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# Dialogue

Vol. 21, No. 3

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—Tim Kredit

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Cover by Mark Yarhouse



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# Editorial

One of the most frightening aspects of modern “conservatism” is not so much the positions taken by conservatives, but the vehemence and closed-mindedness with which some people defend their positions. Inevitably any discussion with such people turns bitter not over the issues at hand but at a failure to listen to *any* argument offered. It is always difficult to discuss with someone who would rather misunderstand and fight than listen, try to understand, and respect.

In the recent election, the term “liberal” became an epithet and something candidates avoided association with at any cost. Anyone with a “liberal” idea or thought became easy prey for “conservatives” who were quickly and easily able to incite the scorn and rally the unspoken sympathies of the silent majority. This development, unfortunately, has made it easy for anyone with a radical argument who doesn’t want to discuss but to fight to engage in *ad hominem* argumentation using libel, slander and malicious deceit with relative freedom under the banner of “conservatism.” Prof. Don Oppewal in his paper, “A Handbook to Heterodox Excision,” reprinted in the October issue of *Dialogue*, identified the steps available to anyone interested in so discrediting an opponent.

As the goal of such “conservatives” is not to learn or incorporate new ideas but to defend the old, it is not necessary to listen to arguments offered in attempts to persuade or define positions, but it is valuable to be familiar with those arguments. A basic understanding of the terminology of the issue at hand is necessary to be able to adequately confuse the terms of discussion, and warped understandings allow loud misrepresentations to be broadcast—misinterpretations which, shouted in simple and base language, are far easier to grasp and more available than the original arguments.

Probably the most frustrating problem in attempting to rationalize with such a “conservative” radical is that sometimes there is no true disagreement between the two parties involved. Arguments arise not from differences in beliefs, but in ideas and presentations of ideas. Yet the “conservative,” who is prone to demand that his and his only is the right to interpretation of a position, resists all attempts at reconciliation and forces the newly created fight out into the arena of public debate. He then rallies his invisible forces and calls down judgment on his opponent. Yet in doing so he often loses sight of the goals of discussion in pursuit of his own personal vengeance.

The church is particularly susceptible to such fights. Historically, the church has been involved in, if not the center of, many of western civilization’s most heated debates, from Galileo’s trial to the Scopes monkey trial. From a debating viewpoint this is understandable since those involved are concerned with issues of religious significance and feel it is their obligation to defend their beliefs with religious fervor beyond mere secular reasoning. Ironically, when a difference of opinion exists within the church, it is usually the side that behaves with the most Christian charity that becomes the target of derision and malice.

Fortunately it is possible to go too far. While Professor Oppewal sarcastically suggests that one can never use too much slander and libel or be too vehement, if one is too set on victory at any cost, one inevitably loses sight of the argument. In such cases the attacker is betrayed by the viciousness of his tactics. Anyone who attempts to decipher his arguments will realize they stem from confusion and anger rather than reason.

Yet there are still people who, although they may hold the same “conservative” positions, do not present them as vehemently. To respond to those people it is necessary to demonstrate a willingness to listen and a respect for their positions and hope that as you try to understand the value of their positions, they may understand and value yours.

It is traditionally over the failure to recognize these less vicious and overt “conservative” extremists that interdenominational and intradenominational schisms result. It is every Christian’s responsibility to defend against apostasy and heresy; therefore, when a confusion over doctrine or belief raises questions of legitimacy it is a real concern for all involved that the confusion be resolved in accordance with God’s will. God’s will, however, is not always clear, and it is usually a misunderstanding of God’s word that leads to confusion over his will. Just as a person may not appreciate the finer points of a poem written in a foreign language and may be tempted to deem it horribly confusing, it is difficult for those involved in theological discussion to concede that they may not fully appreciate God’s word. It is far easier to interpret in light of limited knowledge and understanding—far more difficult to concede authority and acknowledge someone else’s interpretation of a foreign matter.



Inevitably it is those institutions that encourage expression of opinion and foster open interpretation of God's word in intelligent and learned context that take the abuse for being "liberal." The root of the "conservative's" argument often targets the legitimacy of learned opinions—denouncing their authors not only for proposing ideas, but for presuming to be authoritative about them. This denunciation betrays a certain insecurity in the accuser. If we respond to such arguments in a conceited manner, we only verify the "conservative's" suspicions and add fuel to the fire, defining lines of attack and giving the attacker a focus. If, however, we choose not to respond to all, we also run the risk of appearing conceited and distant, as frustrating a response to discussion as the radical's failure to listen to reasonable argument. Only through careful consideration and respect of each other's positions may we hope to gain any credibility at all, and only through such correspondence may reconciliation be reached.

—JLG

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—Tim Van Noord



# CCM and Christian Spirituality

by Brian L. Plescher

Christian Contemporary Music (CCM) has fallen on hard times. It has been the perennial subject of a multi-faceted debate, particularly here at Calvin; an ensuing discussion attempts to answer questions about such things as the proper relationship between a Christian and the popular music culture, the purpose of artistic endeavor in general, and the Christian's call to share the glory of the Word of God—specifically how that mission ought to be inaugurated in the arts. These are but a few of the topics that revolve around the question of the validity of CCM. The question that I would like to put forth for consideration is the following: Why has CCM not found strong support at Calvin? After all, Calvin is a Christian environment, and CCM is certainly Christian; so, CCM ought to flourish at Calvin. This popular contention obviously lacks even initial plausibility. The truly engaging question is how we determine what is appropriate for the Christian community. How are Christians to relate to popular artistic culture? And what is it about CCM that causes such fierce disagreement?

Given that there is a great diversity of opinion, and that most members of the community have not aligned themselves with any particular position, my present intentions are not to pursue an empirically objective analysis of what the Calvin community believes about CCM (although this would be helpful), but my intentions are to approach the question of the validity of CCM through concerns that have been personally relevant to myself and others. So I hope to pursue this question through two related topics: 1) the theology of the suffering servant, and 2) the artistic and aesthetic responsibilities of the Christian.

What I have come to think of as the theology of the suffering

servant began to find its roots in a number of areas, particularly in my study of Russian literature and Orthodox theology, and also from the recent work of Nicholas Wolterstorff on a theology of social injustice; namely, "The Wounds of God: Calvin's Theology of social injustice," (*Reformed Journal*, June 1987), and *Lament for a Son*. My approach will be solely to focus on the latter, since an explanation of Orthodox spirituality would confuse rather than aid most readers. Once the basics of this theology of the suffering servant have been developed, I will find out whether or not CCM fits with this central notion of Christian spirituality. So what is it that Wolterstorff is after?

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*The truly engaging question is how we determine what is appropriate for the Christian community.*

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It is his claim that John Calvin presents a theology of the victim of social injustice that was developed in reaction to the medieval thought of grief and suffering, particularly that of St. Augustine as it is found in his *Confessions*. This autobiography is certainly the narrative of a suffering Christian. The reader is exposed to Augustine's grief over the death of a close friend, his regret for past experience, and most notably, his uncontrolled weeping over the loss of his mother. But, as Wolterstorff points out, Augustine's reaction to his grief about the death of a friend is a profoundly different response than his reaction to the death of his mother. These are Augustine's words in Book IV on his friend's loss:

*My heart was darkened over with sorrow, and whatever I looked at was death. My own*

*country was a torment to me, my own house was a strange unhappiness. All those things which we had done and said together became, now that he was gone, sheer torture to me... I had become a great riddle to myself and I used to ask my soul why it was sad and why it disquieted me so sorely. And my soul did not know what to answer.*

In the following chapters we find Augustine complaining about this grief. "But why am I saying all this? It is not the time now to be asking questions but for making my confession to you" (Book IV, 6). Augustine thought that his sobbing grief was wholly inappropriate; there is in grieving and suffering something essentially wrong and perverse. And Wolterstorff comments that "Between the grief and the writing, Augustine had embraced the Christian faith. His reason for exposing his bygone grief was to share with his readers his confession to God of the senselessness and sinfulness of a love so intense for a being so fragile that its destruction could cause such grief." But his reception of the Christian faith changes his response to suffering when he is grieving over the death of his mother in Book IX:

*I closed her eyes, and a great flood of sorrow swept into my heart and would have*





overflowed in tears. But my eyes obeyed the forcible dictate of my mind and seemed to drink that fountain dry. Terrible indeed was my state as I struggled so. And then, when she had breathed her last, the boy Adeodatus burst out into loud cries until all the rest of us checked him, and he became silent. In the same way something childish in me which was bringing me to the brink of tears was, when I heard the young man's voice, the voice of the hurt, brought under control and silenced.

And when commenting later about the nature of his grief, he hopes that others will weep with him, but not about the sin of suffering, but for the sin that is the cause of the suffering. That is the difference. ". . . and if [the reader] finds that I did wrong during this small portion of an hour for my mother. . . let him not despise me; let him rather, if he is a man of great charity, himself weep for my sins to you" (Book IX).

Augustine's conclusion is that human love, eros, ought to be set on something that would not change, something that remained stable despite the evil in the world. For Augustine that something was God. A human love for God is a love that cannot be broken. This is what Calvin reacts against. The main thrust in Calvin's commentary bears no resemblance whatsoever to Augustine: when a human being suffers, God suffers as well. When Russian Orthodox Christians have been trampled on and herded into work-camps because of their insistence of the Christian faith, God is trampled on and herded around as well. The dramatic suffering of the Orthodox Christian is complemented by the dramatic suffering of God, and Calvin's commentary on Habakkuk 2:6, claims Wolterstorff, "Not only is the perpetration of injustice against one's fellow human beings the infliction of suffering upon God. The cries of the victims are the very cry of God. The lament of the victims as they cry out 'How long?' is God's giving voice to his own lament," and Wolterstorff says that "We are to let our wounds bleed, our eyes tear." The difference between Augustine and Calvin is disparaging.

In conclusion to this important component of Calvinistic theology, we must come to understand and practice patience in our grieving. We should not, as Augustine believes, attempt to uproot our souls from our God-given nature. Human nature should not be struggled against when trying to overcome grief; it is part of what it is to be made in the image of God (Gen. 9:5, 6). Wolterstorff comments that "Calvinistic patience, then, is the paradoxical, unstable combination of grieving over the pain and deprivation that come one's way as one lives a life incorporating struggle for the gospel and for justice. . ."

This theology of the suffering servant is an essential component of Calvinistic theology, and of Christian thought in general. We have, in both Augustine and Calvin,



But, after this discourse, how does this theology have a relation to Christian Contemporary Music? I think that the point will become fairly clear. The question that we must now ask is whether or not CCM is part and parcel of the growth through suffering theme that is found in the Scriptures? Does the CCM community grieve

about the suffering from sin? Are the artists, and the music they create and perform, concerned about actively grieving in the Christian community? Do we all suffer together here? In order to approach this question, it is necessary to first concern ourselves with the claimed purpose of CCM, the lyrical and musical content, and the various beliefs of those who promote CCM.

From my experience and discussions with members of the Calvin community, it has become clear that those who promote CCM believe that it has two specific functions:

- 1) The purpose of CCM is to provide one way for Christian believers to present the Gospel to those who are not Christian. By using the genre of rock music, which includes everything from soft rock to heavy metal, the Christian witness gains the attention of the non-believer. Once this happens, the non-believer will hear the message of Jesus Christ as it is presented lyrically and given support by the music itself. In my view, this is the most important purpose.
- 2) The other purpose of CCM is to give spiritual support to Christians who are already spiritually healthy, or to encourage those Christians who are struggling with their faith.

And, I think, most Christian artists and those who support the industry honestly believe this. I do not think that all Christian musicians are in this for the money (although I have been told that some are); these purposes, for the most part, are not a facade to hide other motives. So I think that they are being quite honest about their purpose.

There is another strong belief in the CCM community that is of the most fundamental importance. It is some variation of this belief that, I believe, incites the emotions of those who are asking whether or not CCM is valid for the Christian community. In some variation or another, those in the CCM community believe that Christians ought to listen to CCM. There is a moral imperative here. The extreme form of this belief is that Chris-



tians should only listen to or perform (participate in) CCM and exclude all other secular music. The normative opinion is that Christians certainly cannot separate themselves from the world, and the result is that a Christian *ought* to participate in CCM, but the option to listen to other music is open to the spiritual risk-takers. The final option, one that I hardly ever encounter, is that CCM is just that, Christian music. It is appropriate for the Christian to participate in CCM, but there is no moral imperative.

My first criticism will deal with those who think that there is a moral imperative, and then I will return to our original question: Does the purpose of CCM have any

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*The final option, one that I hardly ever encounter, is that CCM is just that, Christian Music.*

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relation to the theology of the suffering servant? So how is a Christian to react to this moral imperative, irrespective of whether it is in the extreme or normative form? I will make my first criticism now, and then another when I discuss the aesthetic responsibilities of the Christian.

It seems pointedly strange and obtuse to assert that Christians ought to participate in CCM if they are going to participate in any music at all. First, an accurate characteristic about the CCM community is that it is dominantly composed of white, upper-to-middle class Protestants who are usually 21 years of age. I will proceed further and claim that most of the essential CCM audience ranges from the preteen through high school years. How can any movement that consistently exemplifies only a few sociological characteristics claim that it has a moral imperative that every Christian should respond to? Should the Christian community now require that the Calvin professors participate in CCM, that lower-class, poor Catholics living in the slums of Chicago should

participate in CCM, and that the Christian blacks struggling for social justice in South Africa be required to participate in CCM? By insisting on a moral imperative for all Christians, given the small range of sociological characteristics, aren't we coming dangerously close to promoting an arrogant ethnocentrism? I think that Christians ought to consider the relationship between themselves and the popular music culture—that does seem necessary, but the claim that Christians *ought* to participate in a specific community's answer to that question doesn't seem plausible at all.

Now to return to our original question: Is CCM part and parcel of the growth through suffering theme that is found in the Scriptures? Does CCM fit in with the Christian's duty to bring *shalom*? If a person was suffering as Augustine was, would CCM be a comfort and support? It seems that it does not come close. While the purposes of CCM are quite honest, there are other factors that distract its purpose. More often than not, I think that most participants of CCM get great satisfaction from taking the genre of secular rock music, as is especially evident in heavy metal types, adding lyrics that have a Christian theme, and work with the same music. If Christian music could only sound like Motley Crue, if Christian music were just as hard and loud, wouldn't that be great?! Secular music does not sound any different from CCM. The difference lies in the lyrical content. So how is this a distraction from its purpose?

Here is the picture: There is a community of Christian musicians who carefully watch the secular music culture in order to detect fading or emerging musical interests. Whenever a change occurs, such as the development of punk-rock, these artists return to the studio and produce Christian punk-rock. There is even a CCM Jazz group that I have encountered as well. In addition to copying the trends in secular music culture, there are other elements of that culture that are also copied by Christian artists. So now we have CCM groups doing nationwide tours, selling T-shirts, sweat-shirts, key rings, bumper stickers,

posters, and any other paraphernalia associated with secular rock. The CCM artists themselves dress like the secular artists (see Stryper posters). The Christian musicians seem content with letting the secular music culture create and cause musical development, while they lie in wait in order to capture a few secular leftovers that they can transform into something Christian. My point is this: the CCM community, by and large, has reduced Christian spirituality to a cultural fad. The lyrical message has been transformed, but it loses all its value when it is amalgamated with fashion. When people criticize CCM for not being intellectual, I think that they also mean that it loses its salt when it is all caught up in something insignificant. I am not suggesting that there cannot be Christian participation in cultural fads and trends, but we must recognize them for what they are—cultural trends. Christian spirituality, in the form of the suffering servant, cannot be reduced to fashion. Can Wolterstorff's claim that "we are to let our wounds bleed, our eyes tear" be merely fashionable? That is insulting.

An objection to my conclusion will be that Christian artists are bringing the Gospel to non-believers—so that concern about cultural trends, or the aesthetic quality of the music, should be of secondary importance. And this brings me to the second topic in my approach; the question of the validity of CCM: What are the artistic and aesthetic responsibilities of the Christian? Given that this is a vast topic of study in itself, I will only relate the Christian aesthetic responsibility to the claim that CCM artists need not be as aesthetically responsible, and then suggest further readings.

Nicholas Wolterstorff, in his book *Art in Action*, asserts that there

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*Christian spirituality. . . cannot be reduced to fashion.*

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should be aesthetic excellence in what is not produced for aesthetic delight. So, although CCM is not



produced for aesthetic delight, but to evangelize non-believers and support those Christians in the church, it nonetheless should strive for aesthetic excellence. On page 169, Wolterstorff raises the question of whether or not a hymn, even though its functions are fulfilled, should still be aesthetically pleasing. "I added, however, that if a hymn is to be good it must, like any other artifact, not only serve its purpose effectively, but also prove good and satisfying to use for this purpose. Can we say, then, that if a hymn is to prove good and satisfying to use for praising God, it must in general be aesthetically good? . . . I think the answer is Yes." Wolterstorff then argues that a hymn that is of poor aesthetic quality has negative effects on the listener. Something cannot be aesthetically sterile; it has either positive or negative effects. It is quite possible to exchange the word "hymn" for "CCM" in the argument. In order for CCM to be good music, must it be aesthetically good? Yes.

A similar argument is given by Calvin Seerveld, a senior member in aesthetics at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto. His book on aesthetic life and aesthetic task, *Rainbows for the Fallen World*, is a book that deserves significant attention from those in the CCM community. In his chapter on obedient aesthetic life, a call for not only those interested in art, he writes, "I realize the complexity of life and with all we Christians have to do, once saved, our concern has usually been the fundamental one of giving those in need a cup of cold water, not bothering about what we serve it in. But I'm interested also in what we middle-class people use to serve the cold water—a cool pewter mug, fine glass, cupped hands or paper cup. Or do you let your neighbor lick it off the dripping faucet like a Siamese cat?"

If CCM as it now stands is not wholly appropriate for the Christian community, where do Christians begin to understand the relation between themselves and the popular music culture? That can only be understood when we step back and ask ourselves generally, what is the relationship between the church and culture? This is where the CCM community must



focus its attention. Here are a few suggestions from Seerveld:

*Unless the first chapters of Genesis are simply a handy preface to God's revelation to refute macro-evolutionistic theories, Christians must hear what the Spirit is saying there to the churches, if they want the life perspective of biblically straightened-out believers. Culture is not optional. Formative culturing of creation is intrinsic to human nature, put there purposely—God knows why. . . . Church missionary efforts have traditionally been directed toward those who didn't know the gospel of salvation and lived in settings more dependent upon creational happening than upon man's control devices. Perhaps, within apostate, technocratic mainstream civilization today, where men and women on the street have heard the church for centuries promulgate "salvation" as an escape from the world, so that creation was left to go to hell, perhaps it would be a good repentant mission policy for*

*the world on the Western front to preach for a while the gospel of creation, which is fulfilled in the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ and his body—that's us!"*

The notion of the development of a Christian music must be built up from a general viewpoint of Christ and culture. It is a difficult task that must be understood in light of the doctrine of creation and worked out in a life of patient suffering. That is the responsibility of the Christian servant.

### eggs

inebriates of slime  
crouched in monk cells  
pass the time  
probing blank walls  
(contemplating  
apocalypse)

bursting one world  
to find another.

—Andy Deliyannides



# Statement of Conviction

by Jack Terpstra

I have loved the Christian Reformed Church all my life. Her Biblical and distinctly Reformed creeds and confessions clearly identify her and have been a blessing to me in my personal relationship with God and His Word. Therefore, the present direction of the Christian Reformed Church has been a tremendous grief to me. I find it difficult to believe that with such a thoroughly Biblical foundation, our church, seminary, and college could be led by three Calvin professors, VanTill, Young, and Menninga who are not, and do not claim to be, our spiritual leaders. Many of our elected and appointed educational and spiritual leaders have rushed to the support of these professors and their method of Biblical interpretation in a way similar to the ox rushing to the slaughter in Proverbs 7:22.

There are many who disagree with this present leadership. This group has been very vocal and at times their deep concern has resulted in statements that showed unrighteous anger and did not bring honor and glory to God, Whom they are trying to serve. On the other hand, those who agree with and support the professors do not have spotless garments either. They have often expressed contempt for and ridiculed the persons and beliefs of those who disagree with them.

My conviction is that the things discussed and argued to date are merely symptoms of the real issue we must ultimately face. The length of the creation days is not the issue; whether either side has enough love to hold through disagreement is not the issue. Whether God is great enough to do anything that pleases Him is not the issue. The real issue is: Is God's Word truly and completely inspired? Can we believe *all* of the Bible or will we accept and believe only *part* of it?

These professors suggest that God would be "tricky" or "de-

ceptive" if He meant for us to literally believe *all* that the Bible says, for then it would contradict scientific evidence. This has terrible implications since it echoes the question Eve was asked in Genesis 3:3c, "Has God indeed said. . .?" I dare not judge how God responds to those who imply that He is "tricky" or "deceptive." Those are the Biblical word descriptions of Satan, not God. The Bible says that "God cannot lie" and in another place "Satan is the father of the lie." In Titus 1:2, we read, ". . . In hope of eternal life, which God, Who cannot lie, promised before time began." And in speaking to the Pharisees, Jesus said in John 8:44, "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is not truth in him. When he speaks a lie he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it."

For the purpose of being as brief and clear as possible, permit me to use the word "they" when referring to the Calvin professors and their supporters as I take you step by step along the path of God's Word, the Bible. It will become evident why I stand in complete disagreement with these professors and their supporters. I would also urge everyone to get a copy of the "Report of the *Ad Hoc* Committee," which was given at the February, 1988, General Board meeting of Calvin College. It can be obtained from your pastor or clerk, since every church was sent a copy.

Please give your prayerful consideration to what is to me an obvious and total disagreement between what they say and teach, and what God's word, the Bible says:

## Jeremiah 29:19

" . . . Because they have not heeded My words, says the Lord, which I sent to them by My servants, the prophets, rising up early and sending you them, neither would

you heed, says the Lord."

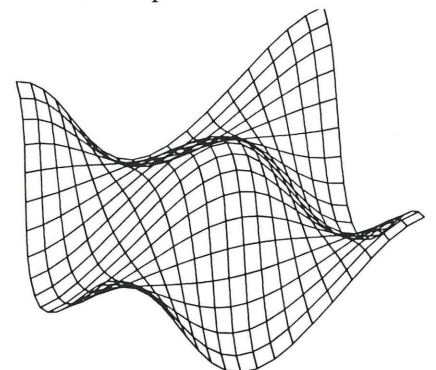
## Jeremiah 30:2

"Thus speaks the Lord God of Israel, saying: Write in a book for yourself *all the Words* that I have spoken to you."

### I. They say:

The Bible is the "Word" of God, but not the "words" of God. This is their foundation stone on which all of their teachings rest. To them this means that the Bible contains the non-specific message of God; That many passages are just story or parable words (packaging) in which the Truth can be found; That these word packages are of less importance than the message contained. They are not at all subtle in trying to convince us that God has failed to give us a clear revelation of His Word and works. So, by whom or by what means are we to be led to the Truth? To continue this line of reasoning, it thus becomes necessary for the "mind of man" to discern which words are God's actual message and which are just "packaging."

From the *Ad Hoc* Committee Report, page 4: "According to VanTill, Genesis 1-11 is the preamble and the first part of this historical prologue of the covenant, and he calls this part of the prologue 'primeval history.'" The report continues by quoting from VanTill's book, *The Fourth Day*, page 83: ". . . Primeval history and parable can both serve as vehicles of truth—important truth. In both





cases, the concrete details of the story constitute the packaging in which the truth is conveyed. In both cases, the content of the truth is of infinitely greater value than the vehicle or packaging in which it is carried. . . . Though it [primeval history] is not to be taken literally, it is to be taken seriously."

**But God says:**

**John 17:17**

"Sanctify them by the Truth; Thy Word is Truth."

**John 17:8**

"For I have given them the words which You have given Me; And they have received them. . . ."

**Matthew 4:4**

"It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'."

**II.** If we package their teaching that some of God's Word is merely "packaging of the Truth," then "man's mind" has determined that the Bible contains two distinct elements, one of which VanTill says has infinitely greater value than the other; That some of the Bible is Truth and some of the Bible is merely packaging, interesting and important packaging, but not "Truth."

**But God says:**

**II Timothy 3:16**

"All Scripture is given by inspiration. . . , and is profitable. . . ."

**I. They say:**

Moses could not possibly be accurate in the narrative, because he lived so long after the history he describes, and the truth could not have been accurately passed on by so many generations.

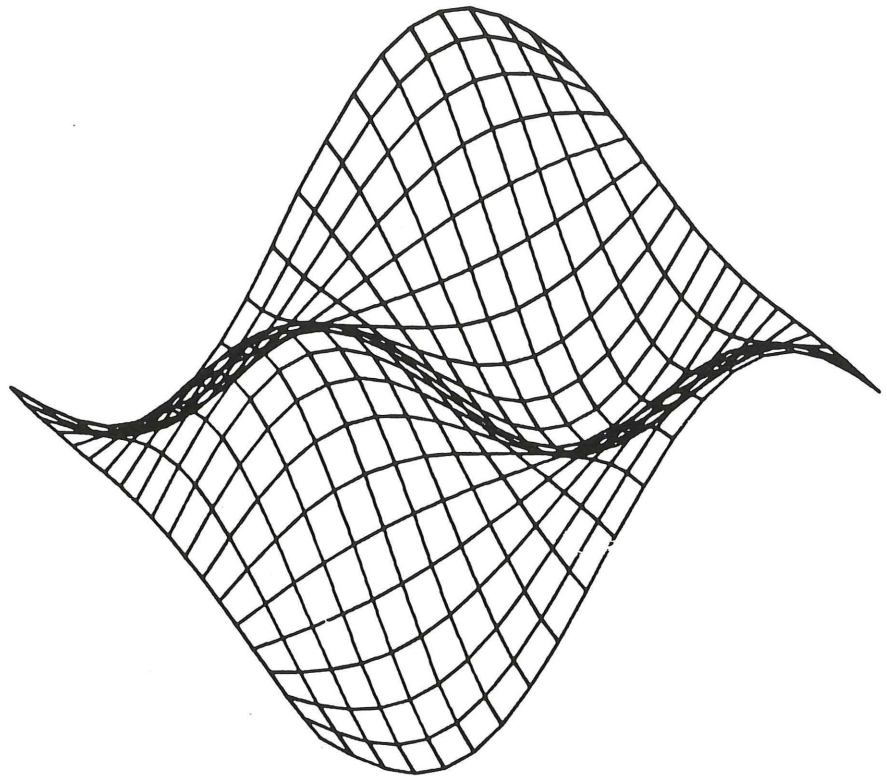
**But God says:**

**Numbers 12:6-8**

(In response to Aaron and Miriam after they spoke against Moses), ". . . Hear now My Words; If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision, and I speak to him in a dream. *Not so with My servant Moses; He is faithful in all My house. I speak with him face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings; And he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?*"

**Exodus 33:11**

"And the Lord spoke unto Moses



face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend. . . . Moses did not have to depend on any other persons or his own memory to be accurate, for God spoke plainly to him, face to face.

**IV. They say:**

Adam was not necessarily created, but maybe Adam was birthed by a primitive mother.

From the *Ad Hoc* Committee Report, page 2 (comments from interview with Professor Menninga), "Maybe the dust is a figure of speech and maybe God formed Adam by enabling a more primitive mother to give birth to an offspring who possessed the image of God." And from another section of the report, Professor Menninga is cited as asking (page 2), "How should Adam be classified? *Homo sapeins* (modern)? *Homo sapiens* (Neanderthal)? Some other species? Menninga is not able to label Adam, so he is uncertain how long ago Adam lived." In the same report, page 7, the committee says of Dr. Young, "It would follow, therefore, that although Prof. Young, in his published writings, has indicated that *Scripture compels us to accept a miraculous origin of man* (italics mine, JT). He would wish to maintain some degree of openness on man's biological origin." From the same report, page 5, Prof. Van Till is quoted from his book, *The*

*Fourth Day*, page 258: "I see no reason whatsoever to deny that the creation might have had an evolutionary history or that morally responsible creatures might have formed through the process of evolutionary development."

Please note:

—Prof. Menninga does not include a "created Adam" in his list of possible classifications of Adam.

—Prof. Young also does not use the word "created," but instead uses the term "miraculous origin" when talking of man's biological origin.

—That Scripture is not so compelling as to keep Prof. Young from wishing to maintain some degree of openness about man's biological origin.

—Prof. VanTill sees "no reason whatsoever to deny that [man] might have been formed through evolutionary development."

**But God says:**

**Genesis 2:7**

"And the Lord formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being." Notice the two steps: The creation from dust, *then* the breathing of life *into* that creation.



**Genesis 1:27**

"So God created man in His Own Image, in the image of God He created him. Male and female He created them."

**V. They say:**

Adam was "weak and vulnerable."

From the *Ad Hoc* Committee Report, page 2: "As a scientist, Menninga is not sure how Adam was formed. As a believer, he confesses that Adam, *though weak and vulnerable* (emphasis mine, JT), was made in the image of God and innocent of sin." In the same report, page 5, VanTill states in his book *The Fourth Day*, page 258, "To consider the possibility that we are creatures, members of God's creation, whose capacity for the awareness of self, of God, and of our responsibility for obedience to divine mandates *has been formed through a process of continuous evolutionary development does not strike me as inappropriate or incongruous or unbiblical*." (italics mine).

**But God says:****Genesis 1:31**

"And God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was *very good*." (Not weak and vulnerable.)

**Genesis 2:19**

"Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field, and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; And whatever the man called each living creature, that was his name."

**Genesis 1:28**

"So God blessed them, and God said to them; Be fruitful and multiply, *fill the earth and subdue it, have dominion* over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Hardly the mandates of a weak and vulnerable man!)

**VI. They say:**

The result of Adam's sin was not death, but "broken relationships."

**But God says:****Romans 5:12**

"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, the death through sin (notice the cause and effect relationship), and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned. . ."

**Romans 5:14**

"Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who was the type of Him who was to come."

**Romans 5:17a**

"For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one. . ."

**Romans 5:18a**

"Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment to all men came, resulting in condemnation. . ."

**VII.** If Adam was not created, but birthed, he would bear the image of that "more primitive mother," not the image of God (even Jesus received His human or Adam's likeness from His mother, Mary, who bore Him).

And if death was occurring *before*

sin, then Adam was just another step in the evolutionary development and would die as his forebearers did without sin. We must also conclude that Adam was not created in God's image and there would be no need to be redeemed.

But God says:

**Genesis 3:19b**

"For dust you are and to dust you shall return." This is part of the curse resulting from Adam's sin; Returning to dust was not Adam's original condition.

**Genesis 1:27**

"So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him."

**VIII. They say:**

The flood could not have covered the whole earth; Our scientific findings do not agree with God's Word.

**But God says:**

**Genesis 7:19**

"And the waters prevailed exceedingly on the earth, and all the high hills *under the whole heaven* were covered."

**Genesis 8:9**

"But the dove found no resting place for the sole of her foot, and she returned into the ark to him, for the waters were on the face of the *whole earth*."

**Psalms 104:5, 6**

"You who laid the foundations of the earth, so that it should not be moved forever, you covered it with the deep as with a garment; The waters stood above the mountains.

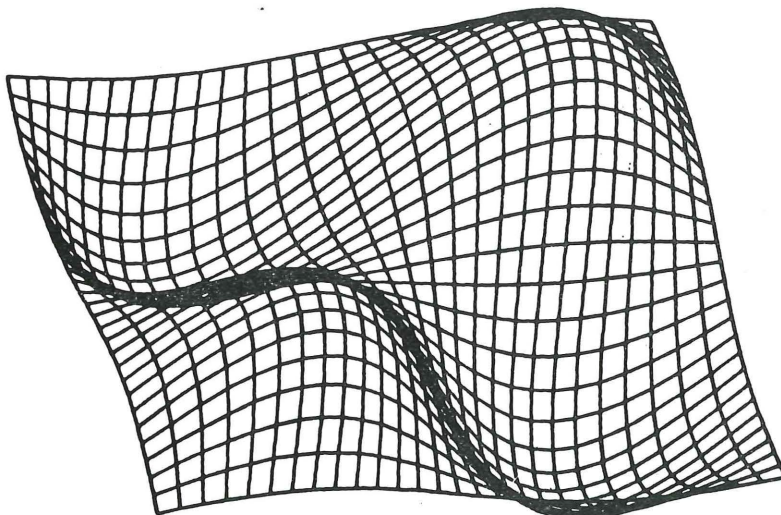
**II Peter 3:6**

". . .Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished. . ."

God's Word is our authority.

When we seek the answers to these questions from His Word, It consistently and firmly disagrees with what they are telling us. We must make a decision. Either we believe *all* Scripture is God's inspired Word and accept by faith those things which we cannot understand; or, we accept their teachings; that God did not mean to have all His Word believed as inspired, and that "man's mind" must determine what parts of the Bible are truly inspired and what parts are to be considered merely "packaging."

To deny any part of God's Word is to deny God Himself, for we cannot





separate the "Word" from the "Person" of God.

**John 1:1**

"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

**John 1:14a**

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. . ."

This denial of God becomes all the more clear when each Person of the Trinity is systematically denied:

—God the Father is denied when they say it is acceptable to believe that Adam was born or birthed rather than created, thus being in the image of "a more primitive mother" instead of God's image.

—God the Son is denied when they say that Christ was not directly responsible for and the Creator of every thing; Nor could His death on the cross be payment for sin since death was occurring before sin.

**John 1:3**

"All things were made by (the Word); And without Him was not any thing made that was made."

**Romans 8:3**

". . . God [sent] His own Son in the

likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin. . ."

—God the Holy Spirit is denied when any portion of God's Word is called "packaging," and they refuse to accept what II Timothy 3:16 says: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable. . ." And when Peter writes in II Peter 1:21, ". . . But holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit," this obviously means that these men did not write their own words, but *only* what God moved them to write.

Can we accept the current teaching that only *part* of the Bible is God's Word and the rest merely *packaging*, and that God has left us without instruction or direction so that it is left to "man's mind" to lead us? God says in Hebrews 11:3, "By *faith* we understand that the worlds were framed by the *Word* of God, so that the things which are seen were *not made of things which are visible*." And Hebrews 11:6 says, "But without *Faith* it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that *He is. . .*" They teach that *what they see or touch* in the created universe is to be

believed *even if it disagrees with Scripture*, thus repeating their denial of God's inspired Word. However, God's Word reminds those who have not seen and yet have believed."

We must consider one more point. God esteems His *Name* so highly, that He says in John 3:18b, "But he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the *Name* of the only begotten Son of God." And yet in Psalms 138:2c God says, "For you have magnified *Your Word ABOVE all Your Name*."

Do we need to be concerned? Jesus Himself says in Matthew 10:33, "But whoever denies Me before man, him I will also deny before My Father Who is in Heaven."

I pray that we could all receive the same blessing as Christ's disciples did just before His ascension, when in Luke 24:44, 45, He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you. Everything must be fulfilled that is written about ME in the law of Moses, the prophets and the Psalms. Then He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures."

## JESTER DANCE

Looking across a bridge at night  
 There sits a young lady who mourns  
 The death of a lover whom she'd never met  
 For a while there is a dull moan  
 From the river below  
 Like an understanding parent  
 Watching as their child is married  
 But only a temporary sympathy  
 She again sits alone  
 On the edge of the bridge wall  
 Her feet dangle over the waters below  
 And in a passionate shiver  
 She leans out over the gentle river  
 And then too far  
 And arms waving and with a short scream  
 She falls  
 Her body finally coming to rest at the murky bottom  
 Seaweed caressing her body like an understanding parent  
 She kicks and twists  
 But those arms don't let go  
 And she slowly expires  
 The oxygen she'd choked during tears  
 Her final and last movement  
 And on the bridge above there sits a young lady  
 Who has died like this many times before  
 And will again until she is at rest  
*En pace requisat*  
*En pace. . .*

—John Steenhoek

## prayer

float, rise  
 birthday balloon  
 thup, thup  
 against  
 my ceiling

—Andy Deliyannides



## Words & Works

# Recollections of a New World



No common theme holds these pictures together except that they were taken by me in Mississippi during a week in the spring of 1988. Perhaps theme enough.

Recollections. I went to Mississippi as part of a SVS-organized work project along with twelve students and a professor and his spouse.

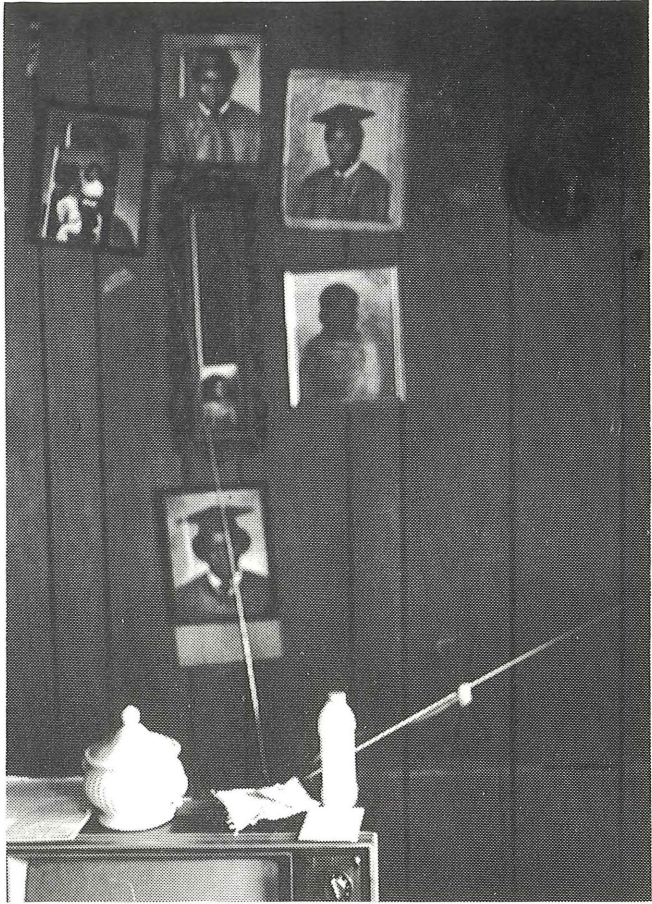
One thing I discovered again was the joy of exploring new spaces—strange (unfamiliar) landscapes, trees I had not seen before and people I had not interacted with before. Interactions. All shoved in front of my eyes and other senses in the space of a week. I, like others I think, experience the world most fully with my eyes. The other senses help round out the experience and make it complete.

I used my camera to help me “see.” These pictures are a (incomplete) record of what I saw [and continue to see?] This “strange” new world was not unlike the one I was used to, so I could make sense of it, more or less. I saw many things. I saw... people, black and white, broken boards, gravel junked cars, in backyards, snarling dogs, little kids, blind woman watching television, old man with a gun, steps I had built on foundations rotting away, tin roofs, dirt, dust, broken windows taped, shadows, darkness, light, water, wind. I saw all these. I saw... swimming pool, us swimming, in Sam’s Pool, Sam—retired WWII official, white, drunk, liquor, with wife every night, having fun! Pecan orchard, laborers, \$2.35/hour. I saw vultures, above dead calf, in a ditch. But I saw so much more. . . .

—Jon Vandervelde



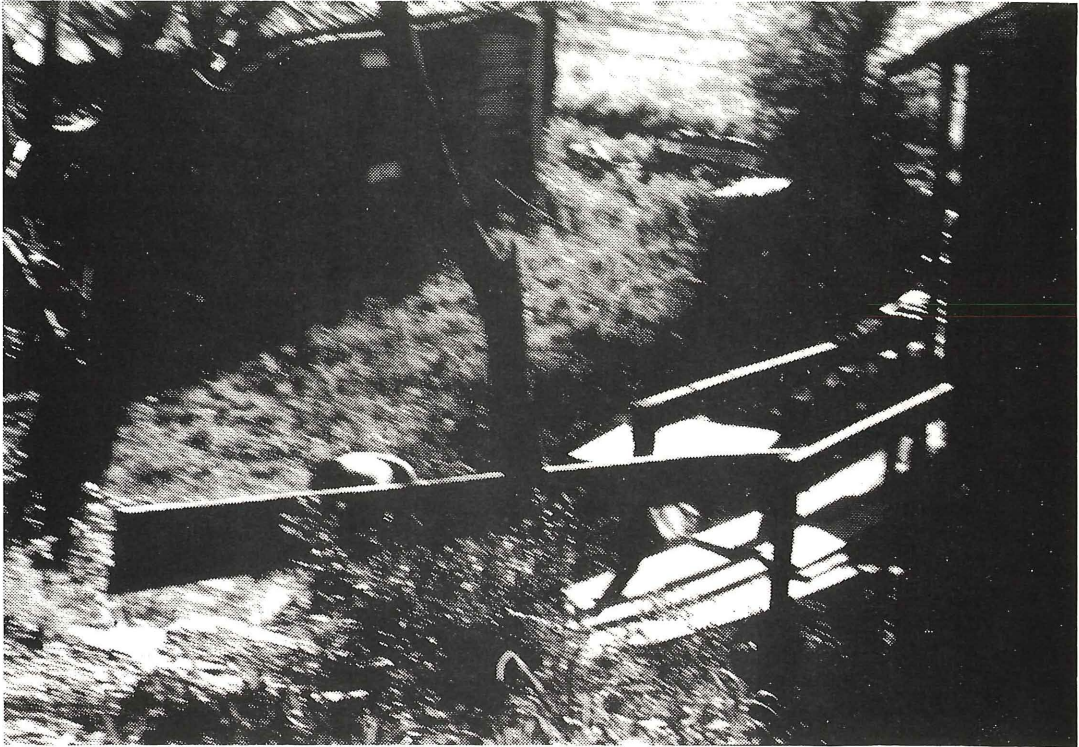














## ICE HOCKEY ON FIGURE SKATES

by Heather Gemmen

There's the puck. Glide over  
before Greg gets there and  
—whack— smack it  
to kingdom come. Then take up  
the pursuit: left, right, left,  
grip the stick with mitted fists,  
maneuver, ready for a pass from Jeff,  
watch the puck sail over the stick,  
stop and turn  
in pursuit

Then kneecaps hit eight-inch ice. Get up  
and skate to the piled snow and hack out  
that puck. Glide along, pass and position  
for a return. Here it comes—so is Greg—  
strike swiftly, sweep to the right and behind  
then momentum  
and skate grips

Combine. Kneecaps perforce hit ice. Ouch.  
Pull the body up via hockey stick, it'll  
serve as crutch until—left, right, left—  
the puck, that puck, it squirts out  
from the scuffle. Jeff hooks Greg  
at the ankle then speeds away. That's fair play  
between brothers. Collect the puck and set up.  
Teammanship: that's it, two on one, threaten  
and menace  
and strike hard:

Swing hard. The shot's wide, never worry,  
retrieve and contrive another attack. Greg  
challenges: pass off then left, right,  
left—didn't see Greg's stick there—  
trip and attempt  
to compensate, but the skates  
connect  
jagged grips

to frozen sheet. Shit. That does it.  
Ease up from the ice and leisurely glide  
the half mile home across the lake.  
Left, right, left, feel gingerly  
with the stick, don't wobble, stay  
steady, and pray—  
no snow-hidden bumps  
nor augered holes

—Heather Gemmen



## FISHERMAN'S BEND

by Heather Gemmen

The women are waiting  
for their men to return from the sea. A  
fortnight's passage  
but still no ragged sail's appearance, still  
the women mend sweaters and nets  
and stock pantries with double provisions.  
By night the intimating waves hint  
restoration, conspiring with stars  
to guide schooner landwards, by day  
spitting forthright on the face  
of shoreline stones.

A crab scuttles to a tidal pool, drawn after  
the withdrawing tide: The aquatic broth  
forsakes crustaceans and fishes daily  
to sustain life clustered at her shores, turning  
minnow over to sea swallow,  
sweeping lobster into lobster trap  
in a current's gentle flow

One more crab grabs  
the wooden spoon handle, is lifted  
then descends into the widow's spiced water.  
Funny how the crab should cling to the tool  
that eases it into the simmering brine,  
how the fishers clung momentarily to mast  
and deckplanks, succumbed  
to the numbing of fingers and mind

The ocean is full of dead men's bones  
nestled in her floral mesh,  
cradled among corroding sextants and anchors,  
as hollow as the shells  
the women throw into their gardens. The widow  
takes up her knitting needles, interlacing  
loop into loop into cableknit form, as intricate  
as the bones and vessels  
fitted together within her nurturing womb

—Heather Gemmen



# Inaugurate

"Why, you're just a boy—still wet behind the ears, I'd say." The vet crushed his cigarette butt. "Well, you'll learn. I'll teach you good enough."

The boy sat down in the trench a little ways from him. Eyeing the vet, the boy did just as he did and laid his rifle across his lap. "What do we do now?" he asked.

The vet spat. "When the shooting gets closer, we shoot. You shoot them first, and you don't let them shoot you. You'll get used to it." The vet slouched a little. "And keep your helmet on," he said. "Bone just doesn't keep the shrapnel out. I'm going to take a nap now; wake me when the shooting gets here." He tipped the helmet over his eyes and closed them.

When the shooting became louder, the boy woke the vet. The vet poked his head over the trench and looked around. "Good," he said finally, "the shooting's still out of range. Nightfall will stop it. Then you and I will move out."

The vet looked in a box. "Eat some of this, and wash it down with your water," he instructed. "But don't eat anything more. Never eat before you shoot," the vet advised. "They give you a bullet in the gut, it makes a mess." The vet opened his package and ate, then finished his canteen.

The boy drank some water. His canteen was half full. "Where do we get more water?" he asked. "And where's extra ammunition when we run out?"

"You weren't told none of that in boot camp?" asked the vet. "We must be sending infants out from boot camp. There's always more bullets and water when you run out. It'll be there; don't you worry. Just think of shooting, and keeping them from getting you. And you'll do good."

At nightfall the shooting stopped. Both camps were still. Sentries were the only ones out; when the

clouds revealed the moon the sentries retreated to the shadows.

The vet was packing. "Now you do just like me," he said to the boy. "Peek over the wall: see that bunker thirty meters down?" He pointed. "We're going there. Did you learn mudcrawling in boot camp?" Well, be sure to keep your butt down. No sense getting it shot off."

The boy imitated the vet's example. The two strapped their rifles to their backs, took two full canteens of water, some packages of food from the box, two grenades, and ammunition.

The boy crawled after the vet. The two crawled through mud, over rocks, snipped a hole through barb wire and crawled through, and lay still among uniformed bodies while a searchlight passed over the field.

The vet motioned the boy beside him. "The bunker's right over there," he said. "Here's what we do. You know how to throw a grenade? Good. Wait here. I'll crawl to the other side; when you hear my grenade go off, throw yours." The vet made a throwing motion toward the opening in the bunker. "Wait a bit, then crawl to the bunker. I'll be there."

The vet crawled off. The boy watched him go and waited. Soon he heard the explosion of the vet's grenade. He threw his into the bunker and after waiting awhile he crawled to the bunker and saw the vet inside.

"We got it," said the vet. "We'll clear out the rubble, and you can get some sleep. I'll wake you when it's my turn."

They moved destroyed boxes and shredded clothing to one side, then the boy stretched out on the floor with his pack for a pillow. The vet sat by the opening, looking into the darkness.

Later the boy felt the vet shaking him. "There are two hours before

sun-up. I let you sleep over a little." The boy got up and the vet lay down. "Stay out of sight by the opening. No use them picking you off before the real shooting begins."

The boy looked out the opening. As dawn came he could see the barb wire fence, the bodies, the long mounds of dirt running in front of the trenches where they were waiting. He could see them once in a while, peeking over the trench, helmets covering their heads.

At dawn the boy woke the vet. They waited for the shooting to begin and did not eat anything.

"I saw a boy once," said the vet. "He ate before the shooting, and he got shot. Just a young boy, like you. Steam and bowels coming from his stomach. We don't teach you about that in boot camp: nobody wants to hear about it."

The shooting began. The boy watched the vet stick his rifle out the opening and shoot the helmets peeking over the trench. Sometimes they fell over; sometimes they shot back. The boy aimed his rifle at them and shot. At first he missed, but then he became brave and they began to fall down.

"Let's take a break," said the vet. "You're doing good. We won't shoot anymore today. Sometimes you can shoot all day, and they won't shoot back. They just peek over and look, and that's when you shoot them."

Near evening the shooting stopped, and the field and trench and bunker were quiet. The boy and the vet ate the packages of food and drank water.

"We've got to go back tonight," said the vet to the boy. "We just ate all the food and water, and we're low on bullets." The vet spat and picked his teeth. "We can take the setback. They won't gain any ground on us tonight."

That night the two crawled back to the trench. There were more



bodies on the field, and more barbed wire. The vet cut another hole through it and they pulled themselves through.

"When we get to the trench I'll keep watch while you secure a place," said the vet. "Sometimes a sentry tries picking off some fool at night."

At the trench the two pulled themselves over the earth mound and into the trench. The boy heard movement in the dark. He shot into the dark many times, and when he stopped he looked.

The vet whistled. "Three of them, waiting for us." The boy found some boxes of shells and reloaded his gun. "You did good work, boy," said the vet.

Then the vet peeked over the trench. He crouched down in the trench again. "I'll show you a thing," he said. "This draws them out from their shadows, when the sentries want to pick us off." He took off his helmet and put it on his rifle. "We stick the helmet up, and while the sentries shoot at it we see where they are. Then we shoot them."

The vet gave the rifle to the boy then peeked over the trench. The boy stuck the helmet up and left it there. He waited.

"They shoot at it right away," said the vet. "I done it many times. Gets them every time."

The moon shone through the clouds and made shadows and lit-up patches on the field. A sentry in the shadows saw the vet peeking over the trench and shot.

The vet fell back into the trench. The boy leaned the rifle against the trench wall and crouched alongside the bet. The soldier saw that the vet's face was shot away.

The soldier looked up. A boy stood nearby, holding his helmet in one hand and his rifle in the other.

"I've just been ordered to the front—"

The soldier spat. "Put your helmet on, boy," he said. "Always keep your helmet on. Bone just doesn't keep the shrapnel out."

—Heather Gemmen

## CHINA DOLL

I was looking through a box  
 Yesterday around five  
 That one we kept for a rainy day  
 We planned to look at it  
 And remember and dream  
 Of yesterday and before  
 What had happened to us  
 And what might become of us

I came across a beautiful piece  
 It was a doll  
 Crafted by that old woman  
 You remember  
 The one who stood outside the Great Wall  
 She said it was porcelain  
 And that such a beautiful couple  
 Ought really have one  
 So I gave her the money  
 Remember?  
 And she smiled and spoke  
 She said we were beautiful again  
 And you laughed  
 And modestly you disagreed  
 Carefully agreeing without being obvious  
 And I laughed too  
 And so did she  
 For we were beautiful  
 And then she left us  
 To our own devices  
 There in vast and deep Chinaland

I cried yesterday  
 Because you are gone  
 And all that I have  
 To remember you by  
 Is a cracked and broken  
 Piece of porcelain doll

—John Steenhoeck















### CAMPING IN THE CATSKILLS

I get up early, just at dawn,  
shake out sleep upon a rock, take up a stick  
and in the dead coals begin to draw  
hearts and half moons, words doing tricks.

I draw back, watch my breath  
. . .not enough sleep last night. . .never enough these nights.  
A wayward foot comes down to earth,  
a coal kicked over springs back to life;

I add my stick for fuel and my breath for flame,  
step back and look up, smoke on its way.  
Fingers of light fold out like a fan,  
golden gray, ash and day, fire and frost begin to play

. . .time to find the coffee cup,  
clear my throat, and wake her up.

—Tim Van Noord

### THE TWO FORTY FIVE

Setting down my bags, I look back.  
They've all left by now, so busy you know,  
leaving me alone to wait for my train.  
I crack my knuckles, crack my back  
and find a seat in the shadows, up out of the rain.

What this place must be like at rush hour, I think,  
what this place would be like  
if it ever had a rush hour.

The Ticket Taker's Cat slips to a puddle to take a drink,  
leans in, bells sing dull from a distant church tower,

and another crow lands across and down the tracks  
—for whom do the bells toll?—joining the faithful other few  
in the Feast of the Deceased by the 9:30 Train.  
Tree branches rattle, several twigs crack back  
and I shuffle my feet to ease the prickly pain.

It rises in the East, I can see it now, slowing down,  
the ravens take quick flight  
at the rumble in the rails;  
I rise up, bend down,  
pick up my bags and face the Rain Like Nails

as the Two Forty Five is ten minutes late  
. . .no matter, though, it's been worth the wait.

—Tim VanNoord

### ORPHEUS UNBOUND

On that listing rock  
the mandolin plays softly  
in the hands of the prophet  
living out his days  
on the footing of his death.

White caps sweep sand  
up around his still feet  
and foam lingers longer  
than the dancing beach  
skipping away.

A gull cries out to him  
and wants to know  
what it is he sings about  
and why it is he sings so slow,  
the gull gathers others,  
their numbers grow  
and he stands to speak  
but instead shouts  
as they flee away  
into the air.

They don't understand,  
none of them understand  
his language,  
usually silence.

Wind through his white hair,  
salt stuck in the berries of his beard,  
he now lifts a whisper  
about to be heard  
as he resolves another new year.

He sits back down  
on that rock  
in his place  
and motions his fingers  
while picking out notes  
made for this moment

and nothing emerges

as the salt spray fog  
ending his day  
comes pushing down.

Somewhere a dog howls lonely  
and an eagle from clifftop sees nothingness  
and the rock stands turned over  
vacated for time  
and in the tide the mandolin drifts  
as a wooden boat  
cut loose and wandering  
empty in the sea.

—Tim VanNoord



# The Wait

by Thomas Hegewald

## SPIDER

over the miles she sang the death  
of more spiders; web kept pulling  
in odd things like spent tires  
and axles still full of grease  
these all came with a thrust not  
known in these parts, some she  
ate for brunch and others she devoured  
after her mid afternoon run to  
the store for sugar and milk to  
pour over her sour prey (that is what  
she'd say, we all know that she  
simply wanted to brag to old Mrs.  
Sniphorn about still being active in  
the web business Mrs. Sniphorn  
retired after webbing the parson by accident; and  
without the reversal key (she dropped fifteen  
years ago in Briars pond), the parson  
was no longer; "God bless his soul" was  
heard in the valley three times over.

—Tom Bryant

## AT THE BEACH

The best month to set out to sea  
Is October.

Everybody is tired of the beach;  
Everyone has seen enough of the ocean.

The deserted beach  
Is free from footprints;  
The lonely waves  
Have lost their playmates.

The best month to set out to sea  
Is October.

Don't set out to sea in August!  
People are all around you;  
People are all around you,  
And no one sees you go.

Set out to sea in October!  
Nobody is around you,  
Except the deserted beach  
And the lonely waves;  
Nobody is around you,  
And no one sees you go.

The best month then  
Is October.  
But, before you set out to sea,  
Please pick up one or two  
Broken seashells.

—M. Inoue

The theater stands closed to the world surrounding it. Its steel-framed glass entrance becomes both a reflecting pool and a window into an inner world to those outside. Inside can be seen the movement of clerks preparing the theater, oblivious to the cold wind and time.

One by one, a few men congregate at the entrance to the theater to escape for a couple of hours into the world of movies. Their thoughts are not of work or home, but instead concentrating on the idea of being entertained for a brief time. Here at the entrance they can leave their worlds behind in exchange for another one.

One man doesn't speak, but instead makes quiet chirping sounds to himself. His hair is a reflection of himself as it hangs down his head in unkempt greasy strands. Wrapping his thin overcoat around his lean body, he pulls himself in it as if a turtle, afraid of the world around him. He walks constantly back and forth, either to keep warm or out of habit. Every once in a while as if to calculate his distance the man spits on the pavement checking afterwards to make sure his spittle did not catch on his overcoat.

Then there's the youth. Dressed in blue jeans and a jean jacket, his hair stiff from gel, he calmly waits giving the appearance of a statue. But behind his sunglasses his eyes move, watching with interest the reflections in the doors. Behind him he sees a mixed group of teens, who, when finding the theater closed, lose interest and move on to the mall. Then a station wagon unloads half a dozen or more preteen, giggling girls, who bounce up to the doors and try to open them. Realizing their mistake they run off giggling, embarrassed by their lack of observation. A look of contempt appears in the youth's eyes as he watches them disappear.

As if sighing with relief the doors finally open, ready to accept the patrons who have waited so long.











# Israel, the Palestinians, and Nicholas Wolterstorff: A Review Article

by **Mark Stover**  
**Theological Librarian**  
**Calvin College Seminary**

Over the last nine years Nicholas Wolterstorff, professor of philosophy at Calvin College, has published a series of articles, mostly in

*The Reformed Journal*, which deal in one way or another with the Israel/Palestinian issue. His stance is generally sympathetic to the Palestinian (read: PLO) position,





although he claims to be writing from an objective perspective. The positive effect of these articles has been to bring to the consciousness of North American Christians the plight of the Arab refugees. Professor Wolterstorff writes with emotion and sincerity, leading the reader to empathize with the Palestinians and their woes. Unfortunately, the negative effects of his writings on this issue far outweighs the positive ones. His articles contain half-truths, blurred distinctions, and prejudice. This article will review and critique his positions and published statements on Israel and the Palestinians. I do

not wish to attack Professor Wolterstorff on a personal level. I respect his scholarship and his obvious piety. Neither do I wish to remain silent and allow his statements, often unsubstantiated and one-sided, to go unchallenged.

Most review articles deal with book-length presentations and not, as this one does, with a series of articles and editorials. Problems may arise with this kind of format. For example, an author's views may change significantly over a period of nine years. Or, an author may feel that several articles strung together will not contain the internal cohesion of an edited book, and thus may be more easily criticized. We do not face these problems in this view. Professor Wolterstorff's published opinions on this subject have, for the most part, changed little during the last nine years. And, remarkably, his articles have retained an internal structure which is consistent and cohesive.

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The published opinions of Nicholas Wolterstorff on the Israel/Palestinian debate are not difficult to trace. In 1979 he attended a conference in LaGrange, Illinois where he met several Palestinian Christians. As a result of this encounter (and his subsequent research), he began to develop a deep sympathy for the Palestinian cause. The same year he published in *The Reformed Journal* an editorial ("Painful Lessons," October 1979) in which he expressed distress toward Israel and their treatment of the Palestinians.

Over the next nine years Professor Wolterstorff published several articles and editorials dealing with the Palestinian question in *The Reformed Journal*,<sup>1</sup> as well as an article in *The Banner*.<sup>2</sup> These articles usually coincide with current events in the Middle East (Israel's invasion of Lebanon, the uprising in Gaza and the West Bank), but all of them have as their goal the persuasion of the reader to a more critical view of the Jewish state of Israel and a more sympathetic understanding of the Palestinians. In itself this is not a bad goal. However, in his undertaking of the Palestinian cause Professor Wolterstorff has allowed himself to become one-sided and

prejudiced in his presentation of the facts.

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There are many superficial criticisms which could be leveled against Professor Wolterstorff's views on Israel, but we are not so much concerned with those here. However, I will briefly note one or two of them.

In his writings Professor Wolterstorff often refers to the land presently controlled by Israel as "Palestine" and the "rightful heirs" to that land as "Palestinians." Aside from its dubious etymological origins (why not call Palestine "Canaan" and the Palestinians "Canaanites"?), the land of Palestine is more often than not thought to be the land in which lies the present state of Israel. This is a confusion of historical and present realities. The "native soil" of Palestine, thought by many (including Professor Wolterstorff) to be identical to modern Israel, in fact includes not only Israel but also the Hashemite kingdom of Jordan.<sup>3</sup> The League of Nations and the British Mandate had originally promised the entire area of Palestine (west and east) of the Jewish people. Later, the Transjordan region (east of the Jordan River) was given to the Arabs. But the vast majority of persons living in Jordan (formed in 1946, only two years before Israel!) are no less "Palestinians" than the Arabs who dwell on the West Bank and Gaza.

This is not simply an historical footnote, but a present reality as well. Both Yasser Arafat and King Hussein have in the past referred to Jordan as "Palestine." The Palestinian National Center (constitutional document of the PLO) states that "Palestine, with the boundaries it had during the British Mandate, is an indivisible territorial unit." Thus, the PLO is as much opposed to the Jordanian government under Hashemite rule as it is to the Israelis. (Not surprisingly King Hussein threw the PLO out of Jordan in 1970 for fear that his authority was being usurped).

When we think, then, of the PLO, the Palestinians, and Palestine, we must not think simply in terms of Israel, but also of the nation of Jordan. This will help us to see more clearly the parameters of the



present struggle in the Middle East.

Professor Wolterstorff makes much of European nationalism as the contributing factor in the rise of Zionism. He does not take into consideration the rise of anti-Semitism in nineteenth century Europe (especially the "Dreyfuss Affair" in France) as another major factor. What he almost totally ignores is the role of the Nazi Holocaust in igniting Jewish emigration to Israel. As W. Laquer states:

*For European Jewry the issue was not an abstract one of preserving a historical connection, religious and national ties. With the rise of Hitler it became a question of life and death, and they felt no pangs of conscience: the danger facing the Jews was physical extinction.<sup>4</sup>*

Professor Wolterstorff's terming of Israel as "expansionist" is unfortunate as well as untrue. It is unfair to compare Israel (who only seeks secure borders) with truly expansionist countries like the Soviet Union, whose desire for world domination is doubted by no one. Was Israel's withdrawal from the Sinai an act of expansion? Is Israel's refusal to give up the Golan Heights so as to prevent Syrian (read: Soviet) missiles from reaching Jewish settlements, is that expansionist? Israel, like Marlene Dietrich, just wants to be left alone. Her Arab neighbors, however, have no intention of granting her wish.

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Professor Wolterstorff makes great protestations against those who would accuse him of anti-Semitism. He says that he is "extremely sensitive to even the appearance of anti-Jewish prejudice." He cautions the reader to do "everything possible to root out of our souls whatever traces there may be of hatred for the race from whom came forth the Son of Man." Eloquent indeed, even though it begs the question of why such hatred should ever exist in the first place. Wolterstorff fears that he and others who criticize the policies of the state of Israel will be accused of anti-Semitism. This of course would be unfair, similar in many ways to labeling a critic of Canada's national policies as a "Christian-

hater." But perhaps a subtle form of anti-Jewish sentiment has crept into the heart (and typewriter) of Professor Wolterstorff.

As examples I will quote directly from his writings on Israel. His words must be allowed to speak for themselves. I have tried not to quote him out of context, but the reader will be the judge as to whether or not his words condemn him.

In "A Triple Standard" Professor Wolterstorff defends himself against charges of anti-Semitism. He accuses the Jewish people (not just the Israelis, but all Jews everywhere) of moral arrogance,

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pride of the worst kind. He states, "The Jews of the twentieth century, and the Israelis in particular, have presented themselves as the moral elite of humanity." Judaism is in some ways a moralistic religion. But many Christians (and Muslims and Buddhists and atheists) are moralistic as well. And the Jewish people do not identify themselves (and are not identified by the rest of the world) solely on the basis of religion. Culture, language, and ethnic traditions, as well as religion, bring cohesion to the worldwide Jewish community. To make such broad, sweeping generalizations is insensitive and smacks of anti-Semitism.

But Professor Wolterstorff does not stop there. He goes on to say that modern day Israel lends itself readily to comparison with "the Old Testament picture of ancient Israel as a vengeful, blood-thirsty people, prone to idolatry and wickedness."\* It is incredible, unthinkable, that an enlightened and educated Reformed Christian philosopher in the twentieth century could make this statement. Perhaps Professor Wolterstorff does not know that

\*Emphasis mine.

similar remarks by leaders in the Christian community have caused countless massacres of Jews throughout history. His use of the word "bloodthirsty" is especially odious and ugly in view of the infamous "Blood Libels" (where Jews were accused of drinking the blood of Christian children for ritual purposes) of the not-so-distant past.

Professor Wolterstorff's main point is not that Jews are evil people. It is that Jews are not perfect. One does not need, however, to hurl incendiary epithets to prove that a group of people have flaws. Such rhetoric does not belong in a journal founded in the Reformed Christian tradition. Such rhetoric makes Nicholas Wolterstorff sound more like Louis Farrakhan than Nicholas Wolterstorff.

In "Death of Gaza" Professor Wolterstorff brings a less obvious but equally hurtful tone to his anti-Jewish/anti-Israel writings. He states:

*It was of course folly in the first place to think that the security of the Jewish person in the world would lie in the formation of a tiny Levantine state. . . Zionism is among the great illusory failures of the 20th century. The security of Jewish people lies in countries like the U.S.*

Besides ignoring the hopes and dreams and prayers of Jewish people during the last 20 centuries, Wolterstorff in the above statements patronizes the Jewish community. "Come live with us, Jews. You couldn't possibly survive in a







state of your own, so live with us and we will protect you." Jewish people have heard similar statements before, and have learned not to trust them.

Jews may find security in the Diaspora, but many have chosen to live in a country where there is no threat of a Blood Libel, Holocaust, pogrom, or even country club anti-Semitism. Frankly, Gentiles have often made poor neighbors and worse landlords. I am not arguing that the United States is not a good place to live, for it most certainly is. And many Christians are true friends of the Jewish community. But is it any wonder, given the history of the Jewish people, that we defend the existence of a Jewish state, even if we choose not to live there?

I do not believe that Professor Wolterstorff is an anti-Semite. Yet, in some of his statements there exists an ethnic prejudice so clearly articulated that I cannot help but wonder its source. I hope that it was sympathy for the Palestinians that

led him to write down such insensitive words. I hope that it was carelessness and haste and passion that brought such wrongheaded and hurtful thoughts into print. But whatever it was that gave birth to his anti-Jewish statements, I would urge Professor Wolterstorff to publicly retract them. For the strength of a man lies not in his ability to do what is right, but in his ability to admit when he is wrong.

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Professor Wolterstorff rarely if ever mentions the surrounding hostile Arab nations and their role in the Palestinian problem.\* Perhaps he thinks they are irrelevant to the discussion. If so, he is ignoring critical facts.

Professor Wolterstorff does not seem to think it important that the surrounding Arab countries defied the United Nations partition plan, urged Palestinians to leave their homes, and declared war on Israel. These are the factors that caused the refugee problem, not "Israeli expansionist tendencies."

He does not seem to care that the primary goal of the Arabs during the four major wars of the past 40 years has been "to drive the Jews into the sea." If Jewish people were not suspicious of Arabs before, they are now. Is it any wonder that many Israelis today view the Palestinians, sometimes with justification, as a "Fifth Column" of hostile Arab countries.

Professor Wolterstorff speaks of the present PLO goal in terms of an autonomous Palestinian state on the West Bank. This may very well be a viable solution, but we must ask, why did the Jordanians not set up such a state during the 19 years of their occupation of the West Bank?

In short, the Arab countries surrounding Israel have played a major role in the continuing sad saga of the Palestinians. They have initiated aggressive actions against Israel, encouraging Palestinians with their promise of a *judenrein* Palestine. They have supported the terrorist activities of the PLO while ignoring the humanitarian needs of the Palestinians. Yet, Professor Wolterstorff does not seem to want to talk about Arab complicity. He wants to lay all the blame at the feet of Israel and perhaps also the

United States. All of us know, from our own experience, from exposure to the quarrels of our children, that rarely is only one part solely to blame for an argument, conflict or war. But Professor Wolterstorff does not see it that way. Like the old Roman Catholic Church and the crucifixion of Christ, all of the guilt falls squarely upon the Jews. The state of Israel is of course not entirely innocent. Many of its policies and practices are flawed; some deserve to be severely criticized and perhaps discarded or greatly altered. But Wolterstorff's is not the voice of a constructively critical friend; rather, his is the voice of destructive enmity. He calls for the dismantling of the Jewish state, based on its "discriminatory" practices. Never mind that all of the other Arab countries in the region are even more inherently "racist" and "discriminatory" than Israel. Should these states be dismantled also? Again, we find his virtual denial of any geo-political entity in the Middle East aside from Israel and the Palestinians. Recognizing these other entities and the roles they have played in the Palestinian tragedy will certainly help all of us to maintain a fair and just attitude toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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Most wars brings with them a large number of displaced persons or refugees. The 1948 war between the Arabs and Israel was no excep-

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tion. I mourn for the half million refugees who were born of that war, and for their children. Whether or

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\*One notable exception is "Blood Runs, Hope Fades," where he does blame Syria for some of the problems in the Middle East.



not all of these refugees can claim Palestinian ancestry is another question, for some have argued rather convincingly that many of those who were left homeless after the war did *not* have roots in the land, but rather entered Palestine, legally or illegally, as itinerant migrant workers during the years 1921-1947. In fact, the official U.N. definition of a Palestinian refugee requires only that a person had lived in Palestine for *two years* prior to the war.

In a sense, much of this is relevant, even though it may relate to the Palestinians' historical claims to the land. Whatever their ancestry, the Palestinian refugees are real people, deserving of our

lands that had driven out a million Jews, the "population exchange" idea that has worked effectively in other parts of the world. He is silent about Arab neglect of their Palestinian brothers; his only complaint is that the *Israelis* have not taken care of them. On these and many other questions, Wolterstorff remains strangely silent. And then we have only one side of the story.

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Professor Wolterstorff claims objectively in his articles. However, his biases seem clear enough to me. I make no such claim for the views that I seek to express. My Jewish heritage perhaps makes me more sensitive to anti-Semitism and more emotionally attached to the state of Israel. But it seems to me that nothing and no one in life is neutral, least of all those of us who would write about such volatile political subjects. We are deceiving ourselves if we believe that our lives are free from prejudice. Professor Wolterstorff presents biased arguments, and for that I may be critical of him. More disturbing, though, is his failure to admit or understand his biases.

But all of us occasionally find ourselves in dispassionate moods. I would call for one of these moods, a moratorium on bias (so to speak), and then present the following questions to Professor Wolterstorff. If it is true (as he says) that the Palestinians hate Zionism but love the Jews, why have PLO terrorists attacked Jewish religious and community centers in Europe?<sup>5</sup> Why do Palestinians involved in the recent *intifada* (uprising) "openly yell not "We Shall Overcome" but "Death to the Jews" and . . . punctuate their chants by throwing Molotov cocktails and pipe bombs and lethal building blocks from the roofs."<sup>6</sup>

Why, if the Palestinian cause is so just and pure, will

*grown Arab men send children to the "front," pulling the strings from behind, quite willing to sacrifice others, knowing that the nine-month-old baby who is wounded by a rubber bullet will make headlines around the world, and that no one will question the responsibility of the infant's*

*mother, or of the Palestinians who actually invite such incidents?"*

Or, more to the point, why will Professor Wolterstorff never mention such incidents in his writings?

Is he concerned about the environment? Have the Palestinians who lived on the land for centuries been faithful stewards of God's creation? Or have the *Israelis*, perhaps, been better keepers of the land, better stewards of the environment, than the Palestinians? And, if I may, one final question for the good professor: Why does he continually reject Jewish nationalism but praise and encourage Palestinian nationalism? The answers to these questions, I believe, are obvious to those with ears to hear and eyes to see.

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I do not disagree with everything Nicholas Wolterstorff says about Israel and the Palestinians. His "Nation and Covenant in Palestine (2)" is by and large an excellent piece of theology, and the first installment of that article, aside from an overemphasis on the European nationalistic roots of Zionism, is also well written. Here we find Wolterstorff at his best. He is sympathetic to both Jews and Palestinians, and deals with the subject of "land theology" in a penetrating and insightful fashion.

Why is it, though, that he becomes less sympathetic to the *Israelis* (sometimes approaching, as I have noted, anti-Semitism) and more biased in favor of the Palestinians in his later writings? It could be that, since "Nation and Covenant in Palestine" was one of his first efforts at writing on this issue, he had not yet become entrenched in the pro-Arab propaganda which he himself was soon to espouse. It could be that at the time that his lecture (on which the "Nation and Covenant" article was based) was given (May 1979), Professor Wolterstorff honestly believed that both Jews and Arabs were responsible for the Palestinian dilemma. I do not know. What I do know is that his views have changed from being cautiously critical of Israel to being angry and one-sided and at times anti-Jewish.

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sympathy and prayers. Their plight is a tragic one, and we are not to ignore them. Professor Wolterstorff, on the other hand, completely ignores the *Sephardim*, Jews in Arab countries, almost a million in number, who were forced to flee during and after the war of 1948 from hostile and often life-threatening situations. They have never been compensated for their land that was confiscated, land which their families had owned for centuries. Is this injustice?

Professor Wolterstorff never speaks of the vicious anti-Semitism which has plagued Sephardic Jews for years and which even today cruelly grinds away at the tiny Jewish communities trapped in Arab countries. He does not take seriously the suggestion that the refugees could be resettled (with full citizenship) in the same Arab



I can only hope that the future will bring a more sensitive and cautious approach to the problems of the Middle East from the pen of a man who clearly desires justice and peace in a world in which war and pain and suffering are still dominant.

<sup>1</sup> "Nation and Covenant in Palestine (1)," August 1981, 6-9; "Nation and Covenant in Palestine (2)," September 1981, 6-9; "Israel in Lebanon," August 1982, 8-11; "The Beirut Massacre," October 1982, 2-4; "A Triple Standard," November 1982, 4-5; "Reply by Nicholas Wolterstorff (to letters)," February 1983, 8-9; "Blood Runs, Hope Fades," December 1983, 2-5; and "Death in Gaza," February 1988, 2-5.

<sup>2</sup> "A Christian Looks at the Middle East," December 13, 1982, 8-10.

<sup>3</sup> Joan Peters, *From Time Immemorial* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 234.

<sup>4</sup> As quoted in Colin Chapman, *Whose Promised Land?* (Tring, England: Lion Publishing Company, 1983), 78.

<sup>5</sup> Bernard Lewis, *Semites and Anti-Semites* (New York: Norton & Company, 1986), 15.

<sup>6</sup> Louis Rapoport, "Eyewitness in Gaza," *Commentary* (August 1988), 51.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*





# Memorial Service

by Timothy J. VanNoord

A 78-year-old Gaines Township man was killed Monday night when he was struck by two cars as he walked to a church meeting.

Rufus J. Van Noord, of 6931 Willard Ave. SE, was walking across the 400 block of 68th Street SE when he was struck by an east-bound vehicle, according to Kent County Deputy Harry Verhey.

"He was crossing from north to south and entered the traffic lane," Verhey said. "He was hit twice, by two vehicles, both going the same way.

"That street has a lot of traffic," Verhey. One guy hit him and spun him around in front of another."

Van Noord suffered massive injuries and was pronounced dead on arrival at Butterworth Hospital. The accident occurred about 7:20 p.m. . . .

The speed limit is posted at 35 mph on 68th Street and Verhey did not believe excessive speed was a factor in the accident. He also said the street is lighted, although trees could have played a factor by obstructing the motorist's vision.

Van Noord was on his way to the Cutlerville East Christian Reformed Church at 501 68th Street SE, deputies said. He was to attend the weekly meeting of the men's Bible study group.

A member for about four years, Van Noord "was a person who took a great interest in the church," said the Rev. John Engbers. "He was a faithful member and, until a year or so ago, sang in the choir."

Before moving to Grand Rapids, Van Noord was a farmer in Wayland.

Van Noord's body was taken to the Stroo Funeral Home where arrangements are being completed.

—The Grand Rapids Press,  
December 9, 1980

"Do you know who John Lennon is?" my father asked as we waited at the intersection while the light blazed red.

"Yea," I replied.

"I heard on the news this morning that he was killed last night, I think in New York."

"Yea. . . I heard about that too."

The light finally turned green and we crept ahead in the relative silence of laboring Fords and rubber against asphalt. Just another car among the mass crawl stumbling forward to get a grip on one more morning, one more day spread out like puzzle pieces on a table top. He parked where the busses usually parked in front of school and we headed up the sculptured walk, through both sets of glass doors, and into the walled off darkness, squinting at the removal of a brilliant winter sunrise. At the turning of the first stair we split up to get our things—he to his room near the office and me to my locker in Freshman Hall.

Kids mulled around in every corner, talking, joking, and pushing each other around as they killed time before the first bell rang. I acted as if all was well and half smiled at everyone as I passed by; I kept my mouth shut when I found a couple friends exchanging put-downs next to the drinking fountain, stayed for only a second, nodded, and said I had to go. I pulled down an armful of books from the top shelf of my locker then cursed myself after slamming the flimsy metal door on my knee, sending a million words sprawling across the floor. My angry glare was answered with nothing more than an artificial, indifferent olive drab stare.

"It's okay," the principal said over the chipped countertop, "your dad talked to me, you don't need a written excuse."

My father stood near the faculty

mailboxes at the other end of the office, quietly talking with a few other teachers. I shuffled my weight from foot to foot as I waited for him blindly scanning a nearby bulletin board to learn the latest news and avoid having to look at anyone. The clock on the wall stopped moving and began to spin. Come on, dad. . . .

The evening before began normally enough. I went to my job cleaning the grade school a few blocks from my house, the same school that suffered under my reign of terror a couple years before. The vacuuming came and went as it always did; my mind, not needed, roamed far and wide until I walked over to the gym to set up for the volleyball games later that night. I sang a song to the rhythm of the wrench which spun in my hand as the basket drifted upwards, a trick which didn't succeed in numbing the pain that shot up my arm with every turn. I remembered how much I hated basketball. The screwed-down aluminum support poles hummed under the strain of the stretching net, falling silent and standing tense as I left looking like twigs pulled tight around a spider's web.

At home for dinner I consumed the casserole that my mother slapped onto the table, then retired to the couch downstairs to catch a few useless hours of TV. I curled up and got comfortable as the commercials danced inside the glass, a necessary prelude to watching MASH. My father came downstairs just as the theme music began to play and the helicopters took flight.

"Tim, would you please come up to the living room, I want to have a talk with you."

My head hissed as I strained to recall the day's events—my father never spoke to me like that unless I was in trouble for something I did in school. But hard as I thought I



couldn't remember anything I did that day which would have warranted a call home.

I trudged up the steps in a state of apprehension, not sure of what was going on and beginning to wish I was still at work, not here where this was happening. When I realized that the whole family was gathering in the living room I feared I was about to be publicly flogged and banished from the house. My stomach began to turn.

We resembled a group of refugees in front of the magistrate, waiting to learn our fate in an alien land: five sons, one daughter, their mother and father. I slumped into the couch which stood guard under the family pictures that my mother carefully rearranged every year; my father found a chair in the kitchen, brought it out, and sat down in front of us. That moment I understood what he was about to say.

"I have something I have to tell you as a family. . . I just got a call from Uncle Ray in Michigan. Grandpa Van Noord was walking to a meeting at church tonight, about an hour ago, and was hit by a car as he crossed the street in front of the church. I don't really know all the details but he. . . they took him to the hospital, but there was nothing they could do. He went to be with his Lord. He's dead."

My terror grew with each word he spoke, even as each word clarified the unknown apprehension: now I knew. But. . . no. . . this can't be—how. . . this isn't. . . how can it be? Thoughts staggered through my head: He was in no condition to die—maybe he was old enough, but his health would have lasted another ten years—at least... no, this can't be, there must be some kind of mistake—what? . . . why?

"Please, let's pray. . ."

I didn't hear much of the prayer that my father managed to choke out—the anger cut me off: If it was hit and run I will find out who did this and hunt him down. I won't let this injustice go unpunished. Who would dare do this to him? An old man on a walk—and on the way to church! To church. . . my God. In those few seconds my mind fixed the future: I, the Determined Detec-

tive, examining every clue with an eagle's eye. Nothing would go unnoticed. He would not get away. I, Member of the Bar, brilliantly presenting the case, stoic face cracking a smile after the final argument. I, the Judge, finding the man guilty beyond the shadow of a doubt. I condemning him to death. I, the Executioner, donning my black mask and putting my righteous anger into just action, beating this careless, wreckless, thoughtless fool with my bare hands until his blood ran thick, smothering the voice which screamed from the ground below his feet. How the hell could he. . .

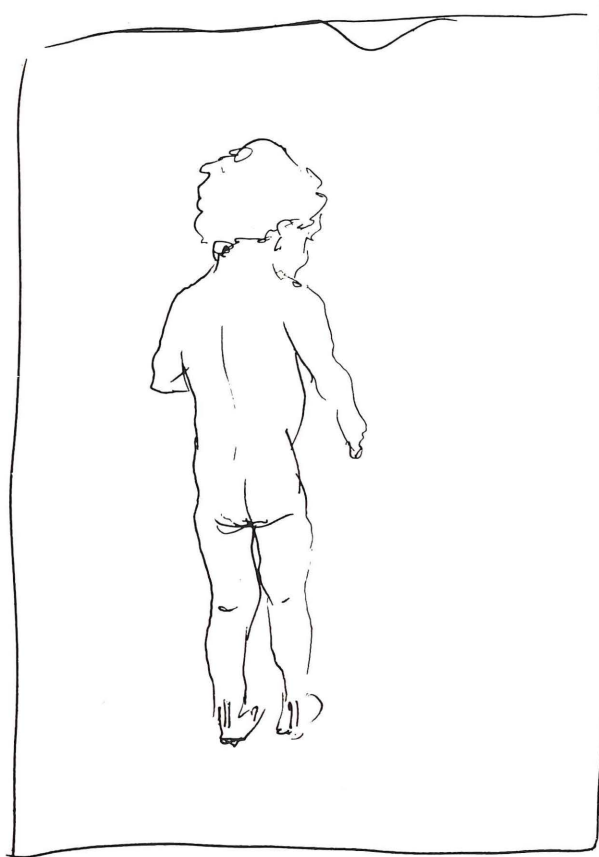
". . . in Jesus' name, Amen."

I tried to hide the tear fumbling its way down the side of my face. I left the room as soon as the prayer ended and followed the dirt in the carpet to the bathroom. My grandfather dead. . .

The night had gotten colder. I shrugged my coat tight and walked back to school to close up after the volleyball games. The very place I longed to escape to when I thought I was about to be burned at the stake now became a prison. The big gym

stunk of sweat and cheap after-shave, silent except for the steady buzz of the purple tinted mercury vapor lights hanging from the ceiling. I fought back wave after wave of emotion as every fiber of muscle in my arm twitched and burned as I wrenched the baskets down to playing height. The slow arc changed the shape of the shadows on the floor and stilled as the chains snapped tight and the cable went slack. The rim came to rest in its exact spot: precisely ten feet above the measured and marked floor and ready for another day of P.E. and basketball practice.

My heavy footsteps echoed and re-echoed off the painted brick walls of the gym as I checked every door and limped into the hall, stopping only for a second at the breaker box to snap the black switches off. Behind my back the room flashed and fell dead. I kicked out the doorstop and let the wooden door slowly swing shut, sealing off the gym with a final click as the catch snapped. I looked back through the darkness, not sure if I had taken down the nets. The Big Dark revealed nothing so I assumed





that the nets were put away and all was in order. I wasn't about to go back in.

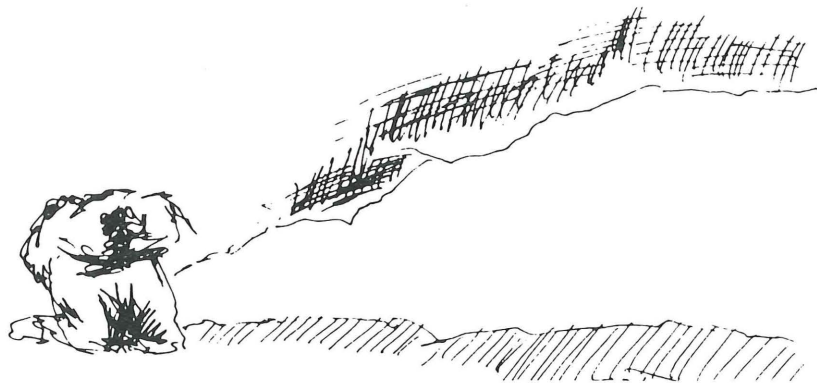
I never liked being in that school at night: every room poured darkness into the hallways instead of the light of day; shadows and shades played where eight year olds played tag and hide-and-go-seek seconds before; the sound of a million kids screaming and pianos playing and children singing—the sound of joy, replaced by the noise of a lone cricket and the rattling compressor in the boiler room that kicked on and off whenever the spirit moved. Anyone could be hiding anywhere and everything seemed to close in on anyone foolish enough to walk the darkened halls. The horrors hidden during the day crept out at night: so many memories in one building that each inch of space presses up against the next like an angry mob; so much history in need of release, threatening to shoot out of the compressed frenzy and rip a gash in the roof on the way to annihilation; specters and spirits wailing, haunting someone somewhere, calling out to the present to be seen, to be heard, to be free. Maybe the fear that night as I walked through those halls was worse than ever, so quickly realized with a phone call and a few words; maybe hardly noticed because my thoughts were a thousand miles away. Maybe that night the spirits did come to life and the past actually intruded into the present, taking advantage of me because I was unwilling to face the fury of present reality. Maybe that night they danced around me a dance of mad delight.

My clock radio woke me to the news that John Lennon had been shot to death during the night. So much for the Beatles. . . I rolled over and turned the noise down to a whisper, stared at the lines of plaster on the ceiling above, then pulled the sheets closer to my body. There was no reason to get out of bed.

The Beatles were the favorite rock group of a neighborhood friend of mine; a trip over to his house meant a journey back to another world of mop-tops and music. I remember the green apple on the label of one of his records and how it spun around on the turntable while the

harmonies and discord surged through the air and pounded on the windows of his room. He told me a story once to try to help me through the loss of a record to little brother's fingernails: the very first record that he bought, a Beatles' album, was doing its thing on an old stereo in the basement of his house when he went upstairs for a few minutes to find out what his mother had been yelling at him through the clothes chute. When he returned downstairs he found the candle which he had left burning on top of the stereo—he never told me what he was doing burning a candle on his stereo—had fallen over onto the record, spilling hot wax all over John, Paul, George, and Ringo. So much for that record.

I think we both hoped—he more than I—that some day the Beatles would get back together and tour the US. They were the heroes of a generation we missed out on but still tried to join. A reunion would mean our adoption into that generation.



But as I shivered in bed that morning none of this really mattered any more. Not much mattered any more. Who cares about the final end of a distant group of bugs? Who cares about the death of a person I never knew in a distant land I never visited? So what if the Beatles are dead—my grandfather was killed last night. Hit by a car. On the way to church. Old people aren't supposed to be killed by cars as they walk to church. It just doesn't happen. So what if the Beatles are history? So what if John Lennon is dead. . . .

Grandpa DeMann shook my father's hand after greeting us at the door; he said he was sorry about

what had happened, it was so tragic. . . . His TV set bustled in the background, spitting out information and entertainment as the pictures flittered across the screen. My parents and grandparents sat in the dining room while the news came on, talking in whispers punctuated with the clink of coffee cups and spoons; light tripped out into the darkened living room as I sat and watched, illuminated by the glow of the box in front of me. They ran a long story about Lennon, complete with pictures of the shooting scene, dramatic reenactments, all the details down to the blood, and eyewitness accounts. People walked about dazed and confused, their long faces split open by shadows and light, projections of the flickering candles they held in their hands. "Give peace a chance," someone said. Then a short story, a little blurb: "A Cutlerville man, Rufus Van Noord, was killed last night when. . ."

"Dad—look, it's on TV. . . ."

As we sped north on 131 to the funeral home we crossed a stretch of land that my grandfather had farmed years back. When the highway went through the government paid a fair price for it and set the Cats in to destruct and construct. My head rattled against the window above the back seat as we spun on and on; I kept having a vision of someone walking out of the darkness at the edge of the road and into the light spreading out from our car. Someone out on an evening inspection of the grounds, checking the ice on the creek. He stepped out onto the blacktop and turned toward us as he realized what was about to happen. His eyes flashed red under the influence of



our light, he blinked once, then looked straight ahead without fear or trembling, only a look of dull surprise. I saw it happen again and again in my head, unable to stop it from happening, knowing what had happened and what was about to happen again, wondering all the while what it must have been like—my God: the horror. . .the horror—or was it like nothing at all?

His face looked as if someone had taken a file to one side of it. The casket lay in its proper place, lid pushed up like a loose flap on a cardboard box, contents propped and primed for all to examine at their leisure. He slept with a certain nondescript expression on his face, stone silent, bearing the scars of his triumph over death.

"If you look at him from this angle," my father said as he bent over sideways, "it looks like he's smiling. . .look." He made sure we all saw what he did.

I couldn't believe they had an open casket. He'd been run over by a car. His body had been raped by death. Why show that? Why put him on view like some kind of side-show freak? One short visit and I let him rest in peace, content enough with my view and in need of some corner to hide in until we left. The finality of it was too much for me, or at least too much for me to understand at that moment, something I knew I didn't want to have any part of.

The facts began to filter in: it wasn't hit and run. . .an accident. . .no way he could have seen the road, a row of mailboxes in the way. . .nothing could be done. . .the man who hit him is really shaken up, won't drive again. . .a Catholic. . .no, he wasn't speeding—Agnus says she can hear when they're speeding—she lives right there, you know—she didn't hear anything. . .two cars hit him, not just one—the second driver denies it all. . .knocked him right out of his shoes.

My father took a walk later that night and traced the footsteps of his father to the accident scene. A pilgrimage, first for his father, now for him. He had to convince himself that it actually happened that way, he had to see the place, he had to be sure that it actually happened. While he was out they talked about

how my grandmother had gone to bed early that night and wouldn't answer when the knock came on her door. She thought it was just some neighborhood kids playing a prank, not worth her while to leave the warmth of her bed on a cold evening. Eventually she wrapped herself in a robe and answered the door. Whoever had come would not go away.

"He was about my height," my father said when he got back "and there's a row of mailboxes down the side of the road. . .you can't see the cars coming. . .I almost got hit." He was sure it was an accident and no one was to blame. He decided to visit the man who drove the first car to let him know that we held nothing against him and that God was watching over all.

"I invited him to grandpa's church," he said later, "and he told me that he might come. He said they're allowed to study the Bible more now than they used to be. I think they even have a Bible study group. We read a few passages together and prayed. He's taking it pretty hard."

I sat near the front of the room during the funeral service. As we entered the little chapel a few minutes earlier the Funeral Director stopped us and insisted that we take one final look at our grandfather, for it would be the last look we would ever have of him. I didn't care to look, but he kept insisting, so I did and saw the same scars, now a little darker, a little deeper, a little older.

After everyone found a seat the Director swung the doors of the chapel shut and rolled the casket up to the front. He left it next to the podium and took his place off to one side, hands clasped in front of him as he stared straight ahead like a Marine, making sure everything went as he had planned.

It was a simple casket, made of an aluminum with a golden tint, decorated with stalks of wheat carved into the sides. A simple casket for a simple farmer, for a man who worked the eternal land with those hands—those same decaying hands.

I can't remember much of what

the minister said during the eulogy—"What a thrill to step from a broken cement sidewalk in this world and onto the golden streets of the next" was about all I heard. I was back at the farm. For a kid from the suburbs of Chicago those few acres of Michigan earth were like Paradise. Grass and trees, hawks and geese, cows, horses, cats. . .the sweet smell of clover instead of smog, and a wind which threw a breath of life into the lungs, not death. When we were in grade school, two of my brothers and myself were allowed to spend a couple summer weeks every year at grandpa's farm, a welcome break from the usual summer routine of sleep and TV, Little League games, village rec programs, and cookouts.

All that we couldn't do at home we could do there: we staged grand expeditions through the eye-high fields and the forests out back, we blasted off the model rockets we never had space to launch at home, we drove the tractor, chased rats, helped bail hay, played in the old barn, explored the milk room with its stainless steel icons, and flung our imaginations free in a place too huge to ever get a grasp of. And we built treehouses. Every summer we'd try to top the previous summer's effort: we found old bent and rusted nails in the barn and hammered them straight on the concrete driveway, we rounded up all the wood we could get without anyone noticing, threw it all into a wheelbarrow with a half flat tire, asked grandpa if we could borrow his hand saw, found the right tree, and went to it. We planned, measured, marked, cut, hammered, and fought, somehow managing to get the thing slapped up just in time for us to leave.

But we always negotiated enough time to inhabit our home. We sat up there, suspended by faith and air, stretched out on our backs as we stared up at the infinite sky. In Chicagoland you see more airplanes in the sky than stars. Not so in Paradise. If the tree would sway we would sway. If the boards rattled and hummed our bodies would resonate, if it rained we got wet. We thought about the time of freedom we'd been granted and about the acres and acres of land with no



neighbors except for the farmers across the street. We recalled the games we played in the woods, the squirrels and chipmunks, the pheasants kicked up as we farmed the land, the snakes run over, dogs chased and chasing, the bats in the rafters. We imagined ourselves to be those tiny furballs hanging upside down in our tree: looking at the stars long enough to see down instead of up, a pool below instead of a dome above—you find yourself in danger of falling into the Great Deep, the infinite sea of darkness with chips of light swimming below. We hung there and wished the time would never end and we'd never have to go back to living a hundred houses per block. But as soon as the impossible occurred, as soon as we stared at the stars long enough and time actually did stop, at that exact moment we found ourselves waving goodbye from the back seat of the station wagon, crawling on top of a dozen brothers to get one final look at the tree-house and the farm.

A glimpse of that last tree house. It was the biggest of them all, the best, but plans of future forts made it look like nothing more than the product of rusted nails and stolen wood. The next one would reach up to heaven. What did we care if it wasn't possible for three little kids to build a ten floor tree house—in our minds we were busy building it. So we found a way to ignore the fact



that we were heading home to the city: the trip back lasted less than the three hours it entailed as we laughed and talked and described to each other how great the next one already was.

Not long ago, taking a break from having too much to do, I fired up my beat-up, old Toyota four-speed and went for a ride. I ended up back at the farm. I wanted to find out for sure if I had ever been there. Traffic passed angrily as I slowed the car to a crawl and scanned the trees lining the driveway to the barn. Thank God—it was still there: that last tree house built on our last trip to the farm still stood, no, slouched in that tree created only for us to build a tree house in, that tree house. Only a few rotting boards remained up in the branches, a few more lay tangled in the weeds below, but I saw our home as it was: rough but sturdy, standing on its foundation of sky, eternity above, hacked out of old, splintered wood, the kind of wood that lasts forever. We actually have been there, Paradise is not a dream, and we even made a mark on that little world—our fingerprints remain. And the fingerprints of that little world remain on me. They stain this paper as I write.

My brother Dave was one of the pallbearers, selected because he is the oldest grandchild. We stood huddled up against each other in front of the funeral home, trying to escape the prying talons of a mid-December wind and watched in a silent whine as the casket was brought out to the black hearse. My brother walked slowly to keep up with the group of old men, bearing grandfather's weight for me as his feet cracked into the frozen ground. The whole car shuddered when they slammed the door.

At the graveyard the sandy soil stood in a rounded and shrouded pile next to the gaping hole which was decided to be the final resting place of my grandfather. The workmen had since retreated to their rumbling pickup trucks to catch a smoke and talk about the latest Lions' loss, or the death of Lennon, or the latest fight with the little wife, or maybe just the weather, anything to keep their minds too full to think.

Dust to dust was all that was left, and they covered it with dirt.

They moved off the farm a few years before his death and settled into a house in the suburbs of Grand Rapids to live out their retirement. It was a nice place, maybe too many kids around who cut through the lawn, but after his death it got to be too much for my grandmother to care for by herself; so she sold the house, and found an apartment closer to the city and closer to the conveniences. She has no lawn or young neighbors to worry about now and keeps to herself, living among too many people to have time to get to know them all, people she hardly understands. Just the other day a black family moved in across the way.

"Really black," she said while passing the pot roast one Sunday, "but they seem like decent people."

I don't think he ever wanted to leave the farm; my father told me how disappointed his father was when he told him he was leaving the farm, going off to college to become a teacher. My two uncles, the remaining children of the family, also left to pursue careers in business and our Paradise wound up being sold for a few dollars and left in care of another family.

I often wonder what I would be doing right now if that farm had stayed in the family.

But I've also come to realize that it has: my father never left the farm. The soil he tends to now is not found in a few Michigan acres, but is found balled up into the image of God. He cares for the clay with compassion and respect; he nourishes growth with love and knowledge and tradition and fear. A teacher is a farmer with more than this year's harvest at stake; lives are at stake; the future is being formed.

And I hope that my father understands when I tell him I'm leaving the farm—teaching's not for me—that I'm not leaving his way of life behind. I might move, but I won't leave the land behind to be tended by strangers. It means too much to me.

I never really knew my grandfather. He can't be the person I saw through the sugar induced coma of childhood: the bigger-than-life





—Tim VanNoord



magic man who could conjure animals from their dens and milk from the cow, who threw pheasants into flight and seedlings into sight. And he can't be the person I saw him as during the close of his life. When he died I was still recovering from, or still in the middle of, an angry rebellion which I considered just. I was fighting the world on its own terms, paying it back with the same blows it struck me with. His death played a part in ending the anger in me. A part. But while he lived out the last few years of his life I lived out the first few years of mine, going through the pains of giving birth and being born, wrestling with myself and the demons of our day, living a life of emotional violence which compares to the physical violence of his death. I wondered if I even existed. Who am I? I didn't seem to fit in. Does anyone? So to make myself fit in I molded myself to the forms that others took on, found a mask similar to theirs, and put it on. I looked cool and tough as I walked to school each morning. No one could see the person who cried at night in bed, wishing he was someone else. I became someone else. The price had to be paid: to fit in with others I could not fit in with myself.

But there were times when the mask would break loose and slip from my face, shatter on the floor, or be ripped off like a bandage from a festering wound. I used to break down and weep whenever I got into the trouble I did for acting so tough: it wasn't me, I said with my tears, that's not what I wanted to do, it's all a mistake, this isn't me, something's wrong. Still I did what I didn't want to do. Still I kept my mask.

And there was my grandfather: quiet, kind, and gentle. I looked at him and saw a weak and feeble person—I the almighty fifteen-year-old, cool dude fuck you all angry at life liar and he the ancient old coot. He was not the kind of person I would look cool around. He cared for people. He didn't make any sense to me and my fabricated world. He didn't fit in with my displaced persona, so I silently exiled him from my kingdom. Secretly I judged him with contempt. I exiled him as others exiled me and I exiled myself. I wouldn't let him be

himself because I couldn't be myself. Is there no higher form of arrogance? Pull others down with you because you are drowning. If I can't have it, no one can. But he never changed—not that I ever expected him to conform to my way of life so that he could be accepted by me. He stayed the same while I lied, I fought, I cried. I never liked him, then he died. I hope he knew me better than myself.

I hear stories of his compassion, whether it be for some stray dog with a broken back or for the cats who hung out in the milk room waiting for a shot of milk, whether it be for his grandchildren or for Nick, the retarded boy who lived across the street from the farm and who followed my grandfather around like a disciple. I hear about my grandfather's passion for the Bible and for God. I still remember the picture which appeared in the local newspaper after he came out to visit us one Fourth of July: he sits there at a picnic table, eyes shining and gray hair tossed by the wind, content, listening to the village band play patriotic music as he holds my little brother Michael in his lap—the patriarch and the offspring, the testimony of the past and the promise of the future, the covenant founder and the covenant bound, the farmer and the city dweller, the 1900s and the year 2000: Reuben and Michael.

My grandfather has become a mystery to me. The older I get and the longer it's been since his death the larger and more complex the mystery grows. As the reality of his presence fades from me I have a hard time trying to imagine what he was like. What he was really like. He's a mystery I will never solve, something distant and hazy in my past, a long figure walking beneath a street light on a foggy night, a glimpse in the mirror gone before I can look again, a word I can never find the meaning of. He's someone I have lost and can never find, someone I run through the woods to capture so I can have a guide to lead me on, someone who knows the woods better than I, someone who always gets away. Someone seeing to lead the blind.

I wish he were still here today—I hope to God he would notice the dif-

ference in me, and I the difference in him which I noticed before but never understood—the same difference I damned. Would I be able to understand it now? I wish he were here so we could talk—I don't know what we would talk about but there's a lot I would like to ask him, a lot I would like to say to him. I'd tell him how much I've changed and how hard it was to change. I'd tell him things I have a hard time telling myself, tell him about things I don't really understand, tell him things he already knows. He would understand. I know he would. We would find out we are very much the same. We would find out we always have been. Maybe we would talk about the land, the piece of Paradise Lost he cared for, the grand great creation, or about the smallest of seeds, or about something as common as rain. Rain means something after a drought. Maybe we would talk about things unmentionable, about the unnamed presence whose name is continually on his tongue, about the sweet heat of the flame, the fire of love, the consummation which consumes him now. I don't know where the talk would begin, or where it would end, maybe in the same place—the same place made new by all the talk that has gone on in between, the same place never seen twice.

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*My grandfather has become a mystery to me...the mystery grows.*

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Or maybe—God forbid—he would still be in exile from my kingdom. Maybe I just couldn't fit him into my approaching the year 2000 lifestyle: we're so much more advanced than he was, the language has changed—could he even understand my words? I might think he was too conservative, too traditional, too old. Maybe I would banish him to a home for the Old and Useless and let him live out his days among the dying, able to play shuffleboard and watch TV whenever he pleased. Maybe we would just sit next to each other and stare at the floor, dumbfounded as we slip and slide at either side of what I would make the mistake of calling



the Generation Gap. What would it be like to sit there like that, to know that we could learn so much from each other and yet to be unable to speak a word? I would be in hell, just as surely as he is in heaven, the gulf between uncrossable, the divorce too great. I would become less and less comfortable as the eternal moments squeezed by and slowed until they no longer flowed. The living water would stagnate, the living language drown. Too much alike to ever share what we have in common, too different; and then to hide behind three words, a definition, to blame it on a gap we, I, have just dug. The real problem is not a gap between the generations, the real problem is the walls we build between others. The kingdoms and castles we banish others from. "Good fences make good neighbors," an American says.

I don't know if I believe him.

My grandfather has become a source of inspiration for me. I have learned so much from him. Maybe this is so only because he is such a mystery to me; maybe because I have made him into something he never was: my own personal legend, a myth. Maybe all of this, all of these words, all of these memories are just the stuff of myth, growing larger with every revision, becoming what never was. Could it be? Is memory, history, all of this, just myth? A wisp of smoke, dust in the wind, a tumble weed blown from the past across the desert of the present? I don't really know—what do I know? I don't think so. He was a man who lived what he believed in, a man with a secret he was willing to share with anyone who was willing to listen. But when he was alive I never wanted to listen,

and how, now that I have realized I'm dying and need the fountain of life, he is gone. Now that I need him he has no need for me. What need do the dead have for the living? Do they even remember us? Have they disclosed all of their secrets to us when they were living, and now remain forever silent? Dear God, I have to know; what was his secret?

"You can never study a man, you can only get to know him," a voice from my past says.

Fine, I agree, I'm finished with my intellectual exercise, my studies, but how do I get to know him now—he's dead. How, Grandfather, do I get to know you now? How? Grandfather, do you really have the answers? Can you tell me, can you, please?

Yet, even now, I think I know what he would say. Yet, even now, I'm not really sure. . . O God, I need to know for sure—Grandfather? Please. . . Grandfather, can you hear me? Grandfather. . . wait. Listen.

His death changed me. I know that for sure. If not then it has now. But how? And why, oh my God, why did it take his death to bring me closer to him? Would time have done the same? Grandfather, did you have to die so that I can hear all I wouldn't listen to when you spoke to me?

My God, something horrible just spoke to me: Grandfather, did you die for me? Were you killed so that I, now, could have life? So that I could find the answers I need to live by looking at your death by violence? Did you have to die for me? Was there no other way?

Grandfather, did I kill you?

Was it my anger that condemned you to die, to die so I could be purged of my anger? Is this what you are saying to me?

Grandfather, tell me—what is it like, can you see? What do you see? What was it like to step into eternity? What is it like to be ravished by death, to be burned by life, to live like a dream? Grandfather. . . Grandfather. . . can you hear me. . . can you. . .

There's no more to be said—I've said too much already. It's pointless: my grandfather is dead. I cannot consider what might be. This is the way it is, the way it had to be. This is the truth as far as I can see. I think, perhaps, that this moment is



—Tim VanNoord



the same moment he died: right now he is stepping out onto the street, right now he sees what his fate is to be, right now the flicker in the eyes, the dull surprise, life flashing in the light and between the lines, he sees everything he has ever done, all he lived for, the need to die. He asks all the questions he was afraid to ask, feels all the doubt he put off, and closes his eyes. In my vision he never closed his eyes; he only blinked. He feels the bumper of the car bruise his knee, time slow to an eternity, then, somehow, now, someone pushes him out of the way as time rockets ahead a thousand times faster than usual and all the answers come to an instant, a glance, as he steps into infinity. How the gold must shine, how the songs must ring. He's probably singing in a choir again—I know he is. I can hear him.

But the rest is left for me to finish. He cannot speak to me. The dead do not speak the language of the living. The eternal infinite is silent. Silence is its language. A still small voice, the silence between the waves, the voice of the children in the apple tree. The questions are left for me to answer. Life goes on; oak leaves turn brown and fall; the tombstones decay. Monday morning waits in the wings, thirty-seven minutes away. Back to work, back to the busy-ness, back to the grind. No time left in my break from having too much to do. Too much time taken already, too much need of release—but not words from the dead.

Every year around December 8 I remember my grandfather. Other people remind me. And I do get bitter when these people remember so well the death of Lennon but have forgotten my grandfather. I'm bitter at the coincidence, not at Lennon, not at others. But the coincidence was and had to be. The coincidence has helped me to see some things I could never have seen if the coincidence had never been. Could it be too ironic to be coincidence? Still, so much hoopla over one man, and so little said about another. A few words spoken over the dinner table, a prayer or two, a visit to the graveyard when my grandfather seems to be the only one who cares. That's about it. No great gather-

ings, no candlelight vigils in Central Park, no books, no movies, no big-wigs praising his name. No songs written about him. I think he would have preferred it this way. He was only a farmer. A quiet man who worked with his hands, not a great man like Lennon. Not the hero of a generation, the savior of the youth, not the idol of sixteen-year-old girls, not more popular than Jesus. Lennon was a great musician, my grandfather was not, he only grew wheat. But why is one more celebrated than the other? Why is one considered a genius, and the other, well, just dead? One a god, the other a distant memory. Two men killed on the same day, both cut down by the violence we face every day—but why does the greatness of John Lennon grow every day while my grandfather's life is left to decay? Why?

Perhaps that is why I keep him alive, why he has become my inspiration—I won't let the life of a great man fade unnoticed. This is my tribute to him, my memorial service, my way to show his greatness to a world which has hardly taken notice of him but to open its mouth and swallow him up in his grave. The earth has done the same, but the earth has no say—I do. The world has choices to make.

All this said: he doesn't matter. He isn't worth the paper this is printed on or the effort invested in remembering. He would tell you so. He would tell you about someone greater than himself, someone well worth the investment, the integrity he staked everything upon. I don't think I even have to mention the one word, the one name that is both his everything and what it is staked upon. Staked up on.

I give you a man with greatness not recognized by this world. With a greatness perhaps only recognized as a weakness. A greatness consisting of compassion and humility, respect for God, respect for man, and respect for creation. Is this weakness? Then I will rejoice in his weakness and follow his pattern of greatness. I once saw him as weak but now I long for the strength he had. God, please, a tenth of it.

A strange thing has happened to me. Now that I have seen this strength in him I notice it in others. Or is it the strength in others that I

overlooked before. And I long to be as overlooked as they are. No, I haven't seen it in someone up on a stage in front of a million screaming fans, or in the actors and actresses on the far side of a distant screen, or in the models who model for us who we should be—though it might still be in them, hidden from me—I've seen it in the people right beside me, the people I have never really seen before. At least not in this light. The people who have suffered but still continue to give, those who give and suffer for it, those who suffer all so that they can give, those who give all—can this possibly be true?—so that they can suffer for others. Where have they been all this time? Where have I been? Who have I been looking at?

But still there are many, too many, that I overlook—do they also have to die before I notice them? Do they also have to die for me? Will I kill them too? Do they have to go ahead of me so I can be willing to speak to them? People right next to me who I either don't care to look at or don't dare. People who have this strength I long to acquire; yet, God I can't even look them in the eye—this terrible good I'm too frightened to see: the flame too hot, the look too deep, the price too great to pay. Too much suffering to bear. But, God, what do I do? They have what I want. Give me the strength to turn to them and talk, before it is too late. Give me the courage to look into their eyes and not turn away. Give me the humility to ask them why: why does the light in your eye burn so bright? Why does that flame threaten me, threaten to consume me in my entirety? Please, tell me, I need to know—I want to know—who are you?

The world can forever mourn the passing of John Lennon: I will not forget my grandfather.





—Tim VanNoord



A letter to freshmen. You write with short sentences. You also do not have enough imagery. The profs do not like this. Disjointed sentences are there too. They have complained. The rhetoric center is swamped. What is a big sentence? You need an example. Here is one.

### **Banana**

I would like a banana to bring to Guatemala where I would show those stupid Contras that we people here in the U.S. are very serious about our fruit and how it is processed for our eating pleasure during the rainy season when many a peon is rained out of house and home because of fish bowls in New England near many of Ronald Reagan's old movie locations that ultimately have brought the closing of the American mines to which an abrupt solution is needed to offset the ever-increasing number of filters in today's fish tanks and also to decrease our GNP; therefore a greater number of didactic preachers can bring colled off molten lava to America's starving freedom loving Republicans who always bring pomegranates instead of bananas to their fundraisers on neoplatonic modes with floppy disks in the lunch bags and newer friends that facilitate a decreasing part of macroeconomics in the northern sectors of quasi-furniture cities such as Grand Rapids and Toronto, Canada where several such people of malevolent persuasion constantly complain of acid rain while Mulroney tries to run his provinces, even as conservatives and liberals alike look on in a pseudo-intellectual gaze that embarrasses a complacent college belonging to John Calvin's future church where at this very moment the cornerstone which was rejected for DeVos Hall is being fitted into the superstructure of Calvin's newest building at a not quite so cheap as we thought price; for to dwindle on such frivolities is not just different but it shows a need for total lobotomies on crowds of euphemistically endowed strangers with a lack of vivarin in a world full of hope and bananas.

—Paul Lantinga