



Summer 2022

Dear listener,

The initial pilot for what became the *Mars Hill Tapes* (and eventually the *Mars Hill Audio Journal*) was released 30 years ago this month. In August of 1992, I had no idea that this crazy concept would blossom and flourish. After all, who would ever take time to listen to *an audio periodical?!?* What was I *thinking??*

Of course, daily and weekly radio programs were *audio* and *periodical*. But in 1992, the idea of distributing what sounded like a radio program on audio cassette — a form of *narrowcasting* — was novel. The word “podcast” didn’t show up until 2004, and it took years for the practice of podcasting to become commonplace.

In the years preceding that 1992 pilot tape, I had worked in several journalistic settings. Between 1975 and 1983, I worked for NPR editing and producing programming in the arts and humanities. I then worked for *Eternity* (an evangelical monthly magazine) and with Richard John Neuhaus on *This World*, the quarterly predecessor to *First Things*. In the late '80s and early '90s, I dabbled in what was then called “desktop publishing,” producing a newsletter on theology and culture called *Genesis* whose subscribers in the summer of 1992 received the initial cassette for the new project I was exploring.

Mars Hill Audio was the result of the intersection of a few interests and concerns. My involvement with the arts — which, among Christians, was less common years ago than is the case now — had long made me aware of a dualism in the hearts and minds of believers and non-believers. Commitment to the advocacy of beauty and a desire to encourage deep religious devotion were regarded as two separate interests, intrinsically having little to do with each other, possibly even in conflict. Such dualism was also expressed in assumptions about the relationships between imagination and intellect, faith and reason, philosophy and theology, politics and religion, body and soul, even Creation and Redemption. Years later I came to understand that the development of such separations was not the result of negligence or temperamental biases, but of theological errors concerning the relationship between God and Creation.

*(In the letter we sent to listeners last summer, I reflected more deeply on these dualisms, with help from Alexander Schmemmann, Wendell Berry, Romano Guardini, and Henri de Lubac. You can download that letter from our website at [marshillaudio.org/texts](http://marshillaudio.org/texts).)*

I have been fortunate to be able to spend a lot of time in the past three decades reading widely in texts that approach ideas about cultural life with a sharper theological edge. I’ve also had hundreds of hours of conversation with some very smart people who have written on such matters, and — realizing how my thinking had been tainted by the mistakes that gave rise to those dualisms — I’ve had to change my way of thinking about some things.

Changing one’s mind is really hard, even if you’re committed to taking time to think carefully. Oliver O’Donovan has commented on the power of *culturally seminal ideas*: ideas

planted by one generation, often in obscure gardens of philosophical speculation, which — centuries later — produce entangling foliage and enchanting blossoms that entrap our brains. “The flowering of an idea,” writes O’Donovan, “comes when it assumes a structural role that determines what else may be thought.” It is especially hard to change your mind if a new way of thinking threatens to make you seem weird to friends and family members. Changing your mind requires the virtue of courage as well as wisdom.

The apostle Paul realized that the Gospel was foolishness to his contemporaries. Within their conceptual paradigm, for example, the Incarnation was unimaginable (to both Jews and Greeks of his time). Nonetheless, he was not ashamed to proclaim *in public* what his neighbors regarded as nonsense. When he addressed the intellectual community of Athens at the Areopagus, he made claims that his hearers dismissed as deserving of mockery (Acts 17:32). But Paul was not interested in offering narrowly “spiritual” truths and then inviting his audience to accept Jesus as their personal Savior. He did not simply add a few moral claims or religious insights to what they already knew. Whatever truth they possessed (and no one is wrong about *everything*) had to be radically reoriented within an entirely different framework of understanding. This new intellectual paradigm required (minimally) the affirmation of God’s *creation* of all things, the recognition of God’s *eschatological goal* for all things, and the celebration of God’s effecting of his purposes by means of the *Resurrection of the Son of God*. Paul thus established a comprehensive cosmological understanding that violated much of what his Greek audience assumed. Their view of reality was challenged, not just their view of their personal spiritual condition.

In the contemporary equivalent of the Areopagus — as well as in public spaces analogous to the Athenian marketplace (cf. Acts 17:17) — Christian proclamation typically suffers from not being as all-embracing or prophetic as was the Mars Hill sermon. This is often because of a lack of courage. But I think it is also because many believers can’t imagine how radically different from conventional thought the truth of things really is.

The evident unravelling of the fabric of modern society is, I believe, an expression of the falseness of many of the assumptions that has held that fabric together. The unravelling is evidence of design flaws, not of failure to maintain adequately ordered systems. Diagnosing those flaws, and offering ideas about better designs, designs more in keeping with *what is real* and *what is true*, is a service offered by many Mars Hill Audio guests over the years. Their articulation of unpopular truths has the capacity to help re-shape our imaginations. I know they have for myself as they have for many of our listeners.

There are many further conversations to have and share in our effort to encourage the recovery of a more confident affirmation of the comprehensiveness of the Christian message. In sharing those conversations, Mars Hill Audio has always relied on the generous patronage of our listeners. Your gift will help us continue to encourage imagining, thinking, and acting that is attentive and faithful to God’s “plan for the fullness of time” (Eph. 1:10).

Gratefully,



Ken Myers  
Host and Producer