

Richard Mouw: Carl Henry was right • David Neff: How the early church read the Bible

Christianity Today

JANUARY 2010

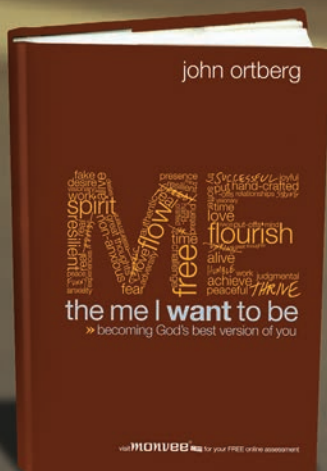


The Myth of the Perfect Parent

*Why the best parenting techniques
don't produce Christian children.*

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GOD'S PROJECT."
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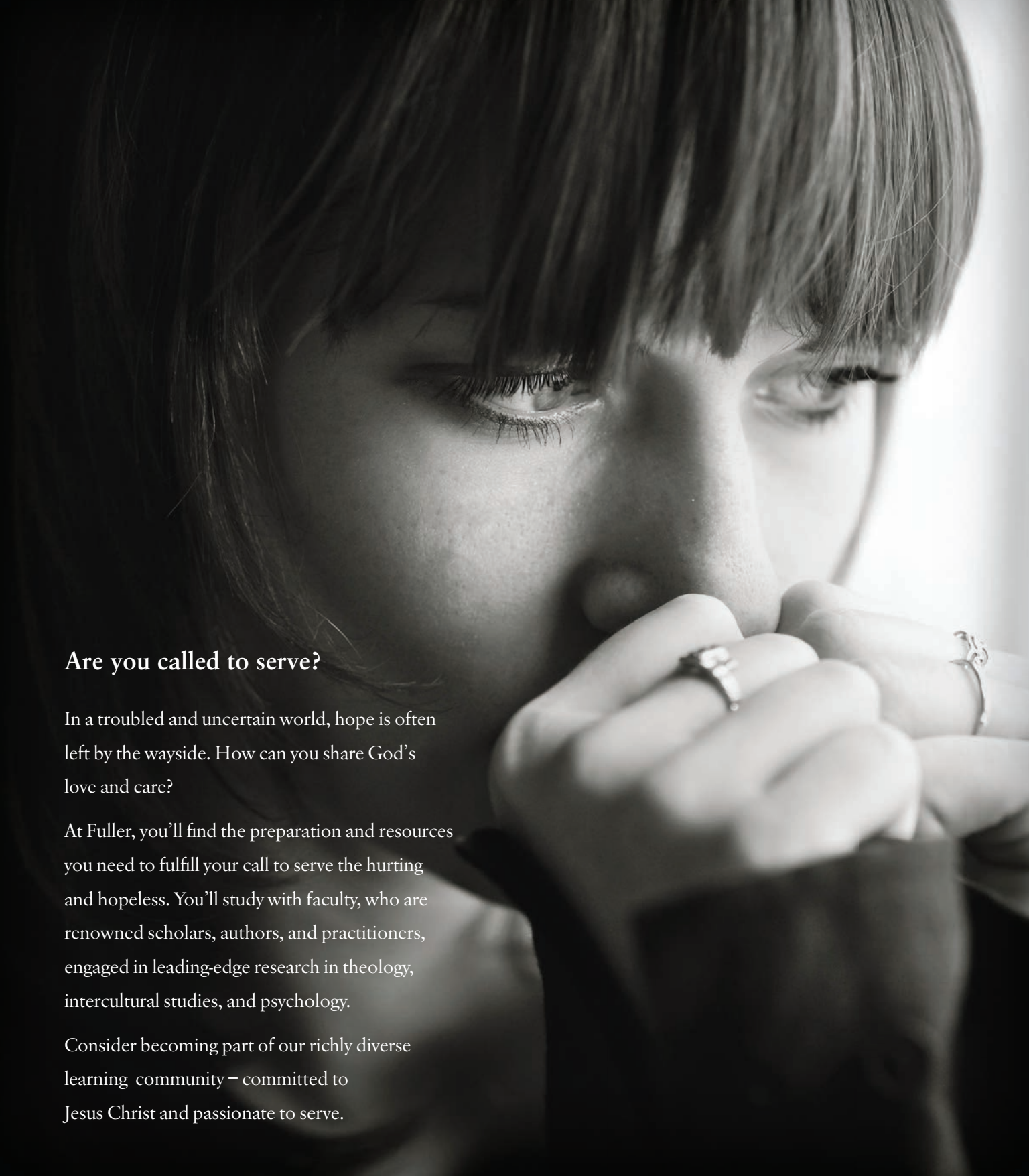
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Your Eyes on God's World

God's world is a big place, and at *Christianity Today*, we have committed to doing everything we can to give you a front-row seat on what God is doing around the globe.

Last July, for example, Jeremy Weber and Gary Gnidovic gave you a rare insider's look at the church in Cuba. Shortly before that, Mark Moring shared stories of amazing grace and reconciliation from a reborn Rwanda. South Africa, North Korea, the Philippines, Sudan, the Congo—CT readers have visited all these places this past year.

We live in a time when American pastors are taking cues from clergy in Rwanda, and a Nigerian pastor from Ukraine can polarize U.S. churches. Because Christ-followers need to connect with fellow believers worldwide, we're expanding our global vision and yours.

Can we continue to increase this unique international coverage? It doesn't come cheap. Like many of you, we at CT have felt the pinch of recent economic uncertainties, while travel to unfamiliar cultures takes much more of our writers' resources.

Fortunately, we've had some help. One friend partially underwrote our trip to Cuba. And several organizations have helped with costs, access, and in-country travel.

Such assistance encourages us as we plan future reports of gospel growth in the "uttermost parts." That is why I want to encourage you as a CT "fellow traveler" to prayerfully consider what you can do to invest in this expanding work.

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David Neff, Editor in Chief

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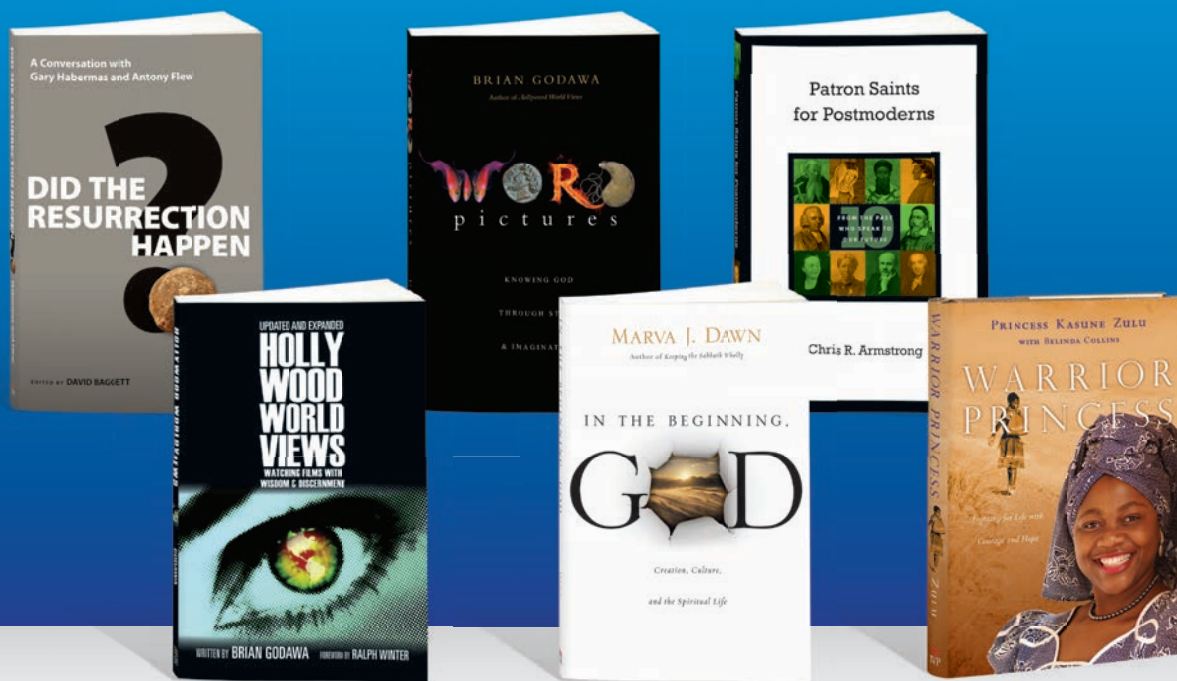
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Christianity Today (ISSN 0009-5753) is published monthly by Christianity Today International, 465 Gundersen Drive, Carol Stream, IL 60188. Periodicals postage paid at Carol Stream, IL, and at additional mailing offices.
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Postmaster: Send address changes to *Christianity Today*, P.O. Box 37060, Boone, IA 50037-0060; 1.800.999.1704. Canada Publication Mail Agreement #: 040029733. Registration #: 126028836RTO001. Return Undeliverable Canadian Addresses to: WWM Inc., 2835 Kew Drive, Windsor, Ontario N8T 3B7. Printed in U.S.A.
Subscription Rates: Regular subscription price: one year \$24.95. Outside U.S. add \$13.00 postage prepaid U.S. currency. \$3.95 per copy.

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Indexes

Christianity Today is indexed in Readers' Guide to Periodical
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Taking the Long View

A good approach in both parenting and editing.

IN MY OCTOBER *Christianity Today* cover essay, I argued that much of contemporary Christianity highlights the horizontal (what we do) at the expense of the vertical (who God is and what he does). That raises the question of how exactly the horizontal and the vertical can work together without turning the horizontal into an idol. I promised that in future issues, we would publish articles that demonstrate a healthy connection.

This issue's cover essay is just such an article. In "The Myth of the Perfect Parent" (page 22), author Leslie Leyland Fields does not deny the crucial job parents have in raising children. There is much God-given horizontal work to be done when it comes to parenting. But she reminds us that in the end, the vertical is not something we can manufacture. As the subtitle puts it, the best parenting techniques do not always produce Christian children. In this case, the word that connects the vertical and horizontal is *trust*: trusting God to work in our children's lives while faithfully doing what he calls us to.

We have some stellar parents who work at *Christianity Today*, but that has not always prevented our children from making poor choices. We live by faith, and have seen God redeem situations that troubled us.

Speaking of staff, please note two contributions in this issue. Our editor in chief, David Neff, begins a column called "Past Imperfect" (page 64), in which he will examine life with a historically conscious eye. Nearly every challenge we encounter, someone has faced before. Knowing a little history often relativizes the urgency of the moment and helps us to know that our struggles are not unique. This is one way for David to share his wide-ranging reading and insights on a more regular basis. But this doesn't preclude other writing: Next month, for example, he will review Walter Wangerin Jr.'s *Letters from the Land of Cancer*. We like to make him earn his title.

The second contribution involves this magazine's first editor, Carl F. H. Henry. Richard J. Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary, apologizes winsomely (page 30) to the monumental and controversial figure. Naturally, CT's early reputation depended largely on Henry's editorial judgment. We look back and, with hindsight being what it is, sometimes disagree with what he did. But far more often, we are thankful for his legacy. CT is a better magazine for Henry's wise leadership in the early years. Mouw pinpoints one area of public life in which that legacy should be recalled.

Next month: We look at the unholy union of Christianity and sports culture, and, because it's our annual books issue, survey the theological vision of Marilynne Robinson's novels and present the 2010 CT book awards.

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The Great Recession

reduces missionary sending and closes hundreds of Christian schools as layoffs hit World Vision, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, Focus on the Family, Asbury Seminary, CT, and many other ministries.



2 Orthodox Anglicans launch a North American province

as the Episcopal Church drops its moratoria on gay clergy and same-sex unions. The ELCA narrowly approves clergy in same-sex relationships, prompting conservative Lutherans to create a rival body. Methodists and Presbyterians maintain their bans.



3 Religious groups agitate for **health-care reform**. Pro-life Democrats and Republicans in the House surprisingly succeed at adding a ban on taxpayer-funded abortions to the House reform bill, largely thanks to Catholic clergy's lobbying.



10 Hispanic evangelical leaders debate boycotting the 2010 Census as a way to call attention to immigration reform.

Meanwhile, the National Association of Evangelicals and other groups prepare for the immigration debate to reignite in 2010.

SPOTLIGHT: TOP 10 STORIES OF 2009

The events, people, and debates of the past year that have shaped, or will significantly shape, evangelical life, thought, or mission.

4 The Obama administration **permits federal funds** for embryonic stem-cell research and overseas groups that promote abortion, while cutting funds for abstinence-only education.

Gaza war hinders reconciliation efforts between Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians. **Believers continue to flee Iraq**; Somalia's Christians almost entirely vanish.



Multisite churches and video-venue campuses evolve from megachurch experiment to near-default option as large congregations expand.



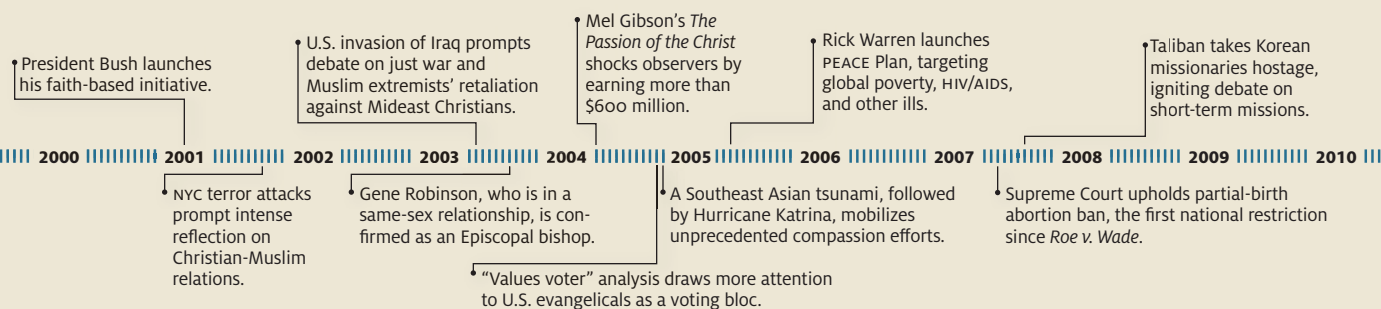
5 Deadly **Gojra riots** in August prompt a government examination, and fresh international criticism, of Pakistan's notoriously abused blasphemy laws.

8 Zondervan **discontinues the controversial TNIV** and announces that an updated NIV translation will debut in 2011.



6 **Swine flu** causes Christian churches worldwide to modify services. Egypt slaughters all pigs, devastating the livelihood of its Christian minority.

TOP 10 NEWS STORIES OF THE DECADE





GLEANINGS

Important developments in the church and the world.

1 Christian leaders take public stand on morality

Evangelical, Catholic, and Orthodox leaders in November publicly pledged civil disobedience if necessary to live out convictions on abortion, gay marriage, and religious freedom. The Manhattan Declaration came days after the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops adopted its first-ever pastoral letter on marriage, which addressed the threat that divorce, contraception, cohabitation, and gay marriage pose to the sacrament.

legislation passed in May. Amid a tide of outside money and activism on both sides, voters prevented Maine from becoming the sixth state to legalize gay unions. Meanwhile, a D.C. elections board denied a petition to conduct a similar public vote before the city council voted to legalize gay marriage in the District in December.

2 Mexico will consider national ban on abortion

MEXICO In November, Veracruz followed 16 other Mexican states in passing legislation that recognizes that life begins at conception. State lawmakers went one step further, proposing that Mexico's Congress amend the constitution to outlaw abortion. The Mexican constitution requires the federal government, which legalized first-trimester abortions in 2007, to consider the proposed amendment.

3 Publisher pulls book after Asians' uproar

Zondervan decided to pull its *Deadly Viper Character Assassins* leadership curriculum after weeks of online protests from Asian American evangelicals in November. The controversy stemmed from the book's use of Asian images and martial-arts themes, which critics charged were stereotyping and offensive.

4 Maine voters repeal gay marriage

Maine became the 31st state to oppose same-sex marriage by a popular vote, when voters in November repealed

5 ELCA to split in 2010

Conservative Lutherans began forming a new denomination in November after deciding they could not remain in the 4.7-million-member Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, which endorsed ordaining noncelibate gays in August. Lutheran CORE members had announced in September they would spend a year contemplating such a move, but said heavy interest prompted them to begin the process immediately.

6 Bibles seized for referencing Allah

MALAYSIA Church officials said Malaysian authorities confiscated more than 10,000 Bibles imported from Indonesia in September because they referred to God as *Allah*. Such a translation predates Islam but was banned by the Muslim-majority government in recent years over concerns it might disrupt public order. The seizures were fresh evidence of increasing discrimination against religious minorities in the island nation.

7 Abstinence efforts may lose federal funding

The Obama administration released a 2010 budget that dropped all federal funding for abstinence-only sex education, prompting abstinence programs

8 Expelled Baptists invited back to China

CHINA BMS World Mission (formerly the Baptist Missionary Society) announced in October that it will return to China. The move comes almost 60 years after the ministry, which has sent 400 missionaries to China, was expelled from the country. Leaders said requests for English teachers from a Shandong medical school founded by BMS missionaries and a nearby language school were a "sign from heaven" to return. Meanwhile, prominent underground churches in Beijing and Shanghai were forced to relocate or close before President Obama's November visit to the country.

9 A Web-driven purpose

Rick Warren and the Reader's Digest Association announced the end of their *Purpose Driven Connection* magazine project in November, nearly one year after launching it. The association, which filed for Chapter 11 in August, said magazine subscriptions fell short of expectations. Saddleback Church will produce a Web version of the magazine and operate a related online community.

10 PC (USA) dodges 'fidelity and chastity' ruling

The highest court of the Presbyterian Church (USA) declined to rule on whether conscientious objections to the denomination's "fidelity and chastity" standard for ordained clergy, first permitted in 2006, were legitimate. In November rulings regarding a lesbian ministry candidate from California and a gay theology professor from Minnesota, the court ruled on

GO FIGURE Evangelism

29%
Converts
(people who
have switched
religions) who
say they share
their faith at least
weekly.

20%
Those who adhere
to the faith of
their childhood
who say they
share their faith at
least weekly.

Pew Forum
on Religion and
Public Life



compiled by Ted Olsen

QUOTATION MARKS

"Because the sanctity of human life, the dignity of marriage as a union of husband and wife, and the freedom of conscience and religion are foundational principles of justice and the common good, we are compelled by our Christian faith to speak and act in their defense."

The **Manhattan Declaration**, issued by 150 Christian leaders November 20.

ManhattanDeclaration.org

"By reserving the right to resist laws they don't like, they forfeit the authority to intervene in the enactment of those laws, as they have done in the congressional debate over healthcare reform[.]"

The **Los Angeles Times**, on those who signed the Manhattan Declaration, in an editorial. The paper also said the declaration "might embolden . . . antiabortion terrorists."

Los Angeles Times

"For the first time, Turkish Muslims have witnessed Christians, not as tourists, but as praying pilgrims, whose devotion has made a lasting impression on the Turkish people."

Bishop **Luigi Padovese**, head of Turkey's Roman Catholic bishops' conference. Turkey last year allowed Christian services at St. Paul's Church at Tarsus.

Ecumenical News International

"The injunction of Jesus to love others as ourselves is an endorsement of self-interest."

Brian Griffiths, member of the House of Lords and adviser to Goldman Sachs International, speaking in St. Paul's Cathedral.

Bloomberg

procedural questions but remained silent on whether chastity for gay clergy was "essential" to Reformed faith and practice.

11 Court rules Christians can opt out of military

COLOMBIA The Supreme Court of Colombia ruled in October that Christians may opt out of obligatory military service due to religious objections. The granting of conscientious objector status came as ministries active in Colombia warned that longstanding violence in the region of Cordoba was at record highs, with several evangelical pastors killed in recent months.

12 Christian frat has appeal dropped

A federal appeals court in October dismissed an appeal from a Christian fraternity to be officially recognized by the University of Florida. The university amended its policy to allow Beta Upsilon Chi to register without having to open its membership to non-Christians, making the appeal moot.

13 Missouri decides yoga is a business

In November, Missouri became the only state to tax yoga studios as exercise businesses instead of exempting them from sales taxes. Studios have pledged to fight for their status as a spiritual pursuit that is entitled to legal protections of religious practice. Washington State imposed a similar tax in 2008, but backed down after strong opposition.

14 Growing ecumenism in Russia

RUSSIA Protestant, Orthodox, and Catholic leaders made plans in October for a historic joint Moscow rally in February 2010. The event, which will focus on how Christian values can

address drugs, alcoholism, suicide, and other ills, resulted from the second meeting of an inter-confessional committee suspended by the Russian Orthodox Church in 2002. Russian Baptists have hoped that the new Orthodox Patriarch Kirill would further ecumenical relations amid a rise in Russian nationalism.

15 Swiss ban minarets

SWITZERLAND Voters in November passed a ban on the construction of minarets at Switzerland's growing number of mosques. The government as well as most political parties, churches, and businesses opposed the move. Four existing minarets are allowed to remain. Switzerland's 350,000 Muslim immigrants compose less than 5 percent of the population and have opened more than 150 mosques and prayer rooms in the country.

16 High court says less Sunday shopping

GERMANY Sunday will remain a day of rest in Germany after its highest court ruled in December that the constitution requires businesses to reduce the number of Sundays they operate. The decision follows Christians' protests over a 2006 law that led to many German states permitting shopping on up to 10 Sundays per year.

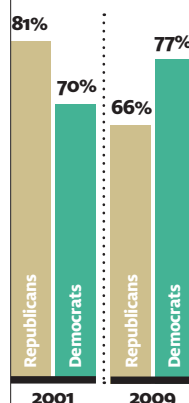
17 Ohio will tax regional church offices

The Ohio Supreme Court ruled in November that denominations' administrative headquarters should not be exempt from property taxes. The ruling denied the appeal of the Church of God in Northern Ohio, which had argued its 2001 office building is used exclusively to support public worship at its 120 congregations. The court ruled 4-3 that public worship does not qualify as a "charitable activity."

GO FIGURE

Faith-Based Initiative

Americans who think it's okay for churches to apply for government funding to provide social services.



Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life



➔
More Is Less:
Christian adoption agencies say kids in need will have fewer options if the federal government requires placement with same-sex couples.

POLITICS

Orphans on Deck

Adoption steps to the frontlines of the culture wars. By Bobby Ross Jr.

Adoption, one of the social ministries most central to Christian theology, is often fraught with roadblocks and difficulties. But new political battles could significantly complicate matters for agencies and parents, observers say.

A foster dad's court challenge to a Florida law that bans adoption by gays and lesbians has made headlines in recent months. So has a proposed same-sex marriage law in the District of Columbia that the Catholic Archdiocese of Washington has warned could force it to cancel its social service programs, including adoption.

At the federal level, U.S. Representative Pete Stark introduced a bill in October dubbed the "Every Child Deserves a Family Act." The California Democrat's proposal immediately drew ire from the Institutional Religious Freedom Alliance (IRFA). The Maryland nonprofit said the proposed law could run "roughshod over the convictions of many

faith-based adoption agencies" and "require every state to forbid every agency that it licenses from preferring mother-father families over gay families or single parents."

"Obviously, [adoption] is becoming a political issue," said Marquette University political scientist John McAdams. "The fundamental problem is that secular elites—who basically don't like religious people at all—aren't willing to make any concessions to the consciences of religious people."

In such a climate, he said, children needing homes take a back seat to politics.

McAdams points to Massachusetts as a prime example: In 2006, Catholic Charities of Boston stopped its 103-year-old adoption service instead of complying with a state law that made it illegal to discriminate against gay and lesbian couples when finding homes for orphans.

On the other hand, Arkansas voters last year passed a referendum banning unmarried couples from

adopting or fostering children—a direct attack on gay parenting. Governor Mike Beebe, a Democrat and active member of an Episcopal church, voiced concern in November 2009 that the law hinders the state's ability to recruit qualified parents.

"It was just a matter of time before [adoption] was used as a lightning rod," said Ram Cnaan, director of the Program for Religion and Social Policy Research at the University of Pennsylvania. "Marginalizing the uniqueness of faith-based organizations and forcing them to act secularly is the cookie-cutter type of mistake. Not all adoption agencies should be molded to be alike."

Adoption is a legal process that has always been subject to political divisions, said John VanValkenburg, spokesman for Bethany Christian Services, whose more than 80 locations in 32 states make it the largest adoption agency in the U.S.

Both political parties have supported a federal tax credit for families who adopt—a benefit that the Grand Rapids, Michigan-based ministry hopes to see renewed or made permanent before it expires at the end of 2010, VanValkenburg said.

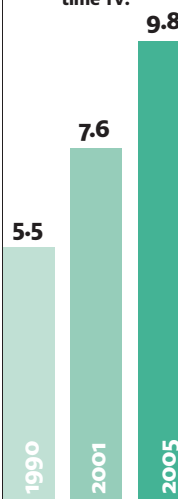
But Jedd Medefind, president of the Christian Alliance for Orphans in McLean, Virginia, said he fears that children in need of families will lose the most as activists work to redefine marriage—and with it, adoption laws.

"If it limits the right of Christian agencies to serve in ways consistent with their convictions, the government will ultimately lose many of its greatest allies in finding families for kids in need," he said.

Like Medefind, Kay Ekstrom, executive director of the Phoenix-based National Association of Christian Child and Family Agencies, expresses concern about what she sees as the increasing politicization of adoption. Yet in her view, the bigger headline is this: Tens of thousands of children remain stuck in foster care without permanent homes as Christians fail to

GO FIGURE Television

The number of profanities during each hour of broadcast prime-time TV:



The New York Times

step up to the challenge.

"If every Christian church in America produced one adopting family, we could wipe out the list of waiting children," said Ekstrom. "And if God's people were responding to this need, the issue of adopting by gay people wouldn't be an issue. All the children would have homes." ☩

LIFE ETHICS

Stunned by Stupak

Surprise House ban reveals pro-life gains.

By M. Z. Hemingway

The successful effort to strip abortion funding from the House of Representatives' health-care legislation may point the way for pro-life forces waging battle in Congress.

Pro-life Democrats and Republicans tried to insert the funding ban in five different committees. Each time, abortion-rights proponents were able to stop them. But a coalition of about 40 pro-life Democrats led by Michigan congressman Bart Stupak insisted they would not support the bill's passage unless a vote was held on an amendment prohibiting government-backed health plans from covering or subsidizing abortions.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi needed their votes for the final bill, so she ultimately permitted the vote. It passed 240–194, with the help of 64 Democrats. The final House version of the bill passed 220–215. The ban could still be stripped before legislation is sent to President Barack Obama for signature.

The pro-life members were supported by a broad coalition of groups, including the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC). With early warning during Obama's presidential campaign that "reproductive services" would be central to his health-care reform

goals, the NRLC began educating its members in January, while the USCCB sent out parish bulletin inserts and ran advertisements explaining how constituents could influence the legislation. The groups helped representatives who oppose abortion funding work on legislative language to remove it, and the bishops themselves called House members to discuss the morality of funding abortions.

Perhaps the greatest asset was public opinion. A May 2009 Gallup poll found that 51 percent of Americans call themselves "pro-life," the first time a majority of adults have identified as such since Gallup first asked the question in 1995. A recent *Washington Post* poll found that 61 percent of Americans oppose taxpayer funding of abortions.

Following the 2004 elections, widely regarded as a failure by Democrats to reach values voters, the political party made a concerted effort to field religious candidates for office. "They have now found that they have a pretty strong pro-life caucus as a result," said the USCCB's Richard Doerflinger.

These pro-life Democrats were willing to stand up to intense pressure from House leadership and the White House because their constituents oppose public funding of abortion. The NRLC's Douglas Johnson said that educating grassroots supporters about the bill through Christian radio and direct mailings was important, especially since mainstream media developed interest only a few days before the bill passed the House.

The Democratic strategy made the pro-life caucus in Congress more bipartisan. Noting that Republicans planned to vote against the health-care bill whether abortion funding was removed or not, Steve Monsma, a senior research fellow at the Henry Institute at Calvin College, says the recent battle shows why it's important to have pro-lifers in both political parties. "You pay a cost if all of your supporters for a certain issue are conservative Republicans," he said. ☩

EVANGELISM

The Sound of Salvation

Audio Bibles propel Scripture into remote regions.

By Ken Walker

While visiting a village in Masai, Kenya, last summer, Morgan Jackson

asked a chief what changes had occurred since his tribe started listening to recordings of the New Testament. "All the people who have been delivered from demons," the chief replied, citing decreases in violence and juvenile delinquency.

Audio Bibles have become a big business in the United States, with *The Bible Experience* and *The Word of Promise* topping Bible sales charts. But they have also carved out a key place in missions, delivering Scripture across the globe in ways not dreamed of in the 20th century.

Jackson, international director of audio Bible ministry Faith Comes by Hearing (FCBH), said technology is making personal distribution easier. FCBH distributed 89,000 audio Bibles last year and established 89,000 church-based listening groups averaging 90 participants each in such places as Africa and India.

"The further out you go, you don't have to have video to capture attention," said project founder Dorothy Miller, founder of God's Story Project. "Audio works in areas where Christianity is not welcome."

Digital technology is so prevalent today that fears of listeners focusing more on the medium than the message are fading, said Gilles Gravelle, director of research for the Seed Company. "People are fairly aware of basic audio technology, even in the most isolated places," he said.

Yet audio Bibles have limits, said Grant Lovejoy, director of orality strategy for the Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission

PASSAGES



Fired
Larry Jones
president of Feed the Children, on November 6 amid an ongoing power struggle with executives. Jones has discouraged donations to the charity he founded in 1979.



Retiring
James Dobson
from Focus on the Family's daily radio broadcast at the end of February. The ministry's founder resigned as chairman in February 2009.



Died
Billy Joe Daugherty
pastor of Victory Christian Center, with a network of 900 schools in 93 countries, on November 22 of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. He was 57.

[continued on 14]

Briefing [from 13]

Board. He noted that, of the more than 6,800 languages worldwide, fewer than 1,500 have the complete written New Testament needed for an audio Bible. In addition, translations for the ear are much different from those for the eye.

Some feel the emphasis on audio may overshadow literacy.

Don Pederson, coordinator of the field ministries office for New Tribes Mission (NTM), said learning to read and write provides the 300 cultural groups that NTM serves with basic skills that open opportunities for trade and employment. "We have nothing against audio, but we put a lot of effort into making sure that literacy is a part of our package," he said. ☩

TECHNOLOGY

Religious Self-Profiling

Identifying faith online proves challenging.

By Sarah Pulliam Bailey

Facebook offers its users only 100 letters to express what has taken theologians

thousands of pages to describe.

San Francisco-based writer Jesse Rice used to put "follower of Jesus" under the "religious views" category of his profile. "I didn't want to put 'Christian' because in San Francisco, it meant right-wing gay bashing," he said. "It was another space to categorize or be divisive."

Eventually, the author of *The Church of Facebook* just decided to leave the category blank.

"People try to get creative or feel the need to be very strong... as if this is their chance to hand out a Christian tract," Rice said. "That's taking a marketing approach, and people are very suspicious of marketing Jesus. [Profile messages] are often shallow, divisive, or inadequate for embodying the gospel of Jesus Christ."

Facebook asks users to define their religious beliefs with fewer characters than it takes Twitter users (who receive 140 characters) to say what they ate for breakfast. Some Christians identify themselves with their denomination, a Bible verse, or a phrase like "staggered by the grace of Jesus."

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary president Al Mohler identifies himself as an "Evangelical

GO FIGURE Church Life

28%
Megachurch pastors' spouses who are also employed by the church.

34%
Megachurch pastors' spouses who work outside the church.

37%
Megachurch pastors' spouses who are not employed outside the home.

Leadership Network

Christian/Baptist." Tony Jones, the former coordinator of Emergent Village, says he's "Emerging." Mars Hill Church pastor Mark Driscoll? "Religion Sucks," he writes.

Piotr Bobkowski, a University of North Carolina doctoral student, conducted a sociological survey of 500 MySpace users. He found that 30 percent who self-identified as Christians did not identify as such on MySpace. On the other hand, 20 percent who said they were not religious identified themselves as Christians on MySpace.

"It's a strange paradox," Bobkowski said. "People don't want to come across as too religious, but they don't want to come across as irreligious."

Ron Edmondson, a pastor at Grace Community Church in Clarksville, Tennessee, uses his Facebook status to promote his church, but also adds nonreligious updates.

"If I struggle with family stuff or I think life is funny sometimes, people are more likely to come to me when they are going through something," he said. "People are [thinking of] Facebook as an evangelistic tool. That's not the point; the point is social media—building relationships in a community." ☩

UNDER DISCUSSION Topics in the current debate.

compiled by Ruth Moon

What was the decade's biggest change in Christianity?

"The expansion of faith-based politics to include nearly every religious group in the country. We now have both the conservative and progressive sides—as well as many other sides—all involved in the political process."

JOHN C. GREEN
senior research adviser,
Pew Forum on Religion
and Public Life

"The huge surge of Christianity in China has changed tens of millions of lives. This could make the difference down the road between world peace and war. If Christianity continues to grow in China, that country's relations with the U.S. will develop very well."

MARVIN OLASKY
editor in chief,
World magazine

"The collapse of Christian consensus against homosexual marriage in North America. This touches many issues: theological method; authority of tradition; individualism and self-determination; and the impotence of ecclesiastical authorities and theologians to affect the tide."

JOHN STACKHOUSE
professor of theology,
Regent College

"The speed with which the emerging church movement has lost its momentum. At the beginning of the decade, *emerging* was a buzzword. Since then, it's become almost a stigma or an albatross that people don't want to associate with."

BRETT MCCrackEN
author, *Hipster Christianity: When Church and Cool Collide*

"The emergence of and reaction against Islam as a political and religious force. Muslims were welcomed in 2001, demonized for much of the decade, and now we have a more pragmatic philosophical engagement with the Muslim world."

KEVIN ECKSTROM
editor, *Religion News Service*

"The dramatic shift of the epicenter of global Christianity. While American faith seems to be simmering on low, spiritual fervor is reaching a boiling point in places like Jakarta, Bangalore, Nairobi, and São Paulo. The church in the developing world is now setting the pace."

J. LEE GRADY
editor, *Charisma magazine*



Stand and Fight: Newport Beach pastor Richard Crocker believes local churches must be allowed to keep their property.

DENOMINATIONS

Land and Building Wars

A handful of parishes win the right to keep their property, but legal experts don't know if their cases are setting a precedent. By John W. Kennedy

Ross “Buddy” Lindsay III receives phone calls every day from pastors who want his help wresting their church property from denominational control. As chancellor of All Saints Church in Pawleys Island, South Carolina, Lindsay has spent a decade immersed in church property disputes.

He is one of only four Americans with a master's degree in canon law from Cardiff University in Wales.

In September, the South Carolina State Supreme Court ruled 5–0 in favor of All Saints, allowing the 800-member congregation to keep its 50 acres worth \$20 million. Before leaving the Episcopal Church (TEC) in 2004, the church amended

its charter, declaring that it no longer accedes to the national constitution. The court ruled the national church did not retain clear ownership of the local church property.

“The All Saints case is a roadmap for other congregations to secure their property before leaving their denomination,” Lindsay says. All Saints is emblematic of passionate struggles that pit scores of breakaway congregations and entire dioceses against mainline denominations, primarily TEC and the Presbyterian Church (USA). In court papers, denominations paint local churches as secessionists, while local congregations see themselves as defenders of the faith set against an apostate national church.

Each side believes the turf wars could impact the future of church-state relations, since the U.S. Supreme Court may get involved. Lindsay says, “If the Supreme Court rules for All Saints, it could largely be the death of Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches.”

Some conservative congregations in the PC(USA) contend that when their denomination has made no financial investment in a local church, it should not stand to gain when a church attempts to leave. “The denomination didn’t put a dime into these local church properties,” says Parker Williamson, editor emeritus of *The Presbyterian Layman*, a conservative North Carolina-based journal.

So far, only a handful of parishes have prevailed against denominations. “It’s relatively easy for religious organizations that have good legal advice to protect the property from a breakaway faction,” says Sarah Barringer Gordon, an Episcopalian and constitutional law professor at the University of Pennsylvania Law School. “Even if the majority wants to leave, the denomination has documentation on its side.”

HISTORIC PRECEDENCE

In 1871, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Watson v. Jones* that local congregations that had agreed to abide by the bylaws of denominations with hierarchal structures were bound by a “compulsory deference rule.” In property matters, the final decision was left to the national office.

Then in 1979, the Supreme Court ruled

in *Jones v. Wolf* that a state may adopt “neutral principles” of law by examining legal documents to resolve church property disputes. The South Carolina Supreme Court used the neutral principles approach in its All Saints ruling. After leaving TEC, the church affiliated with the Anglican Mission in the Americas, a Rwandan

often depend on the state in which the conflict occurs. In California, courts tend to focus on national church hierarchy. In October, the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear the high-stakes case of *St. James Parish v. Diocese of Los Angeles*. St. James lost in pre-trial motions at both the appellate court and state supreme court levels.

More than \$5 million has already been spent by both sides.

“When there is division within a denomination, a congregation can vote to determine which branch of the divided body it wants to join,” says Johnson. In the Virginia case, the parishes realigned with the Convocation of Anglicans in North America, associated with the Anglican Church of Nigeria.

Although the U.S. Supreme Court has made it clear that judges should not rule on doctrinal disputes, civil courts can determine whether the local parish or the denomination is the rightful owner, though this can be difficult to do.

George Washington Law School professor Robert W. Tuttle says that some jurisdictions have been sympathetic to local congregations that never accepted unilateral denominational impositions to control all property in trust.

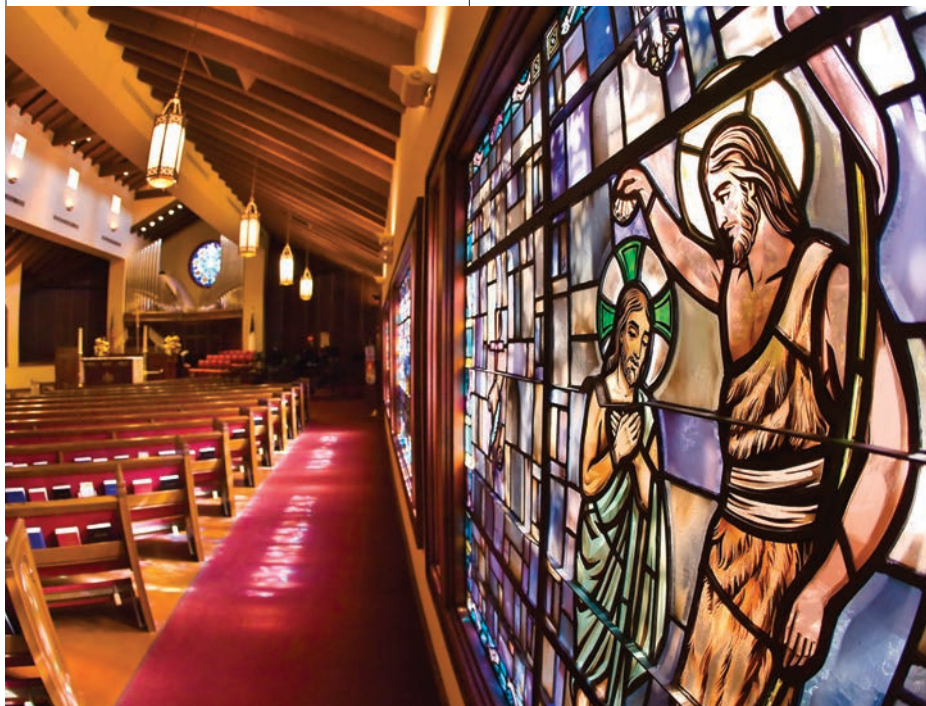
Other jurisdictions have determined that if a congregation remains in a denomination for decades after implementation of such rules, accession is implicit. Consequently, a checkerboard pattern of court decisions has developed.

“In most of these fights there is at least some remnant that wants to remain, so the fights are really about who is the true congregation,” Tuttle says.

“It’s not just about property,” says L. Martin Nussbaum, a Colorado Springs attorney who defends religious organizations. “It’s also about who are the lawful ecclesiastical officers. Typically a majority faction leaves and tries to claim the property on the way out.”

From a legal standpoint, the lawsuits are about the land, the buildings, and all improvements made to the real estate. But because real property includes endowments, wealthy churches may have multimillion-dollar investment portfolios at stake.

University of Missouri School of Law professor Carl H. Esbeck says the disputes are about more than local congregants finding another place to worship. “For some people, these are buildings where they were married, where their children were baptized, where their parents are buried in the churchyard. There are ties and memories to the site that can’t be replaced by pulling up stakes.”



Broken Promise?: St. James Parish leaders base their case on a 1991 promise from their denomination to never lay claim to the property.

mission effort with which many former TEC churches have affiliated.

In the wake of *Jones v. Wolf*, many mainline Protestant denominations have changed their constitutions to declare that real estate, personal property, and endowments are held in trust by the denomination, so that regardless of whose name is on the deed, local churches accede to the national body.

Lindsay says that All Saints is the only local church to confront the accession issue head-on and win. “If accession language remains in the congregation’s charter, it is deadly in a church property suit,” he says. Episcopal officials believe All Saints’ case is an aberration. The church was founded in 1767, before the founding of the national church.

The outcomes of property dispute cases

In 2004, St. James aligned with the Anglican Church in North America, a network comprising former TEC churches.

Richard Crocker, rector of the 350-member St. James in Newport Beach, says he remains hopeful the case will go to trial because of a written promise by the denomination in 1991 that it would never lay claim to the property. In the meantime, he says, “I am trying to keep the mission of the congregation focused on the gospel of Jesus Christ, the only Savior.”

NOT JUST PROPERTY

More cases are percolating up to higher courts. This spring, attorney Steffen N. Johnson of Alexandria, Virginia, will represent half a dozen breakaway TEC churches that have sued the denomination to keep property. In 2008, the Fairfax County Circuit Court ruled in favor of the local congregations. The consolidated case is before the Virginia Supreme Court.

CONFLICTING GUIDELINES

Many property disputes also get bogged down by denominational politics and long-standing doctrinal disagreements.

Mark Tammen, associated stated clerk with the PC(USA) in Louisville, Kentucky, contends that a slim majority of the attempted departures from the denomination are rooted in the debate over ordaining partnered gays. "Lots of times people are mad at the presbytery because they wouldn't let them have the pastor they wanted," Tammen says.

Yet Williamson of *The Presbyterian Layman* says departures almost universally pivot on scriptural authority. "There's a belief that the denomination has departed from its scriptural foundation of ethical issues relating to human sexuality."

Tammen says Presbyterians have a regional authority structure in which geographical presbyteries rather than the national headquarters can dismiss congregations. "The national church gives advice and assistance to the presbyteries, but we

can't control the outcome," he says.

But Williamson believes national leaders are calling the shots. During the legal discovery process for a case involving Carrollton Presbyterian Church in New Orleans, Williamson said the documents showed that the Presbytery of South Louisiana had received 398 e-mails and other communiqués from Tammen.

The *Layman* published online what its editors dub the "Louisville papers," leaked legal memorandums they say Tammen wrote to presbytery leaders on how to deal with local congregations wanting to leave. Among Tammen's advice: Ascertain whether the ruling judge belongs to a hierarchical church rather than a congregational one. "It's very clear that lawyers for the denomination are deeply involved in these local church cases," Williamson says.

He thinks more courts will find application of the PC(USA) trust clause invalid. "The deeds say nothing about denominational ownership. Congregations never consented to place the property they

built and paid for in the control of the denomination."

But Nussbaum notes that canon law is not guided by democratic principles alone. "Many churches are not organized along the line of majority rule," he says. "To try to take property contrary to church law is frankly tantamount to theft. What's at stake in these cases is the freedom of religious bodies to decide their own laws. For a conservative Christian in the Episcopal Church who decides he can no longer stay because of homosexual practice, the proper thing is to leave the property behind."

In other Protestant denominations, property-ownership guidelines are clearer. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America says the local church rather than the higher-level synod or national church owns and controls the property. Baptists and Pentecostals do not have the type of denominational structure that would permit a national body to have control of

[continued on 18]



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local property.

For more than two centuries, United Methodist congregations have held the property in trust to the national denomination. "I don't foresee litigation among Lutherans or Methodists because the legal documents are clear [about] where ownership lies," Tuttle says.

But Lindsay, who has counseled dissenting United Methodist congregations, disagrees. "The language in the Methodist Book of Discipline is almost word for word the same as the Presbyterian and Episcopal provisions. Methodists are just as vulnerable."

A COSTLY ENTERPRISE

Even when a national body wins in court, it seldom amounts to a public relations victory. Valerie J. Munson, who runs a religion and law center at the University of St. Thomas in Minneapolis, has counseled a dozen U.S. Anglican parishes and finds all the litigation unfortunate.

'When there is division within a denomination, a congregation can vote to determine which branch of the divided body it wants to join.'

~ Steffen N. Johnson, attorney

"A lot of money is being spent by the Episcopal Church to litigate cases that could very easily be settled," says Munson, a PC(USA) elder. "In a justice system where over 90 percent of cases are settled, it's a bit of a mystery as to why a Christian denomination would choose to spend its resources on every dispute that comes up."

Archibald Wallace III, an attorney and ordained Presbyterian minister who has counseled both sides, is also grieved by the amount spent on lawsuits. "When you start paying for lawyers, paralegals, briefs, motions, and filings, that's a lot of money," Wallace says. "Think of all the good it could have done."

Legal expenses in some cases are accelerating. For the next three years, TEC has budgeted \$1.3 million annually for legal purposes, while as recently as 2008, its annual legal budget was \$450,000.

Most legal experts are confident the U.S. Supreme Court will not touch church property disputes, while attorneys representing local congregations don't see how justices can avoid them. But both denominations and litigating churches are convinced there will be dire consequences for Christianity if their side loses. +

John W. Kennedy, former news editor for *Christianity Today*, is a freelance writer in Springfield, Missouri.

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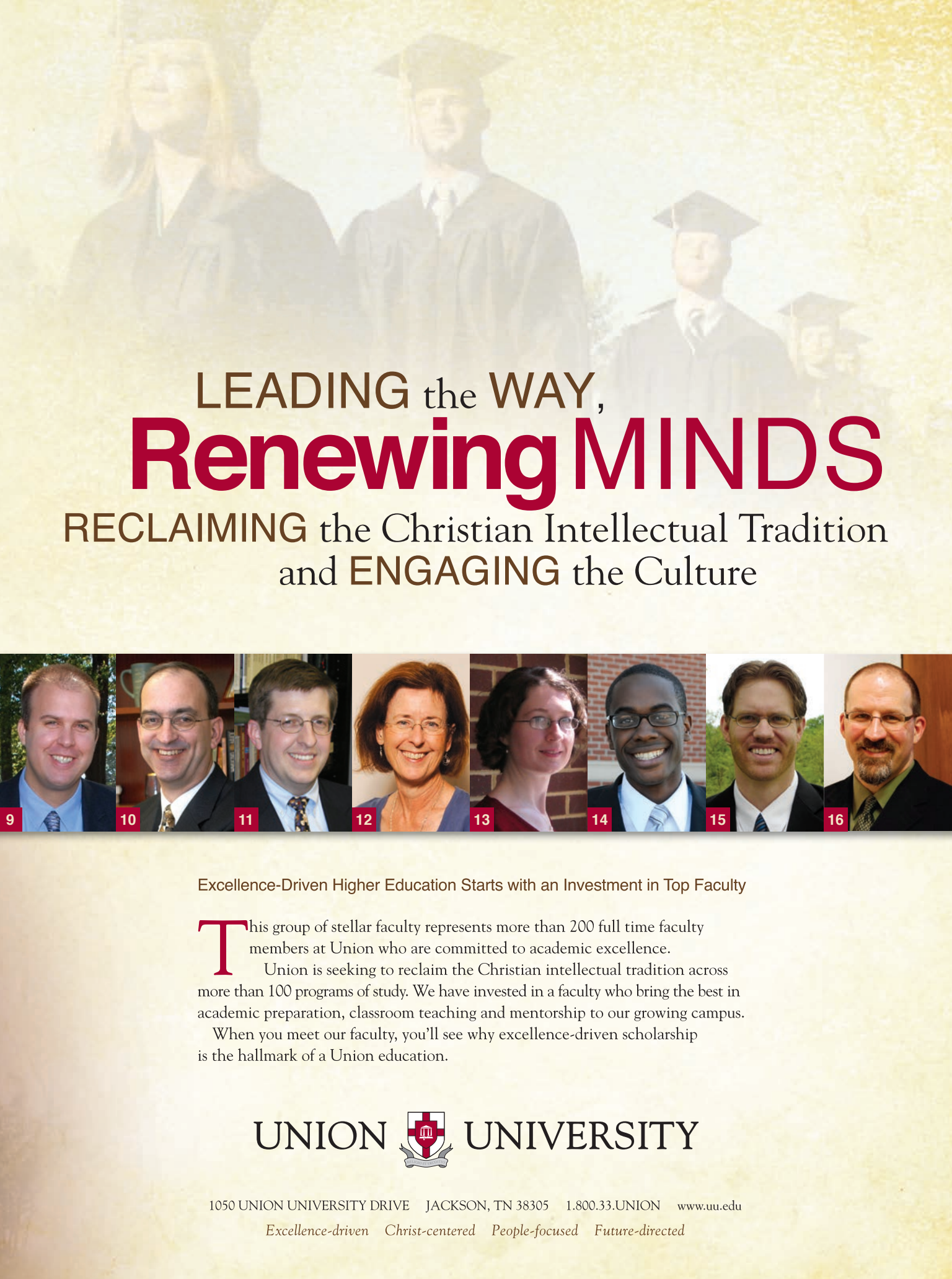
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{ COVER STORY }

THE MYTH OF THE



M

Y FAMILY AND I were traveling in Guatemala a few years ago. We visited a man who had given his life to serving a poor congregation. We sat at the kitchen table with him, a man who had been bent into humility by the burdens of pastoring in a struggling nation while raising four children. Still in the muddy trenches of parenthood with our five sons and one daughter, we confessed to him our feelings of inadequacy.

“Your children are grown. What have you learned looking back on your years of child-raising? Do you have any advice for us?” We looked at him, needy, expectant.

He would have none of it. “I’m not one to talk to. I don’t exactly have a perfect record.” One of his children was immersed in an addiction, he told us, visibly sad. Another had a failed marriage.

He was silent for a moment, nodding slowly, and then continued. “I never lived up to my mother’s expectations either. I’ve been reading her journal lately, and I see how she prayed for me, what she prayed. And I’ve never lived up to what she hoped for me,” he said, his voice a near-whisper. “I think she considered me a failure.”

In my mother-mind, I supplied the last words: “And considered herself a failure as a parent.” This conversation shook me profoundly, touching one of my deepest concerns.

PREVAILING PARENTAL PANIC

I’m hardly alone in my fixation. More than any other generation, today’s parents are worried sick that they will mess up their children’s lives. A massive 2006 study revealed that parents post significantly higher rates of depression than adults without children. Judith Warner’s 2005 book, *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in an Age of Anxiety*, captured the national obsession with successful parenting and its overwrought attempts to secure happiness and success for one’s offspring—and, by extension, oneself as a parent. Joan Acocella’s November 2008 *New Yorker* article, “The Child Trap,” disdainfully chronicled the anxiety and success-driven extremes of overparenting.

There is so much fretting that even the backlash has spawned a notable movement and subgenre of its own, the slacker mom, visible in such books as *Confessions of a Slacker Mom*, *The Three-Martini Playdate: A Practical Guide to Happy Parenting*, and *Bad Mother: A Chronicle of Maternal Crimes, Minor Calamities, and Occasional Moments of Grace*. In these and other popular books, women compete to claim the most artful and witty negligence of their mothering responsibilities.

I find most Christian parents at the front of the line—the anxiety and success line, not the

Why the best parenting techniques
don’t produce Christian children.

By Leslie Leyland Fields

PERFECT PARENT

slacker line. With my own offspring ranging from first grade through college, I take turns stepping into both, perfecting my own blend of angst and aplomb, depending on the issue. This one question, however, sends me elbowing to the front of the anxiety queue, where I find most of my friends and fellow believers. Our most consuming concern is that our children “turn out”—that is, that our Christian faith and values are successfully transmitted, and that our children grow up to be churchgoing, God-honoring adults.

It appears that many of us are not succeeding. The exodus of young adults from evangelical churches in the U.S. is well reported, perhaps over-reported and hyper-hyped. The Barna Group reported in 2006 that 61 percent of young adults who had attended church as teenagers were now spiritually disengaged, not participating in worship or spiritual disciplines. A year later, LifeWay Research released similar findings, that seven in ten Protestants ages 18–30 who had worshiped regularly in high school stopped attending church by age 23. Regardless of which studies are the most accurate, there is little doubt that many youth who were raised in the church do not necessarily stick around.

If this isn't enough to induce parental panic, another unsettling report came our way in a summer 2008 *Newsweek* article, “But I Did Everything Right!” Sharon Begley reported that, contrary to the opinions of decades of experts, genetics may have a more potent impact on child development than our own parenting practices. Begley summarized findings from studies at the Center for the Developing Child at Harvard University and Birbeck University in London. Jay Belsky of Birbeck found that the child most likely to adopt his parents' values is not the mellow, compliant child, as one would expect, but the fussy, difficult child. The fussy child is genetically wired through the presence of DNA variants to be more sensitive and attuned to her parents and surroundings. The mellow child is more like Teflon; good parenting, and even bad parenting, tends not to stick. These findings, among others, are part of a leading edge of study that “promises to revolutionize our understanding of child development.”

If we decide to credit these recent findings, we are going to have a lot of questions, maybe even some righteous indignation. “So, the game is rigged?” we might choke out. “Our efforts to raise our children in the nurture and

admonition of the Lord may be useless on certain children with specific DNA variants? Our chances of passing the torch hang more on their DNA than on our own parenting?”

We splutter with good cause. After all, this directly contradicts the most quoted and treasured verse in the Scriptures related to parenting: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it” (Prov. 22:6). This verse has provided comfort and direction to generations of parents, assuring them that nurture, *our* nurture, is the prevailing force in our child's life, and that if we get it right, the outcome is sure.

But the first blush of retort and defense should be reconsidered. These scientific findings are not only ultimately hopeful and help-

Parents' most consuming concern is that their children ‘turn out’—that they grow up to be churchgoing, God-honoring adults.

ful for parents; more importantly, they also support Scripture in an area that has been plagued with presumption, behaviorism, and wrong thinking for decades.

‘AS THE TWIG IS BENT . . .’

One of the most resilient and cherished myths of parenting is that parenting creates the child: “As the twig is bent, so grows the branch.” While the nature-nurture debate has ground on for centuries, nurture has been the clear popular favorite among most child-rearing experts and parents. We catch some of the zeal and heady empowerment of this belief from one of its most vocal proponents, John B. Watson, a well-known psychologist at Johns Hopkins University. In 1924 he famously claimed that if he were given 12 healthy babies and complete control over their environment, he could “guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select—doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant, chef, yes, even beggar and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations, and race of his ancestors.”

Though few would subscribe to Watson's extreme behaviorism, the notion of the infant as an arriving *tabula rasa* on which we inscribe our design remains deeply embedded in our culture. John Rosemond, a Christian family psychologist and syndicated columnist, hears frequently from parents who believe they have failed when their children have problems. “They think this,” he writes, “because they

believe in psychological determinism—specifically, that parenting produces the child.”

Many Christian writers and parents have absorbed these values and drifted into what could be called spiritual determinism. We have absorbed the cultural belief in psychological determinism but spiritualized it with Bible verses, and one verse in particular. The result is a Christianized version of the cultural myth. It reads something like this: “Christian parenting techniques produce godly children.”

Proverbs 22:6 has been widely adopted as both psychological premise and theological promise, despite the widespread recognition that hermeneutically, the Proverbs are not promises from God, but general observations and maxims. (Ironically, if King Solomon

did pen this proverb, as many biblical scholars believe, he himself failed to exemplify its truth: In his old age, he abandoned the teaching and example of his father, as “his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been” [1 Kings 11:4].)

Despite these problems, entire formulas and programs have been created to divine and instruct on the kind of parental training that will secure the desired outcome. At least one of these programs, claiming to instruct in God's ways of raising children, has sold in the millions. A few of the more stridently conservative writers are so confident of their parenting methods and outcomes, they describe child-training as a risk-free venture analogous to staking out tomatoes, training dogs, and teaching mules, only loosely veiling B. F. Skinner-like techniques with swatches of strategically placed Bible verses.

One writer warns mothers that they must watch all they say and do, because their child's mind, “like a videotape recorder,” is “carefully transcribing every word, right down to the tone of voice and facial expression.” To up the stakes further, he cautions that a child's mind and “emotional patterns” may be firmly established by the time he is 2, a “sobering realization for mothers,” he intones.

Despite the impossible weight of this responsibility, it holds clear advantages: namely, it's much easier to measure the success of our parenting. We simply examine



the evidence—how our children turn out. One parenting writer warns, “If our parents’ approach *seemed* close to biblical parenting, yet bore bad fruit, we can be certain it was not biblical.” We can know this, he asserts, because God’s Word gives us exactly what we need to raise godly children, and if we correctly apply the principles, “parents will not be disappointed.”

An entire branch of Christian parenting takes this tack. “Observe and learn from

winning parents,” one writer advises. Winning parents are those whose children are “obedient” and “respectful,” who “know God’s will,” who “live faithful Christian lives,” he writes. We should be imitating those parents “who are successful, not those who fail.”

One best-selling author takes a more numerical approach to parenting. He begins by identifying the goal of parenting as raising “spiritual champions.” To maximize readers’

ability to produce spiritual champions, the author, a statistician, creates a model based on surveys, statistical studies, and personal interviews. His research reveals that a small family is better than a large family at producing a spiritual champion, that the firstborn is the most likely to become a spiritual giant, and that single-parent homes are seldom successful in producing said champions.

At the end of this section, he admonishes us, before we have children, to “...count the

cost of raising them. The research suggests that the more children you have, the more difficult it will be to facilitate the spiritual health and depth of each child.” (This, of course, is terrible news for me and others with multiple children, though it’s good for the author, who has two.) The book ends with these motivational words: “Between you and your spouse, have you covered the ground necessary to produce children whose lives honor God and advance his kingdom?”

Clearly then, some parents are winners and some are losers. Many friends immediately come to mind: God-loving couples with a child in jail, with an agnostic child, with a prodigal daughter, with children who are lukewarm in their faith, with children who have not yet proclaimed faith. By these measures, they are all losers.

BAD PARENTS OF THE BIBLE

The Bible’s examples of spiritual champions move us in another direction entirely. The great hall of faith in Hebrews 11 provides us with a list of men and women who through extraordinary faithfulness “conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames”—believers of such immense faith that “the world was not worthy of them” (11:32–38).

Yet these spiritual giants were raised in anything but model homes, and many of them were themselves highly flawed parents. Abraham sired a child with a maidservant, then agreed to banish the son to the desert. Isaac and Rebekah were locked in parental favoritism over Esau and Jacob. Rebekah led her son to commit an unthinkable travesty: stealing his brother’s birthright. Jacob learned his lessons from his mother well and continued on the path of deceit and, later, of destructive favoritism among his ten sons. Moses was given the young, pagan, unmarried daughter of Pharaoh as his mother. Jephthah was the son of a prostitute, and killed his only daughter because of an impetuous vow.

Many more examples from Scripture confirm our parenting expectations, but two more must be mentioned. Jonathan, David’s closest friend, was a paragon of righteousness and purity in stark contrast with his murderous father, King Saul. And the boy king Josiah, singularly commended as one who served the Lord “with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength” (2

Kings 23:25), was the son of Amon, a man who “did evil in the eyes of the Lord” (2 Kings 21:20).

By contemporary standards, most of these families would be considered dismal failures. They include polygamous families rife with division and jealousy, prostitute mothers, heathen fathers, clans rampant with favoritism and fratricide. The only discernible pattern here seems to be one of human sin.

If our supposition—that we can measure the success of our parenting by the outcome of our children—is scripturally based, we should be able to apply the test to God himself. After all, God is not only the author of our Scriptures, he is also himself a parent, one who identifies himself as our Father. The Old Testament in particular provides a long, deep look into the Father’s heart. When we look at his children, however, the news is not good.

The descent into rebellion began with his very first children, Adam and Eve, and continued through the days of Noah, ending in global destruction. Then a new family was birthed, the nation of Israel, whom God tenderly calls “my firstborn son” (Ex. 4:22). But that relationship, too, is torturous, marked by constant rebellion and the breaking of God’s father-heart. Our own record as his children is not much better.

If God’s success as a parent is to be judged by his children, what can we conclude? That God himself does not pass our parenting test?

WHO’S IN CONTROL?

We must assume, then, that there is serious error in our beliefs about parenting. We have made far too much of ourselves and far too little of God, reflecting our sinful bent to see ourselves as more essential and in control than we actually are. It’s also our heritage as good Americans, psychologist Harriet Lerner



observed in her 1998 book, *The Mother Dance*: We believe that we can fix every problem, that we are masters over our fate. The root of much of our pain in parenting, she writes, is “the belief that we should have control over our children when it is hard enough to have control over ourselves.”

The reflex to judge ourselves by our children, and to judge others by their children, has further implications: It reveals a faulty view of spiritual formation. We often expect that the children of believing parents, whether the children claim Christ yet or not, will show the same kind of spiritually mature attitudes and behavior we hope to see in each other: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and obedience, as a beginning list.

When we engage in spiritual determinism and a human view of spiritual formation, we can easily fall into judging others. Jeanine, a friend of mine for years, told me that her sixth-grade daughter, Julia, who was struggling with her identity and making friends, was labeled “demon-possessed” by another family in the church. “Some people—even in church—have already written her off. And she’s only 11 years old,” Jeanine told me. The judgment was not only on her daughter’s spiritual condition but also on her own.

JIMMY COHRSEN / GETTY

When a child does make a decision to follow Christ, we often expect visible, even immediate transformation. The Bible demonstrates another reality. God schooled the Israelites for 40 years to walk them from paganism into faith in the one true God. The disciples lived in the presence of Jesus for three long years, their faith still pitifully small despite having constantly witnessed miracles and resurrections. And our redemption was fully accomplished when Christ uttered “It is finished” from the cross, but our transformation into his image continues as long as we have breath.

EZEKIEL’S PARENTING MODEL

The question we ask of ourselves must be reframed. We need to quit asking, “Am I parenting successfully?” And we most certainly

Then the prophetic work of speaking and enacting God’s words began.

How successful was Ezekiel? The destruction he foretold played out in every gruesome detail. From our vantage, Ezekiel’s mission looks like an utter failure. But God spoke a few words in this narrative that changed everything. As God commissioned Ezekiel to speak his words to Israel, three times he prefaced his commands with this phrase: “whether they listen or fail to listen” (2:5, 7; 3:11). One of those three times God completed the sentence: “Whether they listen or fail to listen . . . they will know that a prophet has been among them” (2:5).

This was Ezekiel’s responsibility: to speak and embody God’s words before the people in such a way that they might know who he

faith—“and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Eph. 2:8–9). If even our ability to believe in God is given to us by God, then how much of parenting can we perform on our own? We must proceed, then, on our knees first, beggars before the throne, if we are to parent well.

We must rethink our assumptions and our calling as well. We are responsible to teach our children the fear of the Lord, to impress his laws on them when we “sit at home and when [we] walk along the road, when [we] lie down and when [we] get up”—meaning all the time (Deut. 6:7). And we are commanded to not exasperate our children, but to “bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). But we must be clear about our own limits. We are not capable of producing perfect followers of Christ, as if we were perfect ourselves. Our work cannot purchase anyone else’s salvation or sanctification. Parents with unbelieving children,

friends with children in jail, the discoveries of the geneticists, and the faith heroes in Hebrews 11 are all powerful reminders of this truth: We will parent imperfectly, our children will make their own choices, and God will mysteriously and wondrously use it all to advance his kingdom.

Begley concludes “But I Did Everything Right!” by saying, “It is time to acknowledge there is only so much influence parents can have.” Scripture has taught us this all along. We are not sovereign over our children—only God is. Children are not tomatoes to stake out or mules to train, nor are they numbers to plug into an equation. They are full human beings wondrously and fearfully made. Parenting, like all tasks under the sun, is intended as an endeavor of love, risk, perseverance, and, above all, faith. It is faith rather than formula, grace rather than guarantees, steadfastness rather than success that bridges the gap between our own parenting efforts, and what, by God’s grace, our children grow up to become. ✚

The notion of the infant as an arriving *tabula rasa* upon which we inscribe our design remains deeply embedded in our culture.

need to quit asking, “Are others parenting successfully?” Instead, we need to ask, “Am I parenting faithfully?” Faithfulness, after all, is God’s highest requirement for us.

We see this clearly in the calling of the prophets, and particularly in the calling of Ezekiel. Though Ezekiel was (as far as we know) not a parent, his assignment to the people of Israel has remarkable parallels to parenthood and the question of success.

When God commissioned Ezekiel to be a prophet, he warned him that he was being sent to his own people, a nation set in revolt against God. Ezekiel’s job was to be a mouthpiece for God, to say, “This is what the Sovereign Lord says” (Ezek. 2:3–4). God gives full and dismaying disclosure before the task even begins: The people of Israel, Ezekiel’s own people, will not listen to him any more than they will listen to God himself. The job would be hard, then—harder than the prophet could have realized going in. But God didn’t leave Ezekiel defenseless. He did not make the task easier, but he made Ezekiel stronger, hardening his forehead “like the hardest stone, harder than flint” (3:8–9).

Ezekiel’s response to all this was so encouragingly human, so like myself at times and like many parents I know. With the Spirit of the Lord upon him, he returned to his people on the banks of the river for seven days, “overwhelmed” and “in bitterness and in the anger of my spirit” (3:14–15).

was, a righteous prophet of God, and that they might know who God was. Ezekiel wanted more than this, of course. He desperately wanted to turn the people back to the living God and prevent the impending and appalling judgment and death. The record does not tell us if anyone repented as a result of his words, but Ezekiel was never accountable for the repentance of others. He was accountable only for his steadfast obedience.

FAITH RATHER THAN FORMULA

It is likely that we are asking the wrong questions as parents. We are so focused on ourselves—on our own need for success and the success of our children—that we have come to view parenting as a performance or a test. It appears we are failing the test, as large numbers of our youth leave the church when they leave our nests. And now genetic research tells us the test may even be rigged.

We cannot pass this test, I’m afraid, nor could we ever. If we are graded on a curve, we will always find parents and children who are more obedient, more joyful, and more peaceful than we are. We will find parents whose children turned out better than ours, parents with a higher percentage of “spiritual champions” than we can claim for our efforts.

If we are graded instead on an absolute scale—as I believe we are—we fail even more miserably. But this is why a Savior was provided, and gifted to us through grace, through

Leslie Leyland Fields is the author most recently of *Parenting Is Your Highest Calling* . . . And Eight Other Myths That Trap Us in Worry and Guilt (Waterbrook, 2008), from which this article is adapted. She lives with her husband and six children on Kodiak Island, Alaska.

Go to ChristianBibleStudies.com for “The Myth of the Perfect Parent,” a Bible study based on this article.

SINCE the publication of Robert Coles's *The Spiritual Life of Children* in 1990, academic interest in how children view God has burgeoned. Secular and Christian researchers alike have found that children have spiritual lives independent from the influence of their families and other social factors. Donald Ratcliff, the Price-LeBar Professor of Christian Education at Wheaton College, has studied the topic for three decades. He has written and edited a number of books, including *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, and most recently, *ChildFaith: Experiencing God and Spiritual Growth with Your Children* (Wipf and Stock, 2010). Ratcliff spoke with *CT* associate editor Katelyn Beaty about how parents can guide their child's spiritual growth while acknowledging his or her choice.

In the introduction to *ChildFaith*, you write, "Don't consider this book a prescription for successful spiritual nurture." Why the disclaimer?

Personal experience. My wife and I have three wonderful kids, and we tried many different things to influence them spiritually. But they each made choices and continue to make choices. There is influence, but there is no cause and effect.

We celebrated the Old Testament holidays in our home. My wife and I thought, *This is great. Our kids are going to dive right into the Scriptures.* And it worked well, for

What if children have their own experiences of God—and a genuine free will to respond?

Interview with
Donald Ratcliff
by Katelyn Beaty



SPIRITUAL LIVES

a couple of years. Then our oldest son said, "Dad, we're not Jewish. Why should we do this Jewish stuff?" I realized that, while we had done our best to make it connect, it didn't. So after talking with our other kids, we felt we could back off of the holidays.

We have to be sensitive to where kids are, and adapt to where they are to the extent that we can.

Wouldn't some say that approach is too child-centric? Don't parents have the final say in what their kids are taught?

Yes. But God doesn't do it that way. God works with us individually. Some of us go to more exuberant services, and some to churches that are more traditional. I think God allows and to some extent encourages that diversity, because there are lots of ways to praise him; there are many ways to honor him and serve him.

Every now and then, I would talk to my kids individually. "What do you think about our bedtime practices with Scripture?" My kids were almost always upfront, saying, "I just don't get into that" or, "I really like that."

Was I abdicating my authority? I don't think so. I think I was encouraging honesty. And we really need honesty in order to keep from encouraging kids to put on masks of spirituality.

What role does the local church play in helping parents raise children?

Churches need to realize that kids are not the church of the future; they are the church of the present. The church is not merely to reach the adults, but to reach the entire body of Christ. That doesn't mean that you have to meet together all the time. I think there is a time for people to separate by ages. Still, I do like multigenerational services.

Churches also need to recognize that children are capable of ministry. In my book, I talk about some 4-year-olds I have worked with. There are four or five tasks that are customarily done in church, and I thought they could learn how to do those with one

another. So we encouraged them to take the offering, to preach a short sermon, and so on. When it came time for one little 4-year-old to preach, she said, "Girls don't preach." I didn't know how to respond. So I said, "Well, imagine that girls can preach." And she went up and did a wonderful job.

It's really interesting how kids have the potential for doing more ministry than we could ever dream. They can also pray for

Churches need to realize that kids are not the church of the future; they are the church of the present. The church is not merely to reach the adults, but to reach the entire body of Christ.

people. We always think of children as someone we pray for, but children can pray incredible prayers and do it at moments when it's most needed.

What advice do you give to Christian parents who are wondering if their child is saved?

How do you know if anyone is saved? You ask them. "Do you really love Jesus with all of your heart?" If they say yes, take it at face value.

We have so programmed ourselves to have this moment of salvation, turning from the dark to the light—and I believe that with all of my heart. But when you are talking about a 5-year-old, it's not about years of sin and darkness and then seeing the light. They make incremental decisions that are barely close to their awareness.

What else is there in salvation? An admission of sin. Did they realize their sin? Well, maybe not at that moment, but maybe they will a little later.

How do you counsel parents whose children have walked away from the faith?

That it's not just you. There are many influences, and children have a free will. To feel guilty about what we might have done does not accomplish anything.

I would also say, do not give up. Connect with that child.

Let's say your child has become a Buddhist. Then study Buddhism. What in their Buddhism might connect with our faith?

My brother-in-law is a Buddhist. He grew up in a Christian family, but he walked away from the faith. I find it really stimulating to talk with him about his faith; I try to convey respect for what he believes, as well as affirm where we agree and disagree.

If you never had dialogue with your child,

and they rebelled against you, that's going to be hard to do. But they are worth it. There's still room to try to connect.

We have all blown it as parents. As soon as you realize it, you go to your kid and say, "I'm sorry. I didn't do that right." That should be our immediate response. But what if we just couldn't do that, and now they are older and have walked away from the faith? It's not too late. It takes an awful lot of humility. If you are talking to an agnostic child, you can still say, "I'm sorry I blew it. I'm sorry I pushed you into legalism and pressured you so much [if that is needed]." I don't think it's ever too late to ask for forgiveness.

But realize that sometimes it's not needed. It's just their choice. We sometimes expect our kids to be puppets—if we push the right buttons, they are going to come out the right way. God isn't that way. God gives us free will. What a horrible world it would be if you could push certain buttons and have absolutely predictable results.

Even wayward children are still human beings, and they are still made in the image of God; let's not give up on them. ✚



Donald Ratcliff,
Price-LeBar Professor
of Christian Education
at Wheaton College

ALL THEIR OWN

CARL HENRY WAS RIGHT

Christianity Today's first editor
grasped what I as a young theologian
failed to understand about church involvement
in social justice.

By Richard J. Mouw

HAVE AN ACCOUNT TO SETTLE with Carl Henry. It is too late to personally settle it with him—although I hope the Lord eventually gives me the chance to do that in the hereafter. For now, though, I can at least set the record straight in the pages of this magazine, which Dr. Henry served so capably as *Christianity Today's* first editor.

The story starts in the fall of 1967 when, as a Ph.D. student in philosophy at the University of Chicago, I received a phone call from Henry. A few weeks before I had sent an essay to him, outlining what I took to be a proper evangelical approach to the sub-discipline of social ethics. Henry told me that he very much liked my piece for its critique of liberal Protestantism's approach to the field, and wanted to publish it. He had only one revision to suggest—a minor one, he insisted. At the point where I said that it was indeed important for *the church* to on occasion take a stand on some specific question of social justice, he preferred to have me speak of the need for *individual Christians* to take such a stand.

The essay was the first piece I had ever submitted to any periodical beyond the world of on-campus publications. Needless to say, I was thrilled to get this kind of personal attention

from one of my evangelical heroes. But I was also troubled by the change he was proposing. This was a period in my life when I had often felt alienated from evangelicalism because of what I saw as its failure to properly address issues raised by the civil rights struggle and the war in Southeast Asia. As a corrective, I wanted the church, *as church*, to acknowledge its obligation to speak to such matters. So I responded by telling Henry that I did not see his proposed change as a minor bit of editing. As much as I would be honored to see my essay appear as an article in *Christianity Today*, I said, I could not approve the formulation he was suggesting.

Henry thanked me for my time, and the conversation ended. But over the next two weeks he called several times, on each occasion urging me to accept some revision. At one point, for example, he asked me to approve a statement to the effect that the church should regularly articulate general principles that bear on social concerns, leaving it up to individuals to actively apply those principles to social specifics. I rejected that way of putting the case.

His final call set forth what he presented as some compromises. And I accepted them, albeit with some reluctance. Thus, where I had referred to “the church’s duty” to address the topic of civil rights, he had substituted a revision that spoke, with some ambiguity, of a “Christian duty with respect to the civil

JOHN NEUBAUER



rights of human beings.”

And while he kept my insistence that the church itself must on occasion address social specifics, he limited its role to the making of negative pronouncements. He had me saying that the church can say “no” to things that are happening in the economic and political realms, without mentioning anything about the church legitimately endorsing specific remedial policies or practices.

Here is how the case was put in the published version of my essay: “[I]t is often necessary for the church to take an unequivocal stand against prevailing economic, social, and political conditions, even where it is practically impossible to offer any solution” in terms that don’t draw on extra-theological “‘theoretical and empirical’ analysis.”

FIVE PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

In his biography, *Confessions of a Theologian*, Henry makes it clear that there was much going on in the background during the time we were having those phone conversations. He goes into much detail about how, during this period, he was attempting to take on social issues in a reasonable manner in his editorial role, while also pleasing J. Howard Pew, president of the Sun Oil Company, who was contributing much-needed funding for the magazine.

Henry’s obvious worries that Pew might be troubled by my article were confirmed by the fact that, after my essay appeared in print, Pew wrote to complain about what he saw as my insistence that “the church must often take a stand on economic, social, and

1. The Bible is critically relevant to the whole of modern life and culture—the social-political arena included.

2. The institutional church has no mandate, jurisdiction, or competence to endorse political legislation or military tactics or economic specifics in the name of Christ.

3. The institutional church is divinely obliged to proclaim God’s entire revelation, including the standards or commandments by which men and nations are to be finally judged, and by which they ought now to live and maintain social stability.

4. The political achievement of a better society is the task of all citizens, and individual Christians ought to be politically engaged to the limit of their competence and opportunity.

5. The Bible limits the proper activity of both government and church for divinely stipulated objectives—the former, for the preservation of justice and order, and the latter, for the moral-spiritual task of evangelizing the earth.

Having made his case to Pew, Henry reports that “[t]hereafter I received only infrequent correspondence; little if any of that pertained to the church in politics.” By itself, of course, this could have been a sign that the oilman was satisfied with Henry’s account. But the larger narrative does not allow for this interpretation of Pew’s lack of communication. It is clear, for example, that Pew was instrumental in eventually moving Henry out of his editorship, desiring—as Henry puts it in his autobiography—“a more aggressive

that the church—in the form of both preaching and ecclesial pronouncements—could do more than merely utter a “no” to some social evils. There were times, I was convinced, that the church could rightly say a bold “yes” to specific policy-like solutions. I now see that youthful conviction as misguided. Henry was right, and I was wrong.

In pushing me on this subject, Henry was not merely trying to avoid offending a significant funding source. The second point of the five principles that Henry summarized for Pew had long been a major theme in his reflections on the church’s public calling.

For example, in his now-classic 1947 jeremiad, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, Henry had complained that the evangelical ministers of his day were not addressing important social concerns. In the early pages of his book, he tells us that he had recently posed this question to a group of evangelical pastors about their preaching:

How many of you, during the past six months, have preached a sermon devoted in large part to a condemnation of such social evils as aggressive warfare, racial hatred and intolerance, the liquor traffic, exploitation of labor or management, or the like—a sermon containing not merely an incidental or illustrative reference, but directed mainly against such evils and proposing the framework in which you think solution is possible?

Not one of the pastors, he reports, could testify that he had preached such a sermon.

Note that in urging pastors to address social concerns, Henry is careful to limit their role to the no-saying function. He wants from them a “condemnation” of selected social evils. They are to speak “against” such things. What they are to offer in positive terms is not practical solutions, but the “proposing [of a] framework in which you think solution is possible” (emphasis mine).

In the months immediately preceding my telephone conversation with Henry, he had taken up this theme at some length in *Christianity Today*’s pages. In a feature article, along with an accompanying editorial in the September 15, 1967, issue, Henry praised Princeton University ethicist Paul Ramsey for

‘The institutional church has no mandate, jurisdiction, or competence to endorse political legislation or military tactics or economic specifics in the name of Christ.’ ~ Carl Henry

political issues.” In reporting on this in his memoir, Henry explains how he defended me to Pew.

“Mouw’s essay, I wrote in reply, had clearly stated that the church cannot offer legislative or military specifics, and is on safer ground, moreover, when it voices a negative verdict on the status quo.” Henry goes on to set forth what he explained to Pew as the five principles that had consistently guided his editorial policy on such matters in the magazine’s pages:

denunciation of ecumenical perspectives,” particularly as they related to political and economic questions.

SOMETIMES THE CHURCH MUST SAY ‘NO!’

Here is what I need to say now about my youthful negotiations with Carl Henry: Henry was right and I was wrong. At the time I agreed to Henry’s revision of my draft, I only grudgingly accepted what I considered a less-than-fully satisfactory compromise arrangement. What I really wanted to say is

the way he had criticized ecumenical Protestantism in his recent book, *Who Speaks for the Church?* In particular, Henry praised Ramsey's critique of ecumenical Protestantism's way of issuing what Henry describes (paraphrasing Ramsey) as "a staggering number of resolutions that support particular positions." And the issue for Ramsey was not just the sheer number of pronouncements, but also a methodology that flowed from a defective theology. Henry quotes Ramsey's harsh verdict: "Identification of Christian social ethics with specific partisan proposals that clearly are not the only ones that may be characterized as Christian and as morally acceptable comes close to the original New Testament meaning of *heresy*."

While endorsing the general thrust of Ramsey's case, Henry was careful not to let evangelicals off the hook. This important critique should be the occasion, Henry insisted, for evangelicals "to consider what they may properly say to the world about social justice." The church is obliged to "declare the criteria by which nations will ultimately be judged, and the divine standards to which man and society must conform if civilization is to endure." What the Bible actually says about such matters should "belong legitimately to pulpit proclamation." Evangelicals, he urged, needed to do a more effective job of "enunciating theological and moral principles that bear upon public life."

This did not mean for Henry that the church should get into endorsing specific solutions. A constant theme in his writings was that the church as such has neither the competence nor the authority to address political or economic specifics. He would usually add, though—probably with the memory of Nazi Germany in mind—that there may be "emergency situations" in which the church would have clear mandate from God to address specific evils. But in the normal course of things, the church should leave it up to individuals to take a very general mandate to think and act Christianly in the public arena.

WHAT CHRISTIANS CAN DO TOGETHER

So, again, Henry was right about all of that. If I still have a slight misgiving about the way he made his case, it has to do with an impression Henry gives about what takes place *after* the church provides the Christian community with biblically grounded general principles.

He suggests that once believers have heard what the church has to say, it's up to them to struggle individually with moving toward specifics.

Another of my theological heroes, Abraham Kuyper, would have agreed completely with Henry about the limits of what the church, as a worshiping and catechizing community, can do by way of addressing issues of public life. But Kuyper would have insisted that, between the gathered church and individual Christians going out into the world to struggle with applications to specifics, there is an important intermediate area of activity. Christians must form a variety of organizations that focus on specific areas of cultural involvement, in order to engage in the kind of communal reflection necessary to develop a Christian mind for the area in question.

This means that it is important, say, for Christians who are deeply involved in policies and practices relating to concern for the poor to develop specific proposals building on the general principles proclaimed by that church, by deliberating on these matters in groups that have the expertise to struggle with them. And it is even appropriate to present those policy proposals as Christian-inspired specifics, even if they move well beyond what the church—as church—has a right to say.

In our own day, it may be especially important for the church to see to it that this "beyond the worshiping church" communal discussion actually takes place. A good model is the creative outreach embodied in the very creative Center for Faith and Work, sponsored by New York's Redeemer Presbyterian Church, where laypeople can meet to think more specifically about how to serve the Lord beyond the worshiping community's borders.

But that is not so much a disagreement with Henry as it is a further development of his important views about church and the public arena. I am not alone in owing a debt of gratitude to Henry for his pioneering—and courageous—efforts to encourage a more mature evangelical discipleship in the broad reaches of culture. I hope others will join me in continuing to learn from him how best to search out remedies for an evangelicalism that still suffers from an "uneasy conscience."

Richard J. Mouw is president of Fuller Theological Seminary.



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the end
unchurched
195 million
94%
souls
doom
woe



CHICKEN LITTLE WAS WRONG

The statistics we most love to repeat may be leading us to make bad choices about the church.

By Ed Stetzer

THE REPORTER'S QUESTION was one of the best I had ever been asked. "Why do you evangelicals love to make up and say such bad things about yourselves?"

Great question, I thought. But I'm here to talk about social science research, not abnormal psychology.

I was facing a room full of reporters in a Religion Newswriters Association session at the *Washington Post* building in D.C. They had invited me to explain the difference between good religious research and bad. It's a real problem. News reports are always batting around some new bit of bad research. And sometimes a snippet from good research gets pulled out of context, then mangled, garbled, and spewed all over.

RESEARCH GONE WILD

Once a choice morsel of misinformation gets out, it multiplies faster than dandelions in the spring. We have all heard these soul-seizing yet false factoids. Some of us have even repeated them:

"Christianity will die out in this generation unless we do something now."

"Only 4 percent of this generation is Christian."

"Ninety-four percent of teenagers drop out of church, never to return again."

And perhaps my favorite: "With its 195 million unchurched people, America has become the new mission field. America has more unchurched people than the entire populations of all but 11 of the world's 194 nations." The "195 million unchurched people" statistic is all over the place—from books to blogs to church bulletins. And those who quote it often attribute it to researcher George Barna.

The problem is, it isn't true. That's not what the research showed, and Barna wasn't the one who conducted the study.

The original stat came out of a project I was a part of while working with the Southern Baptist Convention's North American Mission Board (NAMB). We researched the number of *unbelievers* in the U.S., not the number of *unchurched* people. But someone somewhere changed the language, and thus the meaning.

Three years ago, *Christianity Today* sister magazine *Books & Culture* carried a provocative article by Christian Smith entitled, "Evangelicals Behaving Badly with Statistics." Smith, a highly respected professor of sociology at the University of Notre Dame, declared that American evangelicals "are among the worst abusers of simple descriptive statistics."

He went on to dissect an advertisement for a summit that declared, "Christianity in America won't survive another decade unless we do something now." The summit organizers claimed that only 4 percent of today's teenagers would be evangelical believers by the time they became adults. "We are on the verge of a catastrophe!" the advertisement screamed.

As it turns out, that 4 percent statistic comes from an informal survey of 211 young people in three states conducted by a seminary professor nine years earlier. Smith affirmed the professor's approach but explained that an unwarranted inference was drawn from a small, non-representative sample to reach conclusions about the future faith conditions of entire generations.

Smith wrote, "Why do evangelicals recurrently abuse statistics? My observation is that they are usually trying desperately to attract attention and raise people's concern in order to mobilize resources and action for some cause. . . . Evangelical leaders and organizations routinely use descriptive statistics in sloppy, unwarranted, misrepresenting, and sometimes absolutely preposterous ways, usually to get attention and sound alarms, at least some of which are false alarms."

My friends at NAMB and my boss, Thom Rainer (the originator of the 4 percent statistic), accurately reported their methods and conclusions. But the research took on a life of its own. Unfortunately, good people who are trying to help the church change its bad habits in order to reach a lost world often misappropriate the research. Evangelical Christianity in the U.S. undoubtedly faces serious challenges, but hyperventilating doesn't help—even when the statistics are accurate. Crying, "The sky is falling!" might sell books, but it never fixes problems.

I suspect that we are attracted to bad statistics mostly for motivation. We need a personal push and hope to give one to our churches as well. But bad stats can feed self-loathing and lethargy as much as they can encourage steadfastness in mission.

WE WILL ALWAYS HAVE THE ARIS

Another way we misrepresent the state of American Christianity is by seizing upon one startling aspect of a study and pulling it out of context, sometimes ignoring other findings in the study. This happened with the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS), released in March 2009. It found a significant decline in religion and a rise in secularism that set news outlets buzzing.

"The percentage of Americans who call themselves Christians has dropped dramatically over the past two decades, and those who do are increasingly identifying themselves without traditional denomination labels," wrote Michelle Boorstein of *The Washington Post*. Cathy Lynn Grossman at *USA Today* reported, "The percentage of people who call themselves in some way Christian has dropped more than 11 percent in a generation. The faithful have scattered out of their traditional bases: The Bible Belt is less Baptist. The

Rust Belt is less Catholic. And everywhere, more people are exploring spiritual frontiers—or falling off the faith map completely."

The ARIS correctly observed that denominations and denominationalism are in decline, the cultural influence of Christianity continues to slip, more people are describing themselves as nonreligious (now 15 percent), and minority religions like Islam and Wicca are becoming more popular.

Some observers also latched onto the ARIS, finding that nonreligious Americans have dramatically increased in number, and concluded that evangelical Christianity in the U.S. is on the verge of annihilation. But the ARIS finding was only half the equation.

The ARIS also reveals a simultaneous increase in the number of Americans who self-identify as evangelical Christians. There is a lot in the ARIS that should be disturbing to the church, but the decline in the percentage of self-identified Christians that the ARIS found falls far short of a great crackup in evangelicalism.

WHAT DOES THE GOOD RESEARCH SAY?

One of the first things you learn in research is that there are many ways to look at things. Every time we have new data from a well-

designed study, it helps us. But one conclusion from one study is no foundation for a theory on the future of a society.

To get the whole picture, responsible researchers look at various studies, their methodologies, and their results. We must understand the parts in light of the whole. We should interpret each finding in light of the full study, and interpret each study in light of other studies. We reach bad conclusions when we latch onto one finding of one study, drag it out of context, and proclaim it from the rooftops without knowing whether our interpretation is justified.

The ARIS: Perhaps its most interesting finding was the stunning decline of Catholicism in the Northeast. In addition to that trend, 15 percent of Americans claimed no religion at all. The growth that did occur in the Christian population was among those who would identify only as "Christian," "evangelical/born again," or "nondenominational Christian." These groups, 5 percent of the population in 1990, stood at 11.8 percent in 2008.

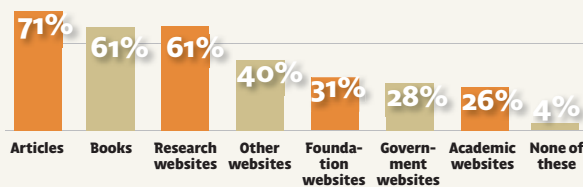
General Social Survey (GSS): One relevant aspect of the GSS (conducted every other year since 1972) is the snapshot it provides about worship service attendance. My book *Lost and*

MINISTRY BY THE MATH

How Protestant pastors use statistics.

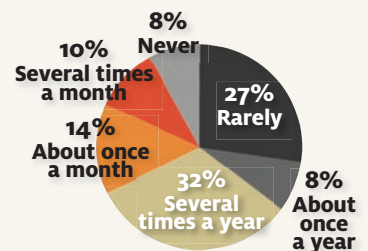
From where?

Protestant pastors obtain statistics and research from the following sources.



How often?

More than 9 out of 10 Protestant pastors consult statistics about church and culture, but the frequency varies widely.



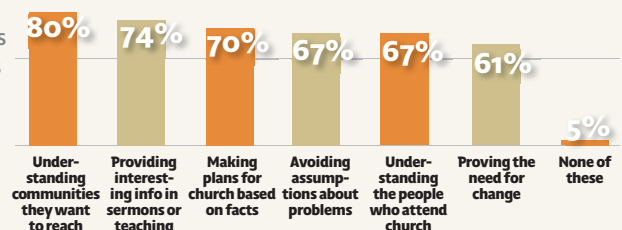
Say what?

The degree to which Protestant pastors agree with this statement: "Christians frequently misuse statistics to fit their own agenda."



Why?

Goals for which Protestant pastors consider statistics and research helpful.



Source: 2009 LifeWay Research study of 1,002 Protestant pastors.

Found included a 1972–2006 gss chart that showed that the percentage of 20-somethings attending weekly worship services has been rising since 2000, after a serious dip in the mid-1990s. My co-authors and I admitted that only time would tell if the rising trajectory would continue. Since then, the 2008 data showed another uptick, bringing attendance among evangelical 20-somethings back to what it was in 1972. Among non-evangelicals there was indeed a decline: Just fewer than 25 percent attended weekly in 1972. In 2008, it was just over 12 percent. Listening to some commentators, you might conclude that young adults had left the church. But that is not what the data tell us.

Gallup: In April 2009, Gallup reported that church attendance among Protestant young adults rebounded in the 1980s and is now close to the level it was in the 1950s. Of course, “Protestant” covers a wide range of denominations, some of which have experienced high membership growth, others of which have declined. Gallup generally hasn’t shown any change in reported church attendance, much less a massive decline among 20-somethings.

To be fair, these numbers are likely influenced by the “halo effect,” where people are more likely to say they go to church than to actually go. People always inflate reports of behaviors when they perceive that the behavior in question is desirable. It’s significant, though, that the numbers on weekly church attendance haven’t changed substantially. If Christianity were in steep decline, the social desirability of it would be, too—which would reduce the halo effect.

Baylor Religion Survey: The 2007 Baylor Religion Survey, reported in Rodney Stark’s book *What Americans Really Believe* (2008), found that, of the 11 percent of Americans who said they had “no religion,” two-thirds expressed some belief in God. In addition, many were not “irreligious” but merely “unchurched.” More to the point, the study found that people do not use activities of the “scattered” church—religious activities not affiliated with or sponsored by a congregation—as a substitute for participation in the “gathered” church.

The study exposed as a myth a widespread dissatisfaction with organized religion. Of those who are engaged in “scattered” activities, such as prayer and Bible study groups, 80 percent frequently attend

church. While many Americans are disillusioned with organized religion, theirs is by no means the prevailing attitude. Organized churches face serious issues, but the facts simply do not support the mantra that churches are dying out.

Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life: A 2008 study conducted by the Pew Forum found that 40 percent of religiously unaffiliated people say religion is still important in their lives. Further, the research found that the “unaffiliated” group does a lousy job of retaining adherents. Pew found that 39 percent of those who grew up unaffiliated are now Protestant, most of them evangelical, while another 15 percent now affiliate with Catholicism or another faith. Though we hear a great deal about young people leaving the church, we hear few reports about the stream of young people coming into the church.

WHAT ARE THE CONCERNS?

It’s hard to generalize about American Christianity. The scene is just too diverse. But the most reputable studies give us certain indicators about particular denominations and the spiritual lives of U.S. adults. Mainline denominations are no longer bleeding; they are hemorrhaging. Increasingly, they are simply managing their decline. For evangelicals, the picture is better, but only in comparison to the mainline churches. Southern Baptists, composing the largest Protestant denomination in the U.S., have apparently peaked and are trending toward decline. The same is true of most evangelical denominations. Only 2 of the top 25 Christian denominations are growing: the Assemblies of God and the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee). Both are Pentecostal.

Still, those worried about church decline are worried about data beyond the simple “more” or “less” numbers. The bigger concern is that people who identify themselves as Christians (and even evangelicals) do not evidence the beliefs historically held by Christians.

The Shape of Faith to Come, a 2008 book by Brad Waggoner (and based on a LifeWay Research study), evaluated seven domains of spiritual formation: learning truth, obeying God and denying self, serving God and others, sharing Christ, exercising faith, seeking God, and building relationships. It found that only 17 percent of Protestant churchgoers in America scored the equivalent of

80 percent or higher in those key areas of Christian discipleship. A full 57 percent of respondents said they had not once explained to another person in the past six months how to become a Christian. Then, over the course of the next year, only 3.5 percent showed a net increase in spiritual growth. These data are cause for concern, for sure. The church cannot grow if Christians are not actively discipling new believers.

AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY IS NOT DEAD

Reports of Christianity’s demise in America have been greatly exaggerated. While the main thrust of good research does indicate that the percentage of Americans who self-identify as Christians is declining, these data are not necessarily a bad thing. If three out of four Americans call themselves Christians, we are in big trouble. Three out of four Americans certainly do not live like Christians. Christianity becomes confused when everyone is a Christian but no one is following Christ. We evangelicals believe that most Americans do not have a relationship with Jesus Christ.

There is little doubt in my mind that the cultural expression of Christianity in America is declining. True, Christianity is losing its “home-field advantage” in North America. At the same time, some trends tell us we are seeing the growth of a more robust Christian faith and commitment. We are seeing some abandon nominal Christianity, and many others retain an authentic Christian faith. Christianity in North America is not going to die out in this generation or any other, even though it is going through an identity crisis of sorts.

In the meantime, bad and misinterpreted data must not convince us that organized Christianity in America is dead and gone. Facts are our friends. The facts tell us that the church in North America is struggling but also, in many places, growing. Discerning research can help us diagnose our condition. It may even help the church find strategic means to address the mission field right outside our doors. And ultimately, we all can agree that a declining church needs the unchanging gospel. ✚

Ed Stetzer is president of LifeWay Research and co-author of *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches That Reach Them* (Broadman and Holman).



{ MEDITATION }

THE DUSTY MESSIAH

Why I no longer believe
in a spiritual Jesus.

By Katelyn Beaty

OUR HOLY LAND tour guide from the Ministry of Tourism had no interest in Nazareth Village. The site is billed as a “living museum” where tourists, mostly Christians, can see an ancient Middle Eastern farm, with locals decked out in beige robes working the land and herding livestock. The decade-old ministry had some of the trappings of Sunday school flannel boards and 1950s Jesus films, going more for the picturesque than the living past.

Our guide, Karl—a secular Jew with a master’s degree in archaeology—was having none of it. He kept to the back of our group, waiting for the closing evangelistic message

to end so we could attend to weightier sights, like Masada and the Qumran Caves.

A first-time visitor to the Holy Land, I was prepared to share Karl’s distaste for quaint depictions of Jesus and his home. Even Karl, with seemingly no interest in getting to know the Man from Nazareth, at least recognized that man as a person who lived in time and space. He knew we were dealing in historical meat, not myth.

Yet something happened as we toured the Village that snuffed out my snobbery and mistrust of marketed experiences. The millennia-old olive trees, the dust in my nose, even the garbed employees—they all helped me to see Jesus as a man deeply acquainted with the essentials of human life. And they unearthed the fact that *I* was the one who had turned Jesus into a nice story.

TEXT MEETS TOPOGRAPHY

As it turns out, I was not the first to think of Jesus more as a compelling concept than as a Jewish rabbi preaching throughout ancient Palestine. Not even 200 years after Jesus’ birth, Gnosticism threatened to unmoor the budding church from its earthy roots. Disdaining physical reality in favor of esoteric, inner knowledge, Gnostics could not conceive of a Messiah who assumed human flesh yet maintained divinity. They believed the supernatural Christ must have escaped before the physical Jesus died on the cross. Marcion—an early heretic whose ideas overlapped with the Gnostics’—believed the Old Testament God was a *demiurge*, for only a lesser god could be responsible for creating the material world. Marcion thus opposed Judaism and the Hebrew Bible, preferring a mystic Christ

ATLANTIDE PHOTOTRAVEL / CORBIS



reared its ugly head again, even after my Nazareth Village moment.

The next day, our group descended a lattice-lined hill to the Church of the Primacy, a Franciscan chapel on the Sea of Galilee's north shore. It houses the *Mensa Christi*, a rock slab on which it is believed the resurrected Jesus dined with his disciples. It also memorializes Peter becoming the *petra* of Christ's church. Twelve feet long, the slab dominates the chapel interior. Germans, Latinos, and Australians jostled alongside our group to touch the slab, to pray kneeling in front of it. In touching, they wanted to connect to this moment in Jesus' resurrected life.

Except for me. Nothing in me compelled me to touch this rock, invested with import indiscernible to me. Couldn't I just as well grasp Jesus' visit to the disciples by reading Luke 24? Was the slab supposed to "do" something—to reveal spiritual truth unavailable in another, more cerebral way? As a fellow traveler sitting next to me said, "I already have something tangible—I have my New Testament." Surely Scripture, illumined by the Holy Spirit, is the best insight into Jesus' acts and their significance. And unlike this rock, it's open to those who cannot afford to travel to the Middle East. No one *must* go to the Holy Land to know Jesus of Nazareth.

But going sure does help. Even before Egeria—a fourth-century Spanish woman recognized by historians as the first Christian pilgrim to the Holy Land—believers from the beginning have known that something happens when word and image collide, when text meets topography. Our five senses take us where the imagination, poring over pages in a study, cannot. There's good reason so many Christians return from tours to Israel saying, "The Bible *came alive* for me. I'll never read it the same way again."

Surveying the Roman port city of Caesarea, with its opulent bathhouses and columns, one sees anew Paul's courage in defending the gospel there (Acts 24). Walking down the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem, perhaps the world's most religious yet most divided city, one grasps why Jesus wept over its inability to accept his peace (Luke 19). And dipping fingers and feet in the Sea of Galilee, one sees the Eleven and their joy upon towing a miraculous catch and eating fish with their risen Savior (John 21). Traveling helped our group see; and seeing helped us believe again.

JESUS THE JEWISH PILGRIM

"The Word did not simply become any 'flesh,'" wrote Karl Barth. "It became Jewish flesh. The pronouncements of New Testament Christology . . . relate always to a man who is seen to be not a man in general, a neutral man, but the conclusion and sum of the history of God with the people of Israel."

I remembered the Swiss theologian's words as our group trekked to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. For the Israelites, this was the nexus of heaven and earth, the place where King David had housed the ark of the covenant, the center of the holy metropolis to which Jewish pilgrims traveled for days to worship *Yahweh*.

Our guide beamed as he led us up the Temple Mount's southern steps. "This is one

Our five senses take us where the imagination, poring over pages in a study, cannot.

of the few places we know for sure Jesus walked," Karl explained. "These steps are from King Herod's era. Jesus would have taught here the same week he was crucified." He noted how the steps alternated long and short lengths, matching the cadence of the Psalms of Ascent. Pilgrims slowly treaded the steps singing, "My heart is not proud, O Lord, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me" (Ps. 131:1). And Jesus was the only pilgrim who could both worship at the temple and claim to *be* the temple, God's dwelling place (John 2:19). In taking on human flesh, Jesus chose to take on the long, chaotic history of a particular people following God in particular places and ways.

This, I realized as our group rested on the steps, is what most compels us to follow the Man from Nazareth. We don't recognize him as Lord because he's the bearer of timeless, practical truths, or the beautiful lynchpin on which our complex theologies rest, or the mystical Divine who perplexes everyone but us. We call Jesus Lord because only the true God would stoop low enough to wander dusty Nazarene farms, eat broiled fish by the Sea of Galilee, and ascend the Temple Mount as one Jewish pilgrim among many—all to raise us up higher than the top of Mount Zion.

Katelyn Beaty is CT associate editor.

divorced from historical messiness.

Early Christian apologists, particularly Irenaeus of Lyons, recognized that the true God had always been present with creation, as the Scriptures revealed. This God, wrote Irenaeus (to Gnostics' supreme offense), "mingled with his own creation," willingly inhabiting a human body and having that body die and rise again so as to "raise up all flesh." Irenaeus recognized that *caro cardo salutis*—"the flesh is the hinge of salvation." It was only through a real earthly ministry and a bodily death and resurrection that redemption was won.

Thanks to this and other theological defenses, today most Christians know we are to celebrate living in a material world. Surely we are not so spiritual as to disdain the kind of body Jesus had. Still, my snobbery

MORE PARTNERS AT THE TABLE

Valdir Steuernagel says we need to learn how to serve in a fellowship of rich and poor, Africans and Asians, subsistence farmers and tech professionals. Interview by Tim Stafford

The realities of world missions require partnership—across national boundaries, spanning different cultures, and between rich and poor. How do we work together in ways that respect our differences yet bring tangible effects? How do we partner so that the rich and powerful do not overwhelm the weak? How do we partner so as to give honor to God through loving “family” relations? *Christianity Today* senior writer Tim Stafford interviewed Valdir Steuernagel, a Brazilian pastor and theologian, and vice president of Christian commitments at World Vision International. His roles expose him to the church in scores of countries around the world.

W

hy does partnership matter?

Jesus tells us very clearly that the gospel message is a message of community. Paul says the same in his letters. The gospel is never an individual enterprise. In the same way in which we are called to preach the gospel and serve the poor, we are called to build community. To be a community of the gospel is never an option but always a mandate. Jesus tells us clearly that this is so important, he is praying heartily for it.

Something I have been trying to learn is that God himself is community. It's beautiful, and I am fascinated by it. God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are a community, and they model community for us. The prayers of Jesus to his Father are amazing. What the Father tells the Son is deep and loving: “You are my beloved Son.” The way Jesus talks about the Spirit coming is warm and intense: “I’m leaving but the Spirit is coming.” The Trinity is a community that models for us how to get along, how to be interdependent, how to keep our own specificity without the sense of competition.

We are not simply talking about a pragmatic *modus operandi*. We are talking about a deep core of the gospel that we need to obey. And I would say that we evangelicals are not very good at that. We look at it through the lenses of pragmatists. We use the word *cooperation* more than *community* or *family*.

Cooperation is a word that suggests a high level of individual autonomy. It's a contractual word.

And it's more pragmatic. You put on the table what you have, and we'll see how we can work together. We should start with the challenge of being a community in order to arrive well at the level of cooperation.

RODRIGO RICHTER VALENTE



What are the unique challenges of partnering today?

In the past when we sat around the table, our eyes would have been focused on the European missionaries. What will they bring? Last century our eyes would have been focused on the North Americans. We thought only about what they brought to the table. Today when we sit at the table there are many more players. One comes from Brazil, another comes from Africa, and one comes from Korea. They bring their own particularity; they bring their own experience and discernment to the table. It's important for us to listen to each other. If we don't listen we don't discern well, and if we don't discern well we serve poorly.

Can I tell you a story? I am a Lutheran, and I went to theological school in Brazil where some of the professors were Germans. I remember trying to take notes as a first-year student in systematic theology. The professor was teaching in German. I was taking notes in Portuguese. In German, the verbs come at the end. In Portuguese the verbs come at the beginning. So to start writing I was waiting for the guy to give me the verb so it would make sense, but it took so long for the verb to come, I lost the second sentence. Sometimes when we try to

at the table, they will say, "Look, we do it our way." This is both good and bad. Some years ago when I was a young guy, we could say that everything was the fault of the Americans. *Yanqui*, go home—all that kind of stuff. I cannot say this any longer, because Brazil has developed its own empires, and we have made our own mistakes. So have the Koreans and the Nigerians, and so will the Chinese.

The expanded table is good, because today we can point to Pueblos Musulmanes International, a Latin American mission that works with great ability in Islamic cultures. They have found ways to do missions with much less money and more simplicity. They have years of experience. They don't ask the North Americans how to do it; they just do it. That's good.

It's also bad. My wife and I arrived in an African country, and our hosts took us to see a new cathedral. It was due for inauguration a few days later. It's a huge cathedral. We were driving by and saw youths running, picking up stones and throwing them against the cathedral. Our hosts told us the church shouldn't have this land. It was meant for something else, but the church had some contact with the government and they got the land. As a Brazilian, I think I know how they got the land.

The gospel is never an individual enterprise. In the same way in which we are called to preach the gospel and serve the poor, we are called to build community.

communicate through our different languages and cultures we miss the second sentence.

Not that long ago, as missions historian Andrew Walls points out, every missionary was a white, blue-eyed person. When they came to the table, they brought tremendous gifts. North Americans came out of an experience of church growth. You had experienced revival in your own country. You brought optimism: "We can do it." The church growth movement and the unreached peoples movement intensified that. "How many unreached peoples do we have? Let's map it out. A.D. 2000. Let's do it; let's do it now. Yes we can."

It wasn't only theory; it was also experience. You came to the table with a lot of positive stories and ministry experiences that you could share. Pentecostalism! Azusa Street. World Vision. Campus Crusade. Youth for Christ. Billy Graham. You could sit at the table and say, "Here it is; you do this, this, and this. You can follow the process. We know how to do it."

And you brought money. You could write checks. Money is a powerful tool.

Today when you sit at the table, it's no longer like that. One of the key questions is, How does the North American missions enterprise sit at the table while no longer calling the shots? When you come to the table today and you have the Koreans, they will say, "We do it our way."

They won't even say that; they will just do it.

Exactly. When you have some of the Brazilians

Later that day, we realized it was a Brazilian church, part of a well-known, made-in-Latin-America Brazilian denomination that is working in 100 countries. The first page of the Zambian newspapers told about some of

the Brazilian pastors being kicked out of the country.

"Brazilians, go home!"

Exactly. We come to the table bringing our own successful experiences, but also bringing our own shortcomings, our disasters, our errors. When we come to the table today we need to come with much more vulnerability.

I hope the Third Lausanne Congress in Cape Town will be this kind of table. That's what some of us are dreaming of—a place where we start talking about our own journeys, our histories, our struggles and shortcomings, our painful experiences. When we do that we come much closer together.

It's this table that brings us together, calling each other to fulfill our call to gospel ministry, calling each other to be good stewards of our possibilities and resources, but also calling each other to repentance. That's a beautiful table. I celebrate that table.

What do you do with those who aren't ready for that kind of engagement?

There are two voices in me. One, I believe in the gospel. I believe in a continuous call into a new experience with the gospel. We need to continue to read the gospel and talk to each other about that.

Second, I believe in the experience of repentance. There are things in my life that I understand only through pain. So as an

The Global Conversation addresses important issues related to world evangelization in preparation for the Lausanne Movement's Cape Town 2010 conference. Join the conversation by reading responses from key Christian leaders at ChristianityToday.com/go/conversation and by posting your own comments.

older person, I need to have historical patience that allows for younger generations to make their mistakes.

We all should be ready to listen to the gospel and repent.

Beware of the power of the golden rule: He who has the gold makes the rules. The reality is that the North American and European missions enterprise still has a lot of money, while many other players have much less. It's not easy to have money and still listen. We need to value what each other brings and learn to partner within that frame.

And also, you don't change systems and regimes just by talking to them. Bureaucracies don't change easily. Don't be naïve, thinking that if you have a good sermon and you pray well together, everything will change. It usually isn't like that. I can see a lot of tension, conversation, and repentance at today's table of partnership for missions.

We need to be hardheaded about the difficulties of change.

And not only individually. Corporately as well.

For good and bad you are a victim of yourself, a product of yourself. Last time I went to Senegal, I said that I wanted to meet the Brazilian missionaries in Senegal. And there were several. We had a meeting at the home of one family who was starting a very simple restaurant. The people serving were former street children. What do you think they were serving? Churrasco, Brazilian barbecue. What do we bring with us? Barbecue. It's a gift.

And how many Brazilian missionaries are working with soccer schools? Priscilla is a Brazilian missionary in India. She's been there since she was 19 years old, and meanwhile she married an Argentinean. They are working with Afghan refugees. What do they have? A soccer school. A Brazilian married to an Argentinean teaching soccer to Afghans in India. It's crazy. It's beautiful.

Just like North Americans took baseball schools to Latin America.

It's natural that we take our experience to other people, because we think it's important. We love it. You take with you what you enjoy. I would say that it is much better to take soccer than to take baseball—I'm a Brazilian [laughs]. We need to be aware of what we bring, but also to laugh about it, and thus relativize what we bring.

How have you worked through these issues in World Vision? You're a very international organization, and your staff come from all over. The money comes in from many countries.

What lessons have you learned about partnership?

The most remarkable lesson I remember was seeing World Vision U.S. give up power. We came up with a proposal that every entity should have one vote. They were part of that decision. When it comes to the governing council, we in Brazil have one vote; the U.S., with 40 percent of the revenue, has one vote. I think that is a powerful witness.

How does partnership apply to the huge numbers of churches that aren't going through established structures to do missions, but are making direct contact with people

in other countries and sending teams and funds directly? How do you help them see the need to make time and space to listen?

The first thing that comes to my mind is that if you don't listen, you will die alone.

Is there a way to listen? A structure? An approach?

I am not much of a believer in listening techniques. I am more of a believer in a gospel that shapes you. The most important piece is where your heart is. Are you willing to listen?

I would say that if you go on a trip and encounter suffering and poverty and you don't cry, something is wrong. We should stress that.

When you feel strong and powerful, you do not listen. But there are moments of vulnerability. For example, if you are part of a rich middle-class church in Brazil, and

you encounter the poor in a *favela* [slum], you realize something is wrong. Why do we have it and they don't? Why do they suffer and we don't? If you are a gospel reader, you will be hurt by the suffering of others.

One of the principles I'm trying to follow is this: Don't expect them to say no to us when we offer our programs and resources. They have been in such a vulnerable state that they cannot say no. It's not fair. You put all of your resources on the table and then you say, "Tell me if you don't want it." Don't do that. Listen first.

Try to find partners who critique you. It's so dangerous to have only partners who want your resources and will do everything possible to make you happy while you are there. You also need partners who engage you and raise difficult questions, so that you establish real conversations.

Try to establish long-term relations, because long-term relationships will bring more reality to the table. I am afraid of short-term missions. I know they are a reality, but they need to be put into a context and, if possible, aligned with some kind of long-term commitment. In our missions history, I really value those missionaries who went for life.



RODRIGO RICHTER VALENTE

THE MISSIONARY WHO WOULDN'T RETIRE

Lesslie Newbigin launched a new career at age 66 by calling Western churches to act like they were in the mission field.
By Krish Kandiah

IT WAS AN unlikely adventure to launch a global ministry—a tediously long bus journey from Madras, India, to Birmingham, England. It was an unlikely background for a champion of the gospel to emerge from—the theologically liberal Student Christian Movement. It was an unlikely age at which to unintentionally initiate the emergent and missional church movements—age 66 after 35 years of cross-cultural missionary service. But Bishop Lesslie Newbigin made his most important contribution and did his most profound thinking in his 70s and 80s. Can this man, whose birth centenary was celebrated in December, help today's church navigate a critical period of change?

American Christianity is a long way from disappearing, but it is embattled. *Newsweek* magazine, bus placards, and best-selling books are all proclaiming the death of Christian America. Over the past 35 years, American confidence in religious leaders has dropped significantly—and dropped farther and faster than confidence in leaders of other institutions. Of those under age 30, only 3 percent hold a favorable view of evangelicals, compared with 33 percent who hold a favorable view of gays and lesbians. The 2009 American Religious Identification Survey showed a 10 percent dip in the number of self-identified Christians while also reporting that the number of Americans who claim no religious affiliation has nearly doubled since 1990, rising from 8 to 15 percent.

These figures come as no surprise to someone from the other side of the Atlantic.

The European church has long struggled with plummeting attendance. The most optimistic reading of our latest church attendance statistics describes the U.K. as “pulling out of the nosedive.” Penn State's Philip Jenkins sees Europe taking the lead as the “acids of modernity” (journalist Walter Lippmann's term) dissolve the Christian foundations of a continent.

Others, like sociologist Grace Davie, see Europe as the exception, the only place on the planet where the church is in decline and facing increasing marginalization. Despite the best efforts of the militant New Atheists, we have ended up not with secularism but with religious pluralism.

In the face of alarming statistics, secularist attacks, and media scaremongering, the church has an important ally in Lesslie Newbigin. His writings continue to call the church to its missionary vocation in the midst of cultural change and ideological pluralism.

Newbigin was born 100 years ago on December 8, 1909. After completing theological studies at Cambridge University and working briefly for the Student Christian Movement, he left for India in 1936 to labor as a missionary, evangelist, and apologist. There he was instrumental in bringing together the Congregational, Presbyterian, Reformed, Episcopal, Methodist, Baptist, and Pentecostal churches from India, Pakistan, and Burma into one ecumenical denomination: the Church of South India. On his return to England, he was shocked to find that the West was as urgent a mission field as the East. Refusing to settle into retirement, he wrote prolifically, issuing

a clarion call to the Western church to rediscover its missionary mandate.

This was not merely a response to the declining state of the church, but the result of Newbigin's wrestling with the interplay of such enormous ideas as election, modernity, contextualization, the end of Christendom, and missional ecclesiology. Seeing the bigger picture of the gospel has inspired many of Newbigin's readers to grasp more fully the interaction between gospel, church, and culture. Three major themes stand out as particularly pertinent to our time.

BIGGER THAN WE THINK

When I speak with students around the world, I find them confident in their ability to present the gospel. They tell me that God loves me, that I have sinned, that Christ died for me, and that I need to believe in Jesus to get to heaven. Their confidence is reassuring, but their content is worrying. Doctoral students and seminarians often seem to have no deeper grasp of the gospel than do Sunday school children. The gospel they present has been reduced to a personalized product that offers the ultimate bargain—exchanging spiritual poverty for eternal riches. The problem





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with much of our evangelism is not what we include but what we omit: the Holy Spirit, the church, persecution, obedience, mission, reconciliation, resurrection, and new creation.

The gospel according to Newbigin challenges this thinking in two distinct ways. First, he calls us back to a gospel that brings personal reconciliation with God, but also a gospel that connects us with God's reconciling purposes in conscience, culture, church, creation, and cosmos. Second, he calls us back to a gospel that is more than a series of bullet points, a *story* that centers on the flesh-and-blood character of the divine Christ.

Newbigin's call is earthed in his careful exposition of John's gospel, but it draws as well on thinkers such as Martin Buber, Michael Polanyi, Hans Frei, and Alasdair MacIntyre, synthesizing their reflections into a powerful, unwittingly postmodern-friendly apologetic. Newbigin encourages us to tell the stories of the gospel as part of the grand sweep of the biblical drama. This is vital if an increasingly biblically illiterate generation is going to hear the gospel for the first time. We must explain that the stories of Jesus, true both historically and experientially, are the only way to understand how our individual stories make sense, and we must demand a personal decision to follow the Lord of all history.

As Newbigin explained in 1994, "The true understanding of the Bible is that it tells a story of which my life is a part, the story of God's tireless, loving, wrathful, inexhaustible patience with the human family, and of our unbelief, blindness, disobedience. To accept this story as the truth of the human story (and so of my story) commits me personally to a life of discernment and obedience in the new circumstances of each day."

As we tell the Jesus story, we draw people to him as a person worthy of allegiance rather than as a proposition to be evaluated.

THE GOSPEL AS PUBLIC TRUTH

In *God Is Back*, *Economist* editors John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge cite economics as the reason Christianity has fared better in the United States than in Europe. They argue that the disestablishment of the American church opened a free market in which religious ideas flourished while their European state-backed religious counterparts disintegrated along with other politically enforced institutions. This insight offers us hope that European-style decline

is not the future of global Christianity, and that the American model may hold the key to the re-evangelization of Europe.

But there is a danger in free-market spirituality. Christianity becomes just another lifestyle option. As we become more aware of the multiplicity of worldviews and religions, and as we rightly value diversity, we can grow increasingly reluctant to commend the truthfulness of the Christian message. Privatized relativism is a real danger for the church. We are tempted to vacate the public square, avoid

God's people are elected to join in God's mission to call others to God in keeping with the Abrahamic calling, 'blessed to be a blessing.'

evangelism out of fear of offending others, and retreat into ghettos. The only alternative seems to be to try to impose Christian values on the wider culture by exerting moral muscle.

Newbigin offers a third way. He challenges the post-Enlightenment separation between so-called objective facts in the public realm (taught at school and presented without the need for the preface "I believe") and the subjective values of the private world of religion and ethics. He argues that the church needs to humbly yet boldly enter the public sphere with a persuasive retelling of the Christian story—not as personal spirituality, but as public truth.

He takes the logic for this public dialogue from the scientific community. A scientist does not present research findings as a personal preference, but with hope for universal agreement if the findings stand up to investigation. In the marketplace of ideas, we should likewise present the gospel not as personal preference but as truth that should gain universal acceptance. This allows us to commend the faith with the humble admission that we might not have exhaustively grasped the truth, but that we have truth that needs to be investigated and seriously engaged.

THE GOSPEL IN COMMUNITY

I remember being in a crowded living room in Birmingham as a group of university evangelists and apologists sat at the feet of a very old man who needed a magnifying glass to read his tightly typed notes. He explained that the bottom line of his whole theological

project was "the doctrine of election." That was my first encounter with Newbigin, and after immersing myself in his writings for five years, I discovered that his entire missiology revolved around that idea. God's people are elected to join in God's mission to call others to God in keeping with the Abrahamic calling, "blessed to be a blessing." There is therefore a dual purpose: God wants to reconcile people to himself, but also to reconcile people to each other. The election of individuals cannot be separated from God's election of the church:

we are elected to be God's missionary people. The church is, by its very nature, missional.

This has two major implications. First, the church, not the individual, is the basic unit of evangelism. A community that lives out

the truth of the gospel is the best context in which to understand its proclamation. This insight is at the heart of courses like Alpha and of the best examples of church planting and church growth.

Second, the unity of the church matters to the mission of the church. Disunity undercuts the gospel of reconciliation that we claim to bring to the world. Newbigin the evangelist's own lifelong commitment to church unity throws down the gauntlet. Whatever we need to do to help this generation to hear the gospel, we need to do together.

As Newbigin wrote, "I have been called and commissioned, through no merit of mine, to carry this message, to tell this story, to give this invitation. It is not my story or my invitation. It has no coercive intent. It is an invitation from the one who loved you and gave himself up for you. That invitation will come with winsomeness if it comes from a community in which the grace of the Redeemer is at work."

Over the past 100 years, the church has made a global impact, and God has proved faithful through every cultural shift. He can certainly be trusted for every new challenge the church faces today. Hearing Newbigin's call to present Christ publicly with courage and humility, in all his glory and with the integrity of a united church that lives his message before a watching world, should fill us with eagerness to prove God faithful in our day and over the next hundred years. ☩

Krish Kandiah is executive director of churches in mission for the Evangelical Alliance U.K.

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CTI102500003 PACP00603917-01



Long-term Love: Some women's bodies are so severely damaged, they cannot be healed. Many such women live at Desta Mender ('Joy Village'), in Ethiopia. The village provides lifelong medical care to some 45 women.

YOU ARE a 14-year-old girl. You've never been to school. You were married to a man in a neighboring village at age 13—before your first menstrual period—and six months later, you became pregnant. Now you are in labor with your first child.

Labor has already lasted for three days, but still the baby has not come. You are exhausted. You have lost a lot of blood and are running a fever. You haven't passed urine in over two days, and your genitals are horribly swollen and bruised from the constant pushing. *Why won't the baby come out?* you wonder. You dread the long, bony fingers of the old woman who is attending your birth. Nothing she does brings relief.

Soon the sun is rising on the morning of your fourth day of labor. At midday, with agony, you manage to pass the child from your body.

The baby is stillborn. It has been dead for nearly three days and has started to decay. The softening of its tissues finally allowed it to pass through your vagina.

Thank God, you sigh. It's finally over. But it's not.

On the morning of the fifth day, you pass more dead tissue. And then it starts. Urine is running out of your vagina, onto your thighs, onto the floor. *What is going on?* The urine does not stop. You find some rags and stuff them between your thighs.

There, that ought to take care of it, you think. But it doesn't.

In an hour or two, the rags are soaked. In six hours, you have run out of rags. In 12 hours you notice—to your horror—that feces are also coming out. No matter how much you try, no matter how much you wash, you cannot get rid of it.

The odor and wetness are constant. Your husband is disgusted. He cannot stand to have you around. Your presence is unendurable.

"What has happened to you? What did you do?" he demands. You



JESUS AND THE UNCLEAN WOMAN

How a story in Mark's gospel sheds light on the problem of obstetric fistula.

By L. Lewis Wall

Photographs by Yanina Manolova

were supposed to have become a *woman*, the mother of his first-born son, but instead you have turned into a human cesspit. This all must be punishment for something you did.

He turns you out of the house. Your family takes you back, but you are not fit to live in their dwelling, so they put you in a shack on the edge of the family compound, where you sit day after day—alone, wretched, and stinking—until your family finally has had enough of you and casts you out.

You are 14. You are illiterate and have no money. You have no skills with which to earn a livelihood. You reek of urine and feces. And you want to die.

You don't know that your condition has a

name; all you know is that you are cursed for reasons you don't understand. As far as you can tell, you are the only woman who has ever been afflicted in this way. You don't know that 3 to 4 million other women currently share your fate of having a fistula. Neither do you know that tens of thousands more join this sisterhood of suffering every year. As the lonely months roll by, you understand that this condition will not go away, that your injury will not heal on its own, and that nothing you can do will change your condition.

Most importantly, perhaps, you do not know that fistulas are both curable and preventable. You do not know that 150 years ago, thousands of American and European

women suffered from this. You do not know that for only a few hundred dollars, a surgical operation could repair your injuries and restore your whole life.

CHRONIC BLEEDING

The fifth chapter of Mark's gospel, verses 25 to 34, contains a story of the healing of a woman with a chronic bleeding problem:

Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about

Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.” Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?” And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’” He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.” (NRSV)

When I read this passage as a child, I was amazed that someone could hemorrhage for 12 years and still be alive—that in itself seemed miraculous to me. English versions of this passage usually use the word *hemorrhage* to translate the Greek, but modern readers are likely to interpret *hemorrhage* as the sudden bursting of a blood vessel that leads to uncontrollable, life-threatening bleeding. That is certainly not the case here. In Mark’s gospel, the Greek phrase is *ousa en rhusei haimatos*, meaning “in a state of blood flow”—a steady ooze rather than a dam burst of bleeding. The King James Version appropriately translates the phrase as “an issue of blood.”

On the morning of the fifth day, you pass more dead tissue. And then it starts. Urine is running onto your thighs, onto the floor. What is going on?

What this passage refers to is menstrual bleeding. The woman who touched Jesus’ garment had what gynecologists call *menometrorrhagia*: heavy, irregular, and unpredictable menstrual periods. There are a number of potential causes of menometrorrhagia, including uterine tumors and polyps of the tissue that lines the uterus. But the most likely reason this woman bled chronically is *anovulation*: her hormonal rhythms were badly off balance, and as a result, she was not maturing an egg in her ovary and releasing it on a regular basis.

Menstrual periods are triggered by



ovulation. If an ovulated egg is fertilized, a pregnancy ensues, and menstruation will stop until after the baby is born, when the hormonal cycle resumes. If ovulation does not occur regularly, the affected woman will not have a regular, predictable menstrual cycle.

As a woman’s hormonal signals become more unsynchronized, her bleeding gets worse. Her uterine lining becomes thick and shaggy, with unpredictable spotting and bleeding. More irregular periods with heavier bleeding follow, and her life steadily becomes more miserable. If the bleeding continues for long, the lining of the uterus can become thin, raw, and denuded, a chronic weeping sore. The common medical term for this condition—dysfunctional uterine bleeding—gives some sense of the reproductive disruption that it often causes.

In noting this woman’s medical condition, what is Mark the evangelist suggesting about her larger condition in life?

First, because regular cyclic menstrual bleeding is the sign of regular ovulation (a prerequisite for conception), this woman was probably infertile. Since Mark says she has had this discharge of blood for 12 years, we can be pretty sure she has not been pregnant during this time. A 12-year stretch without a pregnancy would have been very unusual in ancient Galilee, as it would be today in rural societies where fertility is unregulated by effective contraception. For healthy,

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sexually active couples, where the woman ovulates regularly and contraception is not used, an annual pregnancy is com-

monplace. It would be almost unheard of to go 12 years without a pregnancy under these circumstances. Something was definitely wrong with this woman’s ability to conceive. This lies at the heart of her problem.

It wasn’t so much that the woman had been suffering from hemorrhages as that she was infertile—she was unable to “be fruitful and multiply” as God commanded. She was thus cut off from something that gave her life meaning and provided her acceptable social status: motherhood.

She was also probably anemic from her bleeding, especially in a society with an iron-poor diet, and was likely chronically tired from the resulting decrease in her stamina.

As a result, this woman’s general health was probably poor.

But the real reason that she had “endured much under many physicians and had spent all that she had” was not her unpredict-

able and prolonged menstrual periods. Her desperation came from the fact that she could not have children. To be infertile in a culture where motherhood was the supreme female virtue hung a cloud not only over her current life, but also over her future prospects. In such societies, one’s security in old age came from one’s family. To be childless was to confront, on a daily basis, the likelihood of a very grim and lonely future.

The second devastating consequence for this woman was that she was perpetually unclean according to the rules of ritual purity. Even though most Americans don’t

talk about menstruation in polite company, we do not regard menstruating women as impure persons. We do not categorize them as “unclean” and banish them from our company. We do not exclude them from Sunday worship and other religious events.

In first-century Palestine, however, other rules applied: social behavior was controlled by rules of cleanliness that were deeply embedded in religious practice and belief. These rules were particularly important—and particularly strict—for cultic practices at the temple in Jerusalem.

Leviticus 15:19–28 describes in detail the ritual status of menstruating women. A

the architectural layout of the temple in Jerusalem, which consisted of four courts surrounding the inner sanctum, the holy of holies. The outer court was open to all, even foreigners and Gentiles; the only persons excluded from entry were menstruating women. If a woman was not contaminated by menstruation, she could enter the second court, but could go no further. The third court was open only to Jewish men, the fourth court, only to male members of the priesthood, and the inner sanctuary, only to the high priests clad in their ritual garments.

In Jesus’ time, the rules of ritual purity were tightening, not loosening, in response

more constricting. The irregular bleeder had a more precarious ritual status. She was a *zabab*, not a *niddah*, which meant she was impure not only during her bleeding, but also for a week after each episode of bleeding, after which she had to make offerings through a priest to expiate her sinful, unclean discharge (Lev. 15:25–28).

To have near-constant bleeding for 12 years in a society where such rules were rigorously enforced would be awful. You would be constantly unclean. Those who knew about your condition would not welcome you. You could not participate in religious services or activities. An accident of menstrual hygiene could disrupt your household at great inconvenience to those living with you. The burden of 12 years of such uncleanness would have been overwhelming. The woman of Mark 5 must have wondered why such a thing had been visited upon her.

Furthermore, if her husband was a righteous man, he wouldn’t have come near her due to her impurity—which was virtually all of the time—so the likelihood of her being permanently childless would have been certain.

We now understand why the woman was desperate to find Jesus. We also understand why she wasn’t eager to explain her problem to him face-to-face and to ask for healing; to do so would have been embarrassing and ritually dangerous. How much simpler to avoid all of this by sneaking up and grabbing hold of his clothes, making off with just a bit of his healing power. The plan assumes the woman would be able to catch Jesus in a crowd, with lots of people pushing in on him, trying to hear him, to catch a glimpse of him, to get his blessing, or to ask for some form of healing.

But imagine her horror when, after having stealthily accomplished her task and melting back into the crowd, Jesus turns and asks, “Who touched me?” The reason Mark says the woman “came in fear and trembling” was that she had just done an unconscionable thing. She had approached a holy person willfully, knowingly, and in the flood of her impurity. According to the rules of purity, she had just rendered Jesus unclean. She had been exposed in public in the middle of this shameful, embarrassing, and defiling act.

Instead of castigating and humiliating her, Jesus approaches her directly. We can even imagine him touching her himself. Taking hold of her in such circumstances would



normally menstruating woman (*niddah*) was regarded as impure for the seven days that her period was said to last. Persons who touched her were also unclean until they had bathed and purified themselves. Everything that the menstruating woman sat or laid on was also unclean. Should a man have intercourse with a menstruating woman, or allow her blood to fall on him, he was unclean for a week, and everything that he sat or laid on was also unclean.

It was dangerous for such women to enter the presence of holy things. Normal female physiology made women periodically impure and thus separated them from the most important cultic practices. Women could not, therefore, officiate at the temple.

In his treatise *Against Apion*, first-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus described

Adapting: Fistula patients often gather around open drains, which help them eliminate the constantly dripping waste.

to the presence of a dominating Roman military occupation. The group that regarded itself as the purest of the pure—the

Essenes of the Qumran community, which produced the Dead Sea Scrolls—were celibate men who believed that the law of priestly cleanliness should apply to everyone, not just Levites and high priests. The Temple Scroll from Qumran actually recommended that menstruating women be quarantined in special sections of the cities, separated from the rest of society.

To be sure, many and perhaps most women accepted the purity laws laid out for them in the Torah, abided by them scrupulously, and found fulfillment in living what they regarded to be properly regulated religious lives. But when menstruation became irregular and unpredictable, the purity restrictions became

have been typical of Jesus, for by doing so, he would have been deliberately violating a ritual restriction in order to perform an act of compassion. “Daughter,” he says, using a term that indicates a familial relationship, even though he cannot have been much older than she, “your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

This sudden reversal of expectations—this expression of forgiveness, restoration, and healing—is the moment when the kingdom of heaven breaks forth in the life of this suffering woman.

A SIMPLE OPERATION

Three to four million women in Africa today are shunned by their communities because they are victims of disordered reproductive physiology. But the shame of these women is deeper, their suffering more intense, and their need for healing even greater than that of the unclean woman in Mark’s gospel. Like her, these women try to hide themselves in the crowd, but they are less able to do so because their affliction is more obvious to those around them. These young women have *vesicovaginal fistulas*, a catastrophic complication of childbirth in which the base of the bladder is destroyed during labor, making the women totally and continuously incontinent.

A vesicovaginal fistula results when labor becomes obstructed and is not reversed with timely surgical intervention. Obstructed labor occurs when a fetus does not fit through its mother’s birth canal during labor. Unless the

childbirth, because they do not have access to the surgical care they need. Although Africa accounts for only 20 percent of the world’s births, 40 percent of the world’s maternal deaths take place there. For women who survive the ordeal of obstructed labor, living with a fistula often seems worse than death.

Labor is an involuntary process. Once started, it continues until delivery is achieved or it ends in one of several catastrophic ways. The pregnant woman whose pelvis is too small for childbirth may be in hard labor

to her injuries, and a torrent of urine floods through her vagina. In obstructed labor, the woman’s bladder is trapped between the fetal skull and her pelvic bones. The skull is forced relentlessly downward by the contractions, but the unyielding bones of her pelvis refuse to let it pass. As her pelvis’s soft tissues are crushed, they die and slough away, forming a fistula. Once this happens, the fistula will not heal without a surgical operation.

Because surgery is so scarce in this part of the world, most of these women never receive help. They become “incurables,” wet, miserable, stinking, and friendless—the outcasts of society. Many of these women are teenagers, sometimes barely even of reproductive age, when this event destroys their lives.

The woman in Mark’s gospel could hide her shame with a discrete padding of cloth, but the woman with a fistula is not so fortunate. The constant trickle of urine saturates whatever absorbent material she can find, and the odor emanating from rags soaked in urine is unmistakable to those around her. Unlike the woman in Mark 5, she can’t hide in a crowd. Unfit

for close companionship, these women are frequently divorced by their husbands and abandoned by their families. They are seen as hopeless, drifting to the margins of society where they live lives of misery, isolation, worsening poverty and malnutrition, unloved, unwanted, and alone.

The vast majority of women with fistulas can be cured by an operation that costs only three or four hundred dollars. The surgical cure of a fistula is life-transforming, almost miraculous. A successful surgery pulls these women back from the edge of the abyss of hopelessness and restores their social personhood. It creates a stunning moment when the kingdom of heaven breaks forth in their lives in ways they never could have dreamed of or anticipated. ☩

L. Lewis Wall is professor of obstetrics/gynecology in the School of Medicine and professor of anthropology in the College of Arts and Sciences at Washington University in St. Louis. For more information on the Worldwide Fistula Fund, visit WorldwideFistulaFund.org.



Convenience Clinic: The Hamlin Fistula Hospital in Bahir Dar, Ethiopia, is one of a number of mini-hospitals that each hopes to treat about 400 patients a year.

for days, suffering severe, unrelenting uterine contractions without achieving delivery until—exhausted, weak from blood loss, and probably infected because of the long labor—she dies without ever delivering her child. Sometimes the uterus will rupture, killing both the woman and her baby in a sudden cataclysm in which the fetus and the afterbirth are thrown into her abdomen through

the burst wall of her womb.

Women who do not succumb eventually pass a stillborn infant who is asphyxiated during the long birth process. After death, the entrapped baby starts to decay, eventually macerating and sliding out of the mother’s body.

And as if this were not terrible enough, the worst is yet to come. A few days later, the base of the woman’s bladder sloughs away due

The woman in Mark’s gospel could hide her shame with a discrete padding of cloth. The woman with a fistula is not so fortunate.

woman receives an emergency cesarean section, her labor may last for several days before it reaches its inevitably disastrous ending. The rate of C-section deliveries in the United States has reached 30 percent—probably higher than it should be. But in West Africa alone, the rate of C-sections is only 1.3 percent of all births, far below what’s needed to meet the most basic obstetric needs of pregnant women.

As a result, many African women die in

HOPE FOR THE 'MOST VOICELESS' ON THE PLANET

A human rights lawyer, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, and two world-class surgeons are rallying evangelicals to defeat fistula.

By Elissa Cooper

OBSTETRIC FISTULAS were common in the United States generations ago. L. Lewis Wall, an obstetrics surgeon and president of the Worldwide Fistula Fund (WFF), told *Christianity Today* that due to modern health care, fistula has been “lost

from the collective memory.” (See “Jesus and the Unclean Woman,” page 48.)

A fistula develops when bladder or rectal tissue is damaged during obstructed labor. In most instances, the mother is unable to deliver her baby because her pelvis has not fully grown. Typically her child dies, and

unless surgery is performed, the woman remains incontinent for the rest of her life. Medical experts estimate that more than 90 percent of the 2–3 million women who need the surgery live in the developing world.

WFF is the first American organization focused solely on fistula. Wall and WFF vice president Steve Arrowsmith have performed thousands of fistula repairs since the 1980s. Arrowsmith has a sense of humor about his expertise. “I used to tell everybody I was one of the top five fistula surgeons in the world. There were only four of us, but I was definitely right up there in the top five.”

Australian physician Catherine Hamlin and her late husband, Reginald, were the modern pioneers of fistula surgery. In 1974, the Christian couple founded Ethiopia’s Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital, which has provided free surgery to more than 34,000 women. (Hamlin, who turns 86 this month, still performs surgeries.)

Fistula surgeries are also regularly performed aboard Mercy Ships’ *Africa Mercy*, a nonprofit floating hospital where Arrowsmith serves as surgery coordinator.

All Smiles Aboard:
Steve Arrowsmith joins
patients on *Africa Mercy*’s
gangplank. In 2008, *Mercy
Ships* performed 122 fistula
surgeries in Liberia alone.



LAUNCHING A CAMPAIGN

Intensive media attention has brought the need for fistula surgery to a worldwide audience. Both the BBC and Oprah have aired programs on the topic. And a 2007 Emmy-winning documentary, *A Walk to Beautiful*, followed five women through fistula repair in Ethiopia.

New York Times columnist Nicholas D. Kristof has written on fistula many times and featured it prominently in *Half the Sky*, the 2009 book he wrote with journalist wife Sheryl WuDunn. Kristof told *CT*, "Fistulas were almost unknown ten years ago. It was considered a fairly disgusting topic, not

midwife training.

In Niger, the landlocked state north of Nigeria, WFF is building what it hopes will be a demonstration model hospital, located near a leprosy center. Arrowsmith said the location is intentional because those with fistula and those with leprosy have much in common. "They need a lot beyond just care for leprosy, and fistula patients need a lot beyond just having an operation."

The campaign also plans to create an International Fistula Institute to manage funds and build long-term relationships. "Western governments have a role to play," Kristof said. "But at the end of the day, these efforts have

'Fistulas were almost unknown ten years ago. It was considered a fairly disgusting topic, inappropriate for polite conversation.'

~ Nicholas D. Kristof

appropriate for polite conversation." Fistula sufferers are "the most voiceless people in their societies."

As more Americans learn about the situation of the most voiceless, more want to do something. Enter the influential Michael Horowitz, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute and a general counsel for the Reagan administration. He specializes in assembling broad-spectrum humanitarian coalitions focused on human trafficking, religious persecution, and prison reform, among other concerns.

"In all of these fields, you find some heroic person or people barely keeping the flame flaring, doing everything they can," said Horowitz. "By now I have an instinct for what kinds of things can catch fire."

Last year, Horowitz connected with Kristof, WFF, and Wall. All parties have put their stamp of approval on a global campaign to provide fistula surgery to any woman who needs it. The \$1.5 billion campaign, funded by donations and U.S. foreign aid, would pay for 40 fistula surgery clinics, each having 40 beds and costing \$2.5 million. Nations in which fistula is widespread would be leading candidates for clinics.

Each facility would provide surgery and other medical treatment for fistula patients, as well as train surgeons and medical staff. Other programs would educate communities on fistula prevention through improvements in female and maternal care and

to be owned and supported by local people in these countries." (The U.S. government has a fistula program, but its budget is only several million dollars per year.)

SPIRITUAL PLUS PHYSICAL

Horowitz believes motivating the faith community is critical. WFF's Wall agrees. "If I can mobilize the Christian women of America on this issue, the men won't stand a chance."

The campaign is gaining support among religious leaders. Mark Pelavin, associate director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (RAC), said, "The combination of the magnitude of the problem and the ability to solve it make it exactly the kind of issue or cause that a lot of organizations will be interested in."

Key evangelical leaders strongly support a faith-based campaign to end fistula. Several groups, including the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) and the RAC, held a summit in mid-November to discuss the campaign for creating a fistula-free world.

Kristof is optimistic that diverse groups will come together on the issue. "In general, reproductive health tends to be a toxic area

that creates antagonism," he said. "Fistula is one of the few areas in that world where everybody would like to help and can do some good; it doesn't raise these issues that immediately divide people."

Debbie Fikes, a top leader with the WEA, told *CT* that fistula outreach appealed to her as both a woman and a Christian. She believes that educating congregations on the unique needs of women with fistula is essential. "It's easy to get de-sensitized because there are so many needs," said Fikes. "But this is one that's very achievable."

The campaign is just starting to take hold at the grassroots. Central Peninsula Church in Foster City, California, was looking for an opportunity to address physical and spiritual needs. After pastor Mark Mitchell met Wall through a friend, church leaders became more interested. A significant percentage of fistula surgeries worldwide are performed at Christian hospitals and clinics.

At its 2008 Christmas Eve service, Central Peninsula raised about \$85,000 to construct a fistula treatment center in Niger. Due to the country's political complexities, the fistula project was delayed for several months until ministry leaders could iron out the local politics. Officials eventually granted them permission to build the treatment center. In late November, Mitchell told *CT* that his church was hoping to donate its 2009 Christmas Eve offering toward the fistula outreach in Niger, giving the project a much-needed financial boost.

"Our hope is that we can start taking teams of people and get them involved in hands-on work in both of these areas," Mitchell said.

Mitchell and Fikes acknowledge that there is no shortage of social challenges the evangelical community could address. But, as Horowitz told *CT*, "If the evangelical community defines this as a priority issue, it doesn't have to abandon any other issue. It will strengthen its credibility on all other issues." 

Elissa Cooper is an editorial intern with *Christianity Today*.

HOW TO HELP END FISTULA

To learn more about fistula and the campaign to provide free surgery, contact:

HAMLIN FISTULA HOSPITALS

(866) 756-3700 fistulafoundation.org/hospital

MERCY SHIPS

(903) 939-7000 mercyships.org

WORLDWIDE FISTULA FUND

e-mail: info@worldwidefistulafund.org wfmic.org

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Garden of Gethsemane



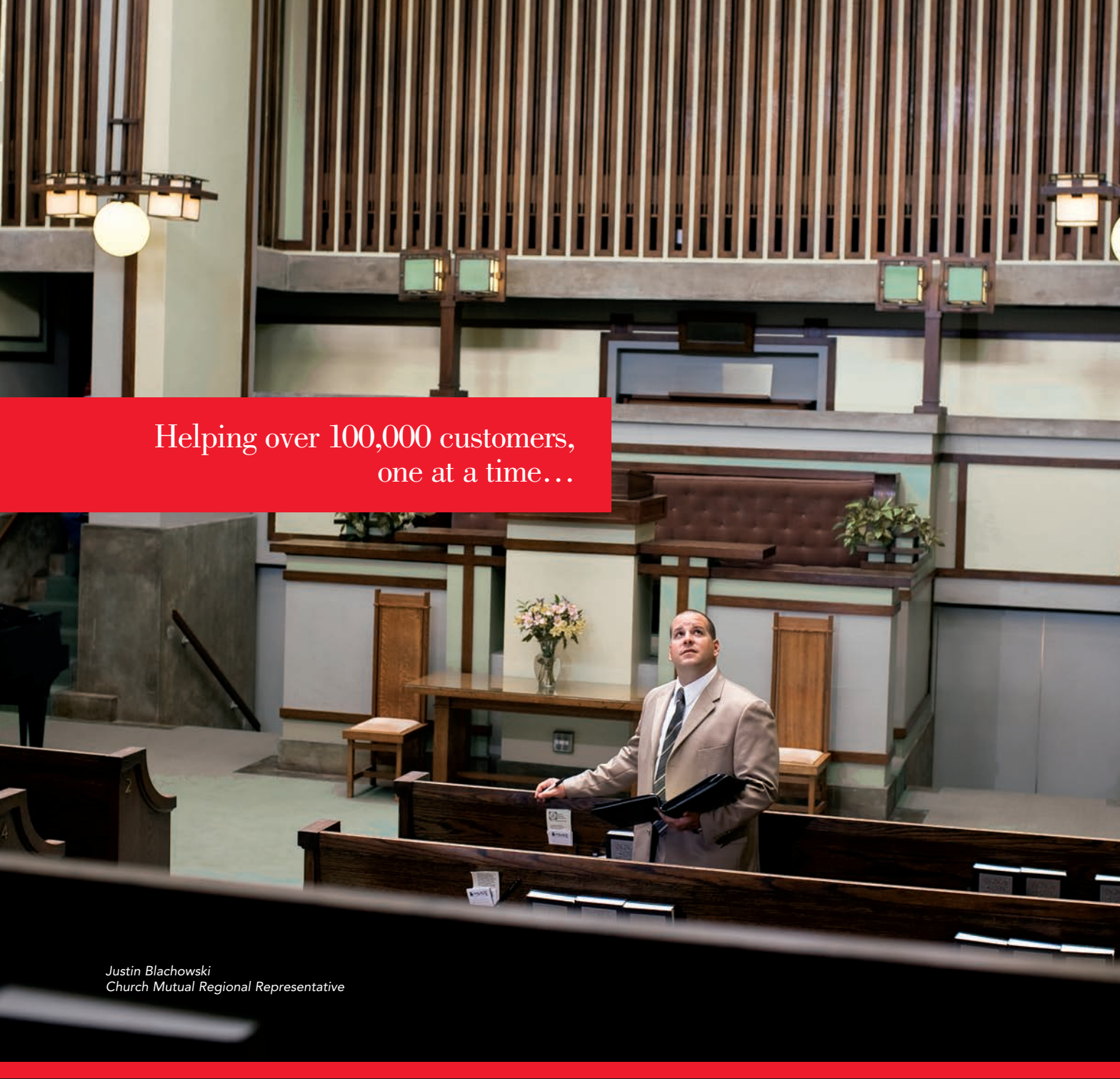
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VIEWPOINTS

OPINIONS AND
PERSPECTIVES
ON ISSUES FACING
THE CHURCH



Having worked in music my entire adult life, I have never seen the social-justice drive as prevalent among the creatives as I do now.

John J. Thompson
Nashville, Tennessee

Redemption Songs

Thank you to *Christianity Today* for shedding light on what's driving so much of today's faith-fueled music ["Songs of Justice, Missions of Mercy," November]. Having worked in music my entire adult life, I have never seen the social-justice drive as prevalent among the creatives as I do now.

I do think CT left out one important story. In the early 1970s, a group of newly converted Christian hippies called Jesus People USA created a community centered on discipleship, evangelism, and social justice. Out of their commune came *Cornerstone Magazine*, an evangelical voice that spoke out against apartheid, spiritual abuse, war, and much more. They fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and—with their hard-edged Resurrection Band—rocked.

Cornerstone, Rez Band, and Cornerstone Festival have a nearly 40-year legacy of this faith-in-action work, and many of the artists mentioned in CT's article have a deep connection to this gathering. I encourage any Christian artist to make the pilgrimage to Cornerstone and get infected by the same bug that bit me 25 years ago.

JOHN J. THOMPSON
Nashville, Tennessee

I have a tendency to skeptically think that social justice is just the latest trend

in Christian music. But I'm struck by how many artists are taking justice seriously and changing their lifestyles as a result. I recently heard two artists quote Amos 5:23–24—the unlikeliest of verses for a musician to quote: "Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream." Seeking justice will take different forms for different artists, but it's wonderful to see hands and feet moving once hearts have been moved.

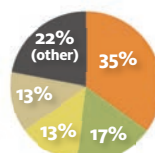
MARK GEIL
Atlanta, Georgia

Fractured Fellowships

A group of students left InterVarsity's chapter at Claremont McKenna College last fall for the very reasons mentioned in "Not All Evangelicals and Catholics Together" [November]. We felt that, in its attempt to unite Catholics and Christians, the chapter had compromised the doctrine of justification by faith alone. The new club includes many students who go to Foothill Bible Church, which is very similar to Capitol Hill Baptist. In my experience, the doctrine of justification is not mentioned in InterVarsity meetings. If students were more informed about the debate, I believe we would see a major shift in campus ministries nationwide.

LUKE RHEE
Claremont, California

TOP 3 What got the most responses in November's CT



1
**Not All
Evangelicals and
Catholics Together**
Collin Hansen

2
**Most Improbable
Dialogue**
Richard N. Ostling

3 (tie)
**Christ at the
Center**
Interview with
Michael Horton by
Mark Galli
and
CT's Redesign

I wish those reading Collin Hansen's article could hear N. T. Wright's 2007 lectures on sacramental theology at the University of St. Mary of the Lake. In the lectures and the Q&A sessions, he delineated how he differs, on biblical grounds, from Catholic theologians and students. Wright is so non-Catholic that the idea that he leads his readers to Rome is preposterous.

The departing group of students' reaction to InterVarsity is standard fare for some polemicists. Timothy George, who knows Reformational theology as well as any evangelical, understands the issues much better, which is why his quotes were helpful. Both sides of this debate need to stop, take a deep breath, and reflect on things more carefully.

JOHN H. ARMSTRONG
Carol Stream, Illinois

I used to be passionate about these debates. Now I can't muster a scrap of enthusiasm for them. They deflect energy away from our main work: loving God and neighbor, and caring for the poor. And they lead to bitterness and disunity, as evidenced by the split among George Washington University students. As well as heeding Paul's message about justification, we also need to remember his message about foolish controversies.

JAMES ADDIS
Auburn, Washington



Working on Grace

Thank you, thank you, thank you for your interview with Michael Horton ["Christ at the Center," November]. After 15 years of deep involvement in the evangelical world, I can corroborate his critique that we get far more good advice than we do Good News. I base this on a number of experiences in ministries that put less emphasis on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and more emphasis on what we need to do.

For example, a recent chapel message at my evangelical seminary focused on the need for Sabbath rest. It emphasized techniques and practices rather than Jesus' work on the Cross as the ground of eternal Sabbath rest. I've heard rousing exhortations to develop accountability relationships and spiritual disciplines, but far fewer exhortations to believe the gospel anew and cling to the completed work of Jesus.

Please continue to follow this story and help re-infect evangelicalism with Horton's and others' rearticulation of the gospel. It is a desperately needed corrective from which the entire "village green" would benefit.

MARK DENNING
Huntersville, North Carolina

Paul's epistles take a distinctly negative view of some Jewish converts' attempts to mix the old covenant and the new. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to correct this error. No one who accurately reads the New Testament would disagree.

My alarm comes from what seems to be a misuse

of the texts that address law and grace. Michael Horton assumes it is okay to use that ancient problem to negatively categorize what he disagrees with in today's church. I think he paints with too broad a brush. He sees law as the biggest problem in evangelical culture, when it is obvious that license is what's killing us. The evangelical gospel is a grace-gift message that requires faith but never works. Our "God has done everything, you cannot do anything" message is the prevailing ideology.

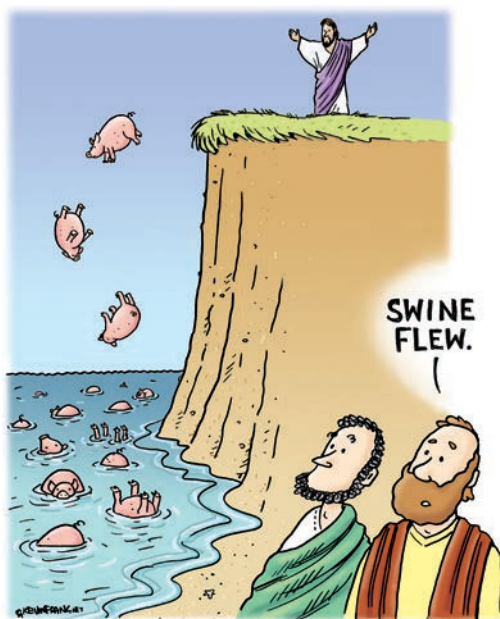
JAN HETTINGA
Bothell, Washington

The Stories of Saints

Chris Armstrong's article on spiritual biographies ["Let Us Tell You a Story," November] was a breath of fresh air. I used to bemoan the fact that I had no one to disciple me. But for the past decades, two women—Amy Carmichael, a missionary in India for 55 years, and Frances Ridley Havergal, a 19th-century hymnist—have been doing so. I am a different person because of their and many others' lives and writings.

RUTH KING GODDARD
Everett, Washington

Correction: November's "Under Discussion" [p. 18] incorrectly identified Ron Kernahan. He is joint coordinator of the 30-Days Prayer Network.



ONLINE POLL

LAW AND GRACE
Does works righteousness pervade your church?

17%

Yes, my church tends to overemphasize projects and what we must do to please God.

9%

No, my church overemphasizes grace, which people use as an excuse to sin.

74%

No, my church properly balances grace with good fruit.

Total Votes: 488

compiled by Laura Leonard

WORTH REPEATING

Things overheard at CT online.

"The reason we hear nonsensical talk such as, 'I don't worship the Bible, I worship Jesus,' is because we have raised a generation of Christians who demand that church . . . function for the validation of themselves."

Glenn, on cultural impatience with the Bible in preaching and teaching.

SoulWork: "Yawning at the Word"

"This looks more like a political agenda than a sincere focus on the breadth of Christian conviction."

Bennett, on the identification of abortion, marriage, and religious freedom in the Manhattan Doctrine, a statement signed by 150 evangelical leaders, as the three fundamental issues on which Christians must unite.

"Leaders Issue 'A Call of Christian Conscience'"

"This is a movie that non-Christians will actually watch."

Mark Almlie, on why *The Blind Side* is an exemplary Christian movie.

CT Movies: "The Blind Side"

"Most Christians love a testimony—when it's over. Hardly anyone is willing to walk through the dark places as a friend."

Jen, on the value of anonymous confessional websites.

Women's Blog: "I Have a Confession to Make"

"What ever happened to getting on your knees and asking the Lord what he wants his people to hear?"

Catherine F., on a recent emphasis on Christ-centered preaching, which some fear ignores the diversity of the biblical genres.

Theology in the News: "Christ-Centered Cautions"

Welcome the Exceptional

Churches that embrace people with disabilities do more than they imagine.

GINNY THORNBURGH, director of the Interfaith Initiative at the American Association of People with Disabilities, recently told *Christianity Today* that “too many churches have barriers to the full participation and inclusion of children and adults with disabilities—physical, sensory, psychiatric, and intellectual.”

Many congregations are aware that their buildings are not as disabled-friendly as they could be. But when it comes to the estimated 54 million Americans with a disability, Thornburgh has something more fundamental than the church building in mind: “The barriers of attitude are the most difficult to address.”

Those barriers are subtle, but they affect both policies on the national level and church life on the local level.

Recent research on Down syndrome reveals what common sense suggests: Negative attitudes about disabilities significantly increase the chance that a mother will have an abortion. Researchers estimate that in both the United States and the United Kingdom, 90 percent of pregnant women who find out that their child has Down syndrome will choose to terminate the pregnancy.

Brian Skotko, a pediatric geneticist from Boston, found that many doctors give to expectant parents a negative and badly outdated portrait of raising special-needs children. A Harris Poll found that medical professionals were the group most likely to be pessimistic about whether people with disabilities can lead quality lives.

Ironically, these findings come during the time of greatest opportunity for persons with disabilities. There are now 90 colleges and post-secondary schools with programs for the more than 83,000 young adults with Down syndrome. And new treatments and technologies allow disabled individuals to live longer and far richer lives than ever before.

Despite the abortion survey findings,

additional research has determined that the percentage of newborns with Down syndrome in the U.S. has increased by about 1 percent annually since 1979—most likely because more women over age 35 are having children. But the explosive growth of safer prenatal testing, which many doctors now recommend for all pregnant women, means that more parents are exposed to pressure to terminate pregnancies when tests detect disability or birth defects.

In October 2008, President George W. Bush signed into law the Prenatally and Postnatally Diagnosed Conditions Awareness Act. (Senators Sam Brownback and the late Edward Kennedy were the two who labored the longest for this legislation.) The law requires the federal government to

- distribute to health-care providers comprehensive and accurate information about disabilities;
- establish a hotline for new and expectant parents; and
- create a registry of families interested in adopting newborns with special needs.

Unfortunately, current federal budget proposals do not adequately fund the law. And this is where churches can step in to help fill the gap, says Thornburgh.

It's not as if churches do not try to extend compassion to people with disabilities. But we tend to think of the disabled as people we minister *to*, by offering worship and other opportunities to them. Thornburgh reminds us that “those of us with disabilities have enormous gifts and talents to bring to the

church. We are not a project. We are on this earth for a unique reason.” Churches would be wise to remember that people with disabilities are like the rest of the congregation: They can contribute mightily to the work, witness, and leadership of the church and community.

Harold Wilke, the late United Church of Christ pastor and seminary professor who was born without arms, is one such example.



Famous for sipping tea from a cup held with his toes, Wilke became a powerful advocate for the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). After President George H. W. Bush signed the bill into law, he handed the pen to Wilke, who received it with his foot.

Thornburgh says that extending “the sacred gift of friendship” is the most important accommodation that Christian congregations can

make. “We can have a church building that is perfectly ADA-compliant. But that sacred gift of friendship—the body of Christ, one on one”—is the key to creating a community where all people are embraced as brothers and sisters in Christ.

That sacred friendship often begins when a mother in the church gives birth to a child with a disability, and the church rallies around the family. That action says, “We will journey with you and this beloved child. We will not abandon you.”

As Thornburgh suggests, celebrating the birth of every child, regardless of prenatal test results, is the first act of friendship that can transform not only churches but also entire societies. ✦

Extending ‘the sacred gift of friendship’ is the most important accommodation that congregations can make.

*Help That Makes
a Difference*

What's the best way to encourage people to save sex for the covenant of marriage?

FOCUS ON CALLING

Mark Regnerus is a sociology professor at the University of Texas, Austin, and author of *Forbidden Fruit*.

Human sexual development has not kept up with our preference to have more education, financial security, and life experience before marrying. On the contrary, the time gap between sexual maturity and marriage is the highest it's ever been.

In response, evangelicals muster popular perspectives on courtship and what clothes can and cannot come off and when. The lack of an authoritative message about sexuality is not lost on youth. Many don't mind that there is no shared story about sex. It makes the lowest common denominator easy to abide by.

Premarital sex will always be alluring. Sex, after all, does what it's supposed to do. It bonds. It makes us want more: more relationship, more security, more sex. That is the reality of its unchanging nature.

What we can change, however, is our widespread misunderstanding of how marriage happens. Christian scholar James Olthuis reminds us that entering into Christian marriage is not a light switch that's flipped on at the wedding, but rather a process in this intended order: a pledge of fidelity, reliability, integrity, and friendship between a man and a woman, a covenant between the two persons and God, a communal recognition of the marriage, and sexual consummation.

In one sense, there's no such thing as premarital sex. There is only non-marital sex and marital sex. When couples skip some of the steps, it's the job of the church to make sure the others occur, or to call non-marital sex the sacrilege it is.

Far too many Christians link sexual morality to the issuance of a legal document by a secular state. But the state does not permit marriages; it only recognizes them. The biblical writers never presumed that marriage was

the domain of the state, nor did they presume that it belonged to the church. It was simply an institution among institutions.

Unfortunately, most young Christians move into their 20s without realizing that a vocational calling—to marriage or singleness—has already been given to them by a loving Creator. Instead, they imagine marriage as the capstone to the self and a wedding as its commencement, to take place when they wish it to.

What we have as a result is what we deserve: lots of unmarried Christians trying to discern what does and doesn't constitute sex, and attempting to retain some semblance of virginity by keeping non-marital partners to "just a few" as they live out the self-centered promises of emerging adulthood. The church is called out of that nonsense to be a peculiar people. In step with their peaking fertility and sexual interest, Christian young adults need to get about the business of their calling to marriage or singleness—whichever it is.

The rest of us ought to help them discern the process, encourage their maturation, empathize in their struggles, and support them better than we have up until now. Nobody else will.

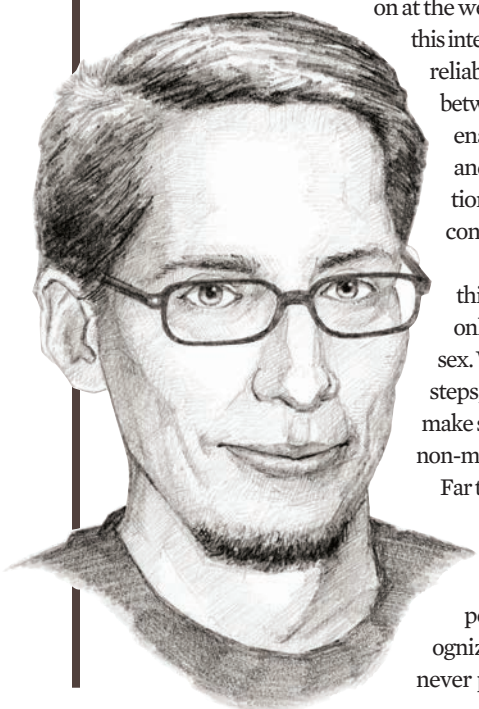
MAKE A PROMISE TO JESUS

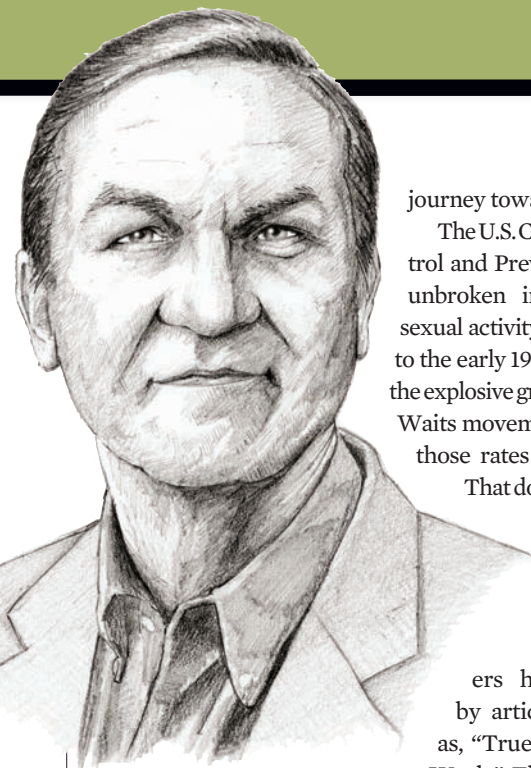
Richard Ross is a professor of student ministry at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and co-founder of True Love Waits.

True Love Waits is not a promise to a program, card, or ring. It is a sincere promise of purity made to the reigning Christ for the glory of the Father by the power of the Spirit.

The promise is kept most tenaciously by teenagers who have moved beyond moralistic therapeutic deism and who adore the King of Kings with awe and intimacy. They know their Lord and Savior said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Their walk in purity is a way to express deep love for him and to respond to his supremacy.

For teenagers who know Christ, that is a far stronger motivator than a desire to avoid disease and pregnancy. Risk avoidance is a weak motivator during adolescence, since the development of the brain's prefrontal cortex (which governs self-control) lags well behind the development of the amygdala (which drives emotions and impulses). Teenagers need to know about the risks of promiscuity, as well as about the benefits that total life purity brings. But the most powerful way to impact prom-night decisions is for parents, leaders, and peers to more fully awaken teenagers to God's Son, to invite them to make a promise to him, and to walk beside them in a





journey toward purity.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) tracked unbroken increases in teenage sexual activity from the early 1970s to the early 1990s. Then, paralleling the explosive growth of the True Love Waits movement, the CDC watched those rates drop through 2008.

That does not prove that True Love Waits made the difference. But it is more than a little interesting.

Some church leaders have been confused by articles with such titles as, “True Love Waits Doesn’t Work.” These articles point to

studies that have lumped together all teenagers who have ever made any kind of pledge or promise related to abstinence, including many students who have made pledges after weak, brief, and entirely secular programs in schools and by community organizations.

Not surprisingly, a number of those students eventually become sexually involved. But here’s the rub: Journalists assign the sexual failures of that pool of students to True Love Waits, even though True Love Waits students usually compose only a fraction of the population studied.

A study of teenagers in one state (Weathersbee, 2002) found that if the behavior of True Love Waits students is tracked exclusively, the students’ behavior is markedly different from their peers’. We are pursuing funding to do a similar study on a national scale. Until the hard data are available, we find anecdotal evidence and scores of stories informative.

The genetic code for True Love Waits is made up of several weeks of thoughtful Bible studies about purity, a promise to God made while surrounded by one’s family and community of faith, continuing encouragement and teaching at home and in church, and support from True Love Waits peers. Students making promises that are Christ-focused, Word-centered, and Spirit-empowered will likely live in purity up to their wedding day and beyond.

STOP TALKING MARRIAGE

Donna Freitas is a visiting scholar of religion at Boston University and author of *Sex and the Soul*.

My initial response to the question—and I’m not being facetious—is the following: Stop talking about marriage when you talk about saving sex.

Over the past year and a half, I have been giving lectures and workshops at colleges and universities in response to a national study I conducted on sexual decision-making and students’ attitudes toward sex as they relate to students’ religious and spiritual commitments. I

talk about hookup culture a lot because it has become the norm just about everywhere you go (save at Christian colleges). Oddly enough, hookup culture seems to send many students into a period of spiritual seeking, drawing them closer to faith and to God.

Living in the context of hookup culture over an extended period of time tends to throw students into a life crisis. Most students experience hookups as self-emptying, exhausting, and unpleasant, making those involved feel ambivalent about sex. As a result, the average college student is eager to find a way out of the culture.

This is when talk about abstinence becomes interesting, even exciting, on just about every college campus I’ve visited.

Offering students a variety of ways to think about not having sex or taking a break from having sex—for a night, for a weekend, for a month, for a semester, essentially trying on abstinence for a period of time—turns on a light switch for many students.

Deciding not to hook up becomes a revolutionary one-night stand of sorts—just not the kind that students are used to, which makes it all the more attractive. Most students are shocked to think you can try out abstinence just like you can try out hooking up.

Most people understand abstinence as a several-years-long commitment, perhaps even a several-decades-long one for young adults, and present it as such. If you present a student, already overwhelmed by living in hookup culture, with what sounds like another overwhelming framework for having sex (or not having it), you won’t get very far, at least not with too many of them. They are already living in one impossible situation—offer them what sounds like another impossible situation, and they are likely to keep treading water where they are. And where they are is hookup culture.

The unpleasant, unfulfilling realities of hookup culture have made abstinence more attractive. But tying a discussion about abstinence to marriage, in my opinion, is a pedagogical mistake. Most students need help in seeing their way out of hookup culture for this coming weekend, never mind being asked to see years beyond graduation to the second half of their 20s, when the average college graduate is likely to marry.

There is so much talk about sexual experimentation during the college years. Choosing abstinence is a kind of sexual experimentation. We just don’t often discuss it in such terms. But college students love the idea, and, once they have thought about it for a while, are often eager to experiment with it.





Segregated in a Whole New Way

A church family from the same generation isn't much of a family.

COOL! Your church has funerals," a friend recently said after I told him about attending one for a fellow parishioner at my church.

My friend attends one of those churches that meet in a Cineplex. Ever since he first told me about his theater church, I had wondered about the logistics of baptisms, weddings, and funerals.

It turns out that the entire membership of his congregation ranges in age from late teens to late 20s. Baptisms are rare and handled at other venues. As far as he knows, they've never had a funeral. And when people get married, they rent out traditional churches for the occasion.

That's what another friend of mine did when she married. Popcorn-scented upholstery and soda-sticky floors were not what she had dreamed of for her wedding day. When she had children, she stopped going altogether since her family didn't fit in with the targeted ministries to young singles. She's yet to find a new church home.

For years, separate age-targeted services and churches were seen as the way to reach the children of baby boomers. More recently, many of these experiments in youth worship have spun off from their sponsoring congregations, shut down completely, or morphed into more traditional congregations.

That's not entirely surprising. A concern for the souls of young adults reached a fever pitch in recent years following surveys showing that young adults were not worshipping regularly even if they had been active churchgoers as teenagers. But the fact is that surveys have pointed to this trend for decades.

"It merely shows that when young people leave home, some of them tend to sleep in on Sunday mornings rather than go to church," says Baylor University sociologist Rodney Stark. "That they haven't defected is obvious

from the fact that a bit later in life when they are married, and especially after children arrive, they become more regular attenders. This happens to every generation."

Whether or not young adults are leaving churches forever or just for a couple of years, I'm not sure age-segregated worship is a wise strategy. No one was more surprised than I that I kept attending church when I moved 2,000 miles away from my family after college. But part of it was that I had been taught that congregations are families that, by definition, include people of all ages and



circumstances.

Each of us learns and benefits from caring for the old, the sick, the suffering, and the dying, just as we benefit from the vitality that children, teens, and young adults bring. We all have vastly different experiences in life. By existing together in one community, we all benefit. Some of us experienced World War II in the trenches, and others experienced it by playing *Call of Duty* on our Xbox.

My dearest friend at my Lutheran church is a widow in her 70s. We became close after her

beloved husband died following an extended battle with cancer. From Dolores I have learned how to sacrifice for one's spouse, enjoy life to the fullest, help neighbors in need, and raise children. If I were to attend a congregation where everyone was roughly my age and at my station in life, how would I learn these valuable lessons in Christian living?

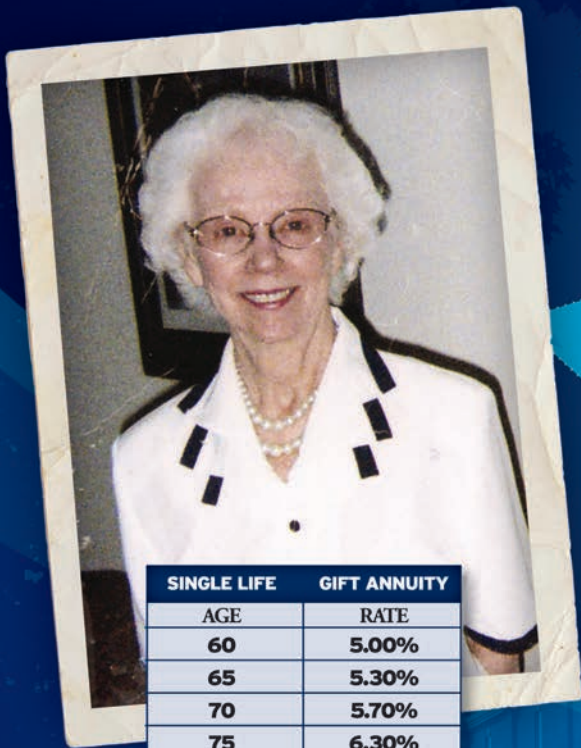
It's unfortunate enough that many churches tend to be populated by people of the same race or socioeconomic group. But to intentionally segregate worship by age makes things worse. Scripture tells us not to scorn the experiences and wisdom of our elders. Proverbs 16:31 teaches that "gray hair is a crown of splendor; it is attained by a righteous life."

Ageist worship also deprives older parishioners of the opportunity to improve their patience when dealing with rambunctious young families. The older folks at my congregation fret when the toddlers stand on the kneelers at our Communion rail or make too much noise. Including all age groups in congregational life teaches everyone to live together in love and forbearance.

The desire to reach young adults—or any other targeted demographic group—is noble, but we pander to them when we segregate worship. We should avoid such overreactions and trust the gospel as the creator and preserver of faith for all people of all ages.

The fact is that aging, dying, and death itself are realities of life. Jesus Christ has conquered death and the grave for us. This is what we hear at funerals at my church, and this Good News is, as my friend said, cool indeed.

Each of us benefits from caring for the old, the sick, and the dying, just as we benefit from the vitality that children, teens, and young adults bring.



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How to read the Bible so that it isn't always about you.



WHEN I WAS A PASTOR in the 1970s, I introduced my congregation to the Serendipity Bible study materials. Small-groups pioneer Lyman Coleman had created exercises that used the Bible as an aid to “self-discovery” and “creative expression.” It was radical stuff.

The groups in my church were used to reading through lists of key texts in order to learn how to explain our church's doctrines. The new study materials were intensely personal. They demanded existential engagement. Unfortunately, they lacked a reference point beyond the self.

It was an adjustment for people who weren't used to being asked what they felt about a Bible passage. They expected an assemblage of scriptural data. Instead, they got an exercise in “encounter.”

I expected some resistance, but as I introduced the new approach (which, I believe, had us use paper plates and crayons), one of the older saints became almost embarrassingly enthusiastic. Her response effectively granted permission to everyone else.

SELF-FOCUSED SPIRITUALITY

Like the members of my congregation, the late theologian Robert Webber had been taught to mine the Bible for doctrinal facts.

This intellectual spirituality colored every aspect of Bob's Christianity, including his way of reading the Bible. He eventually came to realize that “an intellectual spirituality is situated not in God's story, but in *my* knowledge about God's story. . . . This quest to know God through the mind was just another *self-focused spirituality*.” When he realized that narcissistic potential, Bob headed in a different direction: to the early church and its typological way of understanding Scripture.

The early church was as thoroughly convinced of the Bible's historical reliability as modern evangelicals are. Yet, thought Bob, those Christians were in better tune with the

way the Bible tells its own story: focusing on *images* that reveal the repeated patterns of God's activity.

The more that Bob concentrated on the grammatical, cultural, and historical facts connected to the text, the more remote God became for him. “When the cognitive aspect of the person dominates the symbolic side, a vital part of humanity is neglected and the human spirit is squelched.” We need to recover the use of image, symbol, and metaphor in the church, but that doesn't mean that we must start from scratch with only ourselves as reference points. The images are there. And the church fathers can open our eyes to them.

Bob turned especially to Irenaeus, the second-century foe of Gnostic heresy. Irenaeus offered three typologies through which the Bible tells its own story: creation and recreation; the first Adam and the second Adam; the Exodus event and the Christ event. I mention these because it is not unusual to hear that if we follow the church fathers' approach to Scripture, there is no limit to our use of imagination in interpretation. But there were limits: for the most part, the Fathers' interpretations are centered on Christ and his Cross.

Here's an example that goes beyond the plain sense of the text, but which stresses Christ's work on our behalf. Augustine (354–430) wrote about the boat that carried Jesus' disciples across a stormy lake. Jesus walked on the water, he said, to show there was a way. But the disciples, who could not walk on water, needed a wooden boat. The wood of the cross, said Augustine, is like the wood

of the boat. Jesus shows us that he himself is the way to the homeland, but “there is no way to cross over to the homeland unless you are carried by the wood.”

This simple analogy is pictorial and evocative. By translating the wood of the boat into the wood of the cross, Augustine transformed it from something that I as one soul might cling to into something that we as a church ride in together. There's wisdom there.

At a time when many of our biblical scholars have essentially become historians, it is important to recover a *theological* way of reading Scripture. It is important to study the text in its cultural and literary milieu, but such study can easily stop short of helping us hear and respond to God's Word as God's message about God's saving acts.

In November, to inaugurate Wheaton College's new Center for Early Christian Studies, premier patristics scholar Robert Louis Wilken gave a lecture on how the Fathers read Scripture. Wilken, briefly: The books of Scripture do not bear their own significance. They must be united to something greater, which is Christ. The Fathers also understood the interpretation of Scripture to require the reader's participation in the spiritual reality of the text. Thus, it is not enough to say that Christ was crucified. We must also say, “I am crucified with Christ,” and thus also, “I am raised with Christ.”

Ironically, encouraging us to be participants in the biblical story is what Lyman Coleman had in mind. The Fathers can help us do that without the same temptations to spiritual narcissism.



The church fathers focused on the images that reveal the repeated patterns of God's activity.

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CT REVIEW

BOOKS, MOVIES,
MUSIC, AND
THE ARTS



Introverts for Jesus, Unite!

How to get along with the extroverts who populate the Western church. By Christine A. Scheller

There was a time when, after a busy weekend of church activities, I would be so thoroughly over-stimulated that I'd have to go straight to bed when I got home. My extroverted husband would graciously leave me alone and instruct our children to do the same. Those days seem long ago and far away. So little angst remains about my own introverted nature that I wondered if Adam S. McHugh's new book, ***Introverts in the Church: Finding Our Place in an Extroverted Culture*** (InterVarsity Press) ★★★★★, was even necessary. After all, I had figured things out for myself.

But then I polled a group of friends—both introverts and extroverts—and heard that differences in temperament are a major source of tension, both at home and in church. The more I thought about my own relationships, the more I realized there remains a good deal of strain because of such differences. I've settled on an attitude of détente when increased awareness could lead to lasting peace. *Introverts in the Church* is a resource for dissolving the impasse—if it is read by both introverts and extroverts.

The book is founded on the

premise that ours is a culture biased toward extroversion, and that churches reflect this bias. Introverts struggle to find their place, especially in evangelical churches, with their emphasis on evangelism, conversational preaching, and group activities. In the introduction, McHugh expresses his hope that God will use his work to “begin or continue a process of healing introverts—helping them find freedom in their identities and confidence to live their faith in ways that feel natural and life-giving.” I suspect that for a young pastor like McHugh, introversion presents a more profound challenge than it does for congregants and empty nesters who aren't trying to juggle the demands of church leadership and a growing family.

In fact, McHugh himself very nearly withdrew from the ordination process because of doubts about the compatibility of his temperament and his calling. This dilemma presents both the book's *raison d'être* as well as a weakness of it. *Introverts in the Church* is strongest when it is descriptive, and weakest when it offers solutions, precisely because the author's solutions are too pastor-centric and, by his own admission, theoretical. However, in this case a little bit of knowledge yields significant rewards.

McHugh identifies three primary characteristics of introverts. First, he says, introverts are energized by solitude and drained by social interaction. (Extroverts, on the other hand, derive energy from external sources and find both inactivity and too much solitude draining.) Second, introverts tend to filter information and experiences internally; thinking generally precedes speaking. Third, introverts prefer depth over breadth in both relationships and interests. They may look calm on the surface, but their brains are “bubbling with activity”; thus, they require less external stimulation than their extroverted neighbors.



McHugh says, however, that “introversion and extroversion do not describe categories of people but two separate forces within each person.” We all have a “capacity for looking outward at the world of people, things, activities, and events, as well as a capacity for searching inward in the world of thoughts, feelings, imagination, and ideas.” The challenge for those who tend to focus inward lies in “distinguishing between the healthy components of personalities . . . and the coping mechanisms that are the symptoms of our wounds.” Because introverts tend to be good listeners, we can get enmeshed in one-sided relationships and masquerade as extroverts in order to be accepted. Both tendencies drain us of vitality.

We can also use our introversion to excuse laziness and sin, perhaps because we struggle so hard to find balance. McHugh says, “We cannot find freedom in our introversion until we embrace our primary identities as sons and daughters of God.” He wisely adds that “understanding our introversion is not the end of our self-discovery and growth; it is a beginning point for learning how to love God and others as ourselves,” and concludes

This book is founded on the premise that ours is a culture biased toward extroversion, and that the church reflects this bias.

that “the introverted trajectory of growth is toward relationships with others and relationship with the outside world.”

These statements seem sufficient to me. In expanding upon them, McHugh inadvertently makes introversion sound pathological. In chapter 3, for example, he surmises that introverts may be more prone to depression because they internalize emotions and carry inside themselves the dysfunctions of their families in ways that extroverts don’t. He says that while “extroverts commonly feel loneliness when others are *absent*, introverts can feel most lonely when others are *present*,” because theirs is “the aching loneliness of not being known or understood.” He is wrong. Extroverts may hide their pain better and be less self-aware, but they hurt deeply and suffer more when communal life fails to live up to expectations. Depression is an illness, not a function of temperament.

In using therapeutic language, McHugh unnecessarily confuses the need for healing with the need for spiritual and personal growth. This is unfortunate because he beautifully expresses the truth that “we who follow a crucified Messiah know that love will sometimes compel us to willingly choose things that make us uncomfortable, to surrender our rights for the blessing of others.”

His descriptions are most prescriptive in paragraphs like this:

Extroverts, who want to increase their level of involvement, may proceed roughly in a straight line as they move from the periphery into the nucleus of the community. They move from stranger to acquaintance to participant to core member as they increase the breadth and depth of their relationships, finding more

MY TOP 5 BOOKS FOR SHAPING PARENTS

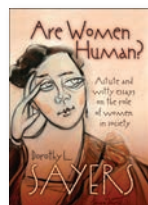
By Caryn Rivadeneira, author of *Mama’s Got a Fake I.D.: How to Reveal the Real You Behind All That Mom*



THE MYTH OF THE PERFECT MOTHER

Rethinking the Spirituality of Women
CARLA BARNHILL (BAKER)

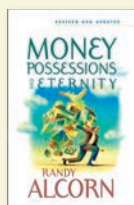
Written by my friend and co-blogger, this book shoots beyond deconstructing myths. Barnhill’s words embrace us moms (and the men who love us) who don’t fit expectations and feel trapped in stereotypes—and lets us know we all are in good company.



ARE WOMEN HUMAN?

Penetrating, Sensible, and Witty Essays on the Role of Women in Society
DOROTHY L. SAYERS (EERDMANS)

The two essays in this witty book give proper perspective to the needs and roles of women (and, therefore, mothers and fathers) throughout history, encouraging women to seek “interesting occupation” no matter their primary role.



MONEY, POSSESSIONS, AND ETERNITY

RANDY ALCORN (TYNDALE)

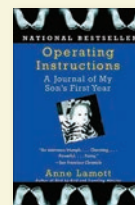
It’s easy for Western parents to get consumed by needing to give our kids every *thing* to be good parents. Alcorn shakes this unbiblical thinking right up and shifts the focus to its proper place.



HEALTHY SLEEP HABITS, HAPPY CHILD

MARC WEISSBLUTH (BALLANTINE)

Sleepless babies make crazy parents—if you’ve been there, you know. These sensible sleep tips for children offered by a kind, wise, and trustworthy pediatrician give parents a way to get their sane selves back.



OPERATING INSTRUCTIONS

A Journal of My Son's First Year
ANNE LAMOTT (ANCHOR)

Parenting is lovely and funny and gross and messy and scary. Lamott makes it okay to not only feel each of these things—but to write about them, too.

energy as they progress into the community. The journey of introverts into a community, however, is better conceptualized as a spiral. They take steps into a community, but then spiral out of it in order to regain energy, to reflect on their experiences and to determine if they are comfortable in that community. They move between entry, retreat and reentry, gradually moving deeper into the community on each loop. The introverted path into community, much to the confusion of many extroverts, never reaches a point in which the spiraling form is shed.

Imagine church members accepting these traits in one another instead of suspecting one another of ambition or unfaithfulness. Imagine spouses of differing temperaments accepting these traits in one another and finding a rhythm that works for both.

McHugh's boldest claim is that introverts are "an important ingredient in the antidote to what ails evangelicalism." What ails it, according to him, is shallowness, showiness, and pragmatism, to name a few of our tribe's alleged faults. He contends that introverts' slower pace of life, thoughtfulness, depth, and listening abilities are "prophetic qualities" that call the evangelical church to a "renewed understanding of God and a fresh reading on the abundant life Jesus came to give us."

It's a provocative thought, but I think he's overreaching. Extroverts are, by nature, doers. Like the biblical Martha, they can perhaps be faulted for disordered priorities, but should be applauded for their zeal and diligence. Nonetheless, in a strong chapter on introverted evangelism, the author says that introverts excel at friendship evangelism and giving spiritual seekers the time and space to grapple with their questions and doubts. Indeed, these gifts shine in a skeptical age.

A more conciliatory and hopeful vision to conclude with is this one: "When the church is led by introverts and extroverts who partner together, each contributing their strengths and offsetting the others' weaknesses, it is a testimony that the Holy Spirit is orchestrating the community." +

Christine A. Scheller is a writer living in New Jersey and a regular contributor to the *CT* women's blog.

Selling Jesus to Optimistic America

How the positive thinking movement has shaped the church. By David Swanson

On a recent fall day in Texas, a large crowd gathered for the well-known Get Motivated! business seminar. Before the keynote speaker emerged, 11,000 attendees danced to "Surfin' USA" while swatting beach balls around the auditorium. When the music subsided, former President George W. Bush emerged to give one of his first speeches since leaving office. Among other feel-good themes, the President-turned-motivational speaker encouraged faith, optimism, and principled living.

Why would Bush make his most prominent post-presidency appearance at such a hokey venue? For Barbara Ehrenreich, author of **Bright-Sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking Has Undermined America** (Metropolitan) ★★★★★, his decision made perfect sense. In its many forms, the positive thinking movement—everything from "possibility thinking" to *The Secret*, *Your Best Life Now*, and the Chicken Soup for the Soul series—has reached complete saturation within American culture. It has also crept into American Christianity, and that, says the author, is nothing to feel good about.

Ehrenreich first noticed positive thinking's pervasiveness when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Immersed in a world of pink ribbons, cancer walks, and motivational stories from survivors, she quickly found there was no place for her outrage at the disease. Anger or melancholy, it was insinuated, only aided the cancer. As in all forms of positive thinking, the key was to ignore the negative emotions and realities and focus instead on your desired outcomes—health and wealth being the usual. After this encounter, Ehrenreich set out to discover how positive thinking became such an accepted and disseminated American narrative.

Bright-Sided traces the lineage of today's positive thinking evangelists

to America's first Calvinists. In Ehrenreich's view, early New England Calvinism was a "system of socially imposed depression," which eventually yielded to the New Thought movement of the 1860s. Ehrenreich may be correct that the movement's founders (people like Mary Baker Eddy) were reacting to a form of Christianity, but her characterization of early American Calvinism is shallow and inadequate. This is the weakest link in an otherwise convincing story.

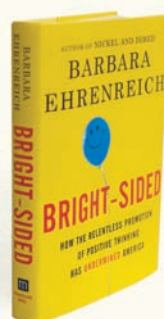
While Ehrenreich seems to harbor no ill will toward Christianity, some of her harshest critique is directed at positive thinking's inroads into American churches. She indicts the usual suspects—Joel Osteen, Robert H. Schuller, Norman Vincent Peale—but she also includes much of the megachurch movement. Like other critics, the author believes the pressures of church growth have caused many pastors to adopt principles from the world of business and commerce at the expense of Christian distinctiveness.

This is a well-known critique; Ehrenreich's insight has to do with the consequences of churches' corporate decisions. Business leaders need to think positively in order to increase market share; so too do enterprising pastors, she says. Facing uncharted territory and a skeptical unchurched population, they depend entirely on their own charisma and salesmanship, which in turn depends often on positive thinking.

In other words, because positive thinking dominates corporate culture, inevitably it will be imported into churches by pastors who borrow

heavily from that culture. We may groan at the most crass examples of health and wealth on Christian television, but *Bright-Sided* requires that we all look closer to home. +

David Swanson is associate pastor at New Community Covenant Church in Chicago and blogs regularly at DavidSwanson.wordpress.com.



DUG DOWN DEEP

Unearthing What I Believe and Why It Matters

BY JOSHUA HARRIS (MULTNOMAH BOOKS, 256 PAGES)

The weight of guilt felt like it would press me into the ground. Crush me. Part of me wanted it to. I longed for sleep—not to rest but to escape. I didn’t want to have to think about what a stupid, hypocritical sinner I was. I’d watched a pornographic video six years earlier, when I was 13, but this was worse. This time I was different. I loved God. I was serious about serving him. I’d flown all the way to San Juan, Puerto Rico, to be a volunteer at a Billy Graham crusade. I was on holy ground.

Yet one night, when the pastor I was staying with left the house for a meeting, I plopped down on his couch and turned on the television. I mindlessly channel-surfed. Then I clicked past a channel that was all static—the images blurred and hard to identify. I clicked back to it. When I did, the static cleared, and the images sharpened. It was a pornographic cable channel. When I finally turned off the television and went to my room, the conviction I had been holding at bay came rushing into my heart. I’d traveled all this way to sit in a pastor’s house and watch porn. What a joke. I was nothing but a disgusting hypocrite. As I lay there staring at the ceiling, I couldn’t even bring myself to pray. I finally slipped into a fitful sleep.

That’s when I had the dream. I dreamed I was in a room filled with index card-sized files. They were like the ones libraries used in the past. When I opened a file, I discovered that the cards described thoughts and actions from my life. The room was a crude catalog system of everything, good and bad, that I’d ever done.

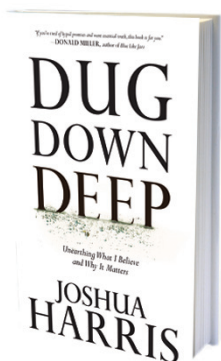
As I browsed the cards under the headings “Friends I’ve Betrayed,” “Lies I’ve Told,” and “Lustful Thoughts,” I was overwhelmed with guilt. Long-forgotten moments of wrongdoing were described in chilling detail. Each card was in my handwriting and signed with my signature. Sadly, my misdeeds woefully outnumbered my good deeds.

Then Jesus entered the room. He took the cards and, one by one, began signing his name on them. His name covered mine and was written with his blood. “No!” I shouted, rushing to him. His name shouldn’t be on these cards.

I don’t think I’ll ever understand how he did it so quickly, but the next instant it seemed I heard him close the last file and walk back to my side. He placed his hand on my shoulder and said, “It is finished.”

I stood up, and he led me out of the room. There was no lock on its door. There were still cards to be written.

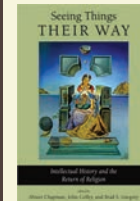
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SEEING THINGS THEIR WAY

Intellectual History and the Return of Religion

EDITED BY ALISTER CHAPMAN, JOHN COFFEY, AND BRAD S. GREGORY (UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME PRESS)

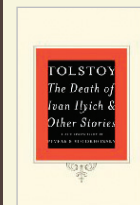


Thesis: “We should identify the precise intellectual and political contexts of the texts we are studying, in order to ascertain what their authors meant and what they were doing.”

Sounds painfully obvious, doesn’t it? Ah, but you haven’t spent enough time in academic settings. And the controversy gets ramped up when we add that this will require historians to take religion seriously on its own terms. *Seeing Things Their Way* is a superb collection of essays on these themes.

THE DEATH OF IVAN ILYICH AND OTHER STORIES

LEO TOLSTOY (KNOPE)



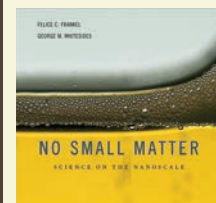
A prosperous innkeeper wants to close a deal on a large tract of land before other potential buyers drive up the price. He sets out on the sledge, driven by one of the peasants in his service. The weather turns

bad—a blizzard threatens—but the merchant insists that they proceed. So begins “Master and Man,” a story that would make my list of the ten best I’ve ever read. There are other gems in this volume, translated by the gifted husband-and-wife team Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. (Don’t miss the novella “Hadji Murat,” written near the end of Tolstoy’s life.)

NO SMALL MATTER

Science on the Nanoscale

FELICE C. FRANKEL AND GEORGE M. WHITESIDES (UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS)



Remember a few years ago, when articles about nano-this and nano-that were all the rage? The Roving Eye moved on, in search of other novelties, but

the patient exploration of creation continues on a million fronts. In *No Small Matter*, eminent science photographer Felice Frankel collaborates with polymathic chemist George Whitesides, juxtaposing stunning photos with short texts in a series of Marshall McLuhanesque probes. How great Thou art!

Breadwinners and Benefactors

Lynn Cohick argues that early Christian women were more active in public life than we might think.

Interview by Sarah Pulliam Bailey

M

any women in the Greco-Roman world of the first century were influencing senators, leading businesses, and giving out loans.

In **Women in the World of the Earliest Christians** (Baker Academic), Wheaton College New Testament professor Lynn Cohick examines literature, inscriptions, and other evidence to uncover what life was like for the earliest Christian women. Cohick spoke with *Christianity Today* online editor Sarah Pulliam Bailey about her findings.

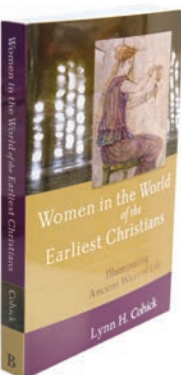
What are some misconceptions about women in the early Christian world?

One misconception is that women were not really part of the culture, that they were at home, uneducated, had their babies, worked their gardens, and that was it. What we find are very wealthy women who were patrons, doling out gifts and influencing senators. Only women were midwives or wet nurses, and there were women who were shopkeepers, heads of businesses, and lenders.

Where do our misconceptions come from?

We read people like Aristotle, who describes women as being inherently less than men. Then people read this as though it is describing rather than prescribing. Or, Christians read a rabbinic text like, "Thank God I am not a Gentile, a slave, or a woman," and conclude that most Jewish men were against women. But I think the comment means that Jewish men were very thankful they could do the whole law while women could not, maybe in part because of childbirth purity codes.

Where do you find biblical examples that show women influencers?



INTERVIEW

In Acts, we see Lydia, who is a patron with clout, and Phoebe, whom Paul describes as a benefactor (Rom. 16:1–2). When you come across a Mary Magdalene and a Joanna in Luke 8, they supported Jesus and the disciples with their own money. This is not like they are having bake sales to raise a little bit of money to help the troops. This fits a pattern in the ancient world of women who are patrons, who are publically honored because they support groups.

The idea of benefaction really helps us understand Phoebe as a deacon. And that plays in then to the question of, What do we do with church orders now, and what kind of responsibilities do women have?

How does this help us understand the earliest Christian women?

Many assume that the women who followed Jesus wouldn't have been seen as serious disciples. But in terms of what women did religiously at the time, they were making their own decisions. For example, many of them were choosing to participate in Judaism or the pagan cults. We also have evidence that women who studied the biblical texts understood fairly sophisticated ideas. For example, when Martha greets Jesus after the death of Lazarus, they start talking about resurrection. That's not something she would have just naturally picked up from the story of the Exodus or during some festival.

You write that women during that time would not have focused on happiness. What did they value instead?

The way we define happiness in our Western culture tends to be, *How do I maximize my self-fulfillment?* In the ancient world,

women and men were thinking, *How do I achieve honor?* Today we think mavericks are awesome; we think, *She is her own person.* That would not have been a compliment in the ancient world. Also, instead of happiness, the Bible uses terms like *joy*, which is not rooted in particular circumstances. It tends to be more reflective of an outlook. You have hope; therefore, you have joy.

How might understanding these women help us live out our faith today?

Today we often ask, what does a woman's Christianity look like? But we don't see a special call from Jesus for women to be good moms. There's a conviction that men and women are both called to be disciples, but not in a gendered sense. We obviously live out our lives as either male or female, in masculine and feminine ways as our culture determines. My husband doesn't wear the dresses and nylons that I have to put up with, but we are both very active in building the kingdom.

Jesus teaches Mary and Martha the same as he does the male disciples.

When Martha tells Jesus, "I believe in the Resurrection," she has thought about it and determined, *This makes sense to me.* Jesus called for radical discipleship, which was a stretch for both men and women. ☩



The Road to Redemption

This post-apocalyptic film is really about the struggle of faith. By Brett McCracken

On the first page of *The Road*—Cormac McCarthy’s Pulitzer Prize winner about a father and son’s survival in a post-apocalyptic world—we are introduced to darkness and gray, stinking robes and plastic tarpaulins, bleak lifelessness “like the onset of some cold glaucoma dimming away the world.” But in this hell, we see a father reaching out to touch his child.

John Hillcoat’s film version (rated R) ★★★★★, now in theaters, opens with this scene as well, perfectly capturing from the outset the “love among the ruins” spirit that makes McCarthy’s 2006 book already a 21st-century classic. It’s an ancient story of humanity that recalls the first spark of fire in the primeval caves; it’s also a story of our time, perhaps the truest and most important piece of post-9/11 literature we have. Coming as it does in the waning months of this tumultuous decade, its cinematic adaptation is everything we need and more.

The story is simple. Against the backdrop of an unknown apocalypse, we follow “Man” (Viggo Mortensen) and “Boy” (Kodi Smit-McPhee), called so because the world is too far gone for such luxuries as names. The duo are



survivors in a not-too-distant future in which nature is dying, fires rage, ash permeates the air, and those who aren’t cannibals are made to scavenge for dead bugs. *The Road* follows the pair on their perilous journey to the coast, a place of perpetual hope where the air might be warmer and food easier to find. It’s an apocalypse film writ small: an intimate portrayal of two people “on the road,” trying to live a life that is about more than avoiding death.

The film perfectly captures the literary mood and landscape of McCarthy’s book. Hillcoat shot the film in real-world locations ravaged by disasters, like Mount St. Helens and New Orleans, striking the right balance of familiarity (abandoned malls, decaying amusement parks) and apocalyptic horror (smoke

and fire, rootless trees falling everywhere, graffiti-filled billboards that say “Behold the Valley of Slaughter”). The characters, grimy and tattered in layers of plastic and improvised raincoats, push their carts and look no different from the homeless in any contemporary city. They’re nomadic and skeletal, moving from haven to haven in search of food and protection from the harsh elements, and from harsher bad guys—cannibals—always patrolling the road.

And what about God? If he exists, observes one character, “he would have turned his back on humanity long ago.” Yet despite the apparent godlessness of the dying world, God is there—if only in remnants and shards. One of the film’s most memorable and touching scenes (one that doesn’t occur in the book) finds the man and boy taking refuge in an abandoned church, huddled beside a fire that looks like a sacrificial altar, beneath a large bright cross. Hillcoat frames a beautiful, indelible long shot in this scene, capturing within the frame a prominent cross and a father who would sacrifice everything for his son, hiding under the archways of a church where worship has been absent for many years. And yet the cross still speaks.

In an interview with *Christianity Today*, Hillcoat said McCarthy gave him complete freedom to adapt, but urged him to highlight the spiritual imagery and metaphors so apparent in the book.

“Cormac is very intrigued by grace under pressure and a higher spiritual element than man,” Hillcoat said. “He’s also interested in the struggle of faith. In many ways, *The Road* is like a biblical tale or a parable. It’s very simple: A man struggling to survive, haunted by all these memories, has a son born into this world. They come across all these obstacles that test them. For Cormac, *The Road* is about the struggle of faith, the obstacles on the journey.”

And for the viewer, *The Road* is one of 2009’s best—an impressively restrained, quietly humane work of art for our fragile times. It’s a triumph of beauty, tragedy, prophecy, and redemption. +

Brett McCracken is a film critic for CT.

Gritty Parish Life

Scenes from a Parish (PBS, December 29) ★★★★★ is absorbing, conscience-stirring, and occasionally tinged with political correctness but grounded in reality. This superbly filmed documentary centers on St. Patrick Parish in Lawrenceville, Massachusetts, the poorest city in the state.

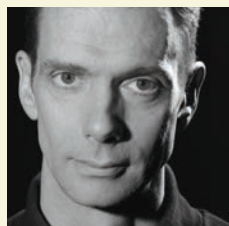
Led by a Harvard-educated activist priest from an affluent family, the congregation—some members wholeheartedly, others grudgingly—reaches out to immigrants, to the hungry and the homeless, to “the least of these.” Over the course of several years, during which the parish raises money to build a center that provides free meals with no strings attached, the film’s director and producer, James Rutenbeck, tracks the lives of a handful of parishioners against the background of the larger story of the church’s calling. We see people transformed by the love of Christ, and we see instances of failure, confusion, and disappointment. Many scenes in the sanctuary—including a beautifully simple foot-washing ceremony—remind us that there should be no disjunction between worship and service to the community. —John Wilson, editor, Books & Culture



James Rutenbeck

TWO MINUTES WITH ...

Doug Jones



Known as “the man behind the prosthetics,” Doug Jones has played the faun in the Oscar-winning *Pan’s Labyrinth*, the Silver Surfer in the sequel to *Fantastic 4*, and Abe Sapien in the

Hellboy movies. In *Legion*, opening January 22, he’s a supernatural being in a theologically erroneous version of the last days: When God, fed up with humanity, sends angels to destroy us all, a band of rebels aided by the archangel Michael puts up a fight. CT’s Mark Moring talked to Jones, a Christian.

If it’s theologically incorrect, why did you want to do it?

I was uneasy about it, with God being the bad guy. But when I found out they wanted to use me and my character to promote the film, it became more important to me. When I told the director—Scott Stewart, who’s Jewish—that I’m a Christian, he said this film mirrored the story of the Flood. I said, “But there’s been a New Testament written with a Messiah, and the God of the Old Testament is actually benevolent.” He respected that, but said, “Let’s pretend the New Testament never happened, that we are living in Noah’s day. Would we be in a place where we would deserve another flood?” I said, “Well, yeah.”

So you are okay with being in secular supernatural films?

I had a conversation with Ralph Winter [a Christian producer] when we made *Hocus Pocus* in 1993—a Halloween movie with witches. We talked about it, and Ralph said, “Doug, they’re going to make this movie with or without us. Wouldn’t it be better if we were on board?” That stuck with me. With *Legion*, they are going to make it with or without me. So wouldn’t it be good if I was a part of the promotion around it?

Do you discuss your faith when talking to the media?

Absolutely. I talk about how my faith plays into the story. I say, “We’re not living in the Old Testament. We do have redemption, and a Messiah. Our sins are paid for. That’s the Good News.”



Fire in My Bones

Raw, rare African American gospel. By Andy Whitman

If, as Martin Luther King Jr. stated, 11 o’clock on Sunday mornings is the most segregated hour in America, then it’s likely that much of the church is unfamiliar with gospel music as it is heard in predominantly black congregations. **Fire in My Bones: Raw, Rare and Otherworldly African-American Gospel** (Tompkins Square Records) ★★★★★, a 3-CD set covering more than half a century of songs, should rectify that deficiency.

This compilation, featuring 80 artists and almost four hours of music, spans six decades, a continent, and a panoply of styles and settings ranging from solo itinerant street musicians to small R & B worship combos to the packed sanctuaries of Pentecostal churches. Many of the songs were recorded for tiny regional labels in the Deep South during the 1950s and 1960s, and the thrill of discovering unheralded but wondrous music is one of the great pleasures of this set. Many more were recorded in living rooms and church sanctuaries, and were never intended as entertainment. Those are the tracks that set this collection apart from others. This is worship music recorded as it

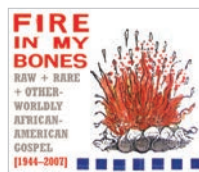
happened, unscripted and spontaneous, and it crackles with raw energy and fervent soul. Fueled by Holy Ghost power? You decide.

It is fitting that the word *raw* is emphasized in the set’s title. Those accustomed to the slick, urbane sounds of CCM gospel may be taken aback by the untamed roar of the music. The electric guitars are distorted, the singers moan and shriek, and there is nothing, absolutely nothing, that suggests a service conducted decently and in order. High liturgists beware. Elder Charles D. Beck, who delivers a hellfire and brimstone denunciation of rock ’n’ roll, is accompanied, ironically enough, by an electric guitarist who channels

Chuck Berry in his rockabilly riffs.

Those are the kinds of juxtapositions that surprise and delight on *Fire in My Bones*. It’s a remarkably rich, vibrant set of music that rocks, stomps, and shouts with unrestrained joy, and it will be a welcome addition to your music collection at 11 on Sunday morning—or any other hour during the week.

Andy Whitman is senior contributing editor for *Paste* magazine.



BOOKS

► GOD'S BATTALIONS

The Case for the Crusades

RODNEY STARK (HARPERONE)

★★★★★ Prolific sociologist-cum-historian Rodney Stark turns his attention to the Crusades—and he really, really likes what he sees. The seven campaigns against Muslim civilization weren't an early exercise in brutal colonization, he writes, but rather part of a heroic just war. Top-notch Crusades scholars like Christopher Tyerman acknowledge mixed motives and deeds among the holy warriors. But these historians aren't Stark's opponent. He wants to challenge the prevailing television pundit-level misunderstanding of the Crusades, and in this, his accessible, enjoyably argued book succeeds.

► JESUS GIRLS

True Tales of Growing Up Female and Evangelical

HANNAH FAITH NOTESS, ED. (WIPF & STOCK)

★★★★★ An "un-testimony" foils both conversion and de-conversion stories, writes Hannah Faith Notess, an editor at Mars Hill Graduate School's *The Other Journal*. "An unruly story, a story that refuses to conform to a simple before-and-after pattern," its "epiphanies" may be found either while "growing stronger" in faith or while "drifting away." As a book of un-testimonies, then, *Jesus Girls* is about as messy as real life. Some voices inspire; others disappoint. Pastors and small-group leaders should expect to catch glimpses of the women they minister to in each story.

► CRAVE

Wanting So Much More of God

CHRIS TOMLINSON (HARVEST HOUSE)

★★★★★ Criticizing books like *Crave* is too easy. Sincere and devoid of underlying angst, it recounts, through 16 story-driven chapters, its 20-something author's quest to find more of God. No introspective dark night of the soul. No Dear John letters to the church.

Worse yet, by the end of his earnest spiritual journey, Chris Tomlinson claims to have discovered what he was looking for: "[God] was there," he concludes, "waiting to give me a bigger spoon, ready to give me more of himself as I gave him more of myself." Readers may find themselves wishing more young authors were so naïve.

► THE VIRTUOUS READER

Old Testament Narrative and Interpretive Virtue

RICHARD S. BRIGGS (BAKER ACADEMIC)

★★★★★ The average book about hermeneutics asks, "How should one read the Bible?" Richard Briggs's question cuts closer to the heart: "What sort of person must you be to read the Bible?" Borrowing from the field of virtue ethics, in which morality is exemplified by excellent character rather than excellent rules, Briggs posits five interpretive virtues: humility, wisdom, trust, love, and receptivity. Without these, he suggests, God's Word remains inaccessible to us. —*Books reviewed by Madison Trammel*

IN THEATERS

► THE BOOK OF ELI

WARNER BROS. | RATED R | JANUARY 15

NOT YET REVIEWED A sacred book holds the key to humanity's hope. The Bible? For this post-apocalyptic thriller, it's all in the film's title. Denzel Washington plays the keeper of the Book of Eli, a leather-bound volume with a cross on its cover. The trailer shows that it includes Genesis, but beyond that, who knows what Hollywood has added to Scripture? For what it's worth, in real life Washington attends a Church of God in Christ in LA, and in the past has taken on roles with spiritual depth. Exactly what kind of meaning *Eli* includes will be seen at press time. —*Mark Moring*

► TO SAVE A LIFE

NEW SONG PICTURES | RATED PG-13 | JANUARY 22

★★★★★ This story—of a high-school basketball star whose childhood friend commits suicide—has the best production values of any church-made feature film yet. An outreach of California's New Song Community Church, *To Save a Life* shows the pressures, loneliness, and sinfulness (maybe too graphically) of teen life. But for all its talk about living differently and being transformed, the film falls short, simply saying that the church is a place you can fit in, and that saving a life is only a matter of being nice. —*Todd Hertz*

► CREATION

BBC FILMS | RATED PG-13 | JANUARY 22

NOT YET REVIEWED Billed as the true story of Charles Darwin, this film had distributors lined up everywhere—except in the U.S. The British *Telegraph* called it "too controversial for religious America." "It is unbelievable to us that this is still a really hot potato," the producer said. Newmarket Films ultimately picked it up for distribution in the U.S., where audiences will

see how Darwin lost faith after the death of his daughter Annie, and sought answers that ultimately led him to write *On the Origin of Species*. Paul Bettany plays Darwin, and Jennifer Connelly his devout Christian wife, Emma. —*Mark Moring*

MUSIC

PHIL KEAGGY & JEFF JOHNSON

► FRIO SUITE

(ARK RECORDS)

★★★★★ Pianist Jeff Johnson had been making Windham Hill–flavored ambient music for years. When he met guitar master Phil Keaggy at a Chrysostom Society retreat at Texas's Laity Lodge last January, they hit it off. For music aficionados, that's a beautiful thing. They stayed in touch and created this album via e-mail, with Johnson recording in Seattle, Keaggy in Nashville. It's a sublime lineup of eight richly textured instrumental tracks—almost an hour in all—that capture, as the liner notes suggest, "a place where heaven and earth meet." —*Mark Moring*

GREG SCZEBEL

► LOVE AND THE LACK THEREOF

(SOULTONE RECORDS)

★★★★★ Canada's Greg Szebel has mastered the art of catchy piano pop—with splashes of rock, jazz, and disco—on this, his second album. A two-time winner of the John Lennon Songwriting Contest, Szebel's lyrics of wit and weight cover topics from complacency to revival, from materialism to heaven. On "Canceling the Noise" he sings, "Building beliefs like pyramids / With a chart and graph and linear paths / That intellect and logic would approve / But what if God cannot be summarized / Or divvied down to science and then pocket sized?" —*Mark Moring*

PAUL BALOCHE

► GLORIOUS

(INTEGRITY)

★★★★★ Having penned new church standards like "Open the Eyes of My Heart" and "Above All," Paul Baloche is recognized as one of worship music's finest wordsmiths. But with this new project, Baloche should also be recognized for his fine-tuned artistry. Translating his talent for leading authentic worship into a top-notch recording, the singer-songwriter offers ten original corporate tunes, plus his own take on the Dove Award-winning "A New Hallelujah." Baloche's songs are poised for continued church-wide acceptance, and his artist career should benefit from this album's A-plus production. —*Andrew Greer*

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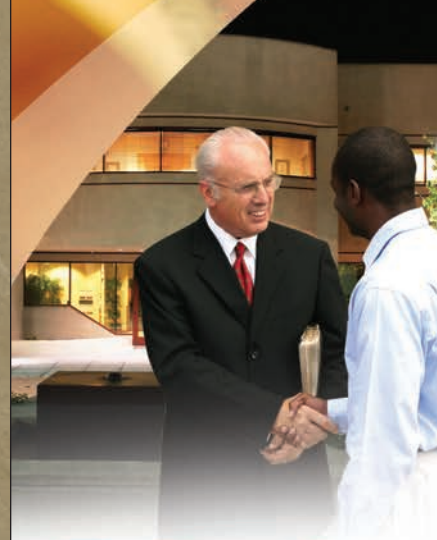
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[Employment Opportunities]

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Statement required by the act of August 12, 1970, section 3685, Title 39, United States Code, showing ownership, management, and circulation of CHRISTIANITY TODAY, published 12 times per year at 465 Gundersen Drive, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. Price per year: \$24.95. Publication No. 109-740. The names and addresses of the publisher and editors are: Publisher, Kevin Miller, 465 Gundersen Drive, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188; Editor in Chief, David Neff, 465 Gundersen Drive, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188; Senior Managing Editor, Mark Galli, 465 Gundersen Drive, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. The owner is CHRISTIANITY TODAY INTL., 465 Gundersen Drive, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. The known bondholders, mortgages, and other security holders owning or holding one percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

	Avg. no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months	Actual no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date
Total No. Copies	143,315	142,625
Paid Circulation		
1. Mail Subscriptions	116,807	112,472
2. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors and counter sales	3,901	7,274
Total Paid Circulation	120,708	119,746
Free Distribution		
1. Free Distribution by mail	11,274	14,513
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Total Free Distribution	16,316	20,063
Total Distribution	137,024	139,809
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BY TIM STAFFORD



Faith Equals Action

To White House Fellow **Adam Taylor**, the math is simple.



When Adam Taylor entered Harvard's Kennedy School of Government in 1999, he was uncertain about his future. He had just spent a turbulent post-college year in New York City working under Mayor Rudy Giuliani. The death of Guinean immigrant Amadou Diallo had set off angry demonstrations, and Taylor, whose father is white and mother is African American, found himself in a familiar role, trying to facilitate conversation and reconciliation. He also wrestled with a call to ministry while leading young adults at Brooklyn's Emmanuel Baptist Church. He felt a complete disconnect between his concept of pastoral ministry and his passion for political advocacy.

At Kennedy, Taylor found Jim Wallis, founder of the progressive Christian organization Sojourners, who was teaching as an adjunct professor. Wallis's class "connected the dots on so many things I cared about," says Taylor. "So much of why I care about social justice is because of my faith." Newly invigorated, Taylor helped found Global Justice, a

student movement that works for HIV/AIDS relief. He later joined Sojourners' staff and in his spare time pursued ordination jointly with the American Baptist and Progressive National Baptist denominations. In August 2009, he began a one-year appointment in the prestigious White House Fellows program, established by Lyndon B. Johnson to expose talented young professionals to government administration.

- **Age** 33
- **Hometown** Washington, D.C.
- **Church** Shiloh Baptist
- **Favorite recent book** *Jesus for President*, by Shane Claiborne
- **On your iPod** *WOW Gospel 2009*
- **Favorite movie** *Chariots of Fire*
- **Favorite Bible verse** Isaiah 40:31
- **Favorite website** GodsPolitics.com

question & answer

How do you connect your faith with social justice?

My social and economic justice activism is rooted in trying to live out Jesus' call in Luke 4 to "preach good news to the poor . . . to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." As much as I feel a calling to speak truth to power around issues of injustice, my participation and membership in a local congregation help to keep me grounded and hold me spiritually accountable.

I seek to go deeper in my relationship with Christ through prayer, Bible study, contemplation, running, and devotions. Each feeds my spirit and helps to order my steps in the context of my activism.

What social justice issue matters most to you?

The overriding passion of my life is to combat poverty, both internationally and domestically. Poverty is the worst form of oppression. It assaults the very dignity that God has given every one of us. Martin Luther King Jr. understood that the next frontier was economic justice. That's why he died in Memphis, where he was fighting for decent wages for garbage workers.

It's almost criminal that 40 years later the minimum wage is lower than it was then [adjusted for inflation]. I feel like we have had 40 years of wandering in the wilderness for economic justice for all Americans. One in eight families is living in poverty. They could be lifted out. That is a real moral imperative, and an issue that Christians should be united around.

How are Christians doing at that?

There has been a real shift in the American church, particularly among younger Christians engaging social justice. Work needs to be done equipping young leaders with tools and skills in how to engage the political world. A gap exists in the church between where opinion is and where action is. But there are lots of good signs.

More: WhiteHouse.gov/about/fellows_Sojo.net

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