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Home (Book Review)

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to the world. In his essay “Carving Stone or Learning to Speak Christian,” Hauerwas compares Christianity to the stone-cutting trade; to be “Christian” means to be immersed in a community with particular stories, symbols, and language that are reflected in a particular way of living. In this context, the Christian university must be a place where people are formed by and for the Christian community. Here, a way of speaking is developed that redefines and confronts the world. Within such a university, disciplines converse with, challenge, and correct each other, and faith engages the academic realm as we seek to know truth. Such a place forms and shapes people to become like Gregory of Nazianzus, who not only wanted to “do something for the poor” but loved the poor and worked to create “liturgical action in which the poor and the leper, through the power of beautiful words, were made the center of a city ruled by Christ” (197).

Overall, Hauerwas makes a strong argument, engaging a variety of ideas while effectively utilizing analogies and stories to support his points. Hauerwas’ ideas reflect the influence of John Howard Yoder, as well as the neo-orthodoxy of Karl Barth, and some might take issue with the implications of these theological foundations. Yet, his message transcends traditional interpretations of the “Christianity and culture” debate with a universal call for the Christian community to reflect upon the purpose and function of the university in the context of the gospel.

What is missing, however, is a discussion concerning the relationship between the Christian community and existing social structures. In calling for Christians to establish an alternative culture, he does not discuss the nature of such structures (are they inherently good or bad?) or whether they might be transformed by the gospel. In creating its own material culture, does the Christian community copy the existing structures of the dominant culture, or do we create entirely new ones? Further, Hauerwas minimizes the role of Christian educational institutions

in forming graduates who participate in the structures of dominant culture as a witness to the gospel. Although it is much easier to maintain an alternative community in separation from the dominant culture, Hauerwas’ call for the Christian community to “remain in” and “exist for” the world necessarily means that influence will go both ways. The Christian community cannot influence the world without the world in turn exacting some degree of influence upon the community. Hauerwas believes that the university must play a significant role within the Christian community for establishing a material culture in contrast to the dominant culture. He does not, however, provide a realistic description of how this can be accomplished without falling into “Constantinianism.”

Regardless, this collection of essays represents a significant challenge for all Christians involved in higher education, from presidents and professors to students and constituents. Hauerwas passionately demonstrates the need for the Christian community to reclaim the university, not just for job training but as a place to develop a different way of speaking and living in the world. Too often Christian educational institutions at every level utilize Christian jargon to legitimize the status quo. Methods of teaching, course offerings, athletic programs, and administrative policies are at times influenced more by movements within the dominant culture than by faithful obedience to the gospel. As money increasingly becomes the driving force in all forms of higher education, Hauerwas prophetically calls Christian institutions with millions of dollars invested in infrastructure, athletic programs, and endowments to become institutions for the poor. He may not give us a clear picture of how this might be accomplished, but through this book Hauerwas summons institutions of higher education to reclaim their place within the Christian community, being informed not by the political, economic, and cultural forces of the dominant culture but being formed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Robinson, Marilynne. *Home*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008. 322 pp. ISBN 978-0-374-29910-1. Reviewed by David Schelhaas, Emeritus Professor of English at Dordt College.

I must confess that rarely have I looked forward so eagerly to a new novel as I have to Marilynne Robinson’s *Home*, her sequel to the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Gilead*. (Robinson is a professor at the Iowa Writer’s Workshop, and in addition to being a teacher and novelist, is highly regarded for her writings on the work of John Calvin.) As it turns out, *Home* is not a sequel. Even though it is set in the town of Gilead and has the same cast of characters, it does not tell us what happened *next* in the lives of the Reverends Ames and Boughten or the other characters. It tells us what was happening at the same time to the same characters but from a different point of view—something for which I have no name. Perhaps we could call it a

“simulquel.”

At first glance this seems an audacious undertaking. How can she set the same cast of characters in the same small, dull Iowa town in almost exactly the same span of time and expect to make a second novel that engages her readers? Yet Robinson does engage us and enlightens us about the power of place, the paradoxical nature of home, the complexity of relationships between parents and children and between siblings, the mystery of good and evil, the wrestling of unbelief with belief, and finally, the wonder of love and grace. She does it with the sheer power of her language and an imagination that provides marvelously subtle insights into the psyches of her

characters.

I have said that I was eager for *Home* to come out, and that was because I found such delight in *Gilead*. It is the most beautiful book I know. I cannot read it (and I go back to it often) without having my spirits lifted. The first-person narrator, Rev. Ames, is that rare thing in life and literature, a good and thoughtful man who has loved his life and is able to talk about his delight in language that is profound and simple. Reading *Gilead* reminds one that life is a sumptuous gift that can be cherished in spite of its pain and hardship. One cannot read two pages in *Gilead* without coming upon an observation by Ames about the mystery and beauty in the most ordinary experiences. He sees two young men

propped against the garage wall in the sunshine, lighting up their cigarettes. . . . They were passing remarks back and forth the way they do and laughing that wicked way they have. And it seemed beautiful to me. It is an amazing thing to watch people laugh, the way it sort of takes over them. . . . I wonder what it is and where it comes from, and I wonder what it expends out of your system, so that you have to do it till you're done, like crying in a way, I suppose, except that laughter is much more easily spent. (*Gilead* 5)

Just two pages later Ames says, "You can know a thing to death and be for all purposes completely ignorant of it. A man can know his father, or his son, and there might still be nothing between them but loyalty and love and mutual incomprehension" (*Gilead* 7).

Again and again we are delighted by these kinds of observations in *Gilead*, but in *Home* we see the world through the perceptions of Glory, the daughter of Ames' dear friend Boughten (though from the third person limited point of view rather than Ames' first person). She does not possess the wisdom or the settled peace that Ames has, and so the book is not shot through with those light-shafts of wisdom we see in *Gilead*.

But *Home* has a brightness of its own. Having just returned to Gilead after a heart-wrenching love affair, Glory is confused about her identity and future, and her struggle to know herself engages our sympathy and curiosity. Then there's her relationship with her brother Jack and her gradual understanding of and sympathy for him as well as her management of his fragile relationship with their father. These character relationships intrigue us.

Jack Boughten is the black sheep in the otherwise wholesome Boughten family, the son born, in his mother's words, "to break his father's heart" (56). After a twenty-year disappearance, he has come home to Gilead where Glory is caring for their father, the Rev. Boughten, who is rapidly failing but still lives in the hope Jack will return. Although Jack is an important secondary character in *Gilead*, his primary function was to fill out the portrait of Rev. Ames. In *Home*, Jack is the central character because

the central concern of the novel is his estrangement from faith, family and father.

A dramatic scene that appears in both novels, Jack's visit to Ames' church on a Sunday morning, serves as an apt illustration of how these novels intersect. Ames' first person description of this event in *Gilead* reveals first of all that he did not know Jack was going to attend service that morning and therefore his decision to preach on the Hagar/Ismael story—so appropriate to certain aspects of Jack's sordid past—was not intentional. But Ames also reveals that his "extemporaneous remarks might have been influenced by his [Jack's] sitting there with that look on his face right beside my wife and child" (*Gilead* 131). The saintly Rev. Ames fears that Jack may have designs on his own young wife after he dies, and he recognizes this suspicion in his heart. In *Home*, Jack's perception of the sermon is quite different. He returns from the service to tell Glory that Ames' intent was "to appall me, that is, to turn me white, as I am sure he did" (206). *Home* shows us that Jack, completely innocent of any designs on Ames' wife, believes Ames is attacking him for the sins of his youth. Thus each character's misperception serves the book in which it appears.

Jack Boughten has always been an enigma. From his earliest days—"almost since you were a baby" his father says—he has been alienated, lonely, a trouble-maker. "I can't explain it. I don't know. I was a bad kid" (114) Jack tells his father. Even now, back in Gilead, Jack says his "disreputable" nature is one of the three "central facts of his existence." And it is complicated by the fact that Jack is smart, charming, talented and compassionate as well as "disreputable."

So the prodigal son has come home, and there has been feasting and even a sort of confession of sin by the son, but not the affirmation of belief which his father so desperately longs to hear. When Glory wonders if he couldn't just lie to their father about his unbelief, Jack, the former thief and drunk, asks, "Ah, Glory. What would I be then?" (143). He doesn't have it in him, he says, to be a "hypocrite." This encounter leads eventually to what seems to me to be the most dramatic scene in the novel, one that grows out of his response to Rev. Ames' sermon and ends up being a discussion of predestination. Jack tells the two reverends that he has often wondered whether he might not be an instance of predestination, that is, of one who was predestined to damnation.

Can a discussion of predestination be high drama? In Robinson's hands, yes. We are captivated by the scene, first of all, because she writes so well. Further, we have come to care a good deal about Jack Boughten by this time, and we want him to be reconciled. We care about Jack because in spite of his flaws, we see him as kind and generous and desperately longing for a little joy in his life. Finally, the resolution of this scene is just perfect and wonderfully simple.

I have said that Jack is the central character of *Home*,

but an argument could be made that Glory is. Though not so complex a character as Jack, Glory is engaged in her own quest for significance, hurt and grieving over her own recent past, searching for peace and a sense of well-being in her life. She fears and hopes that she may have come home for good to Gilead. To her surprise, Jack ministers to her in her struggle just as she ministers so patiently and gently to him. Her epiphany at the very end of the novel, her recognition of the goodness of her life, is immensely satisfying.

Home is not the kind of novel that rides along blithely on its plot; it moves slowly, character driven. At some point you may look back over the last fifty pages you have read and wonder if anything significant has happened.

Gaukroger, Stephen. *The Emergence of a Scientific Culture: Science and the Shaping of Modernity, 1210-1685*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. ix + 563 pp., with bibliography. ISBN: 978-0-19-929644-6. Reviewed by Keith C. Sewell, Professor of History at Dordt College

Almost sixty years ago, Herbert Butterfield published *The Origins of Modern Science* (1949), a book that more than many others helped numerous students make the history of science central to their understanding of the history of western civilization. Butterfield's work was significant for its "thinking cap" and "lantern slide" metaphors, which were so suggestive to Thomas S. Kuhn of "paradigm change" fame. Butterfield also maintained that by uncritically reading our notions of "science" back into the times of late-medieval and early-modern Europe, we could be ensnaring ourselves in all manner of anachronistic misperceptions from the crude to the subtle. Butterfield was not, of course, without his precursors and contemporaries—the Americans George Sarton (1884-1956) and Lynn Thorndike (1882-1965), and European giants such as Pierre Duhem (1861-1916) and Alexandre Koyré (1892-1964), had already made important contributions. Butterfield warned against the fallacies of anachronism in the history of science as in other branches of historical study. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for example, we can find astronomy and astrology intertwined in a complex web of conjecture, discovery, and debate. This complex web has led some to seek the "origins" of *our* truly "modern" science in the nineteenth century—after all, while the word "*scientia*" is of classical lineage, "scientist" comes to us from the century of Charles Darwin and Thomas Huxley. Yet such a stance is less than satisfactory. At the very least, it would seem to under-appreciate the deeper continuities of history; our "modern science" is, in truth, the result of a long process of historical maturation.

In this work, Stephen Gaukroger, Professor of History of Philosophy and History of Science at the University of Sydney, Australia, demonstrates two: to account for how modern science emerged in the West, and to explain why scientific knowledge came to be regarded as the basis upon

But then you recognize that you have been drawn forward, captivated by the subtle growth and change in the relationship between Glory and Jack or Jack's ongoing struggle to understand his relationship with his father.

Does *Home* measure up to *Gilead*? I think it does—as a work of art. But I do not think it will be as popular as *Gilead*, for even though *Home* wrestles with more puzzling and challenging questions than *Gilead* does, its slow pace will put some people off. Nevertheless, it is a fine companion piece to *Gilead*. Both novels move with a patient gentleness; both are inhabited by characters one would like to have as friends; and both evoke a sense of wonder (and sometimes fear) about the deep joys and sorrows at the core of human existence.

which all other claims to knowledge should be assessed. These questions cannot be settled with reference to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries alone. Moreover, as soon as the longer term is taken into consideration, the immense impact of Aristotelian thinking in the late-medieval and early-modern periods must be traversed with care. Accordingly, Gaukroger takes the long view, commencing his discussions with the Paris condemnations of Aristotle in 1210 and 1277 (70 f.). In truth, the synthesis of Aristotelian natural philosophy and Christian theology that we so rightly associate with Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) enjoyed no smooth path to official (Papal) sanction as latter-day "Thomism"; instead, it encountered repeated challenges from both old Platonism and as well as from varieties of the new Nominalism (80 f.).

This volume traverses the broad late-medieval and early-modern periods. It ends with the beginnings of modern-style reflections on the antiquity of man, which also anticipated the development of scientific geology (496-503), to a point where we find ourselves on the brink of Newton's *Principia Mathematica* of 1687 (352-6, 462-8).

Gaukroger is nothing but thorough; he peers into the nooks and crannies, explores half-forgotten byways, and surveys dead-ends, for these all exhibit their instructive moments. He helps keep us from the pitfalls of anachronism by using the term "natural philosophy," reminding us that this was not a single uniform enterprise but exhibited diverse articulations in fields such as mathematics, mechanics and optics (35, 253 ff.). As befits the author of a full length biography (see his *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography*, 1995), Gaukroger is particularly strong on Descartes (1596-1650), whose philosophical project was a response to the perceived failure of Thomism. That failure was already evident in the writings of Pietro Pomponazzi (1462-1525), who had decisively called into