CCU Review

of BOOKS, CULTURE, MEDIA, LIFE

Volume 6
Issue 2

COLORADO CHRISTIAN
UNIVERSITY
Grace and Truth

Your 60

Dear Friends,

In his book *The Vanishing American Adult: Our Coming of Age Crisis — and How to Rebuild a Culture of Self-Reliance,* Senator Ben Sasse recommends an active program to remake adolescence with five character building habits. One of those habits is to build a bookshelf and read in order to become truly literate. He says we must learn not just to read, but to read well and deeply, and to read what matters.

Sasse notes the disturbing trend that U.S. students continue to struggle with basic reading comprehension, reminding us that literacy has been in absolute decline since the 1960s! He says young Americans must stay informed, build their critical faculties, learn to weigh evidence, check facts, cut through ambiguities, and discover truths. These skills are not a luxury, but rather a necessity for responsible adults and citizens, especially for those who live in a republic. America's founders understood literacy to be a prerequisite for freedom and self-government. Our nation's survival depends on an informed and engaged citizenry.

Sasse recommends setting aside 60 inches of a single shelf to build your own personal library of at least 60 books. He got the idea from former Harvard President Charles Eliot (1834-1926). Near the end of his presidency Eliot spoke to a group of working-class men and said he realized that not everyone could go to Harvard, but everyone could read like a "Harvard man." Eliot said a five foot shelf of books could provide a good substitute for a liberal education to anyone who would read them with devotion. Thus were born The Harvard Classics, a 51-volume anthology of great books.

Eliot's example inspired Sasse and his wife to set aside 60 inches of a single shelf next to his desk and to choose only 60 books to show their kids, the 60 books they judged to be important. It would be the heart of their family library, and they would encourage their kids to read for at least 60 minutes a day without looking at their phones.

What are your 60? In this issue of *CCU Review*, we review a stack of great reads. Two of them are actually part of my 60 (*Pilgrim's Progress* and *Confessions*).

In celebration of the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the Pilgrims to New England, CCU student Joshua Cook reviews Governor William Bradford's first-hand account of what happened in *On Plymouth Plantation*. Dr. Ian Clary takes another look at the Puritans with a review of *Pilgrim's Progress*. Looking at the political landscape for this election season, Dr. Tom Copeland reviews Mark David Hall's *Did America Have a Christian Founding?* Michael Plato reviews Douglas Murray's *The Madness of Crowds*, and Dr. David Kotter reviews Al Mohler's *The Gathering Storm*. Giving us deeper insights into the current pandemic, Dr. Mark Parker reviews John Barry's *The Great Influenza*, the account of the 1918 flu epidemic. Capping it off, Jeremy Porier reviews George Orwell's *1984*, and Dr. Megan Devore reviews Augustine's *Confessions*.

This issue of the *CCU Review* puts forward some great candidates for your 60!

So, *tolle lege*, my friend (take up and read).

Don Sweeting

Donald W. Sweeting, President

Contents

CCU Review

The CCU Review of Books, Culture, Media, and Life, *a values-driven journal of peer-reviewed scholarly and creative work, is published semiannually by the Office of the President and the Communications and Creative Services department. While emphasizing articles of scholarly merit, the* CCU Review *is a collection of reviews and essays that are informed by and further enhance the values of Colorado Christian University as outlined in our Strategic Priorities and our Statement of Faith. We welcome suggestions on reviews and essays that are centered on ideas of interest that further the mission of CCU as a Christian, liberal arts university.*

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This edition's cover art was inspired by the journey of Christians across the Atlantic Ocean to the new world.

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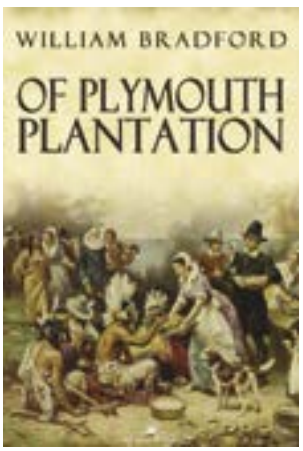
BOOK REVIEW

Of Plymouth Plantation

by William Bradford

REVIEW BY JOSHUA COOK

History, Accounting, and Business Administration Major at CCU



This is the 400th anniversary of The Mayflowers' journey to North America which dropped anchor on the tip of Cape Cod on November 11, 1620. They were escaping what they deemed an overbearing and cruel government and were seeking refuge in the vast unknown of the New World. The voyagers knew they would likely never return to their homeland or see their friends and family again. Nevertheless, as they sailed away from everything they had ever known, their declaration was, "Yet, Lord thou canst save."[1]

Many voices will be reflecting on this event, but to get a fresh look, we go to one of the primary sources. William Bradford, founder and long-time governor of the Plymouth colony, wrote of this event in his 1651 account, *Of Plymouth Plantation*. This American classic is full of fascinating details, showing a people whose trust in God and deeply held convictions compelled them to leave the Old World and come to America.

Of Plymouth Plantation begins by explaining the religious convictions that motivated the Pilgrims to come to the New World. To Bradford, it was apparent that Satan was active in the world, working to confuse and mislead God's people. He saw the Reformation as a significant move away from the devil's confusion to the clarity and simplicity of the gospel. Even so, the King of England was persecuting the godly and enforcing a religious uniformity that went against the Pilgrims' convictions. This forced them to flee to Holland in 1608 to avoid government-sanctioned persecution.

The Pilgrims' flight from England to the European mainland was full of trouble, yet they stayed the course and trusted in God's providence.

In Holland, life afforded little comfort, making some prefer the persecution in England to what they were enduring there. Nevertheless, through their hardships, the Pilgrims remained devoted to their beliefs and way of life, thus earning the respect of many of the Dutch. The resumption of the Eighty Years' War between the Netherlands and Spain forced the Pilgrims to consider heading to the New World. Ultimately, they decided to leave Holland to protect and preserve their children in the faith. Additionally, the Pilgrims hoped to lay a foundation "for the propagating and advancing of the gospel … in those remote parts of the world."[2]

After a long and hard journey, the Pilgrims landed in 1620 at what became known as Plymouth. Their first action was to fall on their knees and give thanks to God. The Pilgrims had drawn up an agreement establishing a "civil body politic" for the governing of Plymouth in the *Mayflower Compact*. It declared that the purpose of their colony was "for the glory of God and the advancement of the Christian Faith."[3]

The Pilgrims' hardships only increased with the onset of their first New England winter. A lack of shelter and everyday necessities, as well as "being infected with the scurvy and other diseases," would lead to the death of nearly half of the *Mayflower* passengers. Nevertheless, various "sound persons … spared no pains night nor day, but with abundance of toil and hazard of their health," cared for the sick, showing the love of Christ to each other and to the strangers in their midst.[4]

Their misfortunes would be reversed with the arrival of Squanto, a native who could speak English. Squanto remained with the Pilgrims, acting as their interpreter and teaching them how to plant corn, showing the Pilgrims where to fish, and countless other necessary tasks for life in the New World. The blessing that the Lord bestowed on the Pilgrims can be seen from the eventual abundance of the first Thanksgiving. This celebration allowed the Pilgrims and natives to share food and enjoy one another's company.

An important lesson that we can take away from the Pilgrims' experience is their experiment with economic collectivism. Initially, the colony was set up so that all of the colonists held their property in common. However, because of man's fallen nature, this course was untenable. As a result, some of the settlers found excuses to avoid work because it did not directly benefit them or their families. Thus, "God in His wisdom saw another course fitter for them."[5] The Pilgrims eventually adopted a system of private property which encouraged individuals to work and care for their own families, thus increasing the productivity and prosperity of Plymouth.

Today we value this work for its first-hand perspective.

Of Plymouth Plantation is written by an important man of history about a committed people of faith. We can connect some of our American identity, especially our love of religious freedom, to the struggles and convictions of the Pilgrims. Thus, one should make an effort to read of these early American settlers to see the ideals and convictions that allowed them to become a part of our American heritage.

Plymouth Plantation

One can learn and be inspired from how the Pilgrims acted in their time of distress. They, too, faced times of disease, uncertainty, social upheaval, and persecution, and yet they remained faithful to God and steadfast in their pursuit of living according to their convictions. When we are made uncomfortable and presented with the uncertainty and troubles of our modern age, we, too, should remain steadfast and cry out in confidence, "Yet, Lord, thou canst save."

FOOTNOTES

1 William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation* (Modern Library, 1981), 14.

2 Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 26.

3 Ibid, 83.

4 Ibid, 85.

5 Ibid, 134.

REVIEWER BIO

JOSHUA COOK

Joshua Cook '21 is a senior at Colorado Christian University majoring in history, accounting, and business administration. He plans to pursue an M.A. in church history and later a Ph.D. in history. His plans for the future include becoming a professor of history to share his passion with others.

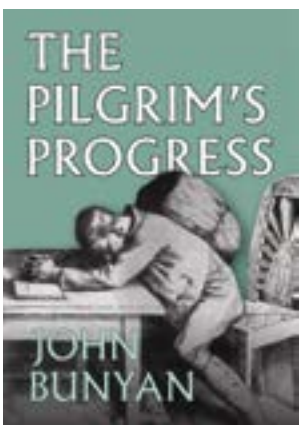
BOOK REVIEW

Pilgrilms Progress

by John Bunyan

REVIEW BY DR. IAN CLARY

Assistant Professor of Theology



While we are advised not to judge a book by its cover, we certainly can judge one by its opening lines. To capture the attention of the reader a book's first sentence is key, otherwise hope of the reader continuing to the final sentence is slim. Consider Melville's "Call me Ishmael," Orwell's "It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen," or Dostoyevsky's "I am a sick man … I am a spiteful man." Who is Ishmael? Why thirteen? Why so sick? It should therefore come as no surprise that one of the most important British novels would begin with these intriguing lines: "As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place where was a den, and laid me down in that place to sleep; and as I slept, I dreamed a dream." What was John Bunyan's dream?

The classic work *Pilgrim's Progress* is a dream that Bunyan (1628-1688) had of a pilgrim named Christian who was providentially summoned to leave his home in the City of Destruction to travel a difficult road to the Celestial City. If you know the circumstances behind Bunyan's book, however, you'll know that the idea for his book didn't come to him while dreaming in the woods, though "wilderness of the world" implies more than a mere forest nap. Rather, if it was a dream at all, it came to him in prison. First published in 1678, *Pilgrim's Progress* was written during the tumultuous period of British history known as the Restoration. The Commonwealth begun under Oliver Cromwell had ended in 1660 and Charles II returned the Stuart dynasty to the British throne. As a result, Nonconformists like Bunyan were placed under the Clarendon Code that lasted from 1661 to the Glorious Revolution of 1688. The code's draconian measures prohibited Nonconformists — those who refused to "conform" to the rubrics of the Church of England's *Book of Common Prayer* — from following their religious convictions. Bunyan, a Baptist pastor, refused to abide by the law prohibiting public preaching and so was imprisoned for 12 years. The book seems to have been written to occupy his mind while he gritted through a particularly rough expression of England's penal system. He says as much in his poetic "apology" that begins the book: "When at the first I took my pen in hand, Thus for to write, I did not understand." He initially put pen to paper but had no idea what sort of story would come forth.

It is regularly noted by scholars that *Pilgrim's Progress* is, after the Bible, the best-selling Christian book of all time. Why has Bunyan's work become such a classic? One way to answer that question is to see how Bunyan and his fellow Puritans, the so-called "physicians of the soul," were psychologists who had profound insight into the human condition.

Having suffered as he did, Bunyan understood that strength of character comes through struggle, and this is evident in the pages of his work.

If ever there was a Puritan motto it would be *Vincit qui patitur*, "the one who suffers conquers," an apt description of Bunyan and his pilgrim. Just

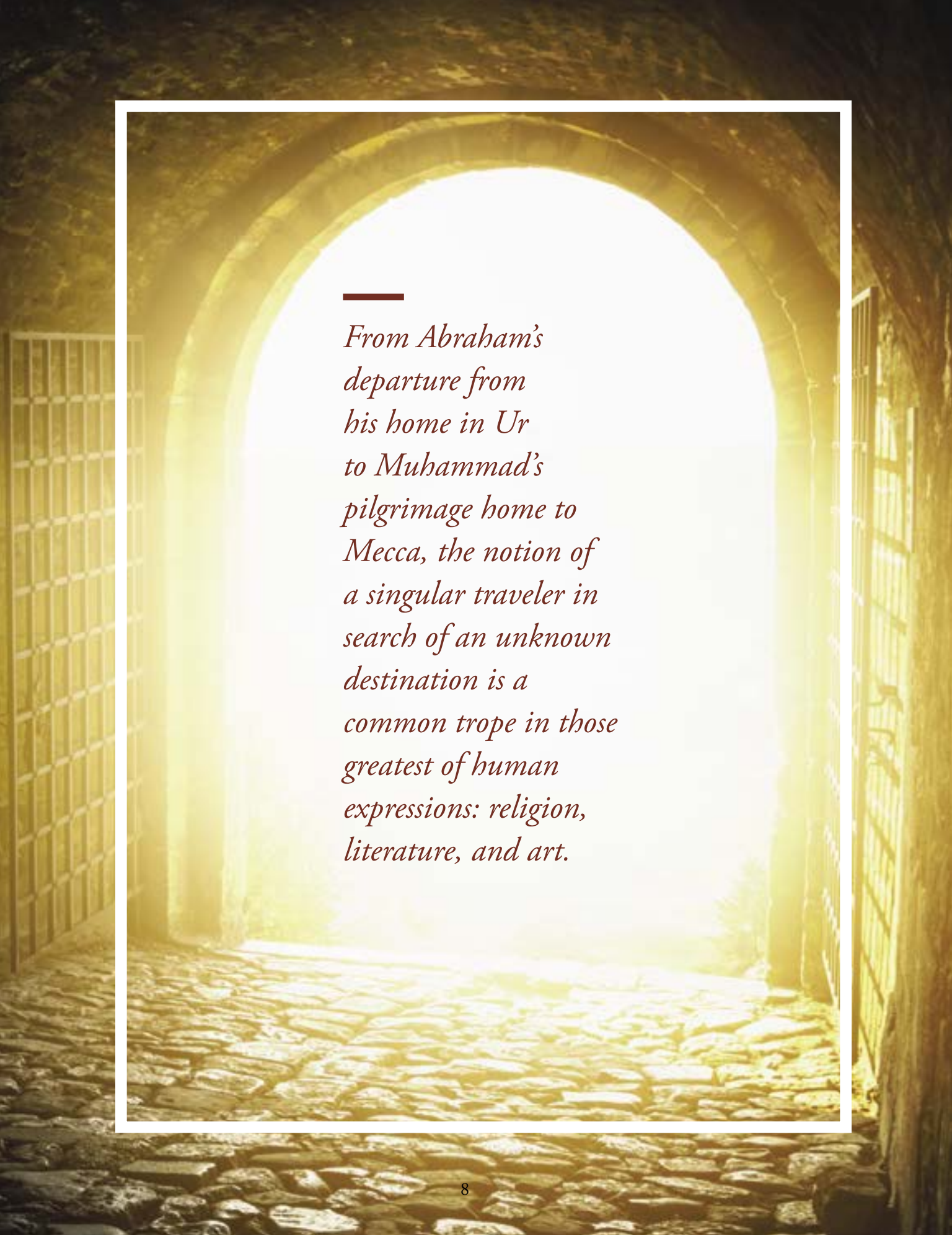
as Bunyan endured prison, so, too, will Christian persevere through suffering to reach journey's end.

Bunyan's success can also be accounted for by the fact that he wrote as a common man to common people. While Puritans such as the great theologian John Owen (1616-1683) were educated in the halls of Oxbridge, Bunyan was not, as he had no formal education. He was the son of a tinker who followed his father's footsteps into a very low-paying career. In his younger years Bunyan served under Cromwell in the Parliamentary Army during the English Civil Wars. Not long after his conversion to Christ — he spoke of being in the pangs of birth for five years! — Bunyan began to preach, eventually becoming pastor of a typical Baptist church in Bedford. By all accounts, Bunyan was a commoner of the British working class. Christopher Hill's description of him as *A Tinker and a Poor Man* is entirely appropriate.

It was from the lower class that Bunyan crafted the ability to connect with his fellow man, the success of which is evident in the crowds of hundreds who heard him preach in his small town in the east of England, and later crowds of upwards of 3,000 in the nation's capital.

His language was plain and simple, and he preached to both mind and heart. Owen, one-time Chancellor of Oxford University, was once asked by Charles II why he would go to hear Bunyan preach. The theologian replied that he would gladly trade all of his learning to have Bunyan's preaching power. Incidentally, it was this same John Owen who was responsible for getting *Pilgrim's Progress* published.

There are numerous themes interwoven in the pages of Bunyan's work. Theologically, it stresses topics including the nature of the gospel or the doctrine of justification. Politically, it is a classic defense of Nonconformity to be placed alongside Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) or Blake's *Jerusalem* (1804). In terms of literature, it ranks as one of



From Abraham's departure from his home in Ur to Muhammad's pilgrimage home to Mecca, the notion of a singular traveler in search of an unknown destination is a common trope in those greatest of human expressions: religion, literature, and art.

the earliest and best of British novels. It images Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (1392) using earthy and at times even racy themes to describe spiritual pilgrimage, reflecting the human experience. From Abraham's departure from his home in Ur to Muhammad's pilgrimage home to Mecca, the notion of a singular traveler in search of an unknown destination is a common trope in those greatest of human expressions: religion, literature, and art. One thinks of Andrei Tarkovsy's evocative 1979 film *Stalker* that draws viewers into the story of three pilgrims searching for pleasure in the Zone. I am currently re-reading Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957), a novel that had a profound impact on me in high school, and that in its own way is a tale of spiritual pilgrimage. In my second reading of it I find myself as intrigued as my younger self was, happily discovering that I have followed Kerouac's road, quite literally. The drive between my hometown of Windsor, Ontario, and my new home of Lakewood, Colorado, is the same one that Sal Paradise hitch-hiked in the 1940s. Indeed, Sal spends significant time in places that I can now visualize in my mind's eye like the dingy apartments of Colfax Avenue in Denver or the saloons of Central City. What is noteworthy about *On the Road* is that although Sal is ever travelling he has no real destination. Sal is emblematic of the rootlessness of post-war America. For Bunyan's traveler, himself on a long and wearying road, the opposite is the case. Christian is called to leave kith and kin, and though at times his trail is no less debauched than Sal's, he is directed by providence to his true home. In contrast with Sal, Christian resists temptation, his traveling companions are not maniacs like Dean Moriarty, but true friends like Hopeful or Faithful, and his destination terminates not in a worldly life of sensual pleasure, but in a death that leads to everlasting joy. The road through ruin begins with a wicket-gate, a small opening that allowed travelers to pass through England's famous hedges. Having left all earthly pleasures behind, including family, the narrow gate leads the pilgrim onto a path of salvation wherein his shoulders are relieved of the heavy burden of sin, as he grows in assurance of faith, while given the means to persevere on the road until the end is finally reached.

It is no wonder then that Bunyan has stood the test of time. The late philosopher Sir Roger Scruton testifies to this legacy in the opening words of his memoir, *Gentle Regrets* (2006), where he describes what happened when he read *Pilgrim's Progress* for the first time. Like Bunyan, Scruton grew up in a British working class family. Like other such families, the Scrutons did not have many books, but they had Bunyan's. In 1957, when he was 13 years old, young Roger was home sick from school and picked up the great allegory.

He describes that wonderful effect that only books can give, of going from his rather drab living environment to a "visionary landscape, where even the most ordinary things come dressed in astonishment."

Scruton spoke of how he could not put the book down and upon finishing it spent the following months striding "through our suburb side by side with Christian, my inner eye fixed on the Celestial City." Scruton died this past January, and I hope that his inner eye never lost its focus. His words are a testimony to why all of us should read *Pilgrim's Progress*. We, like Bunyan, live in our own time of defeat, where suffering is a continuing reality, and where the strength of our character will be seen in our commitment to Christ, the first pilgrim of the true Celestial City. May we, too, walk, side by side with Christian, with our inner eye fixed on the final destination. Home.

REVIEWER BIO

DR. IAN CLARY

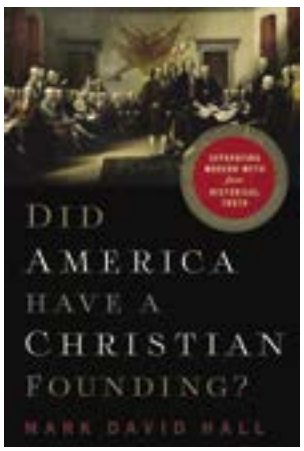
Ian Hugh Clary (Ph.D., University of the Free State) is an assistant professor of historical theology at Colorado Christian University.

BOOK REVIEW

Did America Have A Christian Founding?

by Mark David Hall

REVIEW BY DR. TOM COPELAND
Professor of Politics



One of CCU's Strategic Priorities is to "debunk spent ideas and those who traffic in them." In this new book, *Did America Have a Christian Founding?*, Mark David Hall does exactly that. With extensive use of historical documentation, he thoroughly discredits a number of the claims made by those who argue that America had a secular founding, and insists instead that our faith-based founding benefits all Americans of any or no faith at all.

Hall's book has received significant public attention, not only because the subject is controversial but because it is so well done. The book is endorsed by prominent historians such as Wilfred McClay and Hadley Arkes, editors such as Marvin Olasky, and commentators including Glen Beck and Ben Shapiro. Hall is the author or editor of a dozen books on Christianity and the founding of the United States, and a historian at George Fox University. He is uniquely qualified to provide a masterful argument for our Christian founding.

DEBUNKING THE DEBUNKERS

Hall debunks the idea that most or all of the Founders were deists. He focuses largely on one key element of deism — the idea of the "clockmaker God" who created the universe, wound it up like a clock and let it go, with no further interest in human affairs. Yet Hall digs into the historical record and finds that nearly all of the founding generation claimed that God was a providential actor in human history. In fact, only one — Ethan Allen — was truly a deist, and his 1784 book advocating deism only sold 200 copies. Hall concludes, "There are good reasons to believe that many of America's founders were orthodox Christians, and there is virtually no evidence to suggest that most (or many) of them were deists."

He debunks the idea that we should interpret the Establishment and Free Exercise clauses of the First Amendment (exclusively) in the light of Thomas Jefferson's views in his letter to the Danbury Baptists, wherein he describes the "wall of separation between church and state." This is important because scholars, judges, and politicians suggest that the Virginia Bill of Rights, authored by Jefferson, was the primary influence on the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, and therefore we should read it through the lens of his letter. But Hall points out that Jefferson was in France while the First Amendment was being debated, the Virginia Bill of Rights was scarcely acknowledged as relevant even at the time, and indeed that Jefferson is articulating the "wall of separation" as a protection against government interference in religion.

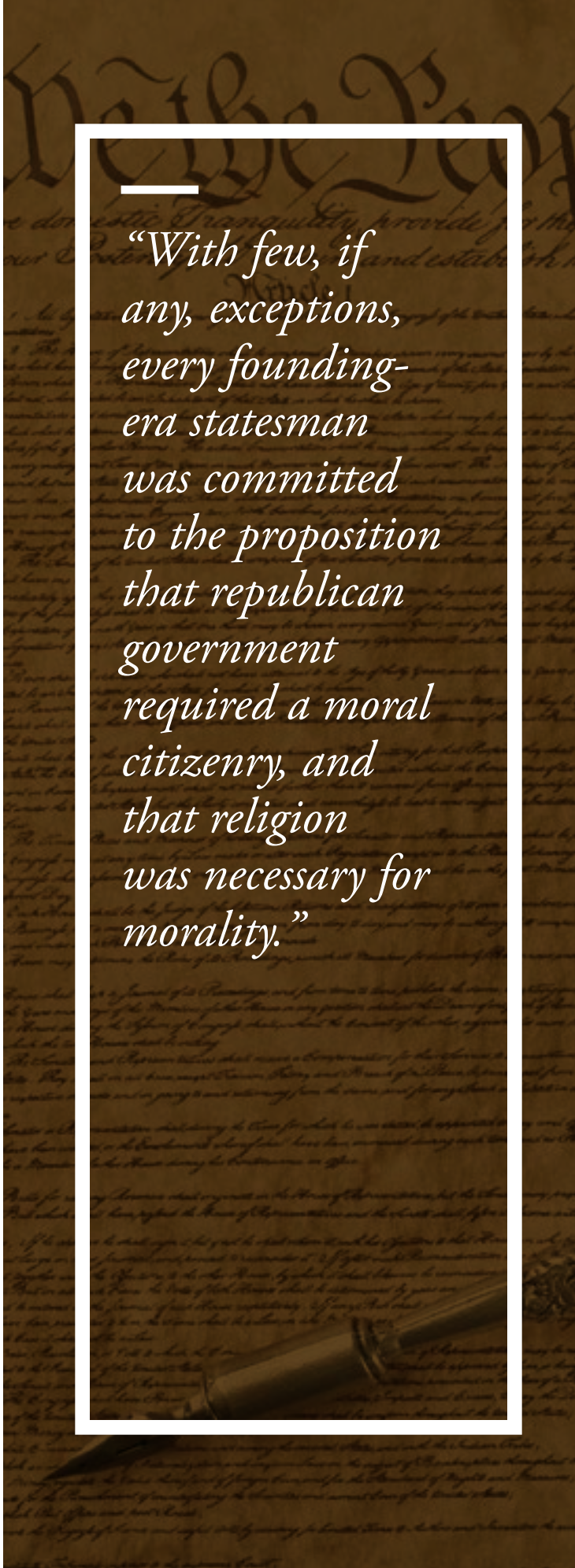
Hall debunks the idea that the Constitution is a godless document. Hall acknowledges that the Constitution does not reference God explicitly, although it refers to some Christian practices like sacred oaths and Sabbath keeping.

Instead, Hall focuses on the sources that the Founders turned to — and the question of whether they were influenced more by Enlightenment thinkers or by Scripture.

Again in Hall's words, "With few, if any, exceptions, every founding-era statesman was committed to the proposition that republican government required a moral citizenry, and that religion was necessary for morality." He goes on to suggest how a biblical understanding of fallen human nature led the Founders to build federalism, separation of powers, and checks and balances into our constitutional system. Further, the Bill of Rights is built on natural law and natural rights granted by our Creator, including especially the right to life.

Finally, *he debunks the idea that government should not support religion and morality.* This chapter in the book is unique, as it explores how state leaders in Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and Georgia (among others) wrote government support for religion into their state codes. Considering similar statutes throughout the new republic, this is more evidence that Jefferson's "wall of separation" has been intentionally misconstrued by the Supreme Court in a number of major decisions.

In the concluding chapters, Hall looks at how the Founders supported the "sacred right" of conscience and freedom of worship, and at modern efforts both to protect religious freedom (like the Religious Freedom Restoration Act) and to limit it (Masterpiece Cakeshop and others). While the Founders were deeply influenced by Christianity, "they did not design a constitutional order only for fellow believers." The fact that Americans today have the freedom to believe and practice their faith — or not — is a direct result of the convictions of the Founders.



PICK IT UP AND READ IT

In the process of debunking spent ideas, and making the case that America had a Christian founding, Hall makes extensive use of primary sources — the letters, journals, sermons, and legislation of the founding generation. Yet the book is accessible and easy to read, designed with the ordinary reader in mind. At 154 pages, it is a quick read on a weekend.

Much of what Hall argues in this book is already incorporated into the American history and American politics courses that are part of the core curriculum at CCU. But his book provides solid evidence that not only students, but the general public need to see and understand. Why is this book so timely?

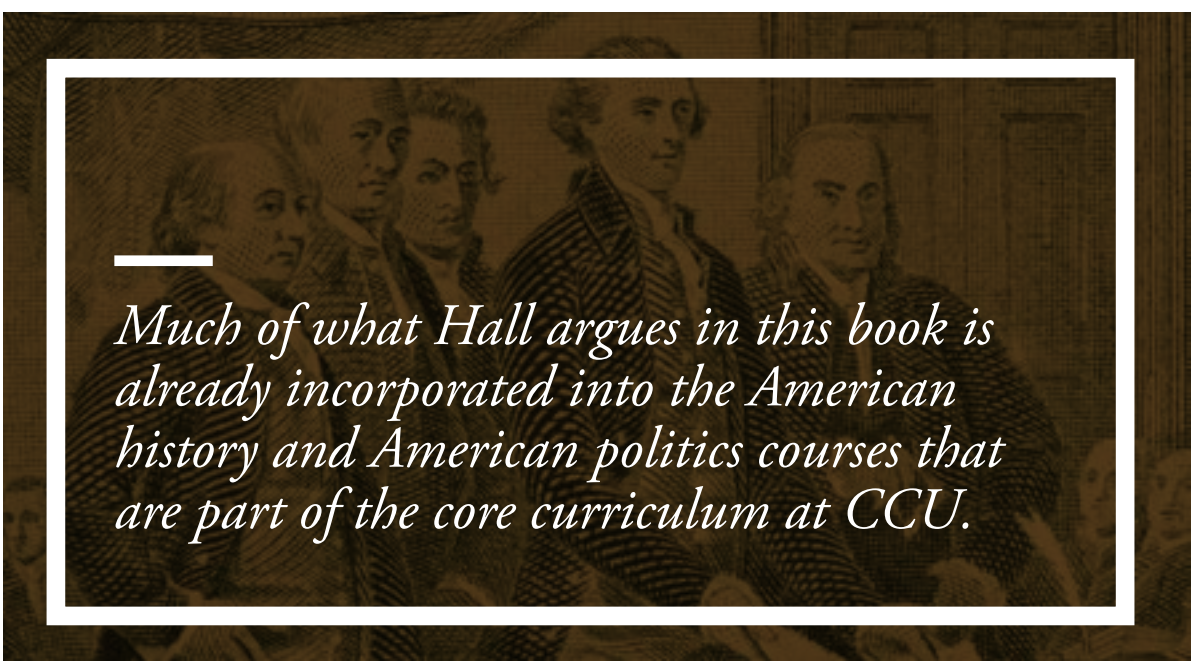
During the early Covid-19 crisis, state governors effectively placed their citizens under house arrest, and in a number of cases explicitly banned religious believers from gathering for worship or funerals. Christians were deeply divided over whether to abide by health officials' orders to limit church gatherings or to follow an interpretation of Hebrews 10:25 ("do not give up meeting together") and Acts 5:29 ("obey God rather than men") that would suggest meeting despite the warnings. Debates began over tyrannical uses of state power, the principles of federalism and separation of powers, and the idea of religious freedom as an essential freedom.

More broadly, it certainly seems that the role of Christianity, and indeed all religious expression in public, is being challenged in new ways by our culture, the media, and politics. Hall's book provides unique and important historical context and a strong argument that government should promote rather than restrict religious freedom.

REVIEWER BIO

DR. TOM COPELAND

Dr. Tom Copeland (Ph.D., University of Pittsburg) is a professor of politics at CCU. He has been in academia for 16 years, after working in Washington, D.C., in the public and private sectors. He has been published in The Hill, Town Hall, USA Today, *and the* Christian Scholars' Review.

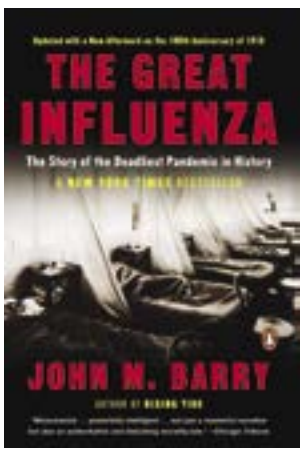


BOOK REVIEW

The Great Influenza

by John Barry

REVIEW BY DR. MARK PARKER
Dean and Professor of Biology



Charles Dickens begins A *Tale of Two Cities* with: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness." The same could be said of the field of medical science in the early years of the 20th century and during its battle against the worst outbreak of influenza to occur in human history. Beginning in 1918 and tapering off in 1919, the so called "Spanish Flu" caused clinically apparent illness in one third of the world's population and resulted directly in the deaths of between 35 and 100 million people. A fatality rate, not just among those with the influenza, but in the entire population of the planet of 1.5-5%. In the United States alone, 675,000 are believed to have perished directly from the disease, a staggering 47% of *all* deaths. The mortality was so high, in fact, that it actually drove down the average life expectancy in the U.S. by more than 10 years. In contrast, the case fatality rate of the current COVID-19 outbreak in the U.S. is approximately 4% in those diagnosed with the disease.

"Yet the story of the 1918 influenza virus is not simply one of havoc, death and desolation … It is also a story of science, of discovery … and grim, determined action." John M. Barry's book, *The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History*, exhaustively details the medical, social-cultural, and economic landscape that allowed for the explosive and devastating spread of the world's first truly global pandemic. Described by one review as "magisterial" in scope, Barry's work relies on exhaustive research and provides a level of detail worthy of a college-level textbook. The book is broken into 10 sections: "The Warriors," "The Swarm," "The Tinderbox," "It Begins," "Explosion," "The Pestilence," "The Race," "The Tolling of the Bell," "The Lingerer" and "Endgame." Each section details important aspects of the pandemic or the conditions that allowed for its spread and the measures taken to limit the spread.

In the first section, "The Warriors," Barry details the players who were involved in transforming medicine from the static profession it had been since the days of the Greek physician Galen of Pergamon into a modern, scientific endeavor practiced by highly educated professionals. In the section titled "The Swarm," possible origins of the outbreak are discussed along with the nature of the virus and the function of the immune system. "The Tinderbox" outlines the social and cultural landscape in 1918, the unprecedented mobilization of U.S. society toward the war effort, and other conditions that set the stage for the rapid and devastating transmission of the virus while at the same time hampering the ability to respond to the outbreak domestically. "It Begins" tracks the early origin and distribution of the virus, highlighting the hypothesis that the virus' first zoonotic transmission from animals to humans occurred in rural Kansas, moving rapidly from Camp Funston to other Army Cantonments around the country. "Explosion" documents the exponential spread of the soon-to-be pandemic from the initial outbreak to the entire world, in one Philadelphia hospital between 20-25% of patients died each day. "The Pestilence" utilizes the refrain, "This was Influenza, only influenza …" repeatedly to describe how the "old man's friend" had developed new and

devastating characteristics and consequences, with the majority of deaths occurring in men and women aged 25-29 and the second most in those aged 30-34. The disease also struck with an unprecedented speed; in a three-mile street car ride the conductor and six patrons died before the route was completed. "The Race" describes the work of the leading scientists of the day, introduced in "The Warriors," to mobilize the best and brightest to identify the causative agent of the disease and to develop effective treatments. "The Tolling of the Bell" details the organization of the response to the pandemic with its failings and successes, highlighting specific instances from different cities, detailing also how the media downplayed the severity of the outbreak with the oft repeated theme of "Don't be scared!" while the virus spread inexorably and the desperate call went out for doctors, nurses, and volunteers. In New York coughing or sneezing without covering your face was punishable with a $500 fine and one year in jail.

The long-term consequences and indirect effects of the virus are highlighted in "The Lingerer." The 1918 virus had significant and potentially long-term consequences on the central nervous system. The book in fact purports that U.S. President Woodrow Wilson was so seriously affected during the negotiations to end World War I that the extravagant concessions made by him were a direct consequence of the disease.

The final section, "Endgame," bookends the first describing the major players after the epidemic had run its course. Much like the bulk of the book, there are vignettes both tragic and triumphant.

The story of the 1918 influenza pandemic is not a story of the triumph of modern medicine over disease, rather it is a cautionary tale which is incredibly timely.

The course of the pandemic was not controlled by pharmacological, immunologic, or public health interventions, rather as with many disease agents, the virus "reverted to the mean," losing virulence and behaving more like previous and subsequent influenza outbreaks. The first five army cantonments to see outbreaks saw 20% of the infected develop pneumonia and 37% of those die. The worst case was Camp Sherman with 36% of the infected developing pneumonia and an astounding 61% of those dying, a staggering 22% mortality rate. This is in sharp contrast to the last five camps struck where only 7% of influenza victims developed pneumonia with only approximately 1% dying.

The virus had devastated a war-torn world, transported globally by the movement of troops aboard trains and ships uniquely organized to ensure its spread. The pandemic helped mold modern medicine and public health policy, but is seldom mentioned or studied, an omission that could and should be addressed. John Barry's book is an excellent starting point for that study and can be used as a sole source for those with a passing interest, or as a jumping off point for more academic investigations. The book is exhaustively researched and highly informative, a historian might question certain emphases, or an immunologist or microbiologist critique his coverage of certain parts of the text, but the book is quite accessible to the average reader and is an outstanding summary of the topic.

REVIEWER BIO

DR. MARK PARKER

Mark Parker (Ph.D., University of Denver) is dean and professor of biology in CCU's School of Science and Engineering. He is a trained developmental biologist and neuroscientist. Dr. Parker joined the CCU faculty in 2011.

BOOK REVIEW

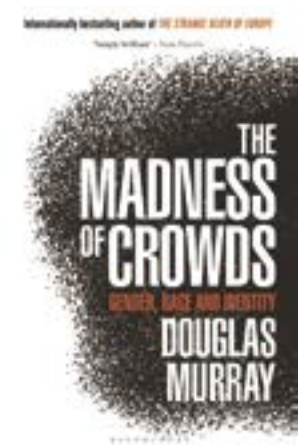
The Madness of Crowds:

Gender, Race, and Identity

by Douglas Murray

REVIEW BY MICHAEL PLATO

Assistant Professor of Intellectual History and Christian Thought



Could anyone have anticipated the world in which we now live? The COVID-19 pandemic has been one of the most trying and difficult experiences many of us can remember. Added to this has been an explosion of social unrest and protest the likes of which have not been seen in America since the 1960s. Images of police brutality in the media have justifiably triggered indignation and outcry, but also something more. Statues and historic monuments are being torn down and defaced. Demands for major and immediate social and institutional transformation have become more acute and insistent, echoing not only in the streets, but also in the courts and the halls of government. Entering into the fray is Douglas Murray's *The Madness of Crowds: Race, Gender and Identity*, a book that seeks to explain how we all got here, and where we might be going.

Murray speaks from an unusual vantage point. He is British (a Brexiteer with a love for continental Europe), a secular atheist, and openly gay. He is also one of the most outspoken and articulate conservatives writing today. An associate editor for Britain's *Spectator* magazine, his previous book, *The Strange Death of Europe* (Bloomsbury, 2017), explored the growing cultural malaise of European society and its fraught immigration policies, which he sees as leading to that continent's current state of political, cultural, and social decline. His latest work, which also takes the theme of decline to heart, is much broader ranging, and therefore more pertinent to North American readers.

Murray opens *The Madness of Crowds* by describing much of the irrational and *"unpleasant"* groupthink which has risen to public prominence in the past few years. It is not something that just emerged in the post-COVID era (Murray's book was released in the fall of 2019), but has been slowly yet relentlessly growing over the past few years. He calls it *"a great crowd derangement."* He notes that we may not know where it comes from, but we all recognize its presence and reality.

This new groupthink has coalesced around a few ideas which just a couple of decades ago were only discussed in university humanities departments — concepts such as social justice, identity politics, and intersectionality.

These are the main concepts behind a host of more tangible and popularly known terms, such as LGBTQ, systemic racism, white privilege, transphobia, triggered, and safe spaces.

Yet how did this movement with obscure origins come to be so dominant in contemporary Western culture? In his introduction Murray makes two claims by way of explanation. First he points to

the end of the Cold War and the demise of many of the political ideologies of the 20th century. In this political and intellectual decompression, *"all our grand narratives have collapsed,"* which, he adds, also includes the older religious ones. Without these larger stories to help make sense of the world and their place in it, people faced something of a mass identity crisis.

> "People in wealthy Western democracies today could not simply remain the first people in recorded history to have absolutely no explanation for what we are doing here, and no story to give life purpose. Whatever else they lacked, the grand narratives of the past at least gave life meaning. The question of what exactly we are meant to do now … was going to have to be answered by something." (1-2)

The second development which laid the foundation for the new paradigm was what the Australian political philosopher Kenneth Minogue called "St. George in retirement syndrome." Murray explains it this way: *"After slaying the dragon the brave warrior finds himself stalking the land looking for more glorious fights. He needs his dragons. Eventually … he may eventually be found swinging his sword at thin air, imagining it contains dragons."* (7-8) In other words, all of the movements which brought about civil rights and social transformation in the 20th century are still pressing on, even though the revolution is largely over.

Instead of enjoying the fruits of their victory, which are the products of a liberal and democratic society, the members of these movements have pressed their causes so much, that they will not stop until they are recognized not as the fruits of civilization, but the very roots.

Murray sees this new enterprise as so

"For while racial equality, minority rights and women's rights are among the best products of liberalism, they make the most destabilizing foundations…"

foundational that the transformations these radicals seek could be described as metaphysical and even religious. They no longer want to change society, but the very nature of nature itself and what it means to be a human. Yet this new foundation they seek is largely a precarious one. He writes:

> "For while racial equality, minority rights and women's rights are among the best products of liberalism, they make the most destabilizing foundations…The products of the system cannot reproduce the stability of the system that produced them. If for no other reason than that each of these issues is a deeply unstable component in itself." (8)

Until recently, the received wisdom had been that aspects of a person such as their gender, their skin color, or their sexual orientation, were the superficial attributes of a specific individual. Now they are considered central and fundamentally defining of a person's identity and place in society. Martin Luther King Jr. once asked that we not judge a person by the color of their skin, but the content of their heart. This view is now judged to be not only impossible, but heretical. Murray's goal in this book is to first explain how we got into our current situation, then offer some suggestions as to how we might pull ourselves out of it.

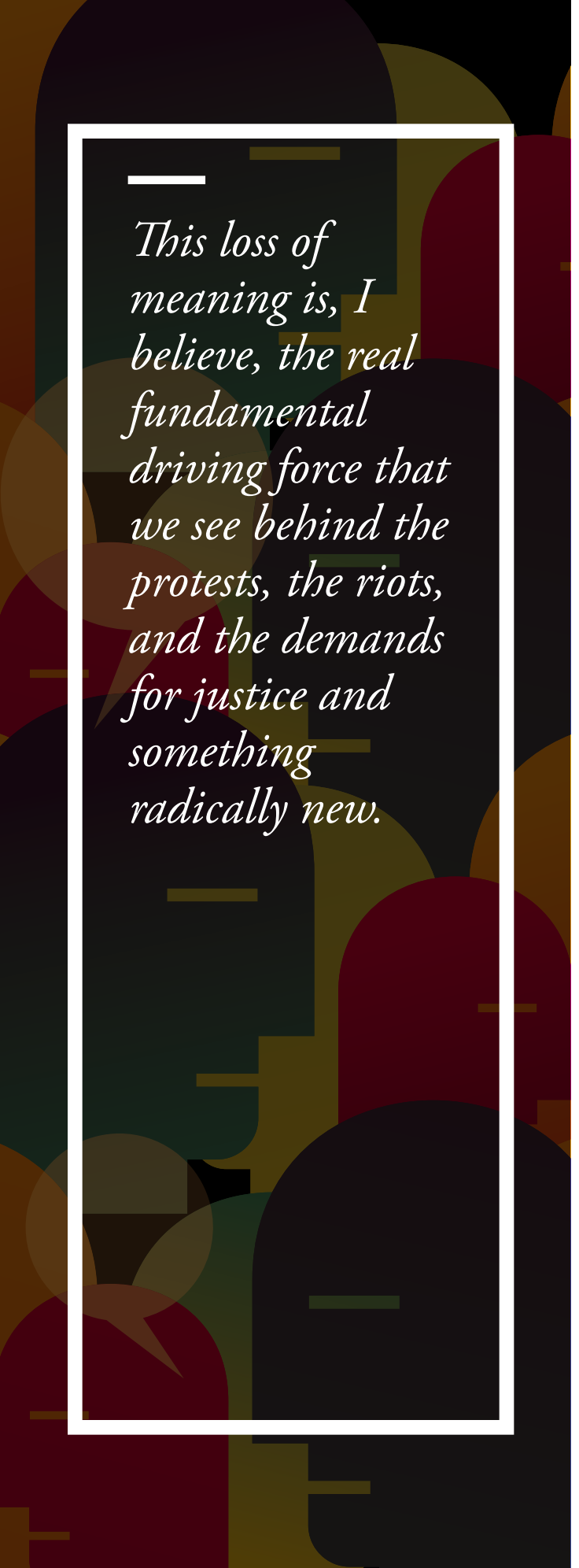
The Madness of Crowds is divided into four major chapters, titled "Gay," "Women," "Race," and "Trans," representing the four most recognized subgroups of current identity politics. Each of these chapters is separated by a shorter "interlude" which seeks to examine the role of such things as Marxism and the influence of new technology, including social media. There is much to say on each of these sections, but I shall here confine myself to a few brief overall comments.

On the negative, Murray does not really go much into the intellectual origins of these new movements, certainly not to the degree that was promised. His interlude on "Marxist foundations" for example, spends more time on postmodern thinkers rather than Marxists, and even then, seminal voices of postmodernism, such as Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, are given superficial and glib treatment. This may be understandable given that Murray is writing for a popular level audience, but it is also somewhat unhelpful. Foucault, Butler, and company may be difficult and obscure writers, but they have had enormous reach and influence, and most importantly, they actually point to the loss of meaning that many in our world now feel.[1]

What Murray is good at — and this seems to be a product of his journalistic background — is describing the real world effects of these intellectual approaches and the efforts made by activists to press them into Western and American culture. Some of this can make for shocking and discouraging reading. He focuses on a variety of examples (both well-known and unfamiliar) of widely growing practices such as the policing of language and the coercing of public gestures. A good example of the latter can be found in his chapter on race, where he provides a vivid retelling of the "day of absence" event at Evergreen State College, in Olympia, Washington, in 2017. A white professor at the college refused to follow the demand for all white persons to stay away from the campus for a day. His refusal to comply with this resulted in a sequence of protests and confrontations with black organizers which eventually led to the professor's permanent departure from the school. Murray's account of this episode goes into far more detail than many contemporary news reports, and makes for disheartening reading.

Murray recounts similar stories relating to the other categories of identity politics as well. Many of these episodes may already be familiar to readers, due to their prominence in the media such as the public gaffs of Piers Morgan which got him into trouble with some feminists, or the feminist author Germaine Greer's conflicts with members of the trans movement.

A recurring theme of Murray's book is the unstable tensions and unacknowledged conflicts that exist between many of the (often competing) identity groups themselves.



This loss of meaning is, I believe, the real fundamental driving force that we see behind the protests, the riots, and the demands for justice and something radically new.

Some liberal critics of Murray have contended that many anecdotal narratives of "right wing" absurdities and atrocities could just as easily be tabulated. While certainly true, I think this is missing the point that he is making. No sensible person today would contend that acts of racial bigotry, sexism, or homophobia are acceptable, let alone justified. Yet these actions by identity politics advocates are given a pass, or often explicitly celebrated.

So how then are we to proceed? In his conclusion, Murray proffers some possible ways out of our current scenario. His main riposte, when confronted with the shouts of "Injustice!" from the radicals, is to bluntly ask "Compared to what?" He writes:

> "When people attempt to sum up our societies today as monstrous, racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic patriarchies the [above] question needs to be asked. If this hasn't worked or isn't working, what is the system that has worked or does work? To ask this is not to say that elements of our society cannot be improved, or that we should not address injustice and unfairness when we see them. But to talk about our societies in the tone of judge, juror and executioner demands some questions to be asked of the accuser." (249)

Murray notes that many identity politics ideologues do sense that this is problematic for them and have been attempting to give an answer by reviving Rousseau's concept of the noble savage. The world was in fact a better place in primitive societies, they claim, or at least those parts of the world far from Western influence. Though as he points out, this claim is based on a lot of unsupported assumptions.[2] The gist of Murray's claim here is also perhaps the strongest argument that the conservative can make: namely the need for a sense of gratitude and appreciation and a cherishing of the best of our past and its traditions.

Many other conservative thinkers have also recently been vocalizing this need to cherish our traditions more dearly, including the late Sir Roger Scruton. Yet I think that this is not entirely satisfactory on its own. As a secular thinker Murray has only the traditions that have been handed down (good as they may have made the world), and these

can never deal with the existential weight of past injustices that accompany them. Murray also misses the point that in losing our grand narratives we are also losing our sense of meaning. This is a point he himself explicitly makes at the beginning of his own book, but fails to realize. This loss of meaning is, I believe, the real fundamental driving force that we see behind the protests, the riots, and the demands for justice and something radically new. I think that Murray senses this, however, even if he isn't fully able to articulate it. In his small interlude called "On Forgiveness" he points out the difficulty of forgiveness in our modern, secularized world:

> "As one of the consequences of the death of God, Friedrich Nietzsche foresaw that people could find themselves stuck in cycles of Christian theology with no way out. Specifically that people would inherit the concepts of guilt, sin and shame but would be without the means of redemption which the Christian religion also offered. Today we do seem to live in a world where actions have consequences we could never have imagined, where guilt and shame are more at hand than ever, and where we have no means whatsoever of redemption. We do not know who could offer it, who could accept it, and whether it is a desirable quality compared to an endless cycle of fiery certainty and denunciation." (182)

Though there is certainly a lot to unpack here, Murray's statement can be seen to be both astute, but also insufficient.

He points out that with many people in these new movements there is no intention towards or possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation. Only abasement and perpetual guilt is the lot for the (perceived) oppressor.

Yet Murray himself has nothing more to offer in response than the best of a previous tradition in terms of its art, its social liberties, and its civilized comforts and only a shrug at its deficiencies and disasters. As both he and Nietzsche before him have pointed out, true redemption and reconciliation are impossible dreams without the justice, grace, and mercy of a divine judge and redeemer. As a secularist he can only wistfully look back to a time when people actually believed that divine redemption and a God united humanity was a possibility. Yet we cannot just return to the good old days, or a secularized facsimile of it as Murray would probably rather have it. Tradition and the achievements of the past are vitally necessary in order to build up the freedoms and promises of the future, but tradition without transcendence, narratives without meaning, will ultimately fall short of responding to the madness that currently surrounds us.

FOOTNOTES

1 For a couple of helpful and accessible resources on the intellectual foundations of many of these new movements see François Cusset, *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States* (trans. Jeff Fort) (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008) and Jason Demers, T*he American Politics of French Theory: Derrida, Deleuze, Guattari, and Foucault in Translation* (Buffalo, NY: University of Toronto Press, 2019).

2 In response to the claims of allegedly peaceful primary societies, Murray points to the following book by L.H. Keeley: *War Before Civilization: The Myth of the Peaceful Savage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

REVIEWER BIO

MICHAEL PLATO

Michael J. Plato (Ph.D. Candidate, Free University of Amsterdam) is an assistant professor of intellectual history and Christian thought at Colorado Christian University.

BOOK REVIEW

The Gathering Storm

by Al Mohler

REVIEW BY DR. DAVID KOTTER

Professor of New Testament Studies and Dean of the School of Theology

The Gathering Storm is not a book for the faint of heart. Nevertheless, those who choose to work through this volume will find a sobering evaluation of a rapidly secularizing culture coupled with a helpful historical perspective. These ominous assessments are balanced with a solid foundation of biblical truth and a refreshing reminder of the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Dr. R. Albert Mohler Jr. intentionally borrowed the title of this book from the first volume of Winston Churchill's memoir on World War II. Churchill prophetically warned of the growing threat from Hitler and the militaristic aims of the Third Reich. Rather than facing a military threat, Christians are now engaged in a battle of ideas shaping the future of Western civilization and even infiltrating the church itself.

Mohler is uniquely qualified to sound this warning because he is an ordained minister, a theologian, and president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. His personal library rivals that of many universities and his commentaries on culture frequently are heard in the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and many television news programs. Mohler's concern is that most Christians today are not aware of this gathering storm of secularism reshaping the context of Christian ministry.

He defines "secular" as referring to the absence of a binding theistic authority or belief, so that society is no longer held together by a common morality, understanding of the world, or concept of what it means to be human.

Though the majority of people are not yet secular, society itself is being reshaped such that the presuppositions of this new secular worldview are becoming commonplace in many churches as they think about sexuality, religious liberty, marriage, the dignity of human life, and more. Passive secularization happens just because people breathe in culture and are constantly bombarded with cultural messages. In this environment, even people who would still affirm a commitment to Christianity often have a cognitive ordering that is basically secularized.

Indeed, people who self-consciously hold to a biblical model of doctrinal faith are now a "cognitive minority" in this new world, and Christians find themselves as the new intellectual outlaws. This is increasingly obvious as one gets closer to any large city, the East or West Coasts, and especially on most college campuses. Universities in particular are actively secularizing and indoctrinating a rising generation. Colorado Christian University, in stark contrast, continues to train students to trust the Bible and to live out Christian theology while training future leaders in many professions. CCU intends to stand as a bastion holding tightly to the faith once and for all delivered to the saints.

After a general warning, Mohler explores in subsequent chapters the effects of the gathering secularization storm on various areas of life, including the sanctity of human life, God's design for marriage, parental duties, and the coming generations. Each chapter begins with clear definitions of the issues at stake and are illustrated with extensive examples from both history and the recent news. Each chapter closes with biblical analysis and specific admonitions for Christians who are entering this gathering storm.

The chapters on the sanctity of life, gender and sexuality, and religious liberty bear particular attention. Mohler confirms that the secular storm has already claimed the lives of millions of unborn babies who are now considered nothing more than the accidental byproducts of sexual passion. In addition, the sexual revolution collides directly with divine revelation in rejecting the very definition of manhood and womanhood. Further, erotic liberty now trumps religious liberty, and Mohler's chapter is especially prescient in his analysis of the Equality Act. This piece of legislation was intended to amend the 1964 Civil Rights Act by including sexual orientation and gender identity as protected classes along with race and gender. Only a few weeks after Mohler's book was published, the Supreme Court of the United States made this threat into a reality in the *Bostock v. Clayton County* decision which redefined the meaning of the words of the original legislation to broaden the meaning of sex.

In each chapter, Mohler shows Christians how to contend for the faith and provides specific challenges for Christians entering this secular storm. Christians must not be silent, but rather clear and intentional in both living and speaking out sound doctrine. Voting is important, but cultural change takes place before the ballot box. Parents must train their children to know the gospel clearly and the teachings of Christianity extensively. Scripture must serve exclusively as the ultimate authority for life and doctrine. The church must be built up and taught clearly from the Word of God. The message of the gospel must reach every corner of the earth. Ultimately, Christians must trust in the God of history who oversees all cultural changes.

One weakness of a such a prophetic book is that rapidly changing events will render it somewhat outdated. For that reason, readers who appreciate this work are encouraged to join millions of

listeners who download "The Briefing," is Mohler's daily podcast analyzing the news from a Christian worldview.

Churchill's prophetic warnings were ignored in his "wilderness years" of the 1930s. By the end of the same decade, Churchill would be proven right and Europe plunged into the most horrifying and deadly war in human history. The great tragedy of the 1930s was that so many failed to take the threat seriously, but we can be grateful to Mohler that we now have been warned of the gathering storm of secularization. Though this book is not for the faint of heart, it should be read by everyone who knows that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church of Jesus Christ.

REVIEWER BIO

DR. DAVID KOTTER

Dr. David Kotter (Ph.D., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) serves as a professor of New Testament studies and dean of the School of Theology. On more than one occasion he has had the privilege of browsing through Dr. Mohler's personal library of more than 100,000 books.

BOOK REVIEW

1984

by George Orwell

REVIEW BY JEREMY PORIER

Assistant Professor of Computer Information Systems

"Big Brother is watching." Scores of people who have never read George Orwell's classic dystopian work, *"1984,"* understand the basic meaning of these four words. However, to simply reduce this book to a cautionary tale of over-surveillance would miss the most important question of all: why? Why would a government want to know your every move?

The first third of *"1984"* follows Winston Smith, a man in his late thirties who lives an unremarkable life that consists of a shabby London apartment, a job at the Ministry of Truth, and a wife from whom he is estranged and hasn't seen for years. He is a member of "The Party," which comprises 15% of the population of Oceania, a country made up of the Americas, Australia, Britain, and Southern Africa. Oceania is constantly at war with either Eurasia or Eastasia, the only other countries in the world.

Winston's apartment is dominated by one key piece of technology, the telescreen, which broadcasts The Party's content around the clock. However, unlike the television we know, the telescreen is limited to a single channel, can never be turned off, and is equipped with a camera and microphone to monitor the sights and sounds of Winston's apartment. Telescreens are pervasive in Oceania, with one in the residence of every Party member, and extensive deployment throughout public places.

As you might expect, when a person is always on camera, life becomes a performance. In the totalitarian, socialist society in which Winston lives one must constantly be mindful of small facial expressions, lifting an eyebrow, sighing, or other non-verbal cues that may indicate a thought that is not supportive of the Party. After all, the "Thought Police" are constantly monitoring the cameras.

Most Party members accept whatever the Party presents as truth without question, but Winston's inner thoughts are not so easily convinced. In a society that aims to crush the individual and uphold the collective by subjugating the minds of the masses, this puts him in a dangerous position. For instance, what if he should fall in love, a behavior that clearly runs in opposition to Party doctrine?

I first read *"1984"* several years ago with the simple goal of not being in the dark when the phrase "Big Brother" was mentioned in conversation. What I found was that "Big Brother" was merely the tip of the iceberg. Re-writing history, forcefully developing a new spoken language, isolation from all foreign peoples, and radicalizing children at an early age are just some of the components of Orwell's view of the future. What makes the book even more engaging is that woven in between these currently unfulfilled atrocities are Orwell's future predictions that have come to pass, oftentimes with effectiveness unimaginable in the late 1940s.

The idea of a constantly monitored telescreen must have seemed like science fiction when the book was released in 1949, but today heavy surveillance of a population is a technological possibility, perhaps even a probability. The situation is even more concerning in our current society as the screens, cameras, and microphones aren't limited to fixed

locations, but are faithfully carried by citizens to any and all locations. In a twist of irony, we even bear the cost of these "smart" devices. The thought of leaving that device behind seems heretical to most, with many people feeling unsafe without it. Additionally, many homes have devices in them with an open microphone that is listening 100% of the time (Alexa?) and perhaps a camera watching the front door.

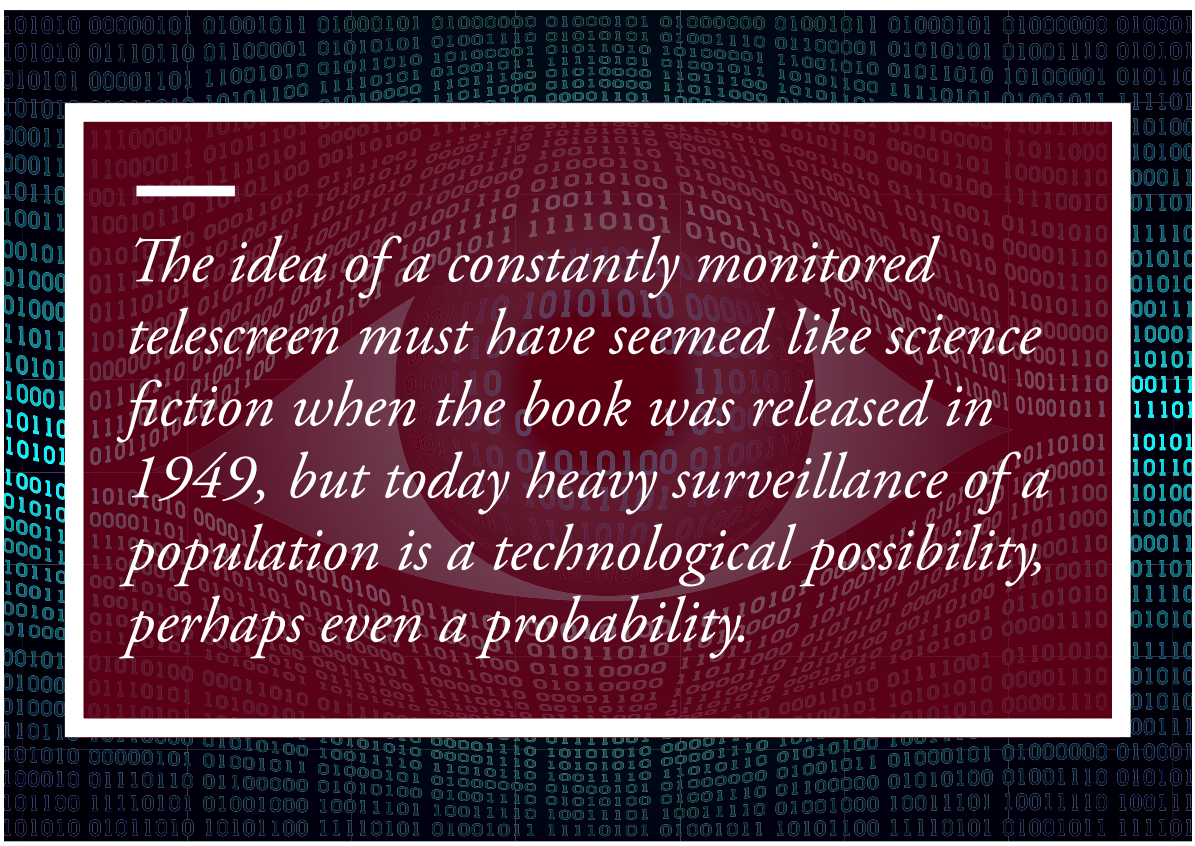
In Oceania, telescreens pushed the official message of The Party 100% of the time, even while you slept. The content of our smartphones are not controlled by a party per se, but most people choose to solely retrieve news from outlets that match the philosophy of their own chosen party. Receiving news from a variety of sources with a variety of viewpoints, commonplace in my own childhood, is a fading memory.

There are many other similarities between the predictions in *"1984"* and the realities of our modern world, but the book should not be read out of simple curiosity and admiration of Orwell's Nostradamus-like qualities.

Orwell was examining the political and philosophical ideas of his day and extrapolating where they might lead, especially given man's lust for power.

In that same way, I would encourage the reader of "1984" to examine current technological abilities and systems of thought and imagine what the world may look like in 2050, especially if small changes were to happen incrementally.

One such scenario that plays out in my mind with each reading of *"1984"* is video surveillance. In 2020 the majority of businesses have some sort of closed circuit camera setup, many private residences have one or more cameras, municipalities have camera networks for traffic control, and there are security cameras in public parks and other gathering spaces. It is possible that in the future a horrific



crime will be committed and in the investigation it will be determined that if the authorities would have had instant access to several private security camera networks the crime could have been prevented. Public sentiment could be rallied and laws could be proposed to provide the authorities access to all private security camera footage in real time. This decision, in combination with ever-improving artificial intelligence to process and monitor the vast amounts of video footage, could create a more effective (and thus more terrifying) version of the surveillance state described in *"1984."* That which was intended for good could be used for evil.

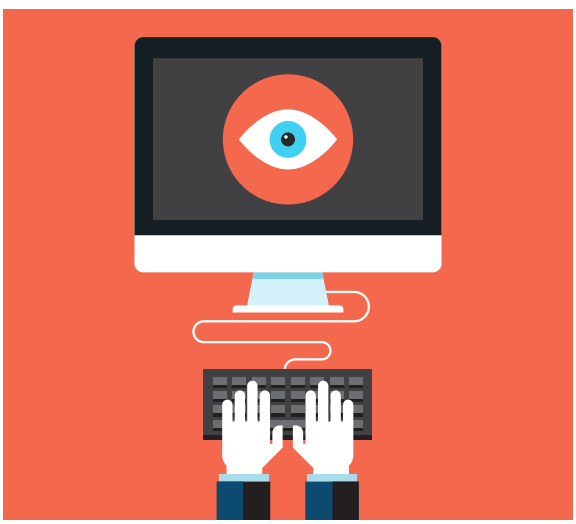
When I discuss possible scenarios like the one above, people sometimes look at me as though I've gone too far, or perhaps even question my intellect. While I admit that these scenarios can seem far-fetched at first, there is always a phrase suspended within my mind that I heard in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks: failure of imagination. Most people never gave credence to the thought that a plane could be hijacked and repurposed as a missile, even though Tom Clancy wrote a book that included a similar scenario.

To me it seems prudent to have some imaginative thought about where our mixture of ubiquitous digital devices, increasing internet capacities, and the emergence of artificial intelligence could lead. As I write this review a global pandemic has been declared and several countries have begun to monitor the movements of individuals and those with whom they have had countact based upon location data from their own smartphones. While this is an efficient way to slow down the spread of a disease, it could also be an efficient way to slow down, or stop, the movement of an idea or even the will of the people in whole.

In the United States we are assured by the likes of Apple and Google that data is only being presented to government agencies in aggregate, without personally identifiable information. This may seem reasonable at first glance, but even aggregate data could be used to limit the freedoms of individuals. For example, it would be possible to identify a popular restaurant or church using aggregate data and increase observation of that location.

To be fair, after the 2015 San Bernardino shootings Apple did stand firm against the federal government's request to decrypt the terrorist's iPhone. This scenario demonstrates the ethical dilemma that technology companies face. There is a desire to learn as much as possible about terrorists, find any accomplices, and bring them to justice. However, building technology that could routinely be used to decrypt phones would open a Pandora's box of security and privacy vulnerabilities that could be another incremental step towards a surveillance state.

These are difficult questions, with outcomes that are even more difficult to predict. Orwell's *"1984"* provokes thought about our society, privacy, and personal freedoms in a way that few books have for me. As Christians we should be informed, thoughtful, and imaginative, lest in our ignorance we help build the infrastructure of our own persecution.



REVIEWER BIO

JEREMY PORIER

Jeremy Porier '00 (M.S., University of Colorado - Denver) is an assistant professor of computer information systems in CCU's School of Business and Leadership. He resides in Littleton with his wife, Rachel '00, and their two sons, Aidan and Micah.

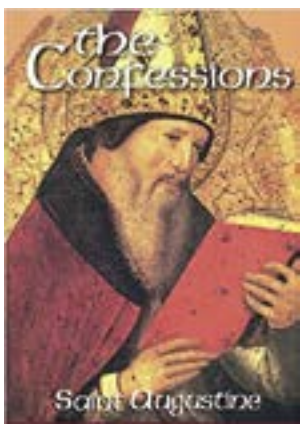
BOOK REVIEW

Confessions

by Augustine

REVIEW BY DR. MEGAN DEVORE

Associate Professor of Church History and Early Christian Studies



"When I turned away from You, the one God, and pursued a multitude of things, I fell to pieces." While those words were penned over 1,600 years ago in a book titled simply *Confessions*, their compelling relevance has not diminished in the present. *Confessions* is one of the most absorbing, original, and interdisciplinary works of literature in the history of Western civilization. It has inspired countless Christians over many centuries. Yet when my students read *Confessions*, what transfixes and transforms them is the way that its author conveys the restlessness of the human heart.

In this book, the great writer and pastor Augustine pens a narrative of his life as pridefully selfish, outwardly ambitious and secretly insecure, fragmented, and constantly seeking both self-realization and numbing distraction. We recognize this story: it is that of ourselves and of the world around us. Yet as we turn each page, we move from Augustine's falsely fulfilled, restless heart to the way he finds rest, peace, and elated wonder in a gracious God. *Confessions* seems at a glance to be about Augustine. Then, as we read, we find that it is about God — and our turn to Him, too.

Indeed, *Confessions* is a text unlike any other. Though it has been classified as a model of pastoral guidance, an exploration into the psychology of memory, a philosophical foray, a literary innovation by a master rhetorician, a grand theological illustration, an autobiographical reflection, and more, it defies categorization. As readers, we find ourselves immersed in contents that resist objective detachment because they are a continuous prayer in ink. That is, Augustine directs the words of this book straightforwardly to God. Composed as a deeply reflective yet public conversation, the *Confessions* speak to the One who is at once "deeply hidden and intimately present." (1.5) We listen, and we too are transformed.

Who is Augustine, and why might he publish such a prayer? Augustine was born in AD 354 in a Romanized, lush, and prosperous region of North Africa. He died in 430, which places his life precisely in the slow crumbling of the Roman Empire. He witnessed various stages of the empire's collapse as well as strong cultural tensions between Christianity and old Roman paganism. Public self-promotion, impatient self-absorption, financial panic, widespread cultural friction, and relativistic pragmatism were rampant (indeed, not unlike our own day). Augustine had a Christian mother but a non-Christian father; he spent the first three decades of his life chasing ambition, pleasure, and sham philosophical 'enlightenment.' By the time he was 31, he had found success with a high-paying, well-connected position as a professor in Milan. In the midst of great achievement, though, restlessness haunted him: "Where could my heart flee to escape itself?" (4.12)

The first nine books of *Confessions* trace this life journey, leading up to the dramatic way Augustine finally turned to God in Milan and then the transformative two years after his conversion. These pages contain now-famous scenes such as

childhood fruit-thievery, adolescent lustful quests that mask inner desolation, the tearful faith-filled prayers of his mother, and the words of a child's song and wisdom of a Christian pastor that lead to Augustine's turn. In all of this, his gratitude is clear: Augustine is foremost a recipient of God's grace. "The One who made me is good ... and in His Name I rejoice." (1.20)

The last four books of *Confessions* resituate the narrative away from Augustine's life and into a much wider landscape. They move with humble awe from a profound exploration of human memory and the senses to a contemplation of a broken humanity's place in a world created by a good God. The narrative then broadens into a worshipful commentary on the first chapters of Genesis, because our lives only make sense in light of the grander Scriptural story. Augustine concludes with God's rest in the seventh day of creation, turning our eyes to the restful peace that is eternity, when all hope is fulfilled. This ending returns us to the leitmotif of the *Confessions*: rest for our restless hearts is only found in God. This is a wider process, incomplete until the eschaton, which is precisely why Augustine often speaks of his own "unfinished state" and also why the final word of the book is *aperietur*, 'it will be opened.' Even unto this last phrase, Augustine constantly proclaims that there is more to unfold in God's world. In closing the *Confessions*, we are left with expectation — not of Augustine, but an expectation that looks to God with steadfast wonder.

In the decades after penning *Confessions*, Augustine continued in the demanding tasks of ministry, including various forms of writing. He had yet to write some of his more famous works, such as *City of God*, and to defend the Church against notorious schismatics like the Donatists. Years later, when reflecting back on *Confessions*, Augustine added nothing. The book timelessly acclaims the God whose goodness transforms: "Without You, what am I to myself but a guide to my own downfall? You turn us back to Yourself in wondrous ways." (4.1, 4.31)

Augustine's ability to call his readers to grace and truth through prayer is striking.

It is no surprise, then, that various classes here at CCU read *Confessions*: we share a similar vision. This is a university that, by the grace of God, labors to reorient a frantic and fragmented culture. Like Augustine, we proclaim that goodness, wisdom, and peace can only be found in the marvelous God of Scripture who ever draws our fragmented lives unto Him. Like Augustine, we know that God's work in us, in His church, and in His world are ongoing — a truth which cultivates in us both hope and grit. The compelling relevance of Augustine's *Confessions* has not diminished. May we, alongside Augustine, find wholeness and meaning only in the Triune God – in the God to whom we also can declare, "You made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You." (1.1)

WHEN YOU READ THE *CONFESSIONS*:

- Use a good translation, such as M. Boulding (New City Press) or R.S. Pine-Coffin (Penguin Classics). Both provide helpful footnotes to Augustine's numerous Scriptural references.
- Consider using a concise reading guide, such as J. Byassee's *Reading Augustine: A Guide to the Confessions*, with helpful commentary and discussion questions, or a brief book that gives context for Augustine's life and writings, such as Knowles and Penkett's *Augustine and His World*.

REVIEWER BIO

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Megan DeVore '01 (Ph.D., University of Wales) is an associate professor of church history and early Christian studies in CCU's School of Theology. Her research focuses on early Christian theology and practice; Augustine's works have enriched her classes, mentoring, writing, and understanding of flourishing and vocation. She is married to a local pastor and has two young children.

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Christ-centered higher education
transforming students to impact
the world with grace and truth.

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Our Strategic Priorities were adopted by the CCU Board of Trustees to serve as a guiding compass for the University. They direct the implementation of CCU's Mission and provide context for our first priority — an enduring commitment to Jesus Christ and His kingdom. The Strategic Priorities provide a point of convergence for every member of the CCU community and for every aspect of life at CCU, from how we teach and learn in the classroom to how we live with and serve others.

- Honor Christ and share the love of Christ on campus and around the world
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- Ask God to multiply our time and ability to the glory of His great name
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