Castaniza. Her son John later published abridged versions of some of the spiritual classics that she had recommended to him.

Susanna's theological shift to Methodism needs comment. Her son John came to an experience of the assurance of salvation at a Moravian meeting at Aldersgate Street on May 24, 1738. He wrote:

I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

She wrote three theological compositions for her children to use in their religious instruction: an exposition of the Apostles' Creed, a commentary on the Decalogue, and a dialogue on natural and revealed religion.

This led him to preach on the new birth and the assurance of salvation.

A year before John's Aldersgate experience, Susanna wrote about her own views on justification by faith alone.

I verily think one great reason why Christians are so often subject to despond is that they look more to themselves than to their Saviour: they would establish a righteousness of their own to rest on, without advertising enough to the sacrifice of Christ, by which we alone are justified before God.

Then in August 1739 she had her own experience of personal assurance of salvation that God had forgiven her all of her sins, whereas previously she had reservations about this type of assurance. She described what happened at Holy Communion in 1739:

When my son Hall [her daughter Martha's husband] was pronouncing those words, in delivering the cup to me, "The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee," the words struck through my heart, and I knew God for Christ's sake had forgiven me all my sins.

Following this conversion Susanna affiliated herself with the Methodist movement of renewal and its doctrines. As the Great Awakening spread under the leadership of both George Whitefield and John Wesley, so debates over the question of predestination caused controversy. Whitefield espoused Calvinism. Susanna rose to the defense of her son's Arminian theology by publishing anonymously a pamphlet entitled *Some Remarks on a Letter from the Reverend Mr. Whitefield to the Rev. Mr. Wesley, in a Letter from a Gentlewoman to her Friend*. Although accustomed to the reserved ceremony of the Church of England, this elderly widow found she could adapt to the outdoor preaching of the Methodists, their extemporaneous prayers, lay preachers, Evangelical theology, and fiery evangelism. Perhaps she might have been a more prolific apologist for Methodism had she not died on July 23, 1742, just a few

years after the movement began in 1738.

As Susanna drew near to death, she did so with Christian assurance and triumph. John recorded:

Her soul was set at liberty. We stood around the bed and fulfilled her last request, uttered a little before she lost her speech, "Children, as soon as I am released, sing a psalm of praise to God."

She was buried in the Dissenters' cemetery at Bunhill Fields, opposite the spot where 36 years later the Methodists built Wesley's Chapel, City Road, London. Susanna was buried in the same cemetery with John Bunyan, John Owen, William Blake, Daniel Defoe, and Isaac Watts.

This mother of Methodism influenced her son John and future generations with respect to independence of conscience, ministry roles of women, and lay theologians. Susanna encouraged the laity to become theologians, to read the best philosophy, spirituality, and theology of their time, and to communicate this faith in a manner comprehensible to family members, parishioners, and the market place. Her writings are being rediscovered today and challenge women to become articulate teachers and defenders of the faith and effective theologians of "practical divinity." ■

For additional information, recommended books are:

Arnold A. Dallimore, *Susanna Wesley*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993.

Charles Wallace, Jr., *Susanna Wesley: The Complete Writings*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

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From Politics to Pampers

by Michelle Morgan Knott

2000 Fellows Class



Michelle Knott

Michelle Knott works full-time raising her two children, Sydney (2 years) and Charlie (9 months). She previously held various communications positions, including Press Secretary for the House Judiciary Committee. She also taught at Cornerstone Community School, a Christ-centered elementary school that primarily serves underprivileged children on Capitol Hill. Michelle and her husband Kerry make their home in Arlington, Virginia.

It's not easy being a stay-at-home mom in Washington. Having jumped ship two years ago to raise my children, I'm slowly learning to reconcile two worlds—the world of politics and power at my doorstep, and the simple, rather gentle life of babies, toddlers, Cheerios, and crayons inside.

I sometimes feel out of step with my contemporaries—a bit like Laura Ingalls Wilder in the big city.

I used to have a normal job like everyone else in this town. As a Congressional staffer, I knew my way around Rayburn, rode the subway, and ate my share of vending machine dinners working late into the night. I worked for a public relations firm, taught elementary school, did communications for an internet start-up, did the Hill thing, and even impeached a president.

Then I traded in a high-profile, hard-driving job working for one boss for a low-profile, exhausting job working for two small, but demanding bosses.

There's a humbling aspect to motherhood, in addition to all the menial labor for which you never get paid. It's the strangely inadequate sounding answer at a cocktail party when asked, "What do you do?" "I'm at home with two kids." Sometimes I feel like saying, "But I used to have a life!"

Then I remember a lesson God has been teaching me: *My worth doesn't lie in how impressive, powerful or noteworthy my career may be.* In fact, if the prestige of my job in any way makes me smug or puffed up, I am sinning.

It's hard to be smug about being a mom. Something about changing dirty diapers just cuts you down to size. Folding laundry, cleaning the day's dishes, and picking up toys are not prestigious jobs—but as a mom, you do them. You can complain every day, or you can aim to glorify God with a beautifully folded stack of clothes for your husband and dinner on the table for your kids. It's a lot more pleasant to embrace the job than to curse it.

That's fine at home, but how to handle that pesky cocktail party question? All of a sudden—when someone asks, "What do you do all day long?" and you wonder if there are antennae

popping out of your head by the look on their face—it's hard to tick off your mundane accomplishments with a smile. For a moment, your life seems downright pathetic, particularly when you remember your former job full of quantifiable successes.

But then a neat thing happens. You remember: my worth doesn't lie in how impressive, powerful or noteworthy my career may be. My worth lies in being a follower of Jesus Christ—forgiven and filled with the Holy Spirit to become a new creation.

Once you realize your own worth hinges on Christ and not your resume, you are freed up to love and appreciate others—regardless of their job or standing in life. A janitor, a senator, a teacher, a lobbyist—all are equally precious in God's eyes and equally deserving of our respect.

What a refreshing way to approach a cocktail party. It's not all about me, and how can I cozy up to the most powerful people of D.C. It's all about Jesus—how can I love others as a reflection of His love for me... and maybe even strike up a conversation about how He's changed my life?

If you think about it, only two things in this world will last forever—God's Word and people. So I believe a wise investment of time, money and resources would include both. My kids fall into that category. They're going to live for eternity and any energy I put into steering them toward Jesus Christ (so they can spend it with Him) and toward a meaningful life on earth—will be eternally well-spent.

And that brings me to my second lesson learned: *Investing my life in my children is worthwhile and rewarding.*

Henry Ward Beecher said it best: "Nothing can compare in beauty and wonder and admirableness, and divinity itself, to the silent work in obscure dwellings of faithful women bringing their children to honor, virtue, and holiness."

Being at home with children (in what sometimes feels like obscurity) is not only beneficial to them, it helps us as parents fulfill a mandate of Scripture:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. *Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.* Deuteronomy 6:5-7 [italics added]

Since I'm with my kids all the time, I'm able to teach my children about Jesus throughout the day. Before Sydney turned two, she knew that the Bible was God's Word, and could sing along with "Jesus is the rock of my salvation." (Although her version made Jesus the "rocket.") She knew that God makes the thunder, the lightning, strawberries, and even Sydney herself. Without me formally teaching her, she had already learned some important truths—namely that God made everything and He loves us.

Being at home gives me a natural entrée to discuss spiritual things without it being overbearing or forced. We sing hymns in the kitchen while cooking, recite our verse for the day when we wake up, and pray and thank Jesus for our food. As the kids get older, we can do Bible studies together and talk about the gospel in more detail. And as parents, Kerry and I pray often that the Lord will draw our children to Him and that they will make a decision to follow Him at a very young age.

A mother who chooses to disciple her children like this can have a lasting impact not only on their life, but on their children and future generations as well. Indeed, seeing the authentic faith of my mother, grandmother and great grandmother helped me to understand what it meant to follow Jesus Christ. The Bible speaks of the great influence women had on Timothy's faith as well. Paul wrote, "I know that you sincerely trust the Lord, for you have the faith of your mother, Eunice, and your grandmother, Lois." (II Timothy 1:5) That verse is taped in front of my kitchen sink to remind me that faithfulness today will bear fruit in the future.

Lest you think I'm a spiritual giant, there are many days I want to give up. Sometimes I think that if gypsies came to my door, I might be tempted to sell my kids... for a good price! As a true people person, it's easy to feel a bit isolated when I'm home with them.

That's why it has been very exciting to discover my third lesson: *My neighborhood is a booming mission field.*

My neighbors are wonderful people, many of whom are around during the day. They range from retirees to other moms and kids. Sydney, Charlie, and I often bring plates of cookies and a smile, hoping to share the love of Jesus with them.

We've also gone door-to-door and put together a directory for our street. We hosted a fall block party in our front yard, and we got to know 75 of our neighbors much better. We pray that these efforts will lead to deeper friendships and meaningful conversations down the road.

Even workmen who come to the house often hear inspiring messages I'm listening to on tape, and they go away with some fresh-baked goodies and hopefully some kindness as a reflection of the Lord.

During the summer, we hosted Young Life Bible studies at our house. This was a perfect ministry for me, because I didn't have to find a babysitter. The Young Life kids came to our house on Tuesday nights, and we got to pray for them and participate in their meetings. Who knows where these friendships will go in the future as we reach out to and mentor high school kids?

All in all, once I accepted this stage of life, I discovered it's a delightful chapter. Isn't so much of life like that? Once we get over our hang-ups of what others will think of us, we often find that we're quite happy. It really doesn't matter how the world rates us. If we're doing God's will, we can rest in His plan and be freed up to experience His joy.

I've even found that cocktail parties are nothing to fear. In fact, children are a great common denominator. I've had very animated conversations with powerful Washingtonians about...kids. For instance, the House Majority Leader told me some of his fondest memories are of rocking his baby to sleep in the middle of the night while the moonlight streamed in through the window. Another time, an NBC producer told me that having a baby is the only thing in life that truly lives up to the hype. In many ways, talking about children is a refreshing break from the debates on polarizing issues we often face.

Somewhere down the road, I may get a "normal" job again and so will begin another chapter in my life. But, in the meantime, I am thankful for the little ones who consume my life now. As I work to teach them about my Lord, I've discovered an added benefit... my Lord is using them to teach me about Him. ■

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Henry Ward Beecher



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