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Dialogue

Staff and writers of Dialogue

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CONTRIBUTORS

Gabrielle Darnell: SWF, enjoys horseback riding on the beach, reading poetry by firelight, and shoveling mulch. Ask for Bruno when you call.

Brad DeVries says, yesterday’s madness is today’s sanity.

Brian De Yong—"Don’t be sad."

Jon Den Hartigh says, “Daytons the mother ship.”

Mark Douma says, live by the gun, die by the gun.

When Pam Henshell grows up, she wants to be Emily Saliers...but for now, she’ll settle for a cup of coffee.

Kevin Hommes is a junior at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan. There is no wit here.

Kara Hunt dedicates her poem to her boyfriend Mikey. Mike, you will always be the smile in my darkest night...so “I send this smile over to you.”

Peter Kooiman is a 6'5", 200lb 22-year-old junior with hair and eyes. Seeking same. No fattys. Will respond to all inquiries.

Barry Lemmen enjoys long walks on the beach, sunsets, cute puppies, and graveyards.

Jess Lilly is a born again rapper.

Amber Lynn McGill is going to be eating bananas in Honduras next semester. Her cat’s breath smells like cat food.

Carin Palsrok does not like tomato soup, and instead opts for cheese fondue. yum.

Brook Pauley’s favorite things to do are goof off with her awesome suite, drink Dr. Pepper, play viola, and sit in the sunshine while admiring tulips.

Rebecca Rosier decided in the second grade that she was going to become a famous author. Those crazy quirks had better be good for something!

Jennifer Slofstra frolicked in the autumn mist in a land called Honalee.

John Steenwyk is a senior who does not have a clue as to what he’s going to do with his life when he graduates.

Nate Swanson: Rock.

Tim Thompson likes to spend his spare time coating his body with honey and then skinny dipping in the Sem Pond.

Joel Vanderveen prefers to have his peanuts strained out of extra chunky peanut butter instead of having creamy peanut butter. Because then you have both peanuts and some creamy peanut butter.

Krista VanderWal likes tomato soup.

Jim Van Farowe is glad graduation is coming soon.

Ellie White-Stevens decided poetry is literary chocolate chip cookies, sweet, tasty, but not nutritious.

Sara Zoeterman really likes to chew on metal.
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EDITORIAL

The Sins of Christianity

"Despite the Christian preaching of love for all, even for one's enemies, the prevailing mentality down the centuries penalized minorities and those who were in any way 'different.'"

"At the end of this millennium the Catholic Church desires to express her deep sorrow for the failures of her sons and daughters in every age. This is an act of repentance, since, as members of the Church, we are linked to the sins as well as the merits of all her children."


The history of the Church is replete with suffering that Christians have inflicted on those who were in some way different. Christian "harm" includes war, inquisition, enslavement, and persecution—any time the name of Christ has been used to justify destruction.

Perhaps God's will indeed justifies harm in some cases. "Harm," after all, can be distinguished from "sin." The latter is a theological concept sometimes difficult to discern, while the former is much more tangible, easily observed in the groans of the suffering. So whether or not we condemn certain things that have been done in Christ's name—take the Crusades, as an example safely in the past—we should be able to agree that harm was caused, measurable in bloodshed, fear, and sorrow.

We further recognize that sometimes the harm that Christians committed was also sin. Take, for example, human chattel slavery in the antebellum South, or the virtual wage slavery that blossomed in the North after the Civil War. In both cases, those who supported a system of human exploitation often legitimated that system by an appeal to God's will—through Biblical support for slavery, or though recognizing God as the "invisible hand" behind unfettered, exploitive labor markets.

As Christians, what do we say about the sins that have been committed in the name of God? There are several maneuvers we could employ. One strategy is to point to all the positive things the Church has done, and simply ignore the negatives. A second strategy is to redefine the "true church" as an invisible body of believers rather than as a social institution, thus making it true
by definition that the church is without sin. Similarly, we could deny that we are in any way responsible for what others have done in Christ's name. But all of these are ways of evading and denying what Christ's body has done. And they are ways of pretending that we are less susceptible to the effects of sin than our forbears.

We Christians sometimes seem to live in two worlds: a personal life that struggles with sin, and a political, social, and institutional life that is unflinchingly certain of the truth. But we cannot conscientiously acknowledge sinfulness in our own lives while ignoring it in the present and past of the church; if we are to take the concept of human sinfulness seriously, we must also be ready to recognize its presence in our public lives. If we take responsibility for the actions of Adam and Eve—so distant and inaccessible—we should also take responsibility for grave errors closer to us.

It is not enough to admit our corporate guilt, to admit that at times the Church has failed egregiously, and to condemn those responsible. We must realize what we hold in common with those who failed, and let their failure—despite their certainty—be a lesson. Even when we firmly believe our actions are supported by the will of God, manifest in the Bible or in nature, we should realize that, just like our predecessors, we are capable of great mistakes.

When we look at the past, often the boundary between harm and sin is unclear. It should be even less clear in the present. Taking responsibility for the past means that today we should listen to those individuals and groups, both inside and outside the Church, who claim to suffer harm at our hands. The forms of harm are multifarious. We need not look for bloodshed when we are confronted with those whom the Church has isolated, alienated, or silenced, on the grounds that they live or think differently. Beyond theological arguments, we need to listen to their suffering—which is also Christ's suffering. And if, after listening, we are struck with uncertainty, we should be willing to err on the side of refusing to do harm.

I conclude with an example. The last four issues of the Spark, the publication of the Calvin Alumni Association, have been the locus of a debate on the Alumni Board's refusal to print a notice that would have helped publicize a gay and lesbian alumni network. In the Summer 1997 editorial, Mike Van Denend explained that "although the result [of the decision] is troubled hearts and hurt feelings, the Board's first consideration was to keep the Association focused on the mission [of the college] and not to get embroiled in a divisive controversy." The Spark received many comments from alums. In the most recent issue, a former editor of Dialogue wrote, "I continue to be amazed that we never seem to learn from our past mistakes." Citing the treatment of ethnic minorities in the past, he commented that "we cannot seem to apply the lesson to a new situation," and concluded, "History will not remember such myopia kindly."

Naturally, we cannot be certain of the truth of this prophecy. But it is dangerous to wait and see—resting on a call for "dialogue"—while our sisters and brothers suffer harm at our own hands. In affirming the body of Christ, we are challenged to combine a consciousness of the checkered history of Christendom with a listening, loving foresight, in order that our actions in the present may reflect the inclusive vision of the Kingdom. —Robert Huie
Jess Lilly

Sammy Whammy as Deadbeat Nick

oil pastel on posterboard
deviant charms

today i witnessed spring's defining moment
when the bleak tree budded overnight
and continued opening up all day
as i watched from my apartment window
where my own plant is growing again
and i'm starting to smell transcendent
so please forgive the odor
because i'm really no romantic
even though the sun shines on my face
and makes me feel gold again
like i was meant to be
and i'm smiling in the warmth
from behind my modern window
where my grandest schemes have all been realized in one perfect ray of light

but i'm no romantic
because you got me all contemplative again
and at dinner you were finishing my sentences
just like that one night when you walked right up to me and said,
"i think this will soon fall apart because you don't have e-mail"
and i thought,
how odd...

i'm perfecting ballroom dancing these days
so, and i think you'll agree with me when i say this, but
wasn't it disturbingly coincidental that we ever met in the first place?

Now the chalk lines that outline my carcass
on this sunny day
filled with stale cigarette smoke and toxic love
remind me that i'm merely a narcissist
waiting to break through the metaphorical world
of unsealed zip lock bags
(you still nag with zeal)
but it's all in vain:
these springtime days remind me i'm sane

--Peter Kooiman
Through the Eyes of The Virgin

I stand here now, helpless
There's nothing I can do, to rescue
There He hangs, all alone
He's not my son, but Yours

I often feel this way, inadequate
How do you care for him, a King
If only these people could see His heart, compassion
They would know the truth, forgiveness

I wish Joseph was here, to comfort
I'm glad he is not here, to see
He made a living for himself, nails and wood
They are used to kill, not create

I pondered once before, His birth
I ponder once again, His death

--Andy Dykhouse
Jennifer Slofstra

Psalm 139
gelatin silver print
A Time for Sheep

Change happens (Grand) rapidly at this time of year: buds, blooms, grades, graduation, engagements, and elopements. Calvin has erupted in the spirit of the season; this spring, Calvin College revealed a plan for change over the next 50 years—a new master architectural plan for the campus. In the feverish spirit of change, the Dialogue staff offers this humble proposal.

Think of sheep. Sheep have been a paragon of innocence since the Jews wandered the desert. Their simplicity and purity have led to sayings such as “a lamb led to slaughter,” “dumb as a sheep,” and “you’ve got to be sheeping me.” Think of the endearing clumsiness, the plaintive “ba-a-a-a.” Now think of sheep dotting the landscape of Calvin.

We know what you’ll say. “This is an institution of higher learning, not a barnyard.” “What’s the difference?” we might reply, but we hold our tongue and instead give you our case. Sheep at Calvin can solve a myriad of problems. We begin with the environmental benefits.

With all the green lawn space at Calvin, it’s hard to imagine why no one has proposed grazing their animals on it. Sheep at Calvin first take the place of lawn mowers as maintainers of the green grounds, minimizing lawnmower pollutants and providing fertilizer free of charge. If grass alone proves not enough, sheep could eat dining hall leftovers, which would reduce the amount of food waste at Calvin.

The potential social benefits are incredible. At the implementation of the sheep program, each sheep would be “adopted” by a group of five incoming first-year students. Students would rally around their sheep, name it, and generally create a family atmosphere. Lessons in responsibility and cooperation would develop from the enterprise of caring for their sheep together.

Because sheep would be tended by students and would eat from already available resources, maintenance costs would be relatively low. They have the potential to even benefit us economically; wool harvested from their coats could be made into sweaters. As a gesture of sisterhood, we could send the sweaters to be sold in Ecuador, in return for the wares they have sent here.

In order to provide a chaste, godly example for students, and to avoid the “multiplying rabbit effect,” it would be prudent to have only female sheep on campus. Subsequent generations of sheep could be cloned from existing sheep in the soon-to-be-built animal testing facility. Should a sheep stray off the beaten path and collide with a late, off-campus student cruising the parking lot for a space, the sheep would be properly appreciated at chapel service, and then donated to the biology department for dissection.

Finally, the spiritual significance of sheep on campus cannot be underestimated. Sheep are a biblical symbol of both our fallenness and redemption. “We all, like sheep, have gone astray” is exemplified for us in the everyday passion play on our lawns. But notice that we did not propose goats for this project; the absence of goats among sheep reminds us of how Christ separates the sheep from the goats, how we are God’s chosen people.

--Kelley Evans
Carin Palsrok
Listermint
oil on board
High Noon
Jim Van Farowe
oil on board
He was a boy like any other. He had staked interests in forts and games. Reason and logic were lost on him. He was of the age when his concerns were inconsequential to the adult world.

The day was a particularly uneventful day, to an outsider. To him, the day was the most demanding day that he had ever encountered, a day that could break any eight-year-old whom he knew. He was nine years old, however, and as any nine-year-old knows, nine-year-olds are privy to a much tougher spirit than even the bravest eight-year-old.

The other boys had persecuted him for his cowboy boots. His father had been telling him antiquated stories of cowboys and Indians before he drifted off every night. The Indians were stronger, more mysterious; therefore more elusive to his young mind. But they were always the losers. He wanted to emulate winners, his dad told him; also his moccasins were unfit for the harsh snow. So cowboy boots it was.

Unfortunately, cowboy boots don’t carry the prestige they used to hold in fifth grade. The popular boys had determined that this day every boy who was wearing cowboy boots should be scorned, and to his chagrin, he was the only one wearing cowboy boots. Even the girls ostracized him. He didn’t take the straight way home—meandering would be his route this day. He walked alone, pondering what cowboys do when they meet nine-year-old boys instead of Indians. His father hadn’t told him this part yet. He couldn’t dishonor his father quite yet by seeking his noble guidance; but this precarious situation necessitated advice. The only person he knew that had more stories than his father was the old man.

His aimless path brought him to the old man on this day. The old man was an eccentric character, even to such a young boy. He had heard stories of the old man at school—not particularly flattering stories. But they were relayed by boys and as any nine-year-old knows, boys have tendencies to exaggerate their falsehoods to the extent that they take on the texture of truths.

On this particular day, the boy came up to his porch seeking the old man’s words of wisdom. The old man was grandiose in the boy’s eyes but the boy was not intimidated, for a comforting warmth came
from a candle on the porch; the boy simply walked up and asked for a story. The storyteller was more than obliged, and so abruptly began to tell the only story he knew. He was a master storyteller and the boy was a master listener so the transaction was a fruitful one. The boy sat entranced with the words, silent with rapt attention. When the story was done being told, the boy thanked him and went on his way. His steps were buoyant as he glided on home, as any thoroughly entertained boy would do.

She was a girl like many others. Or rather a young lady. She was seventeen—the age when she was old enough for her parents not to understand her, but young enough that she didn’t want to leave the friendly confines of home just yet. There was still the matter of finding a strong male in her life.

This day had been a fairly uneventful one; therefore, it had been as good a day as any teenager knows. She had passed her literature test with high marks, her boyfriend reiterated his love for her, and the glistening snow was inspiring her to compose her best poetry of the season. This day became eventful later, however, as her worst fear came to fruition. She was with child. Childbearing was a good thing to her, but even she realized that it has its own time and place. In her mind, its time and place shouldn’t be during senior year. But that didn’t change the fact that she was carrying a child. She didn’t want to tell anyone else quite yet, as people would have their suspicions about her, suspicions that just might be true. Her mother may be open-minded, but she would not take this news in stride.

He left school and went for a walk to collect her thoughts. She traveled through the small town thinking of all the rumors that would create themselves, rumors that would give birth to other rumors. The path she had taken brought her to a darkness created by a gap between the streetlights. The emptiness of the darkness was more than she could take; she needed to muster all the strength she had just to collapse to the ground. A light from a porch pierced her solitude. To escape farther into the black, she buried her head in her hands and pulled her knees up to her face, but to no avail—the light shone through the darkness. It was the light from the old man’s porch that was grasping her. She never recalled him passing judgment on a person, so she allowed the light to pull her in. The old man was known to be a storyteller; she hoped that she would get the benefit of one of his colorful stories on this dirty day. She preferred a story that would not take the form of a lecture, because she knew that lectures had already been wasted on her.

The old man was still seated on his porch when she arrived. In the light of the candle, her face betrayed her emotions as she sat herself beside him. No words were needed and none were spoken. The old man knew what he had to do, for he was a storyteller. He began with the only story he knew and she poured her heart and soul into listening. When the story was done being told, she thanked him and went on her way. She decided to make her way home, for whatever would happen, she had feelings of extreme comfort.

He was a man like any other. He had a loving, compassionate wife, two
rambunctious children, and a job that contributed to his masculinity, a job in which he found meaning for his life. It was in the city; he had to commute, but he told himself sacrifices must be made.

This day was a day he had dreaded. His place of work was in the midst of numerous layoffs. Times were tough; but he was a tough man. This day he had a meeting with his supervisor and he was low on the totem pole of seniority. His toughness was a facade that even he could see through. He was riddled with anxiety since he was the wage earner of the house, the man of the house. The options he would have if he were laid off were narrow in scope. The worst of it would be how to break the news to his family. They held him in high esteem; they looked to him for guidance. He needed to be the strong role-model for his boy; his daughter needed to be taught what to look for in a man. Now more than ever, he needed this job and all it stood for.

Eventually his time came for the meeting. His supervisor sensed his apprehensiveness so she broke the news gently. Since the company was experiencing an economic crunch, that promotion he was expecting would have to wait, she told him. He took the news in stride.

This day he was jubilant. Never had the news of being passed over for promotion sounded so good. This news was received much easier when termination was expected. His brazenness was back, his swagger unabated. He could go home with his head held high and carry out his role for one more day.

This day he left work a confident man. On his way home he stopped by the old man’s place. The old man knew good stories, as any storyteller should. The confident man’s boy loved the sound of stories. He enjoyed the cowboy and Indian stories, but the plots were running dry. The confident man needed new material and the old man was just right for this purpose. He was aiming to hear some stories about a strong, male character because he needed to instill these ideals in his boy. However, the old man didn’t take kindly to requests, just as any storyteller wouldn’t.

The old man was on his porch this day, as often he was, eyeing his candle. The confident man walked up and pulled up a chair. The old man knew what he came for because he was a wise storyteller, and so he proceeded to tell the only story he knew. The confident man listened because he was interested, as anyone who has listened to an efficient storyteller would. When the story was done being told, he thanked the old man and went on his way. His swagger was less of a strut now, for he felt a newer feeling, humility.

He was a man like some others. He was an old man, or rather the old man, a storyteller by choice. The old man lived by himself in a ramshackle old house. The surrounding houses would be termed quaint, but his stood out as a blight. But within this blight, a light shown, for his porch was illuminated with a candle—a candle that was far more radiant than other candles were. This candle not only provided light, but also emitted a warmth that almost equalled the old man’s. Since the old man was a respected storyteller, the community nurtured him as their own, as any community with a respected storyteller would do. The old man was as much a fixture on his porch, regardless of season, as the weeds and tall grasses that populated the wilderness that was his front yard. Many people came to his porch for guidance, because his stories held meanings—stories that could light their way.
But the old man had a secret, as should be expected, for he was a mysterious old man. His secret pertained to his stories—he had only one. As an esteemed storyteller, he owed it to his well-being not to let this secret find its way out. But he knew this story was the only one he needed to tell, for it had all that a story ever needed.

He had acquired this story from his old man. Everyday at the dinner table, his father had described in vivid details the pieces of the story. The words of the story were always the same, but over time, the significance of this story entrenched itself in his mind. He had lived a full life, with all its peaks and crevices, and at each telling of the story, different emotions grabbed hold of him. At each telling of the story, reactions, inspirations, hopes, dreams, lessons came to light.

After his father had left this world, the old man took it upon himself to bless others with the words of his father’s story. The faces of those he had told this story blurred in his mind. The names of the recipients were lost upon him. All that mattered to him was the transmission of the story, for he was a storyteller.

Many of the townspeople had listened to this story, most more than once. The story was so complex, so elegant, so simple, so meaningful, that the the townspeople never realized that the storyteller knew only this story—they continued to seek out the old man in order to receive a few rays of his wisdom.

He was a storyteller, but he was nearing the end of his days of storytelling. But he remembered his story, for he had but one, and it put him at peace, for he knew that his journey was just beginning. His candle burned until it was no more, but the light still shone in his mind’s eye.

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**Fade to White**

Tim is out of style  
It has been a while  
In a decade or so  
We’ll call him retro

His CD’s are dated  
His clothes are faded  
But we still keep his car running

He once was handsome and virile  
His radiation made him sterile  
But his socks were bleached white

People say to my mother,  
“How he looks like his brother”  
But his shoes don’t fit me

He was ten years my senior  
I model his demeanor  
But I’m taking a tuck in that decade

Tim is out of style  
It has been a while  
But nothing is as classic as bright white.

--Joel Vanderveen
Untitled

Along the road
In winter,
The snowdrifts form
A distinct traveling path.

If only life was so easy.

--John Steenwyk

Ducks Geese and Pigeons

The old man sat on a bench
he wore a shabby coat covered with dust
and worn thin by passing years
the bench was painted a drab green
patched and spotty
on three sides old oaks surrounded the man and bench
offering shade in the warm summer days
the fourth side offered a view of a small pond
where ducks would play and swans swam regally
we played our games of youth in the park
wasting away idle hours and once in a while
looking over my shoulder I would see him
sitting there tossing out bread
the ducks and swans would gather around him
as was their daily ritual
people would pass on their way down the path
oblivious to the man and his faithful
until one day he was gone
along with all the ducks and swans
never to be seen again
and I wonder where he disappeared to
now that I am old sitting here on a bench
feeding pigeons
with children playing behind me

--Brad DeVries
Tijuana

For us a trip to Tijuana is a search
for Mexican blankets as cheap as we can get them, maybe
five dollars if we get lucky.
And we might find dollar shots of Tequila from a place
with men in sombreros playing Spanish guitars
and grinning for us.

I've been here before,
though some years separate
that trip, in search of a small silver pocket knife, and
this one.

On the bus back to California,
blankets in our laps,
we heard men laughing
which broke into talk of prostitutes they'd purchased.

In the parking lot through the rain-specked windows
we saw a prostitute thrust between the cold, wet steel of a car
and the proven desires of her buyer behind her.
The lights of Tijuana reflecting it all as lights do in rain-specked windows.

--Kevin Hommes

Promised Land

But she felt none of this, of course;
not warm flowing of milk and honey
on flat griddle chest;
not the smiling of his hungry heart beneath.
When they embraced it was ambiguous;
sunny deck, yellow tee-shirt
melting buttery in sunlight. He moved
on her back like a silly puppy; she took
comfort from patting his head.

--Tim A. Thompson
Kevin Huizenga

Landscape in the manner of Tung Yung, detail, after Kung Hsien

charcoal
INTERVIEW

Bridges and Signposts

On April 3, 1998, Katherine Paterson gave the Wiersma Memorial Lecture during Calvin College's Festival of Faith and Writing. She is the author of such books as *Jacob Have I Loved*, *The Great Gilly Hopkins*, and *Bridge to Terabithia*. She has been honored with such awards as the Newberry Award and the National Book Award for children's literature. The interview was conducted by Joanna Kirkpatrick.

Dialogue: Your work is geared toward a young adult audience. What first inspired you to write for young adults?

Paterson: I first began to write seriously when I was asked by the Presbyterian church to write a book for fifth and sixth graders, which I rewrote and which Eerdmans reprinted in 1992. It was called *Who Am I?* That was my first book, which was originally published in 1966. Until then, I hadn't really thought about writing as a career. Then we began to have lots of children, four in four years (two adopted, two homemade). I was very naive. I simply thought that it was something I could do, since I loved to write and I loved to read. I never really considered myself a writer. I thought that writing was something that I could do at home, so I wrote.

Unfortunately, nobody wanted to publish anything I wrote. There was a lady from my church who took me on as her good deed, because I had all these small children and I never got out of the house. Every Thursday night there was a writing class at the local continuing education office, and this woman asked me to go with her. It seemed like a good idea, since nobody was buying any of my material. I figured I should learn something about writing. We went to a couple of classes, and this woman told me that next semester there was a class on writing for children. She asked me if I wanted to do that, and I said “Sure.” Nothing was working, why not?

So I wrote all these stories for children, and nobody wanted to publish those either. I wrote a story almost every week, because I felt that if I was going to take the class, I should at least produce. Then I realized that if I could write a story a week, I could write a chapter a week, and by the end of the year I would have a book. That’s essentially how I wrote my first novel, in that class. Between the book that I wrote for the church, and the publishing of my first novel, there were seven years almost entirely of rejections. The novel is not your typical children's book—it's set in the 12th century in Japan. But it was classified as young people's literature, and from then on, that's what I wrote.

Dialogue: Did you use your own children as models for the audience for which you were writing?

Paterson: No, because when I first started writing my own children were so tiny. Eventually, they grew old enough to read my books, but not originally.
Dialogue: Many of the characters in your books are troubled youngsters. Are any of the characters or situations in your stories autobiographical?

Paterson: The feelings are mine. The incidents that occur in a novel are usually not things that have happened in my own life. But the feelings have to be mine, because I'm the only person whose feelings I really know. The feelings are autobiographical, while the events seldom are.

Dialogue: From where do you get the ideas for these events?

Paterson: Various places. With Bridge to Terabithia, my son David's best friend was struck and killed by lightning. That story is about a friendship between a boy and a girl, and the girl dies. In that sense, it's sketchily biographical. I write about things I care about. I wrote The Great Gilly Hopkins because I was temporarily a foster mother (and not a very good one). Stories come because they are something I care about or something I'm concerned about. Very often, it starts with just a single image, and you don't know where the image comes from, or what it's about. Then you begin to nudge it, and ask it questions, and it begins to grow into something more than that single image.

Dialogue: Gilly Hopkins caused some controversy due to the profanity used in the book. What is your response to critics who object to your use of profanity and other controversial situations?

Paterson: Well, first I have to show she's a rotten kid. You don't go looking for things that aren't lost, right? There's the lost sheep, the lost son, the lost coin. That's the gospel, seeking to save those that are lost. But you have to prove to the reader that this kid is lost before the salvation of the child makes any sense. Her mouth has got to match her behavior. If she has a nice clean mouth, you wouldn't believe her character. Actually, on the printed page she doesn't speak as badly as the Gillys I know in real life. If I imitated that speech, the weight of obscenity would be so great that the whole story would fall over. You walk a very careful line of showing the reader who the character is without letting it take over the story. Language is very powerful.

Dialogue: How did you decide where that line would lie?

Paterson: Instinct. I can't say that I laid out certain principles and adhered to them. I did it by feel.

Dialogue: You spoke in the Wiersma Lecture about faith and writing. Are there any specific principles you use to decide what part faith would play in your writing?

Paterson: This is a question I get asked frequently, and though it's a proper question, it's not one I'm really able to answer. When you're writing from the deepest part of yourself, it's not a conscious, reasonable thing. Wherever faith lies in the deepest part of myself, it will come out. It's not a conscious decision to say, "Here I'll put in my faith, or here I'll withhold my faith for fear of overwhelming my nonbelieving readers." I write out of the deepest part of myself, and whatever's in there will come out.

Dialogue: Your work is geared mostly toward young people. What would you like for adults who read your work to learn from it?

Paterson: I write to learn myself, rather than to teach. I always hesitate to say that I have this message that I want to give, because that comes from a different place than where I'm starting. I begin a book to
try to learn something for myself, and if the reader finds something different than I’ve found, that’s fine. That’s what that person needed to learn. You make your own choices as to what you’re going to learn. The writer has no right to impose that upon you.

If there’s anything I’d like adults to learn from children’s literature, it’s a certain respect for the child. This week, I’ve been doing signings for Images of God [co-authored with husband John]. Yesterday, this woman at the library came up to me and said, “I can’t buy it because I don’t have any grandchildren or young people to give it to.” I said, “Well, you could read it yourself.” She replied, “But it’s for children!” I told her that Houghton-Mifflin put it in their adult catalogue as well as their children’s catalogue. She said, “But look, right here it says Library of Congress catalogues it as juvenile literature!” There was this fear that she might be caught reading something that is meant for children.

Adults should give themselves the treat of reading a children’s book sometimes; they’re wonderful books! If it’s a good book, it’s a good book. Not just my books, I’m talking about the best of children’s literature these days. If adults would give themselves a chance and stop being scared to death that they might like something that is meant for the kiddies, they would see that the best writers for children have an immense respect for their readers. Probably more so than those who write for adults, who pander to the lowest common denominator. Children are wonderful readers, who think and feel deeply. When you write for a young reader, you’re writing for someone who will be open to what you’re trying to say.

**Dialogue:** One of your Newberry Award winning novels, *Jacob Have I Loved*, does not fall under the genre of typical Christian literature. What role does didacticism play in your writing process, and have you faced criticism in this area?

**Paterson:** I mostly get criticized for being anti-Christian. Obviously, the main character in the story is anti-Christian and hates the church and religion. But these critics are people who don’t know me. Of course, this doesn’t help the poor librarian who has to stutter excuses to outraged patrons who think that the devil has taken over the Presbyterian church. I don’t get that much criticism from non-Christians. Occasionally I’ll have a critic mention something about didacticism, but usually it’s when they make the point that there are all these poor people who are reading Christian books without knowing they’re Christian books.

I do tend to get rather angry and vociferous criticism from Christian readers. My feeling is that these people think that if a Christian is going to be writing at all they should be writing Christian propaganda. Propaganda is not a bad word. We use it with negative connotations, but it’s not bad in itself. I think *Who Am I?* is probably propaganda. It’s an explanation of what the Christian faith is about for fifth and sixth graders. That’s what it was intended to be. But a novel is a story. If it’s not a really good story, then it’s not going to work, either as a story or as propaganda. It’s important to me when I’m writing a story to be the one who’s learning, and the one who’s asking the questions, not the one who’s giving the answers or teaching. That’s when it turns into propaganda.

**Dialogue:** What do you think is the role of a Christian writer in a field such as children’s literature?

**Paterson:** I think you should be all that God intended you to be. That’s what He asks of all of us. God means for me to be the best storyteller I can be. I use all of me to do that; I don’t separate out the Christian part of me from the writer part of me.
Mark Douma  
untitled  
gelatin silver print
Mints

Dad needs mints.
“Right behind you sir...to the left...will that be all? Have a nice day!”
Looking up: “Celebrate Easter!” exhorts their Sunday paper ad. “Just add family!”
Or subtract. As the case may be.

Oh brother! I R.E.M.
Ember last Decem
Brrr! I never thought you’d be
popularasjakobdylan!

But look.
The same (black) line is drawn
(on) towards me...
sorrowawful faces
slumping out into the rain

And look. Clus-
tears of hysterical
14-year-old girls!
The only difference that I see with you
is the Heartache—
666th Avenue.
maybe.

Jakob, watch your mouth! The children!
(ohno, the children!!)
Let the little children come unto the corpse—
Ring around the coffin kids
seizures, flowers, we all choke down
sobs.

But hey, it’s SPRING BREAK!!
No lessons for you this week, kids,
(‘cept read pages 1983-1998...)
And ohyes, you, too, might be dead tomorrow!
(for no reason at all,
so you can pretty much forget
all that health class shit.
Smoke, eat fatty foods, and go ahead, have unprotected sex!)

“Hello, I'm his older brother (smile!)”
(I don’t know you but since you showed up
I should try to catch your name, sir.)
“We knew him from whatever.”
“Oh yes! He sure loved whatever!”

Our deepest  (sorry
condolences  about your loss)

Concerned and oh-so-tactful hired hand
(“our sympathy - that'll be $745 + $324 + $685 for services rendered...)
sidles up to me, hisses: “Sir — the line — it’s going outside...
Could you perhaps move along as quickly as you can?"

“Oh! Certainly...yes, of course.” but
a millimeter thick membrane of civil decorum
deftly facades acid-cynical replies.
Now is not the time for:

“Oh, I’m sorry...I didn’t realize
the dead boy has a pressing nine o’clock!”
Or
“What, don't they pay you
(as you greedily go down on dad’s naked visa)
past 8p.m.??”

...or say! Look over there...
The casket rests on a wheeled thingy!
Let's just have these folks stand in place as we
pushshovewishp...slide
the body past them!

But why stop there?!?
We could increase efficiency MORE!
How 'bout a drive-thru wake?
McViewing! Over 500 served!!
“Hi, can we take your sympathy?”
“Sure, and we'd like to offer remorse...
With a side order of grieving.”
“Can we please get flowers with that?”
“Yes, please, and if there's anything we're doing...”
Pick up the tab? Hah.

Sigh...the bald-headed-pot-bellied
underfaker has left to chide mom:
Can't you cry any faster mommy?
he might suggest...

Betcha don't have the balls to try that trick with Steve!
(Or six feet five inches two hundred and sixty-five pounds later
we’d find out if they give you an employee discount.) pal.

But rage can't hold a candle
to shock and sympathy — oh God, no!
Tiny neighborboy...just 7!!
How you loved the big kids...
“Listen! Listen to me carefully, little clayton:
THAT IS NOT HIM!!!”

Wide eyes, mommy-combed hair...
Sweet voice: iknow. He, uh, he got me mad and...
...and — oh! With his squirt gun...last week
but. Um. But im sad and i can't get him back
cuz he's with jesus.

--Nathan Swanson
For T

you know those moments
—a flash in the pan—
good things are
the world is right
is content the word

which reminds me of bumping along
in your truck
and his voice made me cry
his voice made me think
of late nights
with no lights
and too much lonely heart
start to cry

you wondered how come
i told you it’s because
everything is twisted up
and where am i going with this anyways

but what the big secret is
is that
I was weeping because
of the angel’s crooning voice
a bumpy ride in the truck
wind in my hair
singing off key
cig’rettes
—a flash in the pan—

--sara zoeterman
Don't be so sad

Brian De Yong

mixed media
Girl from J. Crew
Krista VanderWal
oil on canvas
**Untitled**

How to describe  
that glorious thing  
called Sun . . .  
Brilliantly golden  
Casting its light down  
The world glows with sunshine!  
Nothing goes untouched  
by the light.  

It penetrates and permeates.  
Surrounds and enfolds  
in its airy, bright grasp.  

--Brook Pauley

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**Let Go**

Let go of her, let her be.  
Wicked, repulsive monsters  
poking and prodding  
evil whispers, pathetic pride  
gnashing teeth, claws in her flesh  
Hatred in my heart.

Let go of her, let her sleep.  
Familiar presence, business as usual  
cowards at best  
enslaved by the dark warden  
injecting poison, keeping her awake  
Aching in my soul.

Let go of her, let her dream.  
Ill suggestions, incessant taunting  
stealing smiles and laughter  
corruption, deterioration  
puffing smoke, clouding her vision  
Cries in my mouth.

Let go of her, let her sing.  
Powerless in the Light  
flashing swords, radiant beams  
cringing and shrieking  
a chance for her to breathe  
Peace in my mind.

Let go of her, let her kneel.  
Victory in the battle.

--Amber McGill
sleepy

amazing things at street corners
inside shopping carts
spent all day
cutting up the sky into tiny pieces
easy to swallow this way
and following for so long you forget
your destination
but it's somewhere, inbetween
your toes blades slide through
watching sailboats wreck buildings
dawn humming in your ears your own
song, intrusive as broken laughter
watching men limp begging for change
their pockets already full
and all of this manifests a new puzzle
in which you've discarded all the pieces
left lying in the dirt
until the rain begins to
fall,
the sky coming together again
only to collapse
upon your
outstretched palm.

--becky rosier

untitled

sometimes when the light is just
right;
when music reaches a certain
tempo or rhythm or volume—
i feel like hiding under beds
(or any sort of low furniture)
escaping—
just creeping under
into the silence
as if looking for something
(being careful not to bump my head)
or protecting myself from falling books
or lightbulbs;
(my breath reflected on my face off the floor)
i sometimes think i could scrounge up some
little
particles
of
the real me
down there in the corners (in the cracks)
i have all the tape and glue and things
necessary to piece some of me together.

--benjamin david brandt
She had shut the bathroom door. He could hear the water running. At his knock she turned off the water, but the door remained closed.

"Yes?"

His hand gripped the brass knob. The door opened outward, and as he pulled it towards him he saw her standing before the mirror. She was wearing her baby blue nightgown, her thinning white hair rolled in curlers, her feet covered in red wool socks. She hid something behind her back.

"I just wondered if you remembered to take your pills," he said.

She hesitated. "Yes. . . ."

"Yes?"

"Yes, I already took them."

He stood in the doorway for a moment, unsure. His eyes searched the bathroom counters. At last he walked into their bedroom to get ready for bed. He saw the confusion in her eyes and tried to decide how to proceed. The fog had returned.

The bathroom door was again shut. He knocked and opened it. She was tearing off Scotch tape and applying it to her face.

"What—what are you doing?"

"I'm taping my eyes."

"Taping your eyes?" He had a habit of repeating her answers. After fifty-two years of marriage she could still surprise him.

"Yes, taping my eyes. So they won't droop."

She looked into the mirror. "Look," she instructed.

He turned obediently. Her trembling hands pointed to her eyes.

"They're drooping. I think that if I tape them up at night, when I sleep, then they won't sag as much. I look like an old lady."
He took her hands in his own. “And I look like an old man. But I think we make a dashing couple. You barely look a day over fifty. I still have to keep my eye on you when we go to the store; those dirty old men are always looking at you.”

She managed a faint smile.

Opening the medicine cabinet, he reached for her pill box. The container, labeled by days, held pills of varying shapes and sizes. He sorted the pills for her every Sunday night as they watched TV. Looking at the day marked Thursday, he opened the box to discover her pills inside. She stared at the container.

“I forgot to take my pills,” she said.

“That’s all right. We can both take ours together now.”

She nodded, but her eyes filled with tears. He handed her a small Dixie cup and watched to ensure that she swallowed them. Her little feet padded the carpet as she turned to go to their room. A few minutes later he found her sitting on the bed, staring at the wall. He sat beside her and said nothing. He knew.

“Last week was Penny’s birthday. We forgot,” she whispered. “I tried to write her a card today, but I couldn’t write. I couldn’t make sense of the words. It didn’t even look like my handwriting.”

Then she was crying, and he held her thin body. He was crying, too, though she didn’t see the tears. She had begun to lose track of the days and the times. In the middle of the week she would often dress for church, thinking that it was Sunday. On other days she would dress herself in mismatched clothes and shoes. If he pointed these things out to her, she would cry or withdraw.

She was growing so despondent that she only ate one meal a day. In between meals he tried to coerce her into eating crackers. She would take them, but later he would find them stuffed in the back of the couch or wadded up in Kleenex.

She could not articulate the pain. But he saw it. They lived one day at a time.

The lamp was turned off. He lay next to her in their old bed until she fell asleep. Then quietly, so as not to disturb her, he slipped from the bed. He walked down the hall into the spare bedroom and forced his body into the cold double bed. Their nightly routine. His snoring kept her awake. In the morning he would slip back into their bed, or if she awoke before him, she would creep into the room and climb into bed with him. He loved mornings when she would come to him. Those mornings were becoming more and more rare.

The sunlight peeking through the blinds woke him up. He sat up and made his way to their bedroom. She was still asleep. He could see her scalp, exposed and pink where her white curls were disappearing. Her lips were slightly parted, and life passed in and out of her. He kissed her forehead and laid down next to her. She smiled with sleepy eyes, then she looked startled.

“I forgot to take my pills.”

“We took them last night.”

She fell back asleep. He lay awake, staring at the ceiling.
Untitled

a core of steel required
to withstand the intensity
of the scalding waves
washing up my inadequate and
defective tangibles which I thought were
buried under the current or
accepted and unimportant, rather;
but there they lay on the sand
bigger and brighter than I realized and with a
sigh,
my core melting,
I pick them up and resign to their burdensome
load, for
they weigh me down
so I can no longer swim in your ocean;
although exciting and necessary:
this time you blew too hard

--Pam Henshell

The Shadow of a Smile

Your eyes stare at an infinite nothing
And slowly your mind drifts away
    To the cloudy view
When you’re stuck in the gray
Your memories are vivid and bright
But yet in your heart you fight
Your heart is torn
    I know, I know
And the beginning of your thoughts await you
    Each bright morning
And every star-filled night
You think of her and what shall be
I feel I am caught in this branchy tree
    At these moments I glance
And I am brought under your trance
But I have yet to begin to know you
And see your inner thoughts
My heart longs for those moments
    just to know your heart
So patiently I wonder
And long for the night time
When we sit and laugh together
    But I wait...
And long to touch you
    From a distance

--Kara Hunt
Poem-Parties

I wish ideas would come to my poem-parties dressed in tailored metaphors, polished puns, and belted blazons. But my rude guests flounce in late with tasteless attire of tarnished cliches, shabby similies, and costume clip-ons.

I ask them to join me in a metric dance to the hip-hop beat of iambic bands. But they only shuffle their awkward feet and slouch across the floor.

Then these poetic whims guzzle all my spirits and move to stumble out the door. I ask them if they could at least leave a rhyme, but they only mumble repetitions and slam the door.

--Gabrielle Darnell

Pushpins and Pitchforks

I had not pushpins and pitchforks enough To prod him from planting himself in my mind From sewing himself to my soul.

In the fertility of my cultivation he flourished. When I regained a stitch of sanity I stripped the garment of grace from my crinoline countenance.

For I was neither field nor fabric And my imagination was never to be rooted or clothed.

--Ellie White-Stevens