

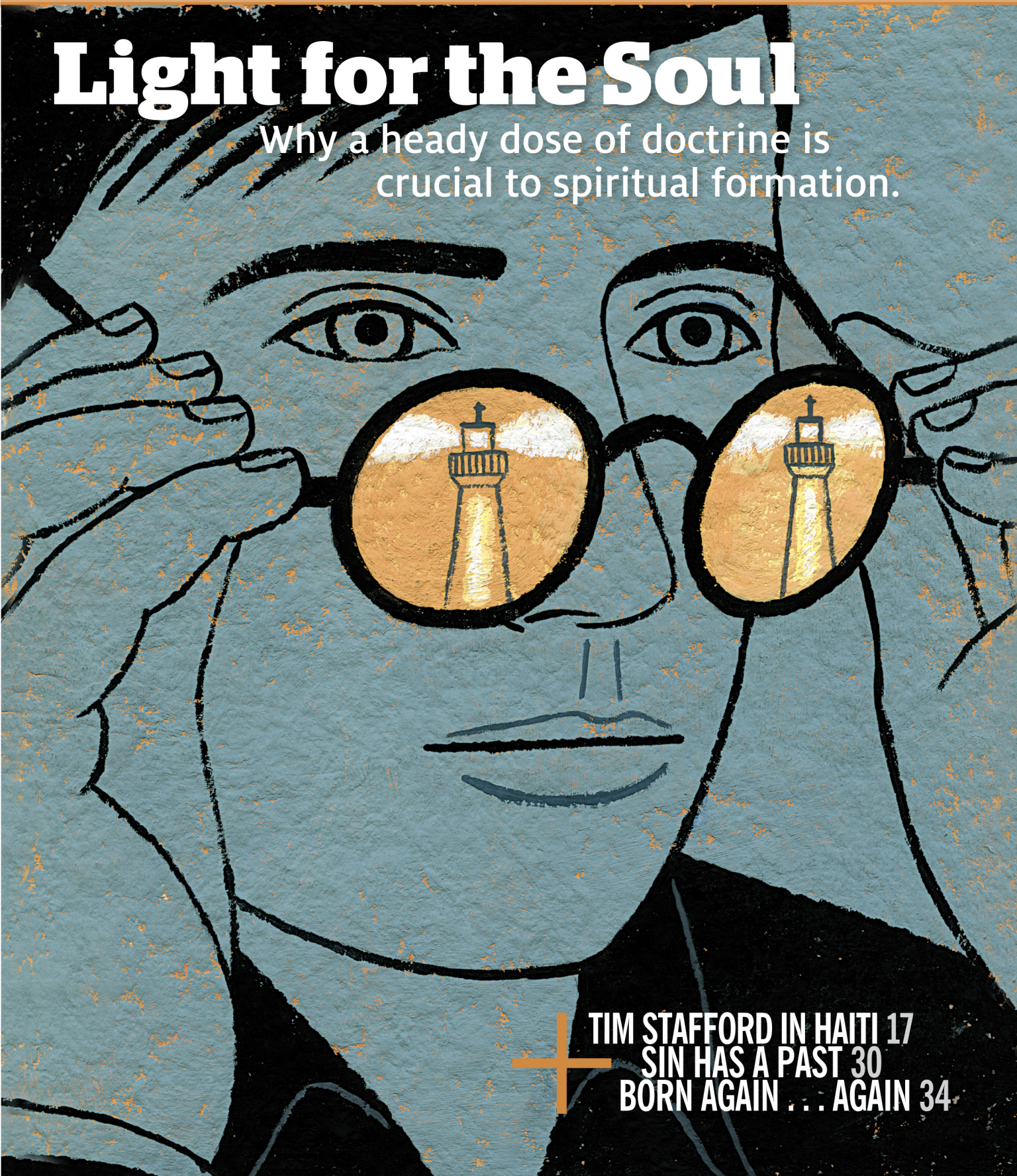
Lauren Winner Lauds Greg Wolfe for *Image* • Scot McKnight Spots McLaren's Fatal Flaws

Christianity Today

MARCH 2010

Light for the Soul

Why a heady dose of doctrine is crucial to spiritual formation.



TIM STAFFORD IN HAITI 17
SIN HAS A PAST 30
BORN AGAIN . . . AGAIN 34



Caroline Dixon,
Master of Divinity 2012



Caroline with Pierce Mentor,
Susan Currie.



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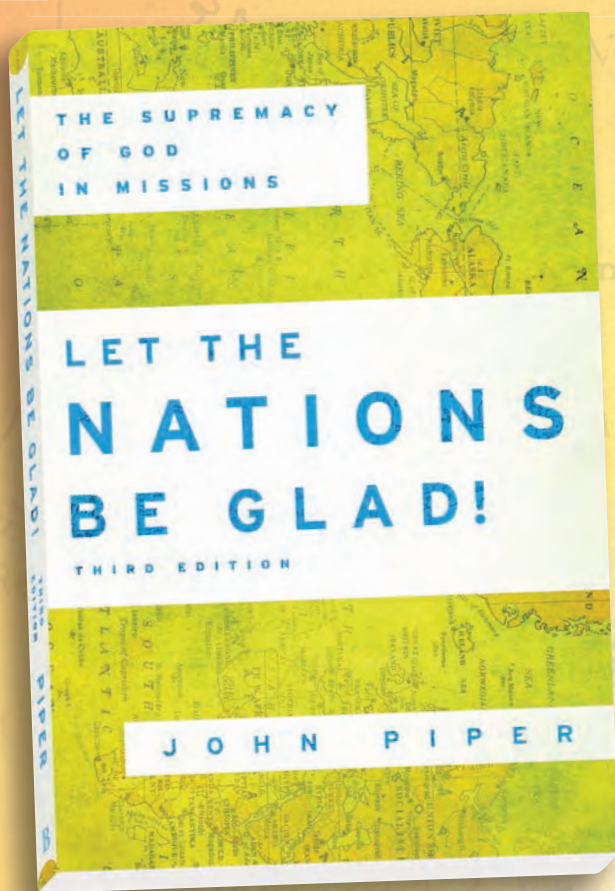


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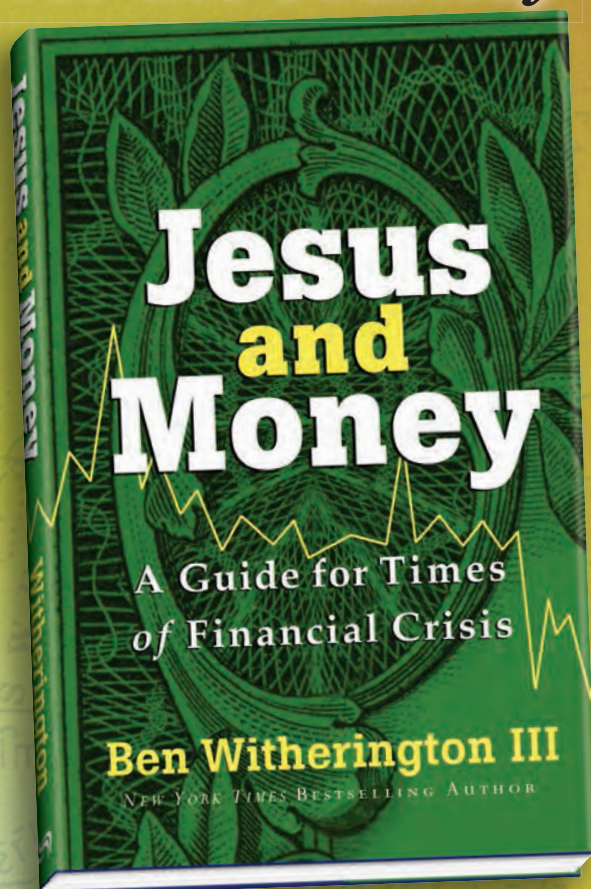
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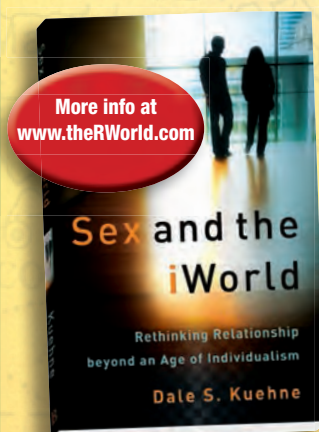
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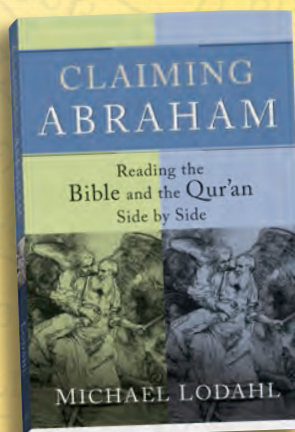
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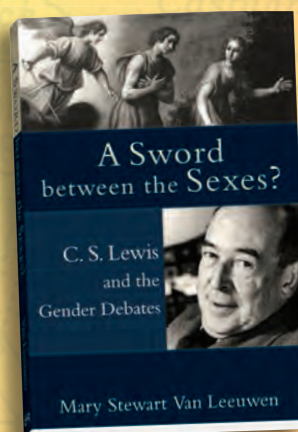
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William Pollard, former ServiceMaster CEO, once said that “if you want people to listen, you have to have a platform to speak from, and that is excellence in what you do.” Excellence—whether in journalism or business leadership—makes people want to know what you know.

The consistent excellence of *Christianity Today*’s journalism creates such a platform. Mainstream media reporters regularly recognize our work—and before they write about conservative Protestants, many of them will give us a call. The first time I was contacted by a *New York Times* writer, Desert Storm was in full swing, and a sudden explosion of end-times interest was focused on Iraq. The reporter asked why. I told him I was no expert and pointed him to knowledgeable people. But then I offered my own take. Two days later, I was surprised to see my words in the *Times*. Over the decades, CT staff have received many calls from journalists looking for a source or wanting to try out a story idea.

Excellence creates a platform. But the practice of excellence is not about building that platform. It is about performing well in daily things, consistently, reliably. As Aristotle wrote, “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence . . . is not an act, but a habit.” Habitually doing small things well doesn’t stop us from dreaming. Could we, perhaps, fund journalists in key cities around the globe? That’s just one of the initiatives we would invite you to support with a gift. By helping us practice excellence, your gift might even expand our platform.

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David Neff, Editor in Chief

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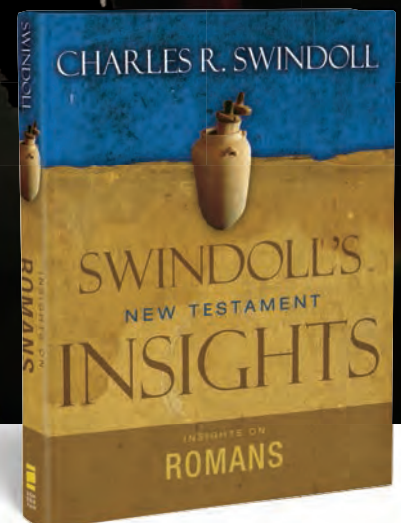


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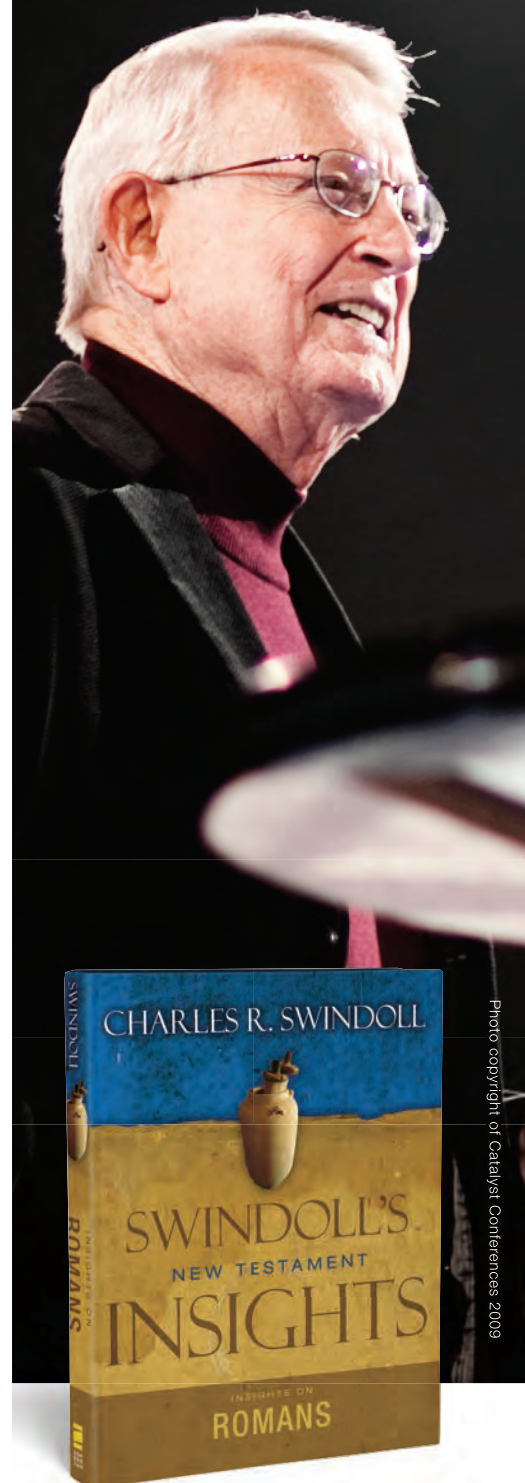


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Getting the Story

Why journalism is not just a profession for us.



WHENEVER A NATURAL DISASTER shakes up some part of the planet, we at *Christianity Today* immediately start looking for a Christian perspective. Major media outlets and relief organizations highlight many things of interest to us, but invariably we find that nobody is as interested as we are in what's going on in local churches. That's why we so often send our own reporter. So to Haiti we sent CT senior writer Tim Stafford, but even he was not prepared for one aspect of the trip:

The Port-au-Prince airport is a madhouse of people trying to get out. Coming in from Santo Domingo was hard enough—I got left behind by my missionary flight and ended up running onto a shaky commercial flight after handing over a bundle of cash. Getting out—well, I wasn't sure I was going to make it. Three or four well-hewed plans collapsed on me. And I was running out of money. Credit cards are worthless pieces of plastic. No ATMs, no checks, no nothing. If you spend your last dollar, you are going to be lining up for those World Vision food distributions. I've been to some pretty remote places, but there was always some way to get money. Not in Port-au-Prince.

Read the rest of Tim's report, "Best Time for a Christian" (page 17), on how local church leaders are already thinking about the rebuilding process.

Not all stories demand equal risk, but they require equal commitment to getting the story right. Online editor Sarah Pulliam Bailey, who does a lot of reporting as part of her job, put it this way:

Reporting is the best form of truth telling, since journalism separates fact from fiction. It allows you to ask questions no one else feels comfortable asking to get to the root of the matter. Journalists are the ones who actually communicate to the community what happens behind closed doors.

Sarah's reported piece in this issue, "Practically Theological" (page 28), tries to put legs on our cover story about the crucial role theology plays in spiritual growth. Her story separates church reality from spiritual idealism.

For us, journalism is not just a profession but also a ministry. And an unusual ministry it is—one that strives to tell the truth, that asks questions others are afraid to ask, and that communicates what's going on in thriving U.S. mega-churches and with Haitian pastors who just saw their church building collapse. ✚

Next month: Scot McKnight, N. T. Wright, and Craig Keener discuss how much we can know about the "real Jesus"; a photo essay takes us on the Jesus Trail in Galilee; and we'll hear the one thing pastors can do to improve their preaching.

Insight

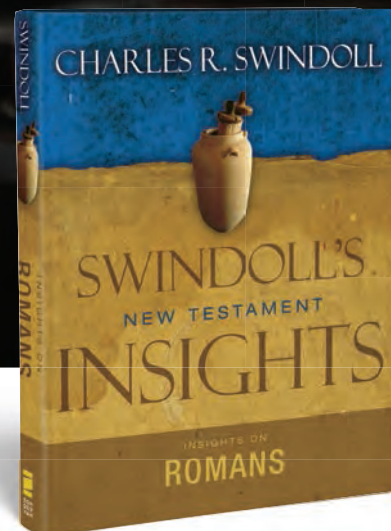
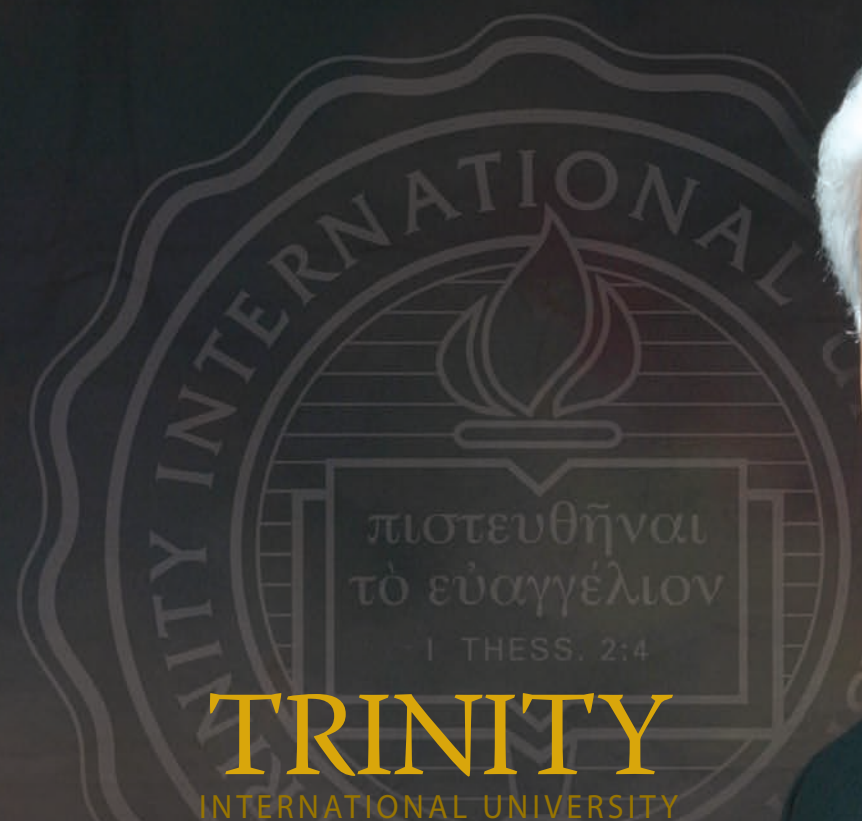


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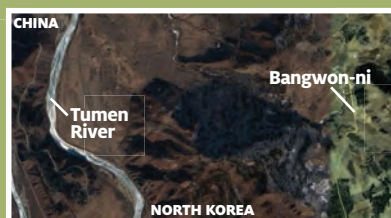
On April 12, 2010, Ravi (MDiv '76) will again visit Trinity's Deerfield, Illinois, campus to address the community and to inaugurate his new role as university professor at large. Partnership details will be posted at www.tiu.edu/rzim as they are announced. TIU is composed of Trinity College, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Trinity Graduate School, and Trinity Law School.



BRIEFING

REPORTING & DISPATCHES
FROM THE CHURCH
WORLDWIDE

SPOTLIGHT: Robert Park's North Korea Mission



After crossing the frozen Tumen River from China into North Korea, Park was reportedly captured in the village of Bangwon-ni.

HOERYONG

CHINA

NORTH KOREA

SOUTH KOREA



KOREA'S FIRST PROTESTANT MARTYR

Park's journey was reportedly inspired by the martyrdom of Robert Jermain Thomas (1839–1866), a Welsh missionary who distributed Bibles in northern Korea.

"I am an American citizen. I am coming here to deliver God's love. God loves you."

ROBERT PARK, upon entering North Korea.

➔ On Christmas Day, 28-year-old missionary Robert Park walked into North Korea in a deliberate—and successful—effort to be arrested. His goal: "to proclaim Christ's love and forgiveness" to Kim Jong Il and to call for the release of political prisoners. On February 5, North Korea sent him home. Before the release, Open Doors USA president Carl Moeller worried that Christians in labor camps "will suffer a bit more" because of the effort. But Park's pastor in Tucson, Arizona, says Park is a hero. "We didn't want it to end with it being a tragedy," John Benson of Life in Christ Community Church told the Associated Press. "We wanted it to end as a win-win, with an outcry around the world."

IN HIS OWN WORDS

"He loves you and wants to save you and all of North Korea today . . . All we are asking is for all North Koreans to be free, safe, and have life."

PARK, IN A LETTER TO KIM

"An estimated 1,000 people a day die by starvation. . . . North Korea has been sent more food aid than any nation in the world, but the food has not gone to the people who need it. So this is murder."

PARK, IN AN INTERVIEW WITH REUTERS THE WEEK BEFORE HIS JOURNEY

"Know that I am the happiest in my life. . . . Incredible miracles are happening in the liberation of North Koreans right now."

PARK, IN A DECEMBER 23 E-MAIL TO HIS PARENTS OBTAINED BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

"I do not want to be released. Until the concentration camps are liberated, I do not want to come out. The Cross means that we sacrifice our lives for the redemption of others."

PARK, TO REUTERS



GLEANINGS

Important developments in the church and the world.

1 Jos riots kill hundreds—again

NIGERIA The uneasy truce between Christians and Muslims in Jos unraveled in mid-January when three days of riots reportedly left more than 300 dead and thousands homeless. The exact cause was disputed: Christian youth protested the construction of a home in a Christian area, while Muslim youth set fire to a Catholic church during a Sunday morning service. The riots came during a political crisis in which Nigeria's Muslim president, hospitalized in Saudi Arabia since November, refused to cede power temporarily to the nation's Christian vice president. More than 1,500 people have been killed in sectarian violence over the past decade in Jos, which sits between Nigeria's mostly Muslim north and mostly Christian south.

2 Consensus may reduce church-state lawsuits

Hoping to reduce the number of frivolous lawsuits, experts on both sides of the church-state debate issued a consensus statement on current U.S. law that governs religion in the public square. The January 12 statement, drafted by evangelical, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, and ACLU leaders under the direction of Wake Forest University Divinity School, puts aside the leaders' debates over what First Amendment interpretations mean regarding religious expression in schools, the government, or workplaces in order to clarify what current law says.

3 Religion beat loses top reporters

The new year brought new assignments for several prominent religion writers. Eric

Gorski, religion reporter for the Associated Press, moved to the news service's higher education beat, while *Boston Globe* religion reporter Michael Paulson was promoted to city editor for the paper. Meanwhile, the *Chicago Sun-Times* dropped Cathleen Falsani's religion column, and Peter Steinfeld of *The New York Times* ended his 20-year-old Beliefs column.

4 Copts protest hit job on holiest day

EGYPT A drive-by shooting that killed six Coptic Christians and a Muslim security guard exiting a Christmas Eve service sparked street protests, vandalism, and arson. Police arrested dozens of Coptic and Muslim teens in connection with the protests. Local Coptic leaders in the southern city of Nag Hammadi, near Luxor, said the arrests were aimed at pressuring Copts to downplay the deadliest attack on them since 2000. Egyptian authorities portrayed the killings as criminal, not sectarian, though President Hosni Mubarak later said that such sectarian violence was threatening national unity.

5 Religion returns to post-Soviet schools

RUSSIA Students in 20 percent of Russia's public schools will be required this year to sign up for courses in religion and ethics, which will be mandatory in all schools by 2012. President Dmitry Medvedev approved the courses in Russian Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and secular ethics as a way to teach religious culture—90 years after the Soviet revolution banned it. A textbook author said the courses are not designed to spread "religious propaganda," but minority faiths

have argued that the dominant Russian Orthodox religion will permeate the teaching. According to a poll, over half of the parents in the pilot districts will send their children to secular ethics classes (rather than choosing a religion course).

6 Questions raised over constitution revisions

KENYA Christian leaders are again protesting proposals in Kenya's slow-moving constitutional revision process. The revisions acknowledge a separation of church and state but reinstate Kadhis' courts, which are designed to uphold Muslim law. Kenya's Anglican Church said the courts' inclusion "elevates one religion over the rest." Churches also warned that vague language on marriage and women's health could be used to allow same-sex marriage and abortion, and that an anti-noise pollution measure could impede worship services.

7 Court: State can regulate church childcare

A Pennsylvania appeals court has ended a decades-long battle over whether the state can regulate religious childcare facilities. The court ruled January 7 that the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare had the constitutional right to shut down St. Elizabeth's Child Care Center in 1997 after state officials discovered that the Catholic center lacked a required certificate of compliance. St. Elizabeth's lawyer, who will call for a rehearing or appeal, argues that the state cannot tell the religious school how to teach social and emotional development, one of the regulations dictated by the compliance certificate since it was revised in 1968.

8 Disney ordered to recognize ex-gay status

The Walt Disney Company must recognize a resolution that adds ex-gays to company diversity programs and sexual

GO FIGURE

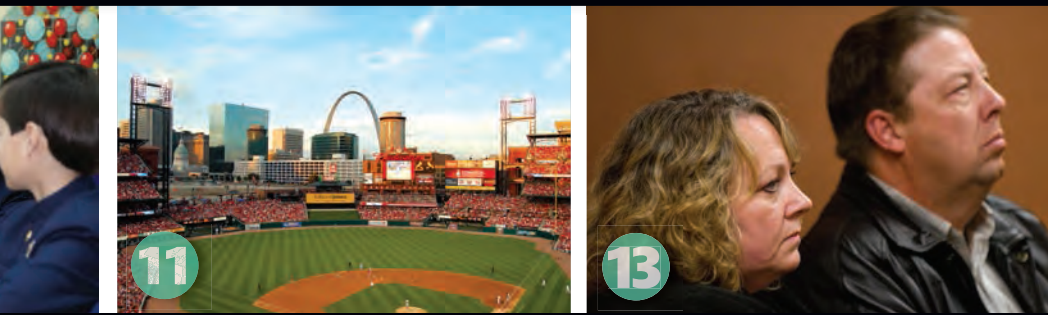
Islam

Americans who attend church less than once a week are

2.4 times

more likely than weekly attendees to report a "great deal" of prejudice toward Muslims.

Gallup



compiled by Ted Olsen

QUOTATION MARKS

"We are potentially a great country but we are messing up and we have to accept that fact."

Ignatius Kaigama, Catholic Archbishop of Jos, Nigeria, and chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria in Plateau State, after January's deadly sectarian violence.

AFF

"This in no way should be thought of as a green light for spanking. This is a red light for people who want to legally limit how parents choose to discipline their children."

Marjorie Gunnoe, a Calvin College psychology professor, on her new study that finds that children who remember being spanked do better in school, volunteer more, and are more optimistic than unspanked children.

The Grand Rapids Press

"My principal responsibility at Fox News isn't to proselytize. But occasionally a mention of faith seems to me to be appropriate. When those occasions come, I'll do it."

Brit Hume, analyst and former anchor for *Fox News Sunday*, on the backlash to his televised comments that Tiger Woods should "turn to the Christian faith."

Christianity Today Online

"Rick, wanna wrestle sometime?"
"Rainn, sure, if in mud, on PPV & proceeds go to help Haiti!"

Tweets between actor **Rainn Wilson** of *The Office* and Saddleback Church pastor **Rick Warren**.

Twitter

orientation policy, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission decided. Shareholders, citing a District of Columbia court resolution in August that ex-gays represent a sexual orientation protected under discrimination law, introduced the resolution to allow ex-gay employees to express their views on homosexuality without facing sensitivity training.

operated by the Christian Family Day (CFD) organization, which gives tickets to at-risk children and organizes post-game evangelistic testimonies from Christian players. The Cardinals invited CFD to keep bringing such children, but the organization declined to take such a limited role and will instead focus on a similar event with the St. Louis Rams.

9 School will require Baptist faith statement

A Georgia school will become the first Baptist college to require faculty to sign the Southern Baptist Convention's 2000 Baptist Faith and Message statement. Trustees of Truett-McConnell College in Cleveland, Georgia, said they adopted the statement as the confessional identity for the college in part to affirm solidarity with the Georgia Baptist Convention at a time when other Baptist schools are loosening ties to state conventions. Faculty will be expected to sign the statement in August 2011.

12 Miniature crosses protest crucifix removal

VIETNAM Hundreds of crosses peppered a hilltop near Hanoi in response to the Vietnamese government's removal of a large Catholic crucifix. Erected in a 50-year-old Catholic cemetery, the crucifix was taken down January 6 because it was put on public land without a permit, authorities said. Hundreds of local Catholics protested by planting small bamboo crosses on the hill, despite police blockades and reports of brutality. The dispute followed a series of prayer vigils in 2008 over historic Catholic land seized by the Communist government.

10 Medi-Share faces another court challenge

A Christian medical cost-sharing group may be defined as health insurance in a case before the Kentucky Supreme Court this spring. Medi-Share pools about \$42 million in annual contributions to pay medical bills among its 40,000 Christian members in 49 states. The Kentucky attorney general's office is fighting to reverse two lower court decisions and have the group defined as an insurance program subject to regulation. Four other states have ruled that Medi-Share is not insurance.

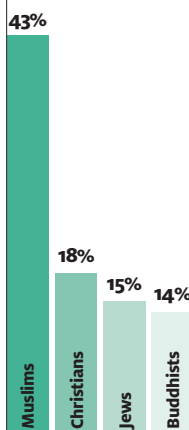
13 Faith healers convicted of homicide

The June 2008 death of a 16-year-old boy who did not receive medical treatment for a urinary tract blockage raised new religious-liberty questions in an Oregon courtroom. A 1999 bill determined that spiritual healing is not a valid defense for parents in manslaughter trials, but Neil Beagley was legally old enough to make his own medical decisions. Jeff and Marci Beagley said their son did not want to see a doctor. Prosecutors argued that Neil, raised in Oregon City's Followers of Christ Church—which advocates prayer for illnesses rather than doctors' visits—was unable to make an informed decision. Jurors found the Beagleys guilty, marking the first homicide conviction against the faith-healing community.

11 Cardinals take over Christian Family Day

Concerned about unused tickets and empty seats, the St. Louis Cardinals announced that it would take over Christian Family Day at Busch Stadium. For the past 19 years, the event has been

GO FIGURE
Other Religions
Americans who say they feel at least "a little" prejudice toward:



Gallup



HIGHER EDUCATION

Beyond Believers

Religion is now the hottest topic for American historians. By Bobby Ross Jr.

The study of religion is too important to be left in the hands of believers.

So claims David A. Hollinger, a professor of American history at the University of California at Berkeley, in his response to religion emerging as the hottest topic of study among members of the American Historical Association (AHA).

Perhaps surprisingly, leading evangelical scholars voiced general agreement with his basic premise.

"The practice of history is best served by many historians working from all their separate angles," said Rick Kennedy, president of the Conference on Faith and History (CFH) and a professor of history at Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego. "What is good about the new surge in religious history is that something that was neglected is now gaining its rightful place."

Barry Hankins, resident scholar at the Institute for Studies of Religion at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, said he shared Hollinger's sentiments,

"as long as the understanding of faith is not left only to unbelievers."

"The trick for insiders is to think critically about their own tradition, while the trick for outsiders is to try to develop a feel or affinity for the group he or she is studying," said Hankins.

In an annual survey of AHA members, 7.7 percent of respondents selected religion as one of three areas of interest. That topped the 7.5 percent who chose cultural history, ranked number one for 15 years.

Maxie B. Burch, author of *The Evangelical Historians*, points out that self-identified believers such as George Marsden, Nathan Hatch, and Mark Noll have helped propel wider academic interest in religious history with their outstanding scholarship.

"Particularly within the larger academic, intellectual world, these guys have helped to legitimize the study of religious history," said Burch, an associate pastor at North Phoenix Baptist Church in Arizona.

Hollinger clarified on his blog that he doesn't regard religious

←
Getting Religion:
Christian historians
are pleased that
more colleagues
are focusing
on faith.

belief as a barrier to successful scholarship. "But this religious demography of scholarship does narrow the inventory of perspectives brought to the field," he wrote.

Like other evangelicals interviewed, Douglas A. Sweeney, a professor of church history at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, said the field benefits from having more perspectives, but voiced concern that most historians do not take theology seriously.

"These scholars don't have to be evangelicals," said Sweeney, director of the Carl F. H. Henry Center for Theological Understanding. "Sadly, evangelical schools offer less support for first-rate scholarship than do secular schools. And evangelical historians are often harder on their own people than they are on religious people from other traditions.

"So, having more evangelical standouts will not necessarily help the cause either of scholarship or of evangelicalism. But having more serious scholars committed to telling the truth . . . could well help the cause of our scholarship and our evangelical movement."

In the AHA survey report, Jon Butler, a professor of history at Yale University, suggested that scholarly interest in religion has grown because "historians realize that the world is aflame with faith, yet our traditional ways of dealing with modern history especially can't explain how or why."

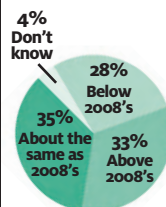
To Paul Michelson, a professor of history at Huntington University in Indiana and the secretary of CFH, such an acknowledgment by a secular scholar by itself speaks volumes.

"It is promising that the misleading dichotomy between sacred and secular spheres is losing some of its recent force in academia," Michelson said. "It is also the case that the assumption that religion is falling by the wayside in modern society has proven false, which means religion appears to be a more viable study than two decades ago."

GO FIGURE

Giving

Protestant pastors who say their church's 2009 offerings were:



LifeWay Research

Discounting the Cost

Christian booksellers cry foul on big-box price wars.

By Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra

Christian booksellers asked federal officials to investigate Wal-Mart, Target, and Amazon.com in December, claiming that the giant retailers are using “illegal, predatory pricing” that damages the entire book industry.

The three companies are engaged in an online price war over the presale of new hardcover bestsellers, CBA (formerly the Christian Booksellers Association) told the U.S. Department of Justice. While hardcover books cost retailers about \$17.50 each, the three companies sold titles for about \$9 each. The American Booksellers Association filed a similar complaint in October.

“We wanted to put everyone on notice that we don’t think it’s fair,” said Eric Grimm, business development manager at CBA.

Winning a predatory pricing case is almost impossible these days, said Steve Kluting, a Grand Rapids attorney who focuses on antitrust issues. But he believes the Justice Department will “closely scrutinize” the allegations. “Obama’s Justice Department is asking, if not begging, for these types of letters by smaller businesses,” he said. “This [letter] may be an indication that such associations now need to engage in ‘bet the industry’-type litigation.”

The Christian bookstore business stands on a foundation of new releases, Grimm said. But after books like the *Left Behind* series and *The Purpose Driven Life* moved onto the *New York Times* bestseller list, things started to change.

“Amazon doesn’t even charge sales tax,” he said. “The model itself is unfair. The giants are looking to dominate the market, and it leaves small businesses with no place to go.”

But retail giants say they have customers’ best interests at heart. “We are committed to providing our customers with the best possible prices, and that is what we are doing here,” said Wal-Mart spokesperson Greg Rossiter. Wal-Mart follows applicable pricing laws, he said.

Selling hyper-reduced books as loss leaders will work for a while but is unsustainable in the long run, said literary agent Rick Christian in the CBA complaint. While consumers will get too-good-to-be-true deals in the short term, he said, over time small bookstores will have to close, leaving the marketplace with fewer titles, voices, and ideas.

Stan Jantz, CEO of ConversantLife.com, disagrees. “The era of digital technology will bring a flourishing of ideas,” said Jantz, who spent 25 years in Christian retail. He sees bigger problems for Christian booksellers: the trends in online shopping, e-books, and self-publishing that are making younger generations of readers less likely to be loyal to a physical book—or to the local Christian bookstore. “Even if Amazon and Target stop selling books tomorrow, these other issues are still there.”

PERSONAL FINANCE

Taking Stock

Funds expand faith-based investing. By Rob Moll

Leah Beale does not support causes opposed to her values. Because of that, she says, “I have probably missed some very good movies.” That’s also why she has invested 20 percent of her money in the recently launched FaithShares exchange traded funds (ETFs).

Tom Phillips and Garrett Stevens launched FaithShares in December 2009 in order to provide Christians an easy way to invest in the stock market without profiting from industries such as gambling, alcohol, tobacco, defense, pornography, or abortion. Stevens manages

investments for faith-based organizations that want to follow value-oriented guidelines. “They want to grow money and be good stewards,” Stevens says. “But we had trouble finding money managers who would do it.” So he and Phillips, CEO and president of an Oklahoma investment management firm, created five ETFs.

ETFs are similar to mutual funds. They seek to mimic an index, such as the S&P 500 for large companies or the Russell 2000 for small companies. This approach has tax advantages, but ETFs also trade all day on an exchange like a stock. ETFs, therefore, are available to anyone with a brokerage account.

FaithShares funds make it much easier for Christian investors, says Rusty Leonard, CEO and founder of Stewardship Partners, because they allow more people to invest according to their values. Yet he worries that “their screening is not as deep as a conservative Christian would like.” While FaithShares excludes specific industries from its funds, Stevens says, it cannot screen for all company behaviors that Christians might object to, such as providing domestic partner benefits.

FaithShares offers five different funds, each with a slightly different stock selection: Baptist Values, Catholic Values, Christian Values, Lutheran Values, and Methodist Values. Each fund invests according to the recommendations of the denomination listed, while the Christian Values fund includes guidelines from all.

“I’m not overly impressed with a lot of the [financial] stuff we do that’s ‘Christian,’” says financial adviser Gary Moore. “These guys know what they are doing.”

Jerry Webb, a financial adviser who offers faith-based investments to his clients, is less impressed. Webb says the funds are expensive compared with the typical ETF. First-year expenses are .87 percent compared with .10 percent for ETFs that track the S&P index.

[continued on 16]

PASSAGES



Died

Harold Kurtz

Former director of Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship and one of the PC(USA)’s most prominent missionaries, on December 18 in Portland, Oregon. He was 85.



Hired

Tic Long

As executive director of Youth Specialties, now owned by Youth-Works, in January. He had been laid off in July 2009 by Zondervan, which previously owned the youth ministry.



Died

Art Clokey

Creator of *Davey and Goliath*, the Claymation program he created for the United Lutheran Church in America, on January 8 in California. He was 88.

Briefing [from 15]

However, the expense ratio for FaithShares is much less than nearly all Christian-oriented mutual funds; plus, the funds donate 10 percent of income to charities associated with the chosen denomination. Finally, Webb doesn't recommend that investors purchase funds with track records of less than one year. Fifty-eight ETFs closed their doors in 2009 due to low volume and funding. ➦

CHURCH AND STATE ROMANIA

When Caesar Renders

Baptists dissent over government funding.
By Susan Wunderink

The Baptist Union of Romania voted in December 2009 to accept government subsidies, two years after rejecting such funds. Some say the policy threatens Baptists' distinctive independence.

European Baptists have long promoted the separation of church and state, a concept they derive from Matthew 22:20–22 (“render unto Caesar”) and Anabaptist teachings.

Romanian Baptists are parsing the concept as they deal with a shrinking population, machine politics, and the higher prices that come with membership in the European Union.

They refuse subsidies for pastor salaries. However, Baptist Union president Otniel Bunaciu estimates that between 20 and 30 of the denomination's 1,800 congregations have accepted funds from local governments for projects such as parking lots and insulation. “While larger churches may have several Western partners who can support their efforts,” said Bunaciu, “many of the small churches do not have such friends and would accept support from local authorities.”

Politics have also been part of the problem. “At every election, local authorities have made significant donations to churches to get electoral support,” said former Baptist Union president Paul Negrut. “Some churches have completely discredited themselves by taking money from everyone.”

When the government asked the Baptist Union to clarify its policy on subsidies, Bunaciu convened the council's 40-some members, who voted to accept such funds.

Danut Manastireanu, World

GO FIGURE Giving

\$1.64 million
Amount given to Haiti relief in private donations per hour in the week following the January 12 earthquake.

The Chronicle of Philanthropy

How people gave in the week following the earthquake:

39%
In person/at church

23%
On the Internet

14%
By text message

12%
By telephone

5%
Through the mail

Pew Research Center

Vision International's director for faith and development in Eastern Europe, said the debate is mostly “typical Balkan-Byzantine politics,” in which rivals imply, “We are standing for the faith; the others are for compromise, as under Communism.” He said the discussion had little theological substance and ignored the fact that both sides already accept government subsidies.

Bunaciu sees no contradiction between the 2009 resolution and the previous one. Romania distributes a portion of tax money to religious groups in proportion to their number of adherents. Accepting the funds, Bunaciu said, is the equivalent of American tax exemptions for charitable donations.

Refusing funds would not doom churches but may scuttle certain projects, said Negrut. “Just follow the future development of those churches that have accepted money to see which is doing better in witness, integrity, and impact. Western Europe speaks volumes.”

In the meantime, Manastireanu said, “Some think there is nothing wrong with state subsidies. Others see this as getting the first finger; then the state will want to control matters of faith and church life.” ➦

UNDER DISCUSSION Topics in the current debate.

compiled by Ruth Moon

Are evangelicals doing a good job at racial integration?

YES

“Evangelicals in recent decades have been the most purposeful at racial integration. In the 1990s, you began to hear a lot about moving toward this in religious organizations. There's a movement out there. Evangelical churches are hearing about it, and some are committing to it.”

KORIE EDWARDS

professor of sociology,
The Ohio State University

“Since evangelicals emphasize that religious identity should be more important than anything else, they have an interesting capacity for creating a new identity. Individuals are willing to accentuate religious identities over ethnic identities within some local churches.”

GERARDO MARTI

author, *A Mosaic of Believers*

“People are just beginning to understand this is more than a good idea. It is New Testament Christianity—the gospel in the 21st century. We've embraced the conversation, but haven't fully committed to integration as a critical component of the church.”

MARK DEYMAZ

directional leader,
Mosaic Church of Central Arkansas

“Christians have the best potential: we have the capacity to think transcendently, beyond ourselves. That should lead us to understand how multiethnic relationships can work. We have theological language to move us in that direction.”

SOONG-CHAN RAH

associate professor,
North Park Theological Seminary

“We are good at it in spurts, but we find it very difficult to have sustained efforts. There's a tendency to settle on looking diverse, but things required to really make it a part of the DNA of those churches are lacking, because it's a little uncomfortable for the leadership and congregation.”

EDWARD GILBREATH
editor, *UrbanFaith.com*

“Generally speaking, we have failed. There are certain sections of the evangelical church where you see a little bit of integration, but most of the big evangelical movements are led by white people, and the evangelical ethnic church is pretty segmented as well.”

DANIEL HILL

senior pastor, River City Community Church

NO



Worship Never Stopped: A Haitian prays in a ruined Port-au-Prince church. Despite the damage, many churches held Sunday services on schedule.

MINISTRY HAITI

'Best Time for a Christian'

Resilient evangelicals vow to restore Haiti, body and soul. By Tim Stafford

The urban sprawl of Port-au-Prince spreads out from the coastline between mountains to the north and south. The metro area of three million people has no gleaming skyscrapers, only streets lined with ugly square concrete architecture, two to six stories high and rarely higher.

The capital's destruction was shockingly erratic. The January 12 earthquake left one building untouched, the next one reduced to debris. It's as though a giant danced a jig over the town, crushing buildings underfoot. A five-story children's hospital, for example, has become a head-high pile of rubble. The bodies have been cleared away, but the smell of rotting flesh from the estimated 200,000 fatalities lingers.

Every park and open space in greater Port-au-Prince overflows with tens of thousands of deeply traumatized quake survivors. There have been 33 aftershocks. Haitians are anxious and jumpy, refusing to spend time indoors. They sleep outside their perfectly sound houses; some congregations worship outside their unharmed sanctuaries.

An estimated one million residents have no homes to return to. Nearly all normal activity (work, school, family life) has ceased. One of the questions that has surfaced time and again among everyday Haitians living in huge squatter camps is, "What will we do with the rest of our lives?" Underneath that question, Haitians realize their lives will be measured by how they respond to the disaster.

GRIEF, STRESS, SURVIVAL

Eleven days after the quake, *Christianity Today* spent one week in the coastal quake zone to discover how Christians and their churches were responding. Haiti is home to about 8,500 churches; of those, 80 percent are Roman Catholic and 16 percent are Protestant. Adventists and Baptists are the largest Protestant bodies. Many church leaders spoke at length with *CT*. They shared stories of rescue, survival, grief, and dreams for the future of Christianity in Haiti.

In the midst of stress and chaos, believers undertook heroic rescue efforts—not all of them successful. Gersan Valcin, pastor of the Eglise de la Communaute Evangelique d'Haiti in Port-au-Prince, spoke of one neighbor whose wife was buried under the ruined Ministry of Justice.

Somehow her husband found her and worked alone until 11 P.M. to free her. He then recruited neighbors, who borrowed or bought tools to help. In the early morning, they released her, then brought her home when it was obvious that admission to a hospital was impossible.

"I've failed you," her husband wept bitterly. "I didn't do enough."

"You did all you could. I love you," she said, and died.

The following Sunday, Valcin titled his sermon, "This Is the Best Time for a Christian to Be Alive." One girl raised just one hand to praise God. She later explained that she could not raise the other. It was broken. The hospitals had turned her away because it was not a life-threatening emergency. A church member offered to take her on the long overland journey to the Dominican Republic, where he found and paid for proper treatment.

Valcin was visiting one of his deacons on a busy street when a destitute woman approached. Her shoes had fallen apart and she had a long way to travel. A member of Valcin's church donated her own shoes—the pair she had on, and the only one she owned.

"Haitians are resilient people," was heard repeatedly. Indeed, media impressions of looting and madness do not do justice to the overall situation. Calmness and dignity were much more evident. *CT* heard not one story of violence or crime. And in many cases, relief groups have been able to rely on camp leaders to register families for orderly food distribution and medical assistance.

World Vision's Laura Blank, who arrived the day after the quake, was amazed by the self-sacrificial attitude of the nonprofit's Haitian staff. When they passed by destroyed buildings, they often called out the names of friends or relatives who had died there.

"I can't imagine how they cope with the grieving and stress," said Blank. "They are so used to being helpers, and now they see themselves as survivors who also need help."

HARD TO SEE AHEAD

Consider what happened in the life and ministry of Jean Dorlus, the young president of STEP (Séminaire de Théologie Évangélique de Port-au-Prince), an

interdenominational Bible college.

Dorlus was in his office, on the second floor of the school's main building, when the earthquake struck. Walls and floor bucked around him for an eternal 35 seconds. He cried out to God, sure that the building was going down. When the shaking stopped, he made his way along the destroyed corridor and down a set of stairs into the open air.

The façade on the central core of the college building had peeled off, leaving offices open to the outside like rooms in a dollhouse. Whole rooms had tumbled down in a pile of rocks and mortar, leaving one employee clinging to the ledge of what had been his office. Other employees fell from their perches onto the masonry below. It would be hours before searches confirmed that one student had been killed, buried under falling rock, and three students severely injured. Constructed in 1942 by American missionaries, the building—and with it two-thirds of the seminary's space—was gone forever.

In no time, crowds from surrounding neighborhoods piled onto the extensive, shady campus, glad for the safety of its relatively open spaces. Two resident American missionary families, the Schmids and the McMartins, began offering sheets and blankets to people whose homes had been destroyed. Darkness fell about 90 minutes after the quake, and thousands of people tried to rest. A census taken a few days later found 4,000 people on the college campus, most of them sleeping on towels or blankets stretched on the ground.

A Haitian medical doctor set up an outdoor clinic, scavenging for anything—Tylenol, hydrogen peroxide, torn-sheet bandages, cardboard splints—to aid the wounded. Other medical providers from the neighborhood soon joined her. The Boys' Brigade from two local churches provided crowd control, and leaders from local neighborhood committees organized the campers.

By the time *CT* arrived on campus, several American groups had joined in: Crisis Consulting International to assist with security, Medical Teams International to offer more physical care, Samaritan's Purse to provide water purifiers. The Christian Reformed Church's World Relief

Committee was working with the United Nations World Food Program to distribute a week's worth of staple foods to each family.

Dorlus, though, stared at his ruined building and thought longingly of the



Trusted Resource: Haitians view church leaders such as Jean Dorlus (above, with son) and Claude Jeudy (right) as reliable in the rebuilding effort.

2,000 volumes in his personal library, all lost. He was profoundly thankful to be alive, and his wife and two young children with him. Yet it was hard to see ahead. Could the school survive? Could they reopen in tents? Where would money come from, with students too impoverished now to pay tuition? And how would they ever rebuild?

At Dorlus's home nearby, 16 friends and family members slept in his yard, terrified of falling buildings. He got little sleep; when he closed his eyes, his mind replayed the nightmare. Something like a hundred of his friends and relatives had died. He had no electricity and no Internet, and no money to buy a generator (if he could find one). The banks were closed indefinitely. His car had broken down. Proud that his seminary could shelter thousands of homeless refugees, he also wondered if it would become a permanent encampment. The stress was extraordinary.

MULTI-YEAR RECOVERY

Dorlus breaks down the recovery process into three phases. The first is relief: the immediate provision of food, water, medical attention, and emergency shelter.

The second is the “tent phase,” during which Haiti’s infrastructure starts up again in temporary facilities. Leaders have asked for tents, tarps, and lumber for transitional housing. Finally, leaders rebuild the nation across the board, including less tangible areas. Dorlus highlights the priorities:

- Psychological. To a remarkable degree, residents of Port-au-Prince are living in constant fear. Some fears are reasonable. Structurally damaged buildings can collapse in severe aftershocks. But the fear also

- Spiritual. Dorlus told me, “I have heard many people thank God they are alive. I have not heard a single person curse God for what he has done to us.” The Western diatribe against an indifferent or cruel God who allows suffering finds little uptake in Haiti. More usual is a sense of fatalism or paralyzing shame. After all, death came not primarily because of the earth’s movement but because of paltry building standards. Too little rebar points to generations of corruption. In order to rebuild, Haitians must come to terms with this legacy. One young pastor said, “I read and re-read the Book of Lamentations. With Jeremiah I ask, ‘Are we still the people of God?’”

‘We can be sure that God spared us. The next question is, why? What am I going to do with the fact that he spared my life?’

~ a Haitian pastor’s wife



hints at the mental trauma Haitians have suffered. Most Haitians cope. Some are too overwhelmed to function. One morning a friend of Dorlus’s arrived sobbing, absolutely desolated. He was provided for physically, but he remained plagued by the horrible sights he had seen and the memory of many friends who had died.

Contributing to Haitians’ trauma is the lack of funeral rites for the tens of thousands who were thrown into mass graves or remain buried under concrete. For Haitians, a burial is a crucial mourning ritual. Pastor Valcin plans to hold memorial services, but the custom is alien to Haitians and unlikely to be imitated.

- Urban infrastructure. Dozens of major roads are badly damaged. The electric grid is down and may be months from restarting. Mains all over Port-au-Prince are spurting water.

- Government. Entire ministries have been destroyed. The six-story tax authority was pancaked, obliterating records and eliminating nearly all staff. The National Palace and the Palace of Justice fell down. Just reconstructing state buildings is a daunting task; rebuilding the government apparatus so it can provide law and order as well as a legal framework for international investment is a much bigger task.

- Homes and churches. Replacing hundreds of thousands of physical structures would be overwhelming in a rich country (think New Orleans). “The Haitian private sector cannot do it,” Senator Jean Hector Annacacis said. “They have no money and they have no vision.”

Pastor Claude Jeudy, national director of Habitat for Humanity in Haiti, told *CT* that of 3,000 homes Habitat has built, only two were destroyed.

But “we can’t do [the rebuilding]. It’s huge,” he said. With all its worldwide partners, Habitat builds 1,500 homes a year. The country may need several hundred thousand new dwellings.

TRUSTING CHURCHES

Leogane is a sleepy coastal town west of Port-au-Prince. Close to the quake’s epicenter, it sustained perhaps the highest rate of building destruction among Haitian towns. An estimated 90 percent of all buildings were destroyed.

Ernst Leroy, president of the local evangelical pastors’ league, spoke with *CT* while standing in front of his flattened church. A short, light-skinned man who radiated seriousness, Leroy made no attempt to sugarcoat the disaster or the number of urgent unmet needs.

Thirty-eight of Leogane’s churches were destroyed, he said. Five thousand Christians are without a home. He was unimpressed by what aid had reached them nearly two weeks after the quake.

“It’s anarchy the way they are distributing it.” American soldiers throwing down food from helicopters has angered him. “I’m a pastor. Should I be fighting others to get to the food?”

He said that they should have used the churches, which have plenty of organization, to distribute food fairly and peacefully.

When asked what the churches needed, Leroy replied simply: “Food. Health. Lodging.” As for rebuilding, a top priority is reestablishing the schools that reside in almost every evangelical church.

CT visited a flattened Compassion International–partner church where six sponsored children had died. A local staff worker said that the surviving children’s greatest need is counseling. All have experienced trauma; many have lost their parents.

“When it hits them, they have strange reactions. They may close in on themselves, or they may take off running,” the worker said. Compassion staff are trying to figure out how to clear a safe and usable space. They want the church to offer “a center of normalcy to children living in tents,” as regional director Edouard Lassegue put it.

No one imagines that the Haitian church will lead the way in rebuilding roads or the central government. But many believe it is crucial for rebuilding the nation’s spirit and identity. Churches are the most effective and trusted link to the grassroots of Haitian society—and the least corrupt.

“People trust the church,” Senator Laurent Mathurin told *CT*. “I won’t say the



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church has no problems, but they are relatively minor." Several pastors are assured that evangelical churches have strong organizational networks and can be trusted to distribute aid fairly and efficiently.

Pastor Valcin's middle-class church has distributed seven tons of food at eight satellites throughout Port-au-Prince, and serves 400 meals a day provided by World Vision at the main church building. "Any church in Haiti would do the same if they had the resources," he said flatly.

CHANGE MEANS GROWTH IN CHRIST

As for help from the U.S., a visit to the chaotic Port-au-Prince airport makes it clear that American Christians are already involved, jamming every available flight with eager volunteers. Missionary Aviation Fellowship has flown in more than 2,000 people.

"Don't come without guidance," said Habitat's Jeudy. Haitian Christians want people who listen and consult, who coordinate and avoid duplication, and who will be involved for the long haul. As Dorlus exclaimed out of the blue one day, "Oh, Americans—they would be almost perfect people except for one thing: if they would listen!"

"The real problem," Compassion's Doug Bassett commented, "will be when the media get tired. I pray that this will be a turning point and will get Americans to think deeply. We need to make a long-term commitment to Haiti."

A local World Vision leader, Paul-Emile Cesar, also pastor of a ruined Pentecostal church, cited the words of the wife of another pastor. She said, "We survived. We can be sure that God spared us. The next question is, why? What am I going to do with the fact that he spared my life? Will I be the same? Or how can I use it to care for others?"

Commented Cesar, "I've been asking every day, 'Why me? Why me and not someone else?'"

"We should let the situation help us grow in Christ together. We have things to learn from [visiting Americans], and they have things to learn from us. Let this change both of us."



Tim Stafford is a *Christianity Today* senior writer.

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The Mind Under Grace

Why theology is an essential nutrient for spiritual growth. By Darren C. Marks

JON IS A FIRST-YEAR Bachelor of Theology student from a vibrant church. He is active in campus ministry and will likely become a church leader. Like many of his fellow students, he has shown up for Theology 1020E, Introduction to Christian Theology, with a great heart but little understanding of his faith, save some parroting of slogans. The university where I teach, however, is relentless in questioning the world. Jon's cul-de-sac faith is no longer an option; he is now in the secular realm, and his Christianity is under fire.

Like many beginning theology students, Jon feels threatened when he learns that there are many kinds of Christians. Initially, some of the ideas I present in class visibly upset him. But he slowly learns to major in the majors. Hardcore academic and historical theology, in my experience, almost invariably makes a student like Jon a better Christian—not in his heart per se, but in his understanding of God's call for him and his generation.

Jon recently commented in class that "things click now." He is growing up, and the study of Christian doctrine—the mind under grace—helps him to do this.

Doctrine. The word conjures in the modern mind a string of negative images: The Inquisition. Boring professors debating the number of angels on the head of a pin. Bloggers arguing endlessly while the church flags in relevance in the once-Christian West. Doctrine is a bludgeon, a curiosity, a rearranging of the deck chairs while the ship sinks. Vibrant Christians want little to do with it, and instead focus on spiritual disciplines, works of mercy, and authentic Christian living. Doctrine belongs to the past, when it was used mainly to divide believers. How many Protestants spend time pondering whether it is acceptable to chew Communion bread (a major issue for the first Reformers)?

But we have to ask: Is it possible to live out discipleship without a good measure of heady doctrine? I see doctrine not as a boundary but as a compass. Its purpose is not to make Christians relevant or distinctive but rather to make them *faithful* in their contexts. Doctrine is a way of articulating what God's presence in the church and the world looks like. It can orient us by helping us, like Jon, major in the majors.

Illustrations by James Steinberg

In addition, I believe the crisis in the Western church is not about information itself but about the kind of information we absorb in our churches. Philosopher James K. A. Smith put it best: “Theology is not some intellectual option that makes us ‘smart’ Christians; it is the graced understanding that makes us faithful disciples.”

DEFAULT BUDDHISTS

I’m using the terms *doctrine* and *theology* interchangeably. To be exact, doctrine is more or less settled theology. You find doctrine in creeds and statements of faith. Theology or “doing theology” is about the process and rules we use to talk about things that may end up as doctrine. A doctrinal statement (Jesus is “true God from true God,” as the Nicene Creed testifies) is always a theological statement. But not all theological statements become doctrine. Still, in this essay, I will use *doctrine* and *theology* to refer to our intellectual grappling with the faith, which, as Smith notes, can give us graced understanding and lead to faithful discipleship. Doctrine, while static at

Buddhism, a series of feel-good statements supposedly culled from the Buddha. Our culture does this with all religions, Bruce says. It boils them down to one basic principle: Do what makes you feel good about yourself, and preferably in 10 minutes or less. As religious consumers, we warp every tradition by subjecting it to our needs. The Christian West’s consumer needs, he notes, have by and large led us to abandon traditional Christianity, and the Eastern spirituality we adopt is actually the vapid form of Christianity created by modernity. This is a Christianity of self-experience.

In this sense, Western Christians are children of Friedrich Schleiermacher, the 19th-century Enlightenment thinker who built his theological system on the foundation of spiritual experience. In many cases, we find his influence unwittingly embedded in our church leadership, our seminaries, and our theological faculties. A theology grounded in experience ultimately fades into soft moralism, humanism, or, in the unique case of American Christianity, a civic religion wherein God and country are easily confused.

Doctrine. The word conjures in the modern mind a string of negative images: The Inquisition. Boring professors debating the number of angels on the head of a pin.

times, is meant to help us think about our lives more deeply by considering alongside other Christians the implications of our thoughts and deeds. Doctrine is wisdom that helps us clarify our mission.

Yet we seem decidedly uninterested in such wisdom today, both inside and outside the church.

Sociologist Steve Bruce has observed that Western spirituality is “Buddhist by default”: that Westerners, even Christians, are obsessed with what goes on inside, with spiritual experience. We don’t usually welcome any external testing of our thoughts or actions. Subjectivity takes the ethical and doctrinal teeth out of every religion. Doctrine can help us *think*.

Bruce does not mean that we are actually Buddhists. We don’t practice its asceticism. Instead we prefer a pallid, easy

As I write this, the top three best-selling books in the Christian nonfiction category of Amazon .com are also listed (and number one) in the personal transformation, New Age, and self-help categories. All three books also appear

on the *New York Times* bestseller list. It seems we believe that what we experience is more important than what we think, and we buy accordingly. The authors and their fans would likely say that they are addressing needs. But do we best serve our culture by becoming increasingly theologically illiterate?

SPIRITUALITY IN THE BALANCE

At the heart of Schleiermacher’s work lay an important quest: to understand how to be faithful in a particular context. Schleiermacher and his progeny wanted much to be relevant Christians. The problem lies in where he started.

Schleiermacher thought that the essence of Christianity was its spiritual impulse, not its doctrine, which seemed to cause most of the problems. It had fueled violent conflicts between



Catholics and Protestants and threatened to stifle scientific progress and human achievement. For Schleiermacher, as for many today, if one could boil ideas down to a common essence, differences would dissipate and humankind could move forward in harmony. That essence was religiosity—a connection to God that every human being has the capacity to feel and experience. We might call this *spirituality* or *awe* in everyday parlance.

Schleiermacher began with internal experiences of God and built theology around those experiences, reconfiguring doctrine as needed. He assumed that by starting with ourselves and our

Westerners, even Christians, are obsessed with what goes on inside, with spiritual experience.

desires, we would glimpse a purer vision of God and perhaps a more relevant church. But how did the project fare?

With some 200 years of hindsight, we see that the ramifications were immense. Take what has been called the only empirically verifiable Christian doctrine, the doctrine of original sin. For Schleiermacher, sin is not primarily about trespassing against God's laws or a moral debt we owe to a divine being. Sin is misspent energy. If we only paid better attention and had better information and better situations, we would naturally want to be spiritual. This kind of thinking defines sin as a mis-education or mis-direction of our innate sense of awe. A sinner is one who is out of continuity with his own sense of self, and a religious founder is one who is aware of higher spiritual truths and awakens them in others.

In this trajectory, Jesus becomes a sage who, among others, came to tell us about our potential and awaken our religious sensibilities. Jesus Christ is a spiritual avatar who may be called the Son of God but is different from us only by degree, not by kind. He is certainly not the unique God-man. Church becomes a kind of group therapy we attend to be told we are all right, to share in the piety of Jesus' example. While there is much positive here, the question remains whether God matters as *the* agent of changed lives. In the final analysis, core Christian beliefs, even those about Jesus, have to *feel* authentic or they are discarded.

Let's return to Amazon.com's bestseller list. The current number two bestseller, from a prominent Christian author, claims that belief itself is not enough to overcome bad habits, and that we need to stretch our faith, just as Jesus taught. Ultimately the book points to one goal: achieving *our* dreams and destiny by dint of effort. Sin is a failure to achieve our dreams, Jesus is a personal sage who helps us experience those dreams, and church is where we go to receive positive reinforcement to actualize our destinies. The book does not mention the Sermon on the Mount, or that God's destiny for us may be martyrdom (Heb. 11).

In hindsight, we can see that the belief driving Schleiermacher's entire theological machine needed correction. Schleiermacher led us astray by proposing that we interrogate

theological ideas rather than allow ourselves to be interrogated by them. The emphasis on spiritual experience put us, not God, in the driver's seat.

As far as we remain the children of Schleiermacher, we either unconsciously or actively transform Christianity into something that, while seemingly relevant, is bereft of spiritual vigor.

INTERROGATED BY THE BIBLE

The sharp-eyed reader will note two things missing from my argument so far. One is positioning the Bible as the only guide to Christian faith. The other is looking at the role of the Holy Spirit.

Both are integral to theology. Without them, doctrine and theology become propositions or proof-texting. The opposite of experience is dogmatism, staid religious scholasticism that sucks the life out of a relationship with God.

We have to begin by acknowledging a reality that rightly makes us nervous: All Christian theology helps us interpret the Bible. Theology is what helps us read disparate writings that span thousands of years and arise out of cultures very different from ours. Further, the Bible comprises many texts that address specific problems in specific places (e.g., sexual immorality in Corinth). It presents ideas that at times seem current and at other times obscure. One seemingly crystal-clear verse (Gal. 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek . . .") or book (Philemon on slavery) can be interpreted by the faithful in a variety of ways. The earliest Christians knew this all too well.

The first three centuries of Christianity featured a running dialogue with the Bible. In their theology, the earliest Christians had to avoid reading the Bible as too Jewish, too Gentile, too focused on Peter, too focused on Paul, too focused on faith, or too focused on works. To read the Bible through only one interpretive lens could lead to false conclusions, like denying the Trinity or Jesus' humanity or divinity. In each case, a simple reading of a passage, usually through the reader's cultural lens, resulted in a distortion of Christian life. Those who found little biblical evidence for what was emerging as the doctrine of the Trinity, for example, usually ended up with a Christ who never knew humanity (docetism) or a Jesus who was not fully God (Arianism). Thus, doctrine became a yardstick by which to measure various readings and help Christians pinpoint the essentials.

To some people, this will sound like the Bible is not primary, that theological discourse needs to correct Scripture. This could lead some to see the Bible as an interesting historical document to get us started, not the active Word of God that shapes us. And some argue that Christianity is more a communal practice than a personal relationship with the living God. (Schleiermacher would likely agree with that statement.)

But, at its best, Christian theology has never understood itself to be merely a human reflection on contingent truths. The best theology grounds itself in Scripture as the revealed Word of God, not in the religious experiences of ancient people. Scripture's authority is not something that the community relates to first with its own experience. Instead, as Martin Luther put it, Scripture bears authority because it bears Christ—because

it points unequivocally and majestically in grace to the living God. Scripture interrogates the community. Because it can be a difficult task to hear Christ speak clearly in Scripture, the church has used theology to test that interrogation. Some may read or hear Scripture in a new manner under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as the 18th- and 19th-century abolitionists did regarding slavery. Theology tests such new readings by asking questions of both the text and the church, helping to clarify the movement of the Spirit.

The church's theological task has never been only to comprehend an impersonal piece of literature intellectually. Theology has always understood itself as being under God's

providential grace. It is the result of faithful Christians grappling with Scripture in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Just as Jacob wrestled with God, so have Christians wrestled with Scripture as they have sought to articulate core beliefs about the God active among them, active in and through Scripture itself.

In our conversation with the Bible, we've developed shorthand (though imperfect) to articulate what it reveals. We say God is the *Trinity* and Christ is *Savior*, and we talk about *sin*, *heaven*, and *church*. We use those meanings to understand Scripture even as those core beliefs have come from Scripture. These are not esoteric abstractions but fundamental ways in

THE LOST ART OF CATECHESIS

It's a tried and true way of teaching, among other things, Christian doctrine. By J. I. Packer and Gary A. Parrett

Historically, the church's ministry of grounding new believers in the rudiments of Christianity has been known as *catechesis*—the growing of God's people in the gospel and its implications for doctrine, devotion, duty, and delight. It is a ministry that has waxed and waned through the centuries. It flourished between the second and fifth centuries in the ancient church. Those who became Christians often moved into the faith from radically different worldviews. The churches rightly sought to ensure that these life-revolutions were processed carefully, prayerfully, and intentionally, with thorough understanding at each stage.

With the tightening of the alignment between church and state in the West, combined with the impact of the Dark Ages, the ministry of catechesis floundered. The Reformers, led by heavyweights Luther and Calvin, sought with great resolve to reverse matters. Luther restored the office of catechist to the churches. And seizing upon the providential invention of the printing press, Luther, Calvin, and others made every effort to print and distribute catechisms—small handbooks to instruct children and “the simple” in the essentials of Christian belief, prayer, worship, and behavior (like the Westminster Shorter Catechism). Catechisms of greater depth were produced for Christian adults and leaders (like Luther's Larger Catechism). Furthermore, entire congregations were instructed through unapologetically catechetical preaching and the regular catechizing of children in Sunday worship.

The conviction of the Reformers that such catechetical work must be primary is unmistakable. Calvin, writing in 1548 to the Lord Protector of England, declared, “Believe me, Monseigneur, the church of God will never be preserved without catechesis.” The Church of Rome, responding to the growing influence of the Protestant catechisms, soon began to produce its own. The rigorous work of nurturing believers and converts in the faith once for all delivered to the saints, a didactic discipline largely lost for most of the previous millennium, had become normative again for both Catholics and Protestants.

The critical role of catechesis in sustaining the church

continued to be apparent to subsequent evangelical trailblazers of the English-speaking world. Richard Baxter, John Owen, Charles Spurgeon, and countless other pastors and leaders saw catechesis as one of their most obvious and basic pastoral duties. If they could not wholeheartedly embrace and utilize an existing catechism for such instruction, they would adapt or edit one or would simply write their own. A pastor's chief task, it was widely understood, was to be the teacher of the flock.

THE PROBLEM WITH SUNDAY SCHOOL

Today, however, things are quite different, and that for a host of reasons. The church in the West has largely abandoned serious catechesis as a normative practice. Among the more surprising of the factors that have contributed to this decline are the unintended consequences of the great Sunday school movement. This lay-driven phenomenon swept across North America in the 1800s and came to dominate educational efforts in most evangelical churches through the 20th century. It effectively replaced pastor-catechists with relatively untrained lay workers, and substituted an instilling of familiarity (or shall we say, perhaps, *over-familiarity*) with Bible stories for any form of grounding in the basic beliefs, practices, and ethics of the faith.

Thus, for most contemporary evangelicals the entire idea of catechesis is largely an alien concept. The very word itself—*catechesis*, or any of its associated terms, including *catechism*—is greeted with suspicion by most evangelicals today. (“Wait, isn't that a Roman Catholic thing?”)

We are persuaded that Calvin had it right and that we are already seeing the sad, even tragic, consequences of allowing the church to continue uncatechized in any significant sense. We are persuaded, further, that something can and must be done to help the Protestant churches steer a wiser course. What we are after, to put it otherwise, is to encourage our fellow evangelicals to seriously consider the wisdom of building believers the old-fashioned way. ☩

An edited excerpt from *Grounded in the Gospel: Building Believers the Old-Fashioned Way* (Baker, 2010). Reprinted with permission.





which Christians cross-index their spirituality (their relationship with the God who is present) with a faithful reading of the Bible.

This theological method inverts Schleiermacher's. We do not start with "my spirituality" and then identify core beliefs. Instead, we begin with core beliefs—those discovered by the church as it has intellectually wrestled with the truth of Scripture in the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit. These beliefs, which come from outside myself, correct and shape my spiritual experience.

We have a good example of this process in the theological

work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who studied in the era when Schleiermacher's spirit reigned supreme. Most of Bonhoeffer's teachers were in tune with their country's *zeitgeist*, the swelling German pride that manifested itself in part as anti-Semitism and pro-Nazism. They were reading Scripture, but with personal experience in the fore; thus, their theology merely reinforced the era's powerful sentiments.

But, as Bonhoeffer read Scripture, he began to understand Jesus of Nazareth as "Christ the Center." For him the seemingly dusty ideas of the Incarnation and the Atonement took on life. His theological reflections on Christ helped him see that anti-Semitism and Nazism, especially in the church, were replacing Christ as the center, that they were even anti-Christ. This prompted him to speak out, to actively resist the *zeitgeist*.

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CULTIVATING GRACED UNDERSTANDING

Bonhoeffer knew, as did Calvin, Augustine, and many others, that dry, seemingly irrelevant ideas like the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Atonement, and eschatology are crucial elements of our spiritual formation. Theology helps map a reading of Scripture as Scripture interrogates its readers under the guidance of the Spirit.

For the past 200 years, many parts of Western Christianity

have labored as Schleiermacher's children. The mainline traditions have hoped to achieve relevance. The evangelical and free-church traditions have hoped to read the Bible unadulterated and alone. Both traditions, however, have made our feelings—which are, by definition, slippery and transitory—primary. Mainliners have eschewed theology for fear that it imposes another's context and assumptions, while evangelicals have eschewed theology because it might compete with the pristine Bible or become a rigid boundary. Both traditions forget that theology is a kind of memory that allows us to hear God's Word by clarifying our experiences.

Many complain that the church has become incapable of cultivating Christian habits in its people. No wonder, when for so many the starting point is not God but spiritual experience. How can we sustain any spiritual growth if it

is grounded in something as transitory as what we feel, individually or corporately?

The decreasing lack of interest in core Christian beliefs is due in part to church leaders who chase after relevance over substance—focusing on the *feeling* that something is meaningful rather than the *truth* that something is meaningful. It is also due to church members who imagine that their experience is the touchstone of truth about God, rather than learning to evaluate their experience in light of Scripture and theology.

Over the years, I have found that the students in my classroom grow in understanding by studying "dusty" and "dry" doctrine. They learn to interrogate their experiences, asking how they may find a "theological existence" or mission. I hope that Jon and his peers learn that they cannot have spiritual formation without doctrine, that theology is that business of graced understanding that makes us faithful disciples of Christ. ☩

Darren C. Marks is assistant professor of theology and Jewish studies at Huron University College at the University of Western Ontario. He is the author of *Bringing Theology to Life: Key Doctrines for Christian Faith and Mission* (InterVarsity).

Go to ChristianBibleStudies.com for "The Mind Under Grace," a Bible study based on this article.

How churches
are teaching doctrine—
and finding eager
participants.

By Sarah Pulliam Bailey

Practically

**Kissing Ignorance Good-
bye: Joshua Harris says all
believers are theologians—
most are just bad ones.**

BEFORE HE STARTED TALKING, Solomon Wilken was singing from his crib—and not children's hymns, either. Like the rest of Trinity Lutheran Church in Millstadt, Illinois, he learned "Glory to God in the Highest" from the church hymnal. His father, Todd, an assistant pastor at Trinity Lutheran, bypassed children's church and took Solomon to the sanctuary with the adults. As churches look for innovative ways to teach their members about Christian doctrine, Todd Wilken urges leaders to start with baby steps.

"There are people who bring babies to football games, and it's not because they don't have a babysitter," said Wilken. "Why does a dad do that? It's so important to him that he wants to pass it to his baby as early as he can."

An education gap usually divides pastors, most of whom have years of formal theology training but are stretched thin addressing tangible needs, and their congregants, many of whom are not actively

seeking to study complicated ideas.

Wilken knows that teaching theology doesn't happen magically. One of the first ways to teach doctrine is from the pulpit, and he uses the church calendar to provide structure.

"Many pastors have chucked the calendar, preaching whatever occurs to them, maybe a sermon on sex or something else. They do this to alleviate their own boredom," Wilken said. "Abandoning the disciplined way the church marks time reminds me of watching a guy who thinks he can dance."

DISPENSING DOCTRINE

Pastors advocate different methods to reach the same goal: to bring doctrine to the pews. Many confessional churches, for example, emphasize their respective catechisms.

"Pastors learn about doctrine in seminary but have trouble formulating it in a way that's faithful to the Christian heritage," said Marva Dawn, a teaching fellow in spiritual theology at Regent College in British Columbia. "If they have a statement of faith that's doctrinally ordered that includes dimensions of the faith, it helps people understand those formulations."

The nondenominational Mars Hill Church in Seattle hands out a 30- to 50-page commentary based on Mark Driscoll's hour-long

sermons. “The church councils and creeds—we believe in them and respect them—[but] there are new issues today that weren’t issues at the time, like same-sex relations,” Driscoll said. The post-sermon packets include questions for family and small-group discussion and resources for further study.

“Sometimes everything the most doctrinal Bible teachers say is true, but it’s true like the phonebook,” said Driscoll, whose forthcoming book *Doctrine: What Christians Should Believe* covers the Nicene Creed, the Apostles’ Creed, Martin Luther’s catechism, and the Westminster Catechism. “If you only preach and don’t have people also doing personal study and small-group discussion, I don’t think they’re going to learn that much.”

One of the challenges churches face, Driscoll said, is teaching which doctrines are up for discussion and which are settled. He teaches that certain doctrines—the Trinity, Jesus’ atonement, and

we’re going to study doctrine on Wednesday nights,’ no one would show up. But if you [present] some of the characters behind it and put it in a historical context, people become more interested.”

Congregations can also use national programs like Walk Thru the Bible or Bible Study Fellowship, said Earl Palmer, preaching pastor in residence at the National Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C.

“Evangelism is helping people think things through—that’s how pieces of the puzzle come together,” said Palmer, who has spent 50 years in ministry. A church’s role can be to instill confidence in its members, which can happen through classes a pastor might offer on the Book of Philippians, C. S. Lewis’s *Mere Christianity*, or Karl Barth’s exposition of the Apostles’ Creed, he said.

“The gospel deserves to be studied, not just inspire me for the moment or cheer me up,” Palmer said. “We need a thoughtful Christianity.”

Theological

ARTICULATING FAITH

Thoughtful Christianity has practical implications. Evangelicals concerned

the Bible as the inerrant word of God, among others—go in a closed hand. People in his church are free to disagree over eschatology and spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues. “Churches that tend to be doctrinal tend to shove everything into the closed hand,” he said. “You can be very strong in your closed hand and gracious in your open hand.”

FINDING THE BEST TOOLS

Pastors of all stripes seem to agree that it’s important to make theology accessible and memorable for congregations. Covenant Life Church in Gaithersburg, Maryland, uses its membership class to teach theology in depth. Each session of the nine-week class lasts 90 minutes with small-group discussion afterward. The church uses its own 92-page manual, which combines Bible verses with quotes from theologians like John Stott and R. C. Sproul to explain terms such as *gospel* and *sanctification*.

“I laugh because it’s quite a pain to become a part of our church. It’s a statement at the outset that our church is not about having a country-club feel,” said Pastor Joshua Harris, who recently authored *Dug Down Deep: Unearthing What I Believe and Why It Matters*. Harris’s personal path to studying theology began with books like J. I. Packer’s *Knowing God*, Iain Murray’s *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism*, J. C. Ryle’s *Holiness*, and John Stott’s *The Cross of Christ*. He said Christians tend to set up a false dichotomy between doctrine and experience.

“We shouldn’t say, ‘Eggheads, you do your doctrine thing,’ or for people who are spiritually inclined, ‘Let’s have a prayer meeting,’” Harris said. “We can’t have an experience of Jesus Christ apart from what he’s revealed about himself.”

Reviewing church history in elective classes is also effective for teaching doctrine. Although Calvary Baptist Church of Waco does not formally adhere to any creeds, 80 people from the 800-member congregation attended a class in the fall of 2009 on the Nicene Creed.

“Christians seem to prefer the Thomas Kinkadee stuff that looks pretty on the outside,” said Pastor Jim Coston, who plans to teach on the Didache (an early Christian writing) this year. “If I said, ‘Hey,

with social justice tend to be theologically sophisticated,” said Calvin College philosophy professor James K. A. Smith.

“That’s an example of how doing and thinking are not competing. Because they have engaged with theological reflection, they are moved to care about justice,” Smith told *Christianity Today*. Children growing up in the Christian Reformed Church study the Heidelberg Catechism. “They don’t need to find a new, fabulous curriculum,” Smith said. “There’s a lot of good old stuff we can recover.”

However, theological education is not always explicit. Education is already happening in spiritual disciplines and worship, Smith said.

“Being immersed in spiritual disciplines is forming our minds and imaginations, maybe in ways we might not articulate,” he said. “People who bemoan theological illiteracy don’t appreciate that gospel theology is embedded in our practices.”

William Willimon, former chaplain of Duke University and author of the forthcoming *This We Believe: The Core of Wesleyan Faith and Practice*, has witnessed a resurgent interest in theology, especially among younger Christians.

“A lot of older Christians assume, ‘I’ve been there, done that,’” Willimon said. “Younger Christians seem to have the delight of discovering doctrine and knowing that they didn’t know it.”

He said one of the best programs the United Methodist Church uses is the Christian Believer, a 30-week study that combines Scripture readings with writings from 20th-century theologians, contemporary literature, poetry and hymns that express doctrine, early Christian documents, and writings from Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Wesley, among others. Those who enroll commit to studying about 40 pages of material for 45 minutes six days a week to prepare for a two-hour weekly small group.

“You could argue that the Protestant Reformation was a movement to put theology back into the hands of the people,” Willimon said. “We need a church that loves the riches of its heritage.”

Sarah Pulliam Bailey is online editor at *Christianity Today*.

The Evolution

IN THE VERSION of the Lord's Prayer that appears in the Gospel of Matthew, we're instructed to pray, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." What follows from the metaphor of sin as debt? How does it differ from the Old Testament's governing metaphor for sin? How is the logic of sin as debt related to the strong emphasis on almsgiving in the early church, and what light does it shed on Reformation debates over meritorious good works? How does it bear on the meaning of the Atonement? These are some of the questions Gary Anderson explores in his thought-provoking book *Sin: A History* (Yale University Press).

Anderson is professor of Old Testament and Hebrew Bible in the department of theology at the University of Notre Dame. He spoke with *Books & Culture* editor John Wilson about changing conceptions of sin and forgiveness in the Old and New Testaments, and the consequences of those changes.

You recount a time many years ago when you were reading one of the texts from the Dead Sea Scrolls, and you were struck by a metaphor that surprised you—a discovery that became the genesis of this project.

I was reading a Qumran text called the Damascus Covenant, and I noticed several instances in which the scroll described forgiveness of sins using a Hebrew verb that in the Hebrew Bible never has that meaning. The scroll used the verb *'āzab*, which generally means "to forsake." It struck me as quite odd.

As I pondered it, I realized that the Aramaic verb for "forgiven" means exactly that. It means "forsake" in the literal sense, because in Aramaic to forgive a sin is to remit what you have coming to you in the sense of a debt. You're forsaking an obligation. Someone who holds a debt over someone else technically can collect that debt whenever he wishes. And if by dint of merciful circumstance he decides not to collect, he forsakes or abandons that right.

For me this was an epiphany. What we're witnessing in that little Qumran text is a new way of thinking about sin and forgiveness. It's not found anywhere in the Old Testament, but, strikingly enough, it becomes quite common in the New.

I was well aware of the long discussion of the variance of the Lord's Prayer in the New Testament. Matthew uses a Greek idiom that corresponds with the Aramaic—that is, to remit a debt—whereas it's changed in Luke to "forgive our sins," so that the Lord's Prayer will sound more intelligible to a Greek audience. And there you really have the same thing. The modern reader of the Bible in translation doesn't have any feeling for



'What we're witnessing in that little Qumran text is a new way of thinking about sin and forgiveness. It's not found anywhere in the Old Testament, but it becomes quite common in the New.'

STEPHEN HILL

of Sin

Old Testament professor **Gary Anderson** explains how sin came to be seen as a *debt* rather than a *weight*—and how that shaped Christianity. Interview by John Wilson



this, but in first-century Greek, sins were *not* thought of as debts, nor was forgiveness thought of as a remission or non-collection of a debt. When the New Testament has Jesus speak that way [of sins as debts], it's telegraphing to the intelligent reader that Greek is not this guy's native tongue. His native tongue is Hebrew or Aramaic.

So that was the spark. I thought, *There's a major change going on here. Is there a story that can be told about that change?*

There's a refrain in your book: Sin has a history. And that's a way of encapsulating the story that was suggested to you by this experience. Could you briefly sketch that history?

In conversation about the book, friends will often ask, "Isn't it the case in the Bible that we have all kinds of metaphors that are in

16 and the Day of Atonement, for example, and sees Israel loading sins on the back of a pack animal, erroneously called a *scapegoat*, they find that a very peculiar image. They wonder, *Where does this come from?* They don't recognize that in the world of the Old Testament, that's not an odd image at all. That's exactly what you'd expect. Sins are weights and burdens. What better way to get rid of them than to find an animal to carry them away?

The logic of your argument suggests that in many cases there's a danger in translation that programmatically takes the metaphors out. Part of the reason I found your book so interesting is that it argues for a certain understanding of the way metaphor works—an approach to metaphor that would be applicable to many other topics. Early in the book, you say, "Apart from attention to the concrete particularity of human language, there is no access to the categories of sin and forgiveness." Could you say more about what you meant by that?

I was thinking particularly of the relationship of metaphor to narrative, an insight I borrowed from Paul Ricoeur. His book *The Symbolism of Evil* was extremely important to me. Ricoeur argues that many theologians have failed to see

how our understanding of sin is deeply imbedded in particular narratives, and the narratives, in turn, are dependent on governing metaphors. These metaphors are not simply literary ornaments. Ricoeur's thesis really is, in some sense, the major thesis of my book.

The problem with Ricoeur's book is that he didn't know Hebrew. In many respects you could say my book is a return to Ricoeur's seminal insight and an attempt—on the basis of a complete survey of metaphors for sin and forgiveness in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament—to tell the story Ricoeur couldn't.

One finding that emerged from my work on the book—and it actually came as a considerable surprise—is that once the Second Temple period Jewish writers and Christian writers began to think of sin as a debt, this led immediately to the correlative idea that meritorious actions, virtuous actions, create a credit.

Here the work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson on the logic of conceptual metaphors is very important. If sin is a debt, that means we owe money. And if virtuous activity is going to be a credit, well, the most obvious way to accumulate credits is by giving away money—hence almsgiving. Within synagogue and church, it's true that one can gather merits by any act of charity. Matthew 25 is a classic instance of that, of clothing the naked, feeding the poor, visiting the sick, and so on. But pride of place in this period is reserved for actually giving away your coins and funding what Jesus calls a treasury in heaven.

And as I show in the book, that's not an idea unique to Jesus. That's something he inherited from Second Temple Jews, who in turn created this extraordinary metaphor based on the way in which they conceived of human culpability.

In the Old Testament, one of the deficits of the weight metaphor is that it doesn't create its correlative, a virtuous individual who is, let's say, like Atlas, who can hold the world or hold the sins of others. We don't have that notion at all. Whereas as soon as you have the image of a sinner as a debtor, you immediately get the notion of a virtuous

In the Old Testament, the metaphor that gets 80 or 90 percent of the textual space is sin as a burden that has to be carried. When we move to the New Testament period, the image of sin as a weight disappears almost completely.'

circulation about sin? Why have you settled on just two of them?" And it is true that there are many metaphors in the Bible with respect to sin. But it's also true—and this is what I think most readers didn't realize—that certain metaphors clearly take pride of place.

In the Old Testament, the metaphor that gets 80 or 90 percent of the textual space pictures sin as a weight or burden that has to be carried. But this recurring motif isn't reflected in English translations of the Bible. That is one metaphor in the Hebrew that is not systematically rendered literally in English. So in many, many texts in the Old Testament, where forgiveness is conceived of as taking away a burden, the conventional English translation is just "forgive a sin."

When we move to the Second Temple period (the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament and so forth), that image of sin as a weight disappears almost completely. I have to be careful here. It doesn't disappear altogether, because we have those canonical texts from the Old Testament that remain on the table. But the complete absence of this metaphor is particularly striking in the teaching and parables of Jesus. He never talks about sinful individuals bearing enormous weights on their shoulders, as you might have expected from the Old Testament. Instead, he talks about debtors and creditors and building up treasures in heaven. None of those images can be found in the Old Testament proper, especially for the First Temple period. But they're common in Second Temple Hebrew and Aramaic, and it's no surprise that this becomes the predominant way for Jesus to speak about sin.

So, yes, there are a variety of metaphors, but there's pride of place both in the Old and the New, and that pride of place changes.

Many contemporary translators deliberately take out the metaphors because they say they may obscure the simple meaning of the text.

Yes, and I have no problem with that. I think that's a good policy in translation. Of course, what's lost then is the feel for how ancient Israelites thought about sin. So when the reader comes to Leviticus

person as someone who has an enormous treasury in heaven.

One of the most striking passages in your book was when you quoted a poem from Saint Ephrem, the fourth-century Syrian poet and theologian, where he talks about making a loan to God. You pull a phrase from that poem: “The enricher of all borrows from all.”

Almsgiving was construed in the divine economy as an act of making a loan to God. It was very early on tied to Proverbs 19:17: “He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward him for what he has done.”

I’ve been going to church my entire life, and I’ve never heard a sermon on that passage, which is a very provocative text.

It’s incredibly provocative, and in the early church almost every commentator on Matthew 25, that famous text about the Last Judgment, saw it as a fleshing out of the text from Proverbs. By the time we get to Ephrem, we have a very sophisticated theological mind taking this inherited speech about sin as debt and virtue as credit and configuring it in profound ways. What he’s trying to address here is the challenge of anthropomorphic speech.

Why is it, for example, in the Old Testament that we offer to God sacrifices? Does he need food? Well, the psalmists and many of the prophets say no. But then one might say, “If God doesn’t need food, why do it in the first place?” Ephrem is certainly on to why: Because

as embodied creatures, we need some mechanism to offer worship and service to God. So as Ephrem says, in the Old Testament, God presents himself as a kind of hungry man who wishes to be fed by our sacrifices, though not in need of those sacrifices.

And then, Ephrem says, in the New Testament, God has taken on a new face in a new dispensation. Now he presents himself as a poor person desiring your money, but he himself, we know, is not poor at all. He’s the enricher of all. He, in fact, provides us with the very gifts that we are going to return to him. Giving money to the poor is part of what God has ontologically made the very structure of the universe. That is, the universe operates by a principle of charity. That God loves the world. That God loves the poor. We’re to love the world and love the poor, and if we do such we will benefit from acting in a way in which God himself acts.

So it’s an aspect of divine condescension but it also shows how God desires us to be like him.

Absolutely. And I think there’s another important thing that should be emphasized here.

A lot of the texts that I go through in this book, especially when we touch on the theme of treasures in heaven, became points of considerable disputation between Catholics and Protestants in the 16th century. The conflict revolved around the question of whether human works could be meritorious in the eyes of God. And the quote from Ephrem is very much to the point in trying to settle that question in a way I think both traditions could be happy with. Ephrem certainly sees it as important for individuals to give alms, to follow that work, and to benefit from its meritorious effects. But, as Ephrem says, the very merits we would acquire by virtue of giving alms are really the merits that God has, in a sense, provided in the first place. So it’s a human work at one level, but an act of pure divine grace at another.

I think many readers will have the same thought I had when I finished the book: What would Gary say are the dominating metaphors for sin and forgiveness in the church today?

I think the dominant language of sin and forgiveness is that of the therapeutic. And this would go both for evangelical and mainline Christians: the seriousness of sin is often dramatically underplayed. What might have been seen as sin in the past is now understood as something reflecting my upbringing or other formative circumstances. It’s much easier to talk about fulfillment and human flourishing than it is to talk about sin.

Having said that, though, the evidence of horrible human sinfulness is still present, and from the most unlikely quarters one will find a return to the biblical idiom.

In what was to become a celebrated address on racism, then-candidate Barack Obama referred to slavery in this country as our original sin—a sin that had left a stain on our national character. Well, there we have an individual rhetorically reaching back into the Bible to make the point that sin really has a certain “thingness” to it—it has a very unfortunate habit of hanging around long after it has been committed. So even within the contemporary realm, the need to reach for biblical metaphors can still be found. 



Born Again...

In my ministry of racial reconciliation, I had to move from a culture of effort to a culture of grace. By Chris Rice

"All human nature vigorously resists grace because grace changes us and the change is painful." —FLANNERY O'CONNOR, THE HABIT OF BEING

AFTER 17 YEARS of intense church-based racial justice and reconciliation ministry in Mississippi, my gospel had largely become a matter of trying harder and doing more. And things I held dear began to fall apart.

At the same time that my African American colleague, Spencer Perkins, and I were traveling the nation preaching about reconciliation, we could hardly sit at the same dinner table at home, where our families shared daily life in an intentional Christian community called Antioch. The long friendship and partnership that we had forged in Reconcilers Fellowship, the national ministry we co-founded, was on the verge of breaking up.

While Reconcilers Fellowship was vibrant, in my eyes the Antioch community had shriveled up inside. We were riddled by unresolved relational difficulties, financial stress, and constant and intensifying busyness. I could no longer live with joy and excitement in one sphere and discouragement and hopelessness in the other. Nor could my wife, Donna. I was striving to make a national impact, but that wasn't enough anymore.

I didn't know it at the time, but I needed to be born again—again. This is how it happened.

INTERRUPTED BY JESUS

In 1997, Donna and I decided we had to tell the Antioch members what we saw and felt. But could we reveal our deepest concerns and have them received with compassion?

We took the plunge, sharing in a letter at an Antioch meeting what had become an unbearable contradiction. To our great surprise, a number of others responded positively. "That letter could have come from me," one said.

For Spencer, though, any talk that sounded like leaving was betrayal. What hurt me even more was that he threw down the race card. "Why do only white folks make ultimatums like this?" he asked. My anger, and his, escalated. This was the final straw, Spencer accusing me of being a deserter of the cause.

We asked two mentors to fly in for a last-ditch attempt to save us from a split-up. John and Judy Alexander had spent many years in Christian justice ministry. John had been the editor of *The Other Side*, the leading prophetic evangelical magazine at the time, alongside *Sojourners*. Now they were part of a small church in San Francisco.

John and Judy talked to Spencer, to me, and to Antioch members. A couple days later, we all gathered. I was on the edge of my seat when John gave his diagnosis of our problem.

"Which does the Bible speak more of, loving God or loving your neighbor?"

I thought it was a trick question. *How can you separate the two? Jesus didn't!* (Matt. 22:36–40).

After watching us squirm, John laughed. "I'm a very anal person," he admitted. He described how once he had actually counted all the Bible verses about loving God and loving neighbor. They were innumerable, of course; the latter included many about loving the poor that had profoundly shaped my work with Spencer.

But John said he had made a discovery: Far more than verses about loving God or loving the poor were stories about God's love for us. The most important truth in the world, said John, is not our trying harder to love God or others, but God's acts of love for us. "If you don't get God's love into your bones, you will become very dangerous people," he warned. "Especially activists like you. The most important person in this community is not Spencer, or Chris, or any of you, or the people in the neighborhood. The most important person in any community is Jesus. Your life has to keep Jesus at the center."

Afterward, John and Judy met with Spencer and me to see if we could resolve our differences. But the more we talked, the angrier I grew.

Our old wounds spilled back into the room—the painful residue of renegotiating leadership roles, our very different styles, the constant submitting to each other. My long struggle

Again



with being jealous of Spencer was always a card he could play. We each held tightly to our “lists”: “You did this to me”; “Well, you did that to me.” John said the problem between me and Spencer was mostly about me. I didn’t want to hear that. My list about Spencer was too long, too full of truth. I was tired of such an intense life together. Tired of living in a culture of demanding so much from myself and others. Tired of being tired. And all I wanted to do was to win.

Over the next two days, John and Judy failed to get me and Spencer to forgive each other. But when human efforts fail—when we come to the end of our own resources and somehow let go to God—the Spirit intercedes.

On October 18, 1997, Spencer and I were interrupted by grace. In the last meeting before John and Judy were to leave, still on the verge of splitting up, somehow the love of God that John had spoken of began to work itself into our bones.

Spencer somehow gave me grace to leave Antioch. “I want Chris and Donna to be happy,” he said, “even if it means them leaving.”

I somehow found the grace to stay.

And we gave each other the grace to make a new beginning.

Spencer told how he had responded to John:

“Yeah, yeah, I know all about grace, I thought. I could quote John 3:16 when I was knee high to a duck. Grace is God’s love demonstrated to us, even though we don’t deserve it. But in all my 43 years of evangelical teaching, I never understood until now that God intended grace to be a way of life for his followers. Maybe I’m the only one who missed it, but judging by the way that we all get along, I don’t think so. Sure, I knew that we were supposed to love one another as Christ loved us. But somehow it was much easier for me to swallow the lofty untested notion of dying for each other than simply giving grace to brothers and sisters on a daily basis, the way God gives us grace. Maybe I’m dense, but I just never got it.”

“At our relationship’s weakest moment, Chris and I saw, as clearly as we had ever seen anything, that only by giving each other

grace could we find healing and restoration. We could either hold on to our grievances, demanding that all our hurts be redressed, or we could follow God’s example, give each other grace, and trust God for the lack. We chose grace.”

GOING BACK TO KINDERGARTEN

A new reality demolished our lists, and the interruption shook our life at Antioch to the core.

We decided to replace a culture of demands with a culture of grace. Spencer said it felt like going back to kindergarten—learning a new language and new practices.



For us, “telling the truth” had come to mean telling the church and each other how *they* needed to change. But now we saw that the greatest truth was telling and showing each other how much God loves us. Our paradigm for daily life had shifted to John’s mantra: “Caring for each other, forgiving each other, and keeping the dishes washed. We are forgiven. All the rest is details.”

Grace’s ripple effects spread further. Spencer had seen his father, John Perkins, the morning after John’s bloody beating in a Mississippi jail cell in 1970. Ever since, Spencer had been on a long journey to understand the power of racial strongholds in American Christianity.

Three months after the October breakthrough, during the closing message of a conference we hosted in Jackson, Spencer told the story of our friendship being restored. Speaking on “Playing the Grace Card,” Spencer translated that breakthrough for the church’s racial challenge in America.

“Nothing that I have been learning about grace and forgiveness diminishes my belief

in Christians working for justice,” he clarified, “especially on behalf of the poor and oppressed.”

But *how* we work for this justice must change, Spencer said. “Although we must continue to speak on behalf of those who are oppressed and warn oppressors, my willingness to forgive them is not dependent on how they respond. Being able to extend grace and to forgive sets us free. We no longer need to spend precious emotional energy thinking about the day oppressors will get what they deserve.

“What I am learning about grace lifts a weight from my shoulders, which is nothing short of invigorating. When we can forgive and accept those who refuse to listen to God’s command to do justice, it allows them to hear God’s judgment without feeling a personal judgment from us. In the end, this gives our message more integrity. The ability to give grace while preaching justice makes our witness even more effective.”

Spencer’s words that night were not received with thunderous applause. But just three days later, at age 44, Spencer died of a heart attack. Afterward, many told me they were now taking his words *very* seriously.

GETTING LOVE INTO THE BONES

During the 12 years since being born again—again—I have sought to create more room for grace from God and with others. I used to live as if the psalmist had written, “Be busy, and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10). I hope I have become as radical about receiving the gift of Sabbath as I am about pursuing justice. I remain deeply committed to being shaped by Jesus’ story of the Samaritan who crosses social and racial divides to offer hospitality to the other (Luke 10:25–37). Yet I have also sought to be like Mary of Bethany in the story that immediately follows: She “wasted time” listening at Jesus’ feet (“the one thing needful,” he said) while her sister, Martha, slaved away doing good deeds in a world of everpressing needs (vv. 38–42). I hope I increasingly embody the difference between trying to be a minister and trying to be a messiah.

What does it mean to pursue racial reconciliation in and through grace?

COURTESY OF CHRIS RICE

First, it means to recognize that reconciliation is God's gift; it does not begin with our activism. The language of sociology, marketing, and rights often dominates our talk: "America is changing demographically; therefore, the church must change. Everyone should share in power. Now let's go out and make it happen."

Such visions don't say enough about God's desires and God's power. Second Corinthians 5 offers a far more beautiful and radical vision: God's "new creation" in Christ, and our becoming his ambassadors of reconciliation (vv. 16–21). Reconciliation has already begun with the work of Christ. And God invites us on the journey of reconciliation, the same journey that the early church was on: a journey that includes interruptions (Pentecost, Acts 2), a reconciliation among social divides (Peter's discovery that the gospel is for Gentiles,

in school cafeterias, the faculties of Christian colleges and seminaries, and at 11 A.M. every Sunday morning. But rather than starting with activism—"What should we do?"—grace calls us first to slow down and start with God's gift of lament: to see, name, and feel the brokenness. Only when we experience lament, feel helpless, and let go of control can we open up to our need for God and God's gifts—the only things that can rescue us from our alienation. Getting God's love into our bones gives us a holy boldness and mercy to take the time to see what's going on in our communities and institutions—the residue, the powers, and the imaginations that exclude others or lead to self-sufficiency.

Third, conversion by grace takes time and does not leave us standing complacently where we are. Fourteen years before the breakthrough, our church nearly split over

The most important truth in the world is not our trying harder to love God or others, but God's acts of love for us.

Acts 10), dismantling discrimination (against Greek widows, Acts 6:1–6), a new intimacy (the church in Antioch, Acts 11:19–26), speaking to injustice (Paul confronting Peter, Gal. 2:11–14) and, especially, the Holy Spirit—not Peter or Paul—being the central actor.

Second, it means working for justice with a spirit of mercy. Even during the grip of apartheid, with no guarantee that justice would win, Desmond Tutu preached "no future without forgiveness." And Nelson Mandela, from his imprisonment through his presidency, strove for a future of blacks and whites living together. Different ethnic communities have different captivities, and all are in need of the conversion that grace and the new creation make possible.

But bitterness can blind an African American from imagining why her church should bother building relationships with whites who "don't get it." Legalism can prevent a white Christian from listening to the painful story of a Mexican who crossed the border illegally to feed his family. In everyday situations like these, a lack of grace is tearing Christians apart.

At the same time, a major challenge in post-civil rights era America is seeing the depth of racial brokenness. Ethnic communities continue to be segregated, as witnessed

a racial crisis. Yet a spirit of grace kept both blacks and whites at the table long enough for the whites to see the power and privilege we held tightly to, and for African Americans to see their spirit of unforgiveness. This first breakthrough of grace taught us about the continuing power of race, the later breakthrough years about the power of God's love. Both were necessary; both altered people at their very core. So grace not only takes time but *gives us time* to pursue reconciliation, not with desperation but by embracing long-term practices and disciplines that in the light of God's love become "graces" through which we and our institutions can be converted.

Finally, pursuing racial reconciliation in grace means to journey toward holiness. As my friend Glen Kehrein once said, "I believe in racial reconciliation because it's the best way I know of for a white male to die to self."

Spencer wasn't always the friend I wanted, but he was surely the friend I needed; I don't know who I would be without him, or who he would have been without me. What is at stake is far more than solving the race problem; it's about the renewal of the church—becoming and being a new people. We are deprived and impoverished without one another. Reconciliation is not an event or achievement but a journey that forms the fruits of the Holy

Spirit in us—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Grace insists that segregation in the intimate places of our lives is not normal, inevitable, or acceptable—and that reconciliation is *beautiful*. When knit and transformed together in visible friendship and common mission for the sake of the gospel, we become not only like Christ, we are also joined *into* Christ.

TERRIFYING, BEAUTIFUL GRACE

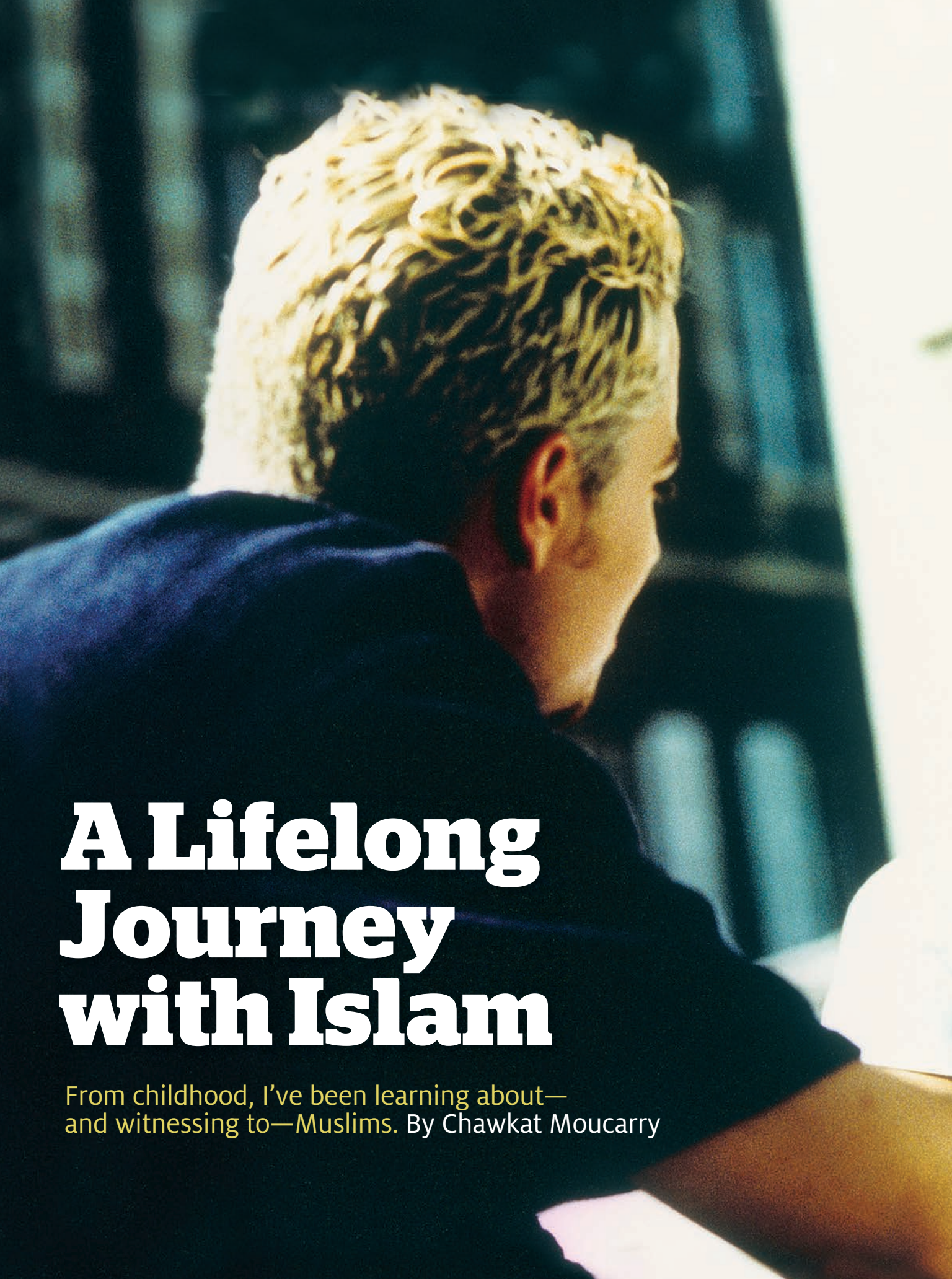
In 1997, we at Antioch declared every October 18 "Grace Day"—a day to remember God's wondrous interruption into our lives. It's a day to remember that if the gospel we live and the social change we seek come to be mostly about trying harder and doing more, it is not good news. It's a day to remember that how we choose to care, forgive, and advocate for a new reality in this world matters greatly—all the while not taking ourselves too seriously. It's a day to remember, as the old folks used to say in Jackson, that "God might not come when you want him, but he's always right on time."

For the good news of the gospel is that it is God's timing, not ours, that matters. We are not the central actors in saving the world's brokenness. In the life and resurrection of the crucified Christ now living in heaven, God has given us everything we need to live well in a broken world through the Holy Spirit. God has already changed everything through the power of a grace we do not deserve.

Flannery O'Connor was right: To receive this kind of grace is a bit terrifying. We and our churches and institutions will surely be changed in ways we'd rather not be changed. It is painful to give up our lists about others—and ourselves—for this other way. Grace is not safe or tame. But it is beautiful. If we receive this gift of God deeply into our bones, and speak it into the bones of those both near and far, everything changes about who we are in the midst of a world wracked by injustice and death. Every Grace Day, I celebrate that. ☩

Chris Rice is co-director of the Duke Divinity School Center for Reconciliation. He is author of *Reconciling All Things*, *Grace Matters*, and *More Than Equals*. He writes regularly at the Reconcilers blog (reconcilers.wordpress.com).

Go to ChristianBibleStudies.com for "Service Rooted in Grace," a Bible study based on this article.

A photograph of a man with curly blonde hair, seen from the back and side, looking out a window. The background is a bright, out-of-focus view of a city or landscape. The man is wearing a dark blue shirt.

A Lifelong Journey with Islam

From childhood, I've been learning about—
and witnessing to—Muslims. By Chawkat Moucarry

How should Christians who have a passion for evangelization relate to Islam? For North Americans, the question took on new urgency in the wake of September 11. But Christians in Muslim-majority societies have dealt with the question far longer. Growing up Christian in Syria gave Chawkat Moucarry many opportunities to interact with Muslims and learn about Islam. In this installment of the Global Conversation, World Vision International's director of interfaith relations describes his commitment to both dialogue and mission.

I HAVE NEVER UNDERSTOOD why some people look at *dialogue* and *mission* in either-or terms. In my experience, these words belong so much to each other that they should never be divorced. Evangelical Christians (whose theology I share) have shown an unwarranted suspicion of *dialogue*, simply because some have used it as a substitute for *mission*. Not only are the two words compatible, but they must shape each other.

I have always believed in God and Jesus Christ. Growing up in a Muslim-majority society, I knew as a child that I was different, and I gradually realized that this difference implied that I had something precious to share with my Muslim friends.

I was born into a Catholic home and was an altar boy in my early teens. I attended a missionary primary school, which gave me my first opportunity to discuss religion with my Muslim peers. However, my significant conversations about Christianity and Islam started after I moved to a government secondary school, where the majority of pupils were from working-class families. I was surprised to realize that many Muslim schoolmates were very interested to know more about Christianity and Christians. And I wanted to better understand Islam. A unique opportunity presented itself when the teacher of Islamic religious education granted me permission to attend his class. I was the only Christian there. He regularly asked me to give my views as a Christian on certain topics. These discussions extended outside the classroom.

In Paris, after I graduated in Christian theology, I felt as an Arab Christian a compelling need to relate my faith to Islam. That required me to study it. The need was reinforced after I started working for the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students among Arab and Muslim students. Sometimes they would ask me challenging questions that I had not seriously considered

as a theological student. Hence, it wasn't difficult for me to find research topics for my Islamic Studies dissertations at the Sorbonne.

For my first degree, I looked into the Islamic charge against the reliability of the Bible, and in my Ph.D. dissertation, I examined Islamic and Christian teachings on forgiveness. Needless to say, studying Islam unavoidably meant re-examining my major Christian beliefs, which I had often taken for granted. My work with students included setting up book tables at university campuses and leading Bible study groups, as well as speaking in public debates in France and abroad on Christianity and Islam.

For 12 years I worked for All Nations Christian College, a mission-oriented Bible college in Ware, England. I was in charge of its Islamic course, to which I invited a Muslim lecturer to contribute each year. His or her talks were one of the high spots of the course, as they provided an opportunity for a genuine and often animated interaction between students, the speaker, and me.

For three years now I have been working for World Vision, whose mission statement echoes the "mission statement" Jesus proclaimed at the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:18–19). The Christian aid organization operates in 20 Muslim-majority countries, with Muslims composing most of the staff in places like Afghanistan, Mauritania, and Somalia. My work includes providing orientation on Christianity and Islam to all our staff. It has been fascinating to learn from each other

counterproductive. It usually provokes a defensive response—Muslims becoming more radical in their beliefs—and often an offensive reaction too—Muslims attacking Christianity even more vehemently. A polemical engagement with Islam produces more heat than light, and is incompatible with "the gospel of peace" (Eph. 6:15), which is about reconciliation, love, and forgiveness.

Christian-Muslim dialogue often takes the form of apologetics for at least two reasons. First, Christianity and Islam make conflicting truth claims about God's revelation, which for Christians reached its climax with the coming of Jesus Christ, and for Muslims with the disclosure of the Qur'an. Second, Islam acknowledges Christianity and Judaism as God-given religions. At the same time, it rejects the core of the gospel (the divinity of Christ and his crucifixion and resurrection). Christian apologetics is about giving a defense of the faith to those who criticize it (1 Pet. 3:15). This, however, should be done with "gentleness and respect" for critics. Even in a heated debate, the Christian apologist must refrain from polemics, personal attacks, and derisive or hostile arguments about Muslims and their religion.

WELCOME AND WITNESS

We often think of *dialogue* as verbal engagement, but this is a very narrow view. Dialogue is first of all about an open attitude toward others, a disposition that reaches out and welcomes people who are different or even antagonistic. Dialogue is a way of life. Understood this way, Christian-Muslim

Fairness requires comparing like with like—for instance, not comparing moderate Christians with extremist Muslims.

about our respective faiths—and often about our own. Without ignoring the distinctive beliefs of each tradition, knowing our common ground enhances our work for the common good of the communities we serve.

WHAT IS DIALOGUE?

I take *dialogue* to mean a deliberate effort to engage genuinely and respectfully with each other; a willingness to listen and understand; a readiness to learn and be challenged. It is also a desire to relate to, communicate with, and be understood by one another. Christian-Muslim dialogue focuses on the two faiths and their implications for individuals and communities in this life and the next.

For many centuries, Christians in the Western world have either ignored or confronted the Muslim world. Ignoring Muslims is no longer an option in our "global village," where Muslims and Christians live next to each other. Some Christians relate to Muslims in a confrontational way. They consider polemics a perfectly legitimate way to approach Islam. *Polemics*, as its derivation from the Greek (*polemikós*, "of war") suggests, is about waging a war of words against Muslims by attacking their religion. This approach is

dialogue is an encounter at three distinct and interrelated levels. Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman (John 4:1–26) is paradigmatic.

First, Christians and Muslims meet each other as *human beings*. They have much in common—physical and emotional needs, human and spiritual aspirations, joys and sorrows, hopes and struggles.

Second, they meet as *monotheistic believers* who share many beliefs (for example, creation, human stewardship, divine guidance, sin, forgiveness, final judgment) and ethical values (for example, moral standards, the sacredness of human life, sexual fidelity, a commitment to the poor), even though the way they think of these is not exactly the same.

Finally, Christians and Muslims claim to be *God's witnesses* on earth. Christians and Muslims have huge misunderstandings about each other's faith. Removing the misunderstandings is an integral part of dialogue. As we explain our faiths to one another, each community bears witness to the Creator according to its own perspective.

We can measure a fruitful dialogue by its outcomes.

It should result in a *better understanding* of each other's faith and of one's own.

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

Dialogue should lead to *better relationships* between the two communities and strengthen their social commitments.

Dialogue is also an excellent *school for tolerance*. It helps us overcome our ignorance, our prejudice, our self-centeredness, our fanaticism, and our spiritual pride.

Is *conversion* a legitimate goal in dialogue? Yes. It is perfectly legitimate for believers who take seriously the exclusive claims of their religion to try to persuade others of the truth they proclaim. There is nothing wrong with hoping and even

Second, we should do our best to *be fair*. This means, for instance, keeping a balance between highlighting similarities and pointing out differences when comparing Christianity and Islam. Focusing on either will give a distorted image of Islam. Fairness also requires comparing like with like—for instance, not comparing moderate Christians with extremist Muslims, ideal Christianity with popular Islam, beautiful texts in the Bible with problematic passages in the Qur'an, and so on. Some Christians are often tempted to compare Islamic

As disciples of Christ, we are under a double obligation to love our neighbors as ourselves and to share the gospel with them.

expecting that some people, having carefully examined these claims, will make a life-changing decision as a result of transparent and free dialogue. Unless we accept conversion as a possible outcome for dialogue, our claim to be tolerant remains unproven.

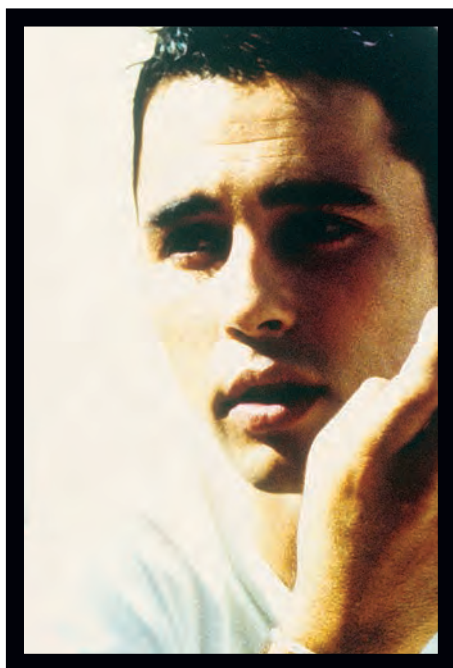
RELATING TO MUSLIMS CHRIST'S WAY

Muslims find a lot in their scriptures about Christianity and Christians. Because Islam is a post-Christian religion, Christians do not find anything about Islam in the Bible. However, Jesus gave us a clear and helpful command about how to relate to people in general: "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets"

(Matt. 7:12). How do we want Muslims to relate to us and to our faith? I would like to highlight some implications of the Golden Rule for Christians who want to engage missiologically with Islam and Muslims.

First, as an expression of loving our neighbors, we must *show respect* to Muslims and to the heart of their identity—their prophet, their religion, and their scriptures. This attitude requires us to avoid catch questions, derogatory comments, and inflammatory language. True, some Muslim polemicists and extremists do not comply with the Qur'anic recommendation to argue with Jews and Christians "in the best possible way" (Qur'an 29:46). But this is no excuse for Christians to indulge in vitriolic criticisms of Islam.

This does *not* mean abstaining from criticisms of Islam. But when we have critical comments to make, we need to put them in the least offensive language and to ensure as far as we can that they are substantiated. Jesus enjoins his disciples not to be naïve and to look critically at self-proclaimed prophets (Matt. 7:15–20); in the same breath, he commands them to take a long, critical look at themselves (Matt. 7:1–5, 21–23).



teaching with the New Testament, which is understandable. However, Christians do not disown the Old Testament, and it would be unfair to ignore the Old Testament when looking at issues such as holy war, polygamy, the penal code, prophet-hood, and theocracy.

Finally, we need to *study Islam and befriend Muslims*. It is legitimate, in fact necessary, for Christians to use Islamic material in their interactions with Islam, but it is critically important that we adopt a humble attitude. We need to acknowledge that the Muslim community is the custodian of its own tradition. Its members are the authoritative interpreters of their scriptures, not us. Some approaches tend to Christianize Islam, others to demonize it. Neither does justice to Islamic

teaching, which should be considered on its own merits.

A Christian perspective on Islam ought to be at the same time incarnational, sympathetic, and critical. It should be concerned more with Muslim people than with Islam. Muslims are first and foremost human beings, made in God's image and loved by God as much as we are. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are under a double obligation to love our Muslim neighbors as ourselves and to share the Good News with them. Not only do the two commands go hand in hand, the second is best carried out as an expression of the first. Dialogue is indeed the privileged way of "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15) to Muslims and members of other religious communities.

Chawkat Moucarry is World Vision International's director of inter-faith relations. He has written several books and articles, including *The Prophet and the Messiah: An Arab Christian's Perspective on Islam and Christianity* (IVP, 2001); *The Search for Forgiveness: Pardon and Punishment in Islam and Christianity* (IVP, 2004); and *Two Prayers for Today: The Lord's Prayer and the Fatiha* (CSS Books, 2007).



I

F, IN THE PAST TWO DECADES, your church has launched an arts ministry, or held a spiritual writing workshop, or devoted a few dollars to purchasing textiles or paintings for the expanses of previously blank walls, you might want to write Gregory Wolfe a thank-you note.

Let me not overstate: the energy around faith and art in evangelical circles has been, in recent years, enormous, and many organizations and individuals have contributed. But ask anyone who's involved in conversations about faith and art to tick off the *sine qua nons*, and they will include Wolfe.

Wolfe has devoted most of his adult life to weaving a braid of faith and art. The first strand of the braid is *Image*, a journal that Wolfe—who cut his journalistic teeth putting together a mimeographed literary mag in junior high—founded just over 20 years ago. He knew three things when he started *Image*: it “had to focus on art and faith”; it had to offer a “creative voice versus polemical, political, analytical”; and it had to focus on the present.

“However much I might love an essay on Rembrandt or Bach,” says Wolfe, he won’t run it. In *Image*’s pages you’ll instead meet sculptor

Roger Feldman, poet Martha Serpas, memoirist Annie Dillard. These are, in the words of managing editor Mary Kenagy Mitchell, “people who would also be published in secular venues, but who want a venue for the best art and lit that engages with Christian faith.” (If you’ve not read the magazine, the best way to get a taste is to pick up *Bearing the Mystery*, just out from Eerdmans, an anthology of work from *Image*’s 20 years.)

The second strand is the Glen, a week-long writing and arts workshop Wolfe helped launch in the mid-1990s, and held, currently, at St. John’s College in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Icon writers, collagists, poets, songwriters—artists of all stripes gather for a week of instruction, worship, and conversation. The Glen is a response to readers who said they felt alone in their pursuit of a life of faith and art until they read *Image*—and it’s a response to Wolfe’s own recognition that editing is lonely.

“We wanted to build community,” he says, and he has.

Completing the troika is Seattle Pacific University’s low-residency Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing, which Wolfe directs. The MFA is intended not to produce “Christian writing” but to give people a space to work out writing and spirituality together. The stellar faculty includes novelist Bret Lott, novelist and nonfiction writer Robert Clark, and poet Jeanne Murray Walker.

Put a group of *Image* readers into a room, and the group will be diverse—religiously, politically. That said, one of the journal’s

PORTRAIT: CATHERINE PRESCOTT

Art for God's Sake

For over 20 years,
Greg Wolfe has
been weaving the
braid of faith and art.

By Lauren F. Winner

strongest constituencies has been evangelicals. Wolfe chalks this up, in part, to the influence of Francis Schaeffer, who he says “opened the floodgate” to evangelical engagement with culture and the arts. Many evangelical organizations have been exploring questions of faith and art alongside Wolfe (who converted to Catholicism in 1983). “It’s hard to imagine *Image*,” says Wolfe, without the art departments at evangelical colleges like Biola, Wheaton, and Gordon, without artists like Bruce Herman (the Lothlórien Distinguished Chair in the Fine Arts at Gordon) and Joel Sheesley (a professor of art at Wheaton).

Lott says that the programs Wolfe has built have been “enormously sustaining for evangelicals who are artists.” He says that the evangelical church tends to view its adherents as “pieceworkers” who are always looking for tangible outcomes: numbers of those saved or helped. “The making of art doesn’t necessarily work that way,” he says. “The making of art is an end in and of itself; it is an act of worship in and of itself; it as an act of humility and joy at once; and, in the life of the believer, it is accomplished as a gift back to the Creator who made us—art for God’s sake instead of art for art’s sake, as it were.”

Lott says that the journal, the conference, and the graduate degree program “serve as a kind of body of believers, a kind of congregation that can share within itself the travails and triumphs of what it means to be that creator of art for God’s sake, especially in a time when such an endeavor is suspect even when practiced in the secular world.”

WORKING WITH WHAT’S HERE

Different people will summarize Wolfe’s project differently. Some will say that Wolfe is “about” excellence; every last story, poem, and piece of visual art that appears in *Image* is irrefutably top-grade, and in a culture where people (even Christian people) sometimes conflate Christianity with mediocrity, that’s saying a lot.

Lil Copan, a Glen attendee and editor at Paraclete Press, says that before *Image*, “many evangelicals didn’t even know how to utter the two words *faith* and *arts* in the same sentence.” Wolfe, she says, not only renewed the arts conversation in liturgical churches but also created a place for such conversation among evangelicals. His journal “offered scholarship, engagement, edgy and explorative work—fearless work.” And as such, “he pushed evangelicals past their comfortable places, and one by one they piled like hippies into the little vw Beetle.”

Copan concludes, “His holding steady to a singular vision of quality work in literature, visual arts, and music has resulted in a commanding presence on any magazine stand, with *Image* being one of the top 10 literary/arts journals in circulation.”

Poet Scott Cairns says that Wolfe has “assisted people of faith in reclaiming art as a viable mode of discovering and performing the joy, the beauty—even the exquisite ache—of life in Christ.” As for himself, Wolfe says he is about “Christian humanism,” by which I take him to mean that our story is intelligible only with reference to God’s story, and vice versa.

But if I were pressed to sum up what Wolfe is doing, I would say this: He is trying to get us to take our present moment seriously. Attention to the present hasn’t always been Wolfe’s instinct. As a teenager—a self-described “right-wing weenie”—he was enamored with a certain narrative of decline: Under conditions of modernity, everything is tainted; thus, if you want to find art, you have to go back—back to Jane Austen, or to Chaucer.

But then, Wolfe says, he began to see that “modernity is not monolithic,” and that the artist works within the forms of her age; artists use what’s here, what’s available. Consider T. S. Eliot, says Wolfe: Eliot is capable of looking to the past. But in Eliot we also find someone who says, *Look at what the broken edge of our fragmentation gestures toward: the wholeness off in the distance.*

The narrative of decline that initially captured Wolfe’s imagination is pervasive among Christians: a fear of a present-day society that seems so degraded; a romanticized return to an idealized moment in the mists of time (America’s agrarian past, the Great Awakenings, Europe’s High Middle Ages). It’s because of the pervasiveness of that narrative that I would say the most important thing Wolfe does is not simply help Christians to “appreciate the arts,” though that’s no small thing. The most important thing he does is call our attention to the present moment and tell us: *Look here.*

I don’t wish to reduce art to utilitarian devotional ends. But whenever I put down an issue of *Image*, I find that my sense of wonder has deepened. I feel more able to live with a full sense of creation and human experience; I feel more able to fully live where I am, in this broken, needful present. Which makes me want to say to Wolfe, simply, “Thank you.”

Lauren F. Winner is assistant professor of Christian spirituality at Duke Divinity School, and author of *Girl Meets God*, *Mudhouse Sabbath*, and *Real Sex: The Naked Truth about Chastity*.



{ POPULAR CULTURE }

It's the End of the World, and We Love It

We're flocking to movies about the last days, even in the midst of a penny-pinching recession. Why?

By Mark Moring

T

HERE'S A POWERFUL SCENE near the end of *The Road*, the film adaptation of Cormac McCarthy's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, where a father and son huddle together under soulless skies on a desolate, nameless beach littered with whale and human skeletons. They have finally reached the coast after traversing by foot a post-apocalyptic landscape fraught with unspeakable dangers, toils, and snares.

The boy, about age 10, has never seen the sea. "What's on the other side?" he asks. "Nothing," replies his father, suffering from malnutrition and weakness after fending off all sorts of evils. All along he has encouraged his son to maintain hope—to "carry the fire"—but has slowly lost his own. The boy, who believes there's still goodness somewhere in their dark and dying world, looks out to the sea and says, "There must be something."

Wanting to keep his son's hope alive, the man relents. "Maybe there's a father and his son, and they're sitting on the beach too."

Like McCarthy's 2006 book, the film is both depressing and

redeeming; it depicts one of the most loving father-son relationships to appear on the big screen. And this particular scene speaks volumes for all of us asking a universal question.

What's on the other side?

The question is innate to human experience, and Hollywood knows it—as evidenced by the spate of spiritually themed films to debut after the blockbuster success of *The Passion of the Christ* (2004). In a fear-filled world where war, terrorism, and economic collapse bring the question of death and the afterlife to the fore, the film industry has delivered more stories to fuel the question—though not always providing answers.

The result in 2009 was a record \$10 billion at the box office in the United States and Canada, where theater attendance was up 4.5 percent over 2008 despite an economic recession that saw cuts in consumer spending in almost every other sector.

Much of that record windfall came from a near epidemic of movies about the end of the world—from the explosion-driven drivel of *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* (where all life on Earth is in peril) and *2012* (global mayhem as predicted by the Mayan calendar) to the tongue-in-cheek *Zombieland* and more thoughtful fare such as *Terminator Salvation*, *District 9*, and *The Road*. The trend continued in 2010 with two end-times thrillers, *The Book of Eli* and *Legion*, both of which opened in January, and the documentaries

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Apocalypse Now: Whether it's the bombastic explosions of *Transformers 2* or the contemplative pace of *The Road* (inset), films about the End are connecting with audiences.

THE ROAD: COURTESY OF WEINSTEIN STUDIOS

Waiting for Armageddon and *With God on Our Side*, both exploring the State of Israel's role in ushering in the last days. January also saw the wide release of *The Lovely Bones*, depicting a teen girl's view of heaven (and our own longing for it). More such films—pre- and post-apocalyptic—are on the 2010 tap.

Why are so many of us flocking to the theater when we're pinching pennies more now than in decades? And why are we spending our hard-earned money on movies about the end of existence?

Two things are at work: First, when the economy is down, movie attendance often goes up; it has happened several times before, especially during the Great Depression. Second, people are asking, perhaps more than ever, what happens after we die—whether by natural causes or some cataclysmic event. War. Terrorism. Earthquakes. Teen-idol vampires, hell-bent robots, wandering zombies. Whatever.

RECORD BOX OFFICE

During the Great Depression, unemployment in the U.S. ran as high as 25 percent, and many wondered how they would afford their next meal. But even during the hardest times, 60 million to 80 million Americans—as much as two-thirds of the population—went to the movies every week.

President Franklin Roosevelt said, "When the spirit of the people is lower than at any other time, it is a splendid thing that for just 15

cents an American can go to a movie and look at the smiling face of a baby and forget his troubles."

While many Depression-era films were escapist, Hollywood didn't completely deny the realities of the day. The films of Frank Capra and the Marx Brothers were social commentaries in the guise of screwball comedies, while others (*Gone with the Wind*, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*) were more overt in their social message. Even popular horror films such as *King Kong* and *Frankenstein* had underlying messages about societal ills.

It wouldn't be the last time Americans would head for the movies in hard times. During five of the past seven economic downturns in the U.S.—including the 1970s oil crises and the dot-com bust of the early 2000s—box office earnings went up. And now we have the record-setting year of 2009.

"When times are bad, our business seems to buck the trend," Dan Glickman, president of the Motion Picture Association of America, told *Time* magazine. "The movies are great therapy. It's a lot cheaper than a psychiatrist."

But a psychiatrist likely wouldn't have figured that such bleak fare—about bad things happening at a time when, in the real world, so many bad things *are* happening—would play such a major role in a record-breaking year.

MEANING AND ESCAPE

When 2012 came out in November 2009, *The Fresno Bee* asked scholars and religious leaders what to make of moviegoers' fascination with the end times.

Margaret Gonsoulin, a sociology professor at Cal State, speculated that it reflected a hunger for meaning in anxiety-ridden times: "They want to know about the future," she told the *Bee*.

But there's far more at work here. Brett McCracken, a critic for *CT Movies*, wrote for *Relevant* that we are "compelled" to watch these films because "[t]here is in each of us an innate sense of justice—a sense that all of us probably deserve calamity or worse. When an act of God is on display, we marvel at what we suspect (perhaps hope) is his sovereignty at work, wrathful and terrible though it may be."

While Depression-era moviegoers sought escape, moviegoers during the most recent recession want both to escape and to see films *about* escape—even bleak, scary ones—into another world, the afterlife, or the "other side."

The writer of Ecclesiastes says that God has placed eternity in our hearts (3:11). We are divinely wired to wonder what comes next, and in that wondering, we are acutely aware of our own mortality—whether our death comes by natural causes or the end of the world. The films discussed here feed that fascination—one that runs as high in Christians as in anyone else. (Look no further than the *Left Behind* series, which has sold more than 65 million copies.)

"In difficult times, our restlessness for more comes to the surface," Richard J. Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary, told *Christianity Today*. "These are difficult days, and it should not surprise us that yearnings for eternity—for a final resolution of all the struggle with good and evil—will come to pass."

What's on the other side?

Hollywood may not know that the answer has in fact been revealed, that a Father and his Son wait on the other shore. ☩

Mark Moring, senior associate editor, oversees movie coverage for *CT*.



Ears to Hear: David and Ruby Stecca are passionate about reaching the deaf with the gospel.

CHRISTY ORTIZ, an interpreter for the deaf at a Texas high school, says most of her students have attended local churches for years. But without interpreters in their congregations, the teenagers were not grasping the fundamentals of the faith.

“The cross, Jesus’ death and resurrection—it meant nothing to them,” Ortiz said after her students bombed the religion part of a recent exam. “They were

shocked to learn that Jesus was a Jew.”

Ortiz referred them to some YouTube videos made by Deaf Video Communications (DVC), a Christian ministry to the deaf. The students watched every video over the weekend, and on Monday peppered her with questions about sin, hell, heaven, and Jesus’ role in all of it.

Days later, several students came to a See You at the Pole event. One told Ortiz, “You always talk about your God like he’s a real live

person. This morning, it felt like he was really standing there with us.” Ortiz corrected him: “*Our* God.” He replied, “I need to think about it some more, but I think I like that. *Our* God.”

Based in the Chicago suburb of Carol Stream, DVC makes evangelism and discipleship videos for deaf of all ages. But it has a passion for the 70,000 deaf children nationwide who have few if any other ways to learn about God.

Most churches regard the deaf as a benevolence ministry, similar to the elderly or disabled. But experts argue that a different paradigm is desperately needed: seeing deaf ministry as cross-cultural missions.

Language and cultural barriers have left the deaf a veritable unreached people group right in America’s midst. Christian deaf ministries estimate that only 1 percent of American deaf children will attend church as adults. Less than 7 percent will ever have the gospel presented to them in a way they can understand.

“If we don’t reach deaf children, there won’t be deaf adults going to church,” said DVC founder David Stecca. “The deaf decide as children that church is something hearing people do, because there is nothing they can understand.”

Over 90 percent of deaf children are born into hearing families, yet

COURTESY OF DVC



{ MISSIONS }

Do You Hear What I Hear?

The deaf are virtually an ‘unreached people group,’ but an Illinois ministry is remedying that one video at a time.

By Jeremy Weber

most of these families never learn enough American Sign Language (ASL) to talk about matters of faith. Deaf children find themselves equally isolated at church.

‘DIDN’T UNDERSTAND A SINGLE THING’

Lyn Weston went to church every Sunday as a deaf child growing up in Indiana in the 1960s, but had no one to interpret for her. “The whole time I just sat there, twiddled my thumbs, and scribbled on paper,” said Weston. “I didn’t understand a single thing that was going on.”

Weston eventually came to faith at age 15, when she met a Baptist pastor fluent in ASL while attending the state institute for the deaf. Some of her spiritual growth as an adult has come through DVC videos. “In the past, the deaf didn’t know about God,” said Weston, who now attends Oak Brook Community Deaf Church in Oak Brook, Illinois. “But now hearing pastors [and their churches] can communicate with the deaf”—thanks to ministries such as DVC.

Christianity began to spread first through the spoken and then the written word, but both means have left many deaf on the outside. The printed world is inaccessible to many because over 50 percent of deaf adults read at or below a fourth grade reading level.

Most deaf communicate through ASL, but ASL is not based on English. “The deaf need visual communication,” said Stecca. “Not until video has there been a tool to evangelize and spiritually feed the deaf.”

Stecca and his wife, Ruby, learned ASL in the late 1970s after David, then a police officer in the Chicago suburbs, responded to a domestic fight between deaf parents—and the only interpreter was the couple’s 10-year-old daughter. Stecca and his wife were soon interpreting in churches and leading deaf Sunday school classes and Bible studies.

Over time, David felt called by God to leave his job and start a mission field—a video version of Christian radio. The Steccas began DVC in 1983 in their basement with a home camera and a VCR. Today the ministry has a broadcast-quality production studio, a conference center, and \$300,000 worth of video equipment. With the help of volunteer deaf actors and paid, mostly hearing production professionals, DVC has produced almost 500 videos of Bible stories, sermons, dramas, marriage counseling sessions, and children’s programs—all in ASL.

A free lending library sends out hundreds of copies of videos by mail each week. In 27 years, DVC has fulfilled 55,000 requests for videos

from deaf churches, schools, and individuals worldwide. Donations from supporting churches, foundations, and individuals cover shipping costs and the rest of the \$300,000 budget of the organization, approved by the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability.

MORE THAN AN INTERPRETER

DVC meets a need that many churches don't realize exists. "The hearing church often does not understand the deaf," said Stecca. "Putting an interpreter in front of the church is not the answer. If reaching the deaf were that easy, we'd have more deaf in the church."

Churches that treat deaf attendees as a ministry to the disabled fail to recognize the language barriers that prevent the deaf from accessing Christian teaching. Stecca discovered this when he began translating sermons into ASL.

"It was a waste of time, because the way the sermon was presented was not understandable to the deaf," said Stecca. Hearing pastors tend to deliver non-linear messages at a tenth grade reading level, while most deaf best comprehend linear messages at lower reading levels. In Stecca's experience, deaf Christians often understand less than 40 percent of an interpreted sermon.

DVC knows its videos are meeting a need long unmet. Many groups have requested—and watched—every single video in the catalogue. Hundreds of deaf Christians have approached the Steccas at deaf conferences over the years, many crying with thanks for how DVC introduced them to God through its videos.

Stecca tells the story of one church in northern Michigan that hosted a movie night for the deaf using DVC videos, where 10 attendees accepted Christ. One convert happened to be the president of the local deaf club—the social nexus of the heavily secular deaf community. The president later showed DVC videos at a club meeting, where another 10 deaf came to faith.

FOCUSING ON CHILDREN

DVC has recently focused on children's programming. Recently a young mother approached Stecca at a conference and asked if he had any videos she could use to tell her daughter about God. "She had taken her deaf child faithfully to church for nearly ten years," said Stecca. "But no one was able to tell her daughter about Jesus."

Stecca says many hearing parents are ill-equipped to share faith with their kids. Churches have media resources for hearing children, but most such resources are not accessible.

"It's not like we're saying that [media resources are] going to be the salvation of these kids, but there are relatively few resources to help them," said Marshall Lawrence, who founded Silent Blessings Deaf Ministries near Indianapolis in 1996 after his daughter Rachel was born deaf. He learned ASL, but couldn't find any Christian resources to help him teach Rachel about Jesus.

"Ninety-five percent of deaf children are born into hearing

families, but only 10 percent of parents learn enough ASL to have a conversation beyond 'pass the salt' and 'be quiet,'" said Lawrence. "When parents have limited signing skills, it's daunting for them to teach their children about Jesus or Moses."

Lawrence tells of a 6-year-old deaf girl who long refused to participate in dinnertime prayers despite her mother's ASL translation. After the girl saw a deaf boy signing his prayers on a deaf ministry video, she excitedly signed to her mother, "Mommy, Jesus knows sign language!" Now she insists on praying at every meal.

"If children get the idea that Jesus can't know them because he's 'hearing,' and virtually none of the hearing adults in their lives know sign language, it will be very difficult for them to know they have access to God," said Lawrence. "We have to find creative ways to communicate to these children that Jesus and God are relevant to their lives."

A SERIES JUST FOR KIDS

One of those ways is *Dr. Wonder's Workshop*, the first Christian TV series for children made in ASL. It's a colorful blend of *Sesame Street*-like educational segments with *VeggieTales*' moral lessons. Each episode teaches a Christian theme reinforced by skits, songs, animations, and interviews, all conducted in ASL by deaf actors. Voices and music are later added in English and captions in English and Spanish so that hearing family members can follow along.

DVC partnered with Silent Blessings and a third ministry, Deaf Missions, located in Council Bluffs, Iowa, to produce the first season of *Dr. Wonder's Workshop*. The first 13 episodes aired in the fall of 2008 on seven Christian networks, including Trinity Broadcasting Network and Daystar, reaching an estimated 300 million homes in the U.S. and Canada. The show is currently editing its third season, taping its fourth, and writing its fifth, though DVC was forced to leave the partnership in June 2009 after losing promised foundation grants (producing 13 episodes costs about \$300,000) due to the economic downturn.

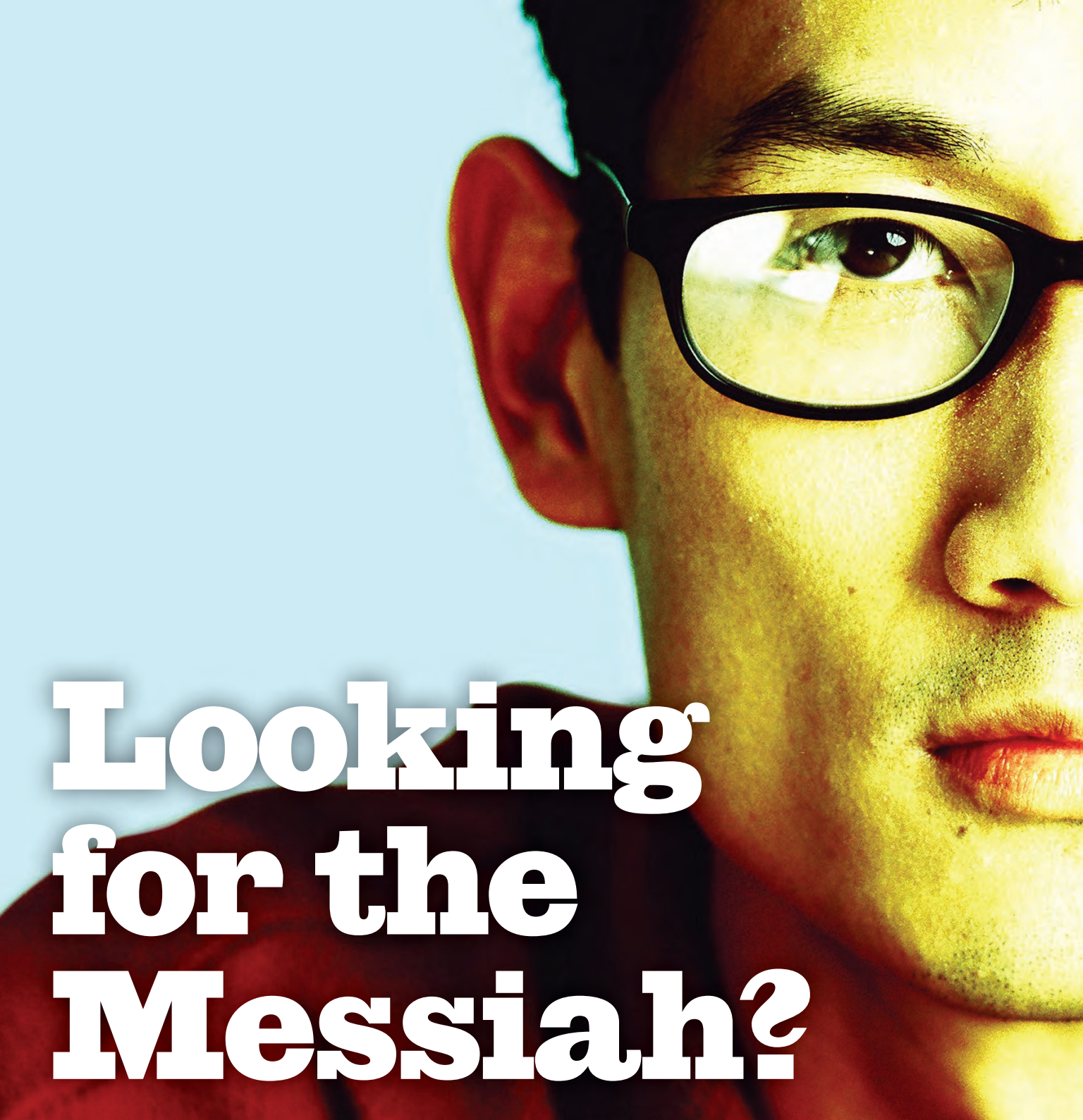
DVC's current focus is expanding its reach through an Internet channel that streams or offers downloads of more than 160 of its ASL programs. The site averages 2,000 downloads per week from around the globe. Said Stecca, "There has never been a better opportunity to reach the deaf around the world with biblical truth."

An e-mail from a 12-year-old in Texas says it all: "I was really giving up hope, because I am the only deaf girl in my area and no one knows how to talk to me but my parents. I [was] wondering . . . whether God really loved me. If he does, why am I deaf and no one else here is deaf like me? But you guys help me out a lot. Thank you. Now I am living a happy life and studying the Bible again." ☩

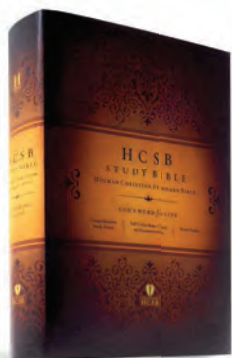
Jeremy Weber is CT's associate editor of news.



Signs of Wonder: Deaf volunteer actors compose the colorful cast of *Dr. Wonder's Workshop*, the first children's TV show in American Sign Language.



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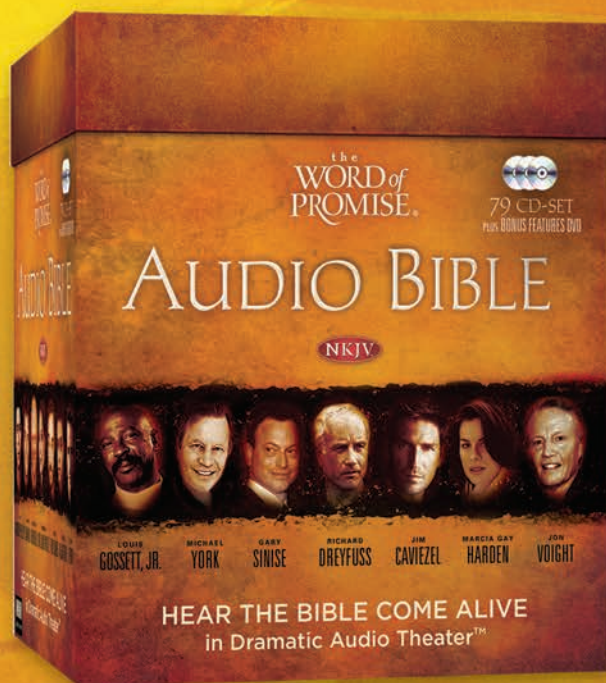
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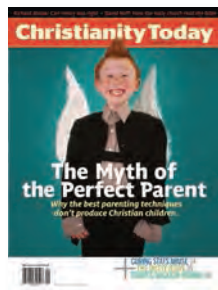
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VIEWPOINTS

OPINIONS AND
PERSPECTIVES ON
ISSUES FACING
THE CHURCH



I used to pat myself on the back for raising three outstanding kids. Then my oldest son called and broke my heart. But I love him more than ever. And I see my heavenly Father in a whole new light.

Anonymous

Grace-Based Parenting

Leslie Leyland Fields ["The Myth of the Perfect Parent," January] is right: The best parenting techniques don't produce Christian children. Praise God that it doesn't depend on us.

Before our four children were born, my husband and I prayed that they would live for God. We prayed the same for our 11 grandchildren and 1 great-grandchild. I believe that, by God's grace, all of them have *mine* written on them in his handwriting. After 57 years of parenting, we have tried to be like the man who scatters seed on the ground (Mark 4:26–27), trusting that God will make the good seed sprout and grow, even though each child will receive it in different ways.

NORMA STEVEN
Santa Ana, California

I wish that every Christian parent in America could read *Christianity Today's* January cover essay. A few months ago I would have patted myself on the back for raising three outstanding 20-somethings. Then my oldest son called me and broke my heart. We both wept. It took a lot more talking for us to come to a place of reconciliation. But how much better to relate honestly for the first time in years. And, more importantly, how vital to see my son for the young man he is instead of the false image the two of us

had created.

I love my son more than ever. And I see my heavenly Father in a whole new light.

ANONYMOUS

Sex & the Older Single

January's Village Green, on "What's the best way to encourage people to save sex for marriage?" missed on a couple points. The word *young* should have come before *people*, as the column ignored the realities of older single adulthood. Most church leaders are married men who don't have a clue about the frustrations of long-term celibacy or of missing out on childbearing.

Donna Freitas's "Stop Talking Marriage" made some sense, but the "unfulfilling realities" of hookup culture also exist in long-term celibacy. Some single Christians have jettisoned indefinite abstinence, forming romantic relationships that may or may not involve sex and may or may not lead to marriage.

Celibacy is an extreme form of self-denial. If I had to do it all over again, I'm not sure that I would.

GWENDOLYN T. COLVIN
Raleigh, North Carolina

While Mark Regnerus's response to the abstinence question was a bit short on application, it did offer a necessary premise: The church is wrong when it accepts the cultural attitude that young

TOP 3
What got the most comments in January's CT

43%

The Myth of the Perfect Parent
Leslie Leyland Fields

10%

The Village Green, Abstinence
Mark Regnerus, Richard Ross, and Donna Freitas

10%

Chicken Little Was Wrong
Ed Stetzer

YAY OR NAY
Readers' response to "The Myth of the Perfect Parent"

77%

23%

marriage is bad. He rightly notes that the job of local congregations is to help young people discern God's will for their lives. Not all will be called to marry, but most will.

We in the West have forgotten how to live, and the church is complicit in this cultural amnesia. Our woes, however, are self-correcting: Cultures that do not foster healthy families collapse, and others with better family values replace them.

DARRIN RODGERS
Springfield, Missouri

Real-Life Introverts

I appreciated the coverage of my book, *Introverts in the Church*, in the January issue of CT ["Introverts for Jesus, Unite!"]. However, I want to challenge the reviewer's critique that "the author's solutions are too pastor-centric and by his own admission, theoretical."

I interviewed dozens of introverts—some pastors, some not—and the solutions I propose have been worked out in real, tangible communities over the past eight years. I intentionally went against my introverted tendencies to seek the input of others, and the practical steps I suggest all draw from and are confirmed by the experiences of introverts who are committed members of Christ's body.

ADAM S. MCHUGH
Claremont, California

compiled by Laura Leonard

WORTH REPEATING

Things overheard at CT online.



The Source of Bad Stats

Kudos for publishing the long-overdue survey of American religious research ["Chicken Little Was Wrong," January]. Ed Stetzer correctly notes the dangers of drawing conclusions from research that may not apply to the larger public or various subgroups therein.

Stetzer didn't address the widely reported research of the Barna Group. One of Barna's most publicized findings has been the decline of church leaders with a biblical worldview. One oft-quoted statistic: Only 71 percent of Southern Baptist pastors have a biblical worldview. That is impossible. The alternative? There must be something wrong with the way the concept is measured. The survey that measures biblical worldview includes eight statements. The person being surveyed must agree with all of them to classify as someone with a biblical worldview. Disagree with one, and you don't have a biblical worldview.

I can easily imagine both CT's founder and original editor not agreeing with at least one of the statements, depending

on one's views on inerrancy, the source of moral truth, God's activity in the universe, and so on. Could it be that puzzling findings on Americans' religious beliefs are simply a function of method?

STEPHEN V. ANDERSON
Albany, New York

Statistics abuse is a disease of Western culture, not just of the church. Global warming advocates use the same apocalyptic language to make their case as do church leaders. Quoting scary statistics may motivate some, but it disillusions many others and reveals an insecurity about losing control.

DALE FINCHER
Steamboat Springs, Colorado

The Bible in High Def

I used to be unimpressed by Holy Lands visitors who returned from their trip making seemingly saccharine statements ["The Dusty Messiah," January]. Now I find myself talking like them. Our tour guide said it well: "It makes the Bible go from black and white to color." High definition, I would add. Traveling there made me see how much I had used the ancient setting of Scripture just to get to the abstract truths. I had discarded the setting like an unneeded garment. Being there re-clothed those truths and made them much more powerful.

DAVE MONTOYA
San Gabriel Valley, California



ONLINE POLL

TORAH READING
How often do you read from the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible)?

14%

Every day.

28%

Every few months.

21%

Every once in a while.

16%

About this time of year as I try to read through the Bible.

11%

When my devotional book quotes from it.

2%

When my pastor has us read from it.

4%

Hardly ever.

Total Votes: 621

"The movement will rise or fall with the dedication and obedience to God's Word, not because it is a magical entity."

Petraon, on the sustainability of the organic church movement.

"Soul Work: Long Live Organic Church!"

"I didn't think he came across as judgmental or sanctimonious. He simply shared his best wishes for a man in deep moral and spiritual trouble."

Tony Richie, on news anchor Brit Hume's on-air suggestion that Tiger Woods "turn to the Christian faith."

"Q&A: Brit Hume"

"Where was God? The same place he was when his Son died on the cross."

Denise Brostrom, on the question of theodicy during the Haitian earthquake.

"Women's Blog: Where Was God in the Earthquake?"

"The Israelites never did well [making] decisions based on popular polls."

Joe, on the ways Christians misinterpret or misuse statistics about the church.

"Curing Christians' Stats Abuse"

"If Denzel can take a violent character, arrest the attention of an audience with it, and then speak some significant truth into their minds, he's found his pulpit."

Pastor Phil, on Denzel Washington's Christian witness in Hollywood.

"CT Movies: Keeping the Faith"

TIM DAVIS

Box Office Pantheism

Critiques of *Avatar*'s spirituality should be winsome—and prophetic.

CS. LEWIS thought pantheism—the belief that a non-personal God and nature are one, that there is an all-inclusive divine unity—was more corrosive to Christianity than atheism itself. Yet might even the Oxford classicist have donned 3D glasses for a romp on Pandora, the lush backdrop of *Avatar*, James Cameron's 2009 sci-fi epic? The most profitable movie ever made, *Avatar* is up for nine Academy Awards this month.

A conventional love story bolstered by dazzling visuals, the film follows ex-Marine Jake Sully as he joins forces with the Na'vi, Pandora's natives, to defend their ecosystem—which is also their god, it seems. The blue humanoids revere all life, believing that each creature is interconnected and charged with divine energy. We see the Na'vi bowing and worshipping before the Tree of Souls, their holiest site. Eywa, an unseen female deity, holds it all together, responding to their prayers for protection against American mercenaries.

What all this amounts to, grumbled *New York Times* columnist Ross Douthat, is Cameron's "long apologia for pantheism," which has been "Hollywood's religion of choice for a generation now." It's the spirit that animates such classics as the Star Wars saga and *The Lion King*, along with the teachings of Eckhart Tolle and Deepak Chopra. Vatican Radio criticized the film for "cleverly wink[ing] at all those pseudo-doctrines that turn ecology into the religion of the millennium." Movieguide said the film "has an abhorrent New Age, pagan, anti-capitalist worldview that promotes goddess worship and the destruction of the human race." The only clear religion in *Avatar* is White Messianism, scoffed David Brooks at *The New York Times*, since "the natives" need a white man, Sully, to lead their crusade.

Whatever spiritual brew Cameron has served up, Christianity it ain't. The question

for CT readers is, so what? The buzz surrounding *Avatar* gives us a chance to ask what kind of religious formation we expect from contemporary film, and what to do when that formation is counter to the kind rooted in Christ. Two responses have long dominated Christians' discourse on the topic.

The first response has been to forgo movies (and books and music) that applaud things out of sync with Scripture and church teaching. Paul exhorts believers to set their minds on the true, the noble, the right, the pure, the lovely, the admirable—whatever is "excellent or praiseworthy" (Phil. 4:8). When popular stories glorify attitudes and decisions that are false, shameful, ugly, impure, we recoil from them, becoming countercultural when the culture is counter to Christ. Some Christians, hearing of *Avatar*'s glowing depiction of God-nature oneness, chose to abstain from it, recognizing the power of story and images to squelch the Holy Spirit and malform the mind.

But, of course, our ability to tell truth from lie, beauty from hideousness, *et al.* is not fully honed; sometimes it's way off the mark. Evangelicals' separatist impulse can lead us to reject excellent and praiseworthy things scattered throughout pagan stories. It can make us seem stingier than Christ, who shows up even in cultural artifacts made by those hardened to him, since the *Logos* is the "true light that gives light to every man" (John 1:9).

The second, more recent response has been to engage movies and other popular stories eagerly, evaluating their narrative and visual artistry alongside spiritual content.

Scholars like Robert K. Johnston, William Romanowski, Craig Detweiler, and former CT Movies critic Jeffrey Overstreet have, thankfully, given us a vocabulary to understand film in ways that take seriously both Scripture and creativity. This response recognizes film's power to awaken what Lewis called *Sehnsucht*, our innate sense that we have wandered far from Home, and long to return to it. Many Christian film critics noted how *Avatar*'s themes of sacrificial love and

restored creation awakened that longing.

Sadly, the engagement impulse has led many evangelicals to neglect their prophetic presence in the public square, as we often seem more set on distancing ourselves from our fundamen-

talist cousins than on seeking personal and corporate soul care. Discernment becomes an exercise in baptizing secular critics' top picks, celebrating their vague spiritual themes but downplaying or ignoring pernicious ones. Or we revel in our freedom to enjoy an array of films, belittling our separatist siblings whose consciences are offended (1 Cor. 8).

The reality is, the engagers could stand to learn a few things from the separatists, and vice versa, as both camps survey the pop culture landscape. The engagers have developed keen eyes to find Light in the most unexpected places. Yet the separatists, who have an instinct for sensing the subtly devastating aspects of culture, can quicken our steps on the path of sanctification. With the engagers' vision and the separatists' instinct, the church and its moviegoers can navigate Hollywood's muddled spiritualities with rigor and grace. ✚



The engagers could stand to learn a few things from the separatists as both camps survey the pop culture landscape.

*Fresh Ways
to Approach
'the Stranger'*

What's the best way to reform U.S. immigration now?

ASSIMILATE JUSTLY

Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, has testified before the U.S. Senate on immigration reform.

Immigration, like many of today's divisive issues, presents a biblical responsibility to American Christians. We must analyze the issue appropriately and work toward solutions that make genuine reconciliation possible.

Christians must incorporate an approach to reform that heals communities, ushers in peace, and exalts righteousness and justice. Many conservative solutions to immigration focus only on border protection and deportation. Many liberal solutions advocate an easy amnesty for undocumented persons. But Christians must offer a better way, one anchored in our Bible-based convictions.

A solution that emphasizes assimilation and justice reconciles Romans 13 (adherence to the rule of law) and Leviticus 19 (Israel's treatment of strangers). As Christians, we stand committed to the message of the Cross. However, that Cross is both vertical and horizontal, representing salvation and transformation, covenant and community.

Such a solution must include the following elements. First, we must put an end to all illegal immigration by increasing border protection, including using infrared, satellite, and other technologies, in addition to border patrols.

Second, we should create a market-driven guest-worker program that provides clear avenues by which millions of undocumented families can obtain legal status in a manner that reflects the Judeo-Christian value system this nation was founded on.

Third, undocumented residents without a criminal record who are earning citizenship status must go to the back of the citizenship line, admit guilt, and receive a financial penalty, while acquiring civic



and language proficiency and serving the local community.

But here lies the challenge: Can we push back on the extremes from both the Left and the Right and come together at the foot of the Cross, where righteousness meets justice, border security meets compassion, and common sense meets common ground?

The answer requires two communities, immigrants and American evangelicals, to express the gospel message of reconciliation that transcends border politics.

Immigrants must understand that what makes one an American is nothing less than an allegiance to and covenant with the values of our Constitution, Declaration of Independence, and Bill of Rights. Internalizing and adhering to those values obligates the immigrant to embrace English as our language, focus on our commonalities, and respect the symbols of our republic, including the American flag, while assimilating into the fullness of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—the American idea.

On the other hand, American evangelicals must reject xenophobia and nativism, embracing a culture of righteousness and justice in which biblical truth trumps political affiliation, and where allegiance stands exclusively reserved, not to the donkey or the elephant, but rather to the agenda of the Lamb. Immigration reform will not happen overnight. But we must start now.

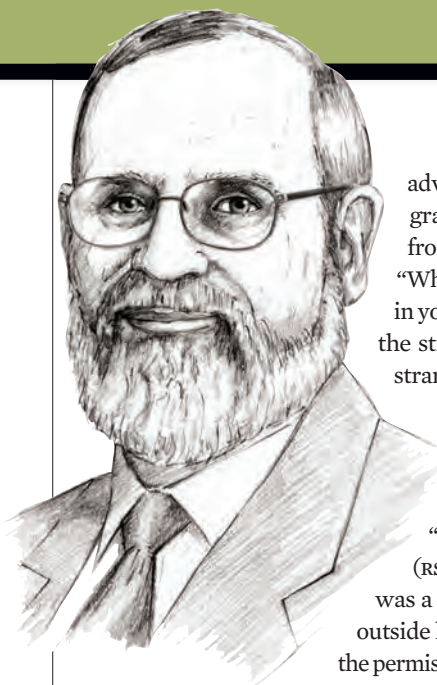
WATCH YOUR WORDS

James K. Hoffmeier, author of *The Immigration Crisis*, is an Old Testament professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Illinois.

The immigration debate is one of the most confusing issues facing our nation. Churches and individual Christians naturally turn to Scripture for wisdom on how to think about the dilemma. As a biblical scholar, I have been intrigued to see how the Bible is used to frame public policy.

For example, a few American cities have declared themselves “sanctuary cities” for immigrants, borrowing from the biblical practice of sanctuary. The ancient Israelite practice, however, was intended exclusively for one who commits involuntary manslaughter, to ensure that the person gains a fair hearing, not permanent avoidance of the law.

Another example: The website of a Christian organization that



advocates comprehensive immigration reform offers verses from Leviticus 19 as its rationale: “When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the stranger . . . you shall love the stranger as yourself.” I found this application of the biblical passage naïve at best.

The Hebrew word *ger* is translated variously as “stranger” (KJV, NASB), “sojourner” (RSV, ESV), and “alien” (NIV). A *ger* was a foreigner who lived in a land outside his homeland, but did so with the permission of the proper local authority.

A case in point: When Jacob’s family wanted to sojourn in Egypt, they said to Pharaoh, “We have come to sojourn in the land . . . please let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen” (ESV). Royal permission was granted. The verb *sojourn* has the same root as *ger*. So the Hebrews became legal aliens in Egypt.

After the Exodus, God gave many laws to protect aliens in Israel. Aliens were not to be oppressed (Ex. 22:21; Lev. 19:33–34). They were integrated into Israelite society, entitled to equal justice (Num. 15:15–16) and equal pay (Deut. 24:14–15), and could celebrate Passover (Ex. 12:48).

Two other Hebrew words, *nekhar* and *zar*, refer to foreigners who came into or passed through Israel. But they were not given the same benefits and protections as the *ger* (Ex. 12:43; Deut. 15:3; 17:15). The “foreigner” and the “alien” did not have the same social and legal status. Unfortunately, the TNIV and TLV translate *ger* as “foreigner,” which is erroneous and creates confusion, allowing the reader to think that these categories of people were the same. They were not.

Before we use the Bible to formulate a theological or political position on the status of illegal immigrants, we must first understand the difference between the *ger*, the *nekhar*, and the *zar* in ancient Israel. Based on my study of the Hebrew terms, I believe that the immigrant with a green card in the U.S. corresponds to the *ger* of the Old Testament, whereas the illegal immigrant should be equated with the *nekhar* or *zar*. Scripture does not offer an all-encompassing prescription for how to deal with immigration. It might be suggested, however, that a measure that balances law and grace should be sought.

LINK MIGRATION TO JOBS

David Skeel, author of *Icarus in the Boardroom*, is a professor of law at the University of Pennsylvania Law School.

Perhaps it’s anathema for a lawyer to question how far we can get with a simple legal change, but I think we need to be modest in our aspirations for legislative solutions to immigration.

If I were a lawmaker, I would focus less on trying to solve the current impasse, and more on legal reform that might unsettle both

sides just a little. Here’s my proposal: Why not adjust our levels of new immigration each year based on changes in the unemployment rate, or on the scope of our social welfare benefits, or on both? Under this proposal, new immigration would be reduced if unemployment goes up or Congress enacts new health-care legislation. In a year in which unemployment drops or Congress enacts welfare reform, immigration would automatically be expanded.

Immigrationists hate the suggestion that there’s a tradeoff between immigration and entitlements, but they can’t have both. Immigrationists need to acknowledge that immigration is a legitimate concern when unemployment is rising, and that a generous social safety net can attract immigrants even when there’s no work. They also sometimes forget that a country’s first obligation is to the health and welfare of its own citizens.

While restrictionists would no doubt ditto these points, they would balk at the possibility that immigration might increase from one year to the next. But restrictionists need to recognize that immigration will always be fluid, and that clamping down on immigration isn’t going to stop the creative ferment that the recent tidal wave of immigration has brought. And not all of the changes brought by immigration are pernicious, as any evangelical whose church was once entirely white can attest.

In my view, our greatest mistake in the immigration legislation of the past several decades has been pretending to please the most passionate advocates on both sides. The most recent major reforms, in the 1980s and 1990s, gave legal status to several million non-legal immigrants, which pleased immigrationists. But the reforms also imposed tight limits on new immigration at the insistence of restrictionists. Both sides rejoiced, though few thought that the limits would be seriously enforced. And they weren’t.

The disconnect between the laws and the reality on the ground has created a moral dilemma—call it a Jephthah’s choice (Judges 11:30–40)—one that is wrenching for churches and Christian leaders. Jephthah had to decide whether to violate the oath he had sworn or to kill his daughter.

While churches’ predicament is not so dire, they must choose between flouting the law so as to be compassionate havens, or insisting that immigrant congregants comply with laws that are flawed and erratically enforced.

No one legal change will solve the immigration dilemma. The most we can hope for may be to change the symbols of the debate. If lawmakers can signal that immigration is dynamic and messy, and that there is no “comprehensive” solution, and if they can diminish the moral dilemma that the current laws create, they will have made progress.





Is Cosmetic Surgery Immoral?

Even more importantly: Why do you want to know?

LATE-NIGHT COMEDIAN Craig Ferguson once noted that society went off the skids when advertising executives began targeting young consumers in the 1950s. They did this, he explained, so that people would commit to products at a younger age and therefore spend more on a given brand over their lifetimes.

But then everyone got on board, celebrating youth rather than the wisdom and wit that come with age and experience. When it became fashionable and desirable to be young, people became frightened not to be so, he argued. “People started dying their hair, mutilating their faces and bodies in order to look young. But you can’t be young forever! That’s against the laws of the universe!”

Death is still inevitable, it turns out. But people are doing their best to fight against aging by getting nipped and tucked wherever they can.

I’m one of those people who frown on cosmetic surgery. Ever since I realized my friends were getting nose jobs for their 16th birthdays, I felt that body modification was somehow cheating. And when I see aging celebrities with lips that look like they belong on a duck, I actually cringe.

For many of us, cosmetic surgery elicits a reaction of repugnance. Ethicist Leon Kass talks about the “wisdom of repugnance,” the idea that our revulsion indicates an intuitive understanding that something is morally awry. Indeed, Michael Jackson’s and Joan Rivers’s adventures under the knife seem like modern-day morality tales.

But is plastic surgery bad because it’s unnatural? Shaving armpits and legs is unnatural, but you don’t hear a lot of popular sentiment about how Americans are going against nature and nature’s God when women buy razors.

Some might argue that most of our grooming (such as dying one’s hair or tweezing unwanted facial hair) is a temporary aesthetic

fix, whereas cosmetic surgery permanently alters what God gave us. But the duration of change is hardly the best ethical barometer. Besides, we don’t seem to have problems with knee replacement surgery or the permanent removal of teeth.

Is the real difference, as I’ve long thought, one of treatment versus enhancement? A woman getting cosmetic surgery following the removal of a cancerous breast is okay, but one expanding her bustline without medical necessity is suspect.

“If only things were so easy,” says Hans Madueme of the Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity. “The world is bursting with ethical and moral complexity,” he says, noting that perfume and makeup are also enhancements.

A pastor friend of mine once told me, “The Lutheran answer to every question is, ‘Why do you want to know?’” A question about the morality of abortion will be handled differently based on whether the person asking is a post-abortive woman seeking forgiveness, a pregnant woman facing a crisis pregnancy and considering abortion, or a curious youth who’s simply seeking instruction.

The answer doesn’t change, but the way we address the issue does.

Likewise, perhaps the best way to approach questions about the morality of

cosmetic surgery is to pinpoint why we’re pondering the issue. A woman who thinks her marriage will improve if she improves her bustline certainly needs help—but probably not the kind of help that a scalpel provides. But what about the man who recently lost hundreds of pounds and has the saggy skin to prove it? Is he morally justified in getting a skin tuck? What about someone who has a birthmark that, while harmless, is tremendously distracting to others?

Just because the issue is morally complex doesn’t mean there aren’t answers. It does mean, however, that there are limits to what we can say with certainty. But understanding the reason someone seeks cosmetic surgery helps us understand whether it’s moral or not.

And there’s another part of this, going back to Ferguson’s rant. Yes, our nip-and-tuck culture is about beauty and covetousness. But it’s also

about our frail and failing bodies, and even more about discontent. We yearn for more meaning and fulfillment and think we might be able to get it if we can just improve this one part of our failing bodies.

Culturally speaking, we do worship our bodies rather than God. And while some cosmetic surgery is a beautiful gift from God, some of it is also symptomatic of our larger cultural rot.



Our nip-and-tuck culture is about beauty and covetousness. But it’s also about our frail and failing bodies, and even more about discontent.



'It's Not About the Past'

New Anglican and Lutheran groups need to nurture a positive identity.

AFTER MODERNITY, we are told, people crave community. Modernity disconnected us. We all need an *us*. But, after modernity, we have seen not just a revival of community but also a resurgence of tribalism. When *us* turns into *us vs. them*, serious danger lies ahead.

Religious communities divide when their sense of *us* grows weak or confused. That has happened with the Episcopal Church as its liberationist gospel has destroyed the denomination's once shared sense of identity. It is clearly time for alternative movements like the Anglican Mission in the Americas (AMIA), the Convocation of Anglicans in North America, and most recently, the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA).

A similar movement is afoot among Lutherans. Lutheran CORE (Coalition for Renewal) is preparing to form a new Lutheran church as well as a network of like-minded churches that will remain inside the mainline Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

Both the new Anglican and the new Lutheran movements need to nurture their brand-new *us* to keep it from degenerating into *us vs. them*.

Serious identity issues existed long before Episcopalians consecrated an openly gay bishop in 2003 and the ELCA Convention approved partnered gay clergy and accepted same-sex relationships in 2009.

In January 1986, I joined about 90 Episcopal leaders in Winter Park, Florida, to discuss our concern about the liberal direction our church was headed. These leaders came from different Episcopal streams—high-church Anglo-Catholics, low-church evangelicals, and peppy-church charismatics. Despite historically distinct senses of identity, we found a united sense of *us* in our commitment to God's revelation in Scripture and to the call for renewal and reformation in the church. An important renewal organization—Episcopalians United—was born there.

But now the strategy for renewal has shifted from inside denominational structures to outside the old boundaries. Because so many feel exiled, we face the danger of what historian Allen Guelzo calls "a harried withdrawal into an ecclesiastical cupboard."

Guelzo is the primary historical authority on a group of evangelicals who left the Episcopal Church in 1873 and formed the Reformed Episcopal Church. They had lost the struggle for identity to the ritualist Anglo-Catholics and an older strain of high-churchers. Although they argued against using vestments and altars and against calling baptized infants regenerate, there was a deeper issue. The Reformed Episcopal leadership had a sense of shared Christian identity that cut across the boundaries of denominations and traditions. By contrast, the Episcopal establishment was so attached to its system of governance that it could not countenance pew and altar fellowship with free-church Protestants.

Thus, the Reformed Episcopalians dreamt of being a catalyst for church unity. Their vision may not have been realistic, but it was noble and biblical. But, alas, dissenting groups don't always stick to their mission. And when the winsomely charismatic bishop who led their movement unexpectedly died, there was a scramble not only for power but also for purpose. As their role changed from beacon for unity to fortress for fundamentalism, they lost their chance to become what their founders had hoped for.

When we create a new *us*, it is important to articulate a clear vision and to keep that vision clear. The leaders of the new Anglican movements are certain that their identity is

not bound up with being "ex-Episcopalians." "It's not about the past," announced ACNA archbishop Robert Duncan. "That's all done." Leaders of Lutheran CORE gave me a similar impression. They don't define their existence over and against the ELCA. They just hope not to repeat ELCA's mistakes.

One path to maintaining a positive identity is to proclaim the gospel to those who do not know it. For Lutheran CORE, that means recapturing an emphasis on global missions. One source told me that from a peak of 1,000 fully supported missionaries in the mid-1960s, mainline Lutheranism's global outreach has declined to about 150 fully supported missionaries, with only about 9 of those having "evangelist" in their job description. Expect the new Lutheran network to work hard to reignite commitment to global missions.

The Lutherans also hope to succeed at church planting where the ELCA has stumbled. The new Anglicans are decidedly more aggressive on the domestic front. The ACNA's Duncan has called church leaders to plant 1,000 new congregations over the next five years. With 700 congregations in the new body, Duncan believes they can surely plant 1,000 more. AMIA is similarly committed to growing new congregations. The September 2009 issue of CT featured an interview with Todd Hunter, who has been charged by AMIA leadership with supervising the planting of 200 new congregations on the West Coast alone.

This outward focus on global missions and domestic church planting signifies a healthy identity. It's just the thing to keep these groups from "a harried withdrawal into an ecclesiastical cupboard." ✚



An outward focus on missions and church planting signifies a healthy identity.

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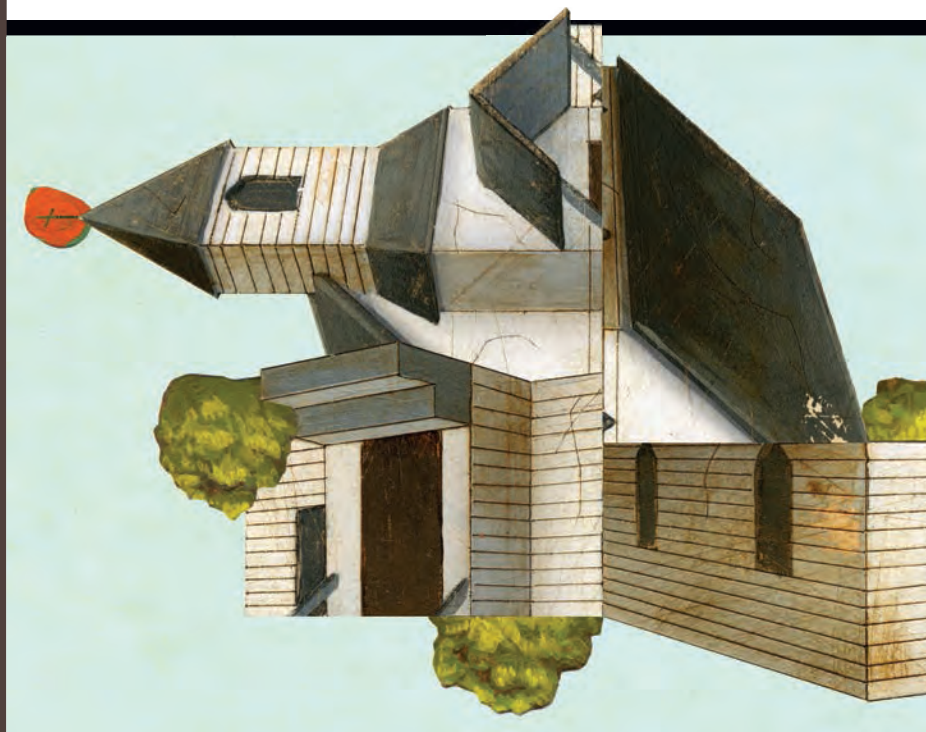
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CT REVIEW

BOOKS, MOVIES,
MUSIC, AND
THE ARTS

Rebuilding the Faith from Scratch

Brian McLaren's 'new' Christianity is not so much revolutionary as evolutionary. By Scot McKnight

Brian McLaren has grown tired of evangelicalism. In turn, many evangelicals are wearied with Brian. His most recent book, **A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions That Are Transforming the Faith** (HarperOne) ★★★★★, must be understood as his latest iteration of a project of deconstructing the old and reconstructing a new kind of Christian faith. In it, he poses a question that this review will seek to answer. It is a question he asks of himself: "How did a mild-mannered guy like me get into so much trouble?" Or, as he asks one page later, "How did I get into this swirl of controversy?"

As a friend and a chronicler for two decades, I have watched Brian's work. *Generous Orthodoxy* gave us a critique of both sides and some glimpses of a third way, even if the book frustrated to no end by leaving too many loose ends dangling. I thought both *The Secret Message of Jesus* and *Everything Must Change* provided us with what could become an evangelical social gospel. Along the way, Brian has poked evangelicals in the eyes and chest by fixating on sensitive spots that bedevil them—not the least of which is the uneasy connection between the "spiritual"

gospel and the "social" gospel.

If evangelicalism is characterized by David Bebbington's famous quadrilateral—that is, biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism, and activism—then Brian has poked and, to one degree or another, criticized, deconstructed, and rejected each.

Some of the pokes, if we are honest, have been deserved. He keeps on poking in *A New Kind of Christianity*—harder than before, in fact. For example, the chapter on how evangelicals defended slavery skewers a problem in their biblicism. In his (unsatisfying) chapter on homosexuality, McLaren writes about a movement he calls "fundasexuality."

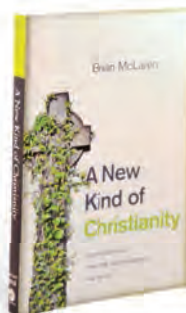
But I want to turn the following comment from McLaren back on him: "Sociologists sometimes say that groups can exist without a god, but no group can exist without a devil." Brian's devil is Western evangelicalism, which he caricatures often, and his poking is relentless enough to make me say that he needs to write a book that simply states in positive terms what he thinks without using evangelicalism as his foil.

BIGGER FISH TO FRY

Brian is not only poking evangelicals, he is also calling everything about Christian orthodoxy—from the ecumenical creeds through the Reformation and up to present-day evangelicalism—into question. He thinks there are four crises facing the world and therefore the church today:

- *prosperity* that is ecologically unsustainable;
- *equity shifts* that are widening the gap between rich and poor at record levels;
- *security* in a world with escalating violence; and
- *a spirituality crisis*, since the world's religions are not adequately addressing the first three crises.

Brian blames what he calls the "Greco-Roman narrative,"



summing up his complaint like this: “I realized that my conversation partners [his evangelical critics] simply couldn’t address life-and-death issues like poverty, the planet, and peace within the conventional paradigms they inherited. . . . The Greco-Roman narrative, founded on a constitutional reading of the Bible . . . rendered those life-and-death issues invisible, insubstantial, and unaddressable.” Thus, the Greco-Roman narrative “needed to be confronted, questioned, and opened up, which then shaped the direction this book has taken.”

This leads me to the two major themes of the book, which shape the ten questions Brian addresses: a critique of the Greco-Roman narrative, and a proposal for a new way of reading the Bible. The topics of the ten questions are narrative, authority, God, Jesus, the gospel (including a sketch of how to read the Book of Romans), the church, sex, the future (a kind of open-theism version of eschatology), pluralism, and praxis. Each of these, to one degree or another, is examined through the two themes.

Brian believes in an old saw—namely, the

Brian’s devil is Western evangelicalism, which he often caricatures, and his poking is relentless.

Constantinian Fall of the Church, the event and era in which the Greco-Roman narrative was developed. In short, this narrative teaches that humans were created in a Platonic, ideal, and perfect world in Eden; then the Fall occurred, which tumbled humans into the Aristotelian and real world of becoming (which is bad). Out of this becoming world, one can either escape or be saved into the Platonic-ideal heaven, or choose eternal perdition in a Greek form of Hades. Brian will later call this the “Greco-Roman soul-sort narrative,” by which he means that life in the here and now is about sorting out the saved from the damned. McLaren’s soul-sort narrative is a caricature of a narrative that no responsible thinker really believes or teaches in the bald, insensitive, and barbaric ways described in this book. It’s a caricature of Romans 5.

The Greco-Roman narrative is directed and determined by a god whom McLaren

calls “Theos,” who is not that distinct from the Greek Zeus or the Roman Jupiter. Theos is much different from the Hebrew *Elohim*, the LORD of Genesis 1–12. How? This Theos loves spirit, state, and being, and hates matter, story, and becoming, since, once again, the latter involve change, and the only way to change or move from perfection is downward into decay. “As soon as something drops out of the state of perfection, Theos is possessed by a pure and irresistible urge to destroy it (or make it suffer),” Brian claims. Theos is “perfectly furious” about humans telling stories, because that is “something that should never happen in the world of Theos.” There’s more: “Theos stands above, holding his thunderbolts ready to strike, ready to melt the whole damned thing down to primal lava, ready to set it all on fire to purge all that is imperfect, so only perfect purified being remains.”

This is, according to Brian, “conventional

MY TOP 5 BOOKS ON COMMUNITY

By Richard Lamb, author of *The Pursuit of God in the Company of Friends*



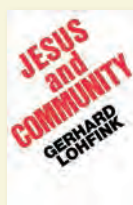
LIFE TOGETHER
DIETRICH BONHOEFFER
(HARPERONE)

These are Bonhoeffer’s thoughtful reflections on the actual experience of people in community. He warns that community will require difficult and at times tedious work. His insights on confession and forgiveness are timeless for those who aspire to forge deep relationships.



SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP
AELRED OF RIEVAULX
(CISTERCIAN PUBLICATIONS)

Written over 800 years ago as a series of dialogues between Aelred and his fellow monks, this short work offers fresh and frank observations on the relationship between God-centered friendship and devotion to God.



JESUS AND COMMUNITY
GERHARD LOHFINK
(AUGSBURG FORTRESS)

Writing for a culture steeped in individualism, Lohfink traces themes in Jesus’ teachings that emphasize God’s communal enterprise, the “contrast society.” This is an excellent biblical study of the people of God in Jesus’ words and the life of the early church.



WHEN THE CHURCH WAS A FAMILY
Recapturing Jesus’ Vision for Authentic Christian Community
JOSEPH H. HELLERMAN
(B&H ACADEMIC)

Hellerman shows how Jesus’ and Paul’s teachings can be understood and lived out only in the family of believers in community. He then applies his biblical study to the practices, decision-making, and authentic leadership of such a community.



PAUL’S IDEA OF COMMUNITY
The Early House Churches in Their Cultural Setting
ROBERT J. BANKS (HENDRICKSON)

Banks goes beyond clichéd notions of the early church to speak about first-century house churches’ practices and structure. Banks explores Paul’s metaphors of the body, the family, and the household, and he helpfully identifies Paul’s source and use of authority among his church plants.

Christian theology.”

The Theos-driven narrative is one in which salvation is equivalent to atonement. Justification and redemption and salvation happen “when Theos finds a way to forgive this fallen, dropout, broken, detestable creation for its descent from perfect holy being into pathetic detestable becoming.” Because humans are immortal and partake in Theos’s essential nature, the damned must suffer eternally while the saved experience God’s joy forever.

I kid you not—this is how Brian sums up conventional theology. “This is,” he says, “the ‘good news’ taught by much of Western Christian religion (not all of it, thank God), the religion in which I was raised, in which I have done my life’s work, of which I am a part today.”

There are some who have attempted to repair this narrative, Brian admits, but he himself belongs to an influential cadre who wants to change it. He observes that “more and more of us are defecting from the project of cosmetically enhancing this story and trying to rehabilitate the image of Theos.” Brian then disavows, rather surprisingly to this reviewer, the inevitability of the blinders we all wear when we try to read Scripture. Instead of reading the Bible through our shared history, he suggests, we can go back to the Bible all over again and read it forward, from Genesis to Revelation. A postmodernist will ask Brian, “Whose reading will this be?” Regardless, McLaren offers a new reading of the Bible. And what do we find?

THE EVOLVING GOD

Here emerges the second major theme in *A New Kind of Christianity*—a new way of reading the Bible. The conventional model, which props up and drives the Greco-Roman narrative, reads the Bible as a law book or an “annotated code,” so that the Bible and our reading of it become a legal constitution: “We turn our seminaries and denominational bodies into versions of a supreme court.”

Instead, Brian argues—and this is one of the book’s best images—the Bible is a “portable library of poems, prophecies, histories, fables, parables, letters, sagely sayings, quarrels, and so on.” (I think of the Bible in terms not unlike this: as a collection of inspired texts that come at things from different angles and use differing terms and speak to ever-shifting

[continued on 66]

Transforming the Brain

There’s a chemical reason why pornography is addicting. By Mark R. Laaser

William Struthers, a neuroscientist and professor of psychology at Wheaton College, has written a book to help us avoid becoming seduced in a culture where pornography can invade our homes.

The bad news, he argues in **Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain** (InterVarsity) ★★★★★, is that the human brain can be chemically hijacked by pornography.

The good news is that the apostle Paul was right: The brain can be transformed by a renewed commitment to sanctification. Yes, I mean the brain, not just the mind. This book demonstrates that, while the process of transformation is based on a spiritual commitment of the mind to Christ, the result will be an anatomical rewiring of the brain.

To explain how this process works, Struthers goes into detailed descriptions of the anatomy and physiology of the brain. Beware: without some patience, wading through this material might feel like sitting through a biology class. While some of the material is daunting, it’s also fascinating evidence of the magnificent complexity of God’s creation. There are more nerve cells in the human brain than stars in the universe. While many of us have been taught that we can find ways to improve other parts of our bodies, like the heart, how many of us know that we can develop spiritual habits that benefit our brains?

For me, an addictionologist, the chapter titled “Your Brain on Porn” is one of the best explanations of how a person becomes addicted to the neurochemicals involved in love, romance, sexual arousal, and human touch. Addiction assumes that the brain becomes neurochemically dependent (tolerant) and will therefore crave activities, such as looking at pornography, that elevate those

neurochemicals. This explanation gives scientific credibility to why “just looking” at pornography can never be done without consequences. It suggests that Internet porn is the crack cocaine of sexual addiction.

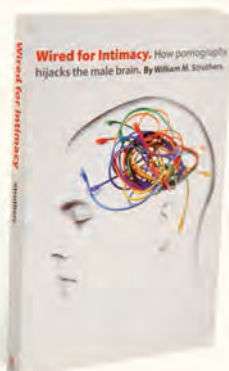
One question I am frequently asked is, “Is masturbation a sin?” Struthers believes, as I do, that whatever one believes about it morally, masturbation is “playing with neurochemical fire.” In other words, even if you can masturbate without “lusting in your heart,” you cannot escape the consequences of addiction if masturbation becomes routine.

Contrary to what our culture teaches, more sex is not better. The truth is that, for the human brain, there is never enough sex. Struthers does a good job in the second half of the book showing how the pursuit of spiritual intimacy in marriage is a true form of masculinity and, as such, will allow any amount of physical sex to be satisfying.

My one disappointment was the relative lack of practical advice on what to do to recover from addiction and walk the path of personal holiness. Struthers offers some suggestions, including a willingness and commitment to change, confession, having a spiritual mentor, and envisioning a better life. Those of us who are addicts, however, have already been discouraged by spiritual answers that are too vague or too easy.

Nevertheless, *Wired for Intimacy* is a valuable contribution to our field. Perhaps Gene Roddenberry was wrong in the introduction to *Star Trek*; the “final frontier” may not be space. It may be the human brain. ✚

Mark R. Laaser, along with his wife, Debbie, are the founders and leaders of Faithful and True Ministries, an outreach to the sexually addicted.



HOLY SUBVERSION

Allegiance to Christ in an Age of Rivals

TREVIN WAX (CROSSWAY, 160 PAGES)

Imagine interviewing for a church position today and saying, “I believe God wants us to be kingdom-focused and mission-minded. It could be that as we start to move into more intensive discipleship, we will shrink before we grow.”

In most churches, you would be shown the door quickly. It’s too risky. No one wants to hear about shrinking. Never mind that the concept is biblical. Never mind that Jesus talks about branches being pruned for the good of the tree. Never mind that shrinking actually happened in Jesus’ earthly ministry.

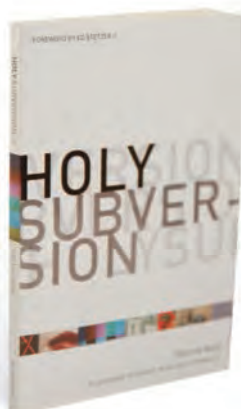
The church in the West is booming on a financial and social level. There are more churches now in the United States than ever before in our history. The percentage of people attending church weekly continues to hold steady. Buildings. Budgets. Baptisms. We have them all. But the influence of Christianity on American society is waning. Our impact is hardly felt. Could it be that we finally have reached the pinnacle of worldly “success,” and that this Caesar is undermining our witness?

We subvert the Caesar of Success whenever we, as a community of faith, reject the idea that bigger is necessarily better. We subvert success when we go from riches to rags on behalf of the world’s poor . . . when we find happiness and contentment in people, not things . . . when our churches partner with one another, not as competitors, but as co-workers in the kingdom.

Above all, Christian communities subvert the Caesar of Success when they recognize the Holy Spirit’s power over results, redefine success to include the embrace of suffering, and actively pursue unity in the body of Christ. Christians are not called to be “successful”; we are called to be faithful.

An excerpt from the late-2nd-century Letter to Diognetus sums up the early Christian understanding of success and faithfulness: “Christians do not find happiness by ruling over their neighbors, or by seeking supremacy over the weak, or by being rich, or by attacking the inferior. On the contrary, Christians see success in taking upon themselves the burdens of their neighbor, using their positions of superiority to benefit the deficient, and in distributing whatever they receive from God to the needy. *This is what it means to be an imitator of God.*”

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WILSON'S BOOKMARKS

From the editor of Books & Culture.



AGAINST THE TIDE

Love in a Time of Petty Dreams and Persisting Enmities

MIROSLAV VOLF (EERDMANS)



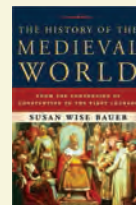
Collections of columns or other such occasional pieces: a genre I usually skip. But now and then there are exceptions. One is this volume from Miroslav Volf, all but one of the pieces in which were first published in *The*

Christian Century. Miroslav, a dear friend whom I see all too rarely these days, is one of our foremost public theologians, and his columns—like those of the late Richard John Neuhaus, another sterling exception—are very much worth gathering in book form, to learn from and argue with.

THE HISTORY OF THE MEDIEVAL WORLD

From the Conversion of Constantine to the First Crusade

SUSAN WISE BAUER (NORTON)



With this hefty volume, the second of a projected four, Susan Wise Bauer continues her chronicle of nothing less than the history of the world. (Conversation in the Bauer household must be interesting.)

Don't be misled by the traditional associations of “medieval”: the scope is worldwide. Bauer's narrative is crisp, assured, and delightfully unfussy. The history of the world turns out to resemble the history of a single life, at once mundane and fantastical, pointing beyond itself.

ROUAULT-FUJIMURA

Soliloquies

THOMAS S. HIBBS (SQUARE HALO)



This lovely booklet, richly illustrated, features an essay by the philosopher Thomas Hibbs (dean of the Honors College at Baylor University) occasioned by an exhibition at Dillon Gallery in Chelsea in the fall of 2009,

juxtaposing two Christian artists: the French painter Georges Rouault (1871–1958) and the New York-based contemporary painter Makoto Fujimura (b. 1960). The booklet concludes with a brief “refraction” by Fujimura, “Georges Rouault: The First Twenty-first Century Artist”; like Hibbs's essay, it invites re-reading and opens up a space for further conversation.

Preach. The. Word.

Still, says **Charles Swindoll**, the best sermons are wrapped in stories. Interview by J. R. Kerr

Charles Swindoll, age 75, is nearing a time when most people enjoy retirement. But the seasoned pastor refuses to quit preaching, and a younger generation still looks to him as a model. In a recent LifeWay Research survey, Protestant pastors said that, after Billy Graham, Swindoll influenced them more than any other preacher. The chancellor of Dallas Theological Seminary has spent more than 40 years as a pastor and contributed to more than 70 book titles. His preaching has been broadcast on more than 2,000 radio outlets worldwide.

Swindoll, also the senior pastor of Stonebriar Community Church in Frisco, Texas, recently began a 27-volume commentary series, starting with **Insights on Romans** (Zondervan). J. R. Kerr, a teaching pastor at Park Community Church in Chicago, spoke with Swindoll about his new book and his advice for young pastors.

You've written several practical, popular books over the years. What compelled you to begin the series with Romans?

This was a personal challenge, given my practical style, to pick up my pen and take on the New Testament books. I began with Romans because of its balance of doctrine and the Christian life and practicality. In it you have eight chapters of doctrine, three chapters that deal with the sovereignty of God in the life of Israel and the church, and the last five chapters have to do with practical Christian living—and, of course, that's right down my alley.

There's been a renewal of gospel-centered preaching, in which the focus

is on the Atonement and making Jesus the hero. How would you respond to critics who say that story-focused preaching draws attention away from the gospel?

When you are giving people the gospel, you are giving them something to believe, and you have to set the stage for that. You don't just drive up and dump the truck and drive off. [You have to] create an appetite. For instance, when Jesus talked about a sower, he didn't provide a formula. Rather, he used something that people already knew about—a sower sowing seed—and probably pointed to [a sower] as he described what kind of seed and what kind of soil. I've given people something to believe when I bring them face to face with the truth as it addresses the needs of their lives.

Some of the best things to preach can be wrapped in story form. Of course, you are certainly always meant to be preaching Christ, just as you are always preaching grace, mercy, compassion, love, discernment, and wisdom. I think it can be a bit false if you set up a story just to shape it around the gospel. Not every text is a gospel text.

What advice do you have for younger preachers?

I want them to say, "I want to get serious about being a Bible preacher. I'm not going to fool around with a lot of entertaining stuff. I'm going to take people to the Word, and I'm going to keep it interesting. I'm going to go through the books of the Bible and subjects that are significant, and I'm going to pour myself into this as a regular habit of my life. I want to be known in 20

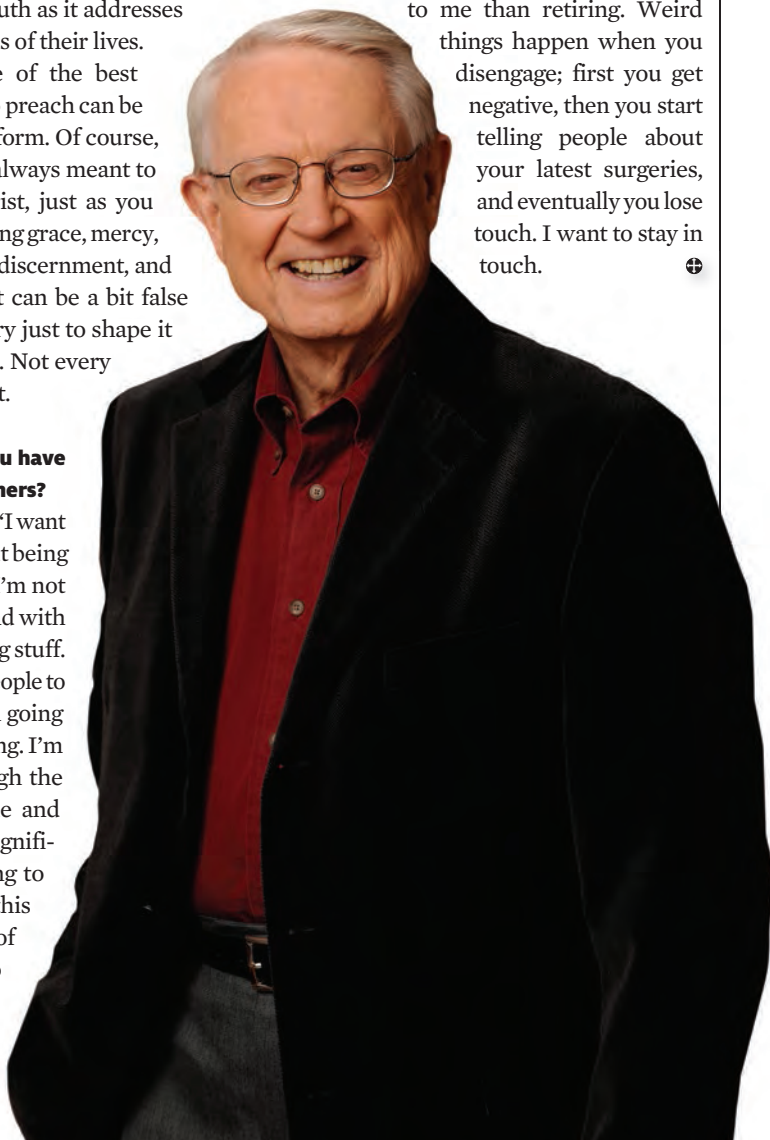
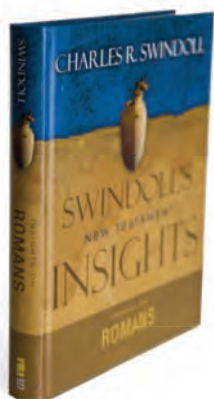
years as an expositor. I want to be able to take the Scriptures and help people see how relevant they are. I'm going to start with Romans verse 1 of chapter 1, and when I finish chapter 16, people are going to say, 'Oh my goodness, what have I missed half my life?'"

If I ever wrote a book on preaching, it would contain three words: *Preach the Word*. Get rid of all the other stuff that gets you sidetracked; preach the Word. Second Timothy 4:2 says, "Be prepared in season and out of season."

A mentor of mine, Ray Stedman, used to say, "Keep your finger on the text whether you are teaching it or applying it. Keep them with their eyes on the Word and tell them about Jesus." It's as simple as that.

How do you intend to spend the remainder of your years?

I want to preach till the last breath in my lungs runs out. Nothing is more bothersome to me than retiring. Weird things happen when you disengage; first you get negative, then you start telling people about your latest surgeries, and eventually you lose touch. I want to stay in touch. ⊕



CT's Best Movies of 2009

Theme of longing runs through our Critics' Choice and Most Redeeming lists.

Last year was packed with films about longing (see page 44), as reflected by the movies our critics deemed the best of 2009. Our Critics' Choice list, which ranks films based on artistic and technical excellence, nods to that longing, especially the top five—a longing for life in *The Hurt Locker*, for relationship in *Up* and *Up in the Air*, for goodness in *The Road*, and for peace of mind in *A Serious Man*. Our Most Redeeming list also features movies with a thread of redemption—sometimes feel-good obvious, sometimes more subtle, but always present.

CRITICS' CHOICE



ONE

THE HURT LOCKER

DIRECTED BY KATHRYN BIGELOW

TWO

UP

DIRECTED BY PETE DOCTER

THREE

THE ROAD

DIRECTED BY JOHN HILLCOAT

FOUR

UP IN THE AIR

DIRECTED BY JASON REITMAN

FIVE

A SERIOUS MAN

DIRECTED BY JOEL AND ETHAN COEN

SIX

SUMMER HOURS

DIRECTED BY OLIVIER ASSAYAS

SEVEN

(500) DAYS OF SUMMER

DIRECTED BY MARC WEBB

EIGHT

STAR TREK

DIRECTED BY J. J. ABRAMS

NINE

AVATAR

DIRECTED BY JAMES CAMERON

TEN

INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS

DIRECTED BY QUENTIN TARANTINO

HONORABLE MENTION:

The Blind Side, Bright Star, Crazy Heart, An Education, Fantastic Mr. Fox, Julie & Julia, The Messenger, Ponyo, Tulpan, The White Ribbon

MOST REDEEMING



UP

DIRECTED BY PETE DOCTER

THE BLIND SIDE

DIRECTED BY JOHN LEE HANCOCK

INVICTUS

DIRECTED BY CLINT EASTWOOD

THE ROAD

DIRECTED BY JOHN HILLCOAT

THE SOLOIST

DIRECTED BY JOE WRIGHT

WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE

DIRECTED BY SPIKE JONZE

DISTRICT 9

DIRECTED BY NEIL BLOMKAMP

THE HURT LOCKER

DIRECTED BY KATHRYN BIGELOW

JULIE & JULIA

DIRECTED BY NORA EPHRON

UP IN THE AIR

DIRECTED BY JASON REITMAN

HONORABLE MENTION:

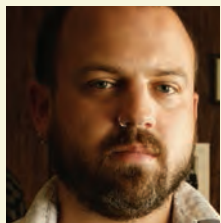
The 13th Day, Avatar, Bright Star, Coraline, Crazy Heart, Earth, Precious, A Serious Man, Sin Nombre, The Young Victoria

THE HURT LOCKER: SUMMIT ENTERTAINMENT UP: DISNEY/PIXAR

MOORE: RYKODISC

TWO MINUTES WITH...

Aaron Sprinkle



Best known as the producer for dozens of artists and styles—from the worship music of Jeremy Camp to the punk rock of MxPx to the death metal of Demon Hunter—Aaron Sprinkle is

also a fine musician. He's done several solo albums and played in a few alternative rock bands, including Poor Old Lu. His new band, Fair, recently released its second album, *Disappearing World* (Tooth & Nail). Sprinkle spoke with CT senior associate editor Mark Moring.

Why is the band called Fair?

We were just looking for a cool, short name that wasn't taken. Plus, it gives music writers some extra ammo if they don't like us.

I hear that you're typically insecure about your own music.

Putting out a record can be a very vulnerable thing. You're essentially asking everyone to be a critic of something you created. For me it's hard not to wonder what people will think and not to get a little freaked out. But in the end, it's about committing to what you think is working, going with your gut, and praying that God is in the mix.

What are you trying to communicate with *Disappearing World*?

The record is about how hard life can be, and how God's grace is bigger than all of it. Life is hard. In the past couple of years, my wife and I have dealt with a complicated pregnancy, financial troubles, family members passing, mortgage troubles, and working in an industry that is drastically changing. I'm a husband and the father of a toddler, which at times can be as difficult as it is rewarding. But I try to write about real life—the ugly, the beautiful, and everything in between.

What's more enjoyable, producing music or making it?

They are both amazing. Producing is more about bringing someone else's vision to fruition, while making my own music is more about connecting with people. They are both something I almost feel like I have to do. They both benefit each other.



Heartbroken Prayer

Allison Moorer finds beauty springing from sadness.



Allison Moorer's 2008 album, a collection of cover songs, was aptly titled *Mockingbird*. Her most recent one, **Crows** (Rykodisc) ★★★★★, is indeed a different creature altogether: She says it's her most personal work yet, and you don't have to read the press release to know these songs could only have come from great pain and heartache.

At first glance, *Crows* is a break-up album, filled with songs about loneliness and separation. But it's more than a chronicle of a crumbling relationship. The album could almost be divided into three acts. In the first, Moorer mixes country-tinged folk with electric pop, confession with psychoanalysis: "Don't expect a twirl, she's not that kind of girl / She reserves the right to be sullen," she sings, perhaps about a character, perhaps about herself. The pain is nearly palpable.

But Moorer gives listeners a respite. The middle of the album is a glorious burst of childhood memories, a retreat into happier times of family and lazy summer evenings. Sadness comes in seasons. One song promises that "this too shall pass," while another acknowledges that "it's gonna feel good when

it stops hurting."

But it's the back half of the album that really glows. A devastating sequence of anguished confessions, laments, and prayers, it's almost hymn-like in its solemnity. Here, sadness leads to soul-searching ("I'm down on my knees, calling on Saint Jude / Maybe he will hear this brokenhearted prayer I bring, and send a miracle my way") but also to an affirmation of grace.



And with grace comes the acknowledgement that pain isn't without purpose. The titular bird shows up on the album's final track as a messenger of lamentation—and Moorer knows that he's "trying to tell me something." Elsewhere, Moorer likens

her sorrow to rain, which falls "to make the flowers grow / to make the rivers flow." She doesn't always understand "where it's gonna land," but she doesn't need to, because the rain is just doing "what it's supposed to." There's a plan here, a design for beauty to spring forth from sadness—something that *Crows* proves in spades.

Josh Hurst, a CT music critic, blogs at *TheHurstReview.wordpress.com*.

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McLaren [from 61]

contexts, but always with the ever-true truth of the gospel that leads us to Christ.)

In this new kind of Christianity, with its new view of the Bible, Brian finds a narrative built from Genesis, Exodus, and Isaiah: God as creator and sustainer, God as liberator, and God as *shalom*-maker. When one reads the Bible with these images of God in mind, one finds that the Bible points constantly to Jesus, whose God is not Theos but Abba. And one finds that the Bible finally makes sense from beginning to end: It's about God's redemptive plan to restore all of creation. In these sections, Brian is doing some of his best work.

I like Brian's themes (though I think he left out some crucial elements, like atonement). Theos, he says, is not the God of the Bible (and I appreciated his caveat but never felt he escaped its grip). He sketches a view of God, sometimes seeing God as a "character" (a titillating suggestion never clarified for me), one who evolves from less mature (Noah's "ethnic-cleansing" God of "genocide") to more mature (Jesus' Abba and John's God of love). Thus, "the more dominating understanding of God will fade and give way to a more intimate one."

The maturation of God unfolding in the Bible has five dimensions: we find it in God's uniqueness, God's ethics, God's universality, God's agency, and God's character. "In some passages, God appears violent, retaliatory, given to favoritism, and careless of human life. But over time, the image of God that predominates is gentle rather than cruel, compassionate rather than violent, fair to all rather than biased toward some, forgiving rather than retaliatory. In this more mature view, God is not capricious, bloodthirsty, hateful, or prone to fits of vengeful rage. Rather, God loves justice, kindness, reconciliation, and peace; God's grace gets the final word." Brian says that we are involved in this maturation when we "trad[e] up our images of God."

This God comes to maturity in Jesus: "The images of God that most resemble Jesus, whether they originate in the Bible or elsewhere, are the more mature and complete images; the ones less similar to the character of Jesus are the more embryonic and incomplete, even though they may be celebrated for being better than the less complete images they replaced."

FATAL FLAW

Despite some keen insights, there are some serious flaws in Brian's new proposal.

Reading the Bible through the lens of Jesus Christ is indeed the way to go. But to use Jesus *against* the God of Israel he worshiped and prayed to and loved and obeyed pits us against what Jesus himself is doing.

One must also ask the root question: How do we determine what is less or more "mature"?

In particular, the evolutionary theory of God contains another fatal flaw. It's not the fact that it was tried out in the 19th-century *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* ("history of religion school") of Germany and has been shown inadequate (though it finds an occasional admirer in folks like Karen Armstrong). And it's not the fact that the category of "evolution" is about as modernistic and imperialistic of a category I can think of. No, the singular flaw is this: The flow of the Bible is not neat. It doesn't fit into an evolutionary scheme. There are as many mercy passages in the Old Testament as there are grace-and-love passages in the New. What's more, passages about God's grace stand side-by-side with passages about God's wrath (e.g., Hosea 1–3; Matt. 23–25). The evolutionary approach doesn't work because that's not how Scripture's narrative works. There is wrath in Revelation and there is covenant love in Genesis. And Jesus talks more about Abba and hell than does the rest of the Bible combined.

Unfortunately, this book lacks the "generosity" of genuine orthodoxy and, frankly, I find little space in it for orthodoxy itself. Orthodoxy for too many today means little more than the absence of denying what's in the creeds. But a robust orthodoxy means that orthodoxy itself is the lens through which we see theology. One thing about this book is clear: Orthodoxy is not central.

Alas, *A New Kind of Christianity* shows us that Brian, though he is now thinking more systematically, has fallen for an old school of thought. I read this book carefully, and I found nothing new. It may be new for Brian, but it's a rehash of ideas that grew into fruition with Adolf von Harnack and now find iterations in folks like Harvey Cox and Marcus Borg. For me, Brian's new kind of Christianity is quite old. And the problem is that it's not old enough. ☩

Scot McKnight is professor of religion at North Park University in Chicago, and the author of many books, including *The Jesus Creed*.

QUICK TAKES

More media of note.

BOOKS

► FOR THE BEAUTY OF THE CHURCH

Casting a Vision for the Arts

W. DAVID O. TAYLOR, ED. (BAKER)

★★★★★ With so many ways to get an edited volume on Christian art wrong—stuffing it with sterile theories, allowing contributors to wax self-reverential, sniffing in disdain at those simple-minded Christians who just don't get it!—David Taylor deserves kudos for an engaging and mature book on art's place in the church. His contributors show a sane appreciation for creativity in the church. It's hard to read their words without wondering how one's own congregation might benefit from a more robust commitment to beauty.

► BASIC CHRISTIAN

The Inside Story of John Stott

ROGER STEER (INTERVARSITY)

★★★★★ Readers may not find every period of the Anglican clergyman's life equally fascinating, but Stott's contributions to Christianity

in the United Kingdom, the United States, and indeed the world are well-charted by Roger Steer. He reminds us that no Western leader has done more to shape modern evangelicalism. Stott's conflicts with charismatics and D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, among others, make for compelling reading.

► IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD

Language—A God-Centered Approach

VERN SHERIDAN POYTHRESS (CROSSWAY)

★★★★★ The table of contents may cause

the average undergraduate's eyes to glaze over—hermeneutics, translation theory, storytelling, diction and syntax, cultural reconciliation, literary theory, logical positivism. The Westminster Theological Seminary professor covers all of this and much more; his theology of language leaves no stone or relevant Scripture verse unturned, it seems. Yet he concludes with a note of common grace, about the God who reveals himself to all, "right in the structures of language and thought."

—Books reviewed by Madison Trammel

[continued on 68]

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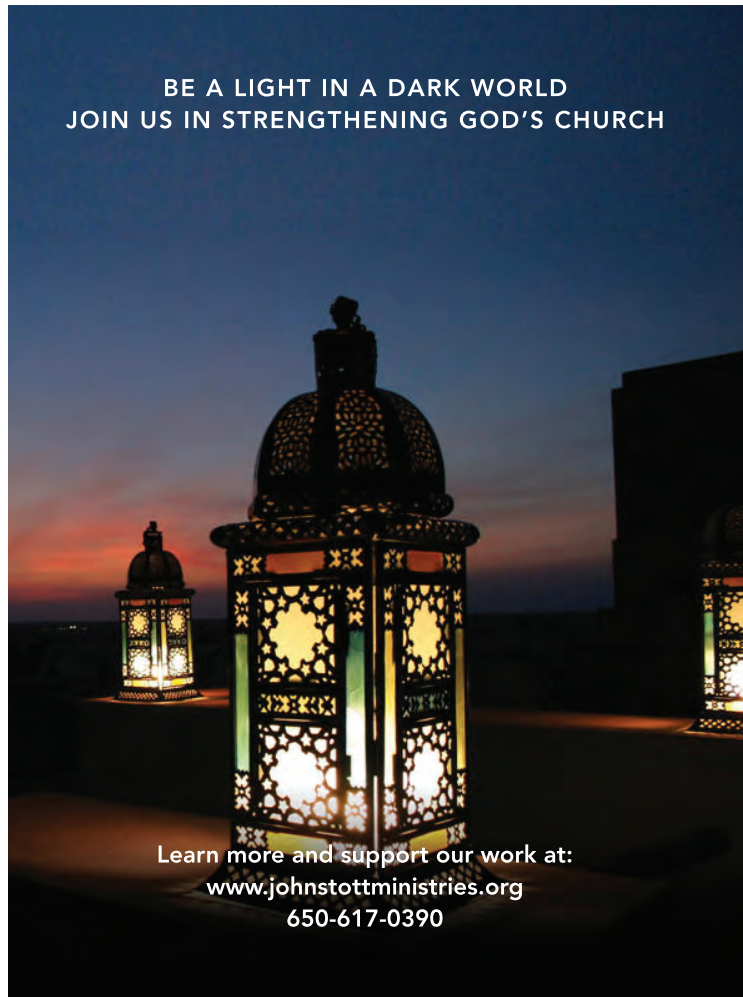
The apostle Paul thought so. (Acts 19:20)

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Quick Takes [from 67]

MUSIC

JON TROAST

► LIVING ROOM

(INDEPENDENT)

★★★★★ 2009 hadn't ended yet when I heard what will be one of 2010's best albums—at least on my list. Troast, a Christian singer-songwriter from little Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, writes irresistible songs of whimsy, warmth, and weight—and, on *Living Room*, ones that celebrate connection, relationship, and the body of Christ. This project is based on his experience crisscrossing the U.S. to play 100 living-room concerts in 100 days in 2009. It's the ultimate road-trip album. As Garrison Keillor told Troast on *A Prairie Home Companion*, "I love your songs." Same here. —Mark Moring

LAURA VEIRS

► JULY FLAME

(RAVEN MARCHING BAND RECORDS)

★★★★★ The ninth album from seasoned alternative-folk musician Veirs, *July Flame* explores the transience of life and love. Her evocative voice, accompanied by ethereal piano-string arrangements, provides soil for familiar questions written in imagery. Can the "unslakeable thirst" for lasting love ever be cured? As time passes, should one think mostly of the past, the present, or the future? Veirs's Solomonic search embraces both the innocent beauty and the pain of the human experience. —Kristin Garrett

CHRISTINE DENTE

► VOYAGE: JOURNEY OF PRAYER

(CENTRICITY)

★★★★★ After a nice CCM run in the 1990s, artful pop duo Out of the Grey—the husband-wife team of Scott and Christine Dente—dropped out of the spotlight. Fans of Christine's lovely voice will be thrilled to hear it again on this project, inspired by *The Valley of Vision*, a collection of Puritan prayers. Dente says that "reciting these prayers helped me slowly absorb the beauty and meaning inside the unfamiliar language." She has repurposed some of the prayers for ten acoustic pop songs; highlights include "Valley of Vision," about finding joy in sorrow, and "The Mover," focusing on the Spirit and the mystery of regeneration. —Mark Moring

Do Short-Term Missions Trips = Christian Tourism?

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Is paying for college driving you nuts?

**How Christian colleges are
meeting the rising financial
needs of students p.70**

**Paying for College:
student success stories p.84**



Keeping Christian Education Within Reach

HOW CHRISTIAN COLLEGES ARE MEETING THE RISING FINANCIAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS.

At a Denny's restaurant in Michigan, a high school athlete and his mother are meeting with a prospective college coach to receive news about his scholarships. The mother would love for her son to attend this particular Christian college, but knows he'll need financial help to do so.

The coach presents the financial package, and when the numbers are totaled, it's clear that the teen can afford to attend. The quiet meal instantly turns loud. Mom stands up and shouts with excitement, then drops to her knees and prays for her son, the school, and the coach. Before she's finished, even the coach is crying.

"This story isn't about sports. It's

about a parent wanting her child to attend a Christian college, and the school putting together the right package to help the family do that," explains Dr. Steven Timmermans, President of Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, IL.

This is just one chapter in the larger story happening at Christian universities and colleges across the nation. It's a story about the tremendous effort these institutions are making to not let a challenging economy push faith-based education out of reach. It's also a story about how Christian institutions are reaching out to help applicants make the most of the financial aid process, and adding millions of dollars in scholarships.

Dale Kuiper, director of admissions

and financial aid at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, MI, says, "We want to partner with you and we recognize this is a challenging financial time. We want you to be in touch with our financial aid staff. Don't close the door on a Christ-centered education just because of the cost," Kuiper says.

One of the more exciting developments benefitting many Christian college students actually comes from the federal government. Trinity's Timmermans highlights the program for incoming students. "The Federal student loan forgiveness law allows students to have loans forgiven after ten years of public service," he says. "This fits right into the mission of many Christian college students. One of the hallmarks of a Christian

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education, no matter what your calling, is to serve God and neighbor."

Eligible students who work full-time after graduation in public service such as public education or law enforcement, or for 501c(3) organizations, including some ministries, may qualify for the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program. Timmermans says the loan forgiveness law, implemented in 2007, has helped open the door to Christian college education for students.

He also says the government recently gave Trinity Christian College its highest work-study funding authorization in school history. "I think Washington is starting to realize that the strength of our nation depends on the capacity of higher education to train the next generation of leaders." He adds, "We have demonstrated we have a number of students willing to work, and willing to work hard to help pay for their education."

Paying scholarships for community service is another way one Christian institution is trying to help students cover college costs. A new program coming this fall to the University of the Southwest, located in Hobbs, N.M., offers full-time undergraduates a \$1,000 scholarship in exchange for community service. Servant Leadership Scholarship participants must propose a service project, complete a formal action plan, and provide a written essay detailing their service over the next semester. In exchange, they receive a \$1,000 scholarship.

"We think the program will provide an opportunity for our institution to have its community profile enhanced; we can reward students for that," says USW President Dr. Gary Dill, creator of the new program.

Despite colleges' helpful financial initiatives, some families may still feel overwhelmed financially. Educators point out that most families won't pay the so-called "sticker price" which is the published cost of each school. Most schools discount the "sticker price," with grants, and a majority of students receive some type of financial aid.

At Cornerstone University in Grand Rapids, MI, 97% of students

received some form of financial help. "During the '09-'10 academic year no new freshman student to Cornerstone University paid full price to attend," says Lisa Link, director of admissions.

Financial aid can actually make a Christian college more affordable than a state school. For instance, administrators at Grove City College, in Grove City, PA, say GCC costs less than Penn State or the University of Pittsburgh.

"You need to wait until you've seen what the financial aid package from the Christian school looks like so that you can compare net cost to net cost," says Michael Sapienza, Vice President for Enrollment Management at Bryan College in Dayton, TN. "But be sure to compare apples to apples. If one package is \$12,000 but includes \$6,000 in loans and \$4,000 in work study, most of that package has to be either paid back or earned. Compared to a \$12,000 package like that, a \$5,000 scholarship-only package might be very attractive."

"Bryan's top academic scholarships cover more than half the cost of tuition, so for high achieving academic students there is great opportunity to put together a package that covers a significant portion of their expenses," he adds.

FINANCIAL AID 101

How do students maximize their chances to obtain the highest amount of financial aid and scholarships? Everyone should begin by filling out a federal Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) form.

"The form collects information from parents and students on income, assets, family size, number of family members in colleges, and uses a standard evaluation process to determine the expected family contribution," explains Calvin College's Dale Kuiper.

"One of the frustrations for parents with a federal form like FAFSA, is that it seems like a cold process that looks at a few basic numbers and not their unique situation." But FAFSA is the necessary starting point to secure money from the college itself or the government.

"Families have to complete that FAFSA on time," says Pete Hamstra, vice president for admissions & marketing at Trinity Christian College. "Timeliness

is crucial. As government dollars get tighter, the deadlines are being strictly enforced. Every year families lose financial aid dollars because they weren't on top of those programs. We have actually brought the form to a family's house to sit down and help them fill it out, if they're going to potentially miss out on that money."

Some families are unsure about income questions on the FAFSA form because they've either lost a job or taken a pay cut. College financial aid officials want to know about these changes. Most schools ask applicants to fill out a supplemental financial aid form, specific to each institution. That's the place to explain extenuating circumstances in the household.

"In Michigan, where unemployment is 16%, many parental incomes won't be the same in the coming year," says Kuiper. "The FAFSA evaluation uses prior-year income information. We realize that this past year isn't a good indicator of what many families' income will look like going forward, due to job changes. We tell families to give us an estimate of what the year will look like for your finances."

Cornerstone's Link says, "Financial aid staff make a conscious effort to acknowledge each student situation separately. This includes offering families the opportunity to provide additional personal information on university forms regarding recent job loss, multiple children in college, medical bills, and other items which may not be addressed on the FAFSA form but affect a family's ability to pay for college."

Some items parents may not think about, like Christian school tuition bills for K thru 12th grade children, may help families get a discount for their older child in college.

Experts say potential students should also visit or contact the campus financial aid office directly. The goal is to become more than just a name on a form to those who are awarding the financial aid. The office may also have information on special scholarship and grant opportunities, plus the application deadlines for those financial awards.

"One of the advantages of a smaller

continued on page 78





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school is that you're not just a number on a page, we get to know our families well," Hamstra says. "The family stories come to bear when we have to make financial aid decisions." Eligible students are usually offered a combination of grants and scholarships from their institution in a financial aid package, rather than one large aid award.

Pepperdine University hosts receptions around the country for newly accepted students. Rick R. Marrs, dean of Seaver College and professor of religion at Pepperdine, says the gatherings can be a venue to talk through the financial aid package. "These personal interactions help students and parents make their decision. We hosted a reception in Portland where I met with three students accepted to Pepperdine, Stanford, and UCLA. Two of the three ended up coming to Pepperdine."

MORE SCHOLARSHIPS

Despite the economic downturn, many

Christian colleges have found ways to allocate more money to scholarship funds. "Cedarville's institutional financial aid budget will increase almost 40% next year and has more than doubled in the past five years," says Roscoe Smith, associate vice president of enrollment management.

He adds that Cedarville, like many Christian institutions, is "aggressive" in its effort to remain affordable. The school has implemented new cost cutting measures across campus. "In recent years Cedarville has upgraded energy management systems and replaced maintenance trucks with smaller, more fuel-efficient utility vehicles." The university also conducted a strategic staffing study to eliminate excess positions.

Pepperdine created a \$1-million "emergency fund" to help current students if their family situation changes dramatically. Dean Marrs explains: "This past year we pushed even more money into scholarships to ensure we

could help students if they had financial issues. Pepperdine contacted every student individually who was eligible to return and told them not to walk away for financial reasons. We are proud of our 97 percent return rate."

Recently, a senior at Pepperdine had to ask for aid for the first time. His parents paid his first three years of tuition using their home-equity line of credit. However, his father then lost his job and his mother had to enter the workforce for the first time. The financial aid office helped him with a \$10,000 Pepperdine assist grant. He paid the rest by taking out a loan to cover his senior year of school.

Families should not be afraid to ask for help from a potential college. Financial aid officials say they're hearing from many new families facing similar situations. "Each year we work with families who do not know where the next tuition payment is going to come from, who have encountered financial

continued on page 80

Meet the Leader of D.C.'s Blockbuster Church Initiative

DAVID STINE

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How do you prepare yourself for church leadership on this level? Stine gives his seminary education at Regent high marks. "Regent answered questions I didn't even know how to ask," he says. Completing both a master's and a doctorate at Regent, Stine is particularly grateful for the mentorship he received from faculty members. In fact, one of his Regent professors is an overseer for the church. "What he taught, what he modeled, not only inspired me but prepared me for the work I'm doing now."

Today, seven of ten on the D.C. Metro

staff are either Regent graduates or current students. "Being able to do so much of the work online makes it possible."

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hardship due to divorce, unemployment, a serious illness or death in the family. However, this year, with this economy, the numbers are increasing," says Thomas G. Ball, director of financial aid at Grove City College.

Grove City decided to focus alumni donations on the issue. "To meet the rising financial need of our student population in 2009-2010, we allocated a greater share of our annual alumni giving toward need-based scholarships for students." Ball also says Grove City has its own private loan program.

The road to a diploma may also be easier, experts say, if families and potential students work on gathering money and private scholarships ahead of time.

"Our Student Financial Services and Admissions Department always encourage our students to look 'outside the box' regarding financial aid," explains Allison M. Stapleton, associate director of admission at Southeastern University, in Lakeland, Florida.

"Many of our students are sponsored by members of their church or even the church itself. We recommend students connect with their hometown Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club, Lion's Club, and other community organizations for possible scholarship opportunities."

Cornerstone's Link says motivated families and students are often able to secure multiple scholarships to help pay for their education. "Scholarship websites like www.fastweb.com are popular for students and allow them the opportunity to apply for various scholarships. However, it is always important to remember that the deadlines for these scholarships may be early. In fact we encourage students and their families to begin researching potential scholarship opportunities during their junior year of high school."

She also recommends taking the ACT test at least twice. "Most students find that multiple test taking can result in higher scores. Even a one point increase

on the ACT can result in an additional \$12,000 of academic aid spread out over 8 consecutive semesters."

Cedarville University's Smith says it's common for the student body to bring a million dollars in outside scholarships to campus. They can be a great "alternative for students who may not qualify for the need-based state and federal aid programs."

Smith mentions one student in particular who received a \$3,000 scholarship from the Wal-Mart Corporation. "It made all the difference for her family and she is now nearly through her freshman year." He also suggests looking into professional organizations related to your child's intended field of study. Some may offer scholarships to incoming students. He also counsels against using companies that promise to find additional financial aid or scholarships if you pay for their services.

When asked about other creative ways students are financing their

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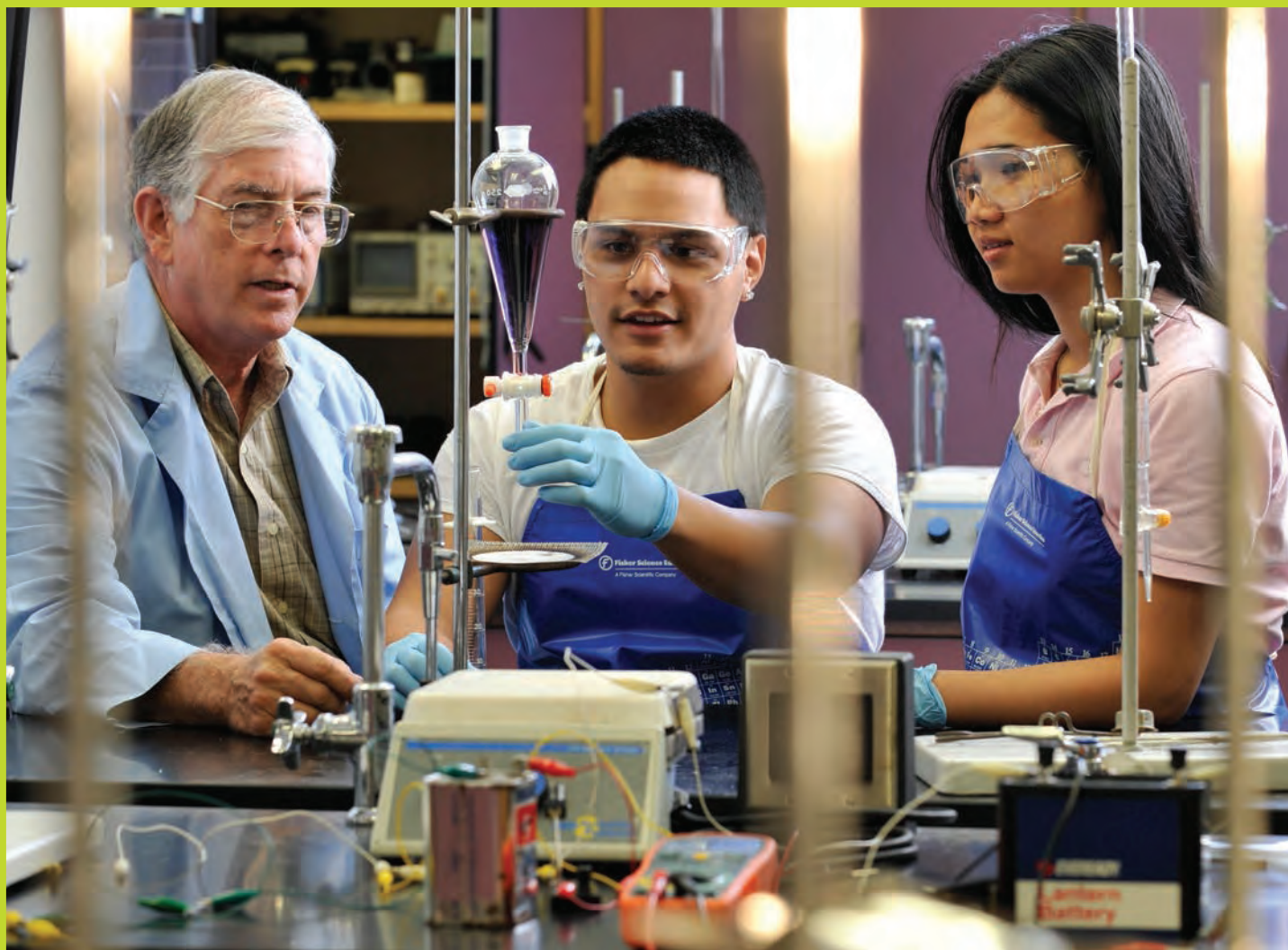
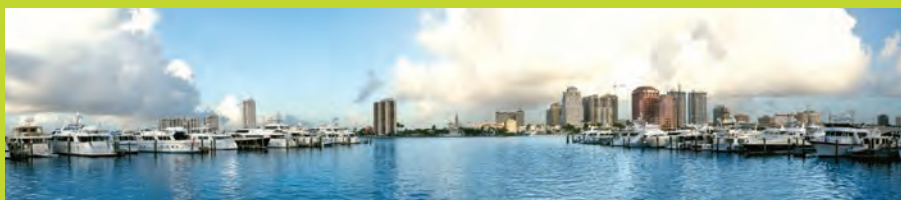
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education, Stapleton says many students find jobs near campus. “We are located in Florida where many families have pools in their backyard, making it essential that all family members learn how to swim. Several of our students are lifeguard certified and give swim lessons to children at families’ homes . . . Students also provide landscaping, house-keeping, tutoring, and nanny services just to name a few.” Stapleton says many Christian colleges have entire departments dedicated to helping students find employment while in school and once they graduate.

Families may also find special financing opportunities at universities in their region of the country or their home state. Bryan College pays the entire tuition for Tennessee residents that meet income requirements. “Our most unique program is the William Jennings Bryan opportunity program. Students from lower income families from Tennessee are eligible to receive a combination of scholarships and grants that is guaranteed to cover their tuition in full.”

Trinity Christian College has a program to encourage students from nearby Chicago to attend. “We’re really proactive in our financial aid office for low income or first generational kids,” says

Trinity’s Hamstra.

A family’s denomination or local church may also be an avenue to obtain scholarship money. Pepperdine is one of several schools with scholarship money set aside for children from the denomination affiliated with the university. “Our heritage is Church of Christ and we do have scholarship money designated for those students . . . Pepperdine also has a major scholarship fund set aside for those that indicate faith is central to who they are. We also offer scholarships for Christian Leadership,” Marrs says.

Cedarville University even offers a matching grant program for money that students receive from their congregation. “This program matches the grants students receive from their church up to \$1,000; Close to 400 students benefit from this program each year.”

College administrators hope more churches will get involved in helping young people afford to attend a Christian college or university. Hamstra says it is in a church’s self interest to create a scholarship pool for young men and women. “The health of the church depends on having good leaders and helping young people learn faith is not a just a Sunday activity. The church will be strengthened if we have more,

not fewer, young people heading off to Christian higher education.”

“College is a time for students to ask the deep questions in life. As a Christian it is important that one can ask these questions and be supported and not persecuted in their journey to find the answers that are consistent with God’s Word,” adds Southeastern University’s Allison Stapleton. “The value of a Christian education is different for every family. We encourage families to determine what they want their child to experience while at college . . . to pray and let God lead them in their decision,” says Dee Mooney, vice president and chief financial officer at University of the Southwest.

Christian colleges across America are clearly committed to finding solutions to help families and students afford a college education, especially in the current economic climate. New programs, expanded scholarships, and a willingness to learn about each student’s situation should help to keep faith-based higher education financially within reach.

Kara Miller is a freelance writer, tv journalist and mom. She can be reached through her blog at writerkara.blogspot.com. She lives with her husband and son in Chicago, IL.

Success Stories

How four students are paying for college.

Miles McCauley knew in early high school he wanted to attend the University of Mobile. “I wanted to go into ministry and I felt like it was the best environment for me to get prepared to do that,” says McCauley. But he also knew it would be a stretch to pay for school.

McCauley got financial planning help from his dad, Michael, a financial analyst for the Air Force. They teamed up, searching for potential scholarships. “I can’t tell you how many nights we sat in front of the computer with an Excel spreadsheet, adding in every scholarship we could find.

“If I was eligible for it, I applied. I probably applied for 25 scholarships my senior year. I got 6-8 scholarships, \$500 here, \$1,000 there,” he says. “I researched and applied for every single thing.”

The ACT also became a critical part of McCauley’s plan. He researched what score was needed to receive a UM academic scholarship at the financial level he required, then studied hard and took the test twice to obtain that score. His efforts paid off with a Founders Merit Scholarship from UM.

Today McCauley is in his senior year, successfully managing his college

bills with various scholarships, money his parents contributed, and a Federal Stafford loan. Sadly, his father passed away last year, but McCauley says his dad’s death motivates him to attend every class and succeed.





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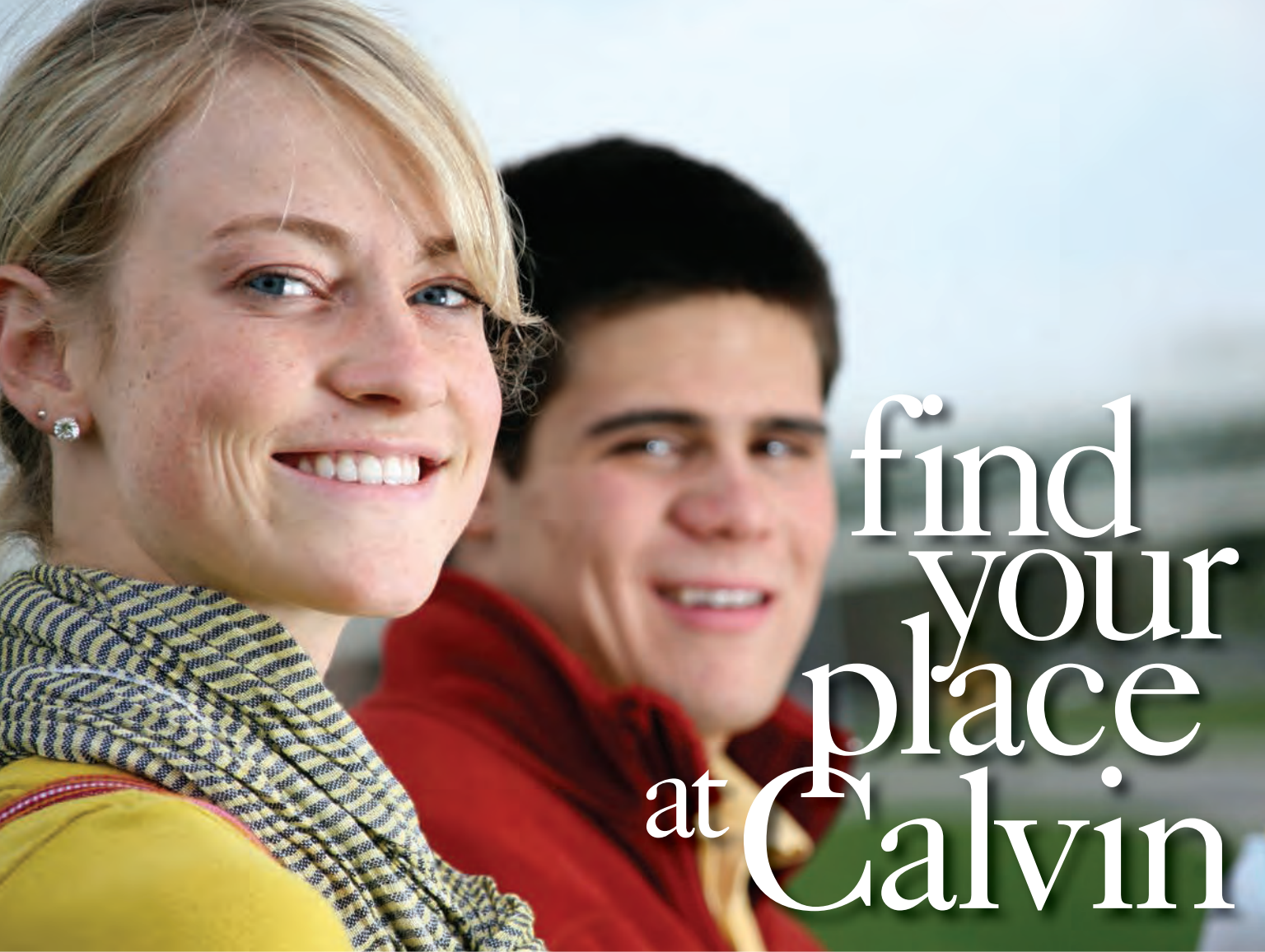
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SPECIAL ADVERTISING SECTION

Before Olivia Lenz could research nanotechnology with NASA, she first had to tackle math. She had to figure out a combination of scholarships and her parents' savings that would equal her college tuition and costs.

She received a Washington Scholars grant, which limited her choices to in-state schools. Seattle Pacific University was on her list and she says a campus visit "sealed the deal."

"I also have a scholarship with SPU. They're really good about giving every student who qualifies a merit-based scholarship." Lenz picked up several academic grants, including more than \$10,000 in a trustee scholarship, and two \$1,000 awards for her interest in engineering.

She also pursued awards from organizations in her hometown, receiving a \$2,000 scholarship from Rotary, and another \$300 scholarship from her Presbyterian Church. Lenz's parents also took advantage of a state education savings plan to save money for college costs ahead of time.

In her sophomore year Lenz switched majors to chemistry, and was looking for additional scholarships to cover costs when she discovered a NASA program in SPU's online scholarship directory. NASA now pays half her tuition and fees, up to \$10,000. "I encourage people to look on NASA's website for lots of scholarships and paid internship opportunities that give you really good experience, and you get paid."

Faith is how James Roe III says he's paying for his education at Liberty University in Lynchburg, VA. God has generously provided, using university donors, complete strangers, and an old van to meet his financial needs.

With missionary parents on a support-based income and three siblings,



Roe needed to pay for most of his education on his own. He attended community college after high school to improve his GPA for an academic scholarship to Liberty. He also took a semester off to work and save money.

During his freshman year he found himself \$1,400 short. He boldly met with the university's co-founder to share his story and financial need. A few days later his student advisor

told him he owed only \$56 on that semester's bill. The rest had been "taken care of."

In his junior year, Roe's mother agreed to sell his van back in Indiana to raise money. But the older, high-mileage vehicle wouldn't sell, and Roe ran out of tuition money. During this time he was also volunteering as an assistant varsity basketball coach at a local school, and the fathers of two students approached him separately to talk about college and finances. Roe shared how he knew God could provide for his expenses. Both men handed him \$100 in cash. Then, just two days later, the van sold for almost double what he expected.

He took the combined cash to Liberty's financial aid office and told the stories of how he received the money. Roe says the financial aid office later told him the rest of his semester's tuition



was covered by a donor.

"It's by faith," Roe says. "I know it's hard to do. If we can have faith God's going to save us, why can't we have faith he is going to pay a little school bill?"

continued on page 90



Sarah Gunder with Houghton's volleyball team in Nicaragua

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When Anna Greenway's parents moved her family to Nicaragua for missions work, little did she know it would eventually help her pay for college. It made her eligible for financial help from



the Christian Missionary Scholarship Foundation. The program partners with six U.S. Christian colleges, including Kuyper College in Grand Rapids, MI, to help pay some of the college costs for children of missionaries.

Greenway had heard about Kuyper before her family moved to South America. She liked that Kuyper was a smaller Christian college with quality education, plus it seemed more affordable than other schools on her list. Greenway remembers being excited to learn she was accepted. "I really went into it with faith. I'm the kind of person that didn't want college debt at all. But then I had to come to the reality that I was going to have to take some loans," she says.

Kuyper staff helped her to find other scholarships. She received a Provost Honors Academic Scholarship, a scholarship called the Dan Vos Scholarship, plus another reward for her overseas experience. "I received a multicultural scholarship. It is offered through Kuyper and is for people from different ethnic backgrounds, or students who are attending as international students."

Greenway has also worked several jobs while in school. She particularly enjoyed a position at the college library. She says the sacrifice of free time is worth it. "It's part of becoming an adult; if I wasn't working then I wouldn't be able to go to college."

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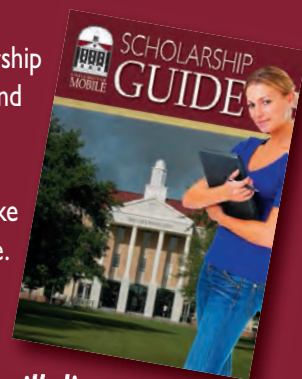
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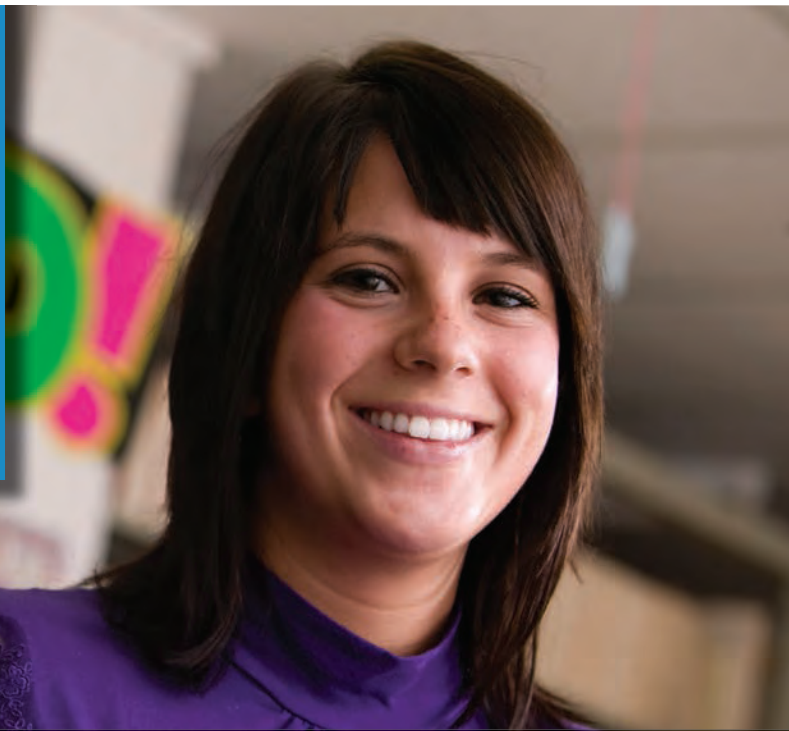
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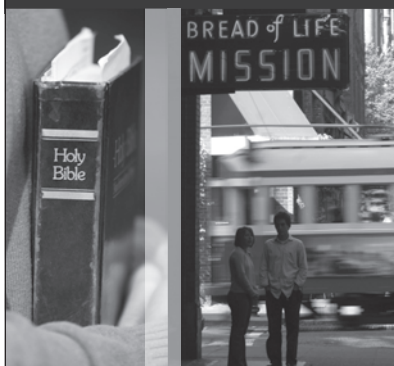


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Deep Faith

Graham Tomlin wants to bring theology back to church.

Graham Tomlin has a radical goal: to bring theology back to the heart of the church. You'd think it would already be there, but Tomlin, on the pastoral staff of Holy Trinity Brompton Anglican Church in London, believes the local church has neglected sound theological teaching for the past 200 years.

"It began when universities began to become secular in the 18th and 19th centuries," says Tomlin, also the principal of Holy Trinity's St. Paul's Theological Centre and the dean of St. Mellitus College, an Anglican theological school. "Theology was being taught apart from Christian life and separate from the churches, to the impoverishment of both. Seminaries started in reaction to that, to provide Christian alternatives to the secular university. Yet those remain one step removed from real local churches."

Holy Trinity is best known as the place where the Alpha Course—which teaches seekers the basics of the Christian faith—launched in the late 1970s and has since been used by over 13 million people worldwide. Tomlin, who has led several Alpha courses, says the class works "because it offers an unthreatening, lively context in which to hear more about Christianity, but crucially also the chance to disagree, debate, and tell stories. It also gives people a chance to experience the reality of God, which often cuts through some of the more sterile arguments." ➤

➤ **Age** 51

➤ **Hometown** Bristol, United Kingdom

➤ **Family** Janet (wife); Sam, Sian

➤ **Currently reading** *The Towers of Trebizond*, by Rose MacAulay

➤ **On your iPod** Mumford & Sons, Elbow, Gloria: *The Sacred Music of John Rutter*

➤ **People you most admire** Martin Luther and Bono

➤ **Favorite recent film** *Sherlock Holmes*

question & answer

Your website says people are "searching for more from their faith." Explain.

Many are looking for faith that's more than a badge that defines them, but also [they want] to integrate faith more into the rest of their lives—and that includes the mind. Thinking through faith, relating it to science, politics, work, relationships—all of that matters. And to do that, you need basic theology.

And that's what St. Paul's Theological Centre provides?

Yes. Our vision is that churches themselves become theological communities where people think, talk, and go deeper in theology without having to leave their church. We have a lot to learn from Muslims and Jews—mosques and synagogues take their educational responsibilities far more seriously than most local churches can or do.

Why can't we laypeople leave theology to the professionals?

Theology is loving God with our minds, and Jesus told us to do that as well as with our hearts and souls. I firmly believe every Christian is a theologian. If theology is basically talking about God, if you do that to any extent, you are a theologian. The only question is whether you're a good one or a bad one—whether what you say is broadly true of God or false.

Church attendance in the UK has been in steady decline. What's your take on it?

While the majority of churches are struggling, one in five Anglican churches is growing. The key question is, can we find a way to enable the life in the growing churches to flow into the ones that are declining? That means various innovative forms of church planting and some bold decisions. And if church can increasingly be seen as the place that helps you live life better—to build relationships, to learn to become more generous, kind, forgiving, and humble—and can show that those things come about only in relationship with God, then I think it has a huge future in the UK.

More: htb.org.uk, sptc.htb.org.uk

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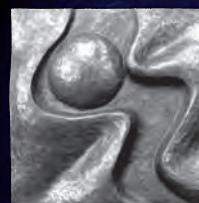
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