

Walt Wangerin, From Cancer Country • Marilynne Robinson, Narrative Calvinist

Christianity Today

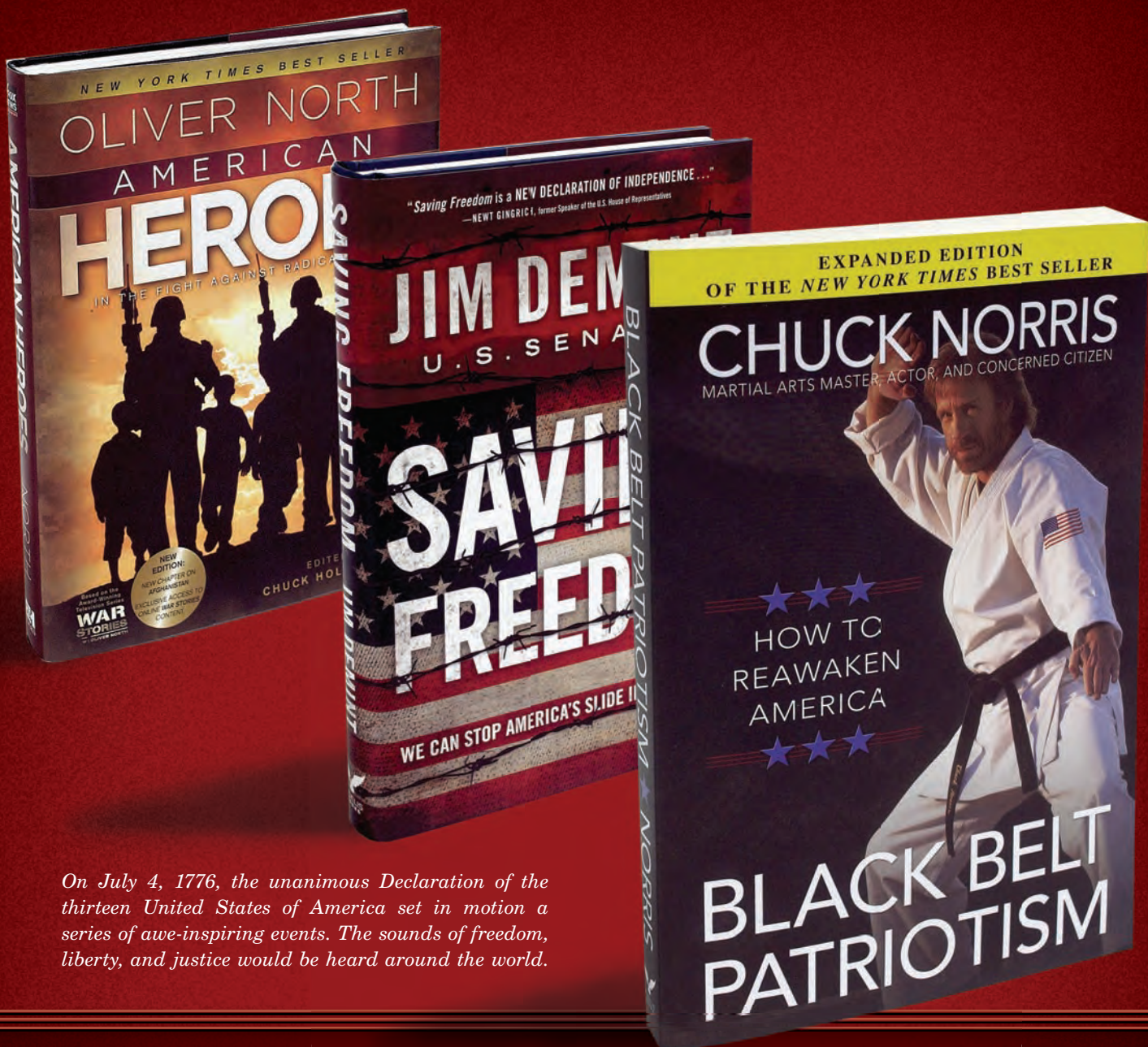
FEBRUARY 2010

Fanatics

**How Christians
have succumbed
to the culture
of sports.**



+ HOW TO DEFEAT HUNGER 40
VAMPIRE LIT 36
CT'S ANNUAL BOOK AWARDS 28



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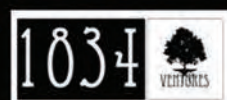
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The Mirror of Truth

Twenty-eight years ago, I left pastoral ministry to become an editor. I oriented myself to my new calling by reading an essay by Wes Pippert, United Press International's veteran political reporter. Was there a theological dimension to the calling of a Christian journalist? Wes connected a journalist's commitment to truth with Jesus' claim to be the Truth.

At *Christianity Today*, I've tried to make the way we handle little-t truth reflect the Truth himself, as "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." But even when it is spoken with grace, the truth can lead to tension. A community's health depends on having an accurate picture of itself, and American Christians need journalists like those at CT to hold up the mirror of truth. After a good look in that mirror, we can celebrate the healthy things we see, as well as scrub off the metaphorical smudges and lose the figurative flab.

In this issue, our book-awards judges highlight the excellent work of authors and publishers who brought us truth-laden books in 2009, while we critique the persistent postmodern tendency to relativize and tribalize truth. We also celebrate an innovative sports ministry in Slovakia, while we critique the extreme devotion of American sports enthusiasts.

CT regularly relies on readers like you to help us hold up the mirror—perhaps by creating buzz about a groundbreaking article or by giving gift subscriptions. Now I would like to encourage each of you to continue this needed support in a new way.

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David Neff, Editor in Chief

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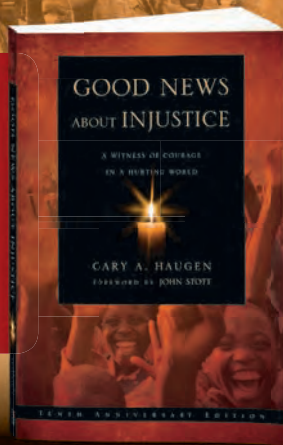
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More Sports Talk

But not the kind you hear on ESPN.



THE EDITORS at *Christianity Today* gently teased each other as we prepared this issue. You may recall that we ran a cover essay titled “Why We Love Football” in September 2008. In that article, author Eric Miller extolled the virtues of the gridiron game. We thought of titling this issue’s cover story, “Just Kidding: Why We Hate Football.”

Of course, the 2008 essay was not about why CT editors love football (though a few of us do), and this issue’s essay is not CT’s official stance on football, let alone sports. As kinesiology professor Shirl James Hoffman points out in “Whatever Happened to Play?” (page 20), sports have a huge cultural presence and affect the lives and livelihoods of millions. For this reason alone, they are a subject fit for Christian thinking. And as with most cultural phenomena, we can see in it the hand of God and the work of the Devil. Miller did a great job of highlighting the blessings of sport. Hoffman does a great job of pointing out its curses. Christian involvement has not always led to the betterment of sports, but often to the detriment of Christians.

The CT editorial wing is not just full of journalism nerds, but includes a few genuine athletes as well. Some staff have experienced the highs and lows of sports culture. I played varsity baseball in high school, and until my knees gave out, enjoyed playing basketball in my community’s 46 Years Plus league. Senior associate editor Mark Moring is the most authentic jock among us, having played tennis and basketball in high school, followed by a stint as a sports reporter in Florida. Since Mark and I oversaw the cover story, you can be sure we are not suggesting that Christians abandon sports.

But Hoffman’s argument is strong. Because his case will be controversial, we think it right to include reactions from evangelicals embedded in sports culture (see “Are Sports the Problem?” page 26). Hoffman says evangelicals have not paid enough critical attention to sports, and we hope the articles in this issue foster a vigorous conversation—theological sports talk—among us.

Books Issue: We also hope this issue encourages vigorous discussion and reading as you scan CT’s annual book awards (page 28). I’m always surprised to see on the list a few books I personally would have never picked, and disappointed to see some favorite volumes missing. But many people have a say in this. And that’s one of the points of lists—to serve as guides not just for reading but also for conversation among readers.

Next Month: We’ll hear why doctrine (that supposedly dry, soul-deadening discipline) is essential for spiritual formation, how grace is the foundation of racial reconciliation, and what Brian McLaren is now thinking about Christianity.



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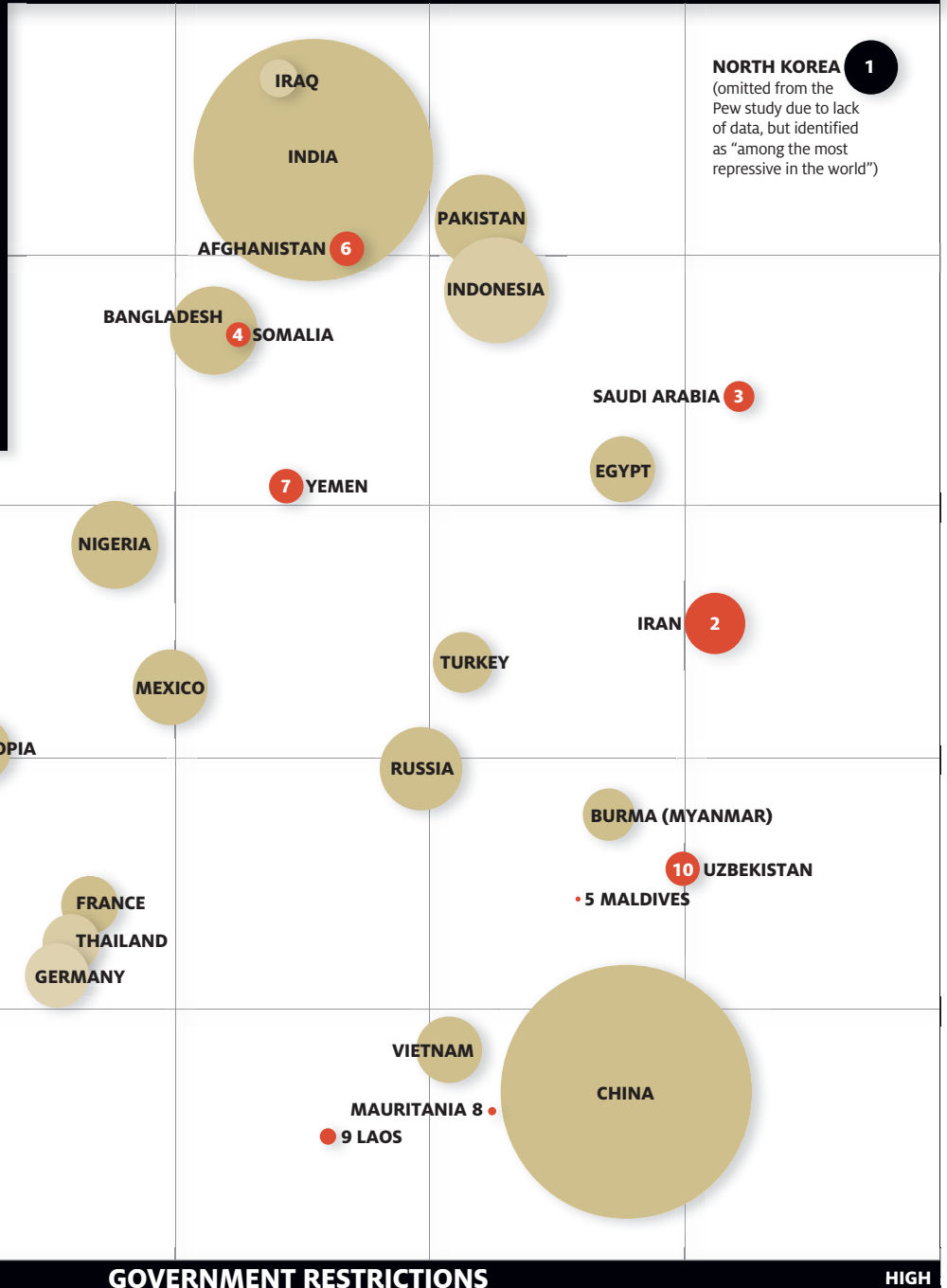
SPOTLIGHT: WHERE IT'S HARDEST TO BELIEVE

HIGH

SOCIAL HOSTILITIES

LOW

➔ A December report from the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life attempted to quantify global restrictions on religion. In contrast to previous efforts, the Pew study separately scored government restrictions and social hostilities (religious violence, intolerance, intimidation, and discrimination by non-governmental actors). In January, Open Doors USA released its list of the world's worst persecutors of Christians, which combines political and social pressures. Here's how the lists compare.



NORTH KOREA 1
(omitted from the Pew study due to lack of data, but identified as "among the most repressive in the world")

The world's 25 most populous countries and selected others from Pew's Global Restrictions on Religion report (includes restrictions on all religions).

10

Rank on Open Doors 2010 World Watch List (emphasizes restrictions on Christianity).



Circle size based on population.



GLEANINGS

Important developments in the church and the world.

1 C. S. Lewis College to open in 2012

The C. S. Lewis Foundation announced plans to create a 217-acre college in Northfield, Massachusetts, dedicated to the Oxford academic and apologist. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc., known for its Christian philanthropy, purchased the land for \$100,000 from Northfield Mount Hermon, a school founded by Dwight Moody in 1879. Hobby Lobby will own the land and spend \$5 million renovating buildings while the foundation runs the college, which is expected to open in 2012 with a class of about 100 students.

The organization had considered blocking such colleges entirely but decided against it because it would lead to a competing job market.

4 Martyrdoms linked to anti-government plot

TURKEY Turkish Christians received some good news in December. The ongoing investigation of the 2007 Malatya martyrdoms received a significant boost when the murders were found referenced in a document outlining "Operation Cage Action Plan," a terrorist plot intended to unsettle Turkey's pro-Muslim government by creating a rash of violence against non-Muslims. The data were recently deciphered from an encrypted CD discovered in April 2009. Meanwhile, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that Turkish churches have the right to start parachurch foundations.

2 Missionary crosses into North Korea

NORTH KOREA Robert Park, a 28-year-old Korean American missionary, walked across the frozen Tumen River from China to North Korea on Christmas Day to raise awareness of the nation's human rights violations. Park, reportedly inspired by the martyrdom of 19th-century Welsh missionary Robert Jermain Thomas, said he wanted to remain a prisoner in the country as an act of Christian sacrifice until the totalitarian state reforms. North Korean officials confirmed detaining a U.S. citizen several days after Park crossed the river.

3 APA will flag many Christian colleges

The American Philosophical Association (APA) will begin flagging employers advertising on its job board whose hiring policies discriminate against practicing gays. The APA will place a mark on the ads of schools that bar homosexual acts.

5 Catholics receive right to use Allah

MALAYSIA Malaysia's high court overturned a three-year ban that had prevented local Catholics from referring to God as *Allah* in local-language publications. The justice who gave the December 31 opinion ruled that Malaysian Catholics can use the term when writing about God to each other, but cannot use it in publications written to Muslims. The ruling vindicated the longstanding efforts of the Catholic *Herald* newspaper but provoked protests: the *Herald's* website was hacked twice within days of the ruling, and nine churches were firebombed or vandalized. The government has appealed.

6 Lexington seminary goes online

As seminaries nationwide face financial crunches, one in Kentucky is adjusting by going almost exclusively online. Starting this fall, Lexington Theological Seminary will shift from a campus-based school to one offering online courses with intensive on-campus supplemental classes. The Disciples of Christ school, founded in 1836, is among the 40 percent of U.S. seminaries expected to drop in size, merge with another institution, or otherwise change operations in the near future due to the recession, according to a study by the Association of Theological Schools.

7 Irish evangelicals split on civil unions

IRELAND Evangelical Alliance Ireland has called for support of a civil partnership bill debated in the nation's parliament in December. The proposed bill, expected to pass into law, would give legal recognition and inheritance rights to same-sex couples. The alliance labeled the bill a means of showing justice and fairness; Aontas (formerly the Association of Irish Evangelical Churches) opposes the bill.

8 Sex offenders allowed in churches

Part of a North Carolina law banning sex offenders from churches with childcare facilities was struck down as unconstitutional December 17 by a local trial court. Two registered offenders had appealed the ban, saying they could not attend the church of their choice under the restrictions. A Chatham County court found the existing law to be too broad to be enforced, but upheld restrictions against offenders visiting schools and other childcare locations. The Chatham County District Attorney's office, which had indicted the two men, will appeal.

GO FIGURE Giving

\$900,000

Amount that Rick Warren asked Saddleback Church to give in 48 hours to meet an end-of-year deficit, in a December 30 e-mail.

\$2.4 million

Amount church members gave by the end of December 31. Nearly all of the donations were less than \$1,000 each.

Los Angeles Times



compiled by Ted Olsen

QUOTATION MARKS

"We have never been the only family group on the block."

Gary Schneeberger, spokesman for Focus on the Family, on news that departing founder James Dobson is launching a new radio program and nonprofit with his son. Dobson's final *Focus* broadcast is February 28.

The Colorado Springs Gazette

"We find nothing in Montana Supreme Court precedent or Montana statutes indicating that physician aid in dying is against public policy."

The Montana Supreme Court, making the state the third in the U.S. to allow physician-assisted suicide.

Montana Supreme Court

"[W]hen people have been let down so very badly by the rest of society . . . my advice, as a Christian priest, is to shoplift."

Tim Jones, parish priest at St. Lawrence and St. Hilda in York, England. Jones, who stands by his advice, urged the poor to steal from "large national businesses, knowing that the costs are ultimately passed on to the rest of us" rather than from family-run stores.

The York Press

"From my end of this discussion, I don't 'deny the being of Almighty God,' I simply consider the question of denial or acceptance irrelevant. Could make for a very interesting court case . . ."

Cecil Bothwell, self-described atheist and newly installed member of the Asheville City Council. The North Carolina constitution bars "any person who shall deny the being of Almighty God" from public office.

ScrutinyHooligans.us

9 Excavators discover Jesus-era Nazareth home

ISRAEL Just before Christmas, archaeologists uncovered the first Nazareth house dated to Jesus' era. The house, found near the current Basilica of the

Annunciation, covers at least 900 square feet and has an entryway to a cave where residents may have hidden during battles between Roman soldiers and Jewish rebels. Pottery shards found inside the home date to between 100 B.C. and A.D. 100. The home will be preserved and displayed by a Catholic group, which is building a center near the site.

10 Copts jointly sue for religious identities

EGYPT The fledgling legal fight over identity documents for Egyptian Christians saw a rare group effort in December. A group of 40 Coptic Christians sued the government over its denial of new ID cards that would identify them as Christians. Such cards are necessary to work and travel. Group members were born Copts but automatically labeled by the government as Muslims when their fathers later converted. The group's lawyer says his clients never converted to Islam because they have not recited an official statement of Muslim faith.

11 Supreme Court to rule on discrimination case

A Christian law-student group will go before the U.S. Supreme Court this spring in the last step of a long discrimination case. Lawyers for the Christian Legal Society, which sued University of California Hastings College of the Law in 2004, claim it is being given an "unreasonable choice" of changing its statement of faith or shutting down. Hastings withheld funding from the group in 2004 after the society barred

students in homosexual relationships from its leadership, and the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the school's decision in March 2009. The Supreme Court is expected to rule by June.

12 Evangelicals poised for recognition

ISRAEL Two Israeli political groups are at odds over whether to recognize evangelicals as a religious group in the Jewish country. The Israeli deputy foreign minister proposed the idea in December, arguing that evangelicals have supported Israel with money and public relations efforts. A spokesperson from the nation's interior ministry disagreed, saying recognizing evangelicals would open a floodgate for other religious groups demanding recognition.

13 Klansman turns preacher

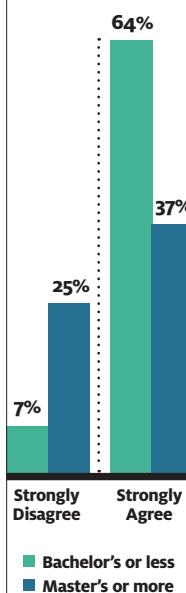
A former Ku Klux Klan national leader is now an ordained minister in the Church of God in Christ, the largest historically black denomination in the U.S. Johnny Lee Clary joined the Klan at age 14 and worked his way up to imperial wizard, the group's highest position. Clary left the KKK 30 years ago and now travels the country speaking on fighting terrorism.

14 Christians jailed for rejecting animism

COLOMBIA Twenty-eight indigenous Christians have been jailed for refusing to return to the historical, animistic religious practices of the reservation they live on. The local governor announced that Christianity was banned at the Kogui reservation in northern Colombia and threw men, women, and children in jail when they refused to convert to the tribe's historic practices. The governor also refused to let the Kogui Christians leave the reservation to practice Christianity offsite.

GO FIGURE

Islam
American Protestant pastors' response to the statement "Islam is a dangerous religion," by education level:



LifeWay Research




Mixed Messages:
 Even as Chinese intellectuals argued for religious freedom in the Communist nation, leaders of this unregistered megachurch received the steepest punishments in years.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM CHINA

Confusion in China

State publishes call for tolerance amid church closures and arrests. By Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra

A state-run Chinese newspaper published a declaration that the country is ready for “an institutional guarantee for the legality and equality of all religions” in December as 10 leaders of an unregistered Protestant megachurch were imprisoned and prominent house churches were locked out of their meeting places.

In an interview with *China Daily*, entrepreneur, researcher, and religion expert Liu Peng called for a “system [to] be developed . . . to let more religious affairs be governed by law, instead of through administrative means.” China’s habit of shutting down churches is a “copy from the erstwhile Soviet Union in the 1950s” and not truly Chinese, Liu argued. He said all religious groups should be given equal and standard access for legal registration.

Religious freedom experts say they are cautiously optimistic about the public pronouncement, which appeared in the government’s official English-language newspaper.

“I was extremely surprised that it came out in *China Daily*,” said Brent Fulton, president of Los Angeles-based China Source. “It tells me that the government is willing to seriously float a major change in religious policy. It really is on the agenda.”

The article signals that the religious policy debate has outgrown academic and church circles and entered the public square, said Carol Hamrin, senior associate at the Global China Center. It followed the June release of a year-long, government-commissioned study by scholar Yu Jianrong, who concluded that house churches were a positive influence on Chinese society and that the government no longer needed to regard them as enemies of the state.

Officials in Linfen, a northeastern coal-mining hub labeled one of the world’s most polluted cities, may disagree. In September, police and hired thugs attacked and closed the unapproved home of a 50,000-member unregistered church.

Ten church leaders have received

prison or labor sentences, including one female pastor who received a seven-year sentence for “illegally occupying farming land” and “disturbing transportation order by gathering masses.” The sentences are the steepest given to Christian leaders since five were sentenced to death in 2001, said Bob Fu, president of China Aid.

Also last fall, an 800-member Beijing house church was banned from its meeting place, while a well-known house church in Shanghai was told to close.

Hamrin said the growth of unregistered churches and the anxiety of Chinese leaders to maintain social stability throughout major national events—the Olympics, the 60th anniversary of Communist rule, and President Obama’s November visit—have led to some of the crackdowns.

But Linfen does not represent national policy, Fulton said. “If it did, then the government would be using violent means to shut down unregistered groups all over the country, which is not happening,” he said. “I believe the long-term trend is toward a legal structure within which religious groups can operate. Chinese officials are well aware that most other areas of society have seen legal reforms that, at least in theory, take the government out of a direct administrative role and create some space within which non-governmental actors can function.”

Some experts believe a comprehensive law regulating religion, as Liu proposed, is the wrong approach. “Laws meant to regulate or register religions are abused, even when the drafters don’t intend them to be abused,” said Nina Shea, director of the Center for Religious Freedom at the Hudson Institute. “I don’t think it’s the way to go.”

Others believe legislating religious freedom may be the right step for China.

“In China, people assume you cannot do certain things unless the government explicitly says you can,” Hamrin said. Legal recognition of

GO FIGURE

Church Life

50

Average number of hours a week that Protestant pastors (including part-time and bivocational pastors) work for their church.

42%

Full-time pastors who work 60 or more hours a week.

LifeWay Research

different churches would be the easiest way to introduce freedom of religion, and would also be the best fit for China's culture, she said.

But any legal guarantees are only as good as the willingness to honor them, said Fulton. "Overall, legal reform in China seems to be a case of two steps forward, one step back. Chinese Christians are helped by this process, but also harassed by the bumps along the way." +

FINANCE

Casting Too Wide a Net

Ministries protest proposed finance reform.

By Ken Walker

With the battle over health-care reform winding down, the U.S. Congress is poised to tackle the financial arena. But ministries are crying foul over the potential reach of a proposed Consumer Protection Agency.

Dan Busby, president of the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA), is particularly concerned that the proposal may require anyone offering financial education to submit its curriculum to Uncle Sam.

"The heart of the issue is the breadth applied to 'financial activities,'" Busby said. "Churches and ministries would be subject to regulation and additional administrative costs under the bill."

ECFA and other concerned groups won a small victory by persuading the House of Representatives, which passed a version of the bill December 11, to exclude nonprofit donor communications from the agency's reach. But the Senate may not be as sympathetic to exempting nonprofits' financial activities.

Kirstin Brost, the Senate Banking Committee's communications director, said the bill focuses on large financial institutions that caused

the current fiscal crisis. "There is language that says the Consumer Protection Agency should take a risk-based approach to regulating non-bank financial institutions," she said.

Busby doesn't expect final action any time soon. In the meantime, a consortium of nonprofits plan to press their case on Capitol Hill.

"The big concern I have is that there is no information . . . on what rules will be put in place," said John Ashmen, president of the Association of Gospel Rescue Missions. Eighty percent of the association's 275 members offer some form of financial counsel to clients. "You don't know how the broad authority is going to be used," he said.

When Congress altered rules for charitable deductions of automobiles five years ago, it cost Willow Creek Community Church \$50,000 in annual paperwork costs (including hiring someone to process the forms), said chief financial officer Brian McAuliffe.

"I can't even fathom what it would require in terms of credentialing teachers and getting documents approved," said McAuliffe, whose church offers finance classes and has created a national stewardship education ministry called Good Sense.

Dave Briggs, director of Enrich Financial Ministries at Central Christian Church of the East Valley near Phoenix, worries that the legislation could violate the Constitution.

"I'm at a loss as to how someone in government could regulate what we're teaching in our classes, any more than they could regulate what's taught Sunday morning," Briggs said.

Forcing churches to curtail or cut back financial counseling couldn't come at a worse time, said Chuck Bentley, CEO of Crown Financial Ministries. Noting figures showing that personal household debt (\$13.8 trillion) is higher than the federal deficit (\$12.2 trillion), Bentley said Crown leads seminars and small groups in 1,300 churches annually.

"Any amount of oversight and

regulation on our outreach will burden our abilities to provide much-needed ministry," Bentley said. +

CHURCH LIFE KENYA

Leaving Mungiki

Skepticism as violent sect receives baptism. By Sue Sprenkle in Nairobi

Two decades ago, Maina Njenga created a quasi-religious sect known as Mungiki, whose young men snuffed tobacco, prayed to Mount Kenya, and took oaths of loyalty. The gang became synonymous with grisly machete killings, extortion, and organized crime.

In early December, Njenga seemed to take a step in the other direction, renouncing the group he led for 20 years and being baptized into one of East Africa's largest churches. An estimated 500 Mungiki sect members followed suit in baptism, as Njenga had promised.

"Let those who were doubting know we are now moving on while they have been left behind," he said.

The leader of a sort of Kenyan mafia claimed he converted to Christianity during a 29-month detainment on murder charges dropped due to lack of evidence.

Local evangelical leaders were skeptical: past Mungiki leaders have made the same claim but stayed involved in gang activities. Most took a wait-and-see approach, praying that Njenga's baptism at Jesus Is Alive Ministries would be the beginning of a movement of God among the millions of Mungiki, all young men from Kenya's largest ethnic group, the Kikuyu.

"I am not scared to welcome Mungiki into my church," said Daniel Thiuri, moderator of the Baptist Convention of Kenya, which includes more than 4,000 congregations. "I was a sinner. God doesn't

[continued on 16]

PASSAGES



Died
Hudson Taylor Armerding

Fifth president of Wheaton College, from 1965–1982, and former president of the National Association of Evangelicals, on December 1 in Carol Stream, Illinois. He was 91.



Died
Arthur F. Glasser
Prominent academic missiologist and advocate of Jewish evangelism, on December 8 in Seattle, Washington. He was 95.



Died
Oral Roberts
Pentecostal evangelist, televangelism pioneer, and founder of Oral Roberts University, on December 15 in Newport Beach, California. He was 91. (For in-depth coverage, go to ChristianityToday.com/go/OralRoberts.)

rank sin. He forgives all of us. Everyone has the right to come to Christ."

Catholic Bishop Martin Kivuva, head of the Diocese of Machakos in Nairobi, said only time will tell if Njenga and his followers have truly reformed or if they are using churches to become more acceptable to the public.

"It is only by their fruits that we shall know whether they are genuine," said Kivuva. "I will definitely not say, 'Hallelujah, they have all changed.'"

Working in a place haunted daily by Mungiki bogus taxes and beatings, Baptist pastor Charles Mwangi said he's seeing evidence of change. In the past, Mungiki gangsters would show up to his Bible study groups in the Dagoretti marketplace to steal and wreak havoc. Now, Mwangi said, more than 60 Mungiki come to learn Bible stories next to women they had previously extorted.

"Is Njenga's conversion real? Only he can answer that question," Mwangi said. "What I can tell you is that I'm seeing hardened gangsters changing their lives for Christ. Something like this is never a small thing to God." ⊕

MINISTRY

Less Aid for AIDS?

Groups fear scaled-back funding will cost lives.

By Bobby Ross Jr.

Leaders of Christian organizations that fight AIDS in Africa are expressing fears that the U.S. government is slowing its fight against the disease. The Obama administration is shifting its global health emphasis from putting more people on AIDS drugs to combating less-costly diseases.

"There seems to be an AIDS funding fatigue developing on many levels," said Nelis du Toit, director of the Christian AIDS Bureau for Southern Africa.

The 2010 federal budget allocates \$5.7 billion for programs like the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. That represents a 3.6 percent, or \$200 million, increase over 2009.

"Technically, it is not flatlining, but given the very considerable growth over the past five years, the AIDS advocates are considering this flatlining," said Ray Martin, executive

director of Christian Connections for International Health.

The World Health Organization estimates that faith-based organizations deliver 30 to 70 percent of health care in developing countries. They account for roughly a quarter of groups that have received PEPFAR grants.

"If antiretroviral medicines become unavailable due to funding shortfalls, then the children who depend on them will die. It is that simple," said immunologist Scott Todd, senior ministry adviser at Compassion International. (The ministry doesn't accept federal grants but supports 1,600 HIV-positive children who benefit from PEPFAR.) "The U.S. government acted honorably and compassionately through PEPFAR, and many lives have been saved. But in saving them, we took up a moral obligation not to end their lives when the wind changes in Washington."

Kay Warren, founder of the HIV/AIDS Initiative at Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California, is urging Obama and Congress to keep funding increases high. But she said churches "are in this for the long haul," regardless of the federal budget. "Our responsibility to the sick isn't tied to congressional funding." ⊕

GO FIGURE Poverty

Who Americans think should take the lead to address poverty:

39%

The federal government

25%

State and local governments

18%

Each individual citizen

4%

Churches

4%

Nonprofit organizations

3%

Businesses

Barna Research

UNDER DISCUSSION Topics in the current debate.

compiled by Ruth Moon

Should Christians leave the American Medical Association?

YES

"Perhaps there are folks God has called to change the AMA from the inside. I don't think it is possible any longer. It's gone so far down a slippery slope, and those who are still in it have such little control that the ability for change is remote."

DAVID STEVENS
CEO, Christian Medical Association (CMA)

"The time, money, and influence involved in a professional medical membership are better spent in affinity organizations such as the CMA. Now that we face a veritable tsunami of ethical conundrums in modern medicine, our trumpet needs to sound a clear call."

RICHARD SWENSON
M.D.

"Increasingly, the deal-making of the AMA as a Washington lobbying group makes it less relevant to what I believe. My mission as a Christian doctor is to take care of the least among us, and it doesn't appear that this is the AMA's mission."

MARTIN MAKARY
professor, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine

"Each physician has to decide whether or not to leave. It depends on how long each doctor feels he or she can fight or be effective—how long the doctor can pay dues to an organization actively working for positions that violate his or her conscience."

PAIGE CUNNINGHAM
executive director, Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity

"I don't think we ought to leave groups like the AMA for secularists. Christians have an obligation to work with non-Christians, not pull out of the arena into their own enclave. One way to do that is to stay members of secular groups."

ALVIN PLANTINGA
philosophy professor, University of Notre Dame

"Once Christians leave the AMA en masse, they lose their ability to influence the organization. There are moments when a Christian cannot in good conscience remain affiliated with a particular institution, but leaving ought to be a rare tool."

D. MICHAEL LINDSAY
sociology professor, Rice University

NO



Anti-Gay Pride: Ugandans in the capital, Kampala, protest Western criticism of the new legislation, which expands current law banning homosexual acts.

POLITICS **UGANDA**

Intercontinental Divide

Global pressure mounts for Uganda to defeat anti-gay bill, and puts evangelicals at odds with one another. By Sarah Pulliam Bailey

New legislation in Uganda that would punish gays and lesbians with life in prison or execution has created a significant rift between American and Ugandan evangelicals.

If enacted in its original form, the controversial bill would imprison for life a person convicted of homosexual acts, including touching “with the intention of committing the act of homosexuality.” The bill calls for capital punishment for serial offenses, homosexual sex with minors or persons with disabilities, or homosexual sex while infected with HIV. It requires community leaders to report to the government any persons suspected of having homosexual relations with minors. The

measure greatly strengthens existing law, which punishes homosexual acts with up to 14 years behind bars.

Last fall, as news of the bill spread beyond Uganda, criticism from overseas and across the political spectrum snowballed rapidly. The Swedish government threatened to revoke \$50 million in aid if the bill passed. President Barack Obama said he opposed the bill, as did Human Rights Watch and many other civil rights groups. One American cable broadcaster branded it the “Kill the Gays” bill. The bill’s author is an unheard-of Ugandan lawmaker, David Bahati, who recently said he has received death threats over the legislation.

Among American evangelicals,

Saddleback Church pastor Rick Warren, Prison Fellowship founder Chuck Colson, and Exodus International president Alan Chambers spoke out in separate remarks against the bill, citing a variety of reasons.

“I oppose the criminalization of homosexuality,” Warren said in an online video. “As an American pastor, it is not my role to interfere with the politics of other nations, but it is my role to speak out on moral issues.

“It is my role to shepherd other pastors who look to me for guidance, and it is my role to correct lies, errors, and false reports when others associate my name with a law that I had nothing to do with, completely oppose, and vigorously condemn.” Warren

[continued on 18]

visited with church and political leaders in Uganda as recently as 2008.

Exodus was among the first American evangelical groups to oppose the legislation. “While we do not believe that homosexual behavior is what God intended for individuals, we believe that deprivation of life and liberty is not an appropriate or helpful response to this issue,” Exodus leaders wrote to Uganda President Yoweri Museveni. “Furthermore, the Christian church must be a safe, compassionate place for gay-identified people as well as those who are confused about and conflicted by their sexuality.”

Colson told *Christianity Today* that he denounced the legislation because it addresses human rights, a universal moral issue. “When you’re talking about human rights and liberty, they’re inherent to the presentation of the gospel. I wouldn’t see this as singling out anyone,” he said. “If you put a person in prison for life for an act of homosexual behavior, that is horrendous, that is so harsh. It’s totally contrary to the Christian understanding of compassion.”

ANTI-WESTERN BACKLASH

Ugandan evangelicals, an influential force in the East African nation that is 85 percent Christian, say the outside criticism is unacceptable and is triggering a backlash. David Zac Niringiye, assistant bishop of Kampala in the Anglican Church of Uganda, told CT that Western Christians should not make such public pronouncements on the bill.

“The international community is behaving like it can’t trust Ugandans to come up with a law that is fair,” Niringiye told CT. “When the Western governments or Western churches or Christians speak loudly about the legitimacy or illegitimacy of this bill, you actually begin to fuel the idea that homosexuality is the product of Western culture.”

Niringiye did not disclose his opinion on the bill. The Catholic Church in Uganda is supporting the bill but not the death penalty clause.

The reaction from Christians in America creates resentment among Ugandan Christians, said Christopher

Byaruhanga, professor of historical theology at Bishop Tucker School of Divinity and Theology at Uganda Christian University.

“You see there’s a kind of imperialism and relativism from the West,” said Byaruhanga in an interview. “They don’t understand our ethics in the country of Uganda, and they are trying to impose what they believe.” Byaruhanga cited as evidence a statement from Katharine Jefferts Schori, presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church. She issued a statement of concern about the bill, urging the United States to “grant adequate access to the U.S. asylum system for those fleeing persecution on the basis of homosexuality or gender identity.”

“If the head of the Episcopal Church says anything on the bill in Uganda, you think anybody would listen to her? She is already in [alliance] with someone who is openly homosexual,” Byaruhanga said. “Anything that comes from this end has no credibility because of what is going on in the Episcopal Church and what is

Protecting Uganda’s Children

American missionaries say, ‘Trust the country’s Christian leaders to respond to homosexuality.’

In the late 1980s, American Christians began working in Uganda to address the HIV/AIDS epidemic and promiscuity. Since 1994, True Love Waits International has focused on teaching young Ugandans the value of sexual abstinence before marriage, using many of the same methods as its U.S. counterpart. Sharon Pumpelly, the lead consultant for True Love Waits International, and her husband, Larry, worked for 17 years as missionaries in Uganda. Now based in Virginia, the couple spoke with CT online editor Sarah Pulliam Bailey about the anti-homosexuality bill.

Is it appropriate for American Christians to give their opinion on the bill?

Larry: We should separate some of the issues. Are we really opposing the harshness of the penalty, or are we opposing the law they are trying to grapple with? Those are separate issues. I wouldn’t try to dissuade them from dealing with the issue of homosexuality.

What should American Christians understand about Uganda before commenting?

Larry: In 1995, Uganda was the country with the highest rate of AIDS in the world. They have dropped their rate of AIDS from 18–20 percent down to

6 percent in the past 10 years. Part of that has been through some of the legislation and rules to regulate rape and incest.

Sharon: When it’s a moral issue, they are not going to let American money change their minds. In the 17 years we were in Uganda, we worked on a university campus, and we did not meet one person who was homosexual. This is a relatively new issue. The whole issue of rape or coercion in sex . . . is something [Ugandans] have been dealing with for a long time. The Ugandan church is probably the first church of Africa to deal with AIDS and to come out with a compassionate response. The church really is about compassion and redemption, but they are also serious about protecting their children.

INTERVIEW

Why is there so much Ugandan resentment about overseas criticism of the legislation?

Larry: If you haven’t spent time in the culture and understand Ugandan and African culture, it’s very difficult to judge it by American or Western standards.

Sharon: You can trust them to deal with legislation that’s going to work for them. They feel like they’ve been attacked. They’re going to deal with this issue in a way that will protect their people and grapple with . . . the rising amount of homosexuality in the country.

'The international community is behaving like it can't trust Ugandans to come up with a law that is fair.'

~David Zac Niringiye,
assistant bishop of Kampala in the Anglican Church of Uganda

going on in American society as far as homosexuality is concerned."

MOTIVATIONS

Most African nations prohibit homosexuality, classifying it as a crime. South Africa is the most lenient. It bans discrimination based on sexual orientation and has decriminalized homosexual acts between consenting adults.

In Uganda, the bill has strong backing from grassroots religious leaders. A handful of local Anglican, Pentecostal, Orthodox, Catholic, and Islamic leaders have formed the Uganda National Pastors Task Force Against Homosexuality to build support for the law.

The group is chaired by Martin Ssempe, a controversial Pentecostal pastor in the capital, Kampala. The task-force in a public statement cited four primary motives for the proposed law:

- to address the growing problem of child sexual abuse;
- to resist Western-based gay advocacy organizations now active in Uganda, such as Integrity Uganda;
- to avoid the mistake of Western nations treating homosexuality with "kid gloves"; and
- to hold institutions, especially schools, accountable for covering up homosexual activity and sexual abuse.

The statement, which is personally addressed to Saddleback's Warren, calls for two changes to the legislation: a limit of 20 years in prison for "aggravated homosexuality" and the creation of church-supported counseling and rehabilitation for people facing "homosexual temptations." According to media reports, it is likely that the bill will drop the death penalty and life imprisonment sentences for those convicted. Parliament may vote on the bill as early as February. President Museveni has yet to say whether he will sign or veto the bill.

The task-force's statement also calls

for Warren to apologize, stating, "Your letter has caused great distress and the pastors are demanding that you issue a formal apology for insulting the people of Africa by your very inappropriate bully use of your church and purpose driven pulpits to coerce us into the 'evil' of Sodomy and Gaymorrah [sic]." Several years ago, Warren and Ssempe forged a partnership to fight HIV/AIDS in Uganda. Ssempe was a featured speaker at two Saddleback Global Summits on HIV/AIDS, in 2005 and 2006. Since then, they have severed ties.

About 88 percent of Uganda's 31 million people live in rural areas. At the village level, there is widespread support for the bill. Julius Twongyeirwe, national director of Proclamation Task, a Kampala-based pastoral training ministry, said that everyday Ugandan churchgoers are aware of the legislation and back its adoption.

"The law works to minimize the effects of sin, but it doesn't fix the problems of the heart," Twongyeirwe said. "It is so that people think in terms of consequences and draw back from attracting a penalty like that. If it is done with a minor and someone who is careless enough to transfer AIDS to a minor, it would scare them enough."

Fred Wantaate, pastor of Full Gospel Church Makerere in Kampala, told CT that Christians in Uganda are not divided on the bill because most of them view homosexual behavior as criminal. "Homosexuality, burglary, prostitution, murder, and other behaviors considered harmful to our society are crimes in Uganda," he said. "Appropriate laws must be formulated to counter all harmful behavior."

Wantaate said that most Ugandans have not had the chance to study the bill in its entirety and may not be aware of some of its extreme wording. "It is alleged that the bill has a clause about 'aggravated homosexuality' or 'aiding and abetting homosexuality' being a capital crime punishable by death, or homosexuals being

treated as terrorists," he said. "If that were true, the punishment in that case would be inappropriate and extreme."

World Vision Uganda was among the few national evangelical organizations to publicly express concerns about the bill. World Vision national director Rudo Kwaramba said in a statement, "The legislation under consideration by the Ugandan Parliament has the potential to stigmatize some individuals in communities targeted by World Vision's work. One of the organization's prevention models aims to reduce any stigma which may deter people from seeking to know their HIV status."

SPARKED BY AMERICANS?

Media reports have connected the bill to a March 2009 conference in Uganda at which three Americans condemned homosexual behavior and promoted restorative therapy for same-sex attraction.

One of the men, Scott Lively of Abiding Truth Ministries, said it is insulting that reporters would connect the bill's origins to the Americans.

"That's really a racist perspective that these guys are pushing, that somehow a couple of little-known American commentators on cultural issues, that our opinions can outweigh the combined resources of a sovereign nation," he told CT. "It's as if the Africans are unable to shape their own public policy, and somehow they're swayed by foreign influences."

Lively thinks that the law is too harsh and that it should focus on rehabilitation instead of penalties. "It's important that we not allow this to harm Uganda and the Ugandan Christians," Lively said. "The law as it's crafted, if it were put into effect, would bring the entire weight of the international Left against their country."

History plays a prominent role in how Ugandan Christians respond to homosexuality. In 1885, a group of 45 Anglican and Roman Catholic young men were martyred after they rejected a Ugandan king's sexual advances. Ugandan Christians honor these individuals on June 3 each year. ☩

Sarah Pulliam Bailey is online editor for Christianity Today.



WHATEVER HAPPENED TO PLAY?

How Christians have succumbed to the sports culture—and what might be done about it.

By Shirl James Hoffman

N WARREN ST. JOHN'S *Rammer Jammer Yellow Hammer*—a fascinating account of the lunacy that is University of Alabama football—the reporter recounts a conversation with a Mr. and Mrs. Reese in their \$300,000 motor home, purchased exclusively to travel to Crimson Tide games. The couple, it turns out, had missed their daughter's wedding because it fell on the same day as the Alabama-Tennessee game. They said they had managed to make the reception, and noted that they had asked their daughter not to schedule the wedding so as to conflict with the big game. Asked why he did it, Mr. Reese could only shake his head and respond: "I just love Alabama football, is all I can think of."

If the Reeses' behavior qualified them for sport fanatics award of the century, surely the son of a Philadelphia woman deserves honorable mention. During a 2005 Philadelphia Eagles–Green Bay Packers game, the man ran onto the field, leaving behind a trail of powder coming from a plastic bag he was carrying. Police learned later that the powder was the ashes of his mother, an ardent Eagles fan. "She'll always be a part of Lincoln Financial Field and of the Eagles," the man told police.

Extreme examples, perhaps. But both are rooted in the same passion that drives spectators to paint their faces with team colors, wear bizarre hats, and engage in the collective delirium that one philosopher has called "too close to the religious to call it anything else." Alumni signal their loyalty by flying their alma mater flags on their front porches and plastering the family car with team logos. And now the truly loyal can

arrange for their final rest to be in coffins adorned with their college team's colors.

Americans are consuming sports on an unprecedented scale. The ancient Romans, long considered the gold standard for how sports-crazed a culture could be, were dilettantes compared to the sports fans of this century. The Romans could squeeze 50,000 spectators into the Coliseum for gladiatorial contests—a quaint assemblage next to the 107,000 seats regularly sold for University of Michigan or Penn State home football games. In 2006, Americans spent over \$17 billion on tickets to sports contests and \$90 billion on sporting goods, over double what they spent on books (\$42 billion). Sports magazines take up prime space on bookstore shelves; the granddaddy of them all, *Sports Illustrated*, sells as many copies in a month (13.2 million) as *To Kill a Mockingbird* has sold since its publication in 1960. A tenth of *The World Almanac* is devoted to sports, more than is allocated for business, science, and politics combined.

JOINING THE PARADE

None of this has been lost on evangelicals, who have been quick to harness sports to personal and institutional agendas. Less than a century ago, major segments of the evangelical community considered sports a cancer on the spiritual life; today their denominational progeny lead the parade to stadiums. The cozy coupling of sports and evangelicalism shows itself not only in the outsized athletic complexes that are common features of church architecture, but also in the ease with which sport and its symbols show up in the sanctuary. Pastors incorporate pithy sports metaphors into their sermons. Famous athletes are

invited to pulpits to tell how their faith helps them compete. Some churches celebrate Super Bowl Sunday by canceling the evening service and assembling in the sanctuary to watch the game on large-screen TVs. “Faith nights” sponsored by local baseball teams draw entire congregations to the ballpark. Evangelistic organizations that center on the public’s fascination with sports flourish.

Intercollegiate sports are given such a high priority at evangelical schools that, some critics say, they hog the spotlight meant for institutions’ spiritual and academic missions. The athletic departments at many of these schools affiliate with the National Christian

genuinely concerned for the athletes’ souls but sympathetic to the often violent, hyper-competitive culture of excess that players inhabit. In Super Bowl XLI (2007), both teams’ coaches had established reputations as Christian gentlemen. The next Super Bowl brought more of the same, as standout Arizona quarterback Kurt Warner and several Steelers players seemed to be showing up everywhere declaring their faith.

THE GAME IN GOMORRAH

On one level, Christians’ attraction to sports is easily understood. Sports are fun and exciting; when played well and in healthy

the University of Memphis’s star basketball player the year prior. His coach—who has since moved to the University of Kentucky for a \$32 million, eight-year contract—claimed ignorance on the matter. This happened around the same time news reports revealed that former college basketball coach Kevin Sampson, placed on probation by the NCAA for serious rules infractions while at Oklahoma, committed the same infractions after becoming the coach at Indiana, and had lost his appeal to the NCAA for reinstatement.

Professional sports testify to an excess of money, success, and competitive zeal. Baseball records linger in a purgatory of ambiguity as

a result of players’ broad-scale use of performance-enhancing drugs. Doping scandals have so plagued the world’s premier cycling event, the Tour de France, that *New York Times* writer George Vecsey facetiously recommended that “a mob

of citizens . . . pick up wooden pitchforks and run the scoundrels out of town.”

Fighting is so rampant in the National Hockey League that we now have a website devoted to its glorification, cataloging the fights and fighters. (For those interested, during the 2008–2009 season, 734 fights between 355 players broke out during 173 different games.) When it was discovered that the New England Patriots’ head coach had arranged to videotape the sideline signals of an opposing team’s coaches, fans showed little moral outrage, probably because it seemed so tame compared with what they’d come to expect.

Lower-level sports tend to mimic those seen on television; thus, it shouldn’t surprise us when they mimic the ethos of televised sports. Youth sports programs certainly provide worthy experiences for young people, but with increasing frequency they seem to spin out of control. When a father in California is sentenced to jail for beating and berating a coach for taking his son out of a baseball game, or when a dentist sharpens the face guard on his son’s football helmet so that he can slash opposing players, or when the father of a 12-year-old hockey player beats his son’s coach to death outside the rink—because, ironically, he thought the coach was encouraging rough play—it’s fair to conclude that in many cases youth sports, like those played on a higher level, have lost their way.

That some deep theological insights might

There may be no more vivid illustration of Mark Noll’s ‘scandal of the evangelical mind’ than the way the evangelical community has neglected to think Christianly about sport.

College Athletic Association, a kind of evangelical NCAA whose 100 member institutions vie for championships in 20 sports. And as sports have invaded Christian culture, the symbols of Christianity have invaded sports. Professional football is a heady mixture of toughness, violence, and piety—vicious collisions coupled with post-touchdown genuflections, trash talk mixed with heaven-directed index fingers, anger and aggression interrupted by prayers.

Riotous celebrations are the backdrop to athletes’ nationally televised post-game testimonies. Professional football, basketball, and baseball teams have their own chaplains,

contexts, they can be constructive leisure pursuits that enrich our lives. But organized sports, played at almost every level, too often bring out the worst in us. With astonishing frequency the reputation of higher education is sullied by players’, coaches’, and alumni’s crimes and indiscretions. Recruiting scandals, under-the-table payoffs, and academic cheating—all perpetrated in the name of athletic excellence—have become such regular features on the sports pages that we have come to accept them as the cost of a Saturday afternoon’s entertainment.

In the summer of 2009, for example, we learned that someone had taken the SAT for

A PERSONAL ASIDE

Nobody likes to think ill of sport. It is all too easy to dismiss critics as prigs who are insensitive to the glorious traditions, unaware of the joys that sports can bring, inexperienced and unfamiliar with its many benefits. My own views have been shaped by a 40-year-long association with sport, first as an athlete (football, basketball, track and field), later as an official (soccer, basketball) and a college coach (basketball), and finally, as a professor and administrator in university departments that prepare physical education teachers and coaches.

In all of this, I have never fallen out of love with sport. In fact, it is my love of sport that inspires my high view of its potential—a much higher view, I would argue, than is held by many who might think me a sport hater. Yet I suppose I have become a hater of what we’ve allowed sport to become, of the feeble uses to which we try to put it, of the ugly social contexts into which we insist on inserting it, and of its distortions and abuses. Most of all, I am disappointed that Christians have failed to wring from sport its full potential for underscoring that peculiar grace that they claim marks the life of the believer. But as to my love of the essence of the sport experience, there should be no doubt. —*Shirl James Hoffman*



Not So Sporting: There's a reason the old joke—'I went to a fight and a hockey game broke out'—still gets a laugh. Every season, fights erupt on average in four out of ten games.

be gleaned from such goings-on, or that God might choose to reveal himself in sports—even in those that bring out the crudest of instincts—is, of course, possible. But I believe it is unlikely. Yet even if I am wrong, this by itself doesn't relieve Christians of the duty to seek the redemption of sports, and to point society toward a better way of playing.

THE DEAFENING SILENCE

Various described by those inside and outside as narcissistic, materialistic, violent, sensationalist, coarse, racist, sexist, brazen, raunchy, hedonistic, body-destroying, and militaristic, big-time sports culture lifts up values in sharp contrast with what Christians for centuries have understood as the embodiment of the gospel. There are simply no easy, straight-faced, intellectually respectable answers for how evangelicals can model the Christian narrative—with its emphases on servanthood, generosity, and self-subordination—while immersed in a culture that thrives on cut-throat competition, partisanship, and Darwinian struggle. If evangelical ethicist R. E. O. White is right to assert that self-absorption is behind all wrong social relationships and, for this reason, self-denial is the first ethical condition of discipleship, then elite athletes immersed in the self-consumed atmosphere of sports, where self-denial is a recipe for competitive disaster, face

a fundamental problem.

This is not the only place where the sports ethic pinches the shoe of Christian theology. While the Bible heralds the human body as the apex of creation, the vessel of the indwelling

Spirit, and reflective of the Creator's image, a large and expanding body of epidemiological evidence suggests that sports are an agent of its desecration; the latest investigations of Congress and others focus on the relationship between playing professional football and the risk of dementia.

Further, while honesty, sympathy, and generosity are the idealized derivatives of a life lived with God, recent data reveal that immersion in a culture devoted to proving one's superiority squelches rather than reinforces these virtues. (Witness the stir caused by Cedarville University's former volleyball coach for merely insisting that her players inform the referee when they had touched the ball before it went out of bounds.) As poetry adds zest to language and music adds zest to sound, so competition can add zest to play. At the same time, it is worth asking whether spending our leisure moments comparing talents, plotting self-advancing agendas, and temporarily at least, stifling feelings of sympathy might foster mindsets that negatively frame our thinking in other endeavors.

If indeed sport is marching toward Gomorrah, it seems to have escaped the attention

of large portions of the evangelical community, which continue to bask in the reflected glory of Christian athletes. Much evangelical commentary glorifies athletes and sports, but becomes timid in situations that warrant indictment. Rarely does the evangelical press ask touchy questions about tensions between the moral culture of Christianity and that of big-time sports. The silence is deafening.

In its vision of sports, bolstered by the large number of Christian athletes who have joined professional and collegiate teams, the evangelical community has yet to ask how the influx of believers has affected the morality of sports.

There may be no more vivid illustration of historian Mark Noll's "scandal of the evangelical mind" than the way the community has neglected to think Christianly about sport, or has excused itself from crafting a sensible philosophy that will help them mine the spiritual riches that sport has to offer.

THE COST OF INTELLECTUAL NEGLECT

Christians' indiscriminate acceptance of sports is just as dangerous as our ancestors' indiscriminate rejection of sports. In today's case, it has three effects: the evolution of an improbable sports theology that has stifled prophetic voices; a well-defined tendency for evangelicals and their institutions to fall into the same ethical quagmires that have trapped others in the sports community; and the Christian community's failure to consider how it might extract sport's potential for spiritual uplift and maximize its capacity to express a Christian vision.

In the intellectual vacuum that has ensued, a locker room—crafted theology has emerged, purporting to explain the relationship between sport and faith. Thirty years ago, *Sports Illustrated's* Frank Deford labeled it "Sportianity"—a triumphal evangelism blended with competitive zeal that has been crafted by and for those whose love of athletics often makes it difficult for them to view sports objectively. Sportianity is a mix of locker-room psychology and athletically slanted doctrines of assertiveness and masculinity, abetted by cherry-picked Bible

verses prescreened to ensure they don't contradict sport's reigning orthodoxies. Sportianity is more Old Testament, with its allusions to religious wars, than New Testament with its Sermon on the Mount.

In other words, Sportianity is Christian theology vetted and co-opted by the dictates of the sports industry. Not surprisingly, it cannot speak truth to power. Its doctrines are promulgated far beyond the locker rooms of the NFL, the NBA, or Major League Baseball. Rationalized and systematized, it is vigorously taught to college, high school, and even younger athletes. Its themes crop up in sermons preached from evangelical pulpits and in articles from the religious press. There are, in fact, few alternative ways of thinking about sports and faith in the evangelical community.

In spite of its theological conservatism, Sportianity advocates a quite worldly view of sports. The concrete trumps the symbolic; doing, achieving, and struggling are favored over mystery, joy, feeling, transport, and spiritual insight. When effort, sacrifice, and competitive success become the preferred ways to glorify God, joyous play—which might be what

sympathetic only to the extent that their communities would, in the words of Washington Gladden, a popular preacher of the day, “enter into them and pervade them and transform them by their own vital energy.” To these Protestants, sports evangelism was aimed at the institution itself. While sports evangelistic organizations deserve credit for their work with individual athletes, the social enterprise that tempts them—that pulls on their egos and frames their performance in violence and spectacle—is largely ignored. Evangelicals have “entered into” and “pervaded” sports, but have yet to seriously take on the burden of transformation.

Consequently, evangelicals in the sports community have too often been followers rather than leaders, adopters of the dominant ethos rather than trendsetters who challenge it. Unsurprisingly, they often become mired in the same ethical swamps that bog down other athletes and coaches who make no special claims about the transforming power of their faith. Frank Deford warned that this would happen: “The bad things about athletics have rubbed off on religion,” he wrote. “Religion

whom the school's graduate divinity school was named, the tournament the team won was that of the National Christian College Athletic Association, and the failing grade in question had been earned in a religion course.

Other examples: A Christian high school in Tennessee that prides itself on a bold evangelical stance and fields a powerhouse football team became national front-page fodder for its questionable ethics; two nationally known evangelical coaches were criticized by the press for refusing to concede that their football teams won only because referees had admittedly made mistakes near the end of the game; the basketball program at a large Christian university became so disjointed from its mission (“advancing the frontiers of knowledge while cultivating a Christian worldview”) that it became a poster child for just how slimy the subculture of university athletics can get; and the creation of the Christian Wrestling Federation, Christian Wrestling Entertainment, and Ultimate Christian Wrestling—all of which promise spectators the same violence, celebration of power, and grotesque images and freak-show ambiance seen on tv, but not,

its promoters point out, “cursing or women parading in skimpy costumes.” All of these suggest it is time for evangelicals to step back and rethink their liaison with big-time sports.

Christians will move toward higher ground when they recognize that many of the ills of sport stem not from violating the creeds of sport, but from over-conforming to them.

theologian Robert K. Johnston has called “a prolegomenon [preface] to further encounters with God”—can seem an unworthy offering. In the dialectical, serious-but-not-serious world of play, Sportians tip the scales decidedly toward the serious, made weightier by the evangelistic mission they are anxious to load onto sports.

In the process, sport played for its impact on the soul, sport that illuminates and spiritually enriches, sport that is serious but also festive and fantastical, gets short shrift. Far beyond the Sportians' horizon is the possibility that players can become what Hugo Rahner, author of *Men at Play*, eloquently called “imitator[s] of the Logos, the Heavenly Wisdom who plays upon the earth, the co-fashioner with God.”

ETHICAL SWAMPS

It is worth remembering that sport's entrée into Christianity in the late 19th century was largely conditional. Protestant leaders were

is like the tar baby—it's gotten stuck and the more it struggles, the more tar it gets on it. There's the danger when anything moral plays with anything as public, as notorious, as celebrated as sport—you get stuck.”

Recent instances prove Deford prescient, as evangelicals in sports have struggled to get unstuck when they should have been pointing the way to higher ground. Several years ago, a small Southern Baptist university's president allegedly ordered a failing grade to be removed from the transcript of the school's basketball star to keep him on the team to lead his school to a national championship. National sports pages gave the incident bold coverage, leading to the president's dismissal. The press's curiosity was piqued not so much because another college athletic program was found to be complicit in dishonest acts, but because the episode contrasted sharply with the values the school claimed to believe in and teach. But here was the crushing embarrassment: The president was an ordained minister for

MISSING THE POINT

Dutch historian Johan Huizinga pointed out in *Homo Ludens* that play is based on a certain imagination of reality, and that what's important is to grasp the meaning of this imagination in understanding how play works in human civilization. If Huizinga was correct, the question of how sports can be shaped to inspire the Christian imagination supersedes all claims about how they help us physically and psychologically or publicize our schools or help spread the gospel. Huizinga affirmed what most sports scholars have long noted: that sports, as a form of play, belong to the realm of the aesthetic, the symbolic, the ritualistic. They fundamentally appeal more to our spirits than to our physiologies. That sports first appeared in culture as a form of religious expression is not an incidental fragment of history; indeed, it may signal their proper place in the created order.

Fearful of elevating something as “trivial” as sports to an undeserved place in the pantheon



possibly favoring side-by-side competitions (swimming, golf, and track and field, for example), which don't require violence or the mental state to sustain violence, over face-to-face contact sports (football, hockey, and boxing). In particular, it's time for the Christian community to rethink its fascination with football. In light of the physical carnage wrought by this popular sport, Christian schools with football programs may be faced with the uncomfortable choice to either modify their menu of athletic offer-

of acceptable ways to celebrate the Holy Spirit's workings, evangelicals have opted to trumpet the practical benefits of sport, even when such claims are overstated. As a result, the Christian community has been like a guest that comes to a banquet, eats the appetizer, and leaves, not realizing what sumptuous delights are to come. Lacking a collective *Christian* imagination of sports, they have settled for a host of other imaginations: *consumer* imaginations, which value sport only as it advances financial or public relations interests; *military* imaginations, which conceive of sport as a partisan encounter where success is measured by victory; and *therapeutic* and *propaganda* imaginations, which value sports only as a tool to achieve some material end. The possibility that sport, properly organized and played, can inspire rather than challenge the Christian imagination is left unexplored. So is the possibility that sports can be what Hugo Rahner called a rehearsal "of that Godward directed harmony of body and soul which we call heaven," an expression of "man's hope for another life taking visible form in gesture," a "feeble imitation" of true play, which will begin "only when this world has been left behind."

Some Christian athletes have intuitively recognized this, talking about their athletic endeavors as "praise performances" or "worship experiences," and expressing a desire to "glorify God" using their talents. Yet sadly, such visions of glorifying God are almost always linked to athletic production. God is

Joy of Sports: One theologian summed up Aquinas's view of play like this: 'God plays. God creates playing. And man should play if he is to live as humanly as possible and to know reality, since it is created by God's playfulness.'

glorified through demonstrations of grit, muscularity, strategic calculation, and victory, notions that that seem more derivative of the coach's office than of the Bible. As the late theologian Lewis Smedes reminds us, glorifying God means applauding God, and that, he noted, is never very productive—at least on a human level.

STEPS TOWARD A WELL-PLAYED GAME

The call here isn't to eliminate competition, a treatment that would no doubt kill the patient along with the disease. Sport is impossible without competition. At the same time, I doubt sports can attain their highest purpose in the Christian life with some mere tinkering around the edges. Calls to "keep our games in perspective" have proven no more effective in our day than did Aquinas's pleas for moderation stem the riotous church-sponsored competitions in the 13th century. If sport played by Christians is to have a distinctive slant—especially sport sponsored by Christian institutions—it won't simply be sport done well, or played without egregious violations of the sporting code. It will be sport creatively structured and specifically crafted to express the joy of the faith.

Christians will move toward this higher goal when they recognize that many of the ills of sport stem not from violating the creeds of sport but from over-conforming to them. Progress will be made when the Christian community begins to discriminate among sports,

ings (i.e., cutting their football programs) or revise their understanding of the human body as the temple of God.

Let Christian athletes, mindful of sport's temptation to pride, shun victory celebrations and consider whether the gospel's spread is well served by on-field prayers, religious gestures, and post-game testimonies. Cheap advertisements of the faith embedded in the cheap milieu of big-time sports smack of cheap grace. Let's scrap the tired images of Christ as coach or Christ as a teammate who is always on our side. It seems to me that hot sporting blood has a much better chance of being leavened when Christ is envisioned as one's opponent.

These and other steps that Christians might take toward the well-played game may seem quixotic, maybe even heretical, to those baptized into the sports religion. They make sense only when framed in the Christian view, that sports are derivatives of the God-given play impulse—intended less to test our spiritual limits than as times and places to recover our spiritual centers of gravity and to rehearse spiritual truths, dim images of the real game that will begin when we leave this world behind. ✦

Shirl James Hoffman is emeritus professor of kinesiology at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. This article has been adapted from *Good Game: Christianity and the Culture of Sports* (Baylor University Press, 2010).

Go to ChristianBibleStudies.com for "Redeeming Sports," a Bible study based on this article.

{ COVER STORY }

ARE SPORTS THE PROBLEM?

Three views.



AMEN, AND A FOUL

By Mark Householder

I FOUND MYSELF saying “amen” more than once to Shirl James Hoffman’s well-written appeal. It’s both a worthy challenge and a chance to envision a new role for sports.

Still, at times I felt lumped in with evangelicals who are being swept up in the tide of materialism, excess, and moral freefall. When Hoffman says that evangelicals “have been quick to harness sports to personal and institutional agendas,” I call a foul. He overlooks the thousands of professional and college athletes every year who give of their time to volunteer in the U.S. and abroad for transcendent causes. They are doing it because they believe there is a victory beyond competition.

It is important to distinguish between individuals in sports and the system of sports. Both are broken due to the Fall; both are in need of the redemption found at the Cross. Over the past 50 years or so, sports have been considered a viable ministry field, and the majority of sports ministries have focused on the individual and his or her platform to influence others.

Effective ministry strategies have been employed that bring the gospel to and through the world of sports. The growth has been staggering—some form of sports ministry exists in over 200 countries around the world.

But more work can be done. It is one thing to see athletes and coaches profess Christ, and quite another to see them engage in the discipleship process that yields Christlike character.

By trying to influence individuals “one life at a time,” we have often overlooked the system of sports. Hoffman is on the mark when it comes to the systemic issues and realities. Here is the reality: Having a few athletes



It is important to distinguish between individuals in sports and the system of sports. Both are broken due to the Fall.

and coaches committed to following Christ doesn’t necessarily change sports culture. That culture is broken. Here’s where we need new ways of thinking, spiritual breakthroughs, and pioneers to lead an effort to redeem the culture of sports.

Nelson Mandela once said, “Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where once there was despair. It is more powerful than governments in breaking down barriers. It laughs in the face of discrimination.” Let’s move forward and capture a much higher view of sports. 

Mark Householder, who played football at the University of Cincinnati, is president of Athletes in Action, a sports ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ.

STAY IN THE STRUGGLE

By Benjamin J. Chase

CAN SPORTS pose problems for Christians? Absolutely. But abolishing certain sports would probably reflect a Gnostic view of the human body. I fully agree that Christians should do some soul-searching in how we approach sports. I also suspect that God's design is for us to conduct our analysis in the very throes of competition.

Obviously, there is a danger for Christians in sports. We may fail against athletic standards or to be Christ-honoring.

But such risks are no different from those faced in business, media, or any other career. I doubt that we can learn how to do sports rightly without struggle in that world.

We need Christians participating at all levels of sports, from youth leagues to the pros. Even at the collegiate level, there are many tiers of athletics, ranging from Division I to Division III, from intramurals to pickup games. In



I suspect that God's design is for us to conduct our analysis in the very throes of competition.

general, the lower you get, the less money is involved, which allows more people to play for pleasure and to enjoy a sense of community.

I played club lacrosse at Wheaton College, and we paid to play, raising an annual budget smaller than the ticket revenues many Division I lacrosse teams make in a single game. As a club team, we relied on community and creativity to meet our budget. We sold merchandise at games, did work projects, and often slept in churches on the road. We didn't have trainers, shuttles, or chartered flights. But we bonded more in petty adversities than we ever would have in luxuries. (Last year, we missed going to nationals by one game—a one-point loss to Division I Missouri State.)

College lacrosse forced us to wrestle with issues of faith and athletics in the midst of competition. Were we above reproach in everything? No, but we loved each other, prayed and talked together, often apologized to and prayed for other teams, and told many players about Jesus Christ. Other teams never saw perfection when they looked at us, but I do believe they saw Christians: people who are highly complex, just like them, yet moving toward redemption. I believe they saw people who can be honest and humble about their failures, since the grace of God fills these gaps too. I don't know what else Christians anywhere—on the field or off—can do or be. ✚

Benjamin J. Chase is a recent graduate of Wheaton College.

THE JOY OF SPORTS

By Ted Kluck

I'M AN ATHLETE. I like to run, lift, compete, and win, and I have my very own "fascination with football," as Hoffman puts it. And perhaps I've been blissfully unaware of the fact that sports have historically been considered a little too dirty and a little too lowbrow to be worthy of Christians' intellectual engagement. I guess this explains why the message boards following my online sports columns for CT always evolved into important debates on things like circumcision.

There's a sort of breathless, "finally somebody said it!" quality to Hoffman's essay, except that I think there are a lot of Christians who for years have been doing sports in the way he recommends. I'm referring to those of us who don't get to play on CBS and don't have 9-year-olds emulating our eyeball, but who have been trying to honor, glorify, and enjoy God through sports—even the high-contact ones.

And without sports like football, there would be precious little of the diversity we all seem to crave at the evangelical schools Hoffman mentions, where the demographic formula seems to be, "take a thousand well-heeled suburban, white, probably home-schooled evangelicals, and add a hundred football players."

Hoffman does a great job of pointing out that sports are full of sinners. Sure, there are a lot of self-glorifying sleazebags in sports. There are also a lot of self-glorifying Christians in sports. For many, God has become nothing more than another lucky pair of socks—another performance-enhancing drug.

But there are also a lot of Christian athletes who care about the Cross, the gospel,



There are a lot of Christian athletes who care about the Cross, the gospel, humility, joy, and sanctification.

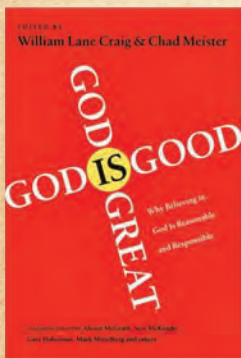
humility, joy, and true growth and sanctification. Sports provide a very public and community-oriented way to care about these things. I've met hockey players, boxers, and football players (as well as golfers, runners, and swimmers) who fit this bill.

The thing is, "the concrete trumps the symbolic" for me, in matters of faith as well as in matters of sport. There is something concrete, and comforting, in the authority of Scripture. And there was something of "hard work and pain" in what Christ did on the cross for me, the worst of sinners. And it's the acknowledgement of that work that makes play—sports—joyful. ✚

Ted Kluck, the author of *The Reason for Sports: A Christian Fanifesto* (Moody), has played pro indoor football.

THE 2010 CHRISTIANITY TODAY BOOK AWARDS

Our judging process began with 472 titles submitted by 72 publishers. *Christianity Today's* editors selected finalists in each category, and our expert judges went to work discovering the best of the bunch from 2009. Here are the 12 winners (including two ties) and 11 notables that best shed light on the people, events, and ideas that shape evangelical life, thought, and mission, with comments from the judges.



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AWARD OF MERIT

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BIBLICAL STUDIES

SIN

A History

GARY A. ANDERSON (YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS)

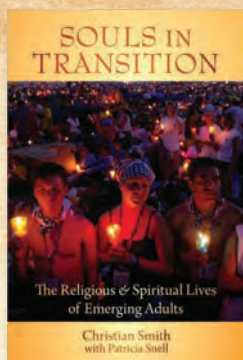
"This masterful account of the history of sin pulls together the biblical text, the church fathers, and Anselm of Canterbury. The breadth of sources used and the thoroughness of Anderson's narrative are impressive, particularly given that he is able to accomplish so much in a rather brief amount of space."

AWARD OF MERIT

THE FIRST AND SECOND LETTERS TO THE THESSALONIANS

(The New International Commentary on the New Testament)

GORDON D. FEE (EERDMANS)



CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE

SOULS IN TRANSITION

The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults

CHRISTIAN SMITH WITH PATRICIA SNELL (OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS)

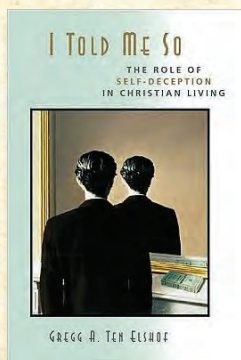
"Sociologist Smith and collaborator Snell present an in-depth scholarly study of the religious, spiritual, moral, and emotion-laden lives of adults ages 18 to 23. The implications of this study for Christian ministry are enormous. Here is an indispensable resource for parents, pastors, campus ministers, and everyone concerned for the future of the church."

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RICHARD JOHN NEUHAUS (BASIC)



CHRISTIAN LIVING

I TOLD ME SO

Self-Deception and the Christian Life

GREGG A. TEN ELSHOF (EERDMANS)

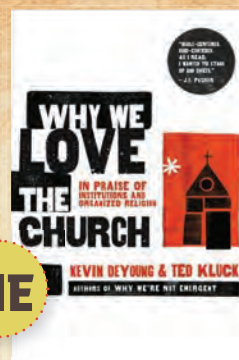
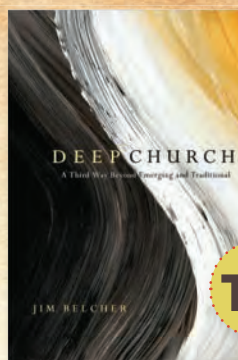
"By combining philosophy, psychology, and theology with practical examples, Ten Elshof clearly shows how we all are self-deceived, and why that is detrimental to our spiritual growth. The author has written a book that is not only intriguing, readable, applicable, and thoughtful, but also a catalyst for self-examination."

AWARD OF MERIT

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Why Celibacy Must Be Reinvented in Today's Church

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WHY WE LOVE THE CHURCH

In Praise of Institutions and Organized Religion

KEVIN DEYOUNG AND TED KLUCK (MOODY)

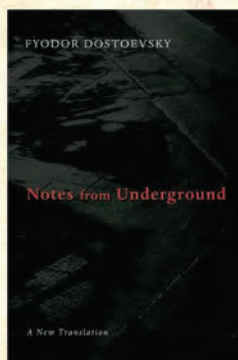
"DeYoung and Kluck respond to the church's many critics with theological verve, historical backbone, biblical agility, and—above all—an infectious love for the bride of Christ, tawdry or frumpy though she can be."

AWARD OF MERIT

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FICTION

NOTES FROM UNDERGROUND

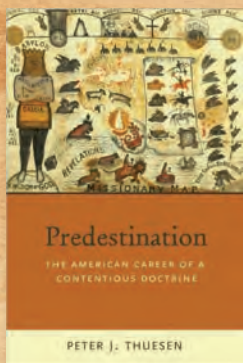
FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY; BORIS JAKIM, TRANSLATOR (EERDMANS)

"Translator Jakim captures so well the coarse, insistent voice of Dostoevsky's underground man, who champions freedom of the will but (prophetically) finds himself unwilling to resist the cruelty in his own heart. This modern, readable translation still conveys the rhythms and colors of 19th-century Russia."

AWARD OF MERIT

ANGEL TIME

ANNE RICE (KNOPF)



HISTORY / BIOGRAPHY

PREDESTINATION

The American Career of a Contentious Doctrine

PETER J. THUSEN (OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS)

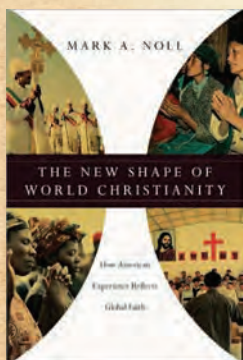
"Surprisingly, Thuesen makes the history of a doctrine—one riddled with arcane terminology and hair-splitting distinctions—not only accessible but also engaging. He has produced an intellectual history that puts ideas in their social context and takes seriously the lives of the men and women who thought about them."

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How American Experience Reflects Global Faith

MARK A. NOLL (INTERVARSITY ACADEMIC)

"With insightful research and poignant historical observation, Noll effectively demonstrates that American individualism, voluntarism, and anti-institutionalism have had a much greater impact on the global church than have money, resources, or power. Noll adds an innovative thesis to our understanding of the contribution of U.S. churches to the amazing growth of the non-Western church."

AWARD OF MERIT

THE HOLE IN OUR GOSPEL

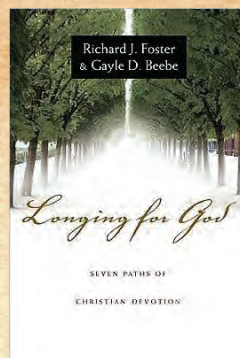
What Does God Expect of Us?

RICHARD STEARNS (THOMAS NELSON)

TIE

THE WORLD MISSIONARY CONFERENCE, EDINBURGH 1910

BRIAN STANLEY (EERDMANS)



SPIRITUALITY

LONGING FOR GOD

Seven Paths of Christian Devotion

RICHARD J. FOSTER AND GAYLE D. BEEBE (INTERVARSITY)

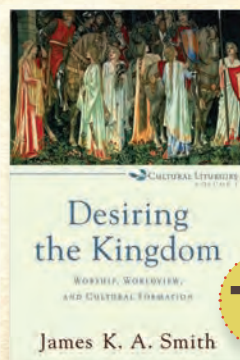
"By featuring the lives and teaching of 26 spiritual masters from church history, Foster and Beebe shine a light on seven paths (or orientations) to spiritual development. This survey brings together shared themes and unique contributions that guide those journeying with and toward God."

AWARD OF MERIT

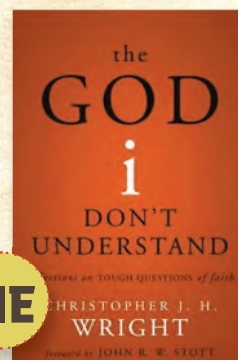
THE END OF SUFFERING

Finding Purpose in Pain

SCOTT CAIRNS (PARACLETE)



TIE



THEOLOGY / ETHICS

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But what "school" is most distinctly Christian? What is the best way to put that view into practice? Does psychological research confirm Scriptural truth, or vice versa? Should Christian psychologists be concerned with the bias of secularism in their field? What does brain and genetic research portend for the theoretical and clinical psychologist? What are the challenges and opportunities confronting individuals called to serve in the field?

These questions will be part of a rich and lively conversation among proponents of the five major approaches to the relationship between psychology and the Christian faith, hosted by the Bryan Institute for Critical Thought and Practice. This conversation will benefit clinician and lay person, teacher and researcher. You are cordially invited.

Schedule

Friday, March 19

11:00 am **Eric Johnson** "Five Views: A Dialogue"

7:00 pm **Warren Brown** "Neuroscience, Psychology, and Faith: Levels of Explanation and the Search for Resonance"

Saturday, March 20

9:00 am **Stanton Jones** "A Christian View of Persons & the Advance of Psychological Science: An Integrative Perspective"

10:30 am **Paul Watson** "Whose Psychology? Which Rationality? Christian Psychology after Postmodernism"

1:00 pm **John Coe** "Psychology in the Spirit: A Transformational Approach to Psychology and Christianity"

2:30 pm **David Powlison** "The Question of Causality: Nature, Nurture, and a Whole Lot More"

4:00 pm **Panel Discussion**

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Warren S. Brown, Jr.
Ph.D. Director, Lee Travis
Research Institute,
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John Coe Ph.D.
Director of the
Institute for
Spiritual Formation,
Biola University



Eric Johnson Ph.D,
Lawrence and Charlotte
Hoover Professor of
Pastoral Care, Southern
Baptist Theological
Seminary



Stanton Jones Ph.D.
Provost and former
Chairperson of the
Psychology
Department,
Wheaton College



David Powlison Ph.D.
Professor, Christian
Counseling &
Educational
Foundation and
Westminster
Theological Seminary



Paul Watson Ph.D.
U.C. Foundation
Professor and Chair of
Psychology, University
of Tennessee at
Chattanooga

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R

RAISED NEAR
the mountains
of Sandpoint,
Idaho, nov-

elist Marilynne Robinson remembers sensing God's presence there long before she had a name for him. "I was aware to the point of alarm of a vast energy of intention, all around me," she writes, "barely restrained, and I thought everyone else must be aware of it." Perhaps they were, but in a culture in which "it was characteristic to be silent about things that in any way moved them," the young Robinson was, in her deepest experiences, alone.

There were mentors, though. She remembers her grandfather holding an iris blossom before her, quietly commending its miracle of form, and the "patient old woman who taught me Presbyterianism," offering Moses' burning bush and Pharaoh's dream of famine as wonders to contemplate. In their reticent attention, both mentors gave Robinson a way to stand before mystery and gradually behold it. "It was as if some old relative had walked me down to the lake knowing an imperious whim of heaven had made it a sea of gold and glass, and had said, This is a fine evening, and walked me home again."

Robinson's first novel, *Housekeeping* (1980), began as a series of prose exercises inspired by the great 19th-century American writers Herman Melville, Emily Dickinson, and Henry David Thoreau. Their rapturous, attentive language drew Robinson back to her childhood landscape, giving her a way to re-inhabit that spiritually charged world. Readers greeted *Housekeeping* as a masterpiece, praising in particular the haunting voice of its narrator, Ruth, whose prose circled and looped, creating a world out of orphaned bits of memory and observation. Raised by her

transient, railroad-riding Aunt Sylvie, Ruth finds in her aunt's disregard for boundaries a way to touch what she had lost. And what Sylvie taught Ruth, Dickinson and her peers taught Robinson. *Housekeeping* demonstrates the power of their attention to the world, their confidence in "the sacramental quality of reality." To Robinson, their way of seeing things is, sadly, nearly gone.

Robinson wrote no novels for almost 25 years after *Housekeeping*, instead deliberately reading her way back into the life and culture that had inspired Dickinson and others. She discovered that one voice influential for those writers was John Calvin, a figure Robinson has been working hard to restore. In her preface to *John Calvin: Steward of God's Covenant* (2006), Robinson bristles at the fact



BRIAN RAY / AP



{ THEOLOGY }

KEEPING PERCEPTION NIMBLE

John Calvin has given Pulitzer Prize winner **Marilynne Robinson** a way of seeing that imbues her novels with the grandeur of God.
By Thomas Gardner

that the Reformer has been hidden under a caricature, known only as “an apostle of gloom dominating a gloomy city,” his legacy one of “repression and persecution.” Robinson instead finds three liberating themes in Calvin’s thought, and in the preface and an earlier collection of essays, *The Death of Adam* (1998), she articulates how they impress upon her literary vision.

PERCEPTION IS THE POINT

For Robinson, Calvin’s theology centers on the belief that God has given individuals the ability to commune with and respond to him without the mediation of priests or bishops. “Perception is at the center of Calvin’s theology,” she observes; God willingly floods our senses with his grandeur in such a way that we can take it in and reflect it back, his

glory “shining forth” as we participate in it. “It is as if we were to find a tender solicitude toward us in the fact that the great energy that rips galaxies apart also animates our slightest thoughts.” Think how elevated a vision of the human soul this is, Robinson suggests, and how far it is from how we often view ourselves.

At the same time, our ability to perceive

God is deeply compromised. None of us sees clearly; indeed, none of us even desires to. All of us turn away from God's presence, failing "to acknowledge what ought to be obvious," Robinson writes, inclined instead "to indolence and selfishness, dishonesty, pride and error, cruelty." She calls the notion of total depravity the "counterweight to Calvin's rapturous humanism," insisting that we can't understand the one aspect of his thought without the other.

Working together, writes Robinson, these twinned elements of "our strangely mixed nature" mean that the passage of a soul "through the vale of its making, or its destruction" will be marked by halts and recoveries,

deepening awareness of the grandeur of God and the fragile beauty of one's neighbors. To borrow a phrase from Dickinson, it keeps believing nimble.

GRACE IN GILEAD

Robinson has recently returned to the novel, producing two honored works: *Gilead*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2005, and *Home*, which won Britain's Orange Prize for Fiction in 2009. Both novels are set in Gilead, Iowa, in 1957, and bring to life the history and rhythms of what was, at the time, a new landscape for Robinson, who began teaching at the Iowa Writers' Workshop in 1989. The mid-century setting allows her

Robinson bristles at the fact that Calvin has been hidden under a caricature, his legacy one of 'repression and persecution.'

each attempt to find meaning chastened by a recognition of limits. This almost exactly describes Ruth's voice in *Housekeeping*, now traced to one of its sources.

Not everyone, however, carries this realization as a great weight, or senses a chance to find release. The doctrine of election, developed in Scripture but popularly associated with Calvin, is a third element for Robinson, who links it to Calvin's focus on perception. True perception—"the radical understanding of the presence of God, and of his nature as manifest in Christ"—is something God must grant a person. It is not natural to our fallen state.

And because God grants such ability entirely according to his own mind, we are brought into a chastening—and, to Robinson, exhilarating—encounter with "the freedom and mystery of God." Far from inducing a dulled passivity, such a doctrine leads to a

to explore a culture in which post-Calvin assumptions about soul and perception and limits are still operative. That readers have used words like *grace*, *radiance*, and *gravity* to describe Robinson's characters suggests that, in their probing, revising reflection on their internal selves, the characters are connected to their 19th-century literary ancestors. And both, it is clear, draw from the same source.

Gilead features the voice of John Ames, a 76-year-old Congregationalist minister writing a series of letters to his 7-year-old son, to be read after he dies. (Robinson is an active member of a Congregationalist church in Iowa City, having moved, as she puts it, "the doctrinal and demographic inch that separates Presbyterians from Congregationalists.") Ames lost his first wife and infant daughter in childbirth, then spent decades living alone, writing sermons and listening to baseball

in the dark, only to have those wilderness years redeemed by a younger woman with whom he unexpectedly fell in love. They married and bore the adored son he writes to now.

These are the major events of Ames's life, but what he wants to tell his son is what his

soul made of them. All three themes that Robinson highlights from her reading of Calvin are at play here. Ames believes he has been called to respond to the sparks of God's presence visible to him as he passes through life. "What an amazing instrument you are," he tells his son. "What a power you have to experience beyond anything you might ever actually need." In Ames's eyes, we are actors on a stage, and God is our audience—an idea he credits to Calvin. We are called to make something of the highs and lows that come to us, all for God's good pleasure.

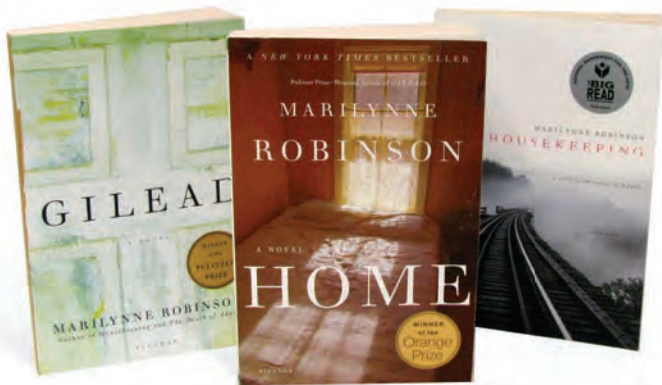
Yet our souls draw back, and we are burdened by our distance both from God and from the deepest part of ourselves. Ames reassures his son, though, that God gives us eyes and the courage to trust them despite our limits, emboldening us "to acknowledge that there is more beauty than our eyes can bear, that precious things have been put into our hands, and to do nothing to honor them is to do great harm."

One memory Ames recounts—of watching his father help a community take apart a church that had burned down—demonstrates this struggle to perceive. Ames's father squatted beside him and, wet and covered in soot, fed his son a biscuit from his scorched hand. "It seems to me much of my life was comprehended in that moment," Ames writes. Returning time and again to the ashy bitterness of the biscuit his father gave him, Ames tries to pinpoint the meaning of it. The bread becomes, in his musing about it, "the bread of affliction," given to both of them by the Lord at separate times. He finally sees it as God's own body, broken for our nourishment, all that he can with confidence offer to his son. "I hope you will put yourself in the way of the gift," Ames quietly remarks, passing on what he has made of his initial perception, leaving room for grace.

THE PRODIGAL COMES HOME

Robinson returns to the Gilead drama in *Home*, working through it again from the vantage of the Boughton family. Robert Boughton is Ames's best friend and an aging Presbyterian minister who has struggled mightily with his ne'er-do-well son, Jack, recently returned to Gilead after two decades.

Jack's sister Glory has also just returned at age 38, and struggles alongside her father to make sense of Jack. We have already been introduced to Jack's unsettling presence in





references it as he seeks to understand why he cannot rest and believe, venturing that perhaps he is one from whom grace is withheld. Robinson, wisely, does not try to address the contentious doctrine in that form. Rather, she is curious about the ability of the other characters to rest in the mystery that the doctrine insists on—that God opens eyes and hearts when and how he chooses.

Glory stares at Jack and is gradually drawn away from a habitual belief, based on the patterns of her family, that “things would come right if only enough effort was given to making them come right.” She becomes someone who can shake her head in awe at a world beyond her control. Suddenly the gospel she has heard all

Gilead. He radiates estrangement and uncertainty; an “incandescence of unease” seems to hang about him. Glory can’t take her eyes off of him and gradually moves from anger and intimidation at his “inaccessible strangeness,” to a posture of sorrow, wonder, and love. Or, to return to Calvin, she begins to perceive in Jack’s inexplicability a live soul. The sparks he emits are the sparks of a soul in hiding but

health, too tired to forgive. He has loved Jack more than any of his other children. Although he has tried to overlook Jack’s life-long estrangement, he has not been able to forget a series of events: Jack’s impregnating and abandoning a local girl over 20 years ago; his decades-long disappearance; his absence during his mother’s funeral 10 years ago.

As Boughton wearies and loses control of his tongue, all of that failed effort returns in the form of bitterness. “Things don’t change, I guess. People don’t. So it seems.” He mutters this after one disappointment. “Tired of it,” he chokes out

near the end of the novel, withdrawing his hand when an equally broken Jack prepares to leave again.

The central question of *Home* is why Glory and her father react so differently to Jack. Why does one soul shrivel before his wounded presence, while the other expands to accommodate him? What it comes down to, I think, is election. Both novels give the doctrine a fair amount of attention. Jack

her life, often from her father’s lips, comes alive. Boughton stares at his son and sees only his own failure. Despite his words, he is not able to rest in God’s sovereignty, and it nearly destroys him.

Near the end of *Home*, Glory has an insight that makes full sense only when the reader knows the lost voices that Robinson is recalling. As Jack walks away from Gilead one more time, weary and sick of the very taste of himself, Glory quietly remarks: “A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and as one from whom men hide their face. Ah, Jack.” She is remembering Isaiah’s suffering servant, of course. She sees in Jack the great burden of human grief and suffering, and our yearning for it to be otherwise. And she sees an even greater mystery: the incarnate God taking on that burden in Jack’s place. She sees this and reaches out to him.

It is an amazing thing to be able to dramatize this inner act, to make it attractive and alive. These are the motions that Robinson’s novels teach us to attend to. ✦

Thomas Gardner is professor of English at Virginia Tech and writes regularly for CT sister publication *Books @ Culture*.

Robinson is curious about her characters’ ability to rest in the mystery that the doctrine of election insists on—that God opens eyes and hearts when and how he chooses.

desperately wishing to be found. For Glory, Jack is a “shockingly unclothed” version of us all, unable to imagine that he can ever be forgiven or welcomed home. Jack “seemed to feel the presence of a soul,” says Glory. “Cankered, perhaps, but that was what gave him his awareness of it.” It’s to this broken soul that she draws near.

Glory’s father, on the other hand, closes himself off from his son. He is declining in



GENDRON

THERE'S POWER IN THE BLOOD

On the heels of the *Twilight* Saga's success, Christian novelists are tapping the riches of vampire mythology.

By Elena Evans

V

AMPIRES are hot stuff right now. The preternatural creatures leer seductively from the covers of books and lust dramatically after their prey in television shows and movies. A glance at recommended reading lists for those who enjoyed *Twilight*, Stephenie Meyer's wildly popular vampire-romance series, yields hundreds of vampire entries, the majority published in the past three years.

This isn't the first time the undead have become a cultural obsession. Religious scholar J. Gordon Melton traces the word *vampire* to the Slavic "upyr," first recorded in 1047. Folkloric tales of night-walking monsters that drink blood to gain immortality surface in the chronicles of ancient Mesopotamia, Africa, and Europe. But the vampire's most recent resurrection owes more to two 19th-century tales, John Polidori's *The Vampyre* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Both authors transformed the vampire from a bloated, red-faced, flabby creature into a monster with sex appeal—sleek and suave, epitomized by *Twilight*'s hero, Edward Cullen—shifting from the purely scary to the intriguing and tempting.

Anne Rice, whose *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) and subsequent Vampire Chronicles have established her as the premier vampire-centric storyteller of this generation, believes the creatures continue to fascinate because we see something of ourselves in them.

"The vampire is a monster who preys on his brothers and sisters, but loves them and needs them emotionally as well as physically," she told *Christianity Today*. "There are times when almost anyone might confess to feeling like a vampire—for using or abusing someone else, for taking rather than giving, for being in pain yet wanting to hang on to life no matter how difficult it gets."

Rice believes the current craze is most likely author-driven, following *Twilight*'s success. "Certain authors develop the mythology, and their work catches on," she says. "The public appetite is potentially

insatiable because the potential of the idea is so great."

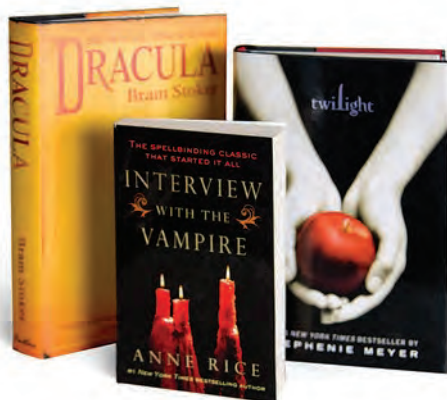
Beth Felker Jones, a theology professor at Wheaton College and author most recently of *Touched by a Vampire: Discovering the Hidden Messages in the Twilight Saga*, believes Meyer's series is so popular because its romance resonates with readers' desire for radical love.

"There's nothing halfway about Bella's love for Edward," Jones says, "or her belief that she has found complete meaning and fulfillment in him." And that's what Jones finds disturbing about the series: Bella "doesn't have any hopes, interests, or desires outside of Edward. She's even willing to sacrifice her soul for his sake." And the vampire motif only raises the stakes: "Readers wait to see who will get bitten and who might have to die in the quest for love."

Shawna Ferrell, owner of the Christian review website Teen Lit Review, wrote cautiously about *Twilight* in 2008, concluding that she couldn't recommend it for teens.

"Teens today are bombarded with all kinds of shows about

paranormal activity, witches, and vampires that are specifically designed to appeal to their generation," Ferrell says. To an adolescent girl who may feel undesirable, "the idea of a superbly handsome young man who is desperately in love with her is very appealing." Because vampires are both "cool and sexy," they possess "everything our media-worshiping society says it takes to be beautiful and thus accepted."



BLOOD DRIVES

While Meyer and the authors following her lead borrow heavily from *Romeo and Juliet* and other archetypal romances, traditional vampire folklore found much source material in Christian theology. The idea of achieving immortality through blood is central to both traditions—the Christian, through the life-giving blood of Christ, and the vampire, through drinking the blood of victims. Vampire legends are rich with Christian symbols, most notably the crucifix (believed to protect mortals) and the consecrated bread and wine of Communion.

University of Richmond English professor Elisabeth Rose Gruner notes that both Christianity and vampirism equate blood with life. Humans instinctually understand that blood is life-giving. But the blood-drinking aspect of vampirism is a “ghastly parody of Christianity,” Gruner told CT. While the Christian

Allen Arnold, senior vice president of Thomas Nelson Fiction, was on board from the beginning. Since the story of Christianity is one of redemption, Arnold says, Christian fiction should depict that redemption regardless of the subject matter. “Rather than flee from a genre, we prefer to dive in and try to redeem it through a wholly original take.”

As to the Christian community's reaction to the trilogy, whose final installment, *Valley of Bones*, releases in spring 2010, Wilson readily admits that some have objected to the story. But not all: “With anything unique, the brave try it first and then word of mouth brings in the curious.”

LEADING TO DARK PLACES?

Thirsty, Christian novelist Tracey Bateman's own vampire-themed book, was released by WaterBrook Press in October 2009. She believes the cultural fascination with

says. “As followers of Christ who long to be in relationship with him, the idea of eternal separation—no death, no redemption—strikes empathy and heartbreak in us in a meaningful way.”

If Christian vampire fiction is a trend to embrace, though, Felker Jones says it will require more discernment. “After my initial interest in *Twilight* and its popularity, I have peeked at some of the other vampire stuff out there, and I do worry that it leads to dark places.” Many of the books dwell too heavily on the “disordered and grotesque connections between vampire lore and fallen sexuality,” she says.

Rice thinks the worry over vampire fantasies is overblown. “Readers know perfectly well what is fantasy and what is reality,” she says. “They don't gravitate to vampires because vampires are evil. They gravitate to them because of what they can reveal about us and our suffering and our desires.”

The fantasy-reality line doesn't always hold, however, says William Schnoebelen, founder of the Iowa-based apologetics ministry With One Accord. Before coming to Christ, the former Freemason and Wiccan says that he was also a member of a vampire sect: a “full-blown ‘church’ with sacraments and a kind of Mass, a dark reflection of the Catholic liturgy.” Drinking blood was a perverse facsimile of the Lord's Supper.

“It does not take much of a leap to see the vampire as a kind of dark Christ,” Schnoebelen says, “who offers immortality through his blood but without all the moral standards.” Yet Schnoebelen doesn't take umbrage at Christian vampire novels. “I am a living example of someone in vampirism who was redeemed and came to Christ.”

Rice says the Christian vampire story is a logical extension of the vampire myth. “Since the vampire starts out as a human being,” she says, “it's quite natural to explore the idea of his wanting redemption or to put an end to his cursed existence of drinking human blood. In other words, the myth is very compatible with Christian ideas and can obviously be developed well in that direction.

“The real evils in this world are not vampires,” Rice says. “They are hunger, injustice, genocide, war. Vampire stories are a relatively safe way to explore human nature.”

‘What greater message is there than a creature ravaged by sin finding redemption? And how fitting that redemption comes by way of blood.’

~ Tracey Bateman, author

believer attains eternal life by accepting the blood freely shed on his or her behalf, the vampire achieves immortality by sucking the life out of another.

Thomas Nelson was one of the first publishers to revisit the parallels between Christian thought and vampire myth, publishing in 2008 *Field of Blood*, the first installment in suspense writer Eric Wilson's Jerusalem's Undead trilogy. Wilson follows the tainted blood of Judas Iscariot as it reaches the Collectors, evil vampires who crave the blood of Christian believers yet know that it will destroy them.

“I figured this would spell the end of my writing career,” Wilson laughs. But he wanted to respond to the “resurgence of interest in the vampire myth: the undead seeking unnatural life through the blood of the living.” The fascination with blood is a perversion of the pure, atoning nature of Christ's blood, Wilson says—a “cheap counterfeit” of the salvation that Christians claim through the blood of Jesus. “It was time to reclaim the genuine concept.”

vampires stems from their immortality: “There is something about the question, ‘What happens when we die?’ that compels us toward the eternal souls of vampires.” The vampire in *Thirsty* is a metaphor for alcohol addiction and generational curses. Bateman told CT that when the book began to take shape, “I knew it was going to be very personal,” and that writing a Christian vampire novel was “tricky.” But “what greater message is there than a creature ravaged by sin, separated from God, finding redemption?” she says. “And how fitting that redemption comes by way of blood.”

Shannon Marchese, senior editor for fiction at WaterBrook, says that while the goal of Christian publishing isn't to emulate worldly trends, it's important to critically engage what consumers are already reading. Christian vampire fiction allows readers to experience the mythology in a new way.

“Christians who have followed vampire stories back to Stoker's *Dracula* have been fascinated by the powerful theme of separation from God running through these stories,” she



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'HUNGER CAN BE CONQUERED'

And, says former *Wall Street Journal* reporter **Roger Thurow**, churches have a crucial role to play. Interview by Rob Moll

TWO COMPLETELY DIFFERENT CONVERSATIONS about food are taking place around the world. One is among the well-fed, who ask themselves, "What should I eat?" The other is among the underfed, who wonder, "How can I keep from starving?"

Christians influence these two conversations significantly, according to *Wall Street Journal* reporters Roger Thurow and Scott Kilman, authors of *Enough: Why the World's Poorest Starve in an Age of Plenty* (Public Affairs). They believe Christians should better understand that most cases of malnutrition and chronic hunger and nearly all starvation can be prevented if the right reforms are put into place. Rob Moll, an editor at large for *Christianity Today*, recently interviewed Thurow, now a senior fellow with the Chicago Council of Global Affairs.

Why use moral and theological language in a mainstream book about world hunger?

There's the political side of hunger and a policy prism. But there is this moral imperative to solving hunger. It's the right thing to do. Churches are extremely important for pushing the moral importance of the issue of hunger. It is something appreciated and understood in churches, since one of the main precepts of all religions is to feed the hungry. And for Christians, Matthew 25:35, there it is: "I was hungry and you gave me food... What you did to the least of these my brethren, you did unto me" (v. 40).

Bono referred to that passage when he was at Wheaton College on his Heart of America tour. Francis Pelekamoyo, the head of Opportunity International in Malawi, searched the Bible and wondered: *What should I do after my years as central bank governor?* That's the passage he kept coming back to. This is what we should do. This is what Jesus wants us to do.

We saw the importance of the churches in creating a grassroots clamor on debt relief and AIDS. Churches were important in delivering President George W. Bush's base, in support for what became PEPFAR, which is one of his great foreign policy legacies.

This is why hunger can be conquered, because the precedent is there. We can stir up this grassroots clamor on these issues. Why not on hunger?

Why are there still starving people? Isn't there enough food for everyone?

The hunger numbers are escalating rapidly. Before the food crisis of 2008, maybe 850 million people were at risk of starvation. In 2009, it's over 1 billion, about 15 percent or 16 percent of the world's population. A couple of years ago, the number was 13 percent.

One thing we saw in 2008, when the price of food skyrocketed, was greater demand from India, China, and other emerging economies. As people become more prosperous, they are eating more meat. So their hogs and cattle need more feed.

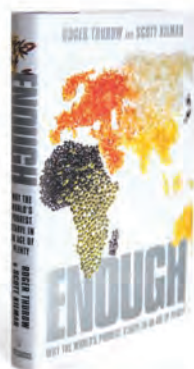
We also saw the cost of negligence. The world didn't carry the Green Revolution forward into Africa. That not only deprived us of a source of food but also created the need for high levels of food aid.

What did the Green Revolution achieve?

Agriculture scientists led by Norman Borlaug developed a new kind of breeding method that resulted in a wheat strain that was more adaptable. It turned out to be just what India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh—which were the world's famine zones in the 1960s—needed. That seed goes over there and *boom*, brings a lot of people out of hunger. It wasn't long after that a country like India has surpluses of wheat and rice. The Green Revolution then moves on to other places in Asia. This formed the basis for the great economic growth seen in India and China over the past couple of

decades. People were freed from the task of growing food to be able to do other things.

But Green Revolution techniques weren't applied in Africa. Agriculture development spending in the developing world fell off a cliff. In Haiti, the peasant farmers were told they should be working in factories making underwear. If you export the underwear, then you buy food.





'Unlike many international development issues, agriculture has attracted average Christians who are able to make a huge difference.'

~ Roger Thurow

Maybe that works in theory, but what happens when the price of rice skyrockets? Suddenly, export earnings aren't buying enough rice. We have rice shortages. There are riots in the streets.

Why does farming need assistance?

Farming is an inherently risky business. You are dependent on the climate. You are dependent on the rains. The farmers aren't in control of the prices. In the richer parts of the world, people share the risk. There are future contracts where the farmer knows what price

for the World are all actively trying to help.

Bread for the World got two women in Birmingham, Alabama, involved. These women happen to be in the constituency of the congressman who was the gatekeeper for the debt relief legislation. They invite him to an event at their church, and he shows up. God works in mysterious ways. They thought, *We'll invite all these members of Congress.* Well, here comes this guy, and he turns out to be the gatekeeper for the legislation. They connected him to David Beckmann, president of Bread for the World, and talked to him about the

buy this first? If someone doesn't come and buy it, we won't have room or money to buy food during the next harvest."

The World Food Program is creating "if you grow it, we will buy it" futures contracts. That's the market engine getting farmers to grow as much as they can.

How has your book been received? Have you had responses to your criticism of the food aid industry and USAID?

Presenting those examples in our book as the unintended consequences of food aid adds to the body of evidence. Many people believe that we should keep the food in food aid. As people become more aware that African farmers are buf-

feted by forces beyond their control, people will see that our policies have an impact.

How are churches going forward on the hunger issue?

We're at this great moment of opportunity now where the Obama administration is talking about this. The President has talked about it on a number of occasions. The political leadership is there. Combine that with the activity of the Gates Foundation. Corporations are discovering this issue. Universities are starting to turn on to this. The relief community is putting this on the top of their agenda.

But for anything to happen, it has to come from voices that are raised on this issue. We have this moment of opportunity. It's really important that clamor comes from the churches.

What can a church do?

Church pastors or education directors can make congregations more aware of hunger and inspire members to get involved.

The work of faith-based organizations shows how individuals can make a huge difference in the fight against hunger. That's why we have provided a number of individual examples in the book, to hopefully provide inspiration. That's why there is a spiritual thread running through the narrative of the book.

It's such a fundamental of the faith. Matthew 25 is one of the more eloquent passages of the Bible. "What you did to the least of these my brethren, you did unto me." It is the moral issue of our time. Individuals can have such an impact. We can all participate in the solution to hunger. 

Wouldn't it be a grand irony if the continent now receiving emergency food aid becomes a continent that feeds the world? That's Africa's potential.

he'll be getting. There's crop insurance. There are price supports. There are subsidies. The intention is to spread the risk so the farmers can grow as much food as possible, because we're interested in food security.

In Africa, farmers bear 100 percent of the risk. There are very little profits. In the United States, when a crop fails, somebody's writing a check, usually the government. In Africa, the crop fails and people die. If there's no safety net and no sharing of the risk, farmers are left hanging.

What is Africa's agricultural potential?

Africa is the final frontier of food. We're going to need to double food production by 2050. Where's it going to come from? What country has potential? The water sources in Africa are underutilized. There's land available for production.

Wouldn't it be a grand irony if the continent now receiving emergency food aid becomes a continent that is helping to feed the world? That's Africa's potential.

Unlike many international development issues, agriculture has attracted average Christians who are able to make a huge difference. The Foods Resource Bank, a Christian organization based in Michigan and Illinois, is linking up churches and farmers with organizations and community groups in Africa. U.S. Christians are helping African farmers build water retention ponds and irrigation systems.

If you get the farmers and people in churches more aware of what's happening in Africa, they will respond. Plus, there's a faith imperative. So Opportunity International, the Foods Resource Bank, and Bread

Bible and hunger around the world.

He starts using this language in the committee hearings, and the Clinton staffers are there. They hear this and go back and tell the White House: This conservative Republican is talking about starving kids in Africa in the finance committee meetings. As a result, the debt relief legislation passed.

What's wrong with food aid that ships American food to hungry people elsewhere?

American food aid saves a lot of lives every year. However, it does add time for delivery and a large expense for transportation.

It can also sap the incentive of farmers. What we call for in the book is that 50 percent of food aid should be in cash. Canada and Europe have gone 100 percent cash. We figure it's good that American food is positioned on the high seas. It can stabilize a situation in an emergency. That's good. But it should be half food aid, half cash.

Cash provides a market for local farmers. It gives them incentive. The two years prior to the famine in Ethiopia were preceded by bumper harvests. They had great harvests, but afterwards prices collapsed 80 percent in some parts of the country. Farmers cut back on fertilizer, hybrid seed, and irrigation. They knew there would be less production. But the traders held back some of the crop from the bumper years. So in 2003, when famine hit, they had some food in warehouses. But there was no money to buy it.

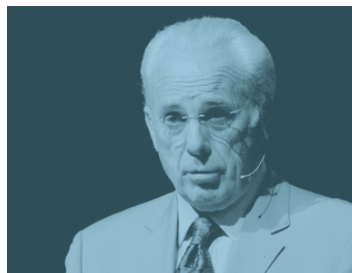
Then the U.S. brought in food aid. The trucks carrying American food aid went right past warehouses full of food. Ethiopian traders looked at that and asked, "Why can't you



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SOWING SUBVERSION IN THE FIELD OF RELATIVISM

More important than winning the argument against relativism is winning the relativist for Christ. By Mark L. Y. Chan

Globalization and migration have brought religious pluralism—something that Asians have lived with for millennia—to the West. In this month's installment of the Global Conversation, Singaporean theologian Mark Chan mines his experience as an Asian believer to help Christians everywhere evangelize those who have been blinded by the fallacies of relativism.

DUE TO GLOBALIZATION and the migration of peoples across national boundaries, religious pluralism has become more pronounced in the so-called Christian West. A shrinking world has brought religions and their adherents closer to each other. We meet people of other races. We learn about their cultures and beliefs through television and the Internet. The growing presence of mosques and temples—not to mention ethnic (i.e., non-Western) restaurants—reflects the increasingly multiethnic and multireligious nature of Western societies.

This pluralism may be relatively new in the West, but it has always been the order of the day in the lands of Asia. Virtually all the major world religions have their roots in Asian history, and they continue to command the allegiance of billions.

The majority of Christians today live alongside people of other faiths. In this, they are not unlike the earliest Christians, who proclaimed Jesus as Savior and Lord in the face of the many gods and lords of Greco-Roman society.

Like them, we are called to embrace, embody, and declare the truth that God has revealed himself definitively and finally in Jesus Christ. Through his death and resurrection, sinners find forgiveness of sin and are reconciled to God. How then shall we proclaim the finality of Christ, given the fact of religious pluralism and the relativizing of absolute truth claims that often comes with it?

Living in a racially and religiously diverse society, Singapore's Christians have had to learn not only how to live with adherents of other religions, but also how to work with them for the common good. And they are to do this without compromising their faith. Some argue that social harmony can only be achieved and maintained if religionists desist from making exclusive truth claims. The church's challenge is to demonstrate the fallacy of this way of thinking.

FROM PLURALISM TO RELATIVISM

Some Christian thinkers have jettisoned the uniqueness of Christ and embraced pluralism. They maintain that all religions are equally valid paths to God or an ultimate divine reality, and that no single religion can claim to have the final word on truth.

They move beyond a descriptive and social pluralism, which allows for a diversity of religious expressions, to a metaphysical pluralism. Such pluralistic ideas (in both the West and Asia) unwittingly sound like Vedanta Hinduism, which teaches that, just as all rivers flow into the same ocean, so all religions lead to the same ultimate reality. Jesus is but one among many ways to that reality.

Some professing Christians in Asia regard Christ as but one avatar among many possible manifestations of the divine. Their relativizing of the truth of Christ owes much to the monistic assumptions of their culture. To be sure, followers of Christ in Asia need to embody the truth within their cultural contexts, but never at the expense of God's truth.

To pluralists, religions are historically contingent expressions of an underlying ultimate spiritual reality. They argue that one should look beyond creedal distinctions to the life transformation that comes from an experiential encounter with that basic reality that all religions point to and mediate.

This decoupling of spirituality from religion not only carries the aroma of political correctness, it also sits well with the postmodern tenor of our time.

Postmodernism defies easy characterization. It means different things to different people, and Christians are not uniform in their attitude about it. What concerns us are the more deconstructive and radical aspects of postmodernism, particularly its incredulity toward absolute truth, its rejection of all overarching stories that explain life and give it meaning, and its relativization of all truth claims. These aspects have major ramifications for the whole church in her efforts to embody the whole gospel and bring it to the whole world.

The postmodern mindset is allergic to universal and absolute truth. We simply do not have access to the absolute truth, the postmodernist says; all we have are *truths*—social constructs fashioned from raw materials drawn from historical and social contexts. In place of truth as an overarching metanarrative, postmodernists offer community-specific stories that have no truth-validity outside the communities in which they function.

Postmodernism tribalizes truth. If truth is a matter of perspective, then everyone is entitled to his or her opinion. Postmodernists celebrate

a diversity of viewpoints and embrace differences. Since there is no neutral or trans-contextual platform from which to judge competing claims, one simply has to put up with a multiplicity of viewpoints jostling for supremacy and acceptance.

To the postmodern pluralist, truth is whatever emerges at the end of the struggle between claims. Truth is defined by power, because all claims to truth are simply manipulative attempts by the powerful, or those with vested interests, to impose their will.

To postmodern pluralists, to assert that Jesus is Truth Incarnate may well be a front for colonial imperialism, cultural chauvinism, or religious intolerance. Here's a hermeneutic of suspicion in the service of political correctness!



TRUTH AND MORAL CHOICES

The same suspicion applies to morality. Questions of right and wrong are attempts by others to impose their will on us. Why should one accept other people's definitions of right and wrong? Postmodern thinking soon leads to the kind of moral relativism where judging between right and wrong is a matter of private interpretation.

Without a universal framework of right and wrong, the claims of the terrorists who detonate themselves and take innocent lives have as much validity as those who dispatch troops to forcefully stop them.

On what basis can a postmodernist oppose others' choices? Whether people are experimenting with embryos or making money off corrupt regimes or providing financial shelter for crooked business corporations, there's no basis for saying they are wrong. Only expediency and economic pragmatism have the final say.

The same goes for decisions at the individual level. Right and wrong are most often determined on the basis of what is useful or what best fulfills a person's aspirations.

Such decisive individualism is ironic, given the importance that postmodern thought places on community and tradition. Suspicious of authority and bereft of any transcendent and objective standard by which to offer guidance, individuals fall

back on their own authority and decide what is true and right on pragmatic grounds. Postmodernism not only tribalizes truth, it privatizes it as well. We see this, for instance, in the way sexual behavior is considered a private matter, left for the individual to decide.

This individualistic orientation fits neatly with the de-centered, anti-authoritarian, and egalitarian character of our Internet age. Its impact is evident in the way spirituality is often

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 *Christianity Today.com/go/conversation* and by posting your own comments.

understood. Those who sign up for a pluralistic view of ultimate spiritual reality—one that is ineffable, amorphous, and independent of religious truth claims—can be spiritual without getting mixed up in institutional religion. They are free to pick and choose from the wide array of religious ideas and fashion a mix-and-match spirituality after their own image. So we find those today who in one breath affirm the incarnation of Christ and in another preach reincarnation.

Such freedom is attractive. Adding to its appeal is the oft-repeated contention that exclusivists are naïve, arrogant, disrespectful of other cultures, and intolerant of other faiths. Their absolutist views serve only to heighten interreligious tension, exacerbate intercommunal conflict, and in some cases, even incite violence. To avoid further polarizing our badly fragmented world, one must, some argue, adopt a pluralistic approach to religions and a relativistic stance on truth.

What do we make of the claims and criticisms of the relativist? And how shall we commend the truth of the gospel today?

We cannot provide warmth to a cold relativism, but we can wrap a blanket around a shivering relativist.

COMMENDING THE TRUTH

To begin with, the belief that knowledge of the truth necessarily translates into arrogant intolerance confuses conviction with condescension and rational disagreement with disagreeable behavior.

Over the years, the National Council of Churches of Singapore has conversed with the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore about matters that concern both religious communities. They have had friendly exchanges, for instance, on how each faith understands community engagement. The bishops, imams, and theologians who gather are all committed believers, and there is no question about their having deep differences. Yet the tone of their interactions has always been gracious and respectful, and because of this, the gatherings have been productive.

Real tolerance entails putting up with what one considers to be error. Precisely because there are genuine differences between people, we see tolerance as a virtue.

By insisting that there is no such thing as universal truth, except the universal truth that there is no such thing as universal truth, relativism is as absolutist as the claim that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. One cannot insist with the pluralist that all religious and moral truth claims are equally valid, and at the same time maintain with the relativist that there is no one ultimate truth that alone makes sense of the diversity of truth claims.

The Christian faith condemns arrogance and an attitude of superiority toward people of other faiths and, for that matter, people of no faith.

To be sure, there have been bigoted Christians and very insensitive practices within missions and evangelism in the church's long history. But these are indicative of the church's

shameful failures rather than the essence of Christian faith.

Christians are called to love rather than tolerate people, and in so doing to mirror God's love for all people. This includes ardent relativists, sanguine pluralists, and pugnacious atheists. In commending the truth in the face of relativism, we must keep in mind that we are at root dealing with people, not cold ideas. The relativist is not just a representative of a worldview but a flesh-and-blood person with all the needs and longings of a human made in God's image. More important than winning the argument against relativism is winning the relativist for Christ.

Convinced relativists, like people everywhere, are not immune to difficulties and troubles. A global economic downturn or a devastating earthquake does not discriminate between relativists and exclusivists. When relativists are struck down by the exigencies of life, it is rare that cogent arguments for truth will draw them. More likely, it is practical care and concern shown by loving Christians. We cannot provide warmth to a cold relativism, but we can wrap a blanket around a shivering relativist.

Meeting people of all faiths and persuasions at the level of our common humanity is a good starting place to share the truth of Christ. In the safety of genuine friendship, where trust is earned and respected, people can honestly

question their fundamental assumptions. Christians can sow seeds of subversion in the field of relativism by raising questions about the adequacy of moral relativism as a guide for living. Can one really live without absolute truth? How many are actually persuaded that there is no difference between Mother Teresa and Pol Pot?

Relativists may insist on the absence of universal truth, but they instinctively assume the reality of it. This is because people have an irrepressible yearning for God and a longing for the truth. God's truth will prevail because there is something coherent and persuasive about his Word, something that rings true to life.

Given the relativistic temper of our times, it's easy for the church to lose confidence in the gospel as "the power of God unto salvation" and to back off from proclaiming Christ as the only way to God. To guard against this loss of nerve, Christians need to be seriously grounded in the truth of Scripture and the knowledge of Christ. The work of commending truth in our world must therefore begin at home—in the life, worship, and disciple-making catechesis of our churches.

To believe in absolute truth is to run counter to the spirit of the age. We can expect to be ridiculed, ostracized, and opposed. We need to be reminded that the one who was Truth Incarnate, the one John describes as "full of grace and truth," became Truth Crucified at the hands of those bent on snuffing out the light of truth. Darkness did not have the last word. Light pierced the tomb of Jesus, and in the resurrection of Christ, we have Truth Vindicated. 

Mark L. Y. Chan is lecturer in theology at Trinity Theological College, Singapore, and editor of *Church and Society in Asia Today*. He is a member of the Lausanne Theology Working Group.

{ MISSIONS }

JESUS BALL IN SLOVAKIA

GoodSports reaches a culture suspicious of Christians by teaching kids how to hit an inside pitch. By Patti McCracken



Diamonds in the Rough:
The kids who attend GoodSports
find a baseball field and a haven
of unconditional love.

A

NUMBER OF YEARS AGO, as leaders at GoodSports International Camp finished off the last of the pizza and headed for a church service in the small Slovak town of Devinska Nova Ves, one camper tucked himself in among them. The other kids had left for the day, but not Roman Mozsi. Yet when the service started, Roman lit out like a shot, disappearing into the dusk.

"I didn't think much of it at the time," says camp director Tom Johnson. "I just assumed it was all a bit too

much for him, because he wasn't used to it."

As it turns out, Roman preferred hanging out with the crowd of contented Christians over returning to the chaos at home. His father frequently wandered away from the family for weeks at a time, only to come home drunk and looking for a fight.

Back at the church, as camp leaders were in the midst of prayer, Johnson looked up and was surprised to see that Roman had returned. He stood solemnly in a clean white shirt, which replaced the baseball T-shirt he had worn all day.

"He had run home to change," says Johnson, shaking his head at the memory. "He told us he didn't think what he had on before was good enough to be in a church where people were praying."

Roman's parents had grown up under Communist rule, which had little tolerance for religious practice, public or private. So when Roman's mother began bringing him to GoodSports, she wasn't looking for salvation for her son, only a port in the storm. But Roman found much more than that.



Language of Love: Tom Johnson (center) knows only a few Slovak words, but his kindness speaks volumes.

CONTINUING AN OLD MISSIONS TRADITION

Sports ministries have blossomed in the past century. Today, there are hundreds of international sports ministries, ranging from niche ministries (Motor Racing Outreach, Christian Bowhunters of America) to those with a broader vision (England's World Sports Ministries and Singapore's School of Sports Ministry). One leading international sports ministry is Athletes in Action (AIA), a Campus Crusade ministry formed in 1966. With a presence in 85 countries, AIA's goal is to "build on society's great love of sports and utilize the platform given to the athletes to reach the world for Jesus Christ."

GoodSports finds its sports niche in Slovakia, and works with about 120 kids annually. It is housed on an unremarkable side street in an unremarkable town. Remarkable are the ruins of Devin Castle a few miles up the road where, in A.D. 862, saints Cyril and Methodius embarked on their legendary missionary work, which spread Christianity throughout Central Europe. In the post-Communist era, Slovakia's constitution guarantees freedom of religion. Sixty-nine percent of Slovaks identify as Roman Catholic, 4 percent as Eastern Orthodox, and 10 percent as Protestant. According to

Greater Europe Mission, of Slovakia's almost 3,000 towns and villages, only 153 have an evangelical church, and only about half of the Slovak population sees the church as trustworthy. The country of 5.4 million is still a large mission field nearly 1,200 years after Cyril and Methodius's missions.

The Johnsons are carrying forward the mission, using the language of sports to spread God's love and lead children to Christ. They have come far from their Minnesota home, far from their old lives, where Johnson was a relief pitcher for the Twins in the 1970s. After five years in the majors, an injury left him out of the game and with few places to turn.

"This was at a time when athletes didn't make big money," says Johnson. "It was a low point in my life, because I had three small kids and no future." He opted for divinity school and the pastorate, leading the Church of the Open Door in St. Paul.

Johnson and his wife, Debbie, came to Slovakia for the first time in 1994 to visit GoodSports, which was then run by a Canadian named Terry Slobodian, a "hockey guy" who turned to the Johnsons to help him teach baseball. The Johnsons took over leadership in 2005 after sensing God's leading, but not without some doubts.

"Anyone who travels knows you have to put up with bad beds, strange food, diarrhea, jetlag, communication problems, and [local] ways of doing things that just don't make any sense," says Johnson. "And the question early on is: Why am I here? But the reason is relationships. The true value of what you do is about the people you meet and the lives you touch."

It is a tall order to build relationships in a country so long oppressed. Religion is a sensitive subject among most Slovaks; many are resistant to any kind of proselytism.

"Our parents have sad memories of fascism and Communism," says Dusan Jaura, a theologian in Slovakia. "People in our part of the world are still deeply suspicious toward any ideology."

While evangelism is gaining a foothold in the former Eastern bloc, the hard-line behaviors of the past are a challenge. The leadership landscape is dotted with mini-dictators, not mentors, but Johnson is trying to change that through his example at GoodSports.

"Kids in Slovakia are bombarded with negative reinforcement," he says. "We let them know we support them, and we encourage them to support each other."

Johnson remembers early on the look of horror that would appear on a kid's face after making a mistake, whether on the field or off. "But then I'd come over and pat them on the back and tell them to try again. They'd never, ever heard that before."

A LIFESAVER

On a cloudless summer day, about 20 kids are gathered in a hot and noisy classroom, a temporary GoodSports home while the main facility—a house provided rent-free by a local Catholic church—is restored. It is the week after the GoodSports sleep-away baseball camp, and the room is still abuzz with chatter.

The heat is no match for the kids, who are mostly busy playing Ping-Pong, basketball, and a guitar game on a donated Wii.

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Jesus Ball [from 49]

A well-built young man enters the room to a chorus of “Ahoy!”—Slovak for “Hi.” It’s Roman Mozsi, now 26—and a long way from the 11-year-old who stood in the archway of the church with a clean white shirt.

“GoodSports saved my life,” says Mozsi as he situates himself on a child’s chair. “I grew up without a good family. I didn’t have any supervision, and I was always looking for a fight.”

But when he observed some kids playing baseball at GoodSports, he wanted to be a part of it—though he doubted he would fit in. “I love sports,” he says, “but those kids looked like they were from normal families. I thought it would be hard to get with that group.”

It wasn’t. As a result of signing up for GoodSports, Mozsi would be changed forever—though he’s still working through some anger and his troubled past.

“I joined because of baseball, but I stayed for the stories,” he says, referring to the Christian teaching and testimonies. But the staff’s unconditional love made the biggest impression.

“It all got me thinking about God,” Mozsi says. “At the time, I liked to fight. But then it shifted. I no longer felt good after I beat someone up. Instead, I’d worry about them. It was then that I thought, *There must be a better way.*”

Mozsi, now a coach with GoodSports, represents the first generation of Slovaks since World War II to be allowed to practice Christianity without fear of reprisal. But like his country, he is a work in progress, struggling to turn a turbulent and oppressive past into a life of promise.

“I’m having to mentor him again as an adult,” says Johnson. “But we’ve helped Roman stay on a good path. He’s not a finished product, yet in many ways, he is a poster boy for the program.”

USE WORDS WHEN NECESSARY

Johnson’s mantra is pulled from the famous but apocryphal saying of Francis of Assisi: “Preach the gospel at all times, and when necessary, use words.”

Parents see the difference. They often comment to him, “What did you do to my kid? He’s kinder, sweeter. She behaves better.”

Johnson says all he has done is use sports for spiritual purposes.

“The beauty of sports,” Johnson says, “is

that in a concentrated period of time you can teach kids so many things, and you can get into their lives in a concentrated way.”

He sees baseball as a metaphor for life.

“It’s not always fair,” Johnson says. “And we as coaches have a responsibility to the children to model for them that you don’t quit when you think things are unfair. This is Christianity in practice—to lead by example.”

Johnson knows only a few words in Slovak, and most of the kids know even less English. He relies on his assistant, as well as a few of the older kids, for translation. But more than that, he relies on hugs and smiles and high fives, all still strictly rationed in Slovak culture.

On one warm afternoon, a dozen or so kids spill out onto the diamond for practice, most of them clad in oversized T-shirts and sweatpants with the drawstring pulled tight—except for Ivan, who has donned his baseball uniform. He is at bat. He taps his cleat on home plate.

Johnson is pitching. He yells something to Ivan in English, then demonstrates a stance. He’s showing Ivan that he needs to move forward. Ivan does, hitting a line-drive double.

After a few innings, the kids come off the field, crowding each other, arms thrown around one another. Johnson reaches out to tousle one of their heads. “Good job!” he says. They understand “good job!” now, because they hear it a lot. But they understand better the tousled hair. It means: *I’m here. I’ve got your back. I support you.*

Later, Ivan stands with one hand on the chainlink fence and the other holding a bat. He slowly, carefully forms the words in his mind before speaking them in English. “Tom,” he says, “is like a father.”

Then he smiles broadly.

Jaura, the theologian, has observed Johnson’s work at GoodSports, and is impressed.

“I’ve seen many missionaries in Slovakia during the past 20 years,” he says. “If they came with a prepared message without listening carefully, they didn’t succeed. Most of them are already back home.”

“But Tom has helped kids understand that God is not locked in the church buildings—that he can even be present elsewhere, even on the playing field.”

Patti McCracken is an independent journalist based near Vienna, Austria.

VIEWPOINTS

OPINIONS AND
PERSPECTIVES
ON ISSUES FACING
THE CHURCH



Let's remember to distinguish between the truth that Jesus is Savior and the claim that Christians have a corner on truth. The former does not entail the latter.

Roger E. Olson
Waco, Texas

Gracious Exclusivism

Theological pluralism—defined as belief in more than one Savior—is an acid that dissolves Christian faith. In “Still the Way, the Truth, and the Life” [December], John R. Franke rightly calls for an uncompromising commitment to Jesus’ uniqueness as God and Savior on the part of all Christians. He makes a compelling case for the necessity of the absolute uniqueness and insurpassability of Christ.

At the same time, it’s important to remember that this Jesus is universally present (John 1:9) so that, as the church fathers declared, all truth is God’s truth. We as 21st-century Christians can say with the 2nd-century apologist Justin Martyr that there is truth to be found even among the pagans, because our Christ is not our possession. He is everywhere present and active by his Spirit.

Let’s remember to distinguish between the truth of Jesus’ uniqueness as Savior and the claim that Christians have a corner on truth. The former does not entail the latter.

ROGER E. OLSON
Professor, George W. Truett Theological Seminary
Waco, Texas

I appreciated the Christocentric approach that Franke took in his cover essay. He didn’t objectify Jesus by making him simply the subject of propositional statements. Rather, he aims to move

the church past debating orthodoxy vs. orthopraxy, so that both our beliefs and conduct are shaped by an unwavering focus on the “personal, active, relational, and gracious” Jesus. I appreciated the reminder that our role is not to prove the uniqueness of Christ, but rather to bear witness to it with our lives.

SHARON AUTENRIETH
Collinsville, Illinois

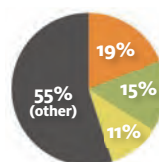
How could an article about Jesus as the Way, Truth, and Life say nary a word about Jesus’ own assertion in that very verse that “no one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6)? Also, I’m all for openness to church history, but in an article about the relevance of Jesus today, did we need three images from the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries? Might something newer speak to a generation not fascinated by oil paintings? Thanks for all the hard work, nonetheless.

TED BOSWELL
Chicago, Illinois

Saving Sex Offenders

As a minister who works with sex abuse agencies, I found the news article on sex offenders in churches [“Modern-Day Lepers,” December] important. Churches’ most important role is to protect the “little ones,” as Jesus calls us to. In the U.S., sexual offenders cannot teach in schools, coach children, or volunteer in

TOP 3 The most-read articles in December’s CT



1
**Modern-Day
Lepers**
Bobby Ross Jr.

2
**Still the Way, the
Truth, and the Life**
John R. Franke

3
**Journey to the
Center**
Tim Stafford

YAY OR NAY Readers' response to "Modern-Day Lepers"



many roles with children. Yet so many of them are active in churches. Should churches be just as vigilant about child safety? Forgiveness is an important virtue, but what about repentance?

Pedophiles are scary people because they are highly manipulative. Few seminaries train clergy in how to work with them, and support groups have little clue as to how to hold offenders accountable. The church’s best role is to train leaders to protect potential victims and let the authorities rehabilitate offenders.

RON CLARK
Portland, Oregon

Editor's Note: A review of Ron Clark's Freeing the Oppressed: A Call to Christians Concerning Domestic Abuse (2009) is on page 61.

Thanks for addressing the complicated issue of how the church can bring God’s love to a group hated by large portions of society. As a case worker who has worked with sex offenders for several years, I’ve grown to see the humanity of those who seem unlovable and even unredeemable. More direct and honest dialogues such as this one can allow offenders to draw closer to God in a safe, responsible way.

RANDALL HUBER
Akron, Ohio

For every sexual offender, there is a survivor. In fact, for every offender who enters a church, there are numerous sex abuse survivors already there. It's true, not all offenders are predators, but predators are very difficult to identify. They operate by deceit, gaining the trust of those in authority and those they target. Survivors feel terribly betrayed when it comes to light that a sexual offender has been welcomed into the church family. They are the silent voices that need to be included in this discussion.

BARB KNUCKLES
Indianapolis, Indiana



Stairway to Where?

Jesus is up to something big! That was my reaction after reading the December issue, especially "Muslim Followers of Jesus?" "Journey to the Center," and the interview with Dinesh D'Souza, "String Theory and Heaven."

One statement from D'Souza deserves comment. He claims the Christian view is that after death, "we live forever in another realm, heaven or hell." No doubt that's what many Christians believe, but that's not what the Bible says. Scripture teaches that Christians should expect not to live in another

realm, but to have everlasting life right here, on the restored heaven and earth. That's what Jesus' resurrection was all about: reconciliation and restoration.

HOWARD A. SNYDER
Wilmore, Kentucky

Dangerous Syncretism

While Joanna Quintrell's intent to reach spiritual seekers is laudable ["Journey to the Center," December], her center's syncretistic relationship with New Age spirituality can lead some to believe in a Christ-optional salvation, or that God's wrath against sin is overridden by his love and the sincerity of the seeker.

As the pastor of a community church in Sonoma County, I've seen how the "gentle and affirming" approach can actually build immunity to authentic Christianity. The Journey Center is another example of a sincere desire for interfaith harmony that simply can't be achieved without compromising the tenets of orthodox Christianity.

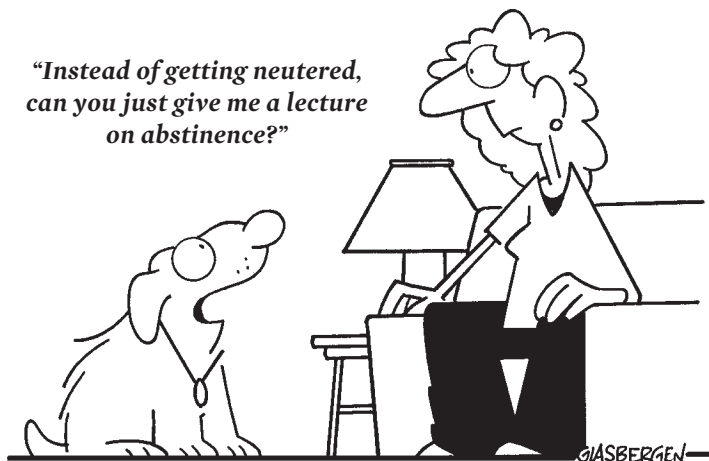
DONALD STRAND
Cazadero, California

A Reader's Thanks

Upon receiving the December issue, I was curious to see if any letters to the editor addressed the small print of the new design. I gave up on the October issue; even my reading glasses couldn't handle the small font sizes and pale colors. It appears you have adjusted both, for I was gratefully able to read this issue. Come thou font of every blessing.

LAVETTA MCCUNE
Richmond, Virginia

"Instead of getting neutered, can you just give me a lecture on abstinence?"



compiled by Laura Leonard

WORTH REPEATING

Things overheard at CT online.



ONLINE POLL

UGANDA
Should American Christians speak out on the anti-gay bill?

44%

Yes, Christians have a duty to speak out against injustice.

10%

Yes, it shows that Christians don't hate gays.

5%

Yes, because it appears that American Christians had some connection to the bill's origins.

11%

No, it's unwise for citizens of one country to tell another country what to do.

6%

No, it would stink of colonialism.

11%

No, quiet, behind-the-scenes work is more likely to get the bill changed or dropped.

10%

If they feel led to speak out, that's fine. But there's no obligation to do so.

Total Votes: 682

For more coverage of Uganda's proposed bill, see "Intercontinental Divide," page 17.

"The reason Oral Roberts found such a following is because so many mainline denominations closed the door to the power of God."

Edward, on the legacy of the Pentecostal televangelist, who died December 15.

"Why the Oral Roberts Obituaries Are Wrong"

"We have shot ourselves in the foot by embracing what sells. I pray we never stop hearing the new, and never forget the old."

Ruth King Goddard, on "the commercialization of worship" in some churches.

"Who Owns Your Christmas Carols?"

"[When] people identify Jesus with their racial group, [they are] just helping others identify [with] Jesus. The sin is when we as Christians do not allow other Christians to identify Jesus in a way that speaks to them."

Adam S., on historically inaccurate depictions of Jesus.

Women's Blog: "The Trouble with Depicting Jesus"

"Being aware of our own lovelessness is part of loving God. If we sit in that state a while, doesn't he take care of changing us?"

Marianne Miller, on moving from loving the idea of loving God to actually loving God.

SoulWork: "Waiting for Jesus to Show Up"

"Suffering points to the sufficiency of God; isn't that what the Cross showed us?"

D. Noorman, on Pastor Matt Chandler's cancer diagnosis.

Theology in the News: "When the Pastor Suffers"

Listen, Then Speak

Uganda's anti-gay bill is making cross-cultural relations more complex than ever.

THE Ugandan Parliament's proposed Anti-Homosexuality Bill (see "Intercontinental Divide," page 17) has brought to light issues between American and Ugandan Christian leaders—issues that go well beyond homosexuality.

For decades, both missiologists and human-rights advocates have debated the best way for Western democracies (and their churches) to relate to emerging democracies. Missions scholars have recognized that well-established churches now exist where there were once only pioneer missions, and they have sought ways to support those churches without reopening wounds from the colonial period.

Some human-rights theorists challenge the idea that all governments everywhere should protect a specific list of individual rights. It is not just individuals who possess rights, they say, but also cultural groups. Unfortunately, the result has been less pressure to abolish practices that most Westerners consider wrong and repugnant (e.g., female genital cutting).

Now Uganda's proposed Anti-Homosexuality Bill has put Western Christian leaders in a bind:

(1) The leaders' commitment to human rights (based on the Golden Rule and the image of God) leads them to oppose harsh penalties for consensual adult homosexual activity; (2) their belief in the traditional family leads them to support Ugandan Christian resistance to sexual liberation movements imported from the United States and Europe; (3) their belief that churches need to minister to homosexuals leads them to oppose legal penalties for those who don't report homosexual activity; (4) their belief that the fight against HIV/AIDS requires confidential testing leads them to oppose laws that could expose HIV-positive people to harsh penalties; (5) their belief in the ability of African churches to make mature decisions

prompts them to remain silent on legislation that African churches are still pondering; (6) their commitment to ongoing engagement in missions and social service with African churches makes them extremely cautious to interfere in general.

THE DEBATE ISN'T OVER

For American Christian leaders, both silence and open condemnation end up violating important missional and human-rights principles. There is no escaping this dilemma, but several points are worth reflection.

First, when American media reported on the proposed legislation, they assumed an inordinate amount of American influence. Media outlets tried to "expose" the power of American evangelicals who had spoken about gay issues in Uganda. Such assumptions were racist, said Scott Lively, one of the speakers. If anything, Ugandan legislators did not follow his advice: He had urged them to favor rehabilitation rather than imprisonment in crafting a new law on homosexuality.

There is American and European influence in Uganda, Anglican bishop David Zac Niringiye told *Christianity Today*. The liberationist sexual politics exported from the West are the true cultural imperialism. Indeed, the member of Parliament who introduced the bill hopes that Uganda will lead the world in fighting moral decadence.

Second, punitive laws against homosexuality were valid and enforced in the U.S. until June 2003, when they were invalidated by the Supreme Court. Less than a decade later, American voters are much more tolerant of homosexual persons. Although they have repeatedly rejected same-sex marriage with their votes, they find punitive "anti-homosexual" legislation repugnant.

The extremely recent change in America's mood should remind us that homosexuality

is still debated internationally. American and European acceptance does not automatically confer global acceptance. Those who predict worldwide acceptance of homosexuality may be surprised by a resurgence of traditional two-sex morality.

We counsel patience as Ugandan leaders sort out among themselves the best way to preserve their culture's sexual mores. We also caution them against punitive strategies, as we believe that capital punishment for homosexual behavior goes well beyond the limit.

Third, in Uganda both church and state have cultural power. In a country whose population is 85 percent Christian, the church may be better positioned than the state to shape

sexual mores. When Saddleback Church pastor Rick Warren spoke out against the proposed law, he pled that legislation and political solutions not be allowed to inhibit ministry. Theologian Tom Oden warned of the dangers of seeking a political solution to this problem. Having worked with many African leaders in recent years, he says, "Don't let the church relationships invade the political arena. Keep the church [conversation] about morality in the presence of God."

As concerns over the proposed legislation grew last fall, CT repeatedly sought comment from African leaders. The voices we heard helped us respect their commitments, even as they, too, shared concerns about the harshness of the bill.

In intercultural cooperation, being eager to listen is often better than being the first to speak. We join many other American voices in our concern over the way the proposed legislation can hamper ministry and harm children of God. But we are also grateful for the African voices who are calling us to pay attention to how Western society may be undermining our own zeal for preserving God's gift of sexuality.



*Rethinking
Spiritual
Disciplines*

Lent—why bother?

TO TAKE UP THE CROSS

Steven R. Harmon, author of *Ecumenism Means You, Too*, is an associate professor of divinity at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama.

In central Texas, where I grew up, the period between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday made obvious the distinctions between how Catholics and Baptists practiced their faith.

Catholic friends came to school with ash smudges on their foreheads, ate a lot of fish, gave up various pleasures for a time, and went to extra church services. My Baptist friends and I did not. We wrongly considered this evidence that Catholics believed they had to do these things to be saved. We believed we were saved by grace and therefore didn't have to do any of that.

As a seminary student, I served as pastor of a small Baptist church in the same area. By this time I had discovered the Christian year and decided to lead the congregation to take up its observance. Advent went all right; four Sundays of anticipating Christmas didn't seem like such a bad thing. Having two Sundays in the season of Christmas seemed a bit odd, but explaining their connection to "The Twelve Days of Christmas" took care of that.

With Epiphany approaching, I knew I would have some explaining to do, so I gave an overview of the history and significance of all the seasons in the Christian year. My church members looked at me, as the local expression went, "like a calf looking at a new gate." One said, "Brother Steve, this is all very interesting, but we're not Catholic. We don't observe Lent."

Can Baptists observe Lent? All Baptist congregations observe some sort of calendar in their worship. Though many Baptists may profess that they "judge all days to be alike," in reality they do "judge one day

to be better than another" (Rom. 14:5), as many expect certain days and seasons of the year to be recognized in worship services. Some of these, like Christmas and Easter, are the inheritance of the patristic church. Other special dates on the calendar of a Baptist church reflect the secular calendar. If Baptists already observe a calendar without worrying that such observances are unbiblical and hinder congregational freedom, and if they have already granted pride of place in this calendar to two feasts of patristic origin, then they can observe the Christian year, including Lent.

An extreme example of the Baptist neglect of Lent is the longtime celebration by one Baptist college of the week prior to Easter Sunday as "Resurrection Week." Without the observance of Lent, and Holy Week in particular, Easter Sunday fails to keep in proper balance the Cross and the Resurrection as the two main New Testament paradigms for the Christian life. The dominant paradigm for Christian discipleship this side of heaven is "sharing in his sufferings" (Phil. 3:10). Baptists not only can but should observe Lent, because it will help them take up the cross and follow Christ in the midst of a suffering world.

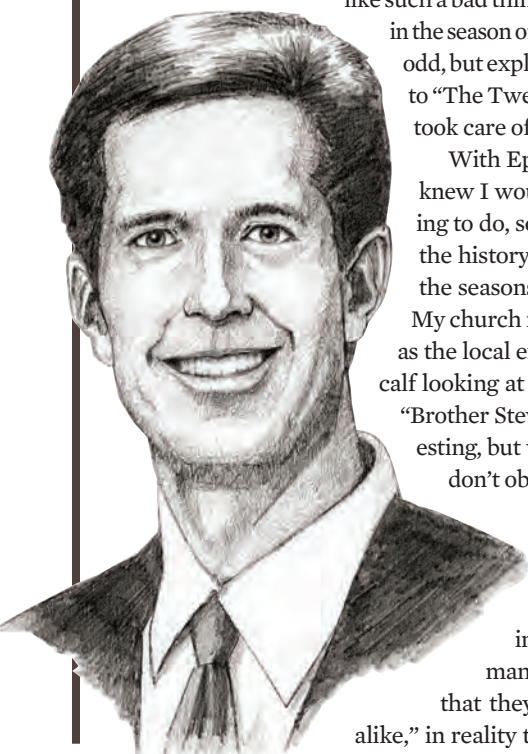
FOR SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

Frederica Mathewes-Green, the author of nine books, is founder with her husband of Baltimore's Holy Cross Orthodox Church.

"Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. . . . I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified" (1 Cor. 9:25, 27, ESV).

Lent is a time of year to remember that God has seen fit to make us not airy spirits but embodied human beings living in a beautiful, material world. The soul fills the body the way fire fills a lump of coal, and what the body learns, the soul absorbs as well. Spiritual disciplines such as fasting are analogous to weight-lifting equipment. One who uses them in a disciplined way will be stronger, not just when he's lifting weights, but also for every situation he meets.

While some people think of Lent as a time to personally choose something to "give up," the practice of the Eastern Christians, from the earliest centuries, is to observe a common fast. This is not a complete fast, but rather abstaining from meat and dairy—basically a vegan diet. Tertullian (A.D. 160–225) likened it to Daniel's diet in the king's court, when he abstained from meat and rich foods and grew stronger than those who feasted.





There's something to be said for following an ancient, universal Lenten custom like this instead of choosing your own adventure. Most of us are not capable of being our own spiritual directors. We don't have the perspective needed to choose the things that will really change us. (Deep down, we may not even want to change. I like to say, "Everyone wants to be transformed, but nobody wants to change.") A fast like this, observed for 2,000 years by Eastern Christians in lands from Eastern Europe to Africa, India, and Alaska, is time-tested.

(The Lenten vegan fast was once a Western custom too, seen by some churches still holding a "pancake dinner" just before Lent to use up the butter, milk, and eggs.)

In Lent we are one not only with the church through time, but also with those in our local church. Orthodox Lent begins with the Rite of Forgiveness, in which all church members form a circle and, one at a time, stand face-to-face with each other and ask forgiveness. This experience is profoundly healing and also preventive; I'm more likely to restrain a harsh word in July if I recall that I will have to ask this person's forgiveness again in March.

Lenten disciplines train us like athletes, strengthening our earthly bodies and souls, healing the body of believers in our local parish, and forging union with the body of Christ throughout time. "Forgetting what lies behind" and the sins of the past, we "press on" to combat those sins that lie ahead, made stronger by our Lenten disciplines, "for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13–14, ESV).

TO LEAD US TO CHRIST

Michael Horton is a professor of theology at Westminster Seminary in California. His most recent book is *The Gospel-Driven Life*.

While Israel's neighbors celebrated the cycle of seasons as shadows of the realm of the gods, Israel celebrated the interventions of God in historical events of judgment and deliverance. The major feasts include Passover, Firstfruits (Pentecost), the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), and Tabernacles (Sukkot). In commanding these feasts, God was incorporating them into his unfolding drama, anchored in his promises and their future fulfillment in Christ.

Unlike the Old Testament, however, the New Testament does not prescribe a church calendar. Furthermore, Lent became associated in the medieval church with all sorts of rules and superstitions. For the most part, the Protestant Reformers continued to celebrate Lent,

but in a more evangelical way. They inveighed against the connection between fasting and penance "as a work of merit or a form of divine worship," as Calvin put it. Lent is still celebrated today in Lutheran, Anglican, and many Reformed churches.

However, many of the English Puritans and Scottish Presbyterians went further, arguing that such observances fostered superstition, constrained the conscience where God had left it free, and undermined the Christian Sabbath as God's appointed holy day. (At the same time, the Puritans did call for special days of thanksgiving and fasting, by order of Parliament!)

In my view, these special days are valuable chiefly as a teaching opportunity. To be sure, every Lord's Day is a celebration of Christ's saving work. Paul seems to have allowed freedom to celebrate old covenant feasts, but upbraided those who bound Christian consciences on the matter, especially with fasts and abstinence.

I believe an evangelical celebration of Lent affords an opportunity to reinforce rather than undermine the significance of Christ's person and work.

Lent is a 40-day preparation for the observance of Christ's passion and Easter. It gives us an annual opportunity to trace the history of redemption. We learn that the number 40 is associated with a trial, a preparation, even an ordeal that leads either to blessing or curse in the stories of Noah, Moses, and Jonah. Recapitulating Adam's trial and Israel's 40 years of testing, Jesus was taken by the Spirit into the wilderness for 40 days, fasting instead of following Adam and the wilderness generation of Israelites in demanding the food they craved (Matt. 4:1–4). Resisting Satan's temptation with God's Word, Jesus was the Last Adam and Faithful Israel who fulfilled the trial not only for himself but also for us, as well as bearing the curse for our covenant-breaking.

New disciples in the ancient church were instructed daily in Christian doctrine and practice for the 40 days of Lent, leading to their baptism on Easter Eve. They realized that they were quite literally wrestling with demons from their pagan heritage. Isn't our culture just as toxic? Are we really making disciples, or just superficial converts?

When unburdened by superstitious rites, Lent still holds tremendous promise if we will recover its evangelical purpose; namely, leading us and our children to Christ by his Word. Hopefully we can all agree that this goal remains the central mission of the church every Lord's Day.





Strength in Meekness

What to do with the anger that saps strength.

MY GRANDMOTHER was great, but she had that special mother-in-law gift of raising my mother's blood pressure. A well-timed comment about cooking or child-rearing would leave my mom stammering and defensive.

As a teenager, I would walk by and whisper, "Water off a duck's back, Mom." She came to understand my code—*Let it go; Nana doesn't mean anything by it, and we know you're a good wife and mother*—and my whispers usually helped. But now I wish I had known to say, "Roll it onto God, Mom."

Psalm 37:5 tells us to "commit your way to the Lord." Translated, this verse says something like, "roll onto Jehovah thy way." At certain family dinners, that means passing the gravy and "rolling" the need to defend ourselves—as well as our more serious needs and concerns—onto God.

Jesus was quoting from Psalm 37 when he said the meek will inherit the earth, and it turns out that the whole psalm is a primer on meekness. I have always been a little over-meek (reticent, shy, too deferential). So when I read the Bible and find the meek congratulated, I'm delighted.

But there's a catch. It turns out that only two people in Scripture are described as "meek": Moses and Jesus. So meekness likely has little to do with timidity.

If meekness isn't weakness, what is it? The word has an association with domesticated animals, specifically beasts of burden. At first blush, this etymology doesn't thrill me; I don't particularly aspire to be ox-like. But when I think about it, an ox at the plow is not weak but extraordinarily strong. The key, though, is that his power is harnessed and directed. Perhaps meekness is strength that is submitted to an appropriate authority.

Shortly after I began writing this column, I found myself in rare conflict with a friend. At first I thought my anger was giving me strength, bolstering my courage so I could

deal with the issues. But the anger soon betrayed me, sapping my energy and compromising my ability to act according to wisdom and divine direction. It's only as I have turned my hurt—and the overwhelming urge to prove that I'm right—over to God that I've begun to be able to respond (and sometimes resist responding) from a place of holy, rather than human, strength.

Psalm 37 is all about strength in meekness. It deals with trusting God to be God, and with not trying to do his job. The meek, for example, don't repay evil for evil; they rely on God for justice (vv. 1–3). Several verses mention that the meek don't fret. And the meek let God provide their hearts' desires rather than trying to manipulate people and circumstances to get what they want (v. 4).

How much energy do I expend trying to secure provisions, control outcomes, and manage people's perceptions of me? Psalm 37 tells us that the meek give that labor up. They trust God's claims that he will provide,

protect, and defend, and in so doing free up resources for putting their hands to God's plow. It's a good plan.

But here's the thing: I would be fine with rolling my burdens onto God if I were guaranteed resolution. There's a joke that describes the effects of playing a country song backwards: Your spouse returns, your dog is resurrected, and your truck starts working again. I wish that surrender to God worked the same way.

But faith isn't like that. The biblical witness is that circumstances often get more challenging, not less, when one's way is committed to the Lord. So why roll it onto God if "it" (the need, circumstance, quarrelsome friend, or critical in-law) isn't necessarily going to get fixed?

There are stories about prisoners in Nazi camps who were made to move heavy boulders from one end of a field to the other, only to carry them back again. Many of the men were eventually driven mad, not by the backbreaking nature of the work, but by its futility.

It isn't the experience of being misunderstood (or suffering or poverty) itself that will undo us, but rather the sense that we are enduring hardship to no good end. That's why the apostle Paul emphasized that we do not labor in vain (1 Cor. 15:58). We discover there is no wasted effort or pain, because there is nothing that God cannot redeem.

I have a choice. I can wear myself out pushing the boulders of my life around my prison yard. Or I can be meek, and roll those burdens onto God. I'm not sure exactly what Jesus meant when he said the meek will "inherit the earth," but I've certainly discovered that this world is a better place when I roll it off my shoulders and into his hands. ✚



I don't particularly aspire to be ox-like. But when I think about it, an ox at the plow is not weak.



Against the World for the World

Our love is most godly when it is both.

OUR MODERN glorification of sentimental love, celebrated with a flurry of Hallmark cards each February, has little to do with Saint Valentine. The only clear account that remains of the 3rd-century priest's life tells of how the Roman Emperor Claudius II personally interrogated him and tried to persuade him to convert to Roman paganism (or die). Valentine refused and tried to convert the emperor to Christianity instead, eventually dying a martyr's death.

While Valentine's story may not have much to do with roses, chocolates, and heart-shaped doilies, it has more to do with real love than we realize. Indeed, Christians have long understood that love is much costlier, stronger, and more difficult than the cheap romanticism of our age.

Nothing could sum that up better than the title of my column. *Contra mundum* first came to my attention while reading a letter penned by John Wesley to that indefatigable public servant and abolitionist, William Wilberforce. In it, Wesley compared Wilberforce to Athanasius, an earlier champion of Christ's cause who had stood "against the world," defending the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity against Arian heretics. My friend Richard John Neuhaus would later pick up the phrase and add another—"against the world for the world"—to describe the modern-day reform movement, eventually known as the Hartford Appeal. Neuhaus, Wesley, Wilberforce, Athanasius, and Valentine all knew that true love for one's neighbor sometimes means standing against the world for the world's sake.

While recently reading Peter Kreeft's wonderful 2004 book, *The God Who Loves You*, I was reminded that almost every prominent modern-day apologist has written at least one book about love. Alongside their tomes defending the tenets of the faith, C. S. Lewis, Francis Schaeffer, Norman Geisler, Ravi Zacharias, Art Lindsley, and Kreeft

have all turned their attention to studying the many facets of love. Why did each of them take time from their urgent calling to write a book on what some might consider a strange subject for apologists?

While these apologists took the stance of being *against* the world—against the false worldviews of their day—they took that stance because they were *for* the world, wanting the world's ultimate good. Love is the true apologist's motive, the *animus*. It is also the *telos*, or end goal: Since God is love, understanding the true nature of love means helping people understand the true nature of God. And if these weren't reasons enough, these writers have learned that love itself is the greatest apologetic.

Yet so many have misunderstood love's meaning because the English language has only one word to describe its many emotions and objects. The Greek writers were more nuanced. Love can be *eros*, the romantic kind that we celebrate this month, or *storge*, meaning affinity and affection, or *phileo*, brotherly fondness, or finally *agape*, God's self-denying love. The first three refer to emotions, but *agape* is an objective state. It is true love. One of the main arguments for atheism, Kreeft warns, stems from a confusion between objective love and mere emotions such as kindness. After all, how could a good God permit suffering in the world?

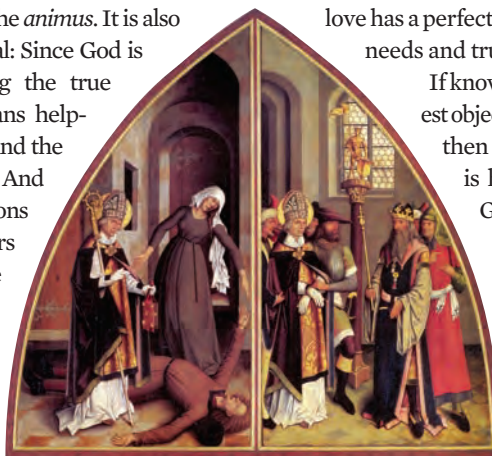
"*Agape* wills the objective good of the

beloved," writes Kreeft. "Thus it wills or tolerates suffering when suffering is necessary for the beloved's true, objective good." He goes on to explain that this is why loving parents discipline their children, and why God does not wipe every tear away until his return. While *agape* often overlaps with kindness, and is always teeming with emotion, God still takes a long-range view of the beloved's best interest. God's pure self-forgetful gift-love has a perfect view of the beloved's needs and true fulfillment.

If knowing God is the greatest objective good for humans, then the aim of real love is helping others know God. It means displacing false gods from the throne of the one true God. It means helping the beloved find that which truly satisfies. Lewis writes in *The Four Loves* that the lesser loves begin to become

demons the moment they begin to become gods. That is why Christ tells us, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife . . . and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26, KJV).

Like Valentine, Athanasius, and Wilberforce—and like God himself—true love must sometimes take a stance of opposition for the objective good of the beloved. True love will dismantle false worldviews. True love will reveal where lesser loves have become gods. True love will be against the world for the world, because true love knows what the world needs most.



Dynamic Lover: St. Valentine heals an epileptic (left) and confronts idolaters (right).

God's pure self-forgetful gift-love has a perfect view of the beloved's needs and true fulfillment.

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OF ~~THRIFT~~ IS
LIMITLESS.”

– THOMAS EDISON

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CT REVIEW

BOOKS, MOVIES,
MUSIC, AND
THE ARTS



A Chronicle of Hopeful Dying

Death is not the enemy, says cancer-stricken Walt Wangerin, but a chance for Jesus to shine. By David Neff

M

artin Luther was an earthy Christian, conscious of his sinfulness, profoundly grateful for God's radical grace in Jesus Christ. The Reformer was keenly aware that what holiness we attain grows not so much from our "religious" callings but as we fulfill our vocations as members of families and workers in the world.

In his dying, Walter Wangerin Jr.—Lutheran minister, award-winning author, radio broadcaster, professor, husband, and father—is living out that Lutheran vision.

Published this month, Wangerin's **Letters from the Land of Cancer** (Zondervan) ★★★★★

was written in 2006 and 2007 as letters to praying friends. During much of that time, his cancer had slowed. But side effects, like a spreading pneumonitis that rendered his lungs incapable of exchanging oxygen, seriously slowed his pace. This gave him time, and a new perspective on time. The result is a rewarding reflection on living one's last years.

Lutherans are, at least in theory, more matter-of-fact about their sinfulness than other Christians. Throughout *Letters*, Wangerin confesses the way that the difficulties of his illness enable

the Old Adam. Weary with

his illness, he returns to his "pickier self, grumpier, fussier, graceless, ungrateful. Hypercritical. Deaf to human nuance, presuming insults no one meant, and, no longer patient in pain, consumed by my precious, superior, artistic labors." He abuses nurses and medical technicians.

"When I am not tired, I can control outward, public manifestations. But these long exhaustions of my long disease disable me. I lose the strength for restraint."

"It isn't okay to be bitter," he writes. "No! Cancer does not give me freedoms others don't have. A snarking thought, even when kept internal, becomes a warm, pumping, venomous fluid that runs in one's vessels, whether bloody or lymphatic or made of the clay of the Creator—filling the vessel that one is."

But the real victims of the venom are "my friends and my family and my wife. And then it is these, oh, my most beloved, who suffer.... And then—recognizing the consequences of the Old Adam's liberation—I must, I must, I absolutely *must* believe in the mercy of God, which makes merciful the people whose mercy I do dearly need."

CALLED BY NAME

Far more than his compounded frustration over his sinful behavior, Wangerin's belief in Christ's mercy pervades this book. He knows that Christ met "the world that was even then dispatching him" with "serenity and forgiveness, grace and love." In Christ, he

finds spiritual healing and grace. In Christ, he rejoices that his name is written in heaven. "My name. The Father who named me at my baptism will in a creating and recreating voice call my name once more, and I shall arise, and I shall like Moses answer, 'Here I am.'"

And in Christ, Wangerin finds the tender Shepherd's care. In



Letter 21, he traces through Scripture how God's word creates what it names. In John 10, he finds "the real source of [his] peace on the threshold of death." In that passage is the figure of the shepherd who calls his sheep by name. The one who, by naming them, makes them *his* sheep, and who gives to the sheep who follow him eternal life.

Wangerin begins this shepherd motif with a childhood experience: Thirteen-year-old Wally huddles in a wintry attic bedroom in Edmonton, Alberta. Pained with a stomachache, he tries to be an adult, tries not to cry. Finally, sobbing, he takes comfort as his mother sings: *I am Jesus' little lamb, / Ever glad at heart I am. / For my Shepherd gently guides me, / Knows my need and well provides me.*

This is "the image which even now most consoles" him as at age 64 he "is given to contemplate another sort of wintry darkness."

Jaded Christians often criticize Christian writing that avoids doubt as sappy and in flight from reality. Whose faith doesn't wobble? But Wangerin's *Letters* avoids both unreality and doubt. Though his life is full of pain and awkwardness, there is never any question about

His story, Wangerin says, is 'the story which must ultimately embrace every living body, every physical person.'

whom Walter Wangerin belongs to. Jesus the Shepherd cares for Wally the Lamb as much in Wangerin's 60s as in his teens.

Wangerin keeps his story real by his tangible accounts of pain, reduced capacity, and irritability. He is short of breath. He loses his temper. He worries for his wife, Thanne, and the uncertainty of her future. Medical tests force him to miss the New York debut of a musical based on his award-winning *The Book of the Dun Cow*. He describes the pain graphically:

No rubbing eases the ache. . . . It is a team of plow horses galloping up my spine, dancing on my ribcage. . . . A thundering down the femur and hard against my kneecap. Or across my back, as if *I* were the horse, saddled with a crop-whip pain. This particular assault causes a whizzing at the

roots of my hair. It crawls down into the lower back—burrowing worm-like into my sacrum. . . . In my skull. Behind my eyes. In my chest. And always, always, morning to night, in the dead center of my chest.

Vicodin helps.

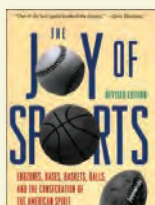
Groaning helps. I recommend it. Seriously.

He describes the bodily changes with humor as well: "One of the advantages of an old man's losing all his hair (so thinks this old man) is that it clears his nostrils and his ear-holes of four mighty bushes. One of the disadvantages of the same fellow's hair's returning is. . . . Well, you get the picture."

Dylan Thomas famously wrote, "Do not go gentle into that good night. Rage, rage against the dying of the light." Thomas's challenge to rage is mirrored in our everyday language. We

MY TOP 5 BOOKS ON SPORTS

By Andrew Parker, professor of sport and Christian outreach at the University of Gloucestershire

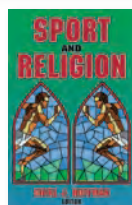


THE JOY OF SPORTS

Endzones, Bases, Baskets, Balls, and the Consecration of the American Spirit

MICHAEL NOVAK (BASIC BOOKS)

Is sport simply a matter of play and games, or is it something more? Could sport be a form of religion or perhaps a religion in itself? Pondering these and other key questions, Novak probes the deeper meanings of sport. This is widely regarded as a classic.



SPORT AND RELIGION

SHIRL J. HOFFMAN

(HUMAN KINETICS PUBLISHING)

This edited collection, from one of the key players in the field, features the good and the great in sport and religion. The narrative is organized around four themes: sport as religion, sport as religious experience, religion in sport, and sport, religion, and ethics.



AN UNHOLY ALLIANCE

The Sacred and Modern Sports

ROBERT J. HIGGS AND MICHAEL C. BRASWELL

(MERCER UNIVERSITY PRESS)

Drawing on a wide range of theological and literary sources, this scholarly, thought-provoking, and highly accessible book considers such issues as pride, greed, guilt, shame, and violence.



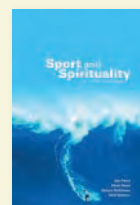
PLAYING WITH GOD

Religion and Modern Sport

WILLIAM J. BAKER

(HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS)

This historically grounded and highly readable account sheds light on the psychological, sociological, and theological aspects of the ways in which sport and religion interact. Of particular interest are Baker's insights into the subculture of sport from Islamic, Jewish, and Buddhist perspectives.



SPORT AND SPIRITUALITY

An Introduction

JIM PARRY, MARK NESTI, SIMON ROBINSON, AND NICK WATSON

(ROUTLEDGE)

This is a book most notable for the broad range of ideas it offers, featuring sports psychology, sports sociology, and professional and religious ethics. The authors' attempts to define "spirituality," within the context of sport and beyond, are especially appealing.

talk about battling cancer. About fighting the disease. For Wangerin there is no reason to rage or fight. The disease is not the enemy, he writes; “it is a rooster’s crow, calling me to the truth of myself and to the precise condition of my relationships—God, society, nature.”

God loves, cares for, and protects his own. There may be other enemies, but the dying is something else. “By declining this change with great passion, or receiving it with a huge natural fear, we accuse the divine providence of tyranny, and exclaim against our natural constitution, and are discontent that we are human.” And thus, he says, we become the enemy, because we fight against God.

Yet when death interrupts, we are overpowered by the impulse to fight. The defense is preparation.

When . . . we remain unprepared for the Ultimatum certainly to seize us, then the death that interrupts our daily lives is monstrous. Fight against it with all your might. Hate it. Be filled with envy and anger for those who are still healthy. Wail, plead, beg, make deals with friends and with the Infinite. Sink into despair. Lie down in hopelessness. Die, then—even before you die.

Or else, prepare. Long before that final confrontation, prepare.

Preparation means paying attention, especially to relationships. It means talking with children about who will care for their mother. It means talking with a spouse about her future. It means talking about everything that ultimately counts, and letting go of all that ultimately does not matter.

There is a literature of preparation. Luther himself wrote about preparing to die. Wangerin references Jeremy Taylor’s famous *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying*. But in *Letters*, Wangerin, always a storyteller, has exchanged the didactic, spiritual advice giving of this *ars morendi* genre for memoir and confession. His story, he says, is “the story which must ultimately embrace every living body, every physical person.” It is also “the story in which our faith in Christ most can shine.”

In these letters, Walter Wangerin has given us a story to live by, and to die by. ☩

David Neff is editor in chief of the Christianity Today Media Group.

Oppression in the Home

A book helping churches respond to an issue we’d rather not think about. By Kate Kirkpatrick

Twenty to twenty-five percent of women in America are abused by their husbands or live-in partners in a given year. While I would like to believe that those figures aren’t directly borne out in the church, the shocking frequency of such behavior means that most of us, at some point or another, will know someone who encounters it.

Ron Clark, a minister with several years of experience working with victims and abusers, has written **Freeing the Oppressed: A Call to Christians Concerning Domestic Abuse** (Wipf and Stock) ★★★★★ to acquaint the church with a problem we’ve had difficulty responding to. He has seen many secular agencies lose hope in the church as a positive advocate for the abused. Beyond accusations of irrelevance, in some instances the church has been seen as part of the problem. Battered and broken women have turned to their congregations, only to be told that Christian submissiveness and forgiveness require them to go back to their abusers. In some cases, when women have left their abusive husbands, the church has abandoned them, leaving them facing a crisis not only of health and heart, but of faith as well.

Clark’s book is an extremely helpful introduction to what constitutes “domestic violence,” issues that the abused face, and how abuse affects families. He highlights that when children even observe verbal or physical abuse, their emotional and physical development is stunted, leading not only to increased anxiety, but often to post-traumatic stress and learning and cognitive disorders as well.

Clark offers a theologically sensitive portrait of God’s concern for the victims of abuse, especially in the context of the

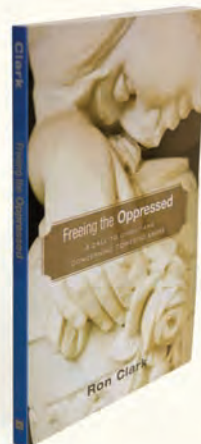
covenant of marriage. He explores what it means to be male and female created in God’s image. He notes how the biblical prescription of submission in marriage has been abused by, and resulted in the abuse of, many women. He argues, in the context of God’s relationship with Israel in the Old Testament, that marriage should be an equal partnership where “both parties work together to bless or mutually benefit each other,” and he discusses what it means for a man to love his wife “as Christ loved the church,” to love her body as his own.

Inevitably, Clark ventures into the controversial territory of divorce, and brings a well-rounded perspective on it as it relates to abuse. Clark draws attention to what follows one of the most famous Bible verses on the subject, Malachi 2:16: “‘I hate divorce,’ says the Lord God of Israel, ‘and I hate a man’s covering himself with violence as well as with his garment.’”

As its subtitle suggests, *Freeing the Oppressed* is a call to Christians first to open our eyes. We must recognize that the church is not immune to brokenness. We are then called to follow Christ in ministering to the broken, not to hide from the uncomfortable ugliness of human sin. “Our church is known in our community by what we stand for,” Clark writes, “and what we stand against.”

Though clearly written, this book is not an easy read; it is full of disturbing stories and statistics. I had to put it down at several points, and my dinner-time conversation has been less than usually cheerful. But if I struggle so to read about these experiences, what must life be like for those who have to live them? ☩

Kate Kirkpatrick is an editor with Lion Publishing in Oxford, England.



THE END OF SUFFERING

Finding Purpose in Pain

SCOTT CAIRNS (PARACLETE, 144 PAGES)

The notion that Christ's sufferings lacked anything (Col. 1:24) may strike some of us as borderline heresy; the idea is at least counter-intuitive. One is very likely to ask, *what* is yet to be done? What is it that Saint Paul and the rest of us are expected to supply? Could it be ourselves?

The very heart of an efficacious faith, it seems to me now, is bound up precisely in our—watchfully—living into this mystery of what appears to be God's continuing desire for collaboration between himself and his creation.

The God-created world is an exceedingly wild place. Bad things happen to good people; good things happen to bad. And even setting aside the simply bad, there is also no shortage of downright evil, from which the good do not appear to be uniformly protected. "For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45). What kind of God is this?

And *where*, exactly, is our God in all of this?

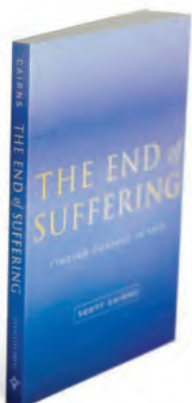
What the fathers and mothers of the church have taught me is that inevitably each of us will, in one or a number of ways, partake of Christ's suffering, and that these experiences will help us apprehend all the more how we are joined to him and to each other.

As I write this, the holy, orthodox, catholic, and apostolic church—that would be the one mystical body of which we are all members, like it or not—is entering the season we call Great Lent. It is in some sense a self-imposed affliction, a deliberate suffering; it is in some sense a death. It is, nonetheless, a death attended by hope, a death that anticipates new life. We feel how it changes us. We are thereby led to a place where the noises, distractions, and false importance of the street—of our dissipated lives—finally "have no access—a place where they have no power."

Similarly, then, in those seasons of our afflictions—those trials in our lives that we do not choose but press *through*—a stillness, a calm, and a hope become available to us; they are a stillness, a calm, and a hope that must be acquired slowly because, as Father Schmemmann says of our joy in Lent, "our fallen nature has lost the ability to accede there naturally."

We are obliged to recover this wisdom slowly, bit by bit. May our afflictions be few, but may we learn not to squander them.

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WILSON'S BOOKMARKS

From the editor of Books & Culture.



BETWEEN RELATIVISM AND FUNDAMENTALISM

Religious Resources for a Middle Position

PETER L. BERGER, EDITOR (EERDMANS)



"If one agrees with an agenda of articulating a middle ground between relativism and fundamentalism . . ." Wait a minute. What if one *doesn't* agree? One will still find this book very useful, as I did. It's divided into two parts—first sociological perspectives, then a range of theological perspectives: Jewish, Catholic, Lutheran, evangelical, and Eastern Orthodox. For me these learned essays were a goad, provoking me to think harder about why the metaphor of a middle ground seems unsatisfactory.

CHURCHILL

PAUL JOHNSON (VIKING)



Yes, there are already far too many books on Churchill, but there is always room for another good one, and you might just gobble up Paul Johnson's biography, slim and wonderfully readable, in a single sitting.

Johnson himself has entered his 80s, and I think that gives him an angle on Churchill's long life that he would have lacked had he written this book 40 or even 20 years ago. Among the lessons Johnson extracts is this: "Churchill wasted an extraordinarily small amount of his time and emotional energy on the meannesses of life: recrimination, shifting the blame onto others . . . , harboring grudges, waging vendettas."

THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF MR. ANDREW HAWTHORN AND OTHER STORIES

JOHN BUCHAN (PENGUIN)



The son of a Scottish pastor, Buchan led a wide-ranging public life: barrister, journalist, publisher; spymaster and propagandist for the UK during World War I; member of Parliament; and finally Governor-General

of Canada. Meanwhile, he wrote book after book, fiction and nonfiction. He is best remembered for his novels featuring Richard Hannay (especially *The Thirty-Nine Steps*), but much of his work is worth recovering, as this well-chosen collection of stories attests. You might expect a man of such worldly attainments to be a bluff, no-nonsense type; on the contrary, Buchan's stories are infused with a sense of mystery.

Why Gayle Haggard Stayed

She tells CT why she remained married to Ted—even after he suggested that she divorce him. Interview by Sarah Pulliam Bailey

What if Ted picked up some sexually transmitted disease and infected me? Gayle Haggard wondered as she brushed her teeth one morning in November 2006. Hours before, a male escort had alleged that her husband, Ted Haggard, had paid him for sex and methamphetamine. Ted subsequently resigned as president of the National Association of Evangelicals and as lead pastor of New Life Church in Colorado Springs. CT online editor Sarah Pulliam Bailey spoke with Gayle about her book **Why I Stayed: The Choices I Made in My Darkest Hour** (Tyndale).

What happened after your husband told you what happened?

There were a lot of tears, as you might imagine. That first night, as I lay in bed and thought through what was happening to us, I just asked myself, “Who are you? Who are you going to be in this?”

What have you learned about church discipline and restoration?

I believe what Scripture says, that when a brother sins, those who are spiritual should gently restore him. And I think *restore* means restore to health, so that a person can fulfill their gifts and callings in God. I would liken it to the story of the Prodigal Son; even though he thought he deserved second-class status, the father didn’t respond that way. The father threw a robe around him and restored him as his son.

What do you want individuals and churches to take away from this?

I really want our story to offer hope to people who find themselves in a crisis of any kind.

The teachings of Jesus really will guide us through. I also want to challenge the church that what we exist to do is to bring forgiveness and healing to the lives of people, not increase their burden with judgment and scrutiny.

What would you tell women who find out their husbands are having an affair or something similar?

I would encourage them to set their trajectory toward forgiveness. It’s a process that they have to walk through to deal with the truth, to face it head on, and to let God walk them through the healing of their hearts. I can’t say that everybody’s story will turn out like mine, because Ted chose to fight for our marriage. He chose to repent and to cling to his faith and God, and to walk through all of this with me. Not every husband does that. I would tell every woman, as much as she is able, to forgive and to love.

Ted suggested that you divorce him. Did you consider divorce?

No. I knew my husband, and I knew what I believed. I felt we could fight through this. I believe in the power of confession. This brought my husband to the place where he had to face his sin and confess it. Once he did, it undid the power of secrecy. Secrecy is what empowers sin. We were able to heal together. I was

encouraged by the fact that my husband was able to openly confess what his struggle had been.

In a nutshell, why did you stay?

I stayed because I believe in the teachings of Jesus, that if we choose forgiveness and love, our relationships can heal. I stayed because my husband is worth it. I wasn’t going to let the struggle that had been going on with him disqualify or undo the 30 years of life we had built together, the wonderful marriage we have, the family and church that we had built. I wasn’t going to let this thing deny all of what we have spent our lives invested in. If I had walked away, it would’ve been a denial of all that.

You had been leading a women’s ministry in a church context. Do you see your role differently now?

I see people more compassionately. I didn’t know what it was like to be the person who so desperately needed compassion. I live to share God’s grace with people who really need it.

The message I want to convey is that people are not alone when they go through their darkest hour. They can trust God, and he will not abandon them in the midst of their pain. With him, they’ll never be alone. His love does cover a multitude of sins.✝

INTERVIEW



Darwin's Devolution

New film explores the naturalist's loss of faith. By Steven D. Greydanus

The title of the film, **Creation** (Newmarket Films, now playing) ★★☆☆, evokes Genesis 1. And its opening image blends natural and religious symbols: a fetal hand *in utero* assuming the pose of the divine hand in Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*. Paul Bettany stars as a 19th-century naturalist who voyages to the Galapagos Islands and reflects on the religious implications of changing species, just as his character in *Master and Commander* did.

This time, though, Bettany is playing Charles Darwin—and neither he nor anyone else in *Creation* ever suggests, as Bettany did in the previous film, that changing species might be attributed both to God and to natural forces. Instead, *Creation* consistently assumes that science and religion offer



mutually exclusive accounts of reality. Some ardently embrace that opposition, like the agnostic naturalist Thomas Huxley (Toby Jones), who crows that Darwin has “killed God.” Others, including Darwin, view it with reluctance—but no one ever questions it.

Creation is not a drama of ideas. The film skips over Darwin's voyage on the *Beagle* and his work gathering specimens. And the intellectual rigor of Bettany's debates in *Master*

and *Commander* with co-star Russell Crowe is unmatched here. Rather, *Creation* portrays an existential crisis. Drawing on the biography *Annie's Box* by the naturalist Randal Keynes, Darwin's great-great-grandson, the film suggests that it was not Darwin's science that cost him his faith in God but rather something personal: God failed to save his 10-year-old daughter, Annie, from tuberculosis.

Doting on his devout Unitarian wife, Emma, Darwin has no wish to undermine the church. In a remarkable speech, he meditates darkly on the consequences “if the whole world stopped believing that God had any plan for us”; he wonders what would happen if everyone concluded that “nothing mattered—not love, not trust, not faith, not honor—only brute survival.” It's a powerful question with no answers here. ⊕

Steven D. Greydanus is a film critic for CT and the *National Catholic Register*.

COURTESY OF LIAM DANIEL
GRIFFIN: TRACI GOUDIE

MY TOP 5 MOVIES ON ROMANTIC LOVE

By Camerin Courtney, CT film critic and author of *Table for One* and *The Unguide to Dating*



ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF THE SPOTLESS MIND

2004 | RATED R

DIRECTED BY MICHEL GONDRY

When their relationship gets rocky, a couple opts for a procedure to have each other erased from memory. But they realize there's something far better than a pain-free life: love, in all its messy, hurtful, and joyful glory.



THE NOTEBOOK

2004 | RATED PG-13

DIRECTED BY NICK CASSAVETES

A man visits a fellow nursing-home resident daily to read from a young woman's journal about a love triangle and a forbidden relationship—and slowly the elderly woman realizes it's their story, that one of this man's final acts of faithfulness and love is helping her remember.



SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

1995 | RATED PG

DIRECTED BY ANG LEE

In this Jane Austen classic, two sisters look for love in 19th-century England. Despite familial, cultural, and financial pressures, as well as their own personality quirks, the women find love and happiness—just not necessarily where or when they'd anticipated.



RETURN TO ME

2000 | RATED PG

DIRECTED BY BONNIE HUNT

A man loses his wife in a car accident, then meets and falls in love with the woman who received her heart in a transplant. Through them we learn that love is worth grieving, waiting for, and opening up to again—especially when you are surrounded by a cocoon of wacky family members.



CASABLANCA

1943 | RATED PG

DIRECTED BY MICHAEL CURTIZ

When former flame Ilsa walks into his Moroccan bar in the early years of World War II, Rick is confronted with old feelings and lingering bitterness. Faced with the complications of love and war, Rick must choose between his own desires and the safety of the woman he loves.

THE BEST ALBUMS OF 2009

After two albums that focused primarily on justice, mercy, and social commentary, Sara Groves wondered where to turn next for her ninth studio project. She ultimately decided to look very close by—into her own soul—and dig deep for *Fireflies and Songs*, her most personal album yet and the winner of *Christianity Today's* 2009 Album of the Year.

It was a runaway winner for first place, beating out albums from U2, Switchfoot, Steven Curtis Chapman, and Buddy and Julie Miller.

"This is a complete surprise, and I'm deeply grateful," Groves told CT. "A record like this is my heart and soul parading around. This is a very raw version of how I write, and it feels good to know that it is resonating."

Here are CT's Top 12 Albums of 2009, as voted by 10 of our music critics.

ONE SARA GROVES
Fireflies and Songs (INO)

TWO SWITCHFOOT
Hello Hurricane (Atlantic)

THREE BUDDY AND JULIE MILLER
Written in Chalk (New West)

FOUR BIFROST ARTS
Come O Spirit! (Great Comfort)

FIVE DAVID BAZAN
Curse Your Branches (Barsuk)

SIX JOE HENRY
Blood from Stars (Anti)

SEVEN THE MOUNTAIN GOATS
The Life of the World to Come (4AD)

EIGHT ASHLEY CLEVELAND
God Don't Never Change (E1)

NINE DEREK WEBB
Stockholm Syndrome (INO)

TEN VARIOUS ARTISTS
Fire in My Bones (Tompkins Square)

ELEVEN U2
No Line on the Horizon (Interscope)

TWELVE (TIE) MEWITHOUTYOU
It's All Crazy! ... It's Alright (Tooth & Nail)

STEVEN CURTIS CHAPMAN
Beauty Will Rise (EMI/CMG)



Eclectic Gospel

Patty Griffin's latest delivers the goods. By Andy Whitman

It's a country music staple: the singer who takes a break from the rigors of love and heartache to record a gospel album. Patty Griffin lives at the intersection of folk and country music, and wouldn't be caught dead in a cowgirl hat, but her latest album still follows in a noble (though sometimes wince-inducing) tradition.

Fortunately, Griffin doesn't have to worry. Produced by jack-of-all-country-trades Buddy Miller, featuring a bevy of Americana's best solo artists and session musicians, and recorded in a historic Nashville church, **Downtown Church** (ATO Records) ★★★★★ is far from a disappointment. Griffin, with six increasingly gospel-oriented singer-songwriter albums to her credit, is in superb voice throughout.

And the guest list is the royalty of contemporary roots and country music, among them Buddy's wife, Julie, Mavericks frontman Raul Malo, ace fiddler Stuart Duncan, and Americana grand dame Emmylou Harris, who is as omnipresent as God, at least in Nashville.

To her credit, Griffin brings a catholic (small c) taste to her gospel smorgasbord. The

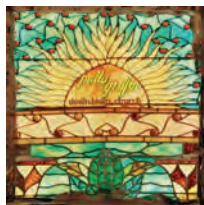
album features country and bluegrass classics, well-known and obscure African American spirituals, a Hispanic hymn, two original folk compositions, and a hymn credited to Francis of Assisi. That's as eclectic as it gets.

Griffin fares best on the black gospel songs, where her fluid melismas and soulful vocals are perfectly suited to the material. The chilling "Death's Got a Warrant" is a country blues fire-and-brimstone sermon, while the better-known "Wade in the Water" and "If I Had My Way" are rescued from overexposure by superb backing vocals from gospel great Regina McCrary. Griffin is more tentative and less successful on the country/bluegrass tracks. Hank Williams's "House of Gold" and

the traditional "Never Grow Old" are stately but a little staid. But she redeems herself with the gorgeous "We Shall All Be Reunited," an obscure country hymn that features a hair-raising trio performance from Griffin, Emmylou Harris, and Shawn Colvin.

It's a surprisingly diverse and beautifully sung album.

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



QUICK TAKES

More media of note.

BOOKS

► THE CHURCH AND THE SURPRISING OFFENSE OF GOD'S LOVE

Reintroducing the Doctrines of Church Membership and Discipline

JONATHAN LEEMAN (CROSSWAY)

★★★★★ Exclusive, divisive, even shaming—church membership and its less-popular sister, church discipline, can be all of these, writes 9Marks communications director Jonathan Leeman. Yet they're also necessary channels through which God's love upholds and binds together his people. Optimistic readers may wonder if Leeman's diagnosis of the church's ills is too broad, his prescription too narrow. Leeman would argue that our ecclesiology has been distorted by years spent in churches that haven't functioned as churches at all.

► THE MALE FACTOR (EXPANDED CHRISTIAN EDITION)

The Unwritten Rules, Misperceptions, and Secret Beliefs of Men in the Workplace

SHAUNTI FELDHAHN (MULTNOMAH)

★★★★★ Most women already know to reserve crying (chapter 5) and low-cut blouses (chapter 10) for off-the-clock occasions. Still, mega-best-selling author Shaunti Feldhahn's eight-year research project into men's rules of the workplace is hard to put down. Like her previous guilty pleasures, *For Men Only* and *For Women Only*, this easy read taps into stereotypes and the endless fascination we take in the opposite sex. But it's also practical and encouraging, and women in the workplace may find in it some helpful mid-course corrections.

► SCRIPTURE BY HEART

Devotional Practices for Memorizing God's Word

JOSHUA CHOONMIN KANG (INTERVARSITY)

★★★★★ Formerly pastor of the 7,000-member Oriental Mission Church in Los Angeles, Joshua Choonmin Kang presents a spirituality that is anything but seeker-sensitive. His Scripture memorization program veers from the touchy-feely—Kang calls his method *memorization divina*—to the highly demanding. "When should we read, pray, memorize? No less than fifteen minutes, no more than thirty minutes, a day." For those willing to commit to it, though,

Kang may have given us the best primer now available on the practice, significance, and hidden depths of "treasuring God's Word in our hearts."

► WORSHIPING WITH THE CHURCH FATHERS

CHRISTOPHER A. HALL (INTERVARSITY)

★★★★★ The third book in IVP's *With the Church Fathers* series quotes often and liberally from patristic sources—every chapter has at least 50 endnotes. The strength of the volume lies in Christopher Hall's easy interpretation of mounds of data. His look at ancient Christian worship—the sacraments, prayer, and spiritual disciplines—is more of an invitation than an inspection, and readers will be hard-pressed to eschew its generous appeal. The fourth and final volume in the series will cover Christian ethics.

DVD

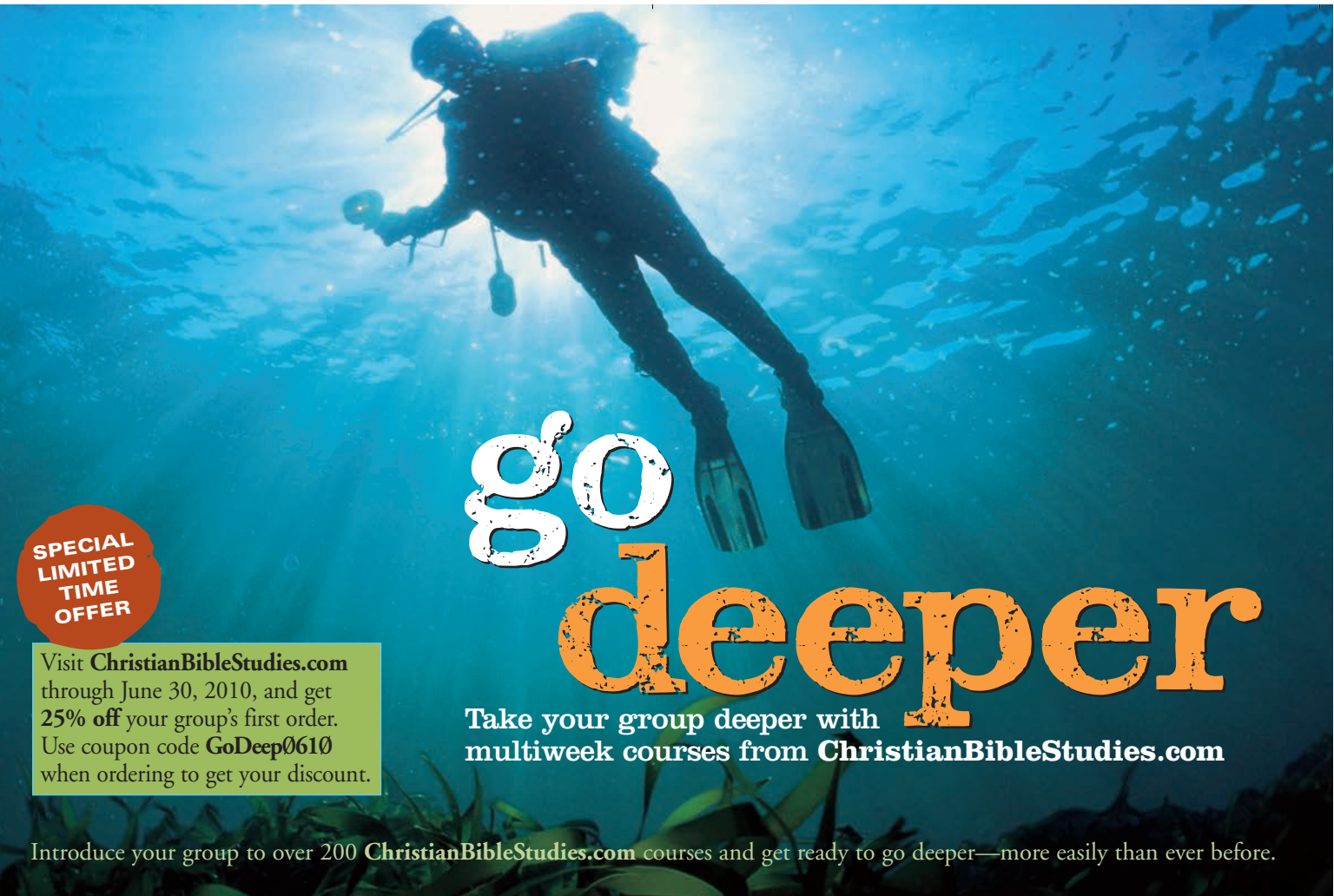
► COLLISION

LEVEL 4 | UNRATED

★★★★★ Director Darren Doane's background is in music videos, not apologetics documentaries, and he frames his film as he would a concert tour. Pastor Doug Wilson and

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atheist celebrity Christopher Hitchens hit the road, irenically debating whether Christianity is good for the world. (If the pitch sounds familiar, the two first debated on *CT's* website.) Hitchens's jabs are as well-aimed as Wilson's. But Doane's background is also in advertising, and the film seems at least partly designed to raise Wilson's profile. No matter: It's among the best religion documentaries around. —*Ted Olsen*

► THE BIG QUESTION

VISION VIDEO | UNRATED

★★★★★ Is there any transgression impossible for a person to forgive? This brief documentary asks that question of several people who have endured heinous acts against them or their loved ones. It explores forgiveness from religious and psychological perspectives. Producer Frank Desiderio is using the film, which has some powerful moments, as a teaching tool at his "How to Let Go of a Grudge" retreats and seminars on forgiveness, but it could also be used in small groups or Sunday school classes. More: *BigQuestionTheMovie.com*. —*Mark Moring*

TV

► EVERYDAY LIFE

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★★★★★ In early 2009, Robert A. Schuller—the son of Robert H.—and a business partner acquired cable television's American Life TV Network. Now the former *Hour of Power* host has his own show, *Everyday Life*, a half-hour mini-drama about residents of a fictional small town. The first of 13 episodes features a self-absorbed attorney on the fast track who neglects all others—including his wife and God—until God sends him a message. We know this because Schuller tells us—in one of many voiceover interruptions to state the obvious—that divine forces are behind it all. —*Mark Moring*

MUSIC

ROCKY VOTOLATO

► TRUE DEVOTION

(BARSUK)

★★★★★ Singer-songwriter Votolato recalls the acoustic sentiments of Elliott Smith or Ryan Adams (minus the cynicism). *True Devotion* heralds Votolato's victory over depression. After years of being consumed with existentialism, physics, and theology, he's now singing, "Please make me your instrument / with eyes inside out I'll never doubt this / The fruit will show where the root is planted / I just want to come back home to you again." Votolato

has given up fighting existential wars, crafting a delicate indie-folk record about making peace with yourself. —*Ron Augustine*

BILL MALLONEE

► CABIN SONGS

(INDEPENDENT)

★★★★★ Shunning the industry standard of making a full album every year or two, veteran troubadour Bill Mallonee has recently

been releasing a new EP about every three months through his website. This seven-song pearl was written and recorded in 10 days in a North Carolina mountain cabin last fall. Mallonee is wrestling with the deaths of his father and a longtime friend, so "a certain sadness," as he puts it, pervades the songs. But, he adds appropriately, "there's a hallowed light scattered about." The album includes his signature voice and clever lyricism. —*Mark Moring*

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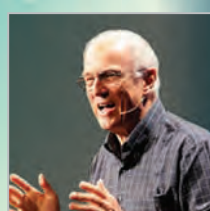
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CHOOSING a seminar

▶ A Road Map to the Right Fit

page 70



▶ A Matter of Priority

page 86





A ROAD MAP to the RIGHT FIT

Factors to consider when choosing a graduate theological institution.



Academic reputation.
Professional expertise.
Spiritual formation.
Programs. Financial aid.

Location. Core values. Scheduling options. Community. Of all the things to consider when exploring a seminary or graduate school, what's most important?

The truth is, admissions counselors advise prospective students to take them all into account. But, most would agree, a careful consideration of God's leading is an excellent place to start.

Even before comparing institutions, "it is important for future seminarians to see the selection process as a season of formation in itself. They cannot spend enough time on their knees as they seek God's will throughout the

process," says Luke McFadden, Admissions Counselor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. "The objective is not merely to end up in the right community, but also to steward the selection process well by remaining aware of the ways in which God is working before transitioning to seminary."

Questions about one's vocation require an examination of both "the internal movement of the Spirit in apparent gifts and abilities and external confirmation by pastors, other leaders, friends and one's spouse, if married," says Jeremy Kicklighter, Director of Admissions at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis. Dr. Dennis P. Hollinger, President of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South

Hamilton, Massachusetts, agrees. "Part of the call to ministry," he says, "is a call of the church itself as it discerns the gifts of potential pastors, missionaries, and leaders."

Answering this question "lays the groundwork for many of the other factors," Kicklighter says. "For example, all students are concerned about finances and want to trust the Lord to provide for them. Being sent gives a reasonable basis for faith that the Lord will provide for you in every area while you are studying."

At Wheaton College Graduate School in Wheaton, Illinois, Julie Huebner, Director of Graduate Admissions, says she invests considerable time in getting to know prospective students in order help them discern

continued on page 74

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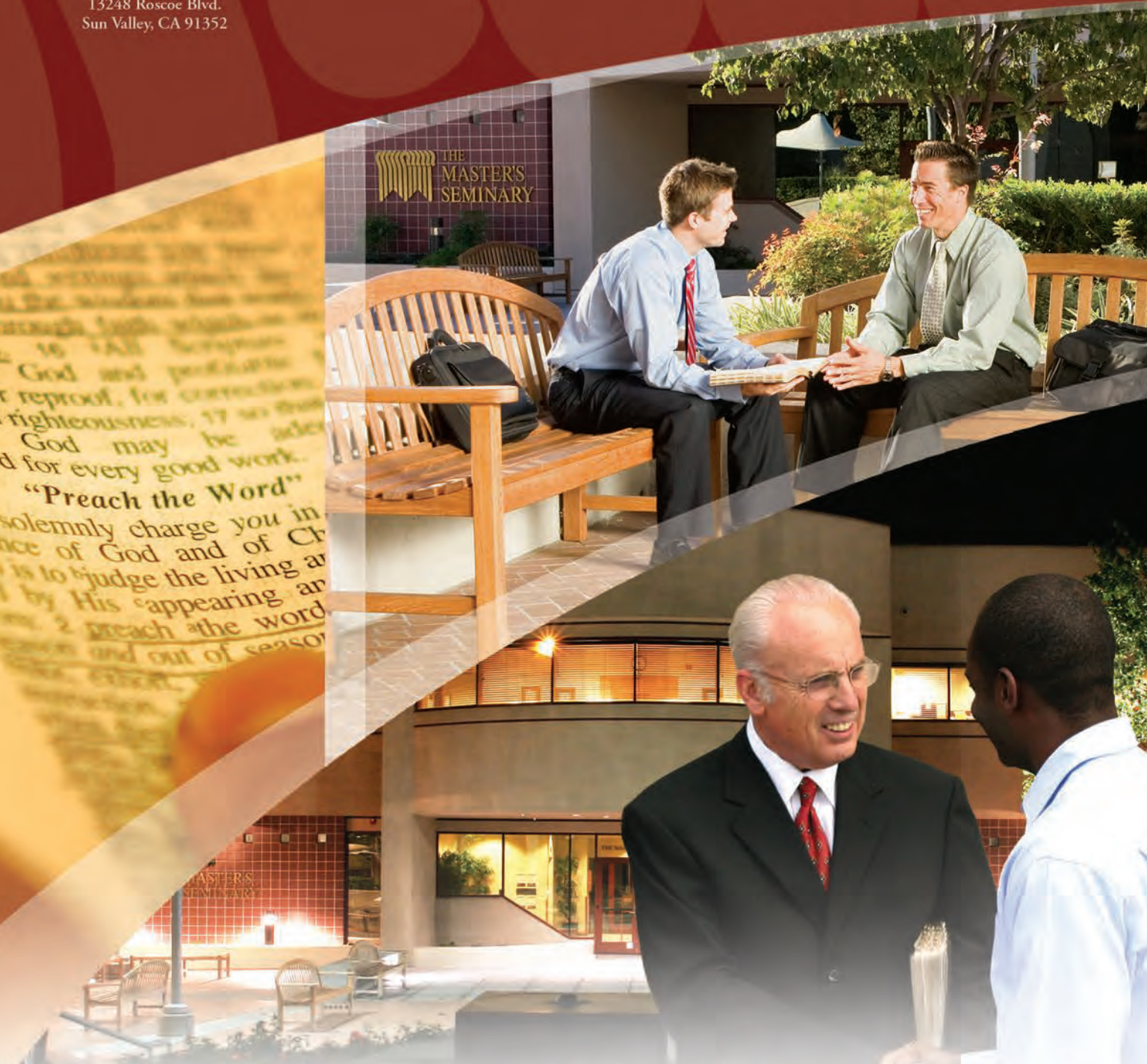
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April's fitness goals are spiritual as well as physical.

For April King, physical fitness and spiritual fitness go hand in hand—or at least they should. “As we evangelize developing countries and share our faith, we have to be careful not to also share some of our culture’s unhealthy habits,” she says, referring to America’s ongoing issues with healthy diet and exercise.

April, a Georgia native who majored in exercise science as an undergraduate, has always been interested in health and fitness. “My intention was always to work as a professional trainer,” she says.

After graduation, while interning as a fitness coordinator in Montreal, April began attending a multicultural church that was heavily involved in mission work. “I was completely fascinated,” says April.

Moving back home to Georgia, she joined another church with a passion for missions. Perhaps this was a message? On a women’s retreat in 2005, she felt assurance. “I finally said, ‘I want to be a missionary,’” she explains. “And I felt a peace when I said it.”

But, where would she find a graduate-level training program that she was sure offered the world-class training and global opportunities she desired? At Regent University, April discovered the School of Divinity’s missiology track—with

its international focus and global reach—was exactly what she needed. As a global center of Christian thought and action for more than 30 years, Regent has prepared thousands of capable men and women to excel as leaders in pivotal professions and ministries.

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“This is a very international environment,” she says, listing China, Africa and Canada as just a few of the many countries represented in the student body. “You connect with the world at Regent.”

While Regent’s online courses would allow her to study many programs from almost anywhere in the world, April considers her decision to live on campus in coastal Virginia just one more plus. If you’re ready to bring your talents into ministry, Regent will help you discover how.

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God's leading. "I don't offer a pat 1-2-3 process because each person is different," she says. But, in general, "I would say to prospective students, 'Know yourself and who God has created you to be; seek input and affirmation from the body of Christ: parents, pastors, faculty, mentors, etc.; and trust God for discernment.'"

As prospective students move from discerning the nature of their call to figuring out where and how to pursue it, admissions counselors generally advise them to examine several criteria.

Core values. Although denominational affiliation matters much less than it once did, the culture of the learning community and its doctrinal commitments do play a critical role in how a student evaluates the education he or she is receiving. "The questions we receive concerning doctrinal issues show that our prospective students want to learn in an environment in which their theological

and denominational traditions are represented," says Trinity's McFadden. Trinity "welcomes students and professors from a wide variety of denominations [and is] committed to representing theological diversity within the context of orthodoxy." This concern goes beyond one's level of agreement on various issues, says Cindy Aalders, Director of Admissions at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia. The question, "Is it a place conducive to constructive dialogue?" she points out, should also receive careful consideration.

Academics. "Preparing well for full-time Christian service requires the right balance of study, supervised ministry, and mentorship," McFadden says. "Therefore, it is important to consider the level of academic rigor at each institution and to determine whether the course work stretches students to attain expertise in areas that will allow them to serve well in ministry. It's also

helpful to see what practical ministry opportunities are available and how students are mentored as they complete these requirements."

The pursuit of "academic excellence" in seminary includes—but also exceeds—mastery of biblical studies, languages, theology, or any part of the ministry "toolbox." Serving God and people well by applying rigorous study to one's context is, in the end, what preparation for ministry is all about.

"Prospective students today want to know that there is a connection between the mind, the heart, and ministerial training," Hollinger says. "At Gordon-Conwell we give significant attention to holding these three dimensions together." Mentored Ministry, Gordon-Conwell's field education component, is required for all of the school's ministerial degrees. "We encourage [students] to have continuity in these experiences, but at the same time to have varied opportunities to develop and discern their gifts. That could mean that their time may be best spent in one or two churches or organizations over the course of their time at seminary, but working in various kinds of ministries within that church or organization."

Relevance to the field is carefully addressed in all professional graduate programs. Many of Wheaton's graduate programs—including the Master of Arts (M.A.) in Teaching degrees, the M.A. in Intercultural Studies and Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), and the Clinical Psychology programs—include practicum or internship requirements. Prospective students also inquire, Huebner says, about licensing, certification, and accreditation issues that may pertain to their fields and, in the case of the clinical psychology programs, the theoretical perspective taught by the faculty. Many students choose Wheaton, she adds, because they are "ministry-minded" in their fields and want a program that offers "a blend of academic challenge and professional preparation."

"Integration is a high priority," says Roy Allinson, Director of Admissions

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for the Graduate Schools of Biola University, referring not only to “classroom integration of faith with the class topic, but the integration of a Christian perspective into the student’s workplace or area of service. This is especially distinctive of Biola’s M.A. in Organizational Leadership and the M.B.A. programs, though it runs through all of our programs.”

Faculty. Not surprisingly, admissions counselors report a very high level of interest in their schools’ facul-

that seminaries and graduate schools support their graduates through that process. At Covenant Seminary, “extensive diagnostic evaluation” of graduates’ gifts, abilities, and understanding of their call complements active consultation with churches and search committees, and evaluation of open positions. “Through the use of these well-researched diagnostics, we are better able to identify when a particular pastor and church are more, or less, likely to match in the key areas

through our Ockenga Institute.” These initiatives include the Timothy Project, which brings together alumni in their first ten years of ministry for ministry assessment, small group discussion, worship, and fellowship; Pastors’ Forums that feature “well-known speakers on timely topics”; and free counseling services for alumni facing crises or transition.

Ministry Value. “I think a final academic and professional issue that students are wrestling with is whether or not seminary is even valuable to what they are going to do,” says Covenant’s Kicklighter. “My encouragement to prospective students is that they think through their ministry aims and see how those aims will be best furthered. Moving away from one’s home and ministry context is a sacrifice, but it also provides the opportunity to move into a committed community of shared learning . . . to build friendships for a lifetime of ministry. It also gives them exposure to what the Lord is doing in many different ministry contexts . . . and to a wider variety of experience and expertise through the faculty.”

Reformed’s Jeanrenaud agrees. “If [students] want greater depth and rootedness in their ministry that will both equip and fuel them, they should really consider seminary,” he says. “I often encourage students to remember that their passion for the people to whom they minister will wax and wane over the years, and will not be the thing that keeps them on the mission field to which God has called them. Rather, it is the Word of God that will encourage and humble them, providing them with the strength to continue ministering. Seminary equips students to go much deeper into that endless resource of his grace, the Word.”

Spiritual formation and community life. Prospective students “want to know whether they will grow or wilt spiritually during seminary, and whether they will be able to engage in transformational ministry” afterward, Kicklighter says. One way schools answer this concern is to connect campus visitors with current students and encourage them to investigate the

A final academic and professional issue that students are wrestling with is whether or not seminary is even valuable to what they are going to do.

ties: their academic expertise, how adept they are at applying that expertise to ministry, even their accessibility outside of class. “The reputation of professors within the classroom and in the Christian and academic communities” is a key concern, Allinson says. Prospective students “are often interested in what level of personal interaction they can have with professors outside of the classroom.” This is particularly true, says Gordon-Conwell’s Hollinger, of younger students, who “want faculty members who will be mentors, not just teachers.” Recognizing professors’ formative influence, schools encourage students to avail themselves of the resources their faculty have to offer.

“Our faculty members are, as a whole, pastor-scholars,” says Stephane Jeanrenaud, Director of Admissions and Alumni Relations at Reformed Theological Seminary’s Charlotte campus. “While they are academic leaders in their respective fields, they are also individuals who have worked in the field of ministry, most serving in the pastorate. They know how to communicate biblical truths to the lay person and use this knowledge to train our students to do the same.”

Post-graduation support. Finding the right job can be a source of high anxiety, so it’s not surprising

of leadership, relationship, and communication styles,” Kicklighter says. The benefits, he adds, are two-fold: a “high ministerial placement rate in ministry contexts upon graduation, and decrease of the attrition rates among our graduates. Our Alumni Office is then tasked with praying and advocating for, following up with, and encouraging young ministers in their first five years of pastoral ministry.”

Many schools have active placement and networking services. Regent College maintains an extensive web-based job board and the Alumni Mosaic, an online networking community. It also provides the Leaving Regent Workshop to help graduates make the transition. Reformed Seminary actively disseminates information on placement opportunities, hosts ministry and church representatives on campus, and provides other means of support and counsel through the process.

In addition to placement services, Gordon-Conwell has invested considerable time and resources into lifelong learning opportunities for graduates. “We attempt to remind our students that their education is not completed the day they graduate,” Hollinger says. “Therefore, we have developed major continuing education programs



"In my time at Trinity, I have really appreciated the intentionality of the faculty in their approach toward their students. They are committed to providing expertise in their field, as well as developing and caring for the whole person. The faculty are extremely pastoral. Here, it's not just my mind that is valued but who I am as a whole person. I feel like I've received an education that connects the mind with the heart."

—Meryl Herr (MDiv '07)

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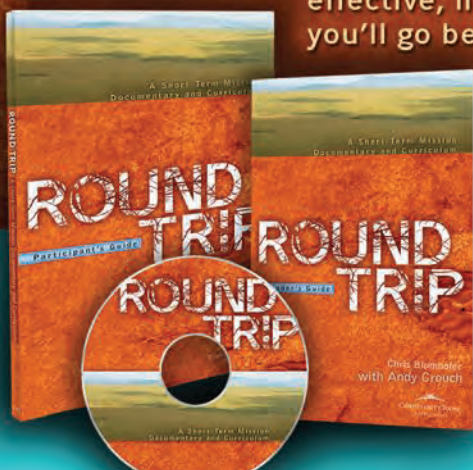
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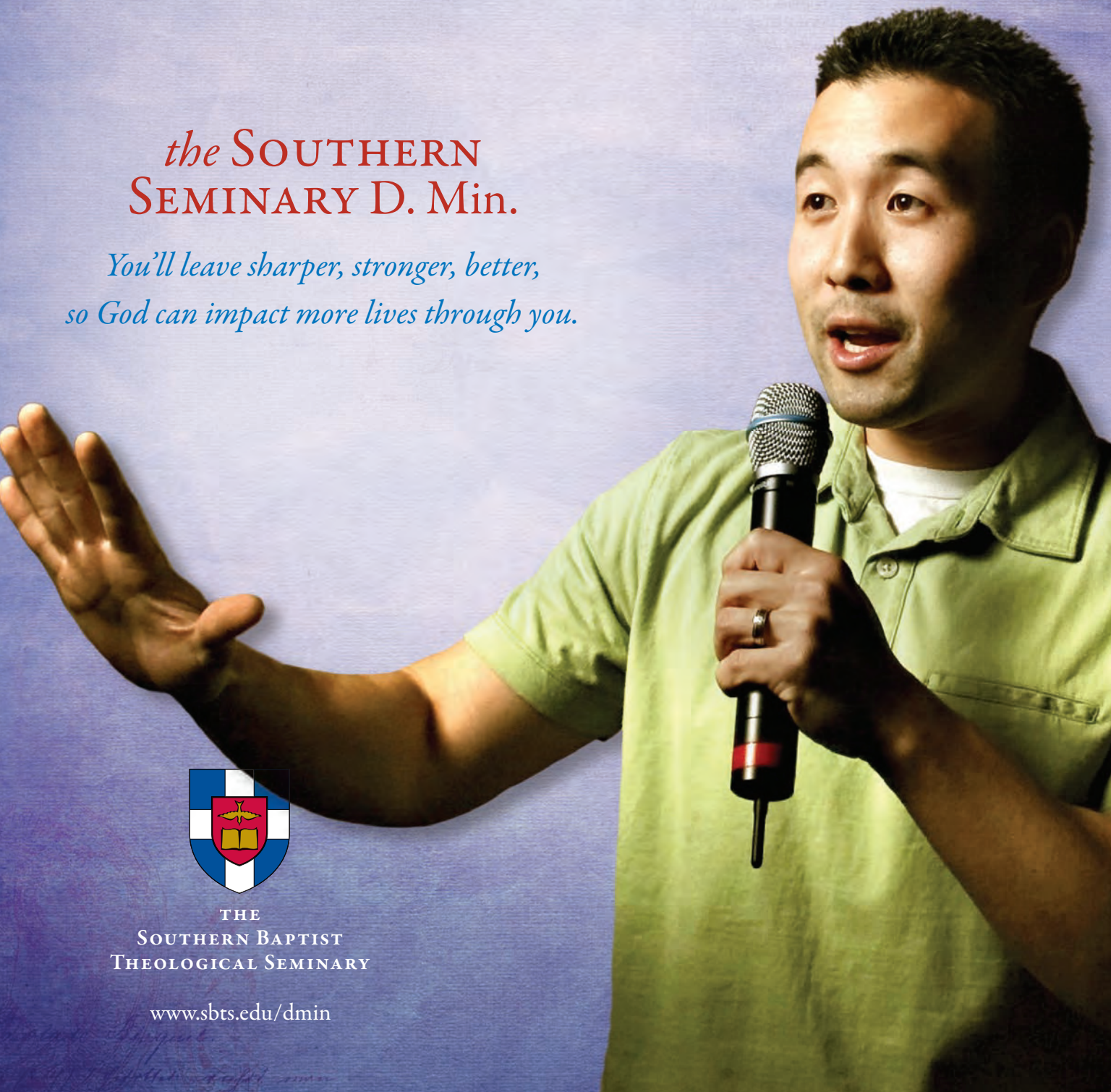
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ministries of alumni. Biola's Allinson encourages additional questions, such as: "Does a place provide community, so that we can learn to follow Christ and be like him among others who are on the same journey? Does it encourage a healthy level of transparency and honesty in the process of spiritual and academic development? Is it open to the work of the Holy Spirit as a vital part of the process, understanding that God cares about and wants to be involved in our work in a cooperative process with us?" Students, says Reformed's Jeanrenaud, "are often concerned that their seminary training not simply be academic, but be transformative to their own devotional lives and to those to whom they will minister. They want to come out of seminary as men and women who love the Lord more and who have personally grown in their relationship with Christ throughout that time."

These questions point to the challenge of maintaining a vibrant spiritual

life in the midst of the demands of school, employment, relationships, and ministry. Schools take this very seriously, cultivating spiritual vitality in their curricula and community life, and encouraging students to take advantage of numerous resources.

Most seminaries require classes that deal with the issue of spiritual formation for ministry and/or a series of classes devoted to spiritual growth; most classes, naturally, include a component of spiritual reflection in their coursework. In addition, seminaries and Christian graduate schools invariably emphasize participation in chapel services and other opportunities for worship and fellowship to foster spiritual growth and connection. Students are strongly encouraged, if not required, to plug into small groups at school or their churches. They are further encouraged to connect with a spiritual director or use counseling services when needed. At Regent College, students are encouraged to participate

in forums on student life, such as time management, writing papers, dealing with depression, and other issues of personal import. During new student orientation, "we attempt to provide an overview of the various challenges of graduate school" as well, Aalders says.

Covenant Seminary "takes great care in helping our students get involved with churches, find suitable housing, and connect with other students within what we call their 'hub community': groups of students who live in geographic proximity to one another," Kicklighter says. "This greatly improves our students' opportunities and ability to integrate a Christ-centered worldview in all of life, not just in the classroom."

At Gordon-Conwell, Hollinger says, "We attempt to emphasize that the patterns of spiritual formation and spiritual life need to be developed now." Their initiatives include the co-curricular Pierce Center for Disciple-Building which, according to its website, offers a community context in which "we invite one another to prioritize life-long intimacy with Jesus Christ while developing as incarnational disciple-builders," through intentional practice of the spiritual disciplines and cultivation of spiritual friendships and community.

Spiritual formation and vibrant community life are also cultivated by the best resource schools have: the faculty. "Our theology professors and church historians, for example, give significant attention to the application of classical theological understandings for the spiritual life," Hollinger says. "Students often comment to me about the practical significance they gain from what many would perceive to be a very academic class."

Graduate school faculties likewise are committed to student formation. "The faculty and academic advisors actually have a great impact on the formation of the student as a whole, through the classroom, individual appointments, and department or degree functions," Wheaton's Julie Huebner says. In addition, "many faculty make it a point to eat lunch with students on a weekly basis, and in these

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Mike learned how to be both biblically faithful and culturally aware, able to answer the tough questions about Christianity in a way that engages younger generations. His Talbot education also equipped him to galvanize Rock Harbor around a gospel that

is less about suburban comfort and more about proclaiming the good news of great joy to a world in need: “That God is making all things new,” says Mike, “and he starts with us.”

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informal conversations a lot is 'caught.'"

Jeanrenaud agrees. "First and foremost [in student formation] is the personal involvement of our faculty in the lives of our students. The faculty are accessible and actively look for ways to spend personal time with students. They see themselves as mentors."

"As many faculty, especially in the ministerial programs, have years of ministry training which often includes a pastoral background, professors naturally care about the spiritual well-being of the students they teach," adds Biola's Allinson.

Financial considerations. "Nobody goes to seminary with the expectation of increasing their earnings potential, so many are especially fearful of accruing debt," Trinity's McFadden says. As does every school, Trinity offers "a variety of scholarships and grants to help students pay for their theological educations, but we also remind them that the financial aspect of the seminary selection process should not be the primary factor. Nobody should foolishly launch themselves into a degree program that will bury them in debt, but it is also foolish to expect that seminary will not require students and their spouses to make sacrifices as they work to pay for their education." Many schools report that the recent economic downturn has heightened concerns. "I do think the cost of graduate education remains a great concern to those who are planning to enter full-time ministry or work in a non-profit organization. The salaries these kinds of jobs provide are not often generous enough to handle large student loan indebtedness," Wheaton's Huebner says.

To help mitigate the burden of financing one's education, seminaries and graduate schools offer need- and merit-based financial support, casting as wide a net as possible through grants, awards, partial and even full scholarships. "Almost 20% of our operating budget is devoted to financial aid, giving the majority of our Master of Divinity students at least a 50% scholarship," says Covenant's Kicklighter. He notes that Covenant also provides

on-campus housing for 40 families—including 85 children—and 40 single students, plus housing for an additional 45 families nearby.

In addition to numerous program-specific scholarships, fellowships, and merit-based awards, Wheaton offers the need-based Wheaton Grant, for which 80 to 85% of its M.A. students qualify, Huebner says, noting that the average award is \$5,200.

"Certainly, given the financial struggles we have dealt with as a nation, students are struggling more than ever with financial and employment concerns. As an institution, Reformed Seminary has developed some new scholarships in addition to the generous scholarships and grants already established," Jeanrenaud says. "Further, RTS staff assist students and their spouses in looking for employment and with their transition to the area, and help students get connected with vibrant worship communities in the various campus locations."

Logistics. In addition to finances, other practical issues—including location, scheduling, and managing priorities—"do pose greater challenges nowadays as opposed to, say, 20-25 years ago," Cindy Aalders of Regent College says. Her sense is that this is indicative not only of the current economic climate, but also the fact that, increasingly, students pursue graduate education "concurrent [with] other professional or personal goals." In addition to offering financial aid and flexible scheduling, she says, "We advise students regarding permit issues, schooling for children, [and] locating housing," among other things. Given the school's location in Vancouver, "Regent also offers assistance and information regarding all aspects of making an international move."

Location is an important consideration, Aalders says, because "you're likely to spend two to four years of your life in a graduate program." It helps to ask oneself, she says, "Where do you want to be located? Does the school's location match your desired ministry involvement during your study time? Does it fit well with your

extracurricular interests?"

Increasingly, schools have several campuses with distinct characteristics. "With multiple campuses, [Gordon-Conwell] attempts to address the need for contextual forms of education. Thus, at the South Hamilton campus, we talk a great deal about how to be a Christian and do ministry in the secularized, pluralistic context in which we find ourselves," Hollinger says. "At our Boston campus, the focus is on doing ministry and living out the gospel in the struggles of urban realities. At our Charlotte campus, significant attention is given to developing spiritual depth in the midst of a very church area."

To help students manage their time and priorities well, Covenant Seminary's Director of Student Life "intentionally meets with first year M.Div. students to counsel and equip them in these family and life issues," Kicklighter says. "In addition to this, we work to provide opportunities for family growth such as free childcare every week of the semester so spouses can attend classes or run errands, and a parents' night out once a month so the student and spouse can go on a date. We encourage spouses to take courses by offering them 100% scholarships. Furthermore, all Covenant students are able to receive free counseling on-campus to work through spiritual and emotional issues that arise during their time and would affect their lives and ministries greatly if not dealt with."

The various issues prospective students bring to the table—from the big picture to the nuts and bolts—are questions "regarding both the nature of the institution and the 'fit' between the prospective student and the institution," Biola's Roy Allinson says. "Far beyond simply seeking increasing enrollments, we are concerned that students find the place where they can best be educated, challenged, and nurtured in preparation for or enhancement of the ministry to which God has called them."

Kathy Furlong is a freelance writer living in Philadelphia, PA.



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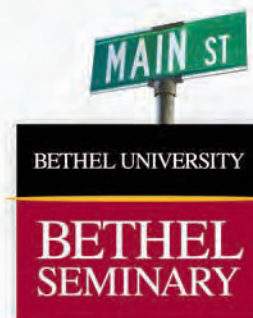
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A Matter of Priority

How four students picked their seminaries.



• **NATALIE CORBIN** •
Denver Seminary



• **MATT GREEN** •
Denver Seminary



• **JOHN ELMORE** •
Dallas Theological Seminary



• **ANDA MOGOS** •
Dallas Theological Seminary

While there are many factors to consider when choosing a seminary, it's important to know which criteria are most important to you. Understanding your priorities will help you narrow down your choices and find your best fit.

From spiritual formation to faculty, from location to cost, these four students share their reasons for deciding on a school.

As a writer, **Natalie Corbin** worked on grants for the non-profit sector in Maryland. Then, following God's prompting to return to school, she spent a lot of time in listening prayer, and believes God directed her to Denver. "I attended a preview weekend for prospective students and listened: to hear God, to gain confirmation," she says. "Time and again he returned confirming answers, both directly and indirectly. It was with confidence that I applied to Denver Seminary and began preparations to move to Colorado."

While obedience to God's direction was primary in Corbin's decision to attend Denver, she also paid attention to the seminary's emphases on academic and spiritual growth. "Rigorous academic programs are partnered with an intentional spiritual formation program that provides an environment of balance between head knowledge and heart knowledge. The two are surely connected and must be pursued together during preparation," she says. As she investigated the school both that weekend and on the web, "it was clear . . . that Denver Seminary had a very holistic philosophy of education and desired to nurture and nourish each student."

Now anticipating graduation with a Master of Arts in Biblical Studies (New Testament), she plans to continue writing, with a new focus. "My hope is to produce works through God's leading that will encourage and challenge people to explore God personally, either for the first time or in on-going pursuit of relationship with him," she says.

Several factors led **Matt Green**, a Philosophy of Religion major (M.A.), to Denver

Seminary. Knowing he wanted to study Philosophy of Religion, program offerings were an important consideration. He was interested in travel courses, and also searched for a school that enjoyed a strong sense of community. He wanted a school that was both denominationally unaffiliated and in close proximity to practical ministry opportunities. Location was also a factor, he says, "as I hoped to be in a place where I could take part in outdoor activities, but also [enjoy] the amenities of urban culture, and ideally be within a day's drive of my home in Montana."

Green chose Denver because it best fulfilled his varied criteria. In addition to its relative proximity to home, its residential campus community was well situated to enjoy both "the benefits of the Rocky Mountains and the city of Denver." The school's philosophy program was attractive, as were "the diverse offerings in biblical and theological studies with professors who are well respected in their fields," he says. "In this environment, there were also numerous opportunities to get involved in ministry."

A writer by trade with a background in communications, Green hopes to fuse his writing skills with his graduate education to engage in outreach. His passion, he says, is "to relate the truth of Christianity through the venues of our culture in a way the culture can comprehend."

"My main intent for seminary was to know my Bible well. God's truth and the gospel of Jesus set people free, period. Jesus did this for me when my world had fallen apart at the age of 30, and I knew I wanted to carry the Lord's hope to others who were hurting."

Thus began **John Elmore's** journey into ministry, and to Dallas Theological Seminary. In 2006, he enrolled at the Kanakuk Institute in Missouri for a year of biblical studies and discipleship. "The school invites professors to come teach each week on a given book or topic and, without fail, my favorite professors were from DTS," he says. "Their authority and resource was the Bible: they knew it well and could teach it well." After Kanakuk, Elmore followed



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his favorite professors to Dallas and enrolled in the Pastoral Ministries track of the Master of Theology (Th.M.) program.

"DTS professors aren't jaded academic recluses," he says. "They are seasoned with a lifetime of field experience and bring that together with expert biblical teaching. Beyond this, they truly love students."

Elmore's goal initially was pastoral ministry in the U.S., but he's sensed

God leading him in a somewhat different direction. "During the last two summer breaks I have been in international crisis areas and I feel my desires and direction changing," he says. During the 2007 food crisis in Haiti, Elmore was part of a group that planted and operated a malnutrition clinic for dying children. The following summer, he ministered with alcoholics in southern Sudan. "DTS is equipping me far beyond what I ever estimated," he says.

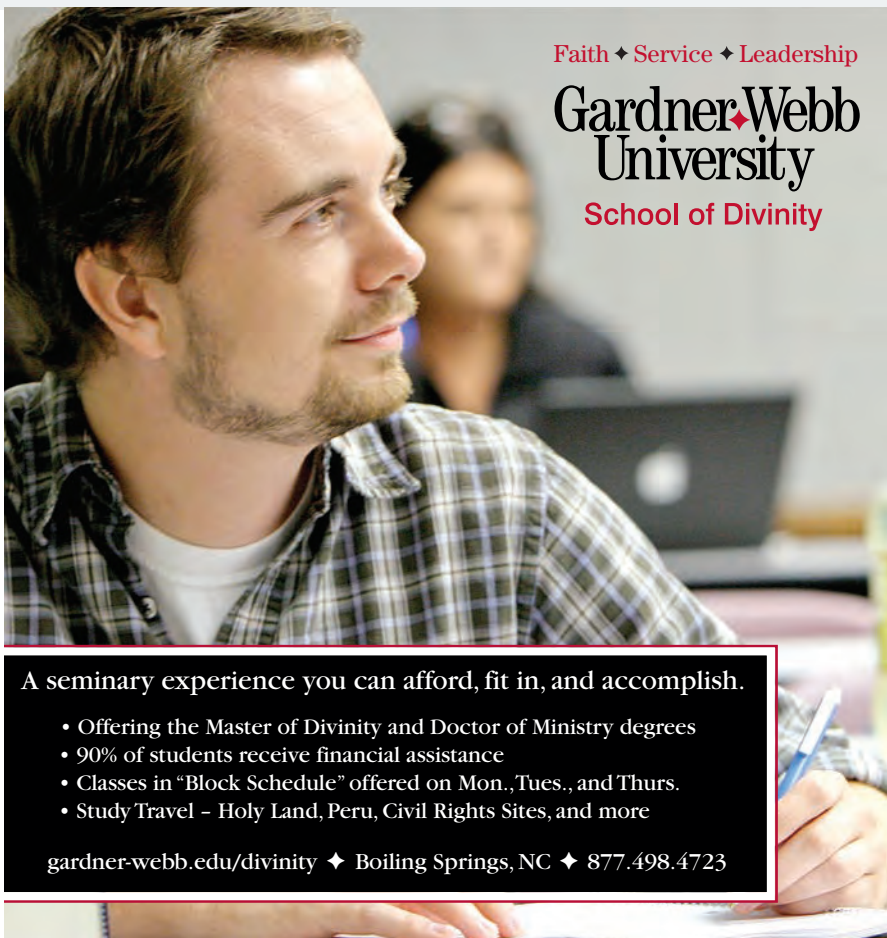
As Christian counselors in their native Romania, **Anda Mogos** and her husband longed for a better way to meet the needs of the people they served. "Although we both had a B.A. in Theology, we felt we were suffocating when faced with situations that overwhelmed our level of training," she says.

They began searching for a school "where Christ would be honored, where the Scripture would be approached without fear and with honesty, and where we would be taught to interact with life as it really is," she says. Their search led them to Dallas Theological Seminary.

In addition to looking for the right program at a reputable school, the Mogoses needed to take their finances into consideration. "From a theological perspective, DTS sounded great, but from an apartment in Bucharest, it was clear that finances would determine if and where we would go to grad school," she says. "DTS has an excellent scholarship program and excellent admissions counselors and these, combined with a mountain of divine miracles, are what brought us here."

Anda will graduate this year with an M.A. in Biblical Counseling. "My plan is to become a certified therapist in Romania and to create and persuade the Romanian government to accredit Integrational Christian Therapy as a legitimate orientation in counseling," she says. "My passion is to encourage evangelicals in Romania to develop a paradigm of integrating healthy psychology with a grace-oriented, Christ-honoring Christianity."

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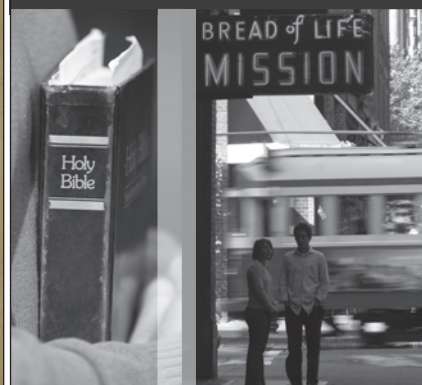


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BY LAURA LEONARD



A Proverbs 31 Woman

Eve Nunez speaks up for children who cannot speak for themselves.

She has spent 38 years fighting for a better future for children and Hispanics in the United States, but Eve Nunez hopes she's just getting started—her grandmothers lived to be 115 and 118. A grandmother herself, Nunez has founded two organizations to support her vision: the Arizona Latino Commission connects faith-based organizations with Hispanic communities, and Help4Kidz ministers to needy, mostly Hispanic children in Phoenix, Arizona, providing them with food, clothes, school supplies, tutoring, health care, and the Word of God.

Nunez is always exploring new channels to support her goals. In 2008, she ran for a seat in the Arizona House, and plans to run again. And as a vice president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, she educates constituents “not only to speak about making the change but about *being* the change. I would like the public to see that Hispanics are an asset instead of a problem to our community.”

All of her work centers on the call of Proverbs 31:8–9, to “speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves . . . [to] defend the rights of the poor and needy.” As one of 18 siblings, Nunez remembers going to sleep hungry many times and asking God, “When I grow up, bless me so I can help the children of the world.” Her prayers continue to be answered.

- **Hometown** Phoenix
- **Family** Joe (husband); Immanuel, Angelique, and Hannah (children)
- **Currently Reading** The Book of Esther
- **Favorite movie** The Left Behind series
- **Hobbies** Historical literature and gourmet cooking
- **Favorite Bible verse** Galatians 2:20

question & answer

What led you, as a children's minister, into advocacy work?

When I was 17, my pastor told me, “One day God’s going to use you as an instrument to speak to government.” I said, “I don’t want to do that—I just want to take care of children.” But now I see that God has taken me to a place where I can be a voice to government officials and tell them about the needs of children and advocate for children’s rights.

What is the issue that most engages your work?

Immigration reform. Because a large percentage of the children we work with have immigrant parents, every immigration law impacts them directly. Arizona’s state workers are required to report undocumented clients who apply for assistance for their U.S.-born children. Many children don’t receive the benefits they are entitled to as U.S. citizens because their parents won’t come in to apply. As a result, Help4Kidz has seen an increase in calls for assistance.

How does this reality shape your work and ministry?

I have sensed resentment and anger in the children due to the unjust treatment of their parents, so I now place a stronger emphasis on teaching the children of immigrants about U.S. history. It helps when I teach that early Hispanics had to work with Native Americans through many struggles.

I also teach them about the Pilgrims, who came and spread the gospel of Jesus Christ in America. I tell them that Jesus was the answer then and is still the answer today.

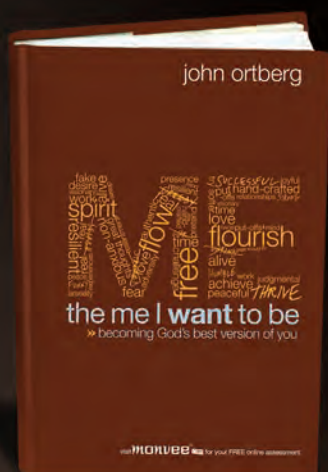
What to you is the church's role?

To embrace these children [regardless of] where their parents come from or if they are legal.

More: Help4Kidz.org,
ArizonaLatinoCommission.com

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EXACTLY WHAT
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“Through the Partnership Program, I learned about recruiting people to be in prayer for my wife, Elizabeth, and me and walking alongside us in financial support.”

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