The Canterbury Tales

Literary Response Journal Prompts

*Each response should be thoughtful and well-developed. 2-3 pages in your LRJ per response is the proper range. Remember: Your LRJ will be collected and graded on exam day – for completeness, thoughtfulness, and effort.*

**1. What Do Women Want?**

Read the editorial “What Do Women Want?” by Dennis Prenger (see below). Prenger makes an assertion about what women want and he identifies and explains “three qualities that the fairer sex looks for.” In your response, first identify Prenger’s claims and supports. Then write an essay that defends, challenges, or qualifies his claim about what women want.

**2. *Radix malorum est cupiditas***

*Radix malorum est cupiditas,* the stated theme of the hypocritical Pardoner’s tale and of his “preaching,” is a biblical quotation from 1 Timothy 6:10 that means in Latin “greed is the root of evils" (or, in sentence order, “the root of evil is greed”). It has been translated into English as “the love of money is the root of all evil” since the earliest English translations. In his *Business Daily* article, “Understanding Money and the Meaning of Life” (see below), Bill Taylor asks: “How is it that brilliant people with more money than they’ll ever need get so caught up in their hunger for even more money that they end up losing everything? How much is enough, and why are people willing to risk so much to get more? And if money is so alluring, how is it that so many extremely wealthy people seem so unhappy?” How does Taylor answer these questions? Explain why you agree or disagree with his answers. How would you answer the questions?

**3. Repercussions of Conversion**

In The Man of Law’s Tale, a Muslim sultan agrees to convert to Christianity in order to marry the Emperor’s beautiful daughter Constance. Many non-religious and irreligious people today might take such an act lightly, but to renounce one’s faith (even for a beautiful gal) can carry some serious repercussions. It did as much for the sultan, whose mother slaughtered her son and all the Christians (except for Constance) while they dined at feast: Christians all were overthrown, / Hacked into pieces, stabbed where they were sitting, / All but Lady Constance, spared alone.” Unfortunately, in some parts of the world today – Sudan, Nigeria, Malaysia, Pakistan, Afghanistan and elsewhere – this kind of occurrence is not uncommon. In some countries, the punishment for conversion to Christianity is execution. Read “Daring Leaps of Faith” by Julia Duin in *The Washington Times* (see below). What issues do ex-Muslims have to face in Muslim countries? In the U.S.? Do you find this surprising? Why or why not?

**4. Scam Artists, Con Men, Swindlers, and Bamboozlers**

The Canon’s Yeoman exposes his master (the Canon) as a scam artist – that is, one who obtains money by fraud or deceit, intentionally misleading another person for purposes of financial gain. The Canon claims to know the secret of how to turn base metals into expensive precious metals, and he’s willing to sell his secret for a pretty price. There is no shortage of scam artists, con men, swindlers, and bamboozlers in every age – including our own. Research one of the following 20th-20st-century scam artists and explain how they conned or swindled in order to make big bucks: Frank Abagnale, Jr., Charles Ponzi, Christopher Rocancourt, Victor Lustig (“The Man Who Sold the Eiffel Tower”), or George Parker (“The Man Who Sold the Brooklyn Bridge”).

***The articles below relate to the prompts above.***

**What Do Women Want?**

*The three qualities that the fairer sex looks for*

By Dennis Prenger,

National Review Online, December 28, 2010

In my previous column, I offered an answer to the question: What do men want? I made the case that what men most want from the woman they love is to be admired. If my answer is correct, and if we presume that the natures of men and women are complementary (a presumption many men and women understandably doubt given how often men and women do not get along), what women most want must be related to that which men most want.

I believe it is.

What a woman most wants is to be loved by a man she admires.

I am well aware that to say this today is akin to announcing that the sun revolves around the earth. For half a century, we have been told that what women most want is professional success and equality. And to the extent that a modern “liberated” woman does admit to wanting a man to love, she will say that she wants a “partner” who is her “equal.” And girls and women have been told — or more accurately, have had drummed into them — that equality means that both sexes are essentially the same (except for the physical differences) and therefore want the same things. Equality and sameness have been rendered synonymous. That is why she cannot say — and ideally wouldn’t even admit to herself — that she wants a man to admire; that would be “sexist” as it would imply an unequal relationship.

The notion that a woman most wants a man, admirable or not, has been scoffed at. This was encapsulated by the famous feminist slogan, “A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle.” Even feminism that did not agree with the fish-bicycle metaphor communicated to young women that an “authentic” woman would not have as her greatest desire to bond with a man.

Today feminism holds less appeal for young women than it did for the previous generation, but “equality” remains the liberal god of the day. That renders my theory — that a woman wants to be cherished by a man she admires — politically incorrect in the extreme.

It is problematic enough to say that a woman most wants a man. But that pales compared to the claim that she most wants a man whom she admires. That seems to affirm gender inequality. The image it conjures up is of a woman looking up to her man as if he were some sort of lord and she his serf.

Yet any woman who believes that she is married to an admirable man would laugh at such a dismissal. Admiring one’s husband doesn’t render a woman a serf. It renders her fortunate.

The truth is that almost nothing — including job success — elevates a woman in her own eyes as much as being loved by a husband whom she admires. That is why when married women get together, they don’t talk about their jobs nearly as much as men do. Among other things, they talk about their man if they are proud of him, and complain about him if they are not. Even most feminists are happiest when married to a man they admire.

And what is it that women most admire in a man? From decades of talking to women on the radio and, of course, from simply living life, I have concluded that an admirable man is one who has three qualities: strength, integrity, ambition.

All three are needed. Strength without integrity is machismo. Integrity without strength or without ambition makes a man a milquetoast. And ambition without integrity makes for a successful crook.

Women are drawn to strong men. Though many men, when asked the secret to their long marriage, answer, “I learned to always say, ‘Yes, dear,’” the truth is that most women are not attracted to “Yes, dear” men. They are attracted to a man who exhibits strength in the outer world and at home as husband and father.

But that strength must come with integrity. If it doesn’t, he is a strong bad man. And while more than a few women fall for bad men (precisely because of the power of masculine strength to attract women), most women do not want such a man over the long run.

And ambition does not mean that he is necessarily rich, but that he is a hard worker who wants to improve himself; plenty of men who earn relatively little are admired and loved by their wives. That is why a major “turn off” to most women is a husband who sits and watches television all night (let alone all day).

The beauty of all this is that it all comes together for men, for women, and for society.

Women get what they want most: to be married to and loved by a man they admire. Men then attain what they want most: to be admired by the woman they love. And society gets the thing it most needs: admirable men.

Unfortunately, none of this is taught at college.

*— Dennis Prager is a nationally syndicated radio talk-show host and columnist. He may be contacted through his website, dennisprager.com.*

**Understanding Money and the Meaning of Life**

By Bill Taylor, *Business Daily Africa*

June 28, 2011

Everywhere you look, there’s compelling evidence that the single-minded pursuit of wealth often leads smart people to do incredibly stupid things — things that destroy what money can’t buy.

Earlier this month, the big story was the conviction of Galleon Group founder Raj Rajaratnam on 14 counts of insider trading, a greed-driven scheme that will lead to obliterated reputations, long prison terms, or both, for senior leaders at IBM, McKinsey and other blue-chip institutions.

A few weeks before that, the big story was the resignation and humiliation of Berkshire Hathaway’s David Sokol, the likely successor to CEO Warren Buffett, undone by his eagerness to cash in on suspiciously timed investments in the stock of a company Berkshire later bought.

And this month also brings HBO’s film adaptation of the best-selling book Too Big to Fail, Andrew Ross Sorkin’s blow-by-blow chronicle of the subprime-mortgage fiasco — an exercise in collective greed that came pretty close to destroying the world as we know it.

Every time I read or see these sorry dispatches, I ask myself the same questions. How is it that brilliant people with more money than they’ll ever need get so caught up in their hunger for even more money that they end up losing everything? How much is enough, and why are people willing to risk so much to get more?

And if money is so alluring, how is it that so many extremely wealthy people seem so unhappy?

To answer those questions, I often turn to a small book that was published 20 years ago: Money and the Meaning of Life, by Jacob Needleman, a professor of philosophy at San Francisco State University.

I met Needleman during the heyday of the first Internet boom, when lots of people in their 20s and 30s were making more money than they ever imagined they would and were trying to come to terms with what their new wealth meant in their lives. Since then, we’ve had a broader stock-market boom, a real-estate bubble, a second Internet boom and plenty of busts along the way.

The specifics of the financial markets have changed, but the questions remain the same.

Drawing from an interview I did with Needleman at Fast Company many years ago, here are some of his answers to those questions. It’s amazing to me how relevant these insights are to what’s happening today.

Money may be the root of all evil, but only if you’re not honest about what it means to you. “Money is about love and relationships,” Needleman explained.

“It has a wonderful power to bring people together as well as tear them apart. You can’t escape money. If you run from it, it will chase you and catch you.

“If we don’t understand our relationship to money in this culture, then I think we’re doomed. If you don’t know how you are toward money and really understand that relationship, you simply don’t know yourself. Period.”

Money truly can’t buy happiness, especially if you’re unhappy to begin with. “If you are worrying about vegetables now, you’ll be worrying about yachts then,” Needleman joked. “You’re a worrier. It’s in you, not the money. Life, except for the obvious physical needs, is not so much defined by the external situation as by the inner one. Having money won’t change your internal makeup.”

Being rich does not make you smart — especially about things other than money. “I met a guy who worked his way up from zero to a half-billion dollars,” Needleman noted.

“I asked him, ‘What was the most surprising thing you discovered when you got rich?’ He said, ‘Everybody asks my opinion about things because they think I know something.

“All I really know is how to make a lot of money.’ See, this guy wasn’t fooled by his money. That’s the key.” Being rich does not automatically lead to a rich life. “There is a difference between money and success. To be totally engaged with all my functions, all my faculties, all my capacities in life — to me that would be success.

“I grew up around the Yiddish language, and in Yiddish there are about 1,000 words that mean ‘fool.’ There’s only one word that means an authentic human being: mensch.

**Developed character**

“My grandmother would say, ‘You’ve got to be a mensch,’ and that has to do with what we used to call character. To be successful means to have developed character... You should be looking for the joy, the struggle and the challenge of work.

“What you bring forth from your own guts and heart. The happiness of hard work. No amount of money can buy that. Those are things of the spirit.”

It’s easy to pass judgment from afar on the misdeeds and missteps of wealthy people in the news. But look in the mirror. What’s your relationship with the pursuit of wealth? How do you think about money and the meaning of life?

*Bill Taylor is co-founder of Fast Company magazine and author of Practically Radical: Not-So-Crazy Ways to Transform Your Company, Shake Up Your Industry, and Challenge Yourself.*

Muslims Who Convert To Christianity and The Price They Pay

**Daring Leaps of Faith**

By Julia Duin, Religion writer

The Washington Times, July 10, 2007

Having just come out of church, they were at an indoor cafe, conversing about former Muslims they knew who were now Christians. Some married into the faith. Some of the converts no longer believed in the Koran. Others said they had had visions or dreams of Jesus Christ. And others felt the Christian message of God becoming a man was more compelling than their faith. These converts face all kinds of dangers for having left Islam: ostracism from family members and friends, kidnappings and even death threats.

"Most of the people who come here start to question the Koran," one of the Egyptians said. "They can read sources not available in our countries, especially sources in Arabic." The government of Saudi Arabia, for example, blocks thousands of Web sites through its Internet Services Unit in Riyadh, including anything criticizing Islam. A Harvard University study conducted in May showed that out of 2,038 sites banned by the Saudis, 250 were religious.

In the West, seekers who've never heard a serious debate on Islam can click on Exmuslim.com, Islamreview.com and Arabicbible.com. Then there's Paltalk.com, a chat site featuring discussions in various languages on a wide range of topics. Some former Muslims enter these chat rooms with the intent to convert Arabic speakers to Christianity, including "Sam Ash," a New Jersey hairdresser.

"I ask them to prove to me that Islam is the way to God," he said. "Jesus said He is the way, the truth and the life. If you can show I have eternal life through Muhammad, I'll become a Muslim this moment."

There is no lack of people who wish to challenge him, which is why he will not divulge his real name.

"I've been hacked" into, he said, "and you should see the viruses people send me."

Most of these converts keep their new affiliation secret, as Islam considers those who leave the faith to be apostates. According to Islamic law as practiced in countries such as Iran, Sudan, Pakistan and in northern regions of Nigeria, the penalty for changing one's religion is execution. The U.S. State Department has documented numerous instances of religious persecution overseas against Muslim converts to Christianity. What is not so well known are the threats against such converts in the United States.

Some have simply been shunned by their families. Others have been kidnapped by family members and friends, and put on a plane back home. All are reluctant to ask for protection from U.S. law enforcement, especially those converts with Arabic surnames who are leery of getting their names on a U.S. police report. However, there are no known instances of converts from Islam to Christianity who have been killed in the United States for their decision to leave their faith.

Most established Christian denominations are unaware of the situation, as converts attend Bible study groups in their own language or small hidden churches that appear on no denominational radar. No academic research has been done on such converts. The closest figures are those by David Barrett, co-author of the World Christian Encyclopedia, who estimates that within U.S. borders, 50,000 Christians per year turn to Islam while 20,000 Muslims adopt Christianity. Befriending the latter, the men say, is a dicey proposition.

"It's written in their books," one said. "You cannot be a friend with unbelievers."

**'Christ in the Koran'**

The Rev. Esper Ajaj, the Syrian-born pastor of Washington Arabic Baptist Church at 4605 Massachusetts Ave. NW in the District, concedes that there are dangers to working with Muslims. Situated within walking distance of American University, he gets a fair amount of seekers at his door.

"They want to ask questions," he said. "Sometimes they come to pray here. Then they have a cup of coffee, and I talk to them. Then I discuss the greatness of Christ in the Koran. "We've seen more Muslims in [the 1990s] become Christians more than any time in history. If they are open-minded, it is easy. If they are closed-minded, it is not."

He is writing a book tentatively titled, "Difficult Questions a Muslim Asks" but confesses that "I don't know if I'll put my name on it."

"Look at Salman Rushdie," he said, referring to the Muslim author from India whose 1988 book "The Satanic Verses" earned him a death warrant from Persian mullahs.

"One guy called my wife and said, 'Let Esper die.' They could give a person $1,000 and shoot me, and no one would know."

Mr. Ajaj said Christianity is not logical to a Muslim mind that cannot fathom worshipping someone who was ridiculed, then killed. Muslims are divided on whether Jesus even died, and the Koran said Jesus was snatched up to heaven by God before the Crucifixion. Some Muslim commentators think Judas Iscariot or Simon of Cyrene died in His place, and none believe He rose from the dead.

The Rev. Hisham Kamel, pastor of the Arabic Evangelical Church in Temple City, Calif., said the certainty of heaven is what draws Muslims to risk losing family and friends when they accept Christ.

"In Islam, the only way they know they'll get to heaven is if they take part in jihad," he said. But there is a downside of working with converts, said the Rev. Charles Farag of Trinity Arabic Baptist Church in Raleigh, N.C. Two years ago, he gave one convert, who showed up at his door with a hard-luck story, one of his favorite cars, a 1994 black Chrysler New Yorker. The convert totaled the car the next day, then showed up back at the church, saying someone had tried to run him off the road.

"Sometimes people lie so they can apply for religious asylum," Mr. Farag said. "Then, after they receive help from you, you never hear from them again." The Immigration and Naturalization Service refused to provide details on religious asylum requests.

Sometimes even offering sympathy to a convert brings opposition. One Washington area pastor asked not to be named because of a nearby mosque that has been scrutinizing him. "I have seven Muslims who have converted," he said. "I do not want any trouble."

Ann Buwalda, an immigration lawyer for Just Law International in Fairfax, sa id she's been approached by Pakistani converts who are refugees. One man, "Masih," was working at a retail store in Northern Virginia, she said, when a Muslim co-worker from Pakistan noticed he was wearing a cross. The man asked Masih why he was wearing it.

"I am Christian," said Masih. The Muslim co-worker became angry, called him derogatory names in their native language, shoved him in a hallway and thereafter tried to get him fired and threatened him after work one night.

"He told the security guards at the retail store, so the employer has separated the two," Ms. Buwalda said.

"I worry about these people. I have given him a cell phone so he can call 911 if these guys stalk him. He has informally told police about it but filed no report" because, she adds, most refugees view American law enforcement in the same light as police from their own countries: people to be avoided at all costs.

She tells of another young female convert who wears a cross and who was stalked by a Muslim Pakistani taxi driver in the retail store where she works. Yet another Pakistani woman who converted to Christianity was threatened with death by Pakistani neighbors. "That kind of stuff, it's frightening when it happens," Ms. Buwalda said.

Victor Gill, a Pakistani immigrant who lives in Philadelphia and who leads a ministry called Christian Voice of Pakistan, said converts are regularly harassed in the United States. "The threat is real," he said. "They think they are doing something to earn credit with God when they kill Christians. When John Walker Lindh converted to Islam, his family supported him. But not so for the converts here. The Koran said people who leave Islam must be killed."

**Killing converts**

Actually, that instruction is in the Hadith, a collection of the sayings of Muhammad, the founder of Islam. It has been enforced in varying ways. Female converts are usually imprisoned in a room - for months or years - as a sort of psychological torture until they recant. As for the men, all the traditional schools of Shariah (Islamic) law stipulate that "apostates" - those who leave their faith - must die. But before they die, they lose all civil liberties. Their children are taken away, their marriage is dissolved, they lose their family inheritance and they cannot be buried in a Muslim graveyard.

One dissident to this traditional interpretation of the Hadith is Taha Jabir Alawani, president of the Graduate School for Islamic Social Sciences in Leesburg, Va. He said the apostate rule was formed in the early seventh century, when leaving one's religion was seen as a traitorous act.

"Mine is a minority opinion," he said. "There's a certain hadith [verse] that said if anyone changes his or her religion, he deserves to be killed. In my research, I found that was linked to some people who were trying to penetrate the Muslim community at the time in Medina. They came from Jewish or pagan communities, and announced they had become Muslims. Then after a few days, they announced they had found this religion to be very bad and they had decided to go back to their religions: Judaism, paganism, whatever.

"The Prophet was trying to stop that kind of conspiracy so he said that if anyone changes from the religion he has adopted, we will kill him. Islamic jurists [ scholars] have not paid attention to [the exceptional nature] of that event. They have generalized that hadith to say if anyone practices apostasy, we should kill him."

Not only has the Hadith been misunderstood, Mr. Alawani said, but the famous Koranic command that there is "no compulsion" in the choice of one's religion has been ignored.

"Everyone has the full right to choose his or her religion," he said. "No one should interfere with that." He is writing a book on the topic but jokes that it should never be released in countries where Islamic law is in full force.

"I should stay away from Pakistan and other places, or I would lose my neck," he said. "Some people living in America even, they don't like those kind of opinions. They will say: 'Don't listen to him. He is trying to Americanize Islam.'"

Some Muslims who convert to Christianity in this country are ordered home immediately, said Samy Tanagho, an Egyptian evangelist associated with Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa, Calif.

"Last year we had one of the princesses from the Saudi royal family who came with her mother who was seeking medical treatment," he said. "I led her to Christ. It was a huge problem with her family.

"Her faith was genuine. We tried to help her and even contacted Congress to try to protect her. All of a sudden, her family sent a limousine to where she was living and they took her away. She didn't have much support here from Christians, and her family had cut off all financial support."

A California lawyer, who asked to remain unnamed for safety reasons, confirmed this account, adding that a security firm hired by the Saudi consulate in Los Angeles nabbed the woman under the pretext of protecting the royal family.

"Religion and conversion and the royal family; those are the hottest buttons you can push," he said. A call by this newspaper to the Saudi consulate in Los Angeles asking for comment was not returned.

"Another convert I know here who is Lebanese, his family threatened to kill him," Mr. Tanagho said. Hence, he added, when he baptized a Persian woman a few years ago, she asked that her baptism be kept secret.

"Egyptians and Iranians show some of the greatest interest" in Christianity, he said. "They've seen the ugly side of Islam."

**Iranians 'feel free'**

Unlike the aforementioned Pakistanis, Egyptians, Saudi Arabians and Syrians, Iranian converts reported the fewest repercussions for their faith.

"I've seen some people who've come from Iran to the United States to persecute, if not kill, in order to bring back their relatives to Islam," said Roopsingh Mohammed, a Farsi-speaking American who pastors the Iranian Church of Eternal Life in Oakton. "That's not the general rule, though. More people tend to feel freer here."

"Of all the Muslim nations, Iranians are the most receptive to the Gospel of Jesus Christ," said Abe Ghaffari of Iranian Christians International in Colorado Springs, Colo. "They've been so well exposed to the Islamic republican government in Iran and they have a lot of disillusionment with life there and the economy."

He guesses that 7,000 evangelical Christian Iranians live in this country, mostly in California.

"There was one case of an Iranian who became a Christian in New York," he said. "His wife, a Muslim, reported this to their families in Iran. The next thing, the father put pressure on him to return to Islam and even had an imam in New York call him and try to pressure and intimidate him.

"He has applied for asylum here because he knows he can't return to Iran and be safe there. Under the Islamic law, he'd be severely punished and if he persisted in his Christian faith, he'd probably die.

"People here are in danger, including from family members in the United States, who shun them, disown them and deprive them of any inheritance. And their family members still back in Iran get used as hostages."

Mina Nevisa, an Iranian convert who lives in the Los Angeles area, has not seen her family since she and her husband fled the country in 1984. She had just started attending an underground church in Tehran with her 28-year-old female cousin when a police raid on the home of the pastor revealed a directory with a listing of names of secret converts to Christianity.

The cousin was arrested on charges of apostasy and taken to the notorious Evin prison, where she was raped, tortured and then killed by a firing squad. The pastor was also killed. Mrs. Nevisa and her husband fled first to Turkey, then to Spain and then Sweden. While in Sweden, she said, she got threatening letters from the Iranian government. She said she also received threatening phone calls.

The couple fled here in 1998, settling in Northern Virginia and setting up an evangelistic ministry geared toward Muslims. In 1999, she published a book: "Don't Keep Me Silent: One Woman's Escape from the Chains of Islam."

The threatening calls started up again. This past January, Mrs. Nevisa said she was alone at home when a caller informed her he knew her husband was out of town.

"Don't you know we know your schedule?" the caller asked. The couple decided to re-establish their ministry in Southern California, but their www.touchofchrist.net Web site leaves only e-mail addresses and post office box numbers with which to find them.

"We got a letter this past Christmas saying 'die' in English," she said. "It's not only the Iranian government that wants to hurt you; it's fanatic individuals."

**Muslim Background Believers**

At Millersville University, a small college in the gentle hills just southwest of Lancaster, Pa., several hundred Arabic-speaking Christians were having their annual conference.

Several called themselves MBBs: Muslim Background Believers. MBBs are former Muslims who become Christians.

One Jordanian who refused to have his photo taken - "Someone published my picture before and there was trouble" - went by the assumed name of Maxwell Mohammed.

"I go out of my way to find MBBs across the country," he said. "They have no one to talk to. Last week I got a call from New York, an Iranian couple. His family had cast him off because he had become a Christian."

Mr. Mohammed, 53, who said his family has disowned him as well, said Muslim groups meet all over northern New Jersey but in numbers of 10 to 20 to escape detection.

"These MBBs have unique problems," he said. "They become family-less and jobless. I help these people with money, jobs and visa problems. It's hard for these people to find mates as well. Even other Christians wonder if they'll go back to Islam.

"They need a family. It's like they carry a cross their whole life. My own mother said to me: 'Your father is dead and you, too.' If you convert, you are given three days to come back. If you do not, blood is shed."

He added: "It is not easy to minister to Muslims. They are good people who love and revere God. I was one of them, and if it weren't for a faithful Christian who loved me for three years, I wouldn't have seen the light of salvation through Jesus Christ."

Zechariah Ananni, a Lebanese who converted to Christianity in 1975 after hearing an American missionary preach on the streets of Beirut, was also at the conference. Convinced that his life was in danger, he emigrated first to Detroit, then to Windsor, Canada, where he spends his time trying to convert Muslims to Christianity. His wife is so afraid for their lives, she has fled back to Beirut, lea ving him with two young daughters.

A Moroccan at the conference said his married daughters were threatened by their Muslim husbands with divorce if they so much as talked to him about his conversion to Christianity. A Palestinian woman told of how her father tore her New Testament in half when he learned she had converted.

"Noor," a woman from Algeria who was converted through an Arabic-language service at Columbia Baptist Church in Falls Church, said her husband divorced her soon afterward. A court in Algiers awarded him custody of their two sons. She retains custody of a daughter. "He still bothers her a lot," Noor said. "He tells my daughter I am an unbeliever, and I am going to hell."