

OPEN TO GRACE

*a journey from atheism to feminism
via the Southern Baptist Seminary*



OLGA-MARIA CRUZ

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	3
INTRODUCTION	5
1) Coming to Southern Seminary	9
2) The Carver School	24
3) The Baptist Church in Louisville	36
4) Fasting	64
5) Serving the Southern Baptists	84
6) Climbing Out	101
7) Oxford	117
8) Gender and Feminism	150
9) Open to Grace	183
APPENDIX I	204
WORKS CITED	214

PREFACE

The idea for this memoir came from conversations with two writers—the novelist Isabel Allende, and my brother, Cooper Cruz. I was privileged to spend some time with Ms. Allende when she visited Bellarmine University, where I was teaching, in 2004. Over lunch, she asked me about my theological studies at the Southern Baptist Seminary. I was flattered, feeling she was trying to tease a story out of me. I mentioned this on the phone to Cooper, who responded, “If there’s a story there, *you* should write it. It’s *your* story.” And so it is.

What follows is an account of my experiences while studying at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary from 1995 to 2003. A lot of growth and change takes place in most people’s lives between the ages of twenty-three and thirty-one. In my case, that personal growth and change occurred within the context of tremendous change and upheaval at Southern Seminary and in the Southern Baptist Convention. While these institutional changes are undeniably significant, they are not the focus here—it is not my intention to write a history of the seminary, nor some sort of exposé, to scandalize the seminary or any of its members or constituents. My aim, rather, is to tell the story of that tumultuous time and place first-hand, from my own point of view, as one of the few women in the seminary community, but most importantly, as one of its members. As the reader will discover, I was not merely an observer of all that happened at Southern in the late 90’s; I was not and do not pretend here to be at all an objective outsider. I

was a participant, one who supported the Mohler administration unquestioningly. What follows is an account of how I came to Southern Seminary, why I stayed, what I experienced, and how I grew finally to be able to question and critique much of what it does and stands for.

In writing this memoir, I have relied on various sources, including newspapers, magazines, audio and video recordings, the seminary archives, the Internet and my own journals. Any quotes that are not cited are from my own recollection and may be paraphrased. Only my own views and opinions are expressed here—I make no attempt to speak for other SBTS seminarians, Baptists, or Christian believers. Some names or their spellings have been changed; those who are not public figures are referred to by first names only.

As my friend, Sallie Bingham, says in her memoir, *Passion and Prejudice*, “Women have often been silenced in history, our voices discredited or blotted out. We have been silenced to preserve elements in the hierarchy, political or social, public or private, institutional or personal. I choose to speak.”

INTRODUCTION

I spent eight years at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, eight years that seemed like more. I tend to think and talk of them as if they were ten years—“a decade,” I’ll often say. I earned both a Master of Divinity degree (required for pastors and other ministers) in Theology, and a Ph.D. in Ethics.

I still live in Louisville, work and teach here, walk my dog here, in an artsy and eclectic area known as the Highlands. Sometimes, every few months or so, I’ll run into an old seminary acquaintance around town, someone who knew me from choir or Hebrew class. They seem happy to see me. I feel a nervous clenching in my stomach.

Invariably, for some reason, one of the first questions they ask is, “Where are you going to church?”

Reluctantly I say, “Oh, I’m a member of _____.” They blanch. The church I have dared to name and to claim membership of is one of the three Baptist churches in town (infamous among conservatives) that have broken ties with the Southern Baptist Convention and joined the more liberal (and therefore somewhat heretical) Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. The conversation ends quickly. I’m not interested in their lives, really, and once they find out we no longer have in common the only thing that bound us in the first place, they lose interest too. I walk away, hurting for the loss of dozens of friends I’ve left behind

in the Southern Baptist church, but also glad that the encounter did not turn into a mini-sermon on biblical inerrancy, and keenly aware of the worse truth I could not admit—I don't even go.

I don't really go to that church. Though I retain my membership, I never pay tithes, don't attend services, even at Christmas or Easter. Still more damning, I don't read the Bible anymore. I studied it for so long, I feel like I have it memorized, and I'm just no longer interested. I thought for a time I was simply burned out, which can happen to seminarians. For a while after graduation, I told people who asked about my attendance at worship, "I'm a little burned out on church," and they accepted that. Now it's been six years, and I can't keep using that excuse. The hard fact is that I just don't believe in Christian doctrine anymore. Though in many ways it still makes complete sense to me—I could argue the evangelical viewpoint on any subject for hours, quite successfully—it no longer shapes my life. Other, more inclusive ideas do. I don't feel the need for Christian worship (though I have fond memories of its beauty and power); I have other ways of connecting with the divine.

I attend yoga classes several times a week, and while I by no means worship Hindu deities, I have found their ancient stories enlightening and encouraging, a breath of fresh air in contrast to the Bible. These are blatantly crazy and outrageous stories: a god and goddess who become a monkey and his tail; a boy whose head is chopped off by his father and replaced with the head of an elephant and who then gets around by riding on a mouse. But what's fun and fascinating and engaging about these stories is that the listener is invited in—beyond identifying only with the protagonist (say, Abraham in Genesis or Moses in Exodus), you are invited to be *all* the characters, and there are lessons to be learned from each. What's

more, precisely because the stories are so outrageous, they refuse to be taken literally. Instead, part of the invitation is to look at and think about the stories from every different angle, to explore the possible meanings yourself, rather than receiving one set meaning from an outside authority.

Maybe part of the appeal for me is that I can listen without feeling compelled to be scholarly. If I go to church and hear hymns, Scripture readings, and sermons, I instinctively analyze them. They judge me and I judge them. I feel I've heard it all before (probably done better) at seminary chapel services. At yoga class, I am no longer a scholar, a professor, an authority on anything but myself. I am invited to take a back seat, to receive—a new way of being in the world, of being in community—without labeling or judging people. The contrast with my seminary experience could hardly be more stark.

Perhaps the most important contrast, which I hope these pages will reveal, is that, for all their talk about the grace of God, the evangelical community is far less gracious than the yoga community. Most of my former, Christian friends have or would now exclude me from their company because of my 'sinful' lifestyle, my heretical views. But my yoga *kula* (Sanskrit for 'the community of the heart', the family of choice made up of friends who are seeking a similar path) is so grace-filled that it includes Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Hindus and pagans.

It seems to me now that in the past, I was dominated by fear—fear was the main feeling, the controlling force of my life, for years. And part of why I was attracted to the church was that they ostensibly claim to eradicate or deal with your fear by giving you soothing hymns, authoritative Bible verses, and unalterable salvation. It will all work out in

the end. But it also seems to me that the evangelical church uses fear, it enjoys fear, it works with it, builds on it, could never survive without it. Evangelicals and their leaders seem to be afraid of women, and sex, and difference; they are afraid of progress and change; they are afraid of losing their power. And in my view, they prey on people's fears, in order to control them. *Listen to me, do what I say, vote how I tell you or everything will fall apart.*

This is a story, primarily about moving from fear to grace. It is grace now, I think, that dominates my life, that characterizes what in the past I would have called my "walk." I walk in grace.

CHAPTER ONE
COMING TO SOUTHERN SEMINARY

Fair and Happy Land

*On Jordan's stormy banks I stand
and cast a wishful eye on Canaan's fair
and happy land where my possessions lie.
...Oh, who will come and go with me?
I am bound for the promised land.*

I came to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in the spring of 1995, a time of turmoil for the institution and myself. That spring term was supposed to be a new beginning for me, but it ended up another crisis. By April, tensions between seminary faculty and administration reached a boiling point: at least a dozen faculty and staff were fired or resigned. The Carver School of Church Social Work, which I was poised to enter, was collapsing. Protests and even bomb threats rocked the campus.

I had moved to Louisville from the University of Florida. I was recovering from sexual harassment, stalking, and assault, as well as processing the aftermath of the infamous Gainesville murders. At seminary, I found myself rushed by male students (who outnumbered women about twenty to one). I received random flowers, phone calls and unwanted invitations. Intimidated, I turned for protection to two very large and spoken-for men, students like me and campus security guards. I also turned to the available father-figures—male professors and administrators—and in the process I was quickly recruited by a

conservative student clique. Tension grew on campus until liberal faculty and students could be heard praying in the classrooms against the rightist administration, and vice versa. But my allegiance to the conservative regime at the time was such that I informed on two of my professors for “liberal” statements or behaviors and saw them resign that year. Along with other conservative students (following my two protectors), I also joined the seminary president’s church, ironically on the very day its pastor resigned in a sex scandal. I decided to cope with my anxiety by fasting. I developed anorexia.

I arrived at Southern Seminary on a snowy day in January of 1995. My mother and I drove up with a small U-Haul trailer from our family home in Florida. We pulled into the parking lot behind Fuller Hall, where I had reserved an unfurnished one-bedroom apartment. A white pickup with “Campus Security” and the seminary seal on the doors pulled in beside us. We were greeted by a tall (6’5”), dark, handsome security guard named Shawn. Shawn offered to give us a hand moving my things in, and he volunteered his roommate, “Bubba,” as well. Bubba (6’ 7”), worked for Campus Security too, and he and Shawn made me feel safe and welcome right away. They were both Southern gentlemen in their early 20’s, and not about to see two women moving boxes and furniture up three flights of stairs in the snow. Shawn and Bubba, I soon discovered, were both very much attached to women back home, which made it easy for me to connect with them in a little-sister way.

One of them asked me, “So what are you—Liberal? Conservative? Moderate? What?”

I was flummoxed by the question. “What do you mean? Um. I’m a Republican....”

But they were looking for my theological, not political, leanings. Shawn clarified. “Do you believe the Bible is the inerrant, infallible, Holy Word of God?”

“Doesn’t everyone?”

They relaxed. “You’re one of us,” they said. The conversation quickly turned to which professors I should take for which courses: Dockery for Theology, Newman for New Testament, Gushee for Ethics, Nogalski for Old Testament.

Compliant as I then was, I let Shawn choose my classes for me. He put me in the sections in which he was already enrolled. I was happy to have such help with the decision. I wouldn’t have known what questions to ask; I didn’t have many criteria in mind for choosing a class, and these general education courses were common requirements for every major. I wouldn’t take Preaching, of course. Women rarely did, and I had no plans to preach in a church. But other than that, I was glad to take all my classes with him—I would have someone to sit with; I wouldn’t get lost. Shawn was an easy-going extrovert who, safely devoted to his girlfriend, would smooth my way into the male-dominated world of Southern Seminary.

Shawn and Bubba, and their friends had all come to Southern the previous semester, in the fall of 1994. Though the average age of seminarians was much older, these students were young, fresh out of college, like myself. Many were unattached, looking for friends and life-mates. The men were almost invariably studying theology, or evangelism—all planned to marry and “take” a church, or go to “the mission field” to win souls for Jesus. Bubba was training to be a music minister. The few women students were going into missions, music, religious education, or counseling. Nearly everyone unmarried was hoping, if not planning, to marry as soon as possible. Not me.

I had come to study and train as a social worker, typical enough for a woman. I was unreflectively conservative. But in terms of looking for love, I did not fit in. I felt intimidated by and romantically uninterested in the male students. I was less intimidated by male professors or administrators, being certain of my role with them—I could fulfill it with simple intelligence and academic diligence. I was determined to keep all “the boys” away. Maybe Shawn and Bubba would protect me.

But as soon as I plugged in my phone, it started ringing. At least half a dozen times that first week, different young men called. It was always the same—early evening, the phone rings and I pick it up—“Hi, is this Olga-Maria?”

“Yes.”

“Hi. You don’t know me, but I’ve seen you on campus, and I heard you were new. My name’s Brian. I’d love to show you around sometime. Are you free for dinner tomorrow?”

Click.

I came to find out that, each semester, the seminary published the contact information of each student and faculty and staff member in a campus directory, complete with I.D. photos and personal information like birthdays, hometowns, and spouses’ names, so it was easy to see who was married and not. Apparently, many single men made a practice of looking women up and calling the unmarried ones whose looks appealed to them.

I was offended by such overtures. I had grown up reading Alcott and Austen and held the old-fashioned notion that new acquaintances should be formally introduced, not only out of respect for one’s privacy, but for mutual protection. Without a personal

introduction, how is one to know that the person on the other end of the phone is mentally stable? Is who he claims to be? Is not secretly a Presbyterian?

Some men even went so far as to come by my apartment uninvited, bringing flowers, or tickets to the symphony or a ballgame. The seminary directory also included home addresses, which for students meant their campus apartment number. I moved swiftly to protect myself, demanding a peephole in my door, new phone number, and removal of my personal information from the directory. I gave out my new number only to trusted friends, who were each instructed never to share it. If someone wanted to contact me, they had to ask a friend of mine to ask me to call them, which put me back in control of my social dealings. These measures proved so effective that when Mary Mohler, the president's wife, wanted to call to invite me for lunch, she had to go through a friend.

I had good reason to be hyper-cautious about safety. My college years had been bracketed by episodes of personal violence.

In August 1990, over the first week of my freshman year at the University of Florida, five students were brutally murdered just off campus. They were seventeen and eighteen years old, four young women and one young man.

My fellow students had been attacked after dark, off-campus. The women were all dark and petite. My brunette friends started talking about highlighting their hair, but even we blondes were terrified. The first news reports of two murdered students came on Sunday,

August 26, just before the first day of classes. Monday morning brought the discovery of another body. The killer had decapitated one victim, cut parts (including sexual parts) off others, arranged the corpses in grotesque poses.

None of us in the dorms was sleeping. We stayed up talking, worried. On Tuesday, two more bodies were discovered near campus, including that of Manuel Taboada. Manny was an athlete, 23 years old, 6-foot-3 and 200 pounds. The fact that such a man had been murdered changed everything for the male students I knew. They had previously been acting macho, offering us girls their protection. Now they, too, were afraid for their lives. There was no indication at that point who the killer might be, or where he was hiding. That night, my room-mate and I went downstairs, and slept in the basement dorm room of a male friend, who stood guard all night by the door with a baseball bat in his hands.

The Army National Guard was called in, along with the county sheriffs and the city police, to support the University Police Department in tracking the killer, and guarding every entrance to every campus building. I made sure to smile and thank them for their work whenever I came and went from the dorm and classrooms. I also prayed for their safety and their diligence.

I prayed a lot during those first days away from home. My newfound faith had certainly never met with such a challenge as the murder of my peers, or fear of meeting the same fate. I did find some comfort in the belief that if I were murdered myself, I would be with Jesus in heaven. I wasn't sure what to think about God allowing college students to be raped and murdered. But I did not question it too deeply, and I don't recall anyone else pushing the issue either.

The university shut down for a week after the last bodies were found, and an extensive manhunt was launched while we students went home and took self-defense workshops. We came back tense and tentative, the men almost as much as the women, and a whole semester went by before the killer was apprehended—he had been camping for months in some woods on campus, not far from my dorm. The motto of my entering class at UF could have been “You’ll Never Walk Alone.” We none of us went anywhere without a buddy, day or night, until graduation. Perhaps it became more a habit than a policy based on fear, but it was our way of life. I moved off-campus senior year to an efficiency apartment, but felt nervous without dozens of friends around to ask along to meals or outings.

Senior year, I was a stagehand at the newly-built Center for Performing Arts on the edge of campus. I got to build sets for David Copperfield, help with costumes for Alvin Ailey and *Madama Butterfly* and, once, turn pages for Jesseye Norman. But I was one of the only women who worked there, and sometimes it got a little rough. Some of the roadies for certain shows were disrespectful or downright sleazy: one of the guys with Tom Jones walked by me in the hall and asked me to take a shower with him. Most of the men who worked for the Center, though, were respectful and even pleasant colleagues.

One stagehand, however (I’ll call him T) started following me around the center, pushing me to go out with him, which I finally did. I wasn’t interested, but he wore me down. After our date, T pushed me to have sex with him, touching me in ways that made me uncomfortable, saying, “Wanna get naked?” I laughed it off, but kept saying no. I wasn’t interested, and I planned to save sex for marriage. On the first day of my last semester of

college, T raped me in my apartment. At first, I didn't even understand what had happened, because I didn't know anything about anal intercourse. All they had told us in school was about vaginal intercourse, the kind that could get you pregnant. All they taught us was how to put on a condom. And I hadn't paid attention, because I wasn't going to need that. I was waiting for marriage, so the information didn't apply.

What hadn't occurred to me was that sex of any kind could be forced on me, that someone might take advantage of all that I didn't know. It never occurred to me that someone who asked for sex over and over again might eventually stop asking—stop caring what I wanted. It didn't occur to me that someone I was dating, however halfheartedly, might not leave my apartment when I asked him to. It didn't occur to me to call a friend or the police to get him to leave.

When he did go, I felt sick. I went to the bathroom and what came out of me wasn't poo. It had a strange smell I hadn't smelled before. I started to wonder what had happened, why he had suddenly been awkward and apologetic. The next day I went to the library and read about sex. I had never been interested, had never done any reading on the subject, but I found several helpful books. I was too embarrassed to check them out, so I sat in the stacks. Then I went to the campus counseling center and told the receptionist what had happened, what I'd read. I said, "I think I was raped last night." She listened carefully. She took me seriously. She said, "I think so, too."

There was no way I was going to class that day. The receptionist introduced me to a counselor, a very gentle woman named Natalie, and I went through the whole story again. She confirmed that I had been raped, even though I had known the guy, even though we

had been dating, even though I hadn't told him to stop—because I didn't realize what he was doing, because I would never have consented to sex with him, especially in that way.

Natalie told me that anal rape is not uncommon, especially when the man wants to make sure no child results from the intercourse. She walked me downstairs to an exam room and held my hand. She backed me up when I refused blood tests—I said I hadn't been sexually active with anyone before, so if I had a disease, it was from this episode. They should test him and just tell me the results. I had had enough of being poked, seriously. I hadn't been able to take control of the sexual encounter, but I took control in the clinic and made the nurses keep the needles elsewhere.

We went back upstairs where Natalie introduced me to Sandy, a counselor who ran sexual assault recovery group. I had to tell my story again, but Sandy, too, gave me full support, and invited me to join the group. She said I wasn't alone, and coming to group would help me feel connected to other women, give me a safe place to start healing. She also encouraged me to file a report with the University Police Department. When I agreed, they brought in UPD's victims' advocate. She too said I had been raped, and we should file a full report so that the same thing didn't happen to other girls. While I was writing out my report, Maggie had a detective look into T, and we found out that there had been a similar incident the year before, with a girl who worked at the Theatre Department's performance space. She hadn't pressed charges, but I decided I would. Enough was enough.

As it turned out, because the assault had happened off-campus, I had to go through the whole process again at the Alachua County Sheriffs' Office, but Maggie came with me. When a few days later, one of the T's friends and another co-worker of ours at the performing

arts center, started stalking and harassing me on his behalf, I reported that, too. A detective was assigned to shadow me for protection. T's friend left flowers on my car on Valentine's Day with a threatening note, saying, "I know where you live." I'd never gotten flowers before. I thought it would be romantic when I did, but as it turned out, I had to hand them over to the police so they could dust the plastic wrapper for fingerprints.

In April of 1994, when I was downtown at the Sheriff's office dealing with the aftermath of my rape, I heard on the radio that the Gainesville Ripper, Danny Rollings, had been convicted. I was not relieved or glad. I just felt sad, thinking how painful and harmful my own experience had been, and knowing that so many others had been through so much worse. The grisly details of the crimes, when I learned of them later, were horribly upsetting to me, but so was the execution. I couldn't find any comfort in the death of this man, sick and dangerous as he was. I tried, but I couldn't feel that his execution offered any real peace or solution.

Moving to seminary just a few months after Rollings' conviction, I deliberately attached myself to several of the faculty and administration, who were mostly white men in their 30s and 40s. At that point, it didn't bother me to have such a male-dominated faculty and administration. There was a level of comfort being in a setting that was shaped by men who on some level represented God—I was a little maiden in their ivory tower. I felt safe there. These men all seemed to love their wives; they did not hit on me. Men and wives alike

seemed to want the best for me. They also seemed to know what that was. If something was going wrong, or if someone was treating me badly, I could always tell someone, usually Dr. Doug Walker, the Dean of Students, and the situation would be remedied. If I needed encouragement, if I needed advice, even if I needed money or counseling, it was all there. The seminary would pay for counseling sessions with a provider of their choice; they even gave small, interest-free loans. Dr. Walker was always in his office when I needed to talk.

I remember thinking frequently that it was to my advantage that power was held by men who looked at me and saw their favorite daughter. I was also aware that this wouldn't last forever. I knew that someday, the power-wielding men would look and see a version of their wife, then their mother, that I wouldn't always be the favorite girl. But it did not occur to me that I could have any power of my own, that women as a rule should have power, or that it might not necessarily be to my advantage to be viewed and treated as a little girl.

When I was about seven, I asked my mother about God and she said our family didn't believe in God, that God and Heaven and Hell were things people made up to help them do the right thing, and that we didn't need rewards and punishments to be good people. I asked my father—my Papi—and he said I could make up my own mind what I believed. He asked me if I wanted to go to church. I had no idea what church was, so I didn't want to say yes, but he said if I ever wanted to go, he would take me.

One day, a man came by our house and sat in our living room with Papí. Papí allowed me to stay and listen to them talk. I remember that the man had a big Bible with him—I think he might have been selling them, or maybe he was just a local preacher inviting us to his church. Papí said, “I already have several Bibles in the house,” which was news to me, but it was true. They were the grown-up kind, without pictures. Papí also said that he didn’t take his children to church but that we could read the Bible any time we wanted and decide for ourselves if we wanted to be Christians.

And that was about it in terms of my religious education. All I had picked up from my covert reading of the illustrated children’s Bible was the story of Adam and Eve hiding their illustrated nakedness behind some shrubs, and the vague idea that everyone else in the Bible wore flowing white or blue robes. I didn’t understand the words very well, but from the pictures, I also gathered that Jesus loved children and liked to carry a lamb on his shoulders.

I was fourteen when my father died, suddenly, in the night, of a heart attack. It was a school day, Tuesday, February 11, 1986. He had come home early from a conference to give my mother a birthday present, and had left his blood pressure medication in his hotel room. My eight-year-old brother and I slept right through the ambulance lights and sirens, the paramedics racing into our parents’ bedroom to try to resuscitate him. I woke up to my alarm clock at 6:15, and felt something eerie about the house. It was spotless. My mother had been cleaning for hours, preparing for the onslaught of funeral guests. I found her furiously polishing the piano.

Mom, what's going on?

Your father's dead. And you can't cry because then I'll cry and I can't cry right now. We have to go tell your brother.

So I didn't cry, not even at the funeral. I went back to school the next day, not knowing what else to do with myself. But I needed to cry. I started finding quiet, tucked away places to cry by myself, so my mother wouldn't know. Nothing was ok. Nothing would ever be ok again. And it wasn't. Not for another fifteen years or so.

Papí died so suddenly, just two years after moving us to Florida. And just as suddenly came the onslaught of Christian concern. The well-meaning townspeople of Dade City were sure my father was in a Better Place—he was with Jesus now, with God, with the Angels. Or they wanted to know where *I* thought he was, whether I thought I'd see him again, if he had “known the Lord.” They continually invited us to church. They were praying for us.

Being fourteen, I heard frequently how especially hard it was for a girl of that age to lose her father, a comment that mystified me at the time. I was encouraged to go to grief counseling. We tried several therapists in the area, but with each of them, there came the God talk again. Was I angry at God for taking my father away? Did I think I would see him again? Where did I think he was?

This line of questioning made me furious. I indeed felt angry that Papí was gone, but I could not take refuge in the notion that there was anyone to blame. Where was he now? *In an urn in a niche in the wall at the cemetery. Are you all idiots?* I would be far happier there myself, as far as I could tell.

I sank into a serious, though high-functioning, depression that would last another fourteen years.

I was baptized on March 18, 1990, at the evening service at First Baptist Church of Dade City, Florida.

The sanctuary was darkened, and a spotlight came on me, and onto the preacher, Pastor Jolly, as we stood together in the baptismal pool. The pastor held his right hand over my head. He offered me his left arm for balance. He offered me redemption. He lowered me backward into the water, saying, “You are buried with Christ,” then lifted me up—“and raised to walk in the newness of life.”

I stood dripping, beaming, in my white robe, in the spotlight. There was applause.

I was seventeen years old. I had rebelled against my secular humanist upbringing and gotten saved. I had gone from being the only atheist at Pasco High School to joining the youth group and two choirs at the Baptist Church. And now, here I was a few years later, at the Southern Baptist Seminary.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CARVER SCHOOL

I was a member of the last class admitted to the Carver School of Church Social Work at Southern Seminary, in the spring of 1995. I don't think I really knew even what it was to be a social worker, but Maggie, my Victims' Advocate, had become an inspiration to me. I asked what her training had been for the job of Victims' Advocate—she had earned a Master's of Social Work. At that point, I had no real direction as to what I would do after graduation. My friends all seemed either to be getting married or going to law school or medical school, none of which was for me. I thought, well, maybe I could be like Maggie.

My understanding of social work was that I could be a counselor or work for the government, placing children in foster care and such, or, I could work for a church, running special programs for women. If there had been a degree program in women's ministry, I would have been all over it. I had never been part of a church that had a women's minister, but I saw a need for such a service in the context of a church model run solely by men, as it is in the Southern Baptist denomination. I had heard advertisements on local Christian radio stations for women's retreats and even women's conferences, so other people were obviously realizing that Christian women needed special ministry. I thought an M.S.W. degree from a seminary might qualify me to work for their benefit.

All incoming seminarians start out in basic theology and church history classes, so in my first semester, I was not yet in social work courses; however, I and five others who entered

Southern Seminary that spring were considered Carver School students, and kept informed of Carver School news and events, including general meetings. One day we were all called to a meeting led by the Dean, Dr. Diana Garland. We gathered—maybe 100 students, mostly women, of various ages—on metal folding chairs set up in long rows. Tense ripples of anxiety and rumors went through the small crowd but we were quiet as Dean Garland stood before us.

There was currently an opening for a new faculty member in the Carver School. The call for applications had gone out, and the search committee had found a candidate they liked and wanted to invite to join the social work faculty. But the new, conservative board of trustees and President Mohler were enforcing a new set of qualifications.

Southern Seminary, from its foundation, has been defined by its Abstract of Principles, which is a theological document, basically a litany of conservative Christian doctrines and Baptist distinctives, ideas that make Baptists different from Methodists and Presbyterians. They still have the original document. In fact, when a new faculty member is installed, there is a beautiful and moving ceremony in the chapel during the annual convocation, and he signs that document with a quill pen. By signing the Abstract, the incoming professor assents to those principles and attests that he will not teach contrary to them. The document has not changed since 1858, when The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary was founded, in Greenville, South Carolina as the first seminary of the denomination. (The institution disbanded during the Civil War, and, during Reconstruction, relocated to Louisville, Kentucky.)

But all of a sudden, new questions were being asked of potential hires; these questions began to be referred to as the “litmus test.” They had to do with abortion, homosexuality, and the role of women in professional ministry. The President and trustees wanted to ensure that their faculty was socially conservative—that these new faculty members held certain views in opposition of abortion, homosexual behavior, and the appointment of women to the pastorate.

Dr. Garland told us she had met with Dr. Mohler about the open faculty position in Social Work, but that he was making it impossible for her to hire anyone, because no licensed clinical social worker is going to be less than moderate on abortion, homosexuality, and women in ministry. The role of the social worker, after all, is not to mandate social policies or behaviors, but to be a counselor, supporting her client in healthy decision-making. In fact, it would be unethical for a social worker to try to steer a client away from having an abortion, to discourage a client from acting on homosexual feelings, or from pursuing a vocational preaching ministry.

A prayer session followed. We bowed our heads, closed our eyes, and various people offered prayers for the situation and all involved. I prayed fervently as well, but for the first time, I struggled to agree with others in prayer. The whole point of praying aloud with a group is that power and efficacy is added by the spiritual agreement of many believers. “Where two or three are gathered in my name,” Jesus says in Matthew 18.20, “there am I in the midst of them.” There had been many times in the four years I had been a Christian that the public prayers of others had surprised or challenged me, but I had never before heard

prayers that were actually vicious. Now for the first time, I heard prayers directed *against* someone, namely Dr. Mohler.

These students and faculty members seemed to feel that Dr. Mohler was an evil person, or at least perpetrating a great evil on the institution and the people in it. They weren't praying for him to die in a fire, exactly, but there was a level of hostility in the tone of many prayers. No one in this gathering thanked God for President Mohler's strong leadership, vision, and courage, as always happened amongst my friends, and at the churches we were visiting. They prayed instead that Dr. Mohler would find in himself a small spark of compassion and Christian love, that he would be more open-minded and tolerant, that God would not allow him to destroy the Social Work school and the community of the seminary.

I believed Dr. Mohler to be not a saint or hero, but a good man doing his job. In my limited view, his and others' fight for the doctrinal purity of the seminary was the noble work he said it was. It quickly became awkward for me to be a member of the Carver School, even on the outskirts of the social work community at Southern, while simultaneously a supporter of the administration. When more liberal students made derogatory comments to me about Dr. Mohler, I always said something gently supportive of him, like, "I've met him and I think he's actually a pretty nice person." Usually their facial expression would shift to disbelief or disgust, and they would walk away.

The day after Dr. Garland met with us, Dr. Mohler asked for her resignation as Dean. He made no move to begin looking for a replacement dean. It became increasingly evident over the following days and weeks that the Carver School would likely not survive. The

atmosphere on campus began to simmer and then to boil. Faculty members throughout the seminary were tense and angry.

Most classes opened with prayer, and Dr. Newman's opening prayers in New Testament class began to be more pointedly critical of the administration; at times he even made negative comments in class about Dr. Mohler and the trustees. This upset and offended me. I didn't think that class time should be taken up with this conflict, which in my view had little to do with the New Testament. I worried that Dr. Newman's loyalties were not aligned correctly. I also saw him drinking a glass of wine over dinner one night, in the restaurant where I worked. Appalled, I promptly reported the incident to Dr. Walker. Nothing came of it, as far as I ever heard, but I could rest easy, having cleared my conscience by exposing his suspect behavior to the proper authorities.

My own loyalties were clear to me—it was clear in my mind that our side was in the right and would win in the end. But the tension in the air was draining and stressful for everyone on campus. Even at the restaurant where I worked, I heard negative comments about the seminary from customers or co-workers who learned I was a student at Southern, especially if they discovered I was a student at the Carver School. I began to understand that the seminary actually affected the larger Louisville community a great deal.

At the height of the turmoil, social work students staged sit-ins in front of President Mohler's office. There were candlelight vigils held on the quad for the death of the Carver School. There were letters to the editor in the Louisville Courier-Journal excoriating the administration. The weekly Baptist paper, the Western Recorder, specialized in critiques of

the new conservative regime (conservatives nicknamed it the “Western Distorter”). The most striking memory I have of that time is of a man dressed as the Grim Reaper who walked up and down the seminary quad for several days. I saw him twice, tall and thin, black-hooded with a sickle—marching slowly and silently, back and forth. He was walking in front of the administration offices: he could be seen by faculty, administrators, and all the students. Only a few students talked about it with me; no one was sure how we were supposed to take it. Was he saying we were all going to die, threatening us? Was he saying the Carver School was dying or already dead? Was it another death threat against Dr. Mohler? Was he saying that under the Mohler administration, the whole seminary was doomed?

One morning there was a bomb threat at the chapel. So, we held chapel services in the quad and worshipped in the open air. It was a beautiful spring day, sunny and mild, and in one sense the service felt somehow especially festive and free, without the high podium, the organ, the confinement of pews. But at the same time, there rippled among us feelings of fear, confusion, and anger. Who could threaten our peaceful worship? “Those loving liberals!” I heard one male student sneer. How safe were we here, in what had seemed a sanctuary of a campus? I couldn’t help but wonder, as we all sang, “*Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart... Lord, I want to be like Jesus in my heart.*”

I went directly back to my apartment after the service, shaken and unnerved. I immediately called my home church, First Baptist Dade City. I wanted to talk to my pastor—I had never called him before. But I needed someone from home to know what was going on, that I felt in danger, that the school seemed endangered. The pastor came to the phone, and listened. He didn’t sound alarmed, as I had thought he might. He told me that our

congregation would pray for me at Wednesday prayer meeting, as always. They would pray for the seminary, too. He did not say that everything would be fine. But I gathered he wasn't too worried, and I guessed I shouldn't be, either. So I stayed.

According to Dr. Mohler, the conflict over the Carver School faculty boiled down to difficulties regarding accreditation. To offer an accredited degree, any institution in Kentucky must be accredited by SACS, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools; to offer a theological degree, it must pass muster with The Association of Theological schools; in order to offer a degree in social work, the seminary also had to be accredited by the CSWE, the Council on Social Work Education. And, he said, the standards of theological schools and of social workers don't necessarily match up all that well. For example, part of the accreditation standards held by the Council on Social Work Education includes the goal of "preparing social workers to practice without discrimination, with respect, and with knowledge and skills related to clients' age, class, color, culture, disability, ethnicity, family structure, *gender, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation.*"¹

The understanding given out by the Mohler administration was that the standards of the social work community were unbiblical and in direct conflict with both scriptural teachings and the moral standards of the seminary. For example, if a woman comes to a licensed clinical social worker for counsel regarding whether or not to have an abortion, the counselor could not say, "No, abortion is wrong on principle. Abortion is murder." Or if

¹ CSWE. Org; 2001 standards—italics mine.

someone came to talk with her about homosexuality, she couldn't say, "The Bible condemns gay behavior. You should be straight." So there were certain hot-button issues where the seminary and the denomination were taking one stance in opposition to the school of social work and, more subtly, the vocation of social work in general.²

Dr. Mohler had been named seminary President in 1993, at the age of 35. When I came, he was 37. Everyone talked about how young he was, but he looked old enough to me. I was 21, and 37 sounded plenty old to be in charge of pretty much anything. There had been a shift (some would say a takeover) at the denominational level, where the Southern Baptist Convention was becoming more conservative. The denomination appoints the boards of trustees for its six seminaries, and the SBTS board started growing increasingly conservative. Before he came, the seminary would have been characterized as theologically and politically moderate-to-liberal, in terms of the theological viewpoints that were taught in the classroom and believed by the majority of faculty, staff, and students. Before Mohler, the seminary's general worldview was broader and more to the left; with his advent, it grew narrower in scope and shifted dramatically to the right.

I met Dr. Mohler in the first few weeks of class. I saw him twice a week in chapel. He spoke several times a year in chapel, particularly at the convocation and graduation ceremonies. I served as a student Ambassador for two years, which involved occasionally helping host gatherings at his house. I once accompanied another Ambassador to pick him

² Writing in the fall of 2008, I saw another indication of the disconnect between the Southern Baptist seminaries and the social work community. The CSWE has, on their homepage, proudly endorsed Barack Obama for U.S. President. SBTS would likely never do such a thing. They would not openly endorse a candidate—as an institution of higher learning, it would not be appropriate—but moreover, they would not endorse a Democrat, or a social liberal.

and his family up from the airport. I was a member of his church and saw him there every Sunday that he was in town. In 1997 and '98, I worked at a local bookstore where he came in to shop at least once or twice a week. Through all these activities I connected with his wife, Mary, and to a greater extent, his children, Katie and Christopher.

Dr. Mohler is one of the most intelligent men I have met. He is a bibliophile who reads probably a dozen books a week, in addition to journals. I have witnessed his ability to talk to anyone on any subject. He is a strong public speaker, in person and in the media; he is organized, focused, and clear. The board could hardly have picked anyone better in terms of any of the skills needed to be a good president of an institution of higher learning. He is also theological and politically rigid, narrow and rightist: exactly what the trustees wanted. There has been some speculation that Mohler might not have been so conservative when he was himself a seminarian, that his own leanings might have been more centrist, but from my own experiences talking with him and spending time with him, he is entirely and sincerely ultra-conservative.³

Under Mohler, the Seminary grew more conservative and more Calvinist, both in terms of the professors it was hiring and the students it was enrolling. Moreover, the staff is largely made up of the wives of the male seminarians, so when more conservative students enroll, more conservative staff shows up as well. When I came to the seminary, roughly a third of faculty and students were moderate, and there was constant friction between them

³ See Appendix I.

and the more conservative students. Over the next two years, the liberal, moderate, and even a good number of the mildly conservative folks left.

The Dean of the Carver School, Dr. Diana Garland, felt hamstrung. The search committee had brought in a wonderful candidate, only to meet an unexpected and apparently insurmountable doctrinal roadblock. Dr. Garland felt that the president and the board of trustees were tying her hands—she couldn't do her job. She stepped down from her role as Dean. Although her husband was a New Testament professor at Southern, she looked for work elsewhere. Other social work faculty left after her, and the exodus soon spread to faculty of other schools as well. The trustees began enforcing the new standards on current faculty whenever they went up for promotion or tenure. Even long-standing faculty were questioned on these issues. Some contracts were canceled; some people were asked to take early retirement. There was widespread turnover on the Theology faculty.

Dr. Garland went to the Louisville Presbyterian Seminary down the road. Many of the Carver School students went to the University of Louisville's social work program. Within months, dozens of faculty members were leaving; the Carver School was shutting down. Churches in Louisville and across the South were caught up in the controversy. The future of my school was in doubt, and my future in it was unclear. If the Carver School closed, where would I go? Why had God brought me here, if He knew everything was going to fall apart around me? How could it all go so wrong, so quickly?

Even several conservative faculty members resigned. They were not asked to leave based on their theological or social views—they were favored by both the students and administration. But they were also deeply disturbed and disheartened by the fact that so

many of their colleagues were being pushed out, not only of their jobs but of the community they had helped build: a Christian community they had felt was home. At that time, I had little empathy for any of the disgruntled faculty, either for the liberals and moderates who were being forced or pressured to leave the institution they had served and loved for years, or for the more conservative sympathizers. I had bought into the administration's view. I was a thorough-going Mohlerite. I fully believed Dr. Mohler was the savior of Southern Seminary, righting a sinking ship, restoring it to its former glory—and anyone who wasn't on board was just a faithless rat.

I had to make a decision that semester, at the beginning of my graduate career, to stay or go. But I couldn't think of anywhere else I'd rather be. I loved my classes. I wanted to keep studying the Bible. I switched my major to Theology, and my degree to the Master of Divinity, which prepares one to be a pastor or other type of minister. I still felt welcome, even as a woman. It seemed that the problem all along had been the liberals, not women—what Southern Seminary needed was me, a brilliant, conservative woman. My brains and my conservatism would make me successful. My womanhood would help me stand out from the crowd. It would make me special. I was convinced.

CHAPTER THREE

THE BAPTIST CHURCH IN LOUISVILLE

Two of my goals upon arriving in Louisville had been to find a new sexual assault recovery group and a new church home. I quickly located the Center for Women and Families downtown, where I went for weekly free counseling and group therapy sessions. Twice a week, I had a safe place to talk with other survivors, and it made the transition to living in a new city much easier.

As I had done in Gainesville, I asked around among the more established students to find out which were the more popular churches in the area. At the seminary, most students were pastoring or serving in a church of their own, often smaller congregations in outlying rural communities. I was not looking to minister in any official capacity: I was looking for a sizable suburban church with a lot of young people and activities, solid preaching and a music ministry I could join. I expected that, in such a big town, and especially now that I was a seminarian, there would be any number of churches that would welcome me as a musician and a Bible teacher. It turned out, that was a very difficult thing to find, and over the next ten years, it didn't get any easier. Being single, a woman, and a seminarian—these were all strikes against me, I discovered, as I was pushed out of one church after another.

The first church I joined was Highview Baptist, Dr. Mohler's church, which was also attended by several other new faculty members (*new* being code for *conservative*). The

congregation was staunchly conservative, politically as well as theologically, and made up of a slightly older, solidly middle-class crowd. There weren't a lot of young people my age, but several seminarians who were my friends were also members (including Shawn and Bubba), and that was enough for me. The day I joined, however, the pastor resigned in a sex scandal. Two weeks later, the music minister also resigned in a sex scandal. They did not go quietly, either—they made tearful confessions from the pulpit at the end of service, pleas for forgiveness and prayer. They had violated their marriage covenants. They had become entangled with unnamed women parishioners. I was too new to have a sense of how the congregation was affected emotionally or spiritually by these developments, but the immediate result was that Dr. Mohler filled in as preacher for some weeks, along with other guest preachers, until they found an interim pastor and then a permanent one.

About six months later, I started to teach Sunday School. The church had a sizeable group of 10-11th graders, and one of my seminary friends, Hunter, was teaching the group. It was getting to a size where he wanted to split the boys and girls after an introductory group time. I think he told them to ask me nicely, and three or four of them stopped me in the church lobby one Sunday morning, begging me—in a silly, teenaged, puppyish way—to be their teacher. One girl got on her knees and groveled. They promised to be angels. They promised doughnuts every week. It was so endearing I couldn't refuse.

And so my first teaching experience began. We jokingly called our Sunday School class "The Hunter and Olga-Maria Show." We styled ourselves after Regis and Kathie Lee—we were warm and energetic and funny and really well-dressed. We had a great time. Once Hunter made up a game, "*Baptist? Not a Baptist?*" where we named popular figures in history

and contemporary life, and they had to guess whether that figure was “Baptist?” or “Not a Baptist.” Historical Baptists included John Bunyan and Nelson Rockefeller; contemporary Baptists included Bill Clinton, and surprisingly, Shannon Dougherty. Paul Newman? Not a Baptist. We had as much fun as possible while teaching them what we could about theology and the Bible.

I got involved with Highview’s prayer ministry as well. There was a separate prayer chapel, where anyone could come at any time and pray through a list of various people’s requests. Sometimes there would be a event where people signed up for time slots around the clock to pray for concerns in the church community. Sometimes the prayer minister, an elderly woman, would hand out prayer cards at the end of Sunday service and we could take them home and add those concerns to our private prayer time. One week, she cut up the seminary directory into small, two-by-three-inch sections and handed them out during worship, so that the whole seminary community was being prayed for by the whole Highview congregation, which was very moving to me.

I had always sung in church; I assumed I would sing solos and join a small ensemble at Highview. But I was told by the woman running music ministry (she was the previous assistant music minister, serving in the interim until a new, *male* minister was hired) that only choir members could solo. The choir rehearsed on Wednesday evening, but I worked every Wednesday night—singing for tips at an Italian restaurant. She would not flex for me. I was disappointed, but not enough yet to make me leave the church.

After my first year of teaching Sunday School, Highview’s youth minister resigned, and the man who came in brought new standards for teachers—limiting the influence of

women in the church. Without warning, women were relegated to teaching only young children; we were removed from teaching high school students. For my part, I have never liked young children in groups, and felt that what I had to offer was specifically for older kids. But the church gave responsibility for my class to another man. I couldn't take this action personally, because it was happening to other women as well, but I didn't know them, and I never heard of any movement to band together on the part of those women. No one reached out to encourage me, to help me find other ways of serving, or even to explain why I was suddenly not qualified to teach a class with which I'd been doing so well for a full year.

It was a challenging time for me—I became felt discouraged, disconnected, I had a hard time eating. Now that teaching and music were both closed to me, I had no reason to stay at Highview. I started looking for another church.

Dr. Mohler had a new assistant that year, Dr. Allen, a wonderful man. He and his wife and son and daughter were blonde, blue-eyed, warm, intelligent, sweet, funny. They went to Valley View Baptist, a thirty-minute drive south of town. Mrs. Allen called the church one of the best-kept secrets in Louisville. It had a beautiful facility. Like Highview, it was big, almost mega-church size—but not overdone at all, just spacious and light-filled. The music was vibrant, and I got involved in the music ministry right away. Choir music bored me, but Sunday morning music was led, not by an orchestra, but by a band, one with real talent. I sang with them, and even played some percussion.

Valley View had also recently lost their pastor to a sex scandal, and Dr. Allen was filling in as interim preacher. In fact, I don't recall there being a music minister, or youth

pastor, either. The two Allen children were both in high school; they had heard about my teaching at Highview and asked me to teach their Sunday School at Valley View. But again, I had a hard time finding a peer group. There were no other seminarians, and no other young women—maybe that had something to do with the scandal. It felt a little lonely there, but I had the Allens and the guys in the worship band. I didn't officially switch my membership to Valley View, though. I was waiting for them to hire a new pastor. And after a few months, they did.

The top candidate for Valley View's pastorate was then pastor of another Louisville church. I was uncomfortable with that proximity: it would increase the awkwardness of his move. Usually, ministers come from another state or area. Valley View seemed desperate for a leader—when a church doesn't have a shepherd, it's tough on everyone. But I didn't have a real concern until this local pastor came to “preach in view of a call.” He served as guest preacher one Sunday morning, followed by an immediate up-or-down vote by the congregation on whether to call him as pastor. And I hated his sermon.

His speaking style was akin to that of a used car salesman. The sermon was not even Bible-based—he started with a Biblical text, but quickly abandoned it and talked more about a newspaper article he'd found. I was not interested in preaching from newspapers; it didn't seem worthy to me. Granted, I was spoiled by twice-weekly chapel services from the best biblical scholars and preachers from all around the nation. But the congregation was thrilled; they voted overwhelmingly to hire him. And I felt I could not go back. I could not lower my standards to accept that kind of preaching when there were so many other good preachers in Louisville. Almost all the seminary faculty and most of my student friends were preaching

somewhere. Even though I was learning plenty in seminary classes and chapel, I was too impatient to spend Sunday mornings listening to a sermon that wasn't even biblical.

I had several friends at that point who were visiting the Reformed Baptist Church. The Reformed church is small, and they are not Southern Baptist. They are *reformed* as in Calvin and Luther: ultra-conservative, socially and politically, beyond anything to be found in the SBC. Their children are almost exclusively homeschooled. Their daughters do not go to college. And their men do not go to seminary; prospective pastors are trained by other pastors in the field, because seminaries are not in the Bible. In the Bible, ministers (like Timothy, for instance) were trained by older ministers (like Paul). Reformed Baptists see no need for any ministry outside or alongside the church. That's how conservative they are—if it's not in the Bible, it shouldn't exist.

The Reformed Baptists are strict Sabbatarians—they refer to Sunday as “the Lord's Day,” and they do no work that day. They partake of no worldly entertainment. The day is set aside for two long worship services, with family meals and quiet talk in between.

When I attended, I found their worship particularly sincere; they sang every verse of every hymn in four-part harmonies. They sang from the *Trinity Baptist Hymnal*, whose songs are meatier and more conservative theologically than the Southern Baptist hymns—most of them are like singing straight scripture. All the verses (six sometimes), with a sung “*Ah-men*” at the end. There was no flashy orchestra or rockin' band here, only a piano, but everyone would sing heartily. Congregational singing was felt to be an essential part of worship. I

purchased one of their hymnals so I could learn the songs, and use the uplifting texts in my private devotional time.

The Reformed Baptists are also notable for their discipline. At the entrance to the sanctuary there are signs that indicate that “Silence Must Be Kept” within its walls, and this is obeyed. When worshippers come in those doors, they refrain from chatter, find their seats quietly and sit in prayer or contemplation of Scripture as they wait for the service to start. Even little children will sit in the service and never fidget or make a sound. There is a nursery, but it is only for babies and toddlers—three and four-year-olds regularly attend morning worship, participating in the singing and sitting silently through the readings and preaching and prayers.

One day I had the privilege of sitting with a tiny four-year-old girl whose father was out of town and whose mother was working the nursery. She sat by my side and stayed focused on the service for the entire hour and a half, all while holding a chocolate-chip cookie wrapped in a napkin. Never once did she nibble or sniff it; neither did she put it down. It was more than I would have been able to do at any age. If a child at the Reformed Baptist church ever gets even remotely out of line, one or the other parent leans down and whispers in his ear, and the behavior stops immediately.

Like other Baptist churches, the RBC meets for three services a week: Sunday morning and evening (along with a single congregational Sunday School class), and a Wednesday night prayer service. Sunday morning worship always includes a reading of a full chapter from the Old Testament and a sermon from the New Testament. Evening service is the reverse—a chapter of reading from the New Testament and a sermon from the Old

Testament. Their practice is to study the entire Bible together, straight through, never skipping passages or leaving anything out, even when a text is difficult or confusing. They don't randomly jump around and pick a topic that seems "relevant" like most churches do—on Mother's Day, there will not be a Mother's Day sermon; on Super Bowl Sunday, football will never be mentioned.

The preaching is so solid and good—really the best preaching I've ever heard in terms of expounding on the Biblical text, opening up a text and explaining it historically but also applying it clearly to the life of the contemporary believer. As noted, I was well spoiled by the seminary chapel sermons and my teachers there, but I learned something every time I attended the Reformed church. I loved the singing, I loved the preaching, I loved the sincerity of spirit there—I really got hooked on it and I attended every Sunday for months.

I visited one Wednesday for prayer meeting, but I was so distressed by the experience, I couldn't go again. Everyone gathers in the sanctuary, silently again, and they sit bowed forward or kneel on the floor as prayers are offered. But only men can pray out loud. A concern is raised, and the call goes out— "Who will pray for this concern?"—but only men volunteer and only men are asked to offer prayer. Women are merely present, silently agreeing with the prayers of the men.

In fact, women are not allowed to speak in any way in any service at the Reformed Baptist Church. Sunday School involves the pastor or another elder teaching from the Scripture, and then a sort of question-and-answer session where people can ask more about the text or the teaching—except for women. No woman can even ask a question, because the Apostle Paul says, "women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to

speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church” (I Cor. 14:34-35).

The only service women are allowed to offer is caring for babies and toddlers in the nursery. There are also women who take turns playing the piano for hymns. After worship, the men and women walk to different sections of the sanctuary for conversation. The women start talking about breastfeeding and homeschooling while the men start talking about theology. The women are taught not to concern themselves with theology. That is the men’s purview.

So where was I supposed to fit in? I had virtually nothing to say to the women. I had no interest in the things that made up their lives; I had no husband or children. The choices I had made in my life were not open to these women. My choices weren’t ones anyone in that congregation had made or could approve of—to be single, to pursue education. It was uncomfortable for all of us. After service, I often walked over to talk to the men. Except they wouldn’t talk to me. Even my seminary friends, Chad and Kenneth and Mark—good friends, who had classes with me, who respected me, who knew my spirit—when I tried to contribute to a theological conversation in that setting, they literally talked right over my head and ignored me.

One night, a Sunday in winter, two acquaintances of mine from seminary were visiting the Reformed church. Mark and Tiffanie were a young, attractive couple, very popular on campus, über-conservative. I was glad see them there, and talked with them as part of a small group of seminary folks, after the evening service. At the end of our chat,

everyone got their coats from the coat closet by the door. When Mark put on his coat, I saw that his collar was flipped backwards and I fixed it. I didn't touch his skin or his clothes, but a few minutes later, he and his wife took me aside, sat me down in the sanctuary and reprimanded me for having fixed his collar. They said my action was sexual, inappropriate, that it was not my place to touch another woman's husband's lapel. I was completely taken aback. It hadn't been my intention to be flirty, and even if it could be read that way, I couldn't see how my action was so bad as to rate this sort of intervention. But their personalities were stronger than mine, and they teamed up against me. I could say nothing in my own defense, only apologize and say it wouldn't happen again. I would be more careful not to touch men in any way.

I felt humiliated, particularly because I had not been able to defend myself, and because they had assumed the worst of me. I cried a little bit on the drive home. Looking back, I feel ashamed again, that I couldn't come up with any stronger response. But even now, I am hard pressed to think of what I could have said that would have worked against people who saw themselves as superior and single women as threatening. People are so rarely rude to me, and I am conditioned to be gentle. My instinct is still to walk away and then quietly cry.

By nature, I am a warm, Puerto Rican, touchy-feely, kiss-you-on-the-cheek sort of girl, but after this confrontation, I felt like I had to become hyper-vigilant about not touching men. I remember feeling humiliation and resentment simultaneously. I was as chaste as any Baptist preacher could hope an unmarried young woman would be. I had learned in college to wear more clothes than felt natural to me, not to sit on people's laps or touch their hair

while we talked, that such behaviors would be read as flirtation, which was not my intention. I had resented it, having to accommodate a culture that felt uptight, restrictive. But I had not rebelled then, and I didn't now. Either I wasn't angry enough—and anger was not an emotion I often let myself feel—or I wasn't courageous enough to act on it. I let myself be silenced.

It was a different confrontation that led me to leave the Reformed Baptists. I got into Southern Seminary's Ph.D. program in Ethics, and I was excited. I had been strongly encouraged by many faculty in the School of Theology; in fact, the seminary had worked hard to put together a program for me, because we'd lost several Ethics professors in political turmoil. I had been working toward this and planning for the past year and finally got my letter of acceptance. I was going straight from the M.Div. into the Ph.D., without a break. On my way out after the next worship service, I stopped to talk to the Pastor, Jim. I was eager to share my good news, expecting that he would be glad for me. I felt that attending his church was helping me grow in lots of ways, and my doctoral studies were going to be a natural outgrowth of that. I shook his hand at the door of the church and I told him, "Pastor Jim, I got into the Ph.D. program!" And his face fell. He almost cringed.

Again, all I could do was walk away. I suddenly realized that my academic advancement must feel like a threat to people who don't think women should be college-educated—the idea of a woman with a Ph.D., who could actually *teach* college, must have been unnerving. Also, this degree would make me more educated than the pastor, not something the Reformed Baptists were going to like at all. But I hadn't considered that I

might face real opposition, and so it didn't occur to me not to speak about it. I knew then for certain there was no place for me at the Reformed Church, even as a visitor.

When Southern Seminary opened its doors in Kentucky, Jim Crow laws there prohibited any college or institution from educating both whites and “members of the Negro race.”⁴ The beautiful story is that there were actually several black students—they weren't allowed in the classroom, but they would sit in the hallway and listen to lectures. Some faculty also offered these men private tutorials in their offices. In a few years, the first blacks graduated, without having ever been in a classroom. In 1999, the Clarence Jordan Center started a scholarship fund for black students, in the names of these first African American graduates, and we planned a big worship service to celebrate. Pastor Charlie Davis of Hunsinger Lane Baptist Church was one of the white pastors who helped put the service together, and he brought his choir. This was my first contact with Charlie and his church, and through the process of putting together this scholarship fund event, I found that Dr. House and Dr. Mitchell were both attending Hunsinger Lane.

When I first visited, on a chilly autumn Sunday, Hunsinger Lane Baptist was a very small, one-room church with swirly, opaque, pastel stained-glass windows and a single piano. It looked dinky compared to Highview or Valley View, with their big orchestras and spacious foyers—but God's Spirit was there. Pastor Davis' preaching was less intellectual than what I'd

⁴ According to a 1904 statute.

heard at the Reformed Church, fewer references to the Greek or Hebrew texts, for example, but just as passionate and thought-provoking. Also, the church was so small that they only had morning services, which I liked because it gave me more free time on the Lord's Day (the Reformed Baptists had sold me on calling it "the Lord's Day"). Ever since college, I had made a special practice of keeping the Sabbath—I never went shopping or out to eat on Sundays (unless others invited me, under which circumstances it wasn't gracious to refuse on holier-than-thou grounds). I made it a personal policy not to study or do homework on Sundays. I read for leisure, I wrote in my prayer journal, I napped, and felt extra godly about those choices.

Several other seminary students were then visiting worship services at Hunsinger Lane, including my friend Stefana and her fiancé, John. Stefana was an acquaintance in the M.Div. program, a year ahead of me, but became more of a friend when we were both working toward the Ph.D. She was a doctoral candidate in Church History; John was a year ahead of us both working on a doctorate in Theology. Stefana was often the only woman in her doctoral seminars, as I was the only woman in mine, but on rare occasions during our M.Div. studies we had had a few classes together. We were the Renaissance women of Southern's campus. Stefana is fluent in French as well as Romanian and English, plays three or four musical instruments, and sings well. She matched me very well as a friend, though she had a more dominant personality and was actually a stronger feminist in some ways. We were neighbors in the dorm for several years, and pretty good friends at that point. I talked with her about how she and John thought they might fit at Hunsinger Lane. We were both

concerned for the same thing—to find a church that would let us (as women) teach adult Bible classes, a goal that had eluded us both thus far.

I asked the pastor on the third Sunday I visited: could I serve at all as a teacher? His response was something along the lines of, “Sure—we have a woman who teaches adult Sunday School; she’s married, and her husband is in the class, and helps lead it. But she does the teaching.” Pastor Charlie walked me over to the room where this renowned woman taught her adult class, to prove it. But the fact that she was married, with her husband in attendance, did seem to imply that a single woman like me would have a tougher time finding such a position.

It was a regular occurrence during that season of my life to be asked by new acquaintances whether I was married. *Not married? Are you engaged? Seeing anyone?* It was more than a little awkward. I became adept at waving aside these questions with phrases like, “I’m focused on serving the Lord right now,” or, “I’m very happy, thank you.” Within the first few days after arriving in Louisville, I heard for the first time the old joke about women coming to school for their “MRS degrees.” I didn’t think it was funny, but I also didn’t realize how true it was at Southern, how strong and continuous the pressure was to marry. Certainly the society of the powerful seemed to have no unmarried members.

Brother Charlie (as the pastor liked to be called) made it clear to me at the same time that, while Hunsinger Lane was at least nominally pro-women, they were *not* pro-seminary. It was a small church at the time, and at least the pastor, if not the congregation, had felt somewhat hurt by the recent turmoil and turnover at our seminary. Even under normal circumstances, seminarians are only around for about three years, Charlie said—they join

sometime within their first year, they serve for two, maybe, and then they're gone. As a pastor, Charlie didn't find that sort of upheaval helpful for his church. He wasn't against the seminary *per se*, but he wasn't excited to have a bunch of seminarians sitting in his church or looking to join it.

Eventually, I did join Hunsinger Lane. I visited for several months, waiting to feel more accepted by the church—waiting, more specifically, for someone to offer me a Sunday School class. They let me sing solos without joining choir; in fact, I sang a lot, and started giving the pastor's oldest daughter voice lessons. But I never got to do any teaching.

That was the only sour spot at Hunsinger Lane—yet again not being allowed to teach. And the thing is, in Baptist life, if you're not *teaching* Sunday School, you're supposed to be *in* Sunday School. And one of the things I absolutely hate about Sunday School is that, at least in the Baptist world, they separate you into groups according to your gender and marital status. So I would have to be in the "Singles" group. I would be the oldest one there, and that didn't feel so good. Most of my friends were in the "Young Marrieds" class. And as a seminarian, I didn't feel the need to go to Sunday School. I skipped it altogether, arriving after the teaching hour just in time for worship.

The year after I joined, Hunsinger Lane Church built a new, larger building on a nearby property. I actually helped in building it—we all helped. We put up drywall and marked electrical wiring and painted. With new education spaces, there were new classes opening up, and there was one adult class I was hoping to teach, so I went to visit it. It was a big class, about thirty people in their thirties and forties. Again, the basic Sunday School model is to read a Bible passage and have people comment on what they think it means. And

over and over in that one class session, I heard comments like, “Well you know it doesn’t really take a Ph.D. to understand this text.” “I’m just glad I can come to God without a Ph.D.” “I’m so glad we can read the Bible without a Ph.D.”

These were continual insults, really, towards graduate students, with several of us right there in the room. While we never made an issue of it, I don’t think anyone in the church was unaware that I was a Ph.D. student, that Stefana and John were as well, that several other seminary students and faculty (with PhDs) I were also serving their church with a good will. But Hunsinger Lane retained a palpable anti-intellectual bias that was surprisingly painful. In ordinary society, people commonly say things like, “Well, it’s not rocket science,” or “It’s not brain surgery,” but I don’t think these comments are meant to devalue the work of scientists or surgeons. At this church, the mantra was, “Well, I don’t have a Ph.D., but I think the text means” From these constant little digs, I got the clear message that I was not welcome, as a thinker or as a teacher. Instead I was again seen as a threat: all that book-learnin’. The congregation does tend to be blue-collar; not a lot of people have college educations, many work at the Ford plant in town, or the Colgate factory or UPS. Looking back, I think this class difference was key in why I couldn’t fit in at Hunsinger Lane—they were not ready to accept people with advanced degrees, and they seemed even less ready for those people to be women.

As I entered the Ph.D. program, I was required to travel to Oxford, England each year for several months. In fact, one of the first times I visited Hunsinger Lane, I met a couple, Les and Alison, who were just returning from some time in Oxford. They enthusiastically told me to visit St. Aldates Church, even gave me the names of the ministers,

and said I should introduce myself as their friend. They were seminary folk, members of Hunsinger Lane and like me, had gone to the University of Florida. I did attend St. Aldates when I went to England, and then joined Hunsinger Lane when I came back, despite my dissatisfaction—it was of primary importance at the seminary to be an active member of a local church.

I went to Oxford again the following year, and when I returned, Les and Alison were starting a new church, called *sojourn*, along with another seminary couple, Daniel and Mandy Montgomery. I caught their excitement about the possibilities of shaping a church and its culture from its inception.

At the same time, Dr. John Dickson, the director of the Seminary Choir, returned from a sabbatical overseas at Cambridge University. Our personalities had clashed in previous years, but suddenly we had a real connection. We had both been changed by our experiences in England, and as the situation at the seminary had stabilized, his temper had moderated, making him easier to get along with. We had some long talks about how different the church and the culture were in England, and the challenges of returning to the culture at the seminary. He was, like most of our faculty, serving at a local church, as the music minister at Highland Baptist. Dr. Dickson suggested that if I was looking for a church, I should come there and sing in his *other* choir. He said Highland was more inclusive of women, like the English churches are.

Highland Baptist was different from any church I'd been a part of at that point—it was moderate-to-liberal, and that was uncomfortable for me. I was used to the talk about Jesus being along the lines of, “Jesus Christ is the eternal God who became a man, lived a

sinless life, died on a cross, was buried and physically rose from the grave to redeem a sinful humanity.”⁵ Highland’s view is more liberal; their Jesus-talk is more, “Jesus is the full expression of the mystery of God,” which initially made me squirm a little. The worship at Highland is “higher,” more liturgical. The ministers wear robes, they chant the Doxology in every service (“*Praise God from whom all blessings flow...*”), there are call-and-response readings of Scripture from the lectionary, and a sermon based on the New Testament reading.

I started going to Highland on Sunday mornings, and to choir practice on Wednesday evenings. I was not going to chapel much any more—I just couldn’t take the authoritarian, patriarchal atmosphere. But on Sunday evenings, Highland Baptist hosted *vespers*, the once-weekly worship service for *sojourn*, the edgy, progressive church that Les and Alison and Mandy and Daniel were starting.⁶

The congregation was made up of a few dozen young people from Southern Indiana and the Highlands in Louisville. It felt like an underground movement among real Christian hipsters—organic coffee-drinking, tattoo-sporting, poetry-reading, art-appreciating, music-making young people in their early twenties who wanted a church of their own. They wanted a church that felt more authentic than the stiff, boring, controlling ones they’d grown up in. They wanted to be able to wear blue jeans, to show their tattoos; they wanted loud, exuberant live music and energetic sermons, and *sojourn* gave it to them. Les was the quiet, shepherd-y guy behind the scenes, Daniel was the fiery preacher, Mike and Jeremy were leaders of the many talented rock-n’roll and acoustic musicians at *sojourn* who wrote their own extraordinary worship music.

⁵ Point 3 under “Our Vision, Purpose, and Beliefs on the *sojourn* website.

⁶ Now called Sojourn Community Church. <<http://sojournchurch.com/>>

The aesthetic at *sojourn* involved text in the all-lower-case lettering that characterized electronic communication at the time; the space was urban, a coffee-shop vibe with exposed brick. Their offices and worship center were in the Highlands, the artiest Louisville neighborhood. And their ministry was centered around the notion of community—reaching in—and connectedness to the city of Louisville—reaching out. For their logo, they adopted Louisville’s symbol of the *fleur-de-lis*. Each ministry leader couple (yes, all the ministry leaders were married) held a weekly small-group meeting called a “community group” in their homes, to build relationships amongst the congregation, ensuring that no one felt left out. Community group members often shared a meal together, then discussed the sermon and its application to their lives, and then spent time in prayer for each others’ needs and the needs of the church. Sometimes they performed acts of service together, like preparing meals for an out-of-work member or sharing rides to cut down on travel expenses.

Sojourn started out small, with just a few families and couples, but began growing exponentially week by week until there were hundreds of us regularly attending worship, and at least a hundred in community groups. No one was officially a member at that point because *sojourn* had yet to establish a formal constitution with the Southern Baptist Convention. It is and always has been an SBC church, whose inception was funded by the Home Mission Board, but this connection is not widely known nor evident in most of what the church does or publishes. Nonetheless, within a year, *sojourn* was constituted, and, as it happened, that marked the beginning of the end for me.

In the beginning, the experience was organic and dynamic—there was a real sense of possibility: What do we all, as a community, want church to be? At first, *sojourn* was conceived

in terms of a lot of things we *didn't* want, a reaction to some of the negative aspects of church we had all experienced over the years. For example, the ridiculous Sunday School routine, with married people and single people being separate—we wanted more connection between the whole church body, through community groups that were formed based on geography and simple desire to connect.

We didn't want hymnals, we didn't want pews, we didn't want stuffiness and all the “kneel to the left, pray to the right, stand up, sit down, fight, fight, fight.” If you wanted to lie down in worship, you could go for it—if you wanted to kneel, if you wanted to sit, if you wanted to raise your hands, if you wanted to dance, you had that freedom. No one was going to be watching you, no one was going to tell you what to wear, or what to do when. There would be, at some points, an *invitation* to stand and sing, for example, but no one would think a thing of it if you sat. There was going to be real freedom in worship.

We at *sojourn* would do away with the traditional litmus tests of the evangelical movement and the seminary—we were not going to judge people or exclude them based on their politics. There was not going to be a check-the-box ethics, where everyone had to have the same priorities and moral values. There was not going to be an attitude of, only if you have the same demographics as I do can you be my friend, or get to be part of this group or ministry or the other. We were going to make church comfortable for people who might not be made welcome in other churches.

Someone found us a property, a little storefront on the main road, and turned it into a gallery. It was a raw space with exposed brick and a small bathroom; we all worked together to make an office space in the back and an art gallery in the front. The opening art exhibit

was an amazing collection of pen-and-ink sketches from the Vatican, and there was a new installation every month or so, with an opening reception that allowed us to practice hospitality to each other and our neighbors in the Highlands. In the early months, we even worshipped in the gallery and had concerts and meetings there. It was called “Aslan’s How,” a reference from C.S. Lewis’ Prince Caspian, to a sort of lair, a hideout for the faithful. In the book, Aslan’s How is underground, full of caves and galleries—the name was Mandy’s idea.

The Groces and the Montgomerys were readers—they were readers of C.S. Lewis, of G.K. Chesterton, readers of literature as well as theology. They brought an appreciation of art and nature to the community and shaped it accordingly. Because of their leadership, the idea was strong at *sojourn* that God can be found in all art, in all nature, in all beautiful things. We would sometimes have worship in the park. There was so much openness, and appreciation of beauty from wherever it could be found. It was a humanist view which I found refreshing. And that this movement was being led by my peers, couples who were just a year or two younger than I, was part of the appeal. They had no authority over me in the way that Pastor Jim and Pastor Charlie had had. Granted, they were married, so they carried themselves with a little superiority—they outranked me socially in that way.

There have been only three brief seasons in my life when I was popular. One was my first year of college. I had a dozen girl friends in the dorm, and I had guy friends at the Baptist Student Center: there were thousands of people on campus, so it was easy to have a hundred friends. For a couple weeks that first semester, I went out with a different guy every night of

the week and two on Saturday. When I was in Oxford, I was also popular, but the people I was popular with were about ten years younger than myself. Perhaps because I was older and more confident, I was able for the first time to be a social leader, to initiate gatherings and pull together impromptu events. I am still close to some of my friends from England, but the feeling of popularity was a short-lived experience—I was only there a few months out of the year for two years.

And I was super-popular at *sojourn*. At twenty-nine, I was almost the oldest person there. There were a lot of younger women in their early twenties who seemed to look up to me. The church had me teach a few classes, and Daniel even let me speak in worship once. I sang a lot in worship, too—I sang rock music, of all things. I made friends with a dozen great musicians: I hung out with them, we wrote songs together, and I learned to create harmonies and play more percussion instruments. I was always having a great time with someone, and there was not a day that my phone didn't ring. There was not a Saturday I didn't have a coffee date with a girlfriend. I felt loved and connected and happy.

Then *sojourn* started to change, to be more like the churches I had already had to leave. The leadership was essentially made up of three couples: Les and Alison, Daniel and Mandy, and the worship (music) leader Mike and his wife, Sarah. They held several meetings with everyone involved in the church where we discussed our vision for the future, what we wanted *sojourn* to be when and as it grew up. One of the main points of discussion was how, in traditional SBC churches, women couldn't serve as pastors or elders. And the leaders said, "We at *sojourn* are going to be more open. The senior pastor will be Daniel, so of course, that position will be filled by a man—but women will definitely serve as deacons, serve as elders."

It even seemed that the role of pastor was going to a man specifically because it was reserved for Daniel, rather than that the pastorate was reserved solely for men on principle. But a year later, when it came down to framing the constitution, no women were asked to be deacons, and it was written into the founding document that no women would serve as elders.

Behind closed doors, it was also decided that divorced people could not serve at *sojourn*. Certain other issues about sexuality also started coming up at church. The community of the Highlands has a great many gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people, and they had always been welcomed at *sojourn*. But in the summer of 2002, Daniel seemed to be reconsidering some of these issues, and he preached a sermon series on gender and sexuality. He preached out of Genesis 1 and 2 the whole summer, without reference to any other Scripture passages. His sermons were largely shaped by a book called *Restoring Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, by evangelical leaders John Piper and Wayne Grudem. The view promoted in this book is so conservative as to be fundamentalist: that is, that God created man and then woman, that man is therefore above woman. Man was created to work, and woman to support him. Man's sphere is the marketplace; the woman's sphere is the home. Men are created to be leaders—warriors and prophets and priests and kings; women are created to be “life-givers and nurturers,” going back to the model of Adam and Eve, who are understood to be literal people, not metaphors or symbols.

A key fundamentalist trait—whether you're looking at fundamentalist Christian, Jew or Muslim—is the goal of return to an original divine plan, and of living out more perfectly the precepts of the religion's founders. One of the things Dr. Mohler did when he became president of the seminary was to reaffirm the original (antebellum) documents of the

seminary founders. I've heard fundamentalist Baptists laugh at how their critics will say things like, "They're stuck in the 1950's," or "They're Victorian," or "Puritanical." Their response is, "No, we want to go *all* the way back," to the ways of the Early Church. Fundamentalists look forward to the time when Christ will restore the creation to how it was before the Fall.

So Daniel, preaching from Genesis 1 and 2, said his goal was to clarify what he called "gender confusion" both in American society and our local community in the Highlands of Louisville. He came out strongly against homosexuality, even though when we first started *sojourn*, we wanted to welcome everybody equally. Now, Daniel was saying that gays and bisexuals were welcome *but* they should go through some therapies to be healed of their perversions. He also opposed the inclusion of women in leadership positions. If your proper sphere is the home, you don't belong in a leadership position outside the home. If your calling is to be a life-giver and nurturer, you need to be busy having babies. He said that if you're not yet married, you should be looking to get married as soon as possible, whether you are male or female, because sexuality needs the safe container of marriage.

This message was really hard to hear, and it's still hard to think about the fact that so many people I care about hold such a restrictive view of gender and sexuality. Daniel preached that women who are unmarried or cannot have children should be nurturing to those around them, which I was doing in various ways, chiefly by mentoring and babysitting. But the (perhaps unintentional) message was clear that I was not as much of a woman, or not truly fulfilled as a woman, because I was not a wife and mother.

Daniel also came out staunchly against singleness. In fact, for several weeks, he asked the unmarried members of the congregation to raise our hands, which was uncomfortable enough. Then he told us to “Look around and find somebody!” It felt humiliating. By the third time, I didn’t fall for it. I kept my hands in my lap, clenched together in anger. Daniel seemed not to believe that anyone was truly called to be single, that that could be a legitimate vocation. Of course Catholics affirm singleness in priests, monks and nuns. There are also plenty of laypersons in the Church at large, who serve God wholeheartedly in their singleness. As far as we know from the Biblical texts, Jesus was single. Paul writes that he would rather be single because he can devote himself to ministry, that it is a blessing not to be married.

Originally, Daniel had seemed to embrace all of that. But suddenly it seemed that sexuality in general was a threat he needed to control by getting us all safely married and pregnant. That had been the culture at the seminary, and the other churches I’d been part of. I had gotten the same lectures and heard the same comments from Dr. Mohler, from Dr. Walker, from pastors, seminary faculty, and particularly the seminary wives. My own mother was never like that. She never once urged me to get married or to procreate—but these comparative strangers didn’t hesitate to exhort me on the subject. I did not sense God in any way calling me to marriage, and I didn’t know anyone who was interested in marrying me. While many of my single friends struggled with their singleness, I did not stay up nights pining for a mate. I did not struggle with lustful thoughts. You can imagine the many times I was told that I was “pricing myself out of the marriage market by getting too much

education”—by pursuing my own gifts and my own path I was closing doors to finding somebody who would actually accept me and love me.

So when Daniel started in on the topic of singleness, I confronted him after the first sermon, reminding him that many single folk were perfectly happy in their condition, and that Scripture supported such a lifestyle. He reassured me that it wouldn't be an issue. Nevertheless, he kept returning to it week after week, all summer.

He preached that the men needed to work hard at their jobs, to “step up,” to have “vision.” I think he found that there were some young men in that church community who weren't working or pursuing any goals—they were playing Nintendo in their parents' basements and riding dirt bikes through the park. He was calling them to grow up, to get a job, get married, and be real, adult men. The idea was that Christian men should resist the notion that they have to be weak, passive, sweet, like the old image of “gentle Jesus, meek and mild,” which is not terrifically appealing to a lot of men.

The most popular resource on Christian maleness in the *sojourn* community was a book called Wild at Heart, subtitled, Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul. The cover quote runs:

There is something fierce, passionate, and wild in the heart of every man. That is how he bears the image of God. And the reason most men "live lives of quiet desperation" (Thoreau) is because men have been told that the reason God put them on earth is to be a good boy. To be nice. But every man longs for a battle to fight, an adventure to live, and a beauty to rescue.⁷

⁷ “Elderedge, John. Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul. Thomas Nelson: 2006.

“A beauty to rescue.” This is the state and the status to which the evangelical church reduces women. Daniel quoted from this book extensively in his sermons. We heard all of these points from the pulpit continually. My sympathies to the women in the congregation then and now who have never considered themselves beauties, or who do not feel the need for male rescue.

One of my best friends then was named Shantay—I met her at one of my very first *sojourn* meetings. She was a brand-new Christian then, and was coming out of a difficult time in her life where she was told me she was in an abusive relationship, and using drugs and alcohol. Shantay is extremely intelligent and held a scholarship to the University of Louisville, but had not been able to follow through and finish her first year. Her bright, vivacious spirit was so contagious that we hit it off right away, and started meeting up for coffee every Saturday morning—I became as much a mentor as a friend to her. One afternoon, Shantay was sharing with her community group her desire to return to college—and Daniel encouraged her not to. He asked her, “Why would you? Why would you want to go back to college?” She had a hard time answering a question like that, especially being put on the spot by her (far more educated) pastor. A significant percentage of *sojourners* chose not to go to college or dropped out. Really bright people, good readers and thinkers. Gifted, intelligent, creative, vibrant, amazing people, who could clearly be making a greater contribution in the world if they had an education. But they remain ignorant, and limited, and therefore they are not flourishing and we in the greater community are not flourishing the way we could be if they were encouraged to develop their gifts.

I left quietly on my own. A silent protest. It did not feel like enough, though. I was angry, not at individual people so much as at the narrow, bigoted views hidden under spiritual language, the harsh, judgmental policies cloaked in religious profundity and earnest Biblical quotations. My spirituality became increasingly private as I withdrew from Christianity, from religion, from religious people and their expectations.

CHAPTER FOUR

FASTING

Once upon a time there was a little girl with a sensitive digestive system. From the time she was very small, she had difficulties with her stomach. Nothing serious. became a Picky Eater.

She didn't like to eat, really. She ate enough to be healthy but not a lot. The only foods she really enjoyed were apples and corn, including popcorn, but none of this agreed with her system.

The little girl's family didn't have much money, and often ate leftovers. She didn't mind the leftovers necessarily, but if she'd had an upset stomach the night before, she wouldn't want the same food again the next day. Sometimes she was scolded for not cleaning her plate. Sometimes she was told if she didn't eat her food, it would be all she would get the next day. She never backed down. She could skip meals with the best of them. Eventually, her parents would let her have something else to eat, in exchange for a few bites of the days-old meal. And she never cleaned her plate. Even when her parents took her to McDonald's for a Cheeseburger Happy Meal, a special treat that happened maybe twice a year, she would leave one bite of cheeseburger on the open paper wrapper.

Once upon a time there was a little girl who was very shy. She was sensitive to people's comments, even to their looking at her. She was six, and not excited about going to first grade. She liked school, but she was nervous every day. One thing she was nervous of was

Mrs. Savage, the teacher's aide. Mostly because her name was "Savage." Another thing she was nervous of was sixth graders. Mostly because they were big. Another thing she was nervous of was the cafeteria. She didn't like to eat in front of other people, she discovered. Scariest of all were the lunch ladies, tall women in strange robes and hairnets who stood behind a counter she couldn't see over.

Another thing she was nervous of was the bathrooms. There were two bathrooms, one in the back of her classroom, and one down the hall. If she had to use the bathroom during school hours, she either had to go in the back of the classroom, where she was sure everyone could hear her pee, or walk down the big hallway by herself and into a big bathroom with six big stalls where anybody might be waiting, including Mrs. Savage or a sixth grader. And she would have to raise her hand and ask the teacher out loud to be excused to the bathroom. Which would be too embarrassing. So the little girl decided she would bring her lunch every day to avoid the lunch ladies, and she would not drink any milk or juice or water all day, so she wouldn't have to pee.

Once upon a time there was a third-grade girl who took fifth-grade classes. Before school, she went to Spanish lessons. After school, she went to violin lessons. Then she transferred to a special school with violin classes during the day and started playing with the high school orchestra. The little girl found that she got nervous before her lessons. Also before performances and rehearsals. When she was nervous, her stomach felt shaky, or she felt like she had to use the bathroom, which she didn't want to do at school. She decided not to eat lunch on the days she had violin lessons or rehearsals or performances.

Once upon a time there was a young girl whose family relocated the year she started junior high. She made some friends, but hated the cafeteria. Her body was growing curvy, and she felt even less comfortable eating in front of all these strangers. She was even more shy around the lunch ladies. But it wasn't cool to bring your lunch. That first year, she couldn't go through the line at all: she sent money with a friend and waited at the table. The next year, she could go through the line, but she could only order one thing, and only if at least two friends went with her.

Once upon a time, there was a young girl whose beloved father died overnight. She was fourteen years old. People came by the house with food—cold cuts and pretty fruit trays and lemon pound cake. But it all tasted like nothing. It tasted like air or cardboard or Styrofoam. She ended up fainting several times that year. She went to a grief counselor who tried to give her “coping skills.”

Once upon a time, there was a young woman who went away to college. Five students were brutally murdered her first week there. She had a hard time facing the cafeteria, and didn't have a car to go to the grocery. Instead of gaining the freshman fifteen, she lost ten pounds in a month. She fainted a few times and missed a few classes. Her grades started to suffer. Her mom sent her a tiny refrigerator and microwave and said she had to learn to cook now. She got friends to take her to the grocery.

Once upon a time, there was a young woman who went away to seminary. She thought it was important to be Holy and Pure, to be close to God. She thought if she was very, very good, God would take care of her. No one else was there to take care of her then. The young woman read a book about spiritual disciplines and tried meditating, but she wasn't very good at it. There was another chapter on fasting. She knew she could be good at that. So she prayed to Jesus instead of eating for forty days, like He did. Then she found she couldn't stop. She only ate one meal a day, sometimes less, for most of the next three years. She prayed a lot.

And God took care of her. Mostly.

There are various theories about eating disorders floating around in the cultural ether. One popular theory of anorexia is that it afflicts only young girls with controlling mothers, and that anorectic restriction of food is an effort to wrest back some power over one's life. Another, even more simplistic but aggressively popular notion is that anorexia is the pathological result of an attempt by otherwise normal girls to look like supermodels or *prima* ballerinas, a narcissistic and idiotic effort to be thin in order to be beautiful. Surely there is some truth to these ideas; they originated with some kernel of truth. But I for one am tired of hearing them, and, when I was struggling with anorexia myself, I quickly tired of people applying them to me. My mother was and is perfectly lovely, and she has always

wanted me to stand on my own two feet. I was at that point a contented size six when I began restricting food to such a degree that I lost almost twenty percent of my body weight. I did not diet to lose weight, or to look like a celebrity. I never hated my body until after the disease had taken hold of my mind.

My own theory of anorexia is that there is a strong genetic component that predisposes one to this disease; that it is genetically linked with anxiety, depression, OCD and substance abuse traits; that the disorder is triggered by circumstances unique to each individual sufferer; and that it can happen to almost anyone. It's no one's fault, no one can solve it, and there's no cure or treatment that always works. But healing is possible, because growth is always possible.

Oddly enough, the trigger for my anorexia came in the form of a book, and a quest for holiness.

Early on in my first semester at seminary, my Formations class took up a text—Richard Foster's Celebration of Discipline.⁸ Foster, a Quaker, outlines several Christian practices which he calls disciplines. If these are practiced faithfully, he says, they can bring individual believers and Christian communities into a deeper communion with God. Our class assignment was to pick one discipline each to practice for a month. The disciplines include confession, prayer, worship, solitude, service, and meditation, and at first, I signed up for meditation. Foster's version of meditation is to focus deeply and intently on the words of Scripture for extended periods of time. Rather than emptying one's mind of all thoughts, as Eastern practitioners do, Foster encourages his readers to fill their minds with the Biblical

⁸ Foster, Richard. "Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth." San Francisco: Harper San Francisco. 1978, 1988.

text, “to take a single event [in Scripture], or a parable or a few verses, or even a single word and allow it to take root in you.”⁹ But this discipline was harder than I had anticipated. As much as I loved the Bible, it was surprisingly difficult to quiet my mind for any length of time. I also didn’t understand why it wasn’t enough just to *read* the Bible verses, or memorize them. I tried it for about a week. And then I privately decided to switch.

Fasting, I thought, sounded much more spiritual, more of a challenge, and yet, for me, more doable. I had never had trouble skipping meals. Quite the other way round, in fact—I often had difficulty remembering to eat, or finishing my food, or eating at all when I was under stress. I started fasting without notifying my professor; no other student in our class had chosen that discipline, so I didn’t feel I had to ask permission.

Foster’s take on fasting is as follows: he notes that while fasting on a regular basis is not strictly commanded in Scripture, dozens of men and women in the Bible fasted on various occasions, many “great Christians throughout church history” did so as well, and that fasting is “a spiritual discipline recognized by all the major world religions.”¹⁰ Moreover, he notes that in Matthew 6.16-18, Jesus instructs his disciples to care for their outward appearance “when you fast,” indicating an assumption that they will indeed engage in fasting. Foster says, “More than any other discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us. This is a wonderful benefit to the true disciple who longs to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. We cover up what is inside us with food and other good things, but in fasting these things surface.” He continues,

⁹ Ibid., 29

¹⁰ Ibid., 48.

Fasting reminds us that we are sustained ‘by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’ (Matt 4.4).¹¹ Food does not sustain us; God sustains us... Therefore, in experiences of fasting we are not so much abstaining from food as we are feasting on the word of God. Fasting is feasting!¹²

Foster goes on to offer advice on the practice of fasting. These are specific how-to’s, directions on developing from a partial fast, skipping two meals a day, to a 24-hour fast once a week for two weeks, to a full forty-day fast. As the body adjusts to its first 24-hour, water only fast, Foster says:

You will probably feel some hunger pangs or discomfort before the time is up. That is not real hunger; your stomach has been trained through years of conditioning to give signals of hunger at certain hours. ... Ignore the signals. ... You are to be the master of your stomach, not its slave.”

He instructs the disciple to “devote the time you would normally use eating to meditation and prayer.”¹³

Fasting was, like so much else in the Christian experience, wholly new to me. I had heard no talks or sermons on it, had never seen it modeled, and had read nothing about it beyond what was explained in this text, and a few brief mentions of it in the Bible. Looking back, it seems odd to me, as I love to research things generally, and am also by nature a cautious person who only makes big decisions after careful reflection, that I did not discuss this decision with anyone or research it further. I think I too rigidly interpreted Foster’s and the biblical injunction to keep my fasting a private matter.¹⁴ In the present age of the internet and instant information, I cannot help but wonder if I would make the same mistake today.

¹¹ The words of Jesus in response to his temptation by Satan during his forty-day fast in the wilderness. Jesus here quotes Deuteronomy 8.3.

¹² Foster 55.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Foster 50; Matthew 6.5-18.

My idea of the fast was that the sacrifice of food teaches one to “deny the flesh,” the appetites of the physical body, and allows one instead to spend extra time and energy building up spiritual strength. In Matthew 17.21 Jesus casts out a demon from a boy whom his disciples could not help, saying, “This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.” He implies here that fasting adds power to prayer—that perhaps God attends more favorably to the prayers of the fasting Christian. Foster says, “Fasting can bring breakthroughs in the spiritual realm that will never happen in any other way.”¹⁵ Fasting, I thereby concluded, might be particularly necessary in times of crisis. And certainly the circumstances at Southern Seminary at that time could be described as a crisis.

So I ate nothing for a month.

I thought that surely my fast, my prayers, would “avail much.”¹⁶ Hope carried me through the first three days, after which I felt a tremendous lift in my spirits—I had joy, energy, new life—which I took to be the clear affirmation of the Holy Spirit. I was being heard! God loved me and would draw me even closer to Himself. Toward the end of the first week, when I knew in the back of my mind I should probably break off fasting, something else would happen that would compel me to continue—I would find some crisis to pray for, in someone’s life, in the life of the community, or the nation, or the world. If fasting was a way of giving strength and efficacy to my prayers, then how could I eat?

Today I understand that there are options, that I could have given up one meal a day, or possibly two, and devoted those food dollars to charity and those meal hours to prayer. Perhaps if I had come from or been in a more ‘high-church’ Christian tradition—like

¹⁵ Foster 60.

¹⁶ James 5.16, “The prayers of the righteous man availeth much.” (King James Version)

Presbyterian, Episcopalian, or Roman Catholic—I would have been familiar with the observation of Lent, and the concept of sacrifice of certain types or categories of food, rather than *all* food. But I was ignorant at the time, spiritually gung-ho, even feeling perhaps that I had something to prove, if not to my class or my professor, then to God or to myself. And I was not one to do things by halves. If it is worth doing, it's worth doing fully.

The fast ended, eventually, but it had felt so good both physically and spiritually, I returned to fasting frequently over the rest of the term, again without letting anyone know. I was living alone at the time, and told no one, as I believed the Scriptures mandated. I lost five pounds, then seven, then ten, but I didn't feel weakened. Instead, I felt my spirit growing stronger all the time. Mentally, however, I was becoming addicted to starvation. Without meaning to, I slid into full-on anorexia. I lost more weight, until I was so bony, I couldn't sit comfortably on the wooden pews in chapel or the classroom chairs. I coped by leaning forward so that my weight rested on my thighs rather than my sit-bones, and so my spine wouldn't touch the back of the seat. Resting on the desk, I'm sure I looked at least half-asleep. I was aware that it seemed disrespectful, but I was not asleep—I was always paying attention, and I often lifted my head to make an important point in class or answer a question. I remember feeling a little burst of pride every time I did that, like I was catching people off-guard, being so sharp when I looked so out of it.

I became physically weaker as my body lost nourishment, and I became emotionally depressed as well. The more typical features of anorexia manifested themselves in my mind: the belief that I was fat; the determination that I did not deserve food; the obsession with

my and others' shape; the compulsion to count calories, to feel my bones, and to restrict certain foods from my diet. I became increasingly anxious, and less energetic.

The disorder continued for months and months, semester after semester. My body adjusted to the fasting, and began to have more and more trouble accepting and absorbing food. Handfuls of hair fell out each day—not enough that anyone would notice, as I'm blessed with a lot of hair. But it was a sign to me that my health was suffering. My once-long and strong nails became brittle and refused to grow. I also noticed that my skin did not heal as quickly as it used to do. Any blemish or bug-bite would leave a deeply pigmented mark that wouldn't go away. I soon began to look like I had acne, even though I didn't, just because of all the scarring.

As part of an agreement I made with myself, I went into therapy when my weight went below 100 pounds. It was hard, though, to find help that was actually helpful. The Louisville area did not seem to have a lot of eating disorder specialists, at least within the Christian community, which was my preference. I wasn't sure that a non-believer would understand my disorder, and its origins: my need for holiness. I wasn't in such bad shape physically that I needed an in-patient program. There is a twelve-step program for eating disorders, and I read the workbook, but it seemed that the focus was on shame and blame, which I didn't need. I also didn't want to go to a group, because the only eating disorder groups in my area were mixed—putting bulimics and overeaters in the same room as anorectics. I knew myself well enough to know that being around heavier people would deter me even further from eating.

I did, however, find some help from friends, including a roommate who was a counseling major, and a woman who worked on campus who admitted to me privately that she had also struggled with anorexia. Folks all over the seminary campus teamed up to try to keep me healthy. I worked out almost every day at the student rec center, and I knew all the guys and girls who worked the front desk, where you had to show ID to get buzzed in. They were friends and acquaintances, and almost all of them would ask me when I showed up to run or lift weights if I'd eaten that day. If I hadn't, some of them would offer me a NutriGrain bar or some such snack; some of them would send me home to eat, and only let me in once I could tell them on my honor that I'd eaten a decent portion of real food. All the faculty seemed to know about my eating problem. Any one might stop me in the hall to say hello, and check on my eating. When I was doing well, they would encourage me. When I was struggling, I could be honest about it, and they would pray for me.

Most often, though, I was not honest. Anorectics, like all addicts, are good at being evasive. I would only tell the whole truth if pressed for specifics.

Some friend passing me on campus might say, "Hi, Olga-Maria! How ya doin'? Did you eat breakfast today?"

"Yep!" I would cheerfully and truthfully reply.

A professor greeting me in the classroom minutes later might say, "Olga-Maria, good morning! Did you get some breakfast today?"

"Yes, sir."

"Whad'ya have?" Testing.

"A bagel." Triumphant.

End of discussion. Moving on.

Only the wisest would think to ask the real question, the one that would get to the heart of things. *How much of the bagel did you eat?*

In fact it had been a plain Sara Lee mini-bagel. No butter, no cream cheese, no jam. And I had eaten about half. Estimated caloric intake: forty.

Without lying, I avoided the full truth largely because I feared disappointing my friends, and I figured out pretty quickly that people who have not gone through their own struggle with this disease have a very difficult time understanding it.

Many friends assumed that my life would always be controlled by anorexia. One boy I dated during my first descent into the illness, came close enough to marrying me to introduce me to his family in Alabama. I took him to meet my family, too, but a few weeks later he pulled away. Apparently, he'd done some research that told him anorexia was incurable, that I probably wouldn't be able to have children; presumably I would either be rendered infertile by malnutrition, or I wouldn't eat enough to sustain a healthy pregnancy. This was enough to persuade him to end our relationship.

There was nothing I could say in my own defense; he had made up his mind. "You have a problem," he said, "and it's just too big for me." I was crushed, angry, incredulous, and panicked, all at once. If we loved each other, and God loved us, how could any problem be too big? And if my boyfriend wouldn't stand by me in this fight—which was obviously harder on me than it was on him—who would? Would anyone be strong enough to see it through? Would I?

At the same time that I worried, I felt he was wrong—that I was not incurable, that I would come out on the other side at some point, that God hadn't given up on me, that I deserved a chance to show I could be healthy, could be a good wife. That, on some level, Reid was being a coward. If he could see me now, he might be shocked: As I write this, I am sitting at a coffee shop finishing a banana muffin and a berry smoothie, publicly consuming food that I walked up to a counter and asked for. I have maintained a healthy weight for eight years now, and have been happily married for four.

My next boyfriend and I dated long-distance, off and on, for several years. There were all sorts of reasons our relationship ended, but one of the main ones seemed to be his qualms about my eating disorder. He was in law school when I met him, and when he contemplated marriage, his plan was to have an open, hospitable home with a wife who could serve as a perfect hostess at a moment's notice. And he too became convinced I would fail in that role—that I would never be well enough to cook meals at home, or eat comfortably in restaurants with him and his friends, even though we ate out together frequently, and the first meal we shared at a restaurant was the first time in years I had cleaned my plate.

Some friends even judged my spiritual life based on my illness, which I thought patently unfair. One older woman from the seminary staff who fancied herself a mother figure once took me out to lunch, during which she seemed to be testing me. She chastised me for having an eating disorder, blamed it on the devil, and indicated that she and others were concerned that I was not actually walking with God—even that I might not truly be saved, since I was plainly under the devil's power. There's only so much of that one can take. At a certain point, I stopped talking about my eating to all but a few of my closest friends.

When I threw my first dinner party a few years later, I reveled in the triumph—I wished my old boyfriends and colleagues were there to see me prove them wrong. I was still angry that they'd had so little faith in me, in the healing power of God within me. Maybe their judgments were just handy excuses to break up. And certainly mental disorder is not a desirable trait in a romantic partner. But I think a lot of people don't understand anorexia very well. What anorexics, like everyone else, need more than anything is grace and love, patience and someone to believe in them.

I do understand better now how hard my illness was on my friends. One of them, a wonderful woman named Tracy, became my roommate for a few semesters. Tracy was a little taller than me, with wavy red hair, ivory skin that never tanned, and green eyes that could well up with empathy or flash with frustration. Another refugee from the defunct social work program, she was a pastoral counseling student, prayerful and supportive, and generally warm. I learned a great deal about myself from her, but in retrospect, I am sure that living with my disordered thinking and behavior wore her down. When my bones started to show, Tracy was the one who told me. She also told me I needed to eat because she was starting to feel fat at a size eight. When she got married after completing the M.Div., I moved into a single room by myself for the next five years until I finished the doctoral degree. I was not going to inflict my illness on another roommate.

The day I knew I really had a problem came fairly early on, while I was still living with Tracy. I was sitting on the edge of the bathtub one morning, shaving my legs when I noticed the reflection of my right thigh in the downward silver curve of the tub faucet. It

looked absurdly tiny, no more than two inches wide. Contemplating this image, I had two nearly simultaneous thoughts: one, that I wished my thighs were really that small; and two, that the first thought was not only irrational but suicidal—that my thighs could only be two inches wide if I had been dead for several years.

I had seen and actually held the thighbone of a woman my size, in a Biological Anthropology course at the University of Florida. The Teaching Assistant passed around a femur bone to examine, and told us it had belonged to a 5-foot 4-inch woman, weighing 120 pounds. I am sure I was all the more interested in this bone because I was also 5 feet, 4 inches, 120 pounds. I remember being surprised at how large and heavy the femur was—if I hadn't known that its previous owner had been small, I would have assumed she was taller, and much heavier, even that it was a man's bone. I remember holding the bone next to my own thigh, to see whether it matched up. It was exactly the right size, and I immediately understood that my leg, like any normal leg, is mostly bone; the muscles and skin wrap around it, but go less than a half-inch deep. I had always thought of legs as being either muscle or fat, had always said of my thighs (as all girls seemed to), "They're so fat." Now there was no escaping the fact that my thighs were better described as "bony"—not that they were small, but that they were made up of far more bone than fat.

This college memory came back that morning as I looked from my freshly shaved thigh to its miniscule reflection in the bathtub faucet. An increasingly powerful part of me wanted my real-life leg to be as tiny as the reflection, two inches wide. But, remembering the woman's bone, another part of my mind knew that was impossible. Even if I lost every bit of fat and muscle and blood vessels and skin, there would still be a sizable bone under there.

I asked myself, *Would that be enough? If my legs were two inches wide? Would I be happy then?*

And the answer came back immediately: *No.*

What would be enough, then?

Nothing. Nothing will ever be enough. Only when I'm dead. When there's nothing left of me.

I finally recognized the true impulse behind my fasting—I wanted to disappear. That day, I decided to seek out therapy. I could no longer avoid the fact that I had wandered into serious territory where my life was in danger.

A few weeks later, my knowledge of basic anatomy again proved helpful in my struggle with anorexia, when I collapsed in my apartment. I don't remember what I was doing, nothing special, but I suddenly felt weak and shaky and I fell to the floor in my living room and laid there for several minutes on my back. I could feel my heart racing and my breath shallow. I placed a hand over my heart to count my pulse, the other on my abdomen to try to fill it with a deeper breath.

As I lay there, I began to picture my heart and lungs, working, and then I began to think of all the other organs surrounding them and working together with them, to keep me healthy. I hadn't thought about anatomy for years, since high school biology, if then, and hadn't spent much time applying that rudimentary knowledge to my own body. But I was suddenly aware, not *of* my organs, but I guess, just that I had them. I lay on the floor and thought about the fact that under my hands were not just a heart and lungs, but a liver and kidneys and a bladder and a uterus, a stomach and miles (I'd been told) of blood vessels and

intestines. I had always been a little grossed out studying these things, but at that moment, it felt sort of special. I felt like a box of presents, a care package, full of unique and magical items.

I also realized that my body was full. I often felt empty, hollow inside, and almost never felt connected between my body and spirit. But with my attention turned to the literal, physical stuff within me, I had to acknowledge that there was a lot packed into a fairly small container. I was not stupid or crazy, I knew I was thin—smaller than a size two by that point—but I hadn't thought of myself as full. Looking at our bodies from the outside, most women, I think, see only muscle or fat. We see the outlines, without acknowledging what's underneath. And anorectics see only fat, only an outline that is too broad, a person taking up too much space in the world.

I remember feeling my torso with both hands, then, reminding myself of all the stuff packed inside it, naming as many organs as I could think of, trying to remember where they were located. And I realized in that moment that I wasn't fat at all. There wasn't any room for fat in that little body. There was barely room—how was it possible?—for a stomach and duodenum and gall bladder and pancreas and a trachea and ovaries and everything else I needed. I tried to picture it all, and naming those organs to myself, I couldn't imagine any fat in there. Before that moment, I had seen my body only as a nuisance, a weight to be carried around, a mouth to be fed. After, I recognized that my body was another miracle of nature, that it really was full of mysterious treasures, and, maybe, worth taking care of.

Not that things became measurably easier after that little epiphany. Every day and every evening was a struggle for me—a constant internal battle that is nearly impossible to

describe. Nicole Kidman as the depressed and anorectic Virginia Woolf in the film, “The Hours,” says, “I wrestle alone in the dark, in the deep dark.” Some sufferers tell of feeling demon-possessed. I did not feel that; I did not feel, either, that there was any truth to the notion that my condition was the work of the devil. I felt strongly and continuously that God was with me, that all my prayers were heard, that I was filled with the Holy Spirit—and every indicator I’d ever had was that God’s love for me was unchanged. It was clear, though, that I wasn’t getting some special, “Get out of Anorexia Free” card from Jesus. I was indeed walking in faith and still trying every day not to die. I was going to have to work my way out of this. Prayer alone was not going to do it for me.

CHAPTER FIVE

SERVING THE SOUTHERN BAPTISTS

In 1996, Dr. Douglas C. Walker, Dean of Students, founded the Ambassador program at SBTS, and I was one of the first Seminary Ambassadors. Having been on the University of Florida's PREVIEW staff in 1992, I brought some valuable experience. PREVIEW is a team of sharp, attractive, ethnically diverse undergraduate students who run the freshman orientation program. The Seminary Ambassadors program was initiated in order to use similarly sharp and attractive—most of all, loyal—students to represent Southern Seminary to all her constituents: prospective students, alumni, trustees, and donors. Ambassadors were paid a lump sum at the beginning of the semester, which covered our tuition.

With prospective students, Ambassadors spent most of our time giving campus tours, and some of us went to Baptist college student conferences on recruiting trips. Each of us also had to put in several hours a week phoning alumni and asking them to make a donation to the seminary. This was the least pleasant part of the job for everyone—most of the alumni on our list had graduated before the conservative takeover, and did not like Dr. Mohler, so

they would rather hang up or spend the phone call complaining to us about how the seminary had declined under Mohler.

When it came to Seminary Trustees, we Ambassadors served as hosts when they visited, twice a year. We helped host banquets, and met with them as spokespersons when they wanted a student perspective on the state of the seminary. Dr. Walker didn't want them talking to just any students, who might not be on board with the administration. Some trustees wanted us to give them a little dirt on liberal students and faculty members, which, at the time, I was happy to offer. The trustees I met seemed quite concerned about our classrooms. They wanted to know if professors opened lectures with prayer, which students and faculty were regularly attending chapel, who seemed supportive of the administration and who didn't. If you were in a position to give them the scoop, you were special. It felt a little like being a spy, which, I'm embarrassed to say, was a little exciting.

At one of our first meetings, Dr. Mohler came by to give us his blessing and to answer questions. I had noted his fond and frequent use of the phrase "flagship evangelical seminary" to describe his vision of what he wanted SBTS to be. I wanted to use this phrase myself, but I wasn't clear on what it meant. He explained that 'flagship' meant leading from the front, and 'evangelical' meant that we proclaimed the gospel in strict accordance with Scripture. I noted later that the Oxford American Dictionary defines a flagship as "the ship in a fleet that carries the commanding admiral." It was pretty clear who that would be.

One of my favorite memories as an Ambassador was actually working at Dr. Mohler's house. At big parties, he sometimes used Ambassadors as assistant hosts—I would greet people, and invite them to sign the guest book; some of the boys would take coats. At a 1996

Christmas shindig, seven-year-old Katie Mohler and I stood by the door, wearing party dresses and welcoming dozens of guests. Katie would reach around behind me and tickle me while I was trying to greet people. It kept a big smile on my face, but sometimes my voice jumped an octave, and I couldn't help giggling while asking them to sign in. I could covertly tickle her too, but since she didn't have to talk to them, it wasn't really payback.

Once all the guests were in, the Ambassadors were supposed to mingle, but after about half an hour I was pretty bored by all the grownups, mostly local conservative bigwigs. So I found Katie again, and asked her to show me her room. It was big and beautifully decorated with pink Laura Ashley florals, a queen-size white canopy bed with stuffed animals and dolls, and low bookcases full of books. She read to me for a while and then we decided to have a picnic. We snuck down to the dining room where the tables were full of food and procured some hors d'oeuvres and crudités, and sat on the floor in her room for our picnic. Katie's little brother, Christopher, who was about four, joined us periodically, but was more interested in pilfering handfuls of cashews from all the little dishes sitting around the house, then running back to the family room to watch the Food Network.

After all the guests had gone, Dr. Mohler gave the Ambassadors a tour of his home office—it took up the whole basement of the house, two large rooms lined with books. It was like a book bunker. There was a big desk, also covered with books and journals. Behind his desk there was a case of Diet Coke, and empty cans on the desk and in the wastebasket. Someone asked how much he read. The answer: several books and magazines and scholarly journals every week. There were plenty of the expected sets of Bible commentaries and theological tomes, but Mohler's interests went beyond divinity. He read history, lots of

biographies, music, science, and art. When I got a job at a local bookstore two years later, I was not at all surprised to see Dr. Mohler there several times a week, usually browsing through the nonfiction areas.

In June of 1995, the Southern Baptist Convention celebrated its Sesquicentennial at its Annual Conference, held that year in Atlanta. I had never before attended a meeting of the SBC, but the Southern Seminary Choir was asked to perform, because Dr. Mohler was giving the keynote address. We drove down in a bus to Atlanta for an overnight stay and two brief performances. I was one of the only non-music majors in the choir and definitely the only Mohler supporter among them.

The music school, like the Carver School of Church Social Work, was notoriously liberal. There were open and suspected homosexual students in those schools, and lots of women, compared with the other two schools at the seminary, the theology school, and the (later-to-be-named Billy Graham) School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth. There were a good number of women on faculty in those schools as well, and men who were sympathetic to women's concerns. The students and faculty of these schools perhaps felt a kinship because of this similarity, and perhaps the music folks felt offended at the decimation of the Carver School. Musicians and social workers do tend to be more politically liberal, and thus more likely to be theologically liberal. Even those who were strenuously

heterosexual were of necessity friends with many gay folks, and not likely to take it well when their institution began institutionalizing homophobia and heterosexism.

There was a history to the music school: it was more of an academy, a training program for professional musicians, skilled musicians, not just entertainers, and certainly more than just run-of-the-mill, small-town church choirmasters. The school was renowned for its composers, singers, instrumentalists. One of the faculty had been instrumental (pun intended) in shaping the newest Baptist hymnal; another had made the school famous for premieres of church musicals. So the focus at the music school was not on saving souls so much, nor on theology necessarily, or doctrinal policies. Music, like all the arts, tends to cultivate liberalism and humanism, not dogmatism.

During Dr. Mohler's keynote address, the Southern Seminary Choir stood on risers behind the lectern and the speakers were seated below us, on the platform, just like at most churches. Except that we were in a packed-out stadium: there were Jumbotron units that projected the speaker's face on huge screens for all to see. The video technology made me self-conscious—I tried to look pretty and attentive and reverent, so that if the cameras zoomed in on me, I wouldn't embarrass the school.

When Dr. Mohler was introduced, he got applause from about half the crowd. When he spoke, he got a mix of applause and boos and grumbles, even from the choir, which may have surprised some in the audience if they noticed, but it surprised him and myself not at all, knowing how his ideas were still not fully accepted even at Southern Seminary.

In his speech, Dr. Mohler talked about how important it was that the Southern Baptist Convention maintain its doctrinal integrity—translation: stay on the path toward

conservatism across the board in all its major agencies. He did not focus exclusively on the seminary and his work there to this end, but he did mention it, and he mentioned the Carver School of Church Social Work specifically. I had no way of knowing how interested the gathered messengers were in the Carver School crisis. It seemed like a local problem to me at the time; I did not have the perspective to see it as part of the larger conservative takeover of the denomination, but I did recognize that there was resistance from the audience to what he was saying. The only point I specifically remember them booing was when he explained that the Carver School had to be closed because its goals and core principles were at conflict with the goals and principles of the seminary—essentially, because it was too liberal, too supportive of women and gays, though he did not articulate any details. Instead, Dr. Mohler favored broader, alliterative statements, including this one: "When a denomination begins to consider doctrine divisive, theology troublesome, and convictions inconvenient, consider that denomination on its way to a well-deserved death."

Several choir members looked daggers at the back of Mohler's head, and I even heard grumbles as he spoke. At the time I was appalled at their behavior. Even if they disagreed with Dr. Mohler or didn't care for him personally, they were representing his seminary and should be properly respectful of their President. Now, looking back at his message, I see how unfair it might have seemed to these students. They had doctrine, they had theology, they had convictions—just different ones from his. The divisiveness was coming from him. He was the primary agent of painful division in their community, in their churches, and in their denomination.

Afterward, as the rest of the choir and Dr. Dickson, our director, walked away, I went straight down to see Mary Mohler and Dr. Walker, who were sitting in the front row of the audience. Mary had noticed the choir's hostility and was concerned for me being with them; she wanted to find another way to get me home besides the choir bus, but couldn't swing a plane ticket for me.

Doug and Mary had been sitting with some wealthy entrepreneur types, and Doug introduced me around. He always made me feel he was proud of me, and proud that I was part of the seminary. Dr. Walker and the Mohlers asked me to join them at the SBTS Alumni Luncheon, and I eagerly agreed. I was eager for free food, but more eager to get away from the angry, liberal choir members, and to show my support for Dr. Mohler amongst the alumni as well, since the bulk of our alums at that point were fairly hostile to his administration. Before lunch was served we prayed and then sang the seminary hymn, "Soldiers of Christ in Truth Arrayed," which I thereupon decided to memorize, since Dr. Mohler and Mary knew it by heart. I came to find that we sang it at every convocation and graduation, as well as these extracurricular seminary events. It was written in 1860 by Basil Manly, Jr., one of the founders of the seminary, and we always sang every stanza, the last one *fortissimo*:

*Soldiers of Christ in truth arrayed,
A world in ruins needs your aid:
A world by sin destroyed and dead;
A world for which the Savior bled.*

*His gospel to the lost proclaim,
Good news for all in Jesus' name;
Let light upon the darkness break
That sinners from their death may wake.*

Morning and evening, sow the seed—

*God's grace the effort shall succeed.
Seedtimes of tears have oft been found
With sheaves of joy and plenty crowned.*

*We meet to part, but part to meet,
When earthly labors are complete
To join in yet more blest employ
In an eternal world of joy.*

At the Annual Meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, any member of a Southern Baptist church can propose a resolution, described on the SBC's website as non-binding "expressions of opinion or concern," which do not entail policy—in fact, some of them are pretty stupid, like one I remember from the Atlanta convention, that single people be renamed "Unclaimed Blessings," which thankfully never got off the ground—but they do tend to get a lot of press if they are passed by a floor vote. They even wanted to convert the Jews. For example, at the 1996 Annual Meeting in New Orleans, a resolution was passed that Southern Baptists would renew their commitment to evangelize the Jews: it's actually titled "Resolution on Jewish Evangelism," and concludes with a commitment "to pray for the salvation of the Jewish people" and to "direct... energies and resources toward the proclamation of the gospel" to Jews. As one would imagine, the Jewish community was not very happy about that idea.

In my travels as a Seminary Ambassador on behalf of the Admissions Office, I made three trips to student conferences organized by the Baptist Student Unions (BSUs). Because

the attendees would be student leaders within the Southern Baptist campus ministries, we could be more assured of connecting with future Baptist ministers. Some student leaders would surely be thinking about seminary. And the seminary found that sometimes it was more effective and cheaper to send a student Ambassador rather than an Admissions Officer. No one warned me, though, that I might find anti-Southern Seminary hostilities simmering at these conferences—that I might be given a hard time by Southern Baptist leaders there.

On my first trip the seminary sent me to Florida, to a Baptist camp where I had attended a BSU conference myself as a college student some years earlier. The meeting went smoothly, except for one awkward conversation with my former college minister. I hadn't thought of this pastor as particularly liberal, but he was openly surprised to see me representing Southern Seminary, his alma mater from 1987, well before the Mohler era.

“Don't they discriminate against women there?” he asked me.

“Well, they sent me here. They selected me as a student representative, so, clearly not.”

The pastor was having none of it. “Do you think they would hire you to do anything more than this, though? Do you think they'd actually let you *teach*?”

“That's what they say—several faculty members and high-level administrators have said I should go for the Ph.D. next and then I could teach.”

He was still skeptical. “Well, good for you.” But I could tell he didn't think it would ever happen.

At the end of the 1995-96 school year, Dr. Dockery left to become President of Union University, in Tennessee, where he still serves. A year later, Dr. Gushee left, joining the faculty there. He was replaced by Ben Mitchell, who was just finishing his Ph.D.; a few years later Ben left for Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and was replaced by Ken Magnuson, also just finishing his Ph.D. While upset at the loss of my favorite faculty members—I developed some abandonment issues when it came to professors—what was interesting to me was that after the big wave of departures in 1995 and '96, none of the faculty who left Southern Seminary were forced out, none of them had such entrenched theological differences with the administration that they were asked to step down. They each left because of the stifling, acrimonious atmosphere at Southern.

Dr. Gushee left at least partly because he wanted to be part of a faculty where women were welcome. It didn't make sense to me at the time; I was pretty caught up in how his move was going to affect me and my studies. Dr. House left because his marriage broke up and Dr. Mohler said he could stay on the faculty as long as he didn't date or make any move toward re-marriage, which Jesus says is adultery.¹⁷ Dr. House has since remarried and found his way back to acceptance among the evangelical community, and he remains an important Old Testament scholar, teaching and serving as Associate Dean at Beeson Divinity School. Beeson is evangelical, fairly conservative, but not Southern Baptist. It's hard to serve the Southern Baptists. They won't take just anyone.

¹⁷ Matthew 19.9.

The Southern Baptist Convention has such a strict policy on alcohol, for instance, that even if you have *served* anyone alcohol in the past year you can't be sent out on the mission field. Some of my friends had to quit their jobs as servers in restaurants, change to lower-paying restaurants that didn't serve alcohol, or switch to working at UPS just to make application a year later to the mission boards.

In 1997 I attended the SBC's Annual Convention in Dallas—and I got academic credit for it, in a summer class taught by Dr. Danny Akin. Dr. Akin was young and energetic, with a great sense of humor, and was Dockery's replacement as VP for Academic Affairs and Dean of the School of Theology. He was openly more conservative than Dr. Dockery had been, maybe slightly to the left of Dr. Mohler. He had us read Nancy Ammerman's history of the conservative takeover, Baptist Battles, attend the Annual Meeting, and write a paper afterwards to get our three credits. I was already assigned to go to the convention as an Ambassador. Like every conference, the SBC annual meeting has an exhibit hall full of booths. We didn't do half as much business there as at a Baptist Student Union conference, but it had to be done. Mostly I had alums and trustees stopping by to say hello.

J. C. Watts was there, then the great black hope of the Republican party; he had given the Republican response to President Clinton's State of the Union address six months earlier, and the press was covering him keenly. There were television cameras and reporters with notebooks or microphones all around the convention center. Word was, the press was also interested in the resolutions that were coming up for a vote this session, including one to boycott the Disney Corporation. The next day, the business of the convention got into

full swing. Committees and subcommittees had had their chance to meet, and now resolutions were prepared to be presented to the full body of “messengers,” representatives of Southern Baptist churches in good standing, who were sent by their churches with official authorization to vote on these matters. And, as promised, there was the Disney boycott resolution, which proposed by the Florida churches.

If you live in Florida, anywhere within a three-hour radius of Disney World, you go there a lot as a kid. If you’re a family or a church or school group, you probably take a bunch of kiddos every year. And if every family and church and school group in that area is going to Disney, chances are some of them will happen to be there on Gay Day, where the parks are full of openly gay couples holding hands and kissing. And, chances are, some of those groups will be deeply offended and want their money back.

The Florida Baptist Convention had already been boycotting Disney for a few years, for this very reason, and also because Disney had instituted a policy of inclusion whereby it offered health and other benefits to gay employees’ same-sex partners. Southern Baptists and other right-wing organizations considered this policy inflammatory. Disney was supposed to be the protector of old-fashioned, middle class American “family values.” The idea of “Main Street, USA” being polluted by gay couples cavorting around, having fun with *their* families was intolerable. The SBC was also upset by rumored oblique sexual images in the animated film, “The Little Mermaid” and by other books and films, including “Stealing Beauty,” which were distributed by Disney-owned companies.

So the text of the 1997 resolution accused the Disney Company of, “increasingly promoting immoral ideologies such as homosexuality, infidelity, and adultery, which are

biblically reprehensible and abhorrent to God and His plan for the world that He loves.” It went on to remind Southern Baptists everywhere that their money belongs to God and that while “we cannot do everything to stop the moral decline in our nation, ... we must do what lies before us when it is right through a proper use of our influence, energies, and prayers, particularly when it affects our nation’s children.” The resolution encouraged Southern Baptists to refrain from trips to Disney Land or Disney World, and from purchases at the Disney Store, and to write to Disney and explain their decision to boycott and the reasons behind it, insisting this is “not an attempt to bring The Disney Company down, but to bring Southern Baptists up to the moral standard of God.”

The resolution passed by a strong majority.

One of the other ways I served my seminary was as a model. From time to time, the PR department needed new publicity photos, and they would select certain attractive students to pose for them, usually choosing a mix of races, and throwing in a woman when they could. I was one of them, and was featured in an ad that ran during the Dallas convention with the headline: “For Such a Time as This,” the new motto of Southern Seminary that season, a reference taken from the Old Testament book of Esther, chapter 4, verse 14. Esther’s uncle Mordecai exhorts her to speak to her husband the King, on behalf of her people, the Jews, who were about to be subject to persecution, saying, “Who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?”

The idea behind the ad was that the Mohler administration had been brought to power in a time of otherwise rampant liberalism, that Southern students could stand up for

truth in an era of postmodernism and relativism, that we were special, chosen by God for particular work in a particular season. It was heady stuff, and I drank it all down. I was a believer, not just in Jesus but in Dr. Mohler and Dr. Walker, in *The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary* in Louisville, Kentucky. During one of the last meetings where I sat down with trustees, they asked me what I hoped to do with my theological training, and I said I could imagine nothing better than to stay on at Southern in some capacity. I told them sincerely that I couldn't think of anywhere I'd rather be.

The first time I realized that I was deeply at odds with Dr. Mohler, he came to speak at Highland Baptist Church, when I was just visiting but also singing in the choir with Dr. Dickson. Mohler did not preach in a service; he didn't even attend the service—he just spoke to the adult congregation during the Sunday School hour in the fellowship hall. He brought along his wife, Mary, and Russ Moore, his right-hand-guy at the time, for moral support. They sat right up front, and I sat a few rows behind them. When Mary saw me, she whispered, “You're not going *here*, are you?” I just smiled and said I came to see *them*. Let her think I came just for Dr. Mohler's speech. She looked skeptical.

And I wouldn't have missed it. I was not at that time much prejudiced against him, and I was certainly not yet on board with the more liberal theology of Highland. My allegiance was more with him than with the church. Until I heard his message to them.

Dr. Mohler's basic assertion was that the Church writ large was split between two diametrically opposed camps, one aligned with Love and the other with Truth. He and his conservative evangelical wing composed the Truth camp; liberals like the Highland congregation were part of the Love camp, and only those on the side of Truth were going to heaven. Seriously. God only loves and accepts those who have their doctrine straight, and those who focus on anything else run the risk of being spit out of His holy mouth. (At this writing, the homepage of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary website features a photo of a big, black open Bible with a fancy ribbon marker and the motto, "Truth. It matters here.")

As I mentioned, I was, if anything, more loyal to Mohler and the conservatives in a lot of ways up to then. But it was clear in my mind that the Jesus of the Bible claimed to be both Truth and Love incarnate, and that there was therefore no Christian way to split these up, let alone to set them in opposition to one another. I had also been around long enough to know that people and churches, Highland included, could be both loving and truthful, and concerned simultaneously with both the doctrine and the practice of Christianity. Dr. Mohler's argument made no sense to me; it was the first, but not the last, time that he made no sense to me.

One of my many former pastors said in a sermon that before people would respond to the Good News that Jesus died for their sins, they needed first to be convinced of the Bad News, that they were sinners separated from God and in need of a Savior. Dr. Mohler wasn't at Highland Baptist to preach, and he didn't bring the Good News—he was there to deliver the Bad News that Love-oriented people who were willing to flex on orthodox doctrine were

separated from the Truth and therefore going to hell. Some people like to quote Matthew 10:34, where Jesus says, “I come to bring not peace, but a sword.” Some people like a Christianity of division and opposition; some people apparently need it to be that way. Dr. Mohler seems to be one of those people whose Christian identity seems to exist primarily in opposition to others. He defines himself and his seminary over against other viewpoints and policies and doctrines, and the people who hold them. (Dr. Mohler signs all of his informal correspondence with his capitalized initials, RAM, which seems particularly fitting.)

At this point in time, I disagree with Dr. RAM on pretty much everything. He thinks that deliberate childlessness is a sin, and that homosexuality should be treated medically in the womb, if that becomes possible. He thinks the fiasco of Abu Grahib is attributable to women serving in the military, as if men don’t behave in these ways unless women are around, as if that scandal was all Lynndie England’s fault. I think gays, lesbians, bisexual, transgender and otherwise queer folk are a special gift the universe offers to itself, just like all the other visible and invisible differences people carry. I think deliberate childlessness is a healthy and sane decision for many people for many reasons and is the business only of the couple involved. I think women should serve in the military, in prisons, and anywhere else they want, according to their gifts, just like men. I think people who condemn other people based on their gender or sexuality are ignorant and mean.

But Dr. Mohler is not all bad. I know this because he officiated at his daughter Katie’s wedding. When she was five years old. To Winnie-the-Pooh. She showed me the pictures—she dressed up in a fluffy white dress and held hands with her stuffed Pooh Bear

and he pronounced them husband and wife. Or bear and wife. *You may now kiss the Pooh.*

Not all bad.

CHAPTER SIX

CLIMBING OUT

It was a book that drew me into the practice of fasting. It was another book that helped me start the long climb out of anorexia and depression. The beginning of help came through the work of Peggy Claude-Pierre, whom my roommate Tracy had seen on Oprah and taped for me. Claude-Pierre has two daughters, both of whom experienced eating disorders. She had real difficulty finding help for them—most of the mental health practitioners they found operated from a behavioral modification framework, where the patient was punished for losing weight and rewarded for gaining it. To Claude-Pierre, it was bizarrely nonsensical to hold a mentally ill person responsible for her illness; as she notes, we don't do this with schizophrenics or bipolar folks. She removed her daughters from this harsh sort of "care," and began treating them herself, focused on maintaining an atmosphere of love and grace, and working to understand the anorexic mind. Once she got them well, the family opened a clinic, Montreaux, to help other sufferers of eating disorders.

Claude-Pierre's 1997 book, The Secret Language of Eating Disorders, is the result of her experiences running Montreaux. I picked up a copy at the bookstore where I was working at the time and took it home to read rather than reading it there, where others might see my reactions. I curled up in my burgundy *papasan* chair by the window, where I did my daily "devotions," where I could stick my feet on the windowsill on a hot day or over the heating grate on a cold one—and read the whole thing in one go. Perhaps the most surprising insight I gained was Claude-Pierre's assertion that anorectics do not suffer from low self-esteem as is commonly assumed. Rather, she says, they lack a self altogether.

I had never heard this notion before, but it resonated with me deeply. I recognized it immediately as my truth. From the outside, I appeared high-functioning and solid, but inside, I knew how fragmented and fragile my spirit was, how unsure. One common phrase I'd heard a lot over the years but never understood was, "Be your own person." "What on earth did that *mean*? Reading Claude-Pierre, I realized that my own lack of self was the root of my confusion at this idiom. Whatever else I was—smart, pretty, accomplished—I was not my own person. I was everybody else's person, everybody else's Olga-Maria.

I began in that moment to realize that I was living as if none of my decisions was really up to me—it was as if I were packing my bags for a weekend away and instead of going through my closet and making selections myself, I was taking a poll of everyone I knew. *Should I pack this white dress? Or the navy one? Navy? Ok. What about shoes? Sandals? Heels? The sandals. Yes.* I would listen to any opinion other than my own, which was not to be trusted, which didn't feel real yet. And that was how I was living: any decision I was contemplating required input from at least three or four sources—friends, mentors, a pastor, my mom, faculty members, their wives. On decisions like what classes to take, what books to read, what friends to have, what boy to date, what movies to see, what music to sing, how to vote, I really did take a poll. And I acted upon the results, discounting the effects or outcomes for myself.

I relied particularly heavily on Dr. Doug Walker. In my first two years at the seminary, he was Dean of Students, and I stopped by his office several times a week, just to check in. I kept him abreast of everything that was going on with me, my feelings, my relationships, and I asked his help on almost every major decision. When I was having problems with boyfriend

R, Dr. Walker told me R and I weren't a good match—I was smarter than he was; we were headed for different levels after graduation. When I wanted to date another boy who wasn't really interested in me, Dr. Walker helped me put the brakes on my feelings and “wait on the Lord.” When I was low on cash, he got me a short-term loan from the seminary. When I decided I needed therapy, Dr. Walker found me a Christian counselor who was an SBTS alum, and arranged for the seminary to cover the cost.

We both knew why I was so dependent on him. My father's death had come up in our first conversation (“What do your parents do?”), and we were open about how I needed him and other faculty members to serve as father figures. Doug was prematurely graying, but insisted he was too young to be my father—he called himself my “big brother” or my “really young uncle.” My need for Doug's approval and my need to prove myself to him were such that I brought every complaint I had to him whenever I felt overwhelmed or wanted to show my loyalty to him and Dr. Mohler. I think that, subconsciously, I was anxious to prove loyalty to the men in positions of authority in order to build safety and security for myself. While I cannot judge myself for feeling this way at the time, I do wish now that I had found mentors then who would have encouraged me to stand on my own. Instead, my dependence was cultivated, especially by Doug Walker.

There was a certain teacher I disliked whose classroom practices made me uncomfortable, and I complained to Doug. I described a guided meditation exercise she led in which we were supposed to visualize ourselves walking down a road with Jesus and listening to what He said to us—I thought this undermined the authority of Scripture over personal experience—and another activity where she paired up students and had us stare at

each other for several minutes, scrutinizing each other's physical appearance to draw conclusions from our observations. She paired me with a single young man, whose scrutiny I found mortifying. No such scenario would have been comfortable for me, only bearable if my partner were another woman, but the professor seemed to have no sensitivity on that issue. I shared my horror of her class with Dr. Walker; to put it plainly, I was hoping that he could simply get her dismissed. I never knew what he did with the information I offered, but he promised to address the situation, and she left the faculty after that year. I felt validated by his response—protected, righteous. I didn't care a bit how my professor felt, and I never spoke with her in class or out of it. Looking back, I have real sympathy for her, and I would be appalled if a student at my own university tried to get a professor dismissed in this way. University professors, though, in contrast to seminary professors, are protected by principles of academic freedom. I wouldn't be a bit upset if students dropped my class because they were uncomfortable with my personality or teaching style. In fact, I'm sure this has happened—but I see it as a matter of taste. At Southern, everything was a matter of doctrine. Like the Plymouth Pilgrims, we were zealous to preserve the purity of our community, ever on the lookout for dissenters or unrighteous behavior.

Sometimes the paternal guidance I craved became too much. One day in therapy, my counselor mentioned that Dr. Walker had called him, wanting an update on how I was doing. *And* he had given Doug him a detailed report on my progress. Granted, I was struggling with anorexia and depression, but I was neither crazy nor ignorant of the principle of confidentiality. In fact, Doug had always said that my conversations with *him* were confidential. Suddenly the safety of both the therapist's office and Doug's were highly

doubtful. I began to pull back from sharing much with either man, and, reading Peggy Claude-Pierre's book, I was able to see what my next step needed to be.

Claude-Pierre's main idea is that when anorectics and bulimics can start building an independent sense of self, by making even small decisions on their own terms, for their own reasons, they can begin to break their pattern of self-destructive behaviors. I decided a good place to start would be with my hair. For years, I had liked how my hair looked when it was wet, and wanted it darker. I had even asked my hairdresser, Charlie, to make me a brunette, but he refused. At the age of twenty-four, he said, I probably wasn't going to turn any darker naturally, and being a devout Christian, Charlie didn't feel comfortable changing the haircolor God gave me. I left his shop and went to the nearest CVS, bought two boxes of dark brown Natural Instincts, and did it myself in my dorm room. Not an expert job, but I was satisfied. I stayed a brunette for several years and never went back to Charlie.

I got a lot of reactions the next day. People were generally shocked, not only because my elbow-length hair was five shades darker, but also because I hadn't told anyone I was going to do it; I hadn't asked their advice or, ostensibly, their permission. This was by design.

The only way I could be sure I was being "my own person," and truly making this first decision on my own terms for my own reasons, was not to bring it up with anyone—just to do it and let the chips fall. And I was prepared for their comments. To those who praised my new look, I said, "Thank you," and changed the subject. To those who had any objection,

I said, "Sorry you feel that way," and changed the subject. To those who questioned me, asking why I'd done this dramatic thing or hadn't told them what I was planning, I replied, "I felt it was my own decision to make." And changed the subject.

It may seem ironic that the first step toward reclaiming my authentic self was to change my natural haircolor. One of my main goals, however, was to look more authentically Puerto Rican, more like a member of my own family, of whom I am the palest member. I also hoped that as a brunette I would look smarter, that people in general would take me more seriously. This plan backfired, I think; I got the sense then and over the next several years that tinkering with my haircolor actually made people take me less seriously, that it seemed an outward indicator of a lack of stability in my sense of identity.

Still, that first autonomous action felt wonderful. I liked the girl I saw in the mirror and felt proud of her courage and individuality. This decision led to other small decisions, like shopping at the mall without bringing along a friend, and without asking sales clerks for their opinions. Like trying not to always think of what my mother would do.

A few months later I took a seminary class designed for those of us who were going into teaching, which covered the history of higher education in America and various issues related to teaching college. It was actually taught by a young woman, an adjunct faculty member brought in solely for this course, and there were several women students in the class, including my friend Stefana. Toward the end of the course, we were assigned group projects. Stefana and Kay and I were assigned to report on Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind, by Mary Belenky, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Goldberger, and Jill Tarule. I'd never heard of this book, but it was several years old at that time, and

apparently an important study into how women learn, and how they relate to knowledge, power, and authority. We each read the whole text and then met to determine how we would split up responsibilities for the presentation. What I discovered in the reading was quite surprising—this, for the first time in my academic career, was a textbook about me.

Women's Ways of Knowing was written in the 1980s by these four women, psychologists and sociologists who met at conferences and were struck by how their fields were shaped by research done by men studying other men. How, they wondered, would the conclusions and assumptions accepted as standard by the academic community be different if that same research had been done by women studying other women? They crafted exactly such a project and their results were not entirely different, but included some interesting adaptations. Essentially, they discovered that women of all ages, socioeconomic levels, racial, religious and academic backgrounds, inhabit and move through five “ways of knowing,” five ways of relating to knowledge, truth, power and authority.

First, many women, especially the young, undereducated or abused, start from (and sometimes remain in) a position of *silence*: all knowledge and truth and authority are outside them, far from them, held by others. Asked what she knows, the silent woman will have nothing to say. *Received knowers* are in a similar position, with knowledge lying outside, in the hands of authority figures, so that what they know, even of themselves, is what others say. Asked what she knows, the received knower will say things like, “My mother says I’m shy,” or “The doctor says my child is hyperactive.”

At the next level is the *subjective knower*, who has discovered—sometimes through a traumatic experience, sometimes through formal education or simply wider experience of

the world—that authority figures can disagree with one another, and that she knows some things herself. Suddenly, all knowledge is a matter of opinion, and one is as good as the next, so that authorities are at least somewhat suspect and her own truth is primary. The *procedural knower* has made the further discovery that some opinions are better than others, that experts do exist, and that there can be objective as well as subjective truth. She works to create a framework, a procedure, for sorting out her own views on a subject, by examining critically the findings and opinions of others. Finally, the *constructivist knower* is able to be not just critical but creative, thinking outside the box, as it were, to create new knowledge—this is the most advanced level of thinking, rarely achieved by people other than artists and academics.

The women on my project and I were fascinated by this thesis. We had never thought about thinking, nor had a framework for assessing it. At our first meeting, on a landing in the women’s dorm, Kay was practically skipping. She had identified strongly with the subjective knower. “I do this! I do this!” she said. “I think about things and then I watch myself thinking about it, and I think about how I’m thinking.” The experience she described was foreign to me. Stefana could see that she was herself a procedural if not always a constructivist thinker. I had been discouraged by the reading, because it was abundantly clear to me that although I was a very smart woman in graduate school, I was still a received knower. This was at the root of my struggle to “be my own person,” and my habit of poll-taking to gather others’ opinions rather than forming my own. I confessed this to Stefana and Kay, who, like good friends, came to my defense.

“You’re not like that,” they insisted. “You’re definitely a subjective knower at *least*.”

I had to laugh. “The fact that I need you to tell me what kind of knower I am just confirms that I really am a received knower!”

Their further efforts to reassure me only served as added confirmation: Kay and Stefana proceeded to critique the book, saying the authors had interviewed fewer than 200 women for their research, and it was only one theory, so I didn’t have to judge myself by it. I hadn’t been able to think that critically—it would be years of hard, hard work before I would be able to think in that way. For me, at that point, if the book said it, it had to be true.

But now I had some vision, an idea of the shape my growth could take. And this made me more ready, I think, when I began in the next year to work toward the Ph.D. with David. Dr. E. David Cook, that is, of the Whitefield Institute¹⁸ (a now-defunct Oxford-based Christian think tank) and Green College, Oxford. One of the most eminent ethicists in Great Britain, Dr. Cook wanted us to call him “David.” He said it was customary in England to call professors by their first names, and I suppose he didn’t need to hear his title all the time.

David pushed me like no one before—mostly by requiring me to form my own opinions. Suddenly, I had to use first person in my writing, which had rarely been allowed by previous professors. Each week I had to read a primary text in philosophy, summarize it, offer positive and negative critique—evaluate its strengths and weaknesses—and then offer my own view. Oh, and then critique my own view. Nowadays, depth-critique is something I can do fairly easily, though it takes quite a bit of energy and focus; at that time, however, it felt well-nigh impossible and took several cups of cappuccino just to get going. In one tutorial, I

¹⁸ pronounced *Whit-field*.

remember, after David had pelted me with rigorous questions about my work, including questions I should have asked and answered in my essay, I asked him, “Will I ever be able to ask questions like you do?” He said dryly, in his Scottish brogue, “I sairtanly houpe so.”

In November of 1998, as my first year of working with David was drawing to a close, he invited me, along with some other students, to visit his home for Sunday supper. We took a bus ten minutes west of town, walked a few leafy blocks, and were greeted by Dr. and Mrs. Cook, who’d prepared a fragrant soup and homemade bread. I was a little nervous to see David outside of tutorials—as supportive as he was of me, he always seemed a little fearsome, so superior was his intellect. After supper, we sat in his parlor on brocade cushions, sipping tea out of little china cups. David stopped the conversation and put me on the spot, asking me to critique my experience of England. “What have been the best and the worst parts of your time here, Olga-Maria?” he asked.

I froze. It was a social setting; I was at the home of the man I’d come to England to study with; I was on my best behavior. At first I stumbled to say something positive, I don’t even remember what. What I do remember was that when he pressed me for the worst part of my experience, I could only say, “Well, I don’t want to be negative.” It seemed like minutes went by with everyone looking at me, waiting for me to be able to offer an honest judgment. Looking back, I know exactly what was going on—David was testing me to see if I had gotten over my sense that negative critique was something nice young ladies didn’t do. And I hadn’t. Yet.

I do remember delighting David one time, when I made a critical assessment of another man who was studying with him, visiting from Texas. This student I’ll call Bob was

not highly complimentary of England or its customs, and when I mentioned this to David he asked why I thought that was so. I said, “Well, Bob’s not just an American, he’s a Texan, and Texas is like its own country. Texans all seem to think that Texas is the only place to live, so it doesn’t surprise me at all he’s unhappy, and I don’t take his comments as having anything to do with England *per se*.” David seemed amused, but I think he was also proud of me for freeing myself just a little from the constraints of polite behavior.

As I studied with David Cook, I was also working at Hawley-Cooke Booksellers, the largest independent bookstore in Louisville, managing the children’s department. My jobs prior had been mostly at clothing retailers, or singing and seating customers at Macaroni Grill. At Hawley-Cooke, I had my first job that felt significant to me—some real responsibility and power. I got to order all the books for my department, whichever titles and quantities I wanted, and I got to display them as I wished, as long as it looked beautiful. We had several themes per month—friendship, travel, grandparents—each with its own wall or table. Also for the first time, I felt I had earned my position: more than just auditioning for a singing gig, this was a job only a grownup could do, a job I got on merit. Not only did I hold a B.A. and a Master’s, but I’d passed a test—the infamous Hawley-Cooke test that included questions like, “In what section of the bookstore would you expect to find a book by: Ansel Adams; Benjamin Spock; Truman Capote, etc.” Also, I had attached to my application a list of all the books I’d read over the past five years. There were at least fifty per year, fiction and

non, plays, and lots of children's books, some in French. I landed an interview on the spot and was hired that day.

The general manager was a woman named Connie, often fierce, sometimes warm, and immensely competent. She appointed me head of a busy department that consisted of two other women, one several years younger than myself and one significantly older. They both seemed to resent me at first, and I later found out they had been working there for years, and had both applied for the manager position. It took me a while to find my feet and win them over. But when I did, we had our own little fiefdom, our own wing of the store, run completely by women.

This pro-woman dominion was only solidified when I started Hawley-Cooke's first Mother-Daughter book club in 1998. The idea came from The Mother-Daughter Book Club, by Shireen Dodson, which had come out the year before and sold well. I got permission from Connie and started inquiring among my regular customers, targeting girls aged ten to twelve. I picked that age group because ten- to twelve-year-old girls are at the height of their confidence, and on the brink of the point where it becomes uncool to be too smart. I had a feeling they would be self-assured enough to speak up in a group, and that they would benefit from the group's affirmation and support.

We started the first week of February 1998, six moms and six daughters, and me as facilitator. For that first meeting, we discussed what we wanted the club to be—their favorite books, the kinds of books they disliked and why. I generated a list of suggested titles: we aimed for books the girls hadn't read before, written by women, with strong female characters

and literary value. I encouraged the girls and moms to talk about the reading before they came to the next meeting.

I had worked it out with Connie that club members would get a discount on the month's book. Some families bought two copies so mom and daughter could both read at the same time; some took turns; some families read the book together aloud. But when it came to our discussion my policy was that the girls talked first—on any question, I wanted all the girls to have an opportunity to speak before we heard from any of the moms. I had the sense that if an adult spoke first, or even if I offered an opinion, it might squelch the enthusiasm of one or some of the girls, or her confidence to offer a different view.

We met monthly, gathering in leather easy chairs around the fireplace near the center of the store, drinking seasonal beverages from the café compliments of the publisher of that month's selection. We had in-depth discussions of wonderful books. I still have the notebook where I prepared my questions: *The main character of E.L. Konigsburg's The Moorchild feels very different from the people around her. Do you think everyone feels different or like they don't belong sometimes? Is everyone different or are feeling and being separate things?* On Carol Fenner's Yolanda's Genius: *Let's talk about the word "genius." What's your definition? What are some different ways to be intelligent? Are there intelligent people you wouldn't find in a book club? What is the role of family in this story? How do you know?*

This was the most significant work I had ever done, and my favorite part of being Children's Department head by far. The most significant thing I'd done up to then, in my mind, was to lead four people to faith in Jesus Christ. Their decision to repent of their sins, trust Jesus and be baptized had eternal value. But here I was changing people's lives by

handing them good books to read; I was helping young girls find community with other readers, a new way of connecting with their mothers and other women role models (including myself), and building their enthusiasm for and skill at reading in an engaged way. This work had tangible results in the here and now.¹⁹

What's more, the book club had special value for me. Since I wasn't allowed any teaching role at church or seminary or its undergraduate Bible College, Hawley-Cooke offered my first foray into teaching. I selected reading options, set boundaries and deadlines, facilitated conversations based on an outline of discussion questions I formulated ahead of time. I developed skill at drawing people out, at listening deeply, at pacing and focusing discussion, and balancing participants' energies. And I loved it. I was good at it. It worked, with very little effort on my part. I was becoming an educator, a different sort of minister, discovering vocation and building confidence and self-esteem, not just in preteen girls, but in myself.

Working at Hawley-Cooke was empowering, and a welcome break from the nearly all-male Baptist seminary. In that way, the bookstore reminded me of the Hebrew class I had two summers before, at the local Jewish community center. I knew Hebrew was coming up for me in school, and although I'd already done well in Spanish, French, German, Italian and Greek, I knew this would be the toughest language, since it had none of the same letters, no punctuation, and was read right to left, the opposite of what I was used to. I decided to get a head start and signed up for a community class, which was made up of women,

¹⁹ In fact, I recently ran into a young woman who was part of that original book club. She is now 21 and graduating with a B.A. in English from a local university and heading to Cambridge University to study for a Master's in Shakespeare. She remembers the book club fondly, recalling easily the names of characters she encountered in the pages of our feminist reading choices.

including some new converts to Judaism, and taught by a woman. There were no tests, no grades, no pressure. We worked toward reading some Psalms. I did well and built my confidence in that more nurturing setting before heading back to my seminary Hebrew classes, taught by men in a competitive, graded environment.

Despite the nurturing, feminist environment at the bookstore, I had some hard days at Hawley-Cooke, too—many days at the beginning when I had to work to earn the respect of the old-timers, and many days throughout that year when I struggled to eat, to have enough energy for both my job and my classwork. But I was proud of my job and proud of myself for doing it; I had a sense that what I was doing was important, and I got to make decisions on my own terms every day.

Though I didn't know it then, my work at Hawley-Cooke and the Mother-Daughter Book Club were steps away from the seminary, steps toward a more enlightened and empowered way of being in the world. In order to climb out of the morass of depression and disordered eating, I needed to *get out*. I needed to get away from the seminary, and away from the Baptist Church. Moving to Oxford to work with David full-time meant leaving the bookstore and my beloved first “students.” It meant stepping out into the unknown. At the time, I didn't see my path for what it was. I couldn't tell that I was beginning to claim my own intellectual life—and my freedom.

CHAPTER SEVEN

OXFORD

Dr. Gushee had told me during my first class at seminary that women were few in the field of Christian ethics; there weren't many women who were scholars at all in Christian evangelical life. We didn't really talk so much about why that was, but it is fairly obvious to me now that women have not been encouraged by that religious establishment to do scholarship of any kind, or to pursue biblical studies in particular. Dr. Gushee was open about trying to find us texts to read in Intro to Ethics that were written by women—it wasn't easy, because there were so few to choose from, apparently, but there were one or two on the recommended reading list. One of the reasons he and other faculty members encouraged me to pursue the Ph.D. in Christian Ethics was because there were so few women in the area. Dr. Walker, Dr. Gushee, Dr. Land (the head of the Christian Life Commission), and others all told me I would be much in demand as a woman ethicist. I could teach and publish, and I would get a lot of attention. I would actually have an easier time standing out in academia, because I would be virtually the only woman.

One of the other draws to the Ethics Ph.D. was that Gushee also said he would supervise my doctoral studies, which would make my transition from the masters to the doctoral program smoother. I would have the continuity of a supervisor who was already my mentor, and we would maybe write some books together, or at least publish an article or two, to get me started. But, within another year, Gushee had left the seminary.

The turnover of faculty of the seminary was high during the late 1990's. Gushee became increasingly unhappy there, partly because so many of his more moderate and liberal friends were being forced out, including women. Just before I arrived, a woman named Molly Marshall had been serving on the Theology faculty. She was the first woman to be tenured at Southern Seminary, but as a feminist theologian, Marshall was something of a lightning rod for those who wanted to close the door on women seeking ministry positions. She was pushed out by Dr. Mohler himself, who claimed that her theology did not match the seminary's Abstract of Principles. Dr. Marshall wrote him an outline of her positions, and when Mohler read it, she was asked to resign.

In the wake of Dr. Marshall's forced resignation, Dr. Gushee told me he was disturbed at the ways women were being increasingly subjugated on campus. I didn't see it that way at the time, and argued that the only women looking for more than they had were looking for too much. Within a few months, Dr. Glen Stassen, the senior ethics professor and Gushee's mentor, had resigned and a semester after that, Gushee left as well. We suddenly didn't have an Ethics department at all, and I suddenly didn't have anyone to study with if I wanted to move forward with the Ph.D.

But the basic class, Intro to Christian Ethics, was required of all students, so the seminary moved quickly to replace Stassen and Gushee. They brought in Ben Mitchell, who was just finishing his doctorate at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. He was and is a wonderful thinker and teacher, and he became a friend and mentor to me. Ben defended his dissertation to great acclaim after his first term at Southern, but because he was such a new faculty member and such a newly-minted Ph.D., he was not yet qualified to supervise

other Ph.D. students. He could serve on my committee, but he could not chair it. So while the Masters' level ethics program was squared away, but the doctoral program was still in limbo. Southern Seminary began to look around for more ethics faculty.

The provost at the time was Dr. Craig Blasing, who found David Cook at Oxford University—Cook is one of the leading biomedical ethicists of Great Britain, and a Baptist. Baptists are rather few and far between in England; as nonconformists with the Church of England, they were not particularly welcome for a long time. Many left for other countries, including America, and those who remain are a distinct minority, particularly on the faculty at Oxford. But because as a Baptist, Dr. Cook was able to affirm the seminary's Abstract of Principles, which every SBTS faculty member must sign, basically swearing they won't teach us any heresy.²⁰ This ensured we could study with Cook and get credit at Southern Seminary. Dr. Blasing created a whole program that brought Dr. Cook to Louisville to work with us for six-week sessions in the summer, and in the fall sent us to England to work with him there.

Because fax and email technologies were newly available, it was also viable to have a long-distance student-supervisor relationship during our months apart. Even when Dr. Cook was in England and we students were in Kentucky, I could send him papers via email and he could email them back with comments (in virtual red ink) or he could print them out, scribble his notes directly on the pages and fax them back to me. This technological assistance was essential to making our program work, and became all the more important when it came time to write the dissertation.

²⁰ See Appendix I.

The chance to work with Dr. Cook added to the drama and excitement of this new chapter of my life. Although I was aware that Southern Seminary's ethics program was hanging on by a thread, I did not consider going elsewhere to study, because they were bringing Oxford to me. Dr. Cook had been promised full supervisory power to create our program of study, and he had guaranteed us that he would hold us to the same rigorous standards of Oxford University; we would do the same work, in the same manner as regular Oxford students.

The seminary also said they would help pay for it, that there would be grant money available for travel, and it was true—I found the cheapest travel option I could for that first semester abroad, and the seminary wrote me the check. I was already on scholarship for most of my tuition, but because I would be on a student visa in England, and not permitted to work, I took out a student loan to help cover living expenses for those years where I would be traveling back and forth overseas and not working.

When he arrived, David Cook asked to see samples of our best writing. His students at that point would be just myself and a man named Phil, with a few other men in the pipeline to join us the following year. I sent Dr. Cook a few of my best papers, and arranged to meet with him after he'd had a chance to read through them. Phil and I were both shaking in our boots a bit. We knew this opportunity would stretch us to a new level, and we weren't at all sure we were ready for it.

Dr. Cook said that in England, even at the undergraduate level, education happens mostly in small-group tutorials (lectures are available but not required, you don't get credit for them). At the graduate level, there are no lectures, and tutorials are one-on-one, so that

each student does her own research and thinking and writing, at her own pace, what today's American educators might call "discovery learning." Students go to the library and read for several days, then generate a weekly essay critiquing the reading, and bring it to tutorial. For us these were twelve- to fifteen-page essays every week, and the standard that these essays should be publishable. Our tutorials were hour-long sessions for which I would bring two copies of my essay—one for myself and one for him. I would read my copy aloud while he made marks on his copy. He would hand it back at the end of the reading and we would discuss his marks and my thinking, and then make a plan for the next week.

Dr. Cook explained that the point was to develop our minds as effectively and efficiently as possible, so that, with Phil and me in the same class, getting the same credit for the same course, we might start out reading the same text but then move on in different directions, to read completely different texts for the rest of term. We would read what texts he selected, on what topics he felt we needed instruction. For example, in a course on Modern Philosophy, we would both likely start out reading Descartes, but depending on what questions arose for me in that reading, I might go on to read Kant or Wittgenstein, and Phil might be reading something else entirely.

In this way our study was individualized in terms of both content and pace. For example at one point, one of my papers was so off-base, Dr. Cook realized we had to go back and do a remedial pre-paper on the foundations of the topic. He had assigned me an essay on postmodern philosophy, but I hadn't understood it well enough, because I had little background in modern philosophy, which the postmodernists were reacting against. I spent the next week studying modernism in order to revise that essay.

We had two kinds of classes with David: seminars and colloquia. In the seminars we read and wrote essays and had private tutorials. Colloquia only took place at Southern, and those were where all the faculty and the students in a given area met weekly to discuss a text—sort of a highly academic book club. Each week, one student presented a chapter. We wrote papers summarizing and critiquing our assigned chapter, made copies for everyone and delivered our paper—we weren't allowed to *read* it, we had to make eye contact and talk *with* our fellow colloquium members—and led a discussion around it. We would be questioned on our understanding of the chapter and might be challenged on any point.

Probably David's greatest challenge in working with us was that we were not great critical thinkers. He made that clear to us fairly immediately. That was when we realized that at the university and the Master's level, we had only been offered content and asked to learn it—we had not been asked to question it. We had not been taught or encouraged to question presuppositions behind various conclusions, or to ask questions regarding what was *not* being presented or whether the way in which the content was presented was fair or thorough. It wasn't that we were incapable of critique, but it wasn't exactly second nature for us to think in this way. I found it completely exhausting, and often discouraging to realize how bad I was at it. I had always been something of an academic superstar; I'd always felt smart and suddenly I felt dumb, on a regular basis. It was not a comfortable feeling.

What had been engrained in me was the acquisition of material—memorize a lot of stuff, spit it out, explain it well, use examples, show how the topic is important, give an application to show how it can be useful—and I was really good at all that. Because in America, the best scholar is the one who “knows her stuff.” But in England, that mattered

so much less. Knowledge was just the beginning—what really mattered was how well you could unpack that “stuff,” how deep you could dig, how many levels of critique you could offer.

What David expected was “depth critique,” that we present a thorough and fair overview of the material, offer our own view on that material. We were to show not only the strengths and weaknesses of the work, but then also what an opposing view would be, as many legitimate alternatives as we could come up with, and the strengths and weaknesses of those, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of our own view. This involved purging ourselves of the arrogance of “knowing our stuff,” and adopting the attitude, “But I don’t know *everything*, and what I do know doesn’t *solve* everything—there’s always more thinking to do.”

By his own questions, David showed us that asking a good question is sometimes the best contribution one can make. Sometimes it’s more valuable in an academic discussion than knowing a whole lot of stuff, to be able to cut through a discussion with an insightful or incisive question. We were constantly to consider what claims we could legitimately make, and on what basis, and what difference does they would make.

He told us about a scholar whose larger contribution may have been not his writings but the questions he posed to challenge the thinking of other academics. As the story goes, Stanley Morgenbesser attended a scholarly presentation made by a colleague, Oxford linguist J.L. Austin who was proposing the thesis that, whereas in English the double negative statement yielded a positive meaning (“I don’t want none” = “I do want some”), the reverse was not the case, that there was no double positive locution that yielded the negative. From

the audience, our hero piped up, “Yeah, right.” If only we could all think so clearly and rapidly. I, for one, held out hope that Oxford tutorials would turn me into this sort of genius.

I first met David in his Southern Seminary office in the summer of 1997. He had looked through my writing sample and was telling me what he thought was strong and what wasn’t quite up to his standard—he was assessing it, trying to discern if I was ready for Oxford-level study—and one of the things he said was that this process was going to change me. I sat there sort of stunned. I had tried to prepare myself mentally for this meeting, but hadn’t thought I’d hear something like this. He said that if I came to England to study with him, I would come back a different person, that the process wouldn’t be easy, and that the return would not be easy either. David said that his program wasn’t about jumping through certain hoops to get a degree—it was about becoming what he calls “a Ph.D. sort of person.” Having a degree gives you certain qualifications, but a “Ph.D. sort of person” is the kind of person who can think critically at the doctoral level on *any* topic, not just her area of expertise. She can ask incisive questions and offer insightful comments, and she can focus on critique and clarity and organization and application no matter what’s on the table. David was saying that I wasn’t that type of person yet, but that if he took me on, he believed I could be. If I did all the assignments he gave me, and worked hard, I would become a Ph.D. sort of person. It sounded immensely daunting.

Dr. Cook also warned me that it would be difficult to return home from Oxford. I would be this different person, thinking in different ways, and I would likely not fit in as I had before. He didn’t spell out specifically what that would look like, so I just basically had to say, “Ok.” That was my response to everything he said in that meeting, essentially: “Ok.”

Nonetheless, he decided to take me on. So I started writing papers for him and reading them to him in tutorials and he scribbled *all* over them with corrections and comments. My students at Bellarmine think I scribble a lot on their papers; they think I'm really demanding and critical, but I learned all that from what David Cook did to my writing. I really learned to write from him. He held me to higher standards of refinement than I knew existed. Split infinitives would give him fits. There could be no second person, no "stage directions"—those phrases like, "let us now consider..."—no dangling prepositions, the proper use of "whom."

Harder to learn was actually how to structure an essay properly in terms of linking ideas, always connecting back to my thesis, always being abundantly clear, making every point abundantly clear for the reader. If there was a question in David's mind that I had not deliberately put there, it was a problem, and he let me know what that question was: *To what does this pronoun refer? In what sense is this term to be taken? To what extent does this judgment hold? How does that idea link to your earlier point? What are you talking about? So what? All down my paper, all through the margins, would appear his manic scribbles—Link? Link? Sense? Sense? SO? Link????? What was my point? And whom did I expect to care?* David had to push me in these ways on every essay I wrote for two years, until I learned to be clear. It was so rigorous as to be painful, and much more demanding than anything I had ever done.

Phil and I flew into London's Gatwick airport on the same day, and met up at the bus station for the hour-plus ride into Oxford. When we pulled into the Oxford bus terminal at Gloucester Green, we could see David jumping out of a tiny blue car, just beaming. In his Scottish brogue he called out, arms spread wide, "Welcome to the dreaming spires!" David

seemed genuinely thrilled to share his Oxford with us, on a glorious, crisp, sunny day, as if he had ordered it up especially for our enjoyment.

He took us on a fast-paced walking tour that was probably a five-mile hike around Oxford, to show us the major colleges and libraries and bookstores. David was especially proud of the enormous Blackwell's Books, comparing its deceptively small footprint to the magic of Narnia—"Come further up! Come further in!" He showed us the plague wall, a bit of Roman road, and places where Protestant martyrs had burned. He took us to a tea shop to teach us to take tea and scones properly—cream first, then jam—and then brought us to Green College, where he was on faculty and where we would be meeting him for tutorials. Green College is one of the newer colleges at Oxford: founded in the 1970's, it serves as the university's medical school.

As David showed Phil and me around the small campus, pointing out offices and dormitories and gardens, he suddenly took off walking across the lawn, still talking. Phil started to follow, but I grabbed his arm before he could leave the path. I told him about the rule at Oxford that only dons (professors) can walk on the grass. David was gone, walking away talking as if we were still with him, but Phil and I were not about to break the rules of this august institution. I still wonder if it was a test, to see how respectful we would be, and to what extent we'd studied the culture before arriving. Finally, David realized we were stuck on the path and called back, "It's all right—you're with me!" Phil and I raced across on tiptoe, gingerly, hoping no one would see.

David also had an assistant of his give us a special session on English etiquette, which was both amusing and informative. She was an American student, who had just completed

her doctorate with him. Her name was Katie, and she was helping David with research and doing some of her own writing at the Whitefield Institute. She filled us in one day on English phone etiquette, going-over-to-people's-houses etiquette, and shopping etiquette. She made it clear that the English care very much about politeness; the absolute worst thing one can do is make someone else feel uncomfortable. The English seem to take great pains to protect each other's feelings, and to perform social niceties in sets of three.

For instance, if a friend invites me to supper some Sunday afternoon, I must offer to bring something to contribute to the meal—and I do need to bring something, the hosts are likely counting on it. So I should offer, saying, “What can I bring?” And the friend will of course reply, “Oh, nothing—just bring yourself.”

Then we are to continue the conversation, and after some time, I am supposed to return to the issue of Sunday supper, saying something like, “I'm so looking forward to our supper; what can I bring? You really must allow me to bring something.” And she'll say, “Oh, no, really—nothing. Everything is taken care of.” And I'm to accept that response and just move on with the general conversation.

Except that I'm also supposed to return, after a few minutes, to reiterate my offer and say something along the lines of, “Can I please at least bring _____?” It can be bread, wine, dessert—but I'm supposed to, at that point, the third time it is mentioned, suggest something specific. “Can I at least please bring a loaf of bread? I know this wonderful baker in the High Street.” And then the response is, “Well, if it's not too much trouble. That would be lovely.”

I found this roundabout line of conversation highly amusing, because I'm a straight-forward, straight-talking American who says "Yes" or "No" and means what she says. I want to say something once and be taken seriously and then, let's move on. I don't want to play games. I was a little skeptical when Katie told us all this—I found it hard to believe that people needed such an elaborate ritual in order to put together a party without hurting someone's feelings. But she said it was the same with phone conversations.

In terms of ending a phone conversation, again, it cannot be either direct or abrupt. If I really have to hang up at a certain time, it is not enough to mention after a while, "I only have ten more minutes." Instead, about ten minutes before I *really* have to go, I say: "It's been so great talking to you—I can't wait to see you..." And then the conversation continues, for a few more minutes. Until I say, "It's been lovely talking with you; I really must go."

But then the conversation still has to continue. There has to be some space between each of the attempts at, or movements toward, goodbye. There have to be three goodbyes, really—and only after the third are you really allowed to hang up. Or walk away—the same rules apply when you're talking in person. Otherwise you're being quite rude. It feels too abrupt, like there's not been proper closure. It feels like you're hanging up on the person. And that's how English people will take it: *Those rude Americans, who say what they mean the first time! She said she was going and there she goes: How dare she? Come back here and say goodbye to me two more times!*

I thought it was fairly absurd, but I tried to remember and use her advice throughout my stay. Even funnier to me was Katie's advice on shopping. It's better when you act it out, but here goes:

Let's say that you are a shopkeeper and I enter your shop on a lovely morning to look around and make a purchase of a pair of fine linen tea towels. As I come up to the till (the cash register), I place the tea towels before you and say, "*Thank you.*" You pick them up, saying, "*Thank you.*" (Never "thank you"—that would be American.)

Then you tell me it will cost "Five pounds sixpence, thank you." And I say, "*Thank you.*" Just for giving me that valuable information.

I hand you six pounds (placing them in your hand, not on the desk) and say, "Thank you." You say, "Thank you," as you take the money. Then you count out my change and place it in my hand, with a "Thank you." I take it with yet another "Thank you." This is all we need say to one another, or are likely to say—since we don't know each other, we don't have to chat about the weather, or the lovely pattern on the tea towels. But our interaction is far from over. Because you wrap up my tea towels, place them in a bag and hand it to me, and you say, "Thank you." As I take the bag, I say, "Thank you." And as I walk out the door, I say, "Thank you." And you say, "Thank you."

At every point of the exchange there must be mutual thanks expressed. It's funny to learn about, but what's really hysterical is when you go in a store and actually do it. You can have a whole, two-minute interchange of unending thank-you's. If you were coming from a country like Japan, all the English you would need to go shopping would be "thank you." You don't even need to be able to count change—the English are so ethical, you can just hold out money and they will take the proper amount right from your hand.

I had been terrified to go overseas to begin with, because I am a Shy Girl, the kind who doesn't really even like to leave the house to go to the grocery, especially if I have to talk to anybody. How I love the new automated checkout counters! Others may decry the depersonalization of the shopping experience, but if I can select my items and pay for them and get out without having to engage with strangers, sometimes that is exactly what I need. Those machines are a godsend to the shy and the eating-distressed.

So I was nervous to go to even an English-speaking country because it would be different from what I knew, and I would have to find my way alone sometimes. But my colleague Phil would be with me, and Dr. Cook took care of a lot of things for us both.

For one thing, David made sure we had some pounds with us before we left the States—not just traveler's checks, because the exchange rate was lousy and the dollar was starting to lose value. He split the exchange rate with us and got us a good deal on some pounds so that we wouldn't have to cash checks at the airport in order to pay for bus fare to Oxford. He set us up in a modest but beautiful house about a mile outside of Oxford in a suburb called Botley. David regularly brought American students to Oxford for study abroad, and they stayed at the Botley House. When Phil and I were first there, no one else was sharing the house, so we each took a separate wing and enjoyed spreading out alone in rooms that were designed for two, and having our own bathrooms. A few weeks later, we would be displaced by nine junior-year women from Gordon College in Massachusetts. For them, the house would be cozy if not crowded. For us, it felt like luxurious space, especially for me, used to living in a single room.

Phil and I had a good time together on this trip. We hadn't been friends so much as acquaintances before. He'd been my grader in one M.Div. class, and he'd been tough, so I hadn't really been a fan. But we enjoyed exploring the house and the town during our first few days. One of the first things we noticed was that the Botley House windows had no screens. This is typical in England, for some reason. But the bugs fly fairly slowly, so I had no trouble killing dozens of them in the first week. I kept a list in my journal for a while, I felt so brave. As a child I had screamed at the sight of any insect and called for a grown-up to come rescue me. Now I was a bona fide adult myself, swatting my own bees and mosquitoes.

The Botley House had a beautiful little kitchen, and an apple tree in the backyard. One day, we picked all the apples that had just come ripe, and I proudly made an all-American apple pie out of English apples. There was a little shopping center nearby, with a grocery store, several small restaurants, a branch bank, and a thrift store. Phil and I arrived in August, and it was just freezing cold that year. I was always shaking. I bought a hat and gloves and an ankle-length navy wool coat at that thrift store, for the equivalent of about twelve dollars—such a great deal. It was a little moth-eaten, and I had to replace the buttons, but that was easy. It was warm and I needed it.

The Botley House had a small TV in the living room, with four channels, each duller or stranger than the previous one. The first week we were there, we'd been hanging out with some of David's research assistants at the Whitefield Institute who were our age, and they came back to the Botley House after dinner, and turned on the "telly." There was this story being reported, in horrified tones, that Mad Cow Disease had been found in British sheep.

I couldn't understand the shock and fear with which the story was clearly affecting the reporters and our English friends.

"What's the big deal?" I asked, "No one eats sheep." Everyone just looked at me.

"We had mutton for dinner—what do you think that is?" Ok.

In America, we don't eat sheep, or not so much. I think I had tried a bite of lamb before, but couldn't stomach the idea of eating a sweet woolly lambkin.

Oxford City is completely walkable, with a simple layout, so Phil and I quickly found our way around town, and even learned to negotiate the buses to get where we needed to go. I remember Phil's cheeky boast after about two weeks: "We *own* this town!" We cooked for ourselves and had friends from the Institute over, and visited with them as well. We also visited a few churches together.

One of my goals was to plug into a church, to get involved and make real friends. I knew it wouldn't make sense to *join* a church when I would only be in the area for a few months out of the year, but I very much wanted to be connected to a spiritual community. David took Phil and me to his Baptist church, but I found it really dull. I had two other churches I already knew I wanted to visit: Christ Church Cathedral and St. Aldates.

So, the first weekend we were in Oxford, Phil and I made our way to Christ Church, where the gate is guarded by two older men in bowler hats, and asked to see the schedule of preachers in the cathedral, as we were interested in hearing Canon O'Donovan. They told us he was preaching that very morning, and the service was about to start. We hurried into the Christ Church cathedral, unable to even notice its architectural grandeur in our

excitement to hear the preacher. The congregation sat in the choir stalls, two long rows of elaborately carved wooden seats facing in toward each other, and the worship style was strikingly formal—not only using the classic liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer, but chanting the prayers. The sermon was amazing, but hampered somewhat in that Dr. O'Donovan was preaching from an elevated pulpit on our side of the aisle, so we couldn't see him at all, which felt odd.

After the service, I wanted to speak to him, but Phil was too shy. He came with me, though, and I approached O'Donovan and stuck out my hand like a good American and introduced us. I said, "Hi, Dr. O'Donovan. I'm Olga-Maria Cruz, and this is Phil Gloyer and we're doctoral ethics students under David Cook. We've just been reading Resurrection and the Moral Order this summer, and we're so excited to meet you." He was so kind as to invite us to attend his lectures that term on "Loving God and Neighbor." We were thrilled; I went to one, and it was brilliant.

David sometimes mentioned that O'Donovan was so intelligent that it made him kind of zany and weird and eccentric, but I thought David was himself somewhat zany and weird and eccentric. In fact, every once in a while, if I was doing fairly well in a tutorial, I'd say, "So, am I getting smarter? How smart do I have to be before I get to be eccentric?" Real geniuses are like that—we cut them all kinds of slack. Artists, and intellectuals, and researchers, if they've made some extraordinary contribution or they're super-innovative in their thinking, they don't even have to wash. They can wear draperies and eat grilled cheese sandwiches with chopsticks. That was my goal in life, to get so smart I could be eccentric.

St. Aldates is right across the street from Christ Church, and their services start a half-hour later. So, walking back from Christ Church, we heard a lot of fun, contemporary music and singing coming out of Aldates. I made Phil sneak in late with me.

One thing that happens toward the beginning of every Sunday morning at Aldates is that they have a moment for the children. The children's minister brings all the children forward to lead the congregation in some songs with accompanying hand motions. Then they have a prayer and the little ones go off for "children's church," their own worship service. I understand now that this is not an unusual practice in many denominations, but I had never seen it before. As family-friendly as Southern Baptist churches try to be, they usually have parents just drop off their children directly into childcare, and the families are rarely in worship together.

This morning, Aldates was holding an entire worship service dedicated to children. When Phil and I walked in, the songs were wrapping up and the sermon was beginning—but a dozen children were on the platform with the minister, acting out a Bible story he was telling. The whole congregation was laughing, engaged and connected—all through the time we were there, through the preaching and the singing and the prayers, I got a sense of the spirit of that community that made me more than eager to come back for more.

At the end of service, one announcement invited "freshers" and other new students to a special service that coming Thursday evening; I had never heard an announcement given from the pulpit that felt so genuine. After that day, I was never absent from a service at St. Aldates for the rest of my visit that year and the next. There were morning and evening services on Sundays and evening services just for students on Thursdays, a program called

“Risky Living” that focused on living one’s faith as a student. The idea behind the name was that it was a risk to be “out” as a Christian at Oxford, where the emphasis is on being brainy and skeptical. The “Risky” program was held in a hall in a church building just across the street from the sanctuary building. The hall had a kitchen, which allowed for a low-cost meal to be served each week. Every Thursday during term, students gathered for a healthy, hot dinner for less than £2 (cooked and served by students—everyone took a turn helping, myself included) and then a mini-worship service with student-led music and a sermon by the new student minister, Simon Ponsonby.

Simon’s father was a butcher, and he looks like a butcher’s boy—he’s a big, sturdy man. He is from Bristol, and his accent is more working-class than some accents you hear in Oxford, but of course, he’s highly educated, with a Master’s degree in Theology, like every minister. I fell for Simon right away, for his warmth and self-deprecating humor. I looked up to Simon, and at the same time, I wanted to encourage him. So many of my friends back home were in the same position as he was when I met him, moving into a new ministry position, finding their way with a new staff and congregation, new expectations and responsibilities. Coming from seminary, where all my friends were ministers, I felt I could understand and support Simon and his lovely wife, Tiffany, in a special way.

I felt a little removed at first from the undergraduates at Aldates, and I wasn’t sure I belonged at Risky Living. I was at least ten years older than the other students, but I *was* still a student, and this was a student ministry. So I went to Risky every week of Michaelmas term in 1998 and ‘99. Phil wasn’t really interested. He was focused on working through the

seminar quickly and getting back home to his wife, while I was focused on making friends, because he'd be leaving me on my own soon.

One aspect of the Risky Living gathering that I found surprising and really wonderful was that the whole ministry team of St. Aldates participated. John and Sue Chorlton were there; the vicar, David MacInnes, was there (adoringly referred to by most folks as David Mac); the children's minister was there; the music minister was there—they interacted with everyone, sharing dinner with us, each at a different table. They were equally enthusiastic in welcoming new and returning students, whether incoming freshmen or visiting and exchange students from all over the world. I'd never seen anything like it, and the spirit of hospitality and love that I observed reinforced in me the knowledge that God is everywhere, and God's people are everywhere. Clearly, I wouldn't be lonely at Aldates, and neither would anyone else, no matter how far from home.

After dinner, everyone worked together to move the tables away, rearrange the chairs in rows, and we had some worship music and prayer and Simon gave a talk. Then we sang and prayed some more, and when it was over, we cleaned everything up together. And then everyone without a crushing load of essays to write was headed to the pub.

That night, the group was headed out to a pub called The Mitre—rather a famous one, mentioned in Dorothy Sayers' Gaudy Night and other novels. Now, among Southern Baptists there is no drinking. Drinking is in the same category with dancing and gambling and smoking and cursing—we just don't do it. Jesus wouldn't like it. It doesn't glorify Him; it doesn't lead to anything good; it's not up for discussion. I'd been living in Louisville for years at this point, a very Catholic town, where drinking and gambling were hardly sins for

most people, but I had never been around it. I had never been to a bar. But my new English friends assured me that bars and pubs were different. You go to bars to dance and pick people up, they said; you go to pubs to chat with your friends, like coffee shops in America. I was having a good time with these people and wanted to know them better; I did not want them to think I was a prudish, Puritanical type, and I figured, “When in Rome, you can at least go where the Romans go.” And the vicars were all coming. So I went along.

We walked in chatty groups, probably twenty of us in all, down the dark streets a few blocks to the Mitre. And when we got there, the whole front room was actually full of vicars. There was a big picture window, a fireplace, tables and chairs and a dozen or more vicars, male and female, in their little white ‘dog-collars’. Drinking beer. In full view of the street and any passers-by. I was shocked. I was just trying to get used to the idea of Christians drinking, but the notion of pastors drinking, and in public, was utterly bizarre. It was nothing anyone from my church or seminary would ever do. Southern Baptist’s don’t even drink wine at communion, just little shots of grape juice.

It took about a year for me to decide that alcohol *per se* was not evil, only its abuse, and to recognize that none of the folks from Aldates was abusing drink. In future weeks, the group wandered over to The Three Goats’ Heads pub, and then to The Angel and Greyhound. One night I saw a guy at a pub wearing a t-shirt that said, “Beer is evidence that God loves us and wants us to be happy. -Benjamin Franklin.” I was struck by the fact that the quote was from a lowly “colonist.” My new friends wanted to share their joy of proper English beer with me, and sometimes urged me to taste one of their “pints.” I never liked

the taste, but I went along and enjoyed the company. Simon taught me to order club soda with lime cordial. Lame, I know.

As much as I loved it there, I couldn't actually join St. Aldates Church, for a couple of reasons. For one thing, they were a little charismatic, meaning (for one thing) they liked for people to speak in tongues, which is not in any tradition or spiritual practice that I understand, to this day. I was skeptical of its authenticity and value, and felt uncomfortable around the practice. It definitely highlighted the differences between my and their theology of the Holy Spirit. Primarily, though, my inability to join Aldates came down to two factors. First, I am a Baptist, not an Anglican, and I would have had to change denominations and go through a new ceremony to become Anglican, which, even if I wanted to do, would no doubt be problematic in terms of my standing at the Baptist seminary. Second, I was only staying in England for a few months out of the year, really just for the Michaelmas terms in 1998 and '99, so it wouldn't make sense to move my membership.

Some folk at Aldates suggested I might want to visit the one Baptist church in town, which was David Cook's church. I did visit, but compared to Aldates, it was boring. There weren't many students, there wasn't the same degree of warmth or humor, and I did not feel the spirit of God so powerfully there. At Aldates, I swear, even if you're not a Christian, you can't escape the feeling that God is right there. I know because I've asked people who are not Christians who have attended with me. They tend to say something like, "Oh, I'm sure there is a God, and whatever God is, it's here right now." I stayed actively involved at St. Aldates all the time I was in Oxford.

One of the most significant elements during my studies at Oxford came, not surprisingly, through the books I was reading. In the course of my ethics studies, David had me read a book called Natural Law, Natural Rights by John Finnis, a preeminent natural law scholar and former Oxford don who now teaches at the University of Notre Dame. We were exploring various theories of ethics, and I had not studied natural law theory before. I read Natural Law, Natural Rights in the library, and found it so gripping I went right out to buy my own copy.

Finnis' thesis builds on the work of Aristotle in exploring the central question of ethics for the ancient Greeks—What is the good life for human beings? Finnis' answer is that the good life for human beings is one of flourishing (my favorite translation of the Greek term, *eudaimonia*) which involves doing well, being well, and being in good relationship with others and with the divine. The image of flourishing includes the notion of productivity, and it includes both the individual and the community. One of Aristotle's famous quotes is, "Man is a political animal," or as one might now translate it, "People are social beings." According to this view, humans exist in relation to one another, and we seem to need those social connections and interactions in order to do well and be well.

Finnis notes that in order for communities to flourish, their constituent individual members must also flourish; likewise, for individuals to flourish fully, they must be part of flourishing communities. This is not to say that a struggling community is the death of its

citizens, but the citizens will not do as well, or be as well when their communities are, for instance, marked by failed industries and foreclosed homes, as is the case in so many American communities at the time of this writing. Also included in this theory is the idea that, because each individual makes his or her own contribution to the society, a community is only flourishing to the extent that its members are—an ill or unhappy or illiterate member, for example, is a drain on the community, and is not contributing what he or she could do, so the community will suffer a lack, along with the individual.

How we achieve flourishing, Finnis says, comes down to promoting seven basic human goods: life, knowledge, friendship, play, aesthetic experience, spiritual experience, and what he calls “practical reasonableness,” which essentially means making your own decisions, on your own terms, for your own reasons. Along with other natural law theorists, Finnis says full flourishing is impossible without at least the first three basic goods. Each of these pursuits is intrinsically good: it’s just good to know things, to have a friend, to be pleased by beauty, to nurture your own life and spirit. The focus is not on the outcome of activities, not on moral or religious rules to obey. Rather, the focus becomes promoting one’s own flourishing, and the flourishing of others. These goods are also universals, in that every culture and every individual participates in, protects, and promotes them in their own way.

My mother and brother have no real spiritual experience to speak of, but they freely choose that way of life, on their own terms, for their own reasons. In my view though, my family is not flourishing as it might were they more spiritually awake. Someone else may have a strong spiritual experience, but be in a cult, or a religion that is far more restrictive than the Baptist church was in my life—the women in the Fundamentalist Mormon church, for

instance. Are they freely choosing their mode of dress, sexual behaviors, or education on their own terms for their own reasons? I don't think so. I think they have been handed a set of reasons, by a group of men who hold all power over their women's lives. When one has no practical reasonableness, no liberty in the areas Finnis outlines—aesthetics, knowledge, friendship, play, etc.—then there can be no real flourishing. It's not enough to be spiritually engaged.

The more I read about these ideas, and the further I unpacked Finnis' argument for my paper that week, the harder it became for me to avoid a personal application, the fact that I myself was not flourishing, and hadn't been for a long time. This text also showed me why: when I didn't eat well, I was not only neglecting the most basic good, life, but I couldn't enjoy any of the other goods either.

I found Finnis' concept of "practical reasonableness" particularly striking. The idea of making my own decisions on my own terms for my own reasons was still a new one for me. I had ceded so much of my decision-making capacity to other people: I had let my seminary professors tell me what to think theologically. I had let my pastors tell me how to practice my spirituality. I had let my friends and mentors shape my social modes of being, my look, my dress, my language, far more than was necessary for basic social acceptance. The loss of my father at such a young age, and my subsequent joining such a restrictive and prescriptive church community, precluded a lot of decision-making in many areas of my life and continued to diminish my sense of self. I had started by making small choices, like how to color my hair, and they made me freer, stronger, with a clearer sense of identity.

Finnis' book makes no comment with regard to eating disorders, but it was clear to me then as now that proper nutrition is required to pursue the basic good of Life. People who make a habit of neglecting their nutrition, as anorectics do, are trying either to live *against* life, which won't work for long, or actively if subconsciously trying to die. This was not news, even to me then, but I hadn't thought about my condition from this angle. Suddenly, I wanted to be flourishing. I had more to live for; I stopped thinking about wanting to die; I wanted to grow intellectually, to use all my gifts and enjoy them.

I wanted to fulfill the promise that David Cook saw in me.

As difficult as it still was sometimes just to put food in my mouth, as much effort as it required to go out and find food or prepare it, I was freshly inspired to have energy for my work, and I was likewise inspired to try some new types of cuisine that were available to me in England. Now, the phrase "English cuisine" may be something of a joke, but I did discover custard, and Yorkshire pudding, and best of all, Indian food.

My friend Cassa introduced me to Indian fare, at an adorable little restaurant on the Cowley Road that she described as "cheap and cheerful"—so cheap, in fact, we had to bring our own beverages. She invited a whole crew of friends and ordered for all of us: papadoms, crispy Indian flatbreads accompanied by complex dipping sauces; basmati rice with mysterious spices and golden raisins; chicken, lamb, and veggies in various curry sauces. We started with the mildest curries, korma and marsala, and then had Kashmiri naan bread for dessert, a soft flatbread stuffed with raisins, cherries, and coconut. It was a feast. Everything was incredibly fragrant and savory. All the flavors were new to me, but, I think because Cassa

was so lovely, as were our friends and our servers, I was not intimidated by the unfamiliarity of it all. Instead, I reveled in each new sensation. I still reckon it one of the best meals of my life.

I also had occasion to eat at the homes of several English friends, including Cassa, where I got to try some classic English dishes, like Yorkshire pudding, custard, and the Cornish pasty, which rhymes with “nasty,” but isn’t. Cassa herself hails from Cornwall, but the pasty is easily found all over England as a popular street food. The pasty is similar to a calzone in shape and concept, but the filling is more like a stew. It is a hearty food, and easy to eat on the go, with one hand and no utensils. You can get them filled with vegetables, or any meat. I fell in love too with fruited scones and cream, which I would pick up for £1.50 at the Covered Market. “Fruited” means the scones have dried currants and raisins inside, and “cream” means it comes with a thick layer of fresh clotted cream inside, usually with some sort of jam or preserves on top as well.

And yet the most dramatic experience of my life came at St. Aldate’s church in my second year in Oxford. I had been struggling with depression ever since my father’s death, fifteen years earlier. I’d tried reading books on depression. I’d been to maybe a dozen different counselors. I’d tried Prozac and Paxil, to very little effect. My mood would be slightly more stable when I was busy and feeling secure—physically and emotionally safe—which is why seminary had been so good for me. But there had not been a day, not a single

day since he died, that I wanted to live. Every day, even though I was enjoying academic success, even though I had friends, even though I probably looked like I was fine, I would have preferred to be dead. I thought about ending my life every time I got behind the wheel of a car, every time I saw a bottle of pills, every time I saw a bridge. Even taking a bath made me think about dying. Until the fall of 1999, when God healed me of depression.

Now, I had prayed for healing plenty. Pastors and Christian friends had prayed with me; I'm sure dozens if not hundreds had prayed for me to be healed of depression and anorexia, behind my back as it were. But all God had done up to that point was get me through one day at a time. Which was fine. I wasn't complaining, at least not publicly. Privately, however, I was probably giving Him a hard way to go. My prayer journals of those years are full of imprecatory Psalms imploring God to "sustain" me, restore me, renew me.

Baptists and other evangelicals like to imagine the Bible is written just for them, that whatever they want, they can have if they ask in Jesus' name—there's a verse that says so. So, they will "claim" some verse as a personal "promise" to them from God. They'll just ask for that thing over and over until they get it. A Scripture I frequently "claimed" was Joel 2:25—"I will repay you for the years the locust has eaten." My idea was that depression and anorexia had eaten up the best years of my life, and that therefore, God owed me. Or at least that if He loved me, He would naturally want to heal me and make up to me the years that felt lost. After all, God had the power to heal my depression without medicine or counseling.

I took some comfort in knowing that I was not the only faithful believer to be thus afflicted—Charles Spurgeon, The Prince of Preachers, suffered from depression, as did Jonathan Edwards' wife, Sarah Pierpont. But I had been suffering long enough, I thought.

So I continually prayed for relief from this invisible, internal suffering. I was somewhat ashamed to be depressed; there is still a stigma attached to mental disorders, especially within the evangelical community, where the “health and wealth gospel” (the idea that God loves us and wants us to be thriving physically and financially) is still prominent.

One of my favorite passages from the Psalms was 91.1-4:

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High

Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. ...

He will cover you with His feathers,

And under His wings you may seek refuge.

I had a prayer book that was given to me by a dear friend when I graduated college, called “Prayers that Avail Much.” It was full of Bible-based prayers already written out with little blanks where you could fill in the names of people you were praying for. One I used so much I had it memorized was based on Psalm 91, and included the line, “I abide under the shadow of the Almighty, whose power no foe can withstand.”

In the second or third week I returned Oxford that fall, the Aldates’ worship team introduced a new song with the refrain, “Lord, I hide in the shadow of your wings.” As we sang it fervently that Sunday night, five hundred strong, hands raised in the air, I felt the Holy Spirit come over me. Not *in* me, He was already there, but over me, hovering, as if with wings that covered my head. God was always moving at Aldates’ worship; He had spoken to me on occasion, had moved me many times, but never come this near, never in a way that was so close to a physical reality.

Standing there, I kept my hands raised to God, but stopped singing. I just breathed in the presence of the Almighty, whose power no foe can withstand. And I felt, again as if physically, God lift my depression from me. People will commonly use the metaphor, “a weight lifted off my shoulders,” or “that’s a weight off my mind,” but this felt literal. I felt not euphoria but an ease, a peace that reached all the way through me. Suddenly there was a warm, open space where the pain had been. And I had the clear sense that it was really gone, gone forever. It did not feel in the least like a mood swing. It felt like an genuine change, one that no one but God had accomplished.

I called my mother the next day to tell her the news. She is not a believer, so I didn’t expect her to understand what had happened, but I knew she would be able to tell the difference in my demeanor, even over the phone. Mom said, “That’s great, sweetie. You sound good. You hang on to this feeling and remember it next time you get down.”

I said, “Mom, you don’t understand. There isn’t going to be a next time.”

“That’s a wonderful attitude, honey. You hang on to that.”

But I was right. There has not been a next time. In the past eleven years, I have finally experienced emotional normalcy; I have finally been able to grasp what people meant when they have said to me, “Just let it go,” or “Let it roll off you, like water off a duck’s back.” Before, if someone or something hurt my feelings or upset me, it would ruin my day, maybe a few days or a week. After the Aldates experience, nothing bothers me for more than a few hours. Even the death of a friend or other more seriously disappointing or upsetting news will not affect me half as much as it used to, and no negative mood lasts as long.

As I noted earlier, Dr. Cook had warned me that it would be hard to come back to Louisville from my time in England, that Oxford would change me. I think part of what he meant was that if I became a critical thinker, I wouldn't be able to take my own culture at face value anymore; I wouldn't be able to take sermons in church at face value anymore. I wouldn't be able to read a text and not critique it. I would be a questioner, which I had never been before—I would be one of those people who pick things apart. Which would likely be uncomfortable sometimes for me and for other people around me, especially if I voiced those questions and critiques. And all that happened.

The other way in which he was right to say that it would be hard to come back was that I had been taken seriously in England. It hadn't mattered that I was a woman. I had been able to have all sorts of interesting conversations with all sorts of people, had been free to put forth a view about anything, and if I could support it, I was listened to. I could ask anybody any question and they wouldn't ignore me or tell me or hint to me that it was inappropriate for me to be questioning them. No one had or tried to have any authority over me, spiritually or intellectually.

I remember a conversation with a terrifically brilliant undergraduate—a physics student who explained black holes to me, of all things. He was a Christian of Jewish heritage who was attending Aldates; one of the recent sermons had come from an Old Testament text and he wanted to know more about it. The other vicars couldn't help him so much, because their seminary preparation focuses more on in-depth research of one topic, rather

than broad education on a range of topics, as I had received at Southern. So he ended up asking me, and, along with some other friends, we had a long conversation about prophecy and the Hebrew Scriptures. This led to a long conversation the following week, about science and faith and black holes. It was perfectly comfortable and mutual—there was never an issue about who was what age or gender, who had what marital status or politics. Oxford was a community where ideas and facts and theories and interpretations were very important, exciting and to be shared, and conversation was a game everyone was invited to play.

This intellectual community I found in England was another factor that made it difficult to come back to seminary and the Louisville-area churches. The chauvinistic and parochial attitudes that had bothered me somewhat before I left became almost unbearable upon my return. Coming home to Southern, I was back to being treated as a second-class citizen. I had had so many friends in Oxford, too, mostly through my involvement in St. Aldates church, and it seemed there was always someone ready to meet up with you, to share a meal, or hang out. It had been that way in my own undergraduate days: whenever you had free time, there were other people who did too. When I came back to seminary, though, being in the doctoral program and not in classes, I was on my own most of the time.

I also missed Oxford as a place. I missed all the little shops and bookstores and restaurants, I missed the clanging church bells and the stony architecture and even the weather. It was a loss all the way around for me—socially, spiritually, intellectually. And I was indeed different, as David Cook had said I would be. I was a more critical thinker, more informed about philosophy. I was significantly happier, no longer struggling with depression, eating better. But I was also lonelier, and, in some ways, less contented.

I don't know that David Cook could have predicted the emotional changes or the spiritual growth I would experience in Oxford, but he was dead on with his prediction that I would struggle in returning to the seminary as a more critical thinker. But studying with David made me who I am today: I was already most of me before I went, but now I am more of myself. I see it most in my own teaching. What I bring to the university classroom—intellectual rigor, respect for differing viewpoints, the ability to construct clear argument and polished sentences so that I can teach my students to do the same—all came from David Cook. David taught me to write; David taught me to think; Finnis and St. Aldates taught me to celebrate, to enjoy my life and my spirit. Whatever the challenges of Oxford, both going and returning, having gone has been well worth it.

CHAPTER EIGHT

GENDER AND FEMINISM

One day in my first year at the seminary, I was taken out to lunch by Mary Mohler, the President's wife. She took another seminarian, Stefana, and me out to the Uptown Café on Bardstown Road. Stefana and I both ordered vegetarian entrees, and Mrs. Mohler was shocked. She commented, "Now you girls know that you're never going to find a husband unless you eat meat, or at least cook meat. You know, men eat meat."

I would have said, when I first came to Southern Seminary, that I was a feminist already. I chose Southern, in fact, partially because there were more women faculty members than at any of the other six Southern Baptist seminaries. But in the first year I was there, when the Carver School collapsed, most of the women faculty and students left. Most of the women had taught in social work; some remained in education or music, very few in the School of Theology, and most of these were lost to attrition over the next few years.

I think I was indeed a feminist to the extent that I believed women deserve education and the right to vote and equal pay for equal work. I wanted to see women in leadership, on faculty and administration. But at that point, I had been a Christian for only four years—I was new to the church, to its history and its gender politics. I had no knowledge of the modern history of the church or the Southern Baptist denomination; I didn't know anything about the context, the politics, even the terminology involved. I was not even always clear

between right-wing and left-wing positions. I was not aware that there were denominations or churches that were more liberal or conservative, or that those labels entailed certain ideas about women or sex or homosexuality. In fact, I barely knew what homosexuality was. I just knew that I was a Baptist, so I should go to a Baptist seminary. And they seemed happy to have me—I felt completely welcome. What I couldn't see was the very thick glass ceiling hanging above me, and the thick glass walls all around. A glass cage.

I think I first became aware of those walls in Louisville, as I was looking for a church where I could serve. But my first glimpse of life outside the glass cage came when I went abroad to study at Oxford. In the second month of my study, the church I was attending, St. Aldates, confirmed a woman as a priest. I went to the “priesting” ceremony out of curiosity, but with a negative bias. My assumption had been that women who pursued the pastorate or priesthood must be ball-busters, what Rush Limbaugh called “femi-Nazis,” women who hated and opposed men altogether. I remember feeling uncomfortable, therefore, sitting in the service, as if I was seeing something I shouldn't approve of theologically. But the ceremony itself was unremarkable, and the new priest (I'll call her Jane) seemed unremarkable as well. But we spoke afterward at the reception and she invited me to tea the next day.

We met at St. Aldates' new coffee shop, two doors down from my rented room, and over a pot of peppermint tea, Jane explained to me that women's formal service in ministry was not at all a new thing. She asked if I had learned anything at seminary about the contributions of women in my two masters'-level courses on the history of the church. I had

not. Other than the fact that Augustine's mother was a Christian woman named Monica, women had not been mentioned in my church history class.

Jane told me that a woman had founded St. Aldates church; that another woman had founded St. Ebbe's, the more conservative congregation two blocks to the north; and that Christ Church College's cathedral was dedicated to a woman—as was Oxford City itself—its patron saint, St. Frideswide, whose priory later became the church, and whose prayers had reputedly turned away the black plague. The Wesley Memorial Church, on New Inn Hall Street, had been famously founded by John and Charles Wesley, but they were greatly assisted in their ministries by their sister Susanna. Jane recommended I read a book called *This Female Man of God*, by Gillian Cloke, a church history scholar. She said it would help fill in some of the gaps in my education about the role of women in the church. I hadn't read many theological texts by women, and none in church history. I did find the book in the Oxford library—in the Radcliffe Camera, the famous round library you see in movies—and it was fairly amazing. I went out and bought my own copy the next week at Blackwell's.

Cloke focuses on the women of the “patristic” age, her main research question being, during the age of the so-called Church Fathers (4th-5th century), what were Christian women doing? She finds that they were doing a surprising lot, often turning their backs on social norms, and sacrificing immense fortunes, and even family, in order to love and serve Christ. In fact, most of those Church Fathers were surrounded by numbers of these “holy women,” often financially supported by them, sometimes taking them on as students of Scripture, biblical languages and theology. St. Jerome, who translated the Bible into Latin, was one of these men, and he admitted that some of his female students knew Hebrew as well as he did.

It was Melania the Elder, a student of the scholar Rufinius, who was referred to as a “female man of God.” Her faith and service were acknowledged to be as robust as any man’s.

Some of what I learned from Cloke I used in my next essay for David, on the role of women in the church. I focused on the full giftedness of women, on the positive aspects of all they could do and be, based on the authority not just of the Bible but of the history of the church. It was my first triumph in a tutorial—David had no real criticism for me at all—I had left no point inadequately explained or supported. His only comment was, “You left out the Incarnation.”

“What?”

“The Incarnation—some people would argue that when God came to earth, He chose to be a man.”

“So?”

“So you should address that. God chose to be a man.”

“If God incarnated as a woman in those days, no one would have paid any attention to her.”

I dismissed the Incarnation as a problem, because I didn’t think it limited women in any way. If Dr. Cook had no other point of critique for me, I was a big star.

Being at Oxford had been extraordinary on so many levels, not the least of which was the freedom of being treated like an equal. But when I came back to seminary, there was

the glass cage again. There were the men who would hold conversations literally over my head, talking across to one another, never looking down for any contribution I had to offer. I was also suddenly more aware of, and offended by, the existence of the Seminary Wives Institute. The Seminary exists, for the most part, not for scholarship per se, but to train men for positions in ministry. The bulk of these men will be pastors, or missionaries, music or youth ministers; they need training and ordination, but they also need suitable wives. Single seminarians are continually under a great deal of pressure to get married. The pressure came from everywhere—from churches, from professors, from friends, from the administration—and I saw some men almost crack under it.

My friend Sam, for instance, among others, was slightly older coming to seminary, in his early 30s maybe, and had never married. He had been a lawyer before receiving God's call to ministry, and had been too busy to find a girl and settle down. Sam was a wonderful man, courtly and polite, reserved but warm, with a ready laugh and a strong handshake. Sam was also in the Ph.D. program in Theology. He wanted to pastor a church, and he would have been wonderful. But Sam, like so many other single men, could not find a church that would hire him as pastor. No man would be hired without a wife, not even for a part-time ministry while he was in school, which was part of the expectation for all seminary students. Some of the brightest, sweetest, most godly men I'll ever know couldn't even get assigned a Sunday School class, solely because they weren't married. If you're not married, the message essentially is, *You're a loose cannon, sexually—you're too dangerous, too much of a risk. We don't trust you*—even though the bulk of church sex scandals are perpetrated by married men.

I was constantly under similar pressure myself, as were all unattached women students. It was at the seminary that I first heard the joke that women came to school to earn their “Mrs. degrees.” Pretty much anyone you met at seminary or church—someone’s mother, or a visiting trustee—felt free to ask you if you were married, or engaged, or seeing anybody special. In all fairness, I think it was tougher on the men. The single men were on a dual mission: to convert souls for Jesus *and* to find a wife. And the wife part had to come first, or they wouldn’t get the chance to convert souls for Jesus. Most female students were also on the hunt for husbands, because without a husband they were considered even more dangerous than single men. The overarching goal was for everybody to get married as soon as possible, even quite young, and thereby have their sexuality safely contained. The whole seminary culture was obsessed with marriage as essential for everyone.

For the most part, the wives of the male seminary students worked full time to put their husbands through school. Even though these couples often believed that women shouldn’t work outside the home, I guess they rationalized it as serving a higher purpose. Many students’ wives worked on staff at the seminary itself. There were a few couples who were seminarians together, and that was considered ok—it was the single women who seemed to make people uncomfortable, especially if they weren’t engaged or at least dating someone seriously. The ideal Southern Baptist pastor’s wife is not a career woman. But you don’t want a know-nothing wife; like St. John Eyre, you want a helper for your ministry.

In 1997, the seminary decided to start a special program for the students’ wives in order to prepare them to support their husbands’ future ministries, called the Seminary Wives Institute. On Tuesday evenings during term, several faculty and a number of “faculty

wives” offer condensed and simplified versions of certain core seminary courses. These women basically get Church History Lite, Old Testament Lite, as it were, not that they would call it that. Students in the Seminary Wives Institute also take classes on dressing modestly, feeding your family on a budget, and flower arranging. At the end of the program, the women are awarded a “Certificate of Ministry Studies,” which counts for nothing, academically, and their husbands all come to a ceremony and stand up to applaud and say how proud they were of their little women. It is now a three-year program, to match the three years most of the men spend as students at seminary, with both required courses and “electives.” The current course program includes:

- “Discipleship,” which emphasizes spiritual disciplines including “worship, Bible intake, prayer, serving and stewardship.”
- “Leadership skills,” focusing on personal evangelism and leadership in ministries such as “women’s, children’s, prayer, and community [ministries].”
- “Essentials,” which deals with: “God’s plan for marriage, ... childrearing, budgeting, contentment... and much more.”
- The required courses also include Old and New Testament Survey, Baptist Beliefs, the Southern Baptist Convention, and attendance of a “Family Life” conference.

I am particularly struck by the inclusion of “contentment” as an essential. You will stay in your glass cage and you will like it! The “electives” are also telling, and include: “Embracing Femininity” (no description offered); “Women of Influence” (“a study of significant Godly

women from the past”), “Playing Hymns,” “Biblical Parenting,” “Ministry of Hospitality,” and “Mentoring.”

Most students don’t have a lot of money, so SWI courses cost only \$10 each, and the course materials are provided for another \$10. The mission statement is as follows:

“At Southern Seminary, we recognize the need for God-called ministers' wives to be prepared for ministry. We believe that a minister's wife needs to be educated and equipped as she and her husband prepare for service in the churches and beyond.

The time a student wife is in the seminary setting with her husband is the perfect time to undertake this training. She has opportunity to network with other wives who are preparing for the place God has for them. She will benefit from her study with faculty wives who can share from their rich experience.”

Mary Mohler, the President’s wife, is the Director of the SWI. Its motto Bible verse is Proverbs 31.26, “She speaks with wisdom and faithful instruction is on her tongue.” The seminary’s motto, which is engraved on the lintel of the front doorway of the administrative building, is 2 Timothy 3.17, “That the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”²¹

Not long after my return from Oxford in the spring of 1999, I went to talk to my mentor, Dr. Doug Walker, and I brought up the issue of the Seminary Wives Institute. I said I thought that however helpful it might be, the Institute’s existence only emphasized how male-dominated the seminary was. Doug took offence at my observation, and actually got red in the face. I had not meant to attack anybody, but he was really upset. Doug maintained that the seminary was in no way male-dominated, and that he couldn’t see my point at all. I noted that our faculty was predominantly male, and that the administration was exclusively

²¹ “Thoroughly” being from the King James Version; now the term is translated “thoroughly.” The sentence begins in verse 3.16, “All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness...”

male. He countered that the registrar was a woman, as though that was significant enough to balance out the dozens of faculty and administrative positions that were not open to women. I argued that the board of trustees was clearly run by men. He argued that there was one woman on the board. I remembered that she wore gloves and a hat.

I didn't go back to talk to Doug much after that. It was clear to me that we weren't going to see eye to eye. My view of gender issues at the seminary had shifted ground, and, from my new perspective, the SWI felt and sounded outright sinister. It seemed to indicate that women were no longer welcome at the seminary as faculty or even as students. Today I refer to it as the Stepford Wives Institute.

I couldn't really sort out why the exclusion of women was so important to the seminary culture or why it would be impossible for Doug to admit. He could have said, "Yes, SBTS is male-dominated, the church is male-dominated, and that's because God has ordained it that way." That's what I think most people in that conservative or fundamentalist community would say. That is certainly what other pastors had told me, in so many words. But Doug reacted almost guiltily, with denial, as though he wanted to cover it up. It disappointed me that the two of us, who had been such good friends, couldn't have an honest discussion about male-oriented culture, and about my role within it. At Oxford, I had grown used to being spoken with as an adult and an equal.

I started to pull away from Dr. Walker, and from the other faculty and administrators I had been so attached to previously. I was more self-sufficient at that point, but I also started to look at these men I had so admired, whom I had not before questioned critically, and

think, *You—you built this glass ceiling. You want to limit me. You don't think I can make the contribution you can—but you're wrong.*

One day Dorothy Patterson came to campus. The wife of Dr. Paige Patterson (who is the current President of Southwestern Seminary and former President of Southeastern Seminary), she is actually Dr. Dorothy Patterson, a Ph.D. in her own right. She invited Stefana and me over to a house on campus owned by the Women's Auxiliary. She sat us down and talked to us about a new Master's Program in Women's Ministry at Southeastern. In so many words, she invited the two of us to come join the faculty when we graduated and teach there. I would be teaching Ethics and Philosophy, maybe some Bible or Theology classes—but only for women. Stefana could teach Church History, but it would also be focused toward women.

I don't remember how Stefana felt about it. I don't think she was thrilled. At that time she was more of a feminist than I was. She had a stronger personality than I, and was a much more critical thinker. But I remember I was not thrilled—I had thought I was being recruited to teach at Southeastern full stop, not just within a women-only program. Here was another glass ceiling; it sounded like just a glorified version of the Seminary Wives Institute—where we could watch the men doing the real stuff, and we would play dress-up or something. Let's play "Seminary!"

I had a sneaking suspicion they would pay us less, too.

Maybe what surprised and disturbed me most, and what still stands out in my mind, is that at the end of our conversation, Dorothy Patterson handed me her card, which read,

“Mrs. Paige Patterson.” There was no “Dorothy,” no “Dr.” or “Ph.D.” Wasn’t it enough that she took her husband’s surname? Was that the sort of choice that would be expected of me?

Beyond Doug Walker, there were others—especially Dr. Richard Land—who encouraged me throughout my studies, and who courted me for future work with their institutions. Dr. Land was and is the head of the ERLC, the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, the ethics wing of the SBC and a lobbying group with offices in Nashville and D.C. In my first years at seminary, when I was just discovering the field of ethics, I drove down to Dr. Land’s Nashville office to consult him on how to develop my career. He encouraged me that he was highly interested in hiring me, but that I really needed a PhD. Once I had that under my belt, there would be no stopping me. He actually quoted me a figure of around \$60,000 as a probable starting salary, and took me to visit his church and introduce me to his pastor as someone who might soon be based in Nashville as well.

What I was told over and over by Doug and Dr. Gushee and Dr. Land and even other seminary presidents, Dr. Paige Patterson and Dr. Mark Coppenger, was: *We want to hire you when you graduate. We at the SBC need you—we need women to write and publish articles and books; we need women to teach at the university and seminary levels. We’re not against women, you know—we couldn’t deal with liberal women like Molly Marshall, but you’re conservative, you’ll be so marketable.* Dr. Land, Dr. Walker, and Dr. Mitchell always introduced me to important guests of the seminary when they came around: faculty from other institutions, visiting speakers, leaders in the SBC. They referred to me as a promising scholar, someone who would benefit the future of the denomination. The courtship lasted until the very end of my

studies, in 2003. When I graduated, it turned out that there was really nothing for me, unless I wanted to teach women only at Southeastern Seminary. Dr. Gushee and Dr. Mitchell were gone to other institutions. Dr. Cook was teaching at Oxford and Wheaton College in Illinois, but had no SBC connections to help me find work.

In the spring of 2003 I had another meeting with Richard Land, this one at the seminary coffee shop. He offered me nothing, not even an internship. Years before, he had proudly announced to me that he had hired a woman to run the D.C. lobbying office, and encouraged me that once I had my Ph.D. I might join her, but now he had nothing to say. It wasn't that there were no job openings, that he couldn't create something for me if he wanted to—he had plenty of power, and, I imagined, a sufficient budget. But for some reason, his interest in me had shut down. He didn't say why. All of a sudden, the language of, *You're so marketable*, and, *We need women like you*, had dried up. Richard had no comment, really, on me or my work or my future. I had no idea what I'd done wrong.

I also had a last meeting with Doug Walker. He too, had nothing to offer, no advice or wisdom, no position, no phone call that he was going to make for me. He just asked me what my plans were, as if he had had no role in shaping them. He was clearly not prepared to take such a role, even though he had for eight years intimated that he would—that I had some real level of security, that he could help me get a job at Southern or at Southeastern or Southwestern Seminaries, or at one of the many SBC colleges. He and I had assumed for a long time that I would go to work at the ERLC with Richard Land, but I told him that hadn't worked out. He, too, had no comment.

I suppose I'll never know if it Doug and Richard lost interest only because I was a woman, or if it was because I became too independent, too much of a critical thinker. Maybe because I hadn't published anything much? But they had never told me that I should be publishing, or helped me get published. So I graduated with a Ph.D. but no job, no prospects, and no teaching experience, no real resume—because the seminary had never let me teach in a classroom.

Southern offered its doctoral students teaching and research assistantships called Garrett Fellowships, and these fellowships, offered one semester at a time, paid for a good chunk of one's tuition. I had other scholarships, grants, and a loan, but I also got a Garrett Fellowship each semester of my Ph.D. studies, which essentially covered my rent.

All my colleagues in the doctoral program had fellowships, but the guys got to teach when the faculty member they were assisting was out of town. Sometimes the men even got to teach when the faculty were there. When the subjects the doctoral student was strongest in came up in the syllabus, he was asked to guest-lecture, thus getting some supervision and feedback from more senior faculty. I was only asked to do research, rather than to assist with teaching. The men got real classroom training via these fellowships: they got to do grading, they sat in on classes and helped manage the discussion. I remembered from my own Master's classes that Greg Thornbury and others who served as Fellows were especially helpful, and showed themselves to be gifted in teaching. I was mostly paid to do nothing—paid *not* to grade, *not* to observe classes.

Toward the end of my time at Southern, I served as a Garrett Fellow for Dr. W, a professor who taught at Boyce Bible College, a new undergraduate program started by

Southern Seminary and located on the south end of campus. One week, Dr. W went out of town and, because my undergraduate work had been in literature, he allowed me to substitute teach in his Great Books class. I prepared and delivered two lectures, one on *Othello* and one on *The Iliad*. And I loved it. I was nervous walking in, but I got a feel for lecturing within the first few minutes. I suddenly had a strong sense of belonging, like the front of the classroom was truly my place, as much or more than the back of it had been.

But apparently, I did not belong at the front of a Boyce College classroom, and I was certainly not welcome at the front of a seminary class. I could tell the students, who were almost exclusively men, were uncomfortable with me, and I sensed that they were uncomfortable with my female-ness. I could tell by their facial expressions, their posture behind their desks, their resistance to participate in class discussion. They didn't want to respond to me in any way, which made me feel terribly uncomfortable in turn. It was clear that they found it problematic to have, however temporarily, a woman in a position of authority over them.

The next semester, Dr. W dropped me and I worked for Dr. James Parker. Faculty sometimes changed Garrett Fellows or decided they didn't need one, so I thought nothing of his decision. Dr. Parker assigned me to do internet research for him. The internet was new at that time, and I was good at navigating it. I assumed that Dr. Parker, being older, was maybe awkward online, but now I think he may have simply been grasping at straws for something for me to do that would not involve any authority over the mostly male students. I tried to look on the bright side—that I could make rent by doing about twenty minutes of online research a month—but I could not avoid the realization that my career was being

harmed by this sexist policy. I was being denied essential teaching experience, which would make me significantly less competitive when I completed my degree and wanted to teach at a university: other fresh PhDs would have been teaching undergraduate classes since their Masters' work. I coped by thinking only of becoming a researcher when I graduated, and, alternatively, holding on to the dream that the seminary would hire me right out of the doctoral program, as they had done for some of my male friends.²² Irrational though it probably was, I convinced myself that once I had earned the PhD things would change for me. Like Dr. Walker and Dr. Land had been saying, I would suddenly be a hot commodity, and eminently hireable—rather than essentially *persona non grata* in the classrooms of my own alma mater, as I was now.

Paul's injunction in 1 Timothy 2.12, "I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man; she must be silent," is clearly set in the context of the local church. And the seminary has always made it clear that it is *not* a church. They do not serve the Lord's Supper in chapel services; they do not marry people; they do not baptize people. But they—the Mohler regime and the conservatives and fundamentalists they represent—read the rest of the Bible and see an indisputable and eternal hierarchy between men and women.

I took a summer class on Jonathan Edwards toward the end of my Master's work. It was taught by Dr. Mark Dever, an up-and-coming young über-conservative leader, and the pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. It was a magnificent class. I learned a lot and enjoyed every minute of it. I really liked Edwards, his ideas, his use of

²² In fact, Rob Plummer, two years ahead of me, was already teaching New Testament; Mark Overstreet was appointed President of Criswell College in Texas, and Jerry Johnson President of Boyce Bible College before either of them had finished his dissertation.

language, and at the time I agreed thoroughly with his über-conservative Puritan theology. One memory I still have is of the lecture in which Dever lined out the “great chain of Being,” the idea that all life forms exist on a hierarchical ladder, where you have, say, amoebas at the bottom, and God the Father at the top. It was an important part of a philosophical argument that God created a perfect world despite the imperfections of its many creatures. The concept entails a hierarchical structure even among the Trinity, something like this:

Father
Son
Holy Spirit

Then there would be:

Angels
Men²³
Women
Children
Wild animals—lions, etc.
Animals we work— horses, cattle, mules²⁴
Animals we eat— chickens, pigs
Birds, fish, reptiles
Bugs, snakes
Plants, flowers
Minerals, dirt

I was troubled by this whole idea, and most disturbed at the notion of hierarchy within the Godhead. I had been taught that God was Three-in-One, but it made more sense to me that that three-in-oneness would be better represented by, say, three semi-overlapping circles or ovals, as in the symbol of the triquetra. In Edwards’ teachings, the emphasis seemed to be instead on a linear order, with Person of God #1 over Person of God #2 over #3. It didn’t suit my theology at all.

²³ Historically, we should bear in mind, this would include only white men.

²⁴ Historically, we should note this is where slaves would fall.

I did understand how some might argue the Father sent the Son to accomplish the atonement, and the Son sent the Holy Spirit to indwell believers. But the Son and Spirit were also supposed to be the same person, which I couldn't figure out. The hierarchical view of men over women over children upset me too. I could see where it would have made sense in the past to some or even most people, but it didn't make sense to me anymore. I began to pull away more and more from the purveyors of this sort of doctrine.

The hardest part was that in the seminary community, and the churches I was part of in Florida as well as Kentucky, in fact, the whole Southern Baptist Convention had and still has a pervasive culture of sexism and male chauvinism. Not only does this culture believe that men outrank women in the mind of God and should therefore outrank women in society—in the church and the home and the workplace—but they also believe that this hierarchical notion is *really important*. They believe that it is a critical doctrine, because it reveals the divine order: this dominion of men over women is God's plan for the world and for a healthy society. They will quote I Corinthians 11:13, "I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God."

During Dr. Dever's lecture, I just took it all in. It was not the first time I'd heard these ideas. But later that night I went for a walk around the campus and mulled it over in my mind. As always, I listened to the hum of crickets. As always, I saw rabbits out for evening *silflay*. I smelled the summer honeysuckle and started to wonder about the distance between

the levels of the Great Chain of Being. Surely the proponents of this view, like all proponents of orthodox Christianity, would say that there is a huge gulf between God and man. They would also likely maintain that there is a substantial gap between humans and the rest of the created beings. I myself tended to consider humans far above, if not elephants and whales, then at least frogs and weasels. So was there—in their eyes, at least—a gap between men and women?

If one is going to argue that men have a higher social, spiritual, or ontological status than women, how high is it? How far below them do the women stand? I started to wonder, were the men around me—at the seminary, at the Reformed church—disrespectful to me and restricting of my career because they were uncomfortable with women in general, intimidated by me in particular, or did they in fact see women the way I saw the rabbits who fed on the campus lawns—cute, sweet, and nowhere near my level?

One of the most gripping memories I have from my final semester at Southern is of a conversation with two other male students, colleagues in the doctoral program in another field. I was sitting out on the lawn one evening, reading on the quad. We started talking about a recent event on campus, a women’s leadership conference. Like the “faculty wives” assistance with the SWI, the women who came to speak at this conference were not recognized theologians or pastors in their own right; for the most part, they were the wives and daughters of more established theologians and pastors—Billy Graham’s daughter, Anne Graham Lotz, was one. I had not attended the conference. As I was no longer interested in ministering only to other women, I no longer wanted to hear from people who held such limited views of what women could offer. One of the men told me his wife had gone to the

Women's Leadership conference and that she had come away highly upset. He said his wife was a doctoral student in mathematics at the University of Louisville. She attended the women's conference and really liked it; there was one speaker in particular whose presentation she found striking, and she went up to talk with her after the message. (They call it a "message" when women speak about the things of God, not a "sermon.") So she went to thank the speaker. The speaker asked about her background, and she explained that she was studying for her Ph.D. in math. The speaker looked away and said dismissively, "What a waste."

I've never forgotten that story. The moment I heard it, I realized that not only were other women being shut out of things, even by other women, but that their men could also be hurt by that sexist prejudice and exclusion. I suddenly felt that there were indeed men on that campus who were sympathetic toward me; that there were men even at so conservative and traditional a place as Southern Seminary who didn't hesitate to love a woman with the brains to do a PhD in math. It was a terribly upsetting story, but at the same time it gave me a sense of solidarity. Clearly I wasn't the only one here being shut down and shut out for wanting to exercise the gifts that God gave me. I wasn't the only one being judged for wanting to use my intellect and talents. The attitude of the speaker seemed to be that this woman would never use her advanced degree, that she should have been using her energies in the home or in the lower levels of church service. Her husband said she came home in tears. After being so encouraged by the message, she was utterly and deliberately discouraged by the messenger.

As I sit and write today, I am watching Hillary Clinton's concession speech with which she is bowing out of the 2008 Presidential race. She has just said, "There are no acceptable limits and there are no acceptable prejudices in the 21st century." In this speech, Clinton casts a vision of a future of an America where it is "unremarkable" for a woman to hold the highest political offices. We can keep dreaming, and we can keep working toward that dream—but I think a whole lot of Americans would be surprised to know how many American women living in the mainstream, not on an FLDS compound, feel it is controversial for a woman even to work outside the home.

When people find out that I went to the Southern Baptist seminary, they tend to ask me, "What was it like, being there, as a woman?" Most people who are at all familiar with the Southern Baptist Convention or the seminary are aware that it has become significantly narrower in its politics and theology during the Mohler administration. People in the Louisville area, in particular, remember that Southern Seminary used to be different, used to be fairly liberal, and supportive of women, and they realize that I was there when that change came to the institution.

When the Carver School fell apart, one of the flashpoints had been the trustees adding new litmus tests to the hiring process, including an opposition to abortion, homosexuality, and women in ministry. One way of framing the "women in ministry issue" breaks down like this: it's a basic question of where women serve in the church. Every group draws the line somewhere. The Episcopalians, the Unitarians, and some Presbyterians will allow women to be pastors—only they, among the major denominations of the Christian church, will allow a woman to be the lead pastor or bishop. But women are not allowed, as

of this writing, to be bishops in the Episcopal Church; in fact, it is a question that is threatening to split the denomination.

Everybody else draws a boundary for women's service somewhere lower on the rungs of the ministry ladder. Some will draw the line at the deaconate: there are no women deacons in my home church in Dade City, Florida, for example. Deacons there hold a lot of power—they make key decisions for the church, mostly by serving on committees. Women are allowed to vote. They weren't always. But women can now be full members. They can play the piano, they can sing in the choir and work in the nursery, but they will not serve on the ministry staff. They will not have the title "Minister of" or "Pastor of" whatever.

Some churches will draw the line elsewhere, at certain staff positions. You can look on the websites of various churches, and click on the "who's who" or "our ministry team" link or whatever they have chosen to call it, and see where women are serving in that church. You will inevitably find that the administrative assistants (the secretaries) are all women. You'll see women as Children's Minister or Children's Pastor, absolutely. You'll almost never find a man as Children's Minister. You'll see a woman often as Minister of Education, which means she runs the Sunday School and Vacation Bible School programs. Bigger churches with bigger staffs will often have a woman serving as a counselor or spiritual director. Sometimes a woman will be on staff as part of a couple: she and her husband will both be on staff, ministering most likely to Youth, or he will be Minister to Men and she will be Minister to Women.

Some churches will let women be Associate Pastor. The church I'm currently a member of, Highland Baptist, has a woman as Associate Pastor. She coordinates the Sunday

School programs, she does a lot of counseling, and she'll preach sometimes, usually when the head pastor is out of town. But she is second in command; it is really the rare church that has a woman at the helm. So the "women in ministry issue" comes down to the question of where women are permitted to serve in the church. Can they preach? Can they be ordained? If they are ordained, is it merely to the diaconate, or to the greater power of the chaplaincy, or even to the pastorate? The first I heard of ordination, and of its being a problem as relates to women, was when I came to Southern Seminary.

To be ordained you must answer a series of doctrinal questions put to you by a committee of ordained ministers at your church, generally the pastoral staff and some deacons. If you pass this doctrinal quiz, there is a special service where you are installed as a minister of that church (if you're being ordained a deacon), or where that church blesses your ministry. The service makes it official. Without that, you cannot be hired as a pastor or for most other official staff positions of ministry. You could certainly be a secretary or assistant, but not Minister of Singles or Seniors or Youth or even Music. "Ordained," *per se*, means ordered by God: that God has said, "This should be so." It is the church's stamp of approval, that this person is not a heretic, not a loose cannon theologically. There may be some effort made to ensure that the candidate is moral and spiritual sound as well, but much of the time, there is little accounting for that. Of course, all kinds of people have been ordained, and not all of them have been saints.

When I first came to the seminary, there were a significant number of women there. Southern had a high percentage of women faculty, and of women students, many of whom were ordained or seeking ordination. The topic of women in ministry and women's

ordination came up a lot in conversation in all sorts of Baptist settings—church, seminary, even socially, when I was meeting people for the first time. Learning I was a seminarian, they would suddenly take a cautious tone and ask something like, “Oh, do you want to be ordained?” Or, “Do you want to be a pastor?” with a nervous look. My response was always to reassure them: “Oh, no, no, no—I’ve never thought of either.”

At that point, I don’t think I had much of an understanding of ordination, what it entailed or what it meant, but it was clear in my mind that I honestly did not want to be a pastor or a chaplain. I have never felt called to be in that sort of line of fire—I don’t think I have the constitution for it. But I didn’t have the balls to stand up and say that ordination should be available for other people. I was too much the conformist. There was a clear sense in that season that “you are either with us or against us,” and I wanted to be with. I wanted to be accepted, not to be seen as a threat. So, as I did with evolution and homosexuality and so many other hot topics, I pushed it out of my head and tried not to think about ordination. The safest position was essentially that other women could pursue ordination, and that was fine, but I wasn’t going to make an issue of it. I don’t think I understood the implication at the time for the church at large to be excluding the service of half its members.

My bias at the time stemmed from the lack of consideration I gave to ordination overall. I did not consider it important, let alone vital, that a given man or woman had passed a doctrinal quiz, that a committee at his or her church had said, “Yeah, we dig this person.” That seemed like a lot of baloney to me; it didn’t seem very valuable. There was the obvious practical significance—it’s basically like getting a driver’s license for ministry—but my only concern was whether God’s blessing appeared to be on this person’s ministry. Are you in the

Spirit? Is God using you? I realized during my time at Oxford that I am a teacher, whether ordained or not, whether I'm paid for it or not. I'm used by God regardless of whether any earthly institution recognizes that or affirms. In my view, ordination is fairly irrelevant to actual ministry.

Moreover, ordination *per se* is not in the Bible. We read that God ordained certain things, most importantly the Church. God established the disciples and apostles, and sent the Holy Spirit. But there is no Biblical requirement of ordination for God's service. There is a tradition apparent in the Early Church through Acts and the Epistles, of ministers sending other ministers to do God's work. Paul writes to churches he helped found and says to the Corinthians, essentially, "I'm sending my friend Timothy to you—I can't come myself, but Timothy is a good guy, listen to what he has to say."²⁵ At the end of his letter to the Christians in Rome, he even says, "Here's my dear friend Priscilla; I'm sending you Priscilla. She's going to build up your church at Rome. I myself cannot come, so I am sending you Priscilla. Do what she says."²⁶ Which looks like women's ordination to me. It looks like St. Paul sees wisdom and the Holy Spirit in Priscilla and wants a whole community—one that he wanted to visit more than all the rest—to follow her leadership. I see women disciples in the book of Luke; I see women apostles in Romans; I see women presbyters in Timothy. But overall, my answer was, "Ordination's not really in the Bible, so I don't think I need it." Clever little answer.

At the time, in the late 1990s, women could be ordained in more liberal SBC churches, not often to the diaconate or a full-time staff position, but to the mission field or

²⁵ I Corinthians 4.16-17.

²⁶ Romans 16.1-5.

to chaplaincy in a military or hospital setting. A few years ago, however, the Southern Baptist Convention decided to cease the ordination of women to be military chaplains.

The policy was sealed in February 2002 when the SBC's North American Mission Board [NAMB] voted to cease endorsing women for chaplaincy roles if they were already ordained or had asked to be ordained. The NAMB voted to stop endorsing women chaplains in cases "where the role and function of the chaplain would be seen the same as that of a pastor." This decision essentially brought an end to females being ordained by the SBC as military chaplains, due to requirements by military and some federal agencies for both ordination and endorsement.²⁷

Many women chaplains lost their positions following this policy shift, or, if they wanted to keep their jobs, had to convert to another denomination that would endorse and ordain them. But there are certain Baptist distinctives in doctrine that, if one holds them, would not make one a very good Presbyterian, or Episcopalian, for example. It seems safe to assume that hundreds if not thousands of women were forced to make some compromises that should not have been asked of them—theologically, doctrinally, ecclesiologically. The concept of what the church is, what baptism is, how Communion works, what the crucifixion means—these are significantly different from one denomination to another. There are real reasons why the various denominations exist, and it is not always easy to move between them.

I can only imagine the hardships these women went through and what women who feel called to such ministry still go through. The Southern Baptists' hard message to them was and is, "God is not with you, and never has been. You never were supposed to be doing that work." This message is appalling to me. In the past, I was able to evade thinking much

²⁷ Robison (Rob) B. James, Barbara Jackson, Robert E. Shepherd, Jr., and Cornelia Showalter. The Fundamentalist Takeover in the Southern Baptist Convention: A Brief History. Macon, GA: Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, 2006. 59.

about the issue because I could keep it from affecting me—and if it didn't affect me, it didn't matter much. Now that I am better able to see the bigger picture, I find the resistance to women's ordination appalling and sad. It is also another nail in the coffin of my Christianity. I could never again be part of an organization or institution with such a sexist view.

I wrote earlier about the 1996 SBC Annual Meeting in Atlanta, Georgia, where Dr. Mohler gave the keynote address and I performed with the Seminary Choir. In my later years at the seminary, I served for a few semesters as a Garrett Research Fellow to Ben Mitchell in Ethics, and Dr. Mitchell was asked by an SBC committee to draft something on the image of God in men and women. The committee was working on a revision to the Baptist Faith and Message, which is a document that helps define what the Southern Baptist denomination stands for. It is essentially a list of articles of faith but also extends to matters of policy and social values. The Faith and Message is a changeable document, which can be revised by public vote at Annual Meetings. In fact, the Baptist Faith and Message was revised in 1925 and 1963 to keep up with cultural changes.

At the 2000 meeting, the convention leadership specifically wanted to address the issue of gender and sexuality, and to have the Faith and Message define marriage as existing exclusively between a man and a woman. As one might guess, the Southern Baptist notion of marriage, gender, and sexuality comes largely from the book of Genesis, the story of Adam and Eve, created in God's image.

I had been working toward a dissertation topic, and at that point I was focused on the idea of an ethics based on the image of God. I had published a little article on this

subject—in my view, an image-of-God ethics would expand our notion of sanctity of human life issues. In Genesis 1, God creates man and woman in His image; in Genesis 9, He commands Noah and his offspring not to kill others, expressly because of that divine image present within them—the *imago dei* is, biblically speaking, the source of our notion of the sanctity of human life. In my view, sanctity of life is not just life and death, abortion and euthanasia and capital punishment. It should include how we treat people: do we treat people like they're sacred? How do we treat old people? How do we treat young people? How do we treat women? Are they not fully human? Do they not have the image of God? Are they not therefore sacred? If everyone you meet, saved or unsaved, male or female, child or old person is sacred in the eyes of God, and if God is going to hold you accountable for how you treat that person, that might change some folks' behavior. I spent months studying the image of God. I read the work of dozens of theologians.

My mentor, Ben Mitchell, was well aware of my work on the image of God, and he asked me to help him redraft the proposed resolution. Neither of us was on the drafting committee—Mary Mohler was, not incidentally—but Ben had been asked to work behind the scenes double-checking the theology and polishing the language of the resolution.

The resolution comprised a page of material when Ben and I received it. In its original language, it said that “men and women image God differently.” Essentially, this would mean that the image of God was present in men and women, but in different ways. This draft went on to state that men and women have equal value but different social roles, and that in marriage, a woman should submit to her husband. Each element of the resolution was supported, as is the practice, with Scriptural citations. Scripturally, I couldn't

argue with the marriage idea: even though I was resistant to the notion of set gender roles, the Bible can be interpreted to support that view. The first part, however, about the *imago dei* being different in men and women, I could not countenance. That idea is nowhere in the Bible.

Since I had been studying all the Old and New Testament passages to do with the image of God, I used them to show Ben that there is no indication that the image is at all different according to sex. Moreover, in Genesis 9, where, after the flood, God reestablishes the covenant with Noah, He says, “Even from the animals I will demand a reckoning for your lifeblood.” The idea seems to be that even if a rhino runs you through, God will hold the rhino accountable for your life, because “in the image of God has God made man.”²⁸

The Christian concept sanctity of life is tied to the image of God in Genesis 9. If you’re looking for a scriptural foundation for an ethical judgment—not logic, not experience, not tradition—this passage means a great deal. There is no evidence in the passage that men and women “image” God differently. Moreover, such an interpretation (I use the word loosely) would open the door for women to be viewed as less sacred than men, perhaps even less than fully human, as we used to be viewed. What I wanted to establish was that there is no biblical basis for that position.

Dr. Mitchell and I worked to rewrite the original language of the amendment, to say (emphases mine):

The husband and wife are *of equal worth before God, since both are created in God's image*. The marriage relationship models the way God relates to His people. A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. He has the God-given responsibility to provide for, to protect, and to lead his family. A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the

²⁸ Genesis 9:5-6.

headship of Christ. She, *being in the image of God as is her husband and thus equal to him*, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation.

This new language passed through the committee, it passed the Convention with overwhelming support, and it now stands as the final amendment to the current Baptist Faith and Message. I'm pretty proud of helping with that revision. I like to think that was a bit of a heroic moment for me, that I saved the Southern Baptists from the brink of theological doom, helped pull them back from the edge just a little. The committee did feel the need to assert that wives are to submit to their husbands, which I have never liked, but there is biblical support for that view. However, I could not sit by and let them state or imply that women are less sacred than men, less human, or less or even somehow differently the image of God. Whether you want to use "image" as a verb, or a noun, whether it's something we "bear" or "are" or whatever, it has to be equal—not on principle *per se*, but because that is what the Bible says.

I was newly in the Ph.D. program when I read a book by the English theologian John R. W. Stott. Stott argues that men and women are completely equal, and he supports his thesis biblically, but in a way that seems foreign to the SBC and their pattern of citing Scripture. Rather than going to individual Bible verses, especially taken out of their original context (the Pauline epistles, for example, are letters written to specific churches at specific times), Stott goes to the theological big picture outlined throughout the Bible. His goal is to examine not just what the Scriptures say in terms of how men treat women, but to see how God treats women. What Stott finds is a Trinitarian and egalitarian view, and draws three conclusions:

1. Men and women are equally created by the Father.

2. Men and women are equally saved and redeemed by the Son.

3. Men and women are equally filled with and gifted by the Holy Spirit.

Nowhere in the Bible is there any indication that women are inferior in terms of creation, redemption, or giftedness. And if every member of the Godhead treats men and women equally, the issue seems fairly clear. Unfortunately, not every Christian leader or layperson sees things this way, and in my experience, many of them—women as well as men—will pay lip service to the notion of women’s equality, but practice blatant discrimination at the same time.

There are two competing camps, as it were, within evangelical life, each with its own view of gender and sexuality, and each with its own organization. Those who believe that men and women are equal in every way are termed *egalitarians*; they explore and advocate their views through the Council for Biblical Equality. Opposing them are the *complementarians*, who argue that men and women have equal human dignity, but distinct, complementary social roles. Their organization is the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. It is probably obvious from their titles that each group believes theirs is the position best supported by biblical texts. It is not my purpose here to investigate the claims and arguments of each side; I bring them up mainly to help explain why so many evangelical Christians in the churches and seminaries *talk* about women as being equal to men but do not *treat* them that way. In my view and in my experience, their language regarding gender roles is always encoded with a hierarchical view—the complementarians won’t come out and *say* that men are superior to women, but the role they ascribe to men is clearly a superior role. If the proper role of men is to be educated, to go out into the workforce, to develop

their skills as workers and leaders, men occupy a distinctly more powerful position as compared with women. Likewise, if women's role is to remain in the home, under-educated, with few skills and no access to money or property of their own, their position makes them virtually powerless and immensely vulnerable. And this is the policy for a vast number of churches and Christian organizations, including roughly thirty-seven million Americans.

In my second year of teaching at Bellarmine University, one of my favorite students revealed to me that she is a lesbian. The following semester, two other students came out to me in class. We began meeting for occasional informal lunches together, three or four lesbian students and two allies, including myself, to talk about their experiences of being gay, and the process of coming out. My beloved students described being sexually harassed by men who insisted that a "good fuck would fix them," cut off by family who refused to support them while they persisted in their "sick and perverted lifestyles," and surprised by both positive and negative responses from straight friends. I was regularly heartbroken by what I heard, and frustrated at how little I could do to help—but also grateful for the confidence these young people placed in me and for all that I was learning from them about the hostilities of the pervasive heterosexism I had never before noticed. Within a few months, this group had turned into a new campus club: GLASS, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Society, of which I am the faculty sponsor.

GLASS this year sponsored a screening of the documentary, “For the Bible Tells Me So,” followed by a discussion moderated by myself and staff from Bellarmine’s Office of Multicultural Affairs. In that conversation, I came to a new level of understanding about my connection to my gay students. This understanding springs from more than just my love for them as individuals and a natural tenderness toward people in need. I finally saw that homophobia and heterosexism are merely different faces of the same sexism and misogyny I had been fighting for years. Gay men are hated because they are too feminine, lesbians because they turn to women for love rather than to men. Gay folk upset traditionalists because they upset the traditional order—not the natural order, homosexuality seems to be part of nature, but the perceived divine right of men to dictate the terms under which the rest of us can live.

This is where my heart is now—along with many other third wave feminists—deep in the fight for equality for all people in all things, engaged in the effort to make room in my community for everyone, to make my gay and lesbian and bisexual and transgendered friends feel loved and special and safe. We in feminism’s third wave care just as fiercely and work just as hard for our gay friends as for our own rights as women. We face similar opposition, from the same quarter, and for the same reason—because we do not idolize the male, heterosexual tradition.

CHAPTER NINE

OPEN TO GRACE

“Yoga is the practice of aligning with the universal flow of divine consciousness.”

-*Yoga Sutra #2*, trans. Douglas Brooks

My first yoga experience was a Bikram class. This tradition consists of a strict series of 26 poses (*asanas*) performed twice each in a room heated to around 100 degrees, hence its nickname, “hot yoga.” I could barely breathe in the heat, which felt terrifying. The two dozen or so men and women in the class wore minimal clothing, which I found uncomfortable, especially as we were lined up facing a wall of mirrors. I noticed a lot of different body types, some attractive, some less so. But when we started moving through the sequence of poses, I saw that several people who otherwise looked heavy and awkward were actually strong and flexible, could move beautifully. In yoga, I suddenly understood, the focus shifted from what your body looked like to what it could do—the experience it could give you. It was no longer sufficient for me to have the thinnest body if I couldn’t do the poses.

I struggled through the class and left the room sweating, shaking, and close to tears, which came when I got to the car. I went back a week later just to prove to myself I could survive it without crying. Then I swore off Bikram yoga forever.

Fortunately, I was aware that Bikram was not the only style of yoga available, that it was regarded by non-practitioners as somewhat extreme, and that even its devotees called it “boot camp yoga.” Not only were there other options, but any of them would be significantly easier than what I’d experienced. I joined a gym, the Louisville Athletic Club, and decided to start with a level one *hatha* class. *Ha* is *sun*, and *tha* is *moon* in Sanskrit, so *hatha* is a

balancing, a yoking of two unlike but complementary elements. The poses were simple, not held for too long. The teacher explained the physical benefits of each pose as we did it. She used English rather than the Sanskrit terms for the poses, which felt more accessible. And the “final relaxation” was amazing. For the last five minutes of class, the teacher turned down the lights, turned up the soothing sitar music, and walked around misting the room with lavender essence. As we lay on our mats, eyes closed, she spoke in a gentle voice, inviting us to turn our attention to our breath, to feel ourselves sinking into the floor, our bones heavy, our muscles “falling off the bone.” It sounds like a destructive image, but it is a lovely feeling—after using my muscles to hold myself in challenging poses, working simultaneously on balance, strength, and flexibility, it was a relief to let it all go.

After a few classes, I came to realize that a good yoga session could leave me feeling like I’d had a workout and a nap in one—the best of both worlds. I started attending the level one classes three times a week, and quickly noticed relief from back pain, increased flexibility and a greater sense of energetic equilibrium day to day. I had become hooked on yoga.

I began studying *hatha* yoga at a studio near my home, called Infinite Bliss Yoga. It was run by a woman named Dara, who had recently graduated from Bellarmine University, where I had just begun teaching, and several other faculty members were now her students. From Dara I learned about inhabiting a pose, feeling the sensation of being fully in my body, feeling the pose from the inside out. I learned to be more patient with my body, that my experience of it would be different from day to day, each time I stepped on my mat. I would feel different on the left side than on the right. I learned also to be more patient with my mind. In traditional yoga, the goal of *asana* is to clear the mind and exhaust and balance the

body, in preparation for meditation. We didn't do a lot of meditation, but we spent some time on breathing exercises, called *pranayama* (*prana* is breath, the life force, and *yamas* are practices), which further helped me sense the connection between my body and mind, and taught me to use one to calm and center the other.

A few years later, Dara moved away and sold the studio to Nate and Allison Terracio, who brought with them a new type yoga called Anusara. Allison is a native Kentuckian who after college had moved to New York City, a town that happens to have a strong Anusara presence, and I began to study with her.

Today, as I write this, I am in a small airplane flying to Denver, Colorado, for the first annual Anusara yoga conference, something they are calling the Grand Gathering. Some 800 students of Anusara yoga will meet at a campground in Estes Park for three days of intensive meditation, lecture, and *asana* classes. My teacher, Allison, will be joining me there; she is excited for me to meet her various teachers, and the founders of Anusara, John Friend and Douglas Brooks.

John was a master of Iyengar yoga and Douglas a theologian studying Hindu philosophy and sacred literature when they met at an ashram. They were both transformed by their studies under a female guru, whose focus is grace—defined as the divine love of the universe fully and freely available to all beings everywhere. Douglas and John came together to create a new yoga based around this idea. John expanded and redirected his Iyengar training to continue its emphasis on alignment, but also to open up the *asana* practice to greater freedom and more heart-centered energy. Douglas brought his interpretations of the

Bhagavad Gita, the Yoga Sutras and other ancient yogic writings in the *Rajanaka* tantric tradition—he developed the philosophy that underlies Anusara yoga.²⁹ Douglas also came up with the name, Anusara, a Sanskrit word that means “flowing with grace.”

When I was growing up, *grace* was a way of moving—*graceful*; later, it became also a way of treating people—*gracious*. Later, it was all about Jesus, like everything else. In Christianity, grace was defined as unmerited favor from God. Not going to hell like you deserve was mercy; going to heaven was grace. Today, for me, *grace* is a way of knowing, a way of being. A radical openness: to oneself, to ideas, to the possibilities the universe might have in store.

One of my first questions when I began exploring and considering yoga was whether it was possible to be both a Christian and a yogi. I was told that yoga could supplement any religious beliefs or practices. I certainly do my yoga alongside others who still identify with and find meaning in the Christian story and Christian practices. But in my view, the Christian story, the metanarrative, is so different—antithetical, even—to Anusara, in many ways. Anusara has definitely been an important part of my moving away from Christianity. It has presented me with another way of knowing, another way of being, which seems more positive to me. I tell my philosophy students that when they are reading and assessing and evaluating different theories, their final judgment should probably boil down to whether a given theory holds water—whether it makes logical sense—and whether it is helpful. Christian doctrine used to make sense to me, and it was clearly helpful to me for a long time, in many

²⁹ The term “Rajanaka” has been copyrighted by Douglas Brooks.

ways. Now, however, having been exposed to yoga, I find Anusara to be more helpful, and to make more sense than the other systems of thought I have encountered.

You are the secret the universe is trying to tell.

—Douglas Brooks

Every spiritual tradition has its strict interpreters, its ascetics, and the more mystical followers who tend to be a little loose by comparison. Anusara fits into the second category. It builds on a tantric tradition that Douglas calls *Rajanaka*, which flips the old dualistic views on their heads, and undoes them. As Allison explained to me, yoga was born out of a dualistic philosophy which held that matter and spirit were completely separate entities, and that spirit was higher than matter, meaning the human soul or mind was higher than, and not part of, the human body. This view is similar to Plato's notion that informs the Western dualistic tradition that the soul is, necessarily and unfortunately, entangled in flesh. Followers of this dualistic view developed the physical practices of yoga, the *asanas*, to tame the body and quiet it in order to free the mind for meditation. They also developed the others of the eight elements, or limbs, of yoga, the first two of which consist of extensive ethical codes, and the last five (after *asana*) of which have to do with meditative practices that will lead to Nirvana, the release of the spirit from the body.

Naturally, a second group sprang up in opposition to this notion—the anti-dualists. This was the Vedantic school of thought, which argued that instead of two, everything that exists is actually one. The spirit and the flesh are one, the rock and the sea are one. In fact, the anti-dualists argued for a truly radical oneness, the notion that the things we see and

name are not even real. Rather, our perceptions of differentiation are imaginary. To identify or name something is to separate oneself from it. As Allison says, the wall is not me as soon as I name it “wall.” Against the traditionalists, the Vedantic thinkers would say that “spirit” becomes a separate concept from “body” only when we name them “spirit” and “body,” and they are separate only in name.

Then, the tantric school of thought came along, with the idea that maybe the universe does not exist solely as a unity or a duality: maybe it’s both/and. The tantricas argue that in fact everything is universal consciousness. Oneness and duality exist together—the oneness, the unity of the universal consciousness, exists in both the body and the soul. It expresses itself in both the high and the low, both the eternal and the ephemeral, simultaneously.

In the older dualistic view, the goal of meditation was to achieve an enlightenment that would obliterate the Self, an experience that would be so beyond you that it would eliminate you—you couldn’t imagine it. This is very similar to how Christians talk about “heaven.” Some Christians will say, “This earth is not my home—I’m just passing through.” Which attitude allows them to trash the earth, to ignore environmental degradation, species extinction, and global warming—*Drill, baby, drill*. Why should they care? They’re on their way somewhere else.

By the same token, some practitioners of more dualistic yoga make their physical practices easy. After all, if you’re just hanging out here on this planet, in this body waiting for enlightenment, then you don’t need to make your body stronger or more flexible. Alternatively, some more ascetic yogis will treat their bodies like they aren’t really in them—as St. Paul says, “I mortify my body, I master it.” For these yogis, any pain experienced in

their yoga practice is an opportunity to recognize that the body is only an obstacle to the divine. What all these views have in common is that the body is considered separate from and lower than, perhaps even antithetical to the spirit.

I experienced a taste of this ascetic, mortifying-the-flesh yoga on a trip to California. I was in Sausalito for a week and visited the yoga studio there, which features a mix of yoga styles from teachers of various traditions. I took one class from a man who made the whole group sit on their toes for several minutes; we sat with our knees on the ground and our backsides on our heels, toes tucked under. If you've never done this, try it, and see how little time it takes for the pain to strike. Now, our teacher said, this is a pain that isn't harmful. All that's going on when your brain starts getting pain messages from your feet is your body complaining; it's just the flesh. The lowly flesh that must be transcended. We sat there with our pain. The teacher called the pain messages "the screaming me-me's"—the flesh screaming "Me! Me!" But we should ignore the message, he said, because it wasn't meaningful. There was more meaning in rising above the body and its needs or wants.

We don't do this in Anusara, needless to say. We value the body and try to listen to the messages it sends us. Pain or discomfort in the body is worth listening to: it usually means there is some misalignment. Either we've been holding our bodies improperly, or we've been working too hard or too long. Furthermore, we want our bodies to be happy and healthy and strong and balanced precisely because we live in them. We can't have any kind of experience without them. In the dualistic tradition, the goal is to transcend the body, to ascend to Nirvana, where the self is obliterated and becomes one with the universe. In Anusara, we believe that everyone is already one with the universe; we can each participate

actively by engaging with the universal. But that would be impossible if the soul was not there, if it were obliterated. If there is some transcendent bliss where you have to leave your body or become some other thing, you're not you—so how would you be able to know it or feel it or learn from it? Douglas Brooks says, “You can't have an experience you can't have.” John Friend adds, “You can't do a yoga you can't do.” Anusara practitioners want a life we can live, and a yoga we can do.

After all, if you got to Nirvana, how would you know? No one can be sure there is a Nirvana, that there is a *there* there, and if there is, you wouldn't even know. What would be the point? If you couldn't remember it, it couldn't be very helpful. The body is the house in which we live. As the poet May Swenson says, “My body: my horse, my house, my hound.”

So we don't do asana to prepare for meditation. In fact, at this Grand Gathering in Colorado, we meditate first, in the mornings, when it is still dark. We walk in small, quiet groups from our cabins in the cold, huddle in the vast hall where John Friend will soon lead us through a three-hour physical practice. We find seats on blankets or lean against the walls. We have come by the hundreds for mediation *before* the asana practice, which the dualists would see as backwards. So then why do the physical practice? How does that help build our connection to the divine? For one thing, *asana* helps us align our bodies within themselves—my back feels always better when my hamstrings are lined up and stretched out. It also helps us align with the breath, connecting with the *prana*, the divine energy. To do asana, we make the connection between the breath and the body that breathes it, and is being breathed.

Compared with some other groups of yogis, Anusara practitioners tend to do a lot of twists, backbends, and inversions, like handstands. These types of poses take us off center,

away from the norm. Physically and energetically, twists are centering, backbends are energizing, inversions are exciting. Spiritually, they invite us to see the world from a different angle, which keeps things interesting. We do these odd poses and tell weird stories about guys with elephant heads precisely because they are not straight-forward. The idea is that if the pose is a little twisted or upside down, if the story is odd, it may get you to look from another angle, to investigate more deeply.

The Biblical stories, even when they are fantastical—talking snakes, water turning into wine—are taught in the evangelical community as straight-forward, literally true. Most are taught with the core lesson being that God is in charge, He’s working all things out, and part of that work is punishment—human suffering. Stories like the ones about Noah, Abraham, Jonah, and Paul allow people like televangelist Pastor John Hagee to say that Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans because it was a sinful city that had a gay pride parade, or Jerry Falwell to claim that 9/11 happened because America has strayed from the path of its original Christian founding. For at least the first six years that I was a Christian, I felt like so many bad things had happened to me that God must sort of have it in for me. I didn’t feel cursed, *per se*, but I felt that God was watching and ready to punish me, or at least test me severely. Only after reading about Calvinism (where I got the idea that I was one of the elect, God must love and approve of me) and going through a lot of good therapy did I come to feel that God loved me, that maybe I deserved to be happy. But I still have that reflex that senses, *Things are going so well right now: when’s the other shoe going to drop?*

According to the tantricas, by contrast, there is nothing intrinsically evil in the world; nothing is evil at its core, and certainly those events that are evil or harmful do not represent

some sort of divine punishment. The only lesson in pain is what you choose to take from it. The basic philosophical idea of Anusara is that everything is naturally good, because the divine exists in all things, and that we as humans, because we have the highest capacity for rationality and reflection, have a unique opportunity to recognize and celebrate our divinity. The view is that freedom trumps everything.

At the core of the Anusara system, John Friend explains, freedom has chosen to embody as me. Rather than the Western notion that we are bound creatures struggling to be free, tantra sees humans as divine, free beings choosing to bind—choosing to limit ourselves to a human embodiment and a human experience of life. Douglas says that:

“God has chosen to become human not merely in the character of Krishna [in the Bhagavad Gita],” or, I would add, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, “but relentlessly and for eternity in each and every person. ...God is wholly present in each and every possibility. ... God is never the impossible and so invites us to participate fully in him.”³⁰

Now, one can't do just *anything*. We have to make choices, and we practice making choices to discover what works for us, what is life-enhancing. We never *have* to do anything, but whatever we choose to do is what we choose. Meaning, all my choices are mine, and all your choices are yours. No one will try to force a choice on you or preach at you in Anusara. There are no 'thou shalts' or 'thou shalt nots.'

³⁰ Douglas Brooks, *Poised for Grace*, Anusara Books: 6.

This is fairly radical, Allison explained to me, in that Anusara excludes nothing from this policy: “We say yes to everything, with no exceptions,” she said. “Everything is good—yes, everything. We are radically free to choose from everything.”

At the same time, everyone has the choice to align or to misalign. What we may experience as suffering or pain, or see as evil, is often the result of other people’s choices in their own freedom, which may be misalignments. But even in a misalignment there is an opportunity to chose to play the edge—we can test our boundaries. Anusara is a practical, rather than contemplative tradition. We are invited to contemplate certain yogic texts, but not to retreat from the world. We want to engage the world, as deeply and enthusiastically as we can.

There are two kinds of yogis, it seems to me—the ones who can do every pose and the ones who can’t. My teachers are, naturally, of the first sort. They can do headstands and handstands without help, without the support of a wall. They can stand up out of a backbend or drop into one from standing straight up. They can twist themselves into strange shapes, again while balancing or upside down. I can do very little, comparatively. I love my yoga, I love doing asana practice, and, like most people, I have one or two “gift” poses—ones that come easily, without years of work. But I can’t keep up with my teachers, and I certainly can’t keep up with the yogis and yoginis (the feminine term) here in Colorado.

For one thing, a lot of them are professionals, yoga teachers or dancers or athletes who have been practicing yoga for years longer than I have. For another, I am suffering from altitude sickness. We are at 7500 feet and I have a constant, splitting headache. I feel dizzy

and nauseated and shaky and weak. I'm having trouble breathing, and even walking up the hill to my room. I am a low-energy person normally, and, as I am discovering, I have even less energy on top of a mountain. My mountain-top experience makes me want to come back down to sea level. There are two kinds of people, it seems—those who can operate at 7500 feet and those who can't.

In my regular day-to-day yoga practice in Louisville, our classes run about an hour and fifteen minutes. The daily classes here, led by John Friend, are three hours. Three hours. There's no clock in the enormous hall where we meet each morning to fit our mats into taped-off sections on the floor, so close we have to stagger ourselves so as not to hit one another when we raise our arms. When I feel I can't go on, I check my cell phone for the time and am not surprised to find that it's been exactly an hour and fifteen minutes. The second day, I push myself to an hour and a half. By day three, I make it almost to two hours. But then I have to leave. I have developed the strategy of placing my mat close to an exit, so that when I get tired, I can slip out of the hall without much awkwardness.

I take my mat, find my shoes just inside the door, and walk out into the bright Colorado morning. Sometimes, I go sit under a tree and write. Sometimes I go to the camp cafeteria and try to eat something. Besides the nausea I am feeling today, I am also still uncomfortable eating cafeteria-style. I don't like going through a line carrying a tray; I don't like feeling like a whole big group of people can see me choosing and eating food, or that someone might comment on my food choices. There are two kinds of people in the world—those who have food issues and those who don't. Healthy as I am, I will never be in the second group. And however long I practice, I may never be one of the yogis who can easily

balance in handstand or twist both my legs over one shoulder, which is fine. It's fine with me, and fine with my *kula*—my yoga community, the community of the heart.

In Anusara yoga, even when the world presents itself in twos, one element is not privileged and the other rejected—both are to be embraced. I receive just as much affirmation and acceptance when I am weak as when I am strong. When anyone achieves progress in a pose, everyone else in the *kula* celebrates with her, applauds her improvement. That includes the least steady student finally getting a balance, or someone recovering from injury finding a way to modify a pose to facilitate his healing.

To offer a further example, yogic philosophers teach us that our life experience is shaped by both the forces of *karma* and *lila*.³¹ *Karma* provides boundaries, the divine, cosmic law of cause and effect. And it works, most of the time. Most of the time, when you do x, you get y. Except when you don't. That's where *lila* comes in. *Lila* is the playfulness of the divine, the randomness, the part that doesn't need a reason or a plan.

One of my favorite yoga stories is about two unlikely friends, two men who are also a snake and a tiger. The snake is Patanjali, the tiger is Viagrapada, and they meet while they are each looking for the Nataraj, the dancing Shiva, whom they hope will teach them yoga. Patanjali has been told that Shiva is near, so he burrows underground in order to listen for his drumbeat. Viagrapada has heard the same news, and climbs high in the treetops in order to find Shiva. As the Nataraj approaches, Patanjali and Viagrapada notice one another, and circle around each other warily, but only when they both take their seats as potential students does the teacher appear.

³¹ Pronounced, *LEE-luh*.

Perhaps you've seen an image of the dancing Shiva. He has two legs and four arms; he stands on his right foot and the left is kicked out in front of him at an angle, pointing right. His lower right arm is outstretched to the right and the lower left arm is also reaching toward the right, parallel to the left leg. As the story goes, Patanjali sat down on Shiva's left and Viagrapada on his right, and he asked them what they wanted.

"To learn yoga," Patanjali said. So Shiva gave Patanjali yoga—*asanas* and *pranayama* and *ayurveda* and all the practices and all the boundaries of yoga. Picture how Shiva's dance, from the left side, looks closed off, bounded. And the delighted Patanjali went away to do his yoga.

What did Viagrapada want? He had wanted yoga, too. But he couldn't just say what Patanjali had said.

"I want what's more. Is there anything more?"

There's always more.

Viagrapada got a yoga of openness, grace, of boundlessness, of possibility. Of not *having* to do anything.

And in Anusara, we enjoy both. We get the *karma* of reliable results—if I isometrically pull my shins in and resist my thighs back in a standing pose, I will always get more stable. We also get the *lila* of randomness—some days I can balance on one foot and hold the other out to the side with my hand, and some days I can't. We enjoy both the bounded practice of standing poses, balancing poses, inversions, backbends, seated, and supine poses, in that order, every time, and we get the freedom to rest out and take a break when things get too intense. I have the freedom to skip classes for a month to act in a play, and call that my yoga.

Essentially, Anusara is a path of deep responsibility—there are no practices that are disavowed or disallowed. People can experiment with alcohol or marijuana, for example. People are free to explore their sexuality. But the focus is on what is life-enhancing, what helps us experience the divine. We are considered responsible enough to choose, to select for ourselves what we want to experience, which path we want to go down. It's very adult. Christianity, by contrast, tells you what to do all the time, how to think, how to feel. Your position is that of a "child of God." In the church we are constantly told we are children, and *bad* children at that. The tantric view is that we are divine and perfect—and adult enough to make our own choices.

In Anusara, therefore, we are invited into experiences rather than being forced or coerced into them, shamed or commanded into them. We are encouraged to turn off the voices in our heads that label and prejudge. If I run into an uncomfortable feeling, physical or emotional, I am learning to sit with it, until I can move through it or let it go. In this yoga, I am invited to notice, without judgment, what is going on in my body, in my mind, to build my awareness. I am invited to make choices about what I want to do, about how I want to engage my body. After studying and practicing yoga for several years now, I can control my body in certain way. I can engage it with some skill. I can use it to express my inner being. I am learning to be present in my body, present in the moment, rather than scattered, thinking of the past or the future, neither of which exist in the present. I am learning to be aware of others only selectively, to stay focused on my own work, within the confines of my own mat, rather than being distracted by other people's bodies and practices, and comparing them to my own, which is so tempting. Perhaps it is not surprising that yoga has been shown to be

healing, not just physically, but particularly in dealing with addictive behaviors, body image problems, eating disorders and impulse control problems. If you can build self-awareness and self-acceptance, build a sense of community in a non-judging atmosphere, then you can overcome any number of unhealthy patterns.

Anusara fits with my general moral philosophy of natural law theory—that there is a structure to the universe inherent in every being, and adhering to that structure, aligning with it leads to flourishing. There is great freedom within the boundaries of the universal order. We are free to choose what leads to flourishing or to choose something else. We are free not to flourish. But whatever brings flourishing and well-being to individuals and communities is affirmed.

I also like that the divine is not considered male in Anusara, nor is it a person. The ancient stories include goddesses as well as gods; some tantricas, like Douglas Brooks, actually focus on the goddess traditions. But the divine is seen as a universal consciousness which is impersonal; it transcends sexuality and gender. It has cloaked itself in the physical, manifested in different ways, and these concrete manifestations can perhaps in some way be considered ‘lower,’ in that they will not be eternal—they are always changing and passing away—but they are not less valuable for that. In our embodiment as humans, for example, we may feel or experience being separate from the divine, but our being in the world, and the very being *of* the world, is the divine playing, dancing. The separation we experience is not for the purpose of taking us away from God but to reveal the divine by concealing it in the physical, and in our being.

While I am a student of Anusara yoga and the Rajanaka tantra traditions, I am not a follower or devotee of John Friend or Douglas Brooks. I learn from them and from their students, but I no longer accept, nor am I asked to accept, any person or institution's right to have authority over me, morally or spiritually.

Although others who have similar views still also claim the name of Christian, I no longer call myself a Christian, because I know what that term used to mean to me and what it still means to many of my former friends. The fact is, I no longer hold any text to be sacred. I do not now believe any Christian doctrines, or that very much of the Bible is true or helpful. I can't stomach much of Christian worship, especially songs that focus on a masculine, all-powerful God. Even within yogic spirituality, the god-talk bothers me. I prefer to pray to the "universe," sometimes to the "Holy One," the divine presence that is everywhere, all the time, including in me. I now hold all life forms to be sacred, within gradations—higher life forms being more sacred than lower ones. I no longer eat animals. (I do kill bugs, but mindfully, with silent apologies.)

I don't *believe* in Shiva or Shakti. I'm not even sure that the idea of divine masculinity and femininity is important or relevant to me. I do appreciate the balance between the two in Rajanaka, but I prefer the idea of the oneness of the divine, the unity among the diversity of people, animals, nature. As I write this, I am flying over Colorado on my way home from Denver. Out my window, all I can see is enormous fields stretching out in all directions. The fields are flat, divided into large and smaller rectangles. But there are rivers and hills that swell and veer and curl around the landscape. Do these represent masculine and feminine? Maybe. But certainly it is all land, all landscape. It is easy to see dualities in every aspect of

existence. I look out over old, winding rivers, and newer, straighter ones; small and large fields, light and dark ones. Most philosophies and theologies take note of and emphasize such dualities. Hindu and Buddhist and yogic traditions do as well, but they also emphasize the unity of the universe.

Maybe, at “such a time as this,” unity is the more important message. Maybe diversity has been preeminent for so long and so widely because it is easier to perceive or to feel. It is easy for us to feel different from others. I suspect that most of us spend a great deal of our social energies assessing how others are “different”—how they do or do not dress, speak, think, act like we do. I find it much more helpful and healthy to focus instead on how others are like me, on how we are connected.

On this flight home from Colorado, the woman seated next to me and I are not talking. I’m tired and busy and shy; who knows the source of her reticence. But we are sharing the same experience of flying on this plane. We are also connected through the written word—she is reading a book, and I am writing one. We are both female, we are human, we are alive today in the world as it is right now. We share the same air, the same breath. Our hearts beat next to one another.

To be truthful, I do not feel at all connected to this woman, but I will treat her as I want to be treated. I will respect her and even care for her as I can. I will try to maintain this attitude, this alignment of my heart, so that my actions promote harmony and flourishing. I will make the effort to bear with difficult people and difficult situations with equipoise, keeping my balance, allowing grace to flow through me. I practice a yoga that honors process: that strives to find balance between effort and ease; that resists as much as possible labels

and judgments; that values peace, love, grace, acceptance, effort, attempting, and struggling; that is “is grounded in a philosophy of intrinsic goodness,” celebratory of life at all stages and in all conditions.

I don't find it easy to keep my balance, my emotional or energetic equilibrium from day to day, even hour to hour. I am not unhealthy, just delicate and sensitive, though it sounds lame to say so. I suspect that many people are the same way, whether or not they are particularly aware of it. So many of us self-medicate—with alcohol to relax us, caffeine to wake us up—that I suspect a significant percentage of folks have little idea where their true energetic center is, or are able to keep balanced energy without artificial stimulants. I suspect many have dulled their senses to the effects of nature, art, sound. Perhaps the growing number of children being born with autism and other sensory processing disorders has to do with the universe seeking balance—creating hyper-sensitive people in order to help awaken the desensitized.

I am and have been trying for years to make peace with my own nature in this respect. I have always been an introvert: musical and bookish, quiet, shy. Now I am coming to terms with the fact that I have a very difficult time sustaining my energy. I am generally far quieter in my temperament than those around me. More reserved. Except when I'm not. When I'm teaching or acting or shopping or throwing a party, or I have some reserve of energy saved up from being solitary or at home for some time, I am perfectly bubbly, outgoing—I sparkle at people, I am funny and silly. And I can sustain that for approximately two hours. And then I need a nap.

*“We are sufficient to our own joy... we contain within ourselves all that is required to find
the deepest meaning of the divine in our everyday experience.”*

~Douglas Brooks

My prayer life is still vibrant—I speak to the divine throughout the day, as I have done for years. There is also still an immediacy of comfort, sometimes of “answers” to my prayers. Does this seem arrogant? I don’t think it is, as I now view the divine as dwelling in me, an idea that parallels the Christian notion of the Holy Spirit. Clearly, Christian devotional practices helped me develop the spiritual disciplines to access that Spirit. In my earlier prayer life, I believe the divine did hear and acknowledge my prayers—my praise and thanksgiving, my petitions and intercessions—in the spirit of devotion with which they were offered. I was praying in orthodox, Trinitarian fashion, to God the Father, through Jesus and the Holy Spirit, a doctrine I no longer accept. At the heart of that practice of prayer, though, I was acknowledging and processing my own intentions, connecting with the divine through my own desires. I was focusing on the concerns of others; I was inquiring into deep and universal spiritual questions as well as more particular questions of daily life. At the time, I felt the answers I received were coming from far beyond me, could not possibly be the result of my own rational or intuitive mind. The solutions that came forth could not have resulted merely from my own power.

Even now, as a practitioner of Anusara and a more tantric philosophy, I feel that those answers and solutions did and do arise from the more generalized divine power of the universe—not a daddy or granddaddy on high, but a pervasive force that can manifest as male

or female or neither, that can move through nature, through events, through thoughts and intentions as well as texts. A force that runs deep within me. An ancient wisdom and power I can tap into through spiritual practices or just by breathing.

In the Colorado mountains, I was drawn by the quiet serenity of an old wooden chapel but couldn't bring myself to go inside. Days later, I went into the chapel at the Denver airport for a moment of quiet and solitude. I didn't pray or sing a hymn, as I used to do, however, and the space somehow did not feel harmonious to me. I only stayed long enough to rearrange my bags and clothing. I didn't even sit down. Now, when I want a reflective moment, when I want to connect with the divine, I go to my mat. I sit with my back to a wall and meditate, or I find somewhere to sit outside and just breathe. Just listen. To my own heart. To the heart of the divine.

Appendix I

What follows is an excursus explaining some of the common terms that distinguish certain Christian theological views.

It may be helpful to explain the spectrum of viewpoints on Scripture within the Church. On the far right are the fundamentalists (and these are people who call themselves fundamentalists—the term comes from their notion of preserving the “fundamentals” of the Christian faith). They would say that every word in the Bible is literally God’s Word. God spoke it and people wrote it down, as if taking dictation. The Holy Spirit preserved every word through the ages, just as it was originally written, so there are no contradictions, no inconsistencies, and no errors. In their view, all of the Bible should always be read as literally as possible. There are some passages that are clearly figurative, such as John 15, where Jesus says, “I am the vine; you are the branches”—Jesus was never a vine, branches never grew out of his body. No one believes that. Every interpreter of any stripe understands that passage to be an extended metaphor about the vital and intimate relationship between Jesus and his followers.

Most other passages, however, are interpreted quite literally, sometimes to an extreme. “Be not drunk with wine” (Eph 5:18) is taken mean that no one should ever drink any sort of alcoholic beverage. “Let the women be silent in the churches” (I Cor 14:34) means women should not speak inside any church building.

Along with the fundamentalist view of Scripture comes an ultra-conservative package of political views. First, they are creationists, who believe in the creation of the Earth by God

in six literal, 24-hour days. They also believe in prayer in schools, and may choose private, Protestant schools in order to secure it; they oppose homosexuality. Many students at the seminary when I was there were in this camp.

A small step to the left of the fundamentalist position stand the conservative evangelicals— this is how Dr. Mohler characterizes himself and how the seminary has characterized itself under his administration. He has said, for example, on countless occasions, that his goal as president is that Southern Seminary would become the “flagship conservative evangelical seminary” of the world.

The major difference between them and the fundamentalists is that conservatives don't think the Bible was literally divinely *dictated*, but rather, divinely *inspired*. In this view, the biblical authors were filled with the Holy Spirit, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and wrote down what they felt led to write down, but then those authors were also able to edit their writings. Sometimes perhaps other people helped with the editing process; sometimes there were earlier documents that might have informed the biblical authors' writing—for example, the New Testament very often quotes and cites material from the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament. The epistles sometimes cite the gospels; some of the gospels (Matthew and Luke) cite other gospel material (Mark). These New Testament writers clearly had access to these other documents; they were not merely taking dictation from the Spirit.

Conservatives recognize that there was more of a process involved with how the Bible came to be written down and put together. But the Scripture is still seen by conservatives as inerrant—it has no errors that relate to any important doctrine; it is infallible—it will never

lead a reader astray in any matter of faith; it has no inconsistencies—there is not a word of it that doesn't belong there and there is nothing that should have ever been added to it. Nothing added, nothing taken away. The Holy Bible is viewed as pure and holy and perfect, the supreme guide in all matters of faith, but also of life.

Another example of a key difference between these two right-wing groups is that where fundamentalists believe in a Creation that took place over six 24-hour days, conservative evangelicals will not necessarily take those “days” so literally. “The Bible is not a science book,” they will say. The goal of the creation story in Genesis is not to explain the science of the earth's coming into being, to indicate God's authorship of and authority over that process.

These views are close; sometimes conservatives are mistaken for fundamentalists and they don't like that. The word ‘fundamentalist’ often has a derogatory tenor in theological disputes. But conservatives and fundamentalists share a lot, including a large set of political concerns including edges-of-life issues like abortion and stem cell research, and social concerns, especially homosexuality and gay marriage. Conservatives acknowledge a hierarchy amongst these issues, recognizing that certain ones cannot be compromised—these are key theological, doctrinal issues. There can be no compromise on the divinity of Christ, on the literal virgin birth, on the literal, physical resurrection, etc. But on other issues there is a little more wiggle room. For example, conservatives believe that homosexuality is an “abomination unto the Lord,” but whether a given church bans homosexuals outright, or welcomes them as members but preaches that they should change is up to that congregation or pastor. With fundamentalists, there is only ever one right answer. With conservatives, there might be two

or three options—the range of options remains narrow, and there is no real dialogue available about broadening that range.

A bigger step to the left brings us to the center of the spectrum, the moderate viewpoint. Moderates believe that the Bible is inspired, that it is the word of God, but that it is almost never to be read as literally true. It is an ancient text, which has to be interpreted for modern times, and the goal of biblical interpretation is to discern the authors' intentions. For example, a difficult text like the I Corinthians 14:34, "Let the women be silent in the churches," is read by moderate Christians in the context of the rest of Scripture and other indicators about the Corinthian church at the time, and largely taken to indicate that Paul was addressing specific women who were being particularly fractious in that specific church (a behavior pattern that would be problematic anywhere), rather than delivering a blanket proscription against women speaking within all church walls everywhere.

More importantly, as we move toward the moderates and the more liberal side of the spectrum, there is more openness in interpretation of the Scripture and therefore a wider range of options for answers to social and political and theological problems. A more liberal view of Scripture would be that not all the words in the Bible are necessarily God's words. After all, men wrote the Bible (though maybe one woman snuck in there—there are a few New Testament scholars who argue that perhaps Priscilla wrote Hebrews). The goal of the liberal interpreter is to discern the Spirit working through the Word, to connect with God by reading the Scripture without expecting to find detailed answers to contemporary problems. Instead, the expectation in a more liberal congregation is that today's Bible-readers

can find themes and ideas in the Scriptures that will lead them toward a rational and spiritual consideration of possible solutions.

Even the conservatives will consider the historical context of a biblical text when they go to interpret it, but as we move to the moderate, and all the more, the liberal view, the Bible is seen not only as historical but often as dated, and in some cases as outdated. The challenge of interpreting and using the ancient text in a modern or post-modern world is a serious one, and the Bible is definitely seen as less authoritative as one moves from the right wing toward the left.

Another way of looking at the differences between Christian groups is to consider what my first ethics professor, Dr. David Gushee, called “sources of moral authority.” These are the basic sources to which people turn for guidance in moral decision-making: tradition, reason (logic), Scripture, experience, nature, and the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals will tend to put the Spirit first. In their view, God the Holy Spirit is greater than the Bible, so therefore the Bible cannot possibly contain or express all of God’s leadership or instruction. Roman Catholics will tend to rank tradition first. They have a rich tradition of church teachings, papal encyclicals and such—and these documents, along with their traditional practices, are of primary importance in deciding moral and social, as well as theological and political questions. Conservative and fundamentalist Protestants (including the SBC at this point) will put Scripture first. Moderates and liberal Christians will more likely turn to reason and experience first. For example, certain biblical passages say that homosexuality is a sin—however, in my *experience*, most homosexuals are good and loving people with committed relationships, and *rationaly*, it only makes sense that they should have equal civil rights and

be free to marry. What sources of authority follow after the first-place source will be different from one community or tradition to the next, even from one believer to the next, and generally matters less in terms of what answers we embrace.

For Christian thinkers on the right, the Bible is the only source of truth. “The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword”—this is the classic fundamentalist view. Fundamentalists love that verse (Hebrews 4.12). There’s this violent, strong image of a sword slicing through falsehood and deception and confusion to get to the Truth (with a capital T). There is only one holy text and all others are false; there is only one correct interpretation of each passage and verse, and all others are false. Moreover, the Bible is the supreme source of truth not only on issues of morality, spirituality, and religion but also, fundamentalists would claim, on issues of history and science as well (this is where we get embarrassments like the Creation Museum here in Kentucky, and households in which the only book to be found is the Holy Bible).

On the liberal end of the spectrum, God’s leadership can be found in all kinds of other sources and even other holy texts. A moderate may not consider the Tao or the Koran to be holy, but the liberals may not view the Bible as holy in the way moderates and conservatives do, in that she would likely see the texts of other religious traditions as holy for those believers. The liberal viewpoint is that God speaks to all people, through all sorts of texts, and ours is not the only way, nor the only text. We read and embrace our Bible because *we* find it inspiring, not because it is the only source of truth and inspiration.

The SBC falls on the far right of this spectrum; the General Baptists fall in the center left. The Episcopalians are further to the left; there are two branches of Presbyterians, one

to the far right and one in the middle left. All these groupings and gradations come down primarily to the issue of what the Bible is and how it is to be interpreted. To understand the revolution at Southern Seminary, though, we also have to look beyond Biblical interpretation to other points of theology.

Before Dr. Mohler was appointed to head the Southern Baptist Seminary, the institution was liberal to moderate, the middle-left. There were dozens of women on faculty, including even a feminist theologian, Dr. Molly Marshall. There were a considerable number of women students, including Dixie Petrie, then president of the student body; there were gay students on campus. There was a wider spectrum of belief among the students and staff and faculty. But Dr. Mohler is a conservative's conservative. He is a five-point Calvinist.

Calvin and Luther were the theological authors of the Protestant Reformation (leave aside Henry VIII). While Calvin certainly wouldn't have called himself a Calvinist, current followers of his doctrinal ideas like the term and categorize themselves according to five points of his teaching. Those points coordinate with the acronym, TULIP:

- Total Depravity—All humans are totally depraved, meaning they are morally evil and spiritually worthless from birth; they have no good in them apart from Christ. The best action of the most morally upright human (Gandhi and Mother Teresa are classic examples) does not please God. It is so far away from the perfect holiness of God that it is a foul smell in His holy nostrils.
- Unconditional Election—God elected (chose) each believer before the creation of the world to be His very own, regardless of her actions. She did not and cannot earn that

election, even by faith. Her faith itself is a gift from God, and the result of her election; God's grace actually accomplishes her faith for her. (The favored Bible verse here is John 15:16, "You did not choose me, but I chose you...")

- Limited Atonement—Christ died only for the elect. The reason for this is that the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ died on the cross, "shedding his blood for our sins." But not everyone is a believer and taking advantage of that atoning work, which means that part of Christ's atoning work was wasted. This is a problem if your view of God is that He is all-powerful. Unable to think of that power as potentially wasted, full Calvinists take the view that the atonement was limited to benefit only the elect, those who would become believers then and in the future.
- Irresistible Grace—When God calls the believer to Himself, she cannot resist that call. She will believe and respond by becoming a Christian. It is not truly her choice, but the choice of the Father to send His Spirit to change her heart and apply the work of Christ to her soul.
- Perseverance of the Saints—The commonplace expression of this doctrine is, "Once saved, always saved." Once the believer has accepted Christ by faith and been baptized, she will always belong to Him and can never in the future be rejected by God. No matter how much beer she drinks, she will come back to a righteous lifestyle; no matter how much yoga she does, she will always (somehow) be in the kingdom. This gets a little difficult because the church does have a lot of people fall away from their faith, but in John, Jesus says, "No one can snatch you out of my

hand.” (So my answer to those who might question my salvation at this point could be, “I’m still in God’s hand—I’m just doing yoga there.”)

Some thinkers are five-point Calvinists, some are three or four, depending on how many of the TULIP doctrines they assent to. When I first encountered Calvinism, somewhere in the second or third year I was at seminary, I spent some time reading Calvin’s Institutes of the Christian Religion (an abbreviated version in English, not the original French), and I found myself in agreement with all five points. To me, they clearly went together.

The opposite view is Arminianism: that we’re not totally depraved, there is some good in us; that the atonement was for everybody (there are many verses in the New Testament that say “Christ died for the world”— in Greek it’s the *cosmos*); that grace is resistible, some people are going to hear the call of God and then refuse it; that some people will believe and then walk away and will not go to heaven. For me there was no comfort in the Arminian view: it felt better to believe in a great big, extra-sovereign God who chose me from the beginning of the world, whose ‘meticulous Providence’ ensures that even the fall of a sparrow is under control, whose love is so powerful that everything is just taken care of. The attraction of Calvinism was that it gets rid of randomness and chaos—every event happens for a reason, and God’s wisdom is behind it all.

It also may be helpful to know that while Calvin and Arminius were proponents of these two sets of ideas, the ideas themselves are much older, dating back to the age of the Church Fathers, the first five or so centuries after Christ. Augustine, later sainted, took the

more conservative view, that humans are fundamentally corrupt and at God's complete mercy to accomplish anything of value, particularly their salvation. Origen, then and later labeled a heretic, took the more liberal view, that people are fundamentally good and participate with God in their own redemption. Perhaps it is not surprising that Augustine was a bit of a wild child in his youth, coming to faith in Christ only after partying a lot, getting his mistress pregnant, and running with followers of strange heresies, where Origen grew up in a quiet Christian home. Maybe we select the faith we need.

WORKS CITED

BOOKS:

- Ammerman, Nancy. Baptist Battles. Rutgers University Press, 1990.
- Aristotle. Nicomachean Ethics.
- Belenky, Mary, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Goldberger, and Jill Tarule. Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind. Basic Books, 1997.
- Brooks, Douglas R. Poised for Grace: Annotations on the Bhagavadgita from a Tantric View. 2007.
- Calvin, John. Institutes of the Christian Religion.
- Cloke, Gillian. This Female Man of God. Routledge, 1995.
- Claude-Pierre, Peggy. The Secret Language of Eating Disorders. Vintage: 1998.
- Dodson, Shireen. The Mother-Daughter Book Club. Harper: 1997.
- Elderedge, John. Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul. Thomas Nelson: 2006.
- Fenner, Carol. Yolonda's Genius. Aladdin:1997.
- Finnis, John. Natural Law, Natural Rights. Oxford University Press: 1980.
- Foster, Richard. A Celebration of Discipline. Harper Collins: 1988.
- The Holy Bible, New American Standard Bible.
- Konigsburg, E.L., The Moorchild. Aladdin: 1998.
- O'Donovan, Oliver. Resurrection and the Moral Order. William B. Eerdmans: 1994.
- Robison, (Rob) B. James, Barbara Jackson, Robert E. Shepherd, Jr., and Cornelia

Showalter. The Fundamentalist Takeover in the Southern Baptist Convention: A Brief History. Macon, GA: Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, 2006. 59.

WEBSITES:

Anusara.com

<<http://www.anusara.com>>

Baptist Faith and Message

<<http://www.sbc.net/bfm/default.asp>>

Bible Gateway.com

<<http://www.biblegateway.com>>

Council for Biblical Equality.

<<http://www.cbe.org>>

Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood.

<<http://www.cbmw.org>>

“The History of Jim Crow.”

<<http://www.jimcrowhistory.org/scripts/jimcrow/insidesouth.cgi?state=Kentucky>

Associated Baptist Press Feb 12, 2004.

<http://www.abpnews.com/index.php?option=com_contentandtask=viewandid=2482andItemid=117>. Apr 18, 2009

Rajanaka.com

<<http://www.rajana.com>>

Sojournchurch.com

<<http://www.sojournchurch.com>>

Southern Baptist Convention

<<http://www.sbc.net>>

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Abstract of Principles

<[http://www.sbts.edu/about/truth/abstract />](http://www.sbts.edu/about/truth/abstract/)

Seminary Wives Institute

<[http://www.sbts.edu/women/seminary-wives-institute />](http://www.sbts.edu/women/seminary-wives-institute/)

Wikipedia

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R._Albert_Mohler,_Jr.>