

Christianity Today

MAY 2010

A CANDLE IN THE DARKNESS

*My story of abuse
and deliverance
as a missionary child.*

By WESS STAFFORD
president of Compassion International

+ CULTURE CHANGE CRITIC 32
THE MIGRANT MOMENT 28
ID'S NEXT EVOLUTION 50



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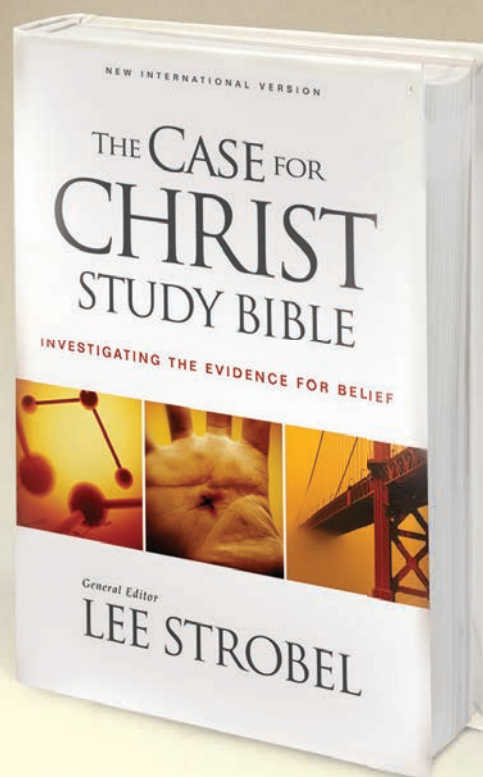
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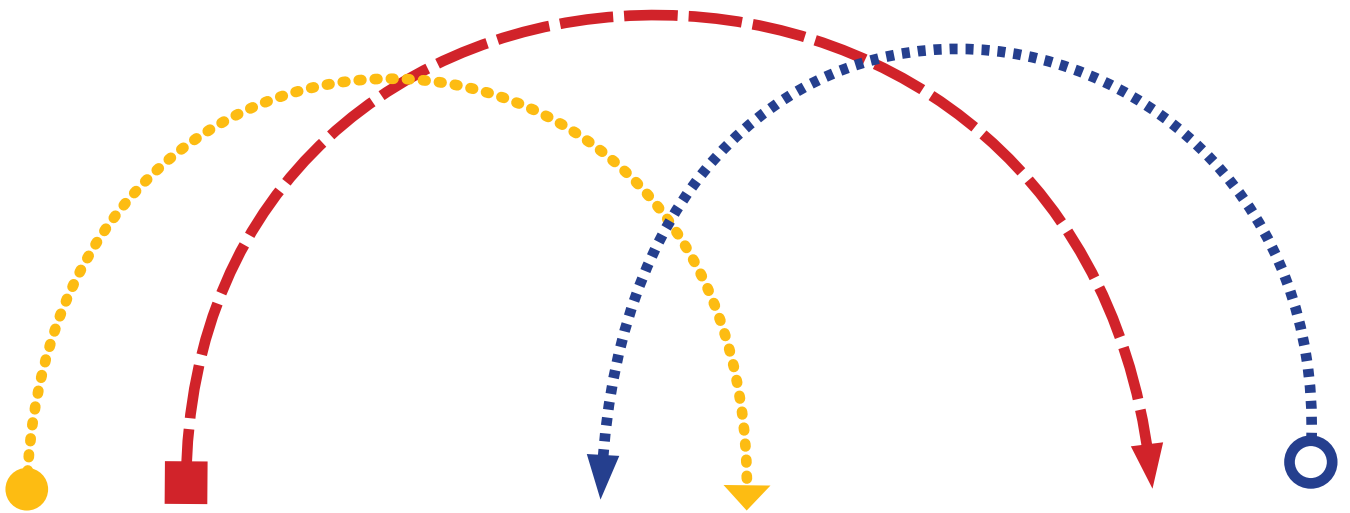
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The Mirror of Truth

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

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

In this issue, we highlight the truth-telling of Compassion International's Wess Stafford, whose abuse as a missionary kid was transformed into a life calling (p. 22). We also report the painful facts of the sex trafficking of minors inside U.S. borders (p. 17). But there is also truth to celebrate: See Collin Hansen's roundup of innovative ministries fighting biblical illiteracy (p. 38).

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

You can make your tax-deductible contribution—of any amount—by check or online. Make checks payable to *Christianity Today*, and put "CT Global Excellence Fund" on the memo line, or visit ChristianityToday.com/donate. Your gift will help us continue to speak the truth with fairness, compassion, and grace.


David Neff, Editor in Chief

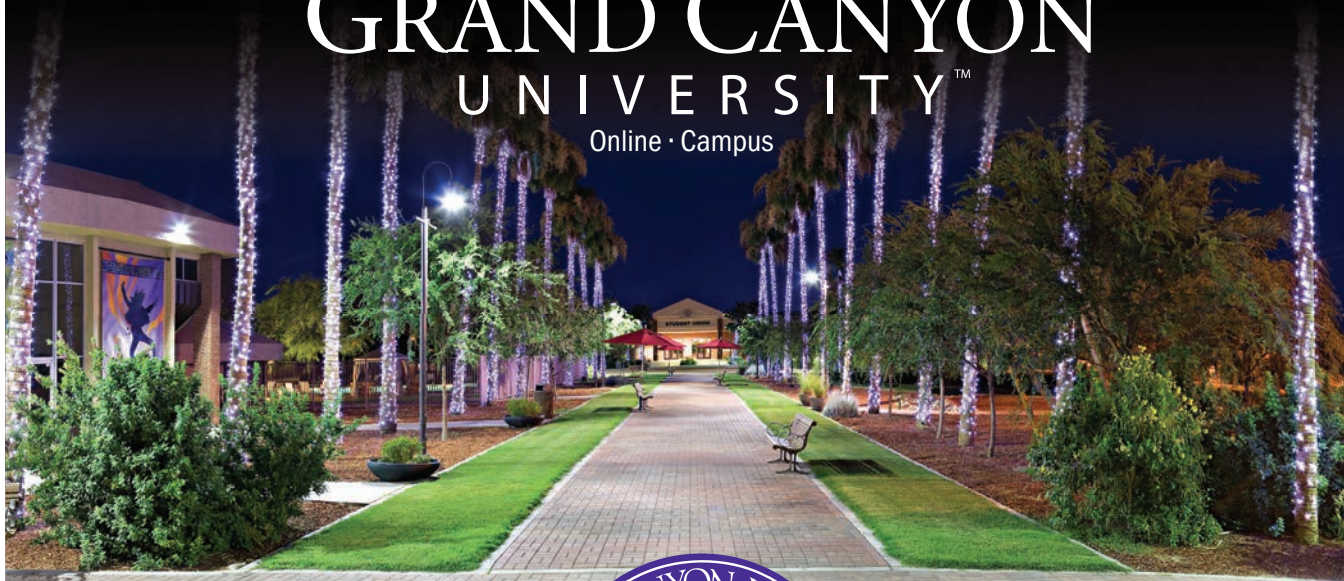
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From Bottom to Top

How to read the Global Conversation upside down.



ISSIOLOGIST J. SAMUEL ESCOBAR has lived in six countries—born in Peru and ending up in Spain. He has learned from experience about migration and immigration. In “Mission Fields on the Move” (p. 28), Escobar diverts us from the economic and security issues that dominate the U.S. debate to opportunities for service and evangelism presented by the almost 200 million international migrants in our world.

Escobar chairs the Lausanne III Advisory Council. His article is the eighth out of twelve stops along our journey toward the Lausanne III event, also known as Cape Town 2010. Last October, *Christianity Today* began this article series designed to stimulate global conversation before delegates gather in Cape Town in October to seek the Holy Spirit's guidance on these challenges.

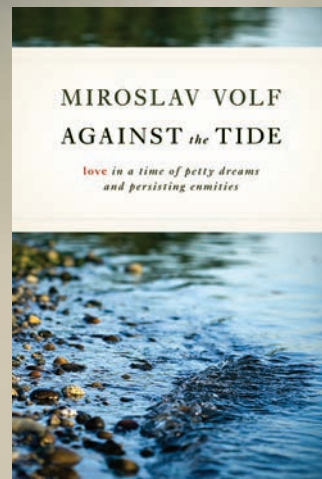
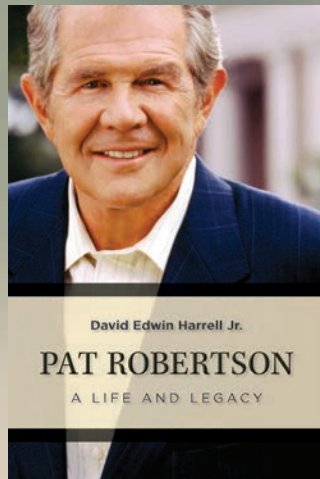
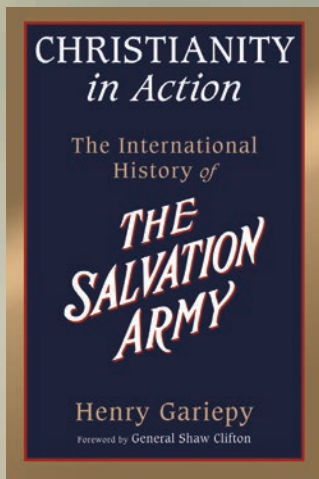
There are limits on Cape Town 2010 attendance so that delegates from the developed world won't overwhelm those from less affluent countries. To expand the reach of the Cape Town discussions, Lausanne leaders have created GlobaLink. Groups anywhere can register to become GlobaLink sites, and then use broadband connections to participate with, and even respond to, the proceedings in South Africa. About 250 GlobaLink sites are currently registered. These will enable 45,000 individuals in 60 countries to participate—about 10 times the number at the face-to-face meeting. By the time the next issue of this magazine is delivered, the number of GlobaLink sites should reach about 350 in 100 countries.

CT has been publishing Global Conversation essays with their web-exclusive responses and reader comments at *ChristianityToday.com/GlobalConversation*. But recently the Lausanne Movement has created a parallel website that tries to use social media technology (think Twitter and Facebook) to encourage even more conversation (see *Conversation.Lausanne.org*).

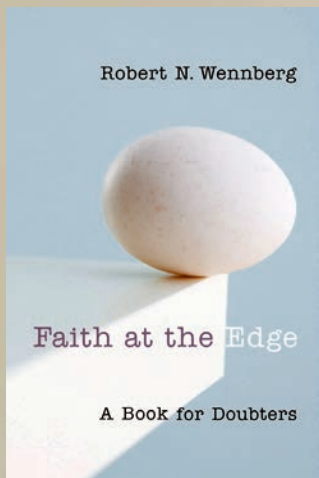
When I first visited that site, I had a hard time finding the essays that were supposed to spark discussion. Then I spotted them—at the bottom of each topic page. This is the reverse of CT's online presentation. Our “top down” approach follows an editorial logic: the essay, then the responses, then the comments.

Lausanne's approach is “bottom up.” It also begins with the keynote essay, but as in all social media, the oldest material soon gets buried beneath the reactions. That is, of course, exactly like real life. But it also embodies a strategy that tries to give less privileged voices greater visibility. This is a parable for a key element in the Lausanne way: to reverse our expectations, amplify voices from the developing world, and help the rest of us hear them. 

Next month: Ed Stetzer (reluctantly) praises what denominations can do, the Global Conversation discusses communications technology, and Jeremy Weber reports on a remarkable city-church movement in Argentina.



EERDMANS



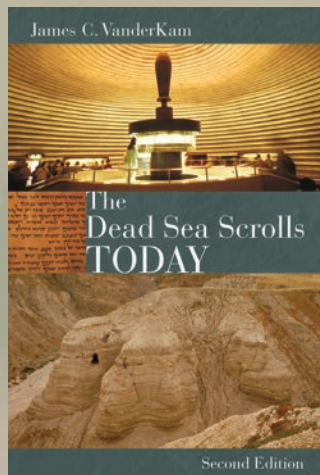
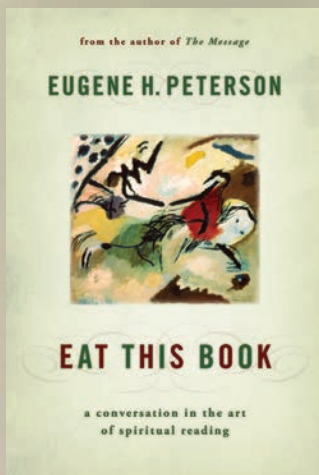
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SPOTLIGHT: American Idols and Saints

➔ With *American Idol*'s record for most seasons at the top of the Nielsen charts (a record it shares with *All in the Family* and *The Cosby Show*), it was inevitable that the show would spawn a Christian imitator. But TBN's *Gifted* shut down as *AI* began spotlighting its contestants' faith commitments (however vaguely stated). These days, *Newsweek*, Fox News, and others debate whether the "Christian viewer vote" has become too powerful.



"There was a time when a worship leader performing on a show like *American Idol* would have caused Christians to question his faith. But with the culture of celebrity becoming more common in the Christian community, the idea of a Christian making it big in the mainstream isn't so distasteful anymore."

Joanne Brokaw, who blogs on *American Idol* for Beliefnet's *Gospel Soundcheck*.

GOD IN THE KARAOKE MACHINE



2002
9.9 million people watch premiere episode on June 11, 2002.



2005
Mandisa Hundley sings Mary Mary's "Shackles," the show's first gospel song. Her statement "God is bigger" than "lifestyle" prompts a gay boycott.

2006
Carrie Underwood's Grammy-winning "Jesus Take the Wheel" becomes one of the best-selling post-*Idol* singles.



2007
Melinda Doolittle tells Jon Bon Jovi, "I like church!"



Contestants sing "Shout to the Lord," dropping "Jesus" for "Shepherd." After complaints, a second airing restores the original lyric.



2009
Six of the eight top contestants have ties to Christian music. Four lead worship at their churches, including season winner Kris Allen.

2010
When viewers eliminate Carly Smithson after she sings from *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *The New York Times* alleges a witch-hunt.

INSTANT CELEBRITIES



R. J. HELTON Season one's fifth-place contestant became the first to release a post-*Idol* album for Christian markets. 2004's *Real Life* sold about 20,000 copies, but Helton's career stalled when he came out as gay. Season two's Clay Aiken would walk a similar path (with greater success).



BO BICE The former New Hope Cumberland Presbyterian worship leader came in second to Carrie Underwood in season four. But season six's Phil Stacey credits Bice with the show's pro-Christian vibe. Bice "laid a lot of groundwork with the producers just in the fact that he was a good Christian," he said.



JORDIN SPARKS Season six's winner had already won the Gospel Music Association's Academy Spotlight Award and had sung backup on two Michael W. Smith tours, but qualified as an amateur for *Idol*. After becoming the show's youngest winner (17), she made headlines defending promise rings on the MTV Video Music Awards.



DANNY GOKEY *Idol* producers placed much attention on the death of Gokey's wife four weeks before his audition. Also noteworthy: He was one of two members on season eight from the worship team at Faith Builders International Ministries, a multisite church in Milwaukee. (The other, Jamar Rogers, was eliminated early on.)



JERMAINE SELLERS "I want you all to come to church with me one good Sunday," the self-described "church singer" told judges. Infamously grumpy Simon Cowell immediately agreed to go, to the surprise of his fellow judges—and Sellers. But the promise was short-lived, assurances that God wanted him to stay notwithstanding.



GLEANINGS

Important developments in the church and the world.

1 Earthquake destroys hundreds of churches

CHILE Headlines about the 8.8-magnitude February earthquake in Chile quickly faded, but the country's Baptists found that the temblor had severely damaged half of their churches. The Baptist General Convention of Texas gave \$25,000 to the Baptist Union of Chile to repair 250 buildings. Other denominations throughout the country suffered as well; up to 80 percent of Catholic churches were destroyed in dioceses surrounding the epicenter near Concepción, Chile's second largest city. The quake displaced 1.5 million people.

2 Court: "Under God" may remain in pledge

Reversing its own 2002 ruling, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the phrase "under God" can remain in the Pledge of Allegiance because the phrase is religious but does not represent a prayer. The court issued a similar ruling about the motto "In God We Trust" on currency, saying the use of "God" is ceremonial and patriotic, not religious. In 2002 the court ruled that "under God" was unconstitutional. All three lawsuits were filed by Sacramento atheist Michael Newdow, who says the phrase alienates nonreligious people in the U.S.

3 World Vision workers killed in Pakistan

PAKISTAN Seven Pakistani employees of World Vision died in a March 10 robbery, the worst attack in the organization's 60-year history. About 15 unidentified gunmen shot the workers, injured six others, and set off a bomb after stealing equipment from the Oghi

office in northern Pakistan. World Vision has halted operations in the country while government officials investigate the attack. An agency spokesman said that on average, one World Vision worker dies each year in violent attacks.

4 Court: Church defamed pastor

An Oregon appeals court determined the First Amendment does not protect churches from all defamation lawsuits and awarded a fired pastor \$355,000 in damages. Pastor Tim Tubra sued the denomination of Vernonia Foursquare Church for defamation of character after officials read a letter to congregants after his resignation, accusing him of misappropriating church funds. At issue: whether a \$3,000 withdrawal in April 2004 was part of his 2003 compensation agreement. The court ruled in Tubra's favor because the defamation was not religious in nature. Observers said the February ruling was a first for church-state issues and will likely head to Oregon's Supreme Court.

5 Government bans intelligent design

AUSTRALIA Christian schools in South Australia are protesting new guidelines that ban the teaching of intelligent design and creationism in science classes. The December policy from the Non-Government Schools Registration Board requires science to be taught "as an empirical discipline" focused on objective inquiry and evidence. The policy does not allow scientific curricula based on literal interpretations of religious texts. A spokesperson for the board said creationism could still be taught in religion courses, but the Australian Christian

Lobby said the policy limits the freedom of religious schools.

6 Christians murdered before election

IRAQ The run-up to Iraq's March elections saw at least 10 Christians murdered and more than 800 Christians displaced from Mosul. Sunni Muslims had promised to wreck the elections; 38 people were killed on Election Day, March 7. Meanwhile, leaders from 14 denominations recently formed the Council of Christian Church Leaders in Iraq to unite believers still in the country. A U.N. refugee commission estimates that half of Iraq's 750,000 Christians have left the country since 2003.

7 Government will monitor church finances

CHINA Churches and other religious institutions must hire accountants and submit annual financial reports to the Chinese government starting in 2011.

The March statement from China's State Administration of Religious Affairs also lets the government audit an institution if its leader leaves. Chinese law recognizes churches as public organizations, and officials say the new rules will help the government supervise finances at the nation's 130,000 religious organizations. China is on a U.S. list of nations whose governments repress freedom of religion.

8 Catholic charity drops spousal benefits

Prompted by the December legalization of same-sex marriage in the District of Columbia, Catholic Charities of Washington transferred its 80-year-old foster care program to another provider. Then it dropped health benefits for spouses of new hires. Church officials said the changes were necessary to maintain

GO FIGURE Media

0.8%
Total news coverage in 2009 devoted to religion, down from 1 percent in 2008.

1.1%
Total news coverage in 2009 devoted to the death of Michael Jackson.

Project for Excellence in Journalism



compiled by Ted Olsen

QUOTATION MARKS

"I've hinted at this before, but now I am saying it—don't give money to the RNC."

Tony Perkins, president of Family Research Council, after news reports revealed the Republican National Committee had spent \$2,000 at a Los Angeles strip club.

Family Research Council

"My soul, my marriage, my family, and my ministry pattern need a reality check from the Holy Spirit."

John Piper, repenting for "several species of pride in my soul" and announcing he would take an eight-month leave to spend time with his wife, Noël.

Desiring God

"I just want to be in peace and quiet for a while and be reunited with my family."

Gao Zhisheng, the Chinese Christian human-rights lawyer who disappeared more than a year ago, in a series of phone calls to media outlets saying he was "free at present." Observers believe he is still under police surveillance and restrictions.

Associated Press

"My faith is very important to me. But I don't necessarily define my faith by going to church every Sunday. Because now when I go to church, I feel like it's a show."

Miley Cyrus, actress and singer.

Parade

"By having the phrase 'In the Year of Our Lord,' it is directly referencing Jesus Christ, and not everyone believes in Jesus Christ."

Sidra Qureshi, a Muslim student campaigning to have the phrase removed from the diplomas of her San Antonio school, Trinity University.

San Antonio Express-News

city contracts under the new law. The organization also added a hiring clause requiring new employees to uphold church tenets.

governments as well as churches and other private organizations partner with Focus to organize the adoptions.

9 New EU group will monitor Christian rights

ITALY A new European Union working group will create guidelines for EU embassies to monitor religious freedom and to help Christians in countries where they are persecuted. The group, headed by Italian foreign minister Franco Frattini, will distribute the guidelines to embassies in countries ranked by nonprofit Open Doors as the worst persecutors. Frattini formed the group in part because of a European Court of Human Rights ruling last fall—later overturned—that crucifixes could not be displayed in Italian schools.

12 Divorce now easier for Indian Christians

INDIA Christians no longer have to wait two years after marriage to file for divorce, according to an Indian high court ruling in February.

When a Christian couple filed suit to be allowed to divorce after eight months, the court declared part of the existing Indian Divorce Act unconstitutional for discriminating against Christians. Like members of other religious groups, Christians can now file for divorce after one year.

13 Popular Chinese Bible updated

The most popular Chinese-language Bible translation has been updated for the first time in 90 years. The American Bible Society translation team, which included scholars from mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, and the U.S., updated language characters no longer in use and designed the translation to be understood in many Chinese regions and dialects. The new translation, which will target more than 300,000 Chinese churches worldwide, will be available this fall.

14 Back door could open to assisted suicide

UNITED KINGDOM A ruling from the British director of public prosecutions could effectively open a back door to assisted suicide in the country. The office said prosecuting a man who helped his parents book a room at a Swiss suicide facility is not in the public interest. Caractacus Downes and his sister received £2.6 million when their parents died. The large amount of money qualified Downes to be prosecuted for assisting a suicide under February guidelines.

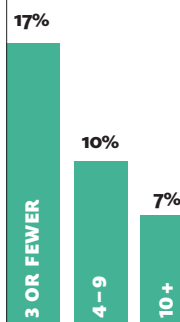
10 Denomination refuses to let church leave

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America refused to let a Florida congregation leave the synod over theological differences. Members of St. Peter Lutheran Church voted twice unanimously to leave the denomination. The last official step in the process was for the regional synod to approve the move, but the Florida-Bahamas Synod refused the request, saying the church is in a key spot for missions. St. Peter moved on without approval and joined Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ.

11 Colorado cuts adoption list in half

Thanks to an initiative spearheaded by Focus on the Family, the number of eligible unadopted children in Colorado shrunk from nearly 800 to 365 in the past two years. Focus started the Wait No More initiative in November 2008, organizing large events where prospective adopters can learn more about adoption and begin the process. State and local

GO FIGURE
Church Life
American congregations that say they can't find enough people to serve on committees, by number of committees they have:



Note: Congregation size did not significantly affect responses.

Faith Communities Today



Will vs. Way:
The arrest of 10 Baptist missionaries to Haiti on child trafficking charges grabbed headlines, but experts say new country restrictions are the real threat to international adoptions by evangelicals.

ADOPTION

Idaho's Impact

Haiti scandal overshadows bigger threat to evangelical adoption efforts. By Steve Holt

The legal saga of 10 Idaho-based Baptists arrested in January for attempting to smuggle 33 Haitian children into the Dominican Republic is winding down. (One of the 10, Laura Silsby, remains in a Haiti prison.) But evangelical adoption advocates wonder what the long-term impact will be.

Leading orphan care advocate Russell Moore suggested in the days following the arrests that the scandal might be a black eye to evangelicals' adoption efforts worldwide. But two months later, Moore said he is no longer worried about a fallout.

"In many ways, the controversy served as an opportunity to clarify what we mean and what we do not mean," said Moore, dean of the School of Theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. "No one in the Christian orphan care community is calling for children to be adopted who are not in fact orphans . . . or to be adopted apart from the legitimate processes."

A larger hurdle for international

adoptions by evangelicals may be new restrictions on adoptions in countries where they have been most prevalent, including China, Guatemala, Russia, Vietnam, and Liberia.

China, which has traditionally accounted for the majority of adoptions to the U.S., rewrote its qualifications for adoptive parents in 2007. Guatemala, the second-largest source of American adoptions, completely shut down its program in 2008 due to widespread corruption, though it will launch a new program this June.

Since 2004, these and other restrictions have resulted in a 40 percent decline in overseas adoptions by Americans—from an all-time high of almost 23,000 in 2004 to fewer than 12,800 in 2009, according to the U.S. State Department.

Soon after news broke of the January 7.0-magnitude earthquake in Haiti—which the U.S. Census Bureau estimates added 15,000 new double orphans (children who have lost both parents) to the 380,000 single and double orphans already in

the country—scores of families began contacting the Christian Alliance for Orphans (CAO) to inquire about adopting orphaned Haitian children. Director Jed Medefind said a necessary tension exists between honoring the generosity of families who want to give orphans a good home and doing everything possible to find or provide family support networks within a child's country.

Medefind said the CAO includes both adoption and in-country care organizations, which he sees as mutually supportive. "They are working together, saying the Christian mandate to care for orphans in their distress includes both in-country solutions and, when necessary, inter-country adoptions," he said.

For example, member organization World Orphan had a relief team in Haiti within days of the earthquake, working with Haitian churches to find long-term care for orphans with relatives, church members, or, as a last option, church-run group homes.

With in-country solutions receiving renewed focus and international adoptions on the decline, what will become of international adoptions in the long run? Medefind maintains that the drop in international adoptions since 2004 does not signal a stagnating willingness among American families to adopt overseas, and he argues that evangelicals in particular have increased interest. Attendance at the CAO's Orphan Summit national conference has nearly tripled every year—from 30 people in 2006 to more than 700 last year. Medefind expects that number to grow at the April 2010 conference in Minneapolis.

When it comes to international adoptions, evangelicals seem to have the will. But with more country restrictions, will there be a way?

"There's more momentum than I've ever seen . . . not just toward adoption but orphan care of various kinds," said Moore. "The church is having its conscience awakened when it comes to orphans."

GO FIGURE Evangelism

According to a survey of 74 ministries, receptivity to the gospel—on a five-point scale—among first-generation immigrants from

Ecuador and Guatemala
4.2

Liberia
4.1

Japan
2.3

Iraq and Iran
2.2

North American Mission Board / LifeWay Research

Moroccan Crackdown

Expulsion of Christians surprises missiologists.

By Bobby Ross Jr.

Six years ago, a delegation of evangelical leaders visited the Kingdom of Morocco and hailed it as “open to evangelical Christian outreach.” In 2005, country officials even invited the Newsboys, Phil Keaggy, and other Christian artists to stage a three-day music festival in the capital, Marrakech.

The North African country is apparently open no more. In March it deported dozens of foreign Christian workers and foster parents. In addition, the country’s 1,000 Christians have faced “significant increased pressure,” according to an expert in Muslim-Christian relations who has frequent contact with religious and government leaders in Morocco (and who asked to remain anonymous).

At the Village of Hope orphanage near Ain Leuh, 50 miles south of Fez, the government expelled 16 staff workers, 10 foster parents, and 13 natural-born dependents. Police first came to the orphanage March 6, questioning children and looking for Bibles and evidence of Christian evangelism.

New Zealand native Chris Broadbent, a worker at Village of Hope, said government accusations of proselytizing were unfounded, and that all staff had signed and adhered to a non-proselytizing policy.

“We were a legal institution,” Broadbent said. “Right from the start they knew it was an organization founded by Christians and run by a mixture of Christians and Muslims working together.”

The change in Morocco’s approach to Christian activity “appears to have taken everyone by surprise, NGO leaders and embassy staff included,” said Steve Moore,

president and CEO of the Mission Exchange. “Informed expatriates with a long history in the country admit their analysis of the political trends have proven to be wrong.”

But J. Dudley Woodberry, senior professor of Islamic studies at Fuller Theological Seminary, said it’s not a surprise in retrospect. “The number of Christians has continued to grow in North Africa, and this has been publicized abroad,” he said. “The Moroccan government, apparently under pressure from the Islamists, is reacting.”

Some Christians in Morocco attribute the change to the country’s new Minister of Justice and Minister of Interior. Others say a strong government faction remains supportive of religious freedom but does not want to be seen as lapdogs for Christians.

Differing interpretations of *proselytism*—which is forbidden in Morocco—could be one problem, Woodberry said.

“While the term is neutral in international law for evangelism or witness, Christian workers in Muslim lands commonly interpret it as using undue pressure or inducements to influence people to change their faith,” he said. “Many Muslims, in turn, see it as referring to any form of witness.” ☩

Additional reporting by Compass Direct News.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Asylum Surprise

Decision for homeschoolers pushes persecution boundaries.

By Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra

A German Christian family received asylum in Tennessee after being severely penalized for illegally homeschooling their children in Germany.

While private and public schools are allowed in Germany,

PASSAGES



Died
E. Earle Ellis

Prolific New Testament scholar and founder of the Institute for Biblical Research, on March 2 near Fort Worth, Texas. He was 83.



Died
Tokunboh Adeyemo

Longtime head of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa and Nigerian scholar who oversaw the African Bible Commentary, on March 18 in Nairobi, Kenya.



Retired
Gary Streit

President of Malone University, in February after admitting to plagiarizing parts of a January 13 chapel speech.

homeschooling is not. The Romeike family was threatened on multiple occasions, fined about \$10,000, and had three children forcibly removed from home and driven to school by police, according to the brief.

The January decision marks the first time the United States has granted asylum over homeschooling restrictions. While the German government was not motivated by religion to persecute the Romeikes, it was frustrating the family’s faith, said judge Lawrence Burman.

The case, on appeal, may set legal precedent, as well as prompt similar cases from Western Europe.

“The definition of what is harming your child is changing [to include] exposing them to religious beliefs or religious rituals like circumcision,” said Eric Rassbach, national litigation director for the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty. “Europeans are used to a much more intrusive state, so . . . nontraditional or minority religious groups [face] a severe lack of understanding on the part of the authorities.”

Thomas Berg, a religious freedom expert at University of St. Thomas School of Law, agreed.

“This is something you see more and more of in Europe,” he said. But laws in the U.S. also were once unfriendly to homeschooling, he said.

American families arguing for a constitutional right to homeschool lost often in federal courts in the 1970s and 1980s, but took their cases to state legislatures and won protection there, said Berg. “I wonder whether the same dynamic will happen [in Europe], where when people who are good parents suffer, it leads to a relaxation of the stringency of the rules,” he said.

If the National Board of Immigration Appeals rules in favor of the Romeikes, it could sharpen U.S. policy on religious freedom, said Berg. The U.S. would have to recognize that persecution can happen even under a law that does not target religions.

“I think this case shows again

[continued on 16]

Briefing [from 15]

that you can have persecution under a generally applicable law," he said. "Does it really matter to the Romeikes that their children are being taken away from them under a general law about homeschooling—[one that doesn't] single out religious reasons? Even generally applicable laws can be the impetus for imposing real suffering on people for their religious beliefs."

HIGHER EDUCATION

Who's the Boss?

Erskine College fights denomination's reforms.
By Jocelyn Green

Erskine College and Seminary had seen its fair share of battles over the relationship between faith and learning. Online debates. Grumblings at denominational meetings.

Then the General Synod of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian (ARP) Church—which sponsors the South Carolina school—voted overwhelmingly March 3 to fire 14

trustees after an investigation found missional drift among trustees and faculty. At issue: widespread confusion on the integration of faith into courses, and the ARP's commitment to biblical inerrancy.

"The issue is not 'academic freedom,'" said Charles Wilson, a retired ARP minister who runs a blog on denominational woes. "The issue is 'academic license' that seeks to subvert the evangelical witness of the [ARP] in higher education."

The meaning of the college's mission to provide "a Christ-centered environment" has been hotly debated in recent years. Students and alumni have formed campus groups and websites to attack and defend particular professors.

James Brooks Kuykendall, chair of the music department, agrees with the investigation's conclusions but worries about the synod's solutions.

"I fear that the synod's dramatic action was the result of a frustration and impatience caused by overly ambitious expectations," he said. "They opted for the furthest and the fastest [change], and there are significant practical obstacles in accomplishing that."

At least 27 denominations have

founded colleges and universities that are members, like Erskine, in the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities. Arrangements run the gamut, said president emeritus Robert Andringa. "[But] this balance of authority needs to change over the years as smaller denominations send fewer students, provide less funding, and have inadequate pools of faculty and staff from which the campus can hire."

Because of the ARP's small size (250 churches), only a minority of Erskine students and faculty members come from the denomination. "It appears that leaders on both sides neglected the duty of building trust between campus and church over a long time," said Andringa. "It takes work and is never easy."

Dismissed trustees and the president of the alumni association soon filed suit against the General Synod. Erskine College filed a similar lawsuit, but dropped it a week later. The court blocked the board changes in April until the case is resolved.

"The matter is very simple: Is Erskine an agency of the [ARP] or is the [ARP] an agency of Erskine?" said Wilson. "All church and college documents are clear. . . . Now, I suppose, we will see what the court says."

GO FIGURE Art

69%
Growth in size of the main courses depicted in Last Supper paintings between years 1000 and 2000.

23%
Growth in size of the bread.

International Journal of Obesity

UNDER DISCUSSION Topics in the current debate.

compiled by Ruth Moon

Should churches celebrate Mother's Day during worship?

YES

"Absolutely, we should celebrate motherhood. The fifth commandment establishes parenthood as a holy calling. But, it also makes good sense to acknowledge 'cultural rhythms'—like certain secular holidays—liturgically, to recognize there is no place God isn't."

SALLY MORGENTHAUER, author, *Worship Evangelism*

"In our culture, these really are significant days when we honor dads and moms. Mother's Day is almost like the elephant in the room—and it's important to acknowledge, to break down this secular-sacred divide that is sometimes so much a part of religious life in America."

KURT FREDRICKSON, associate dean, Fuller Theological Seminary

"We should want to honor mothers. But because this has become a consumerist holiday (like Valentine's Day), we should consider deeper issues about how we order our time and make sure we aren't simply catering to the whims of our consumerist culture."

TREVIN WAX, associate pastor, author, *Shelbyville, Tenn.*

"Focusing an entire service on mothers can be problematic by taking the focus away from God and by being pastorally insensitive. We need to be very careful to recognize both mothers and those who live with hurt related to their own mothers or motherhood."

JOYCE BORGER, editor, *Reformed Worship*

"It's great to acknowledge it. But there is the 'cult of the family,' where motherhood tends to get so elevated in churches that it's above all else. Sometimes that's the knee-jerk treatment, to make it the highest and holiest of callings for women. That's a problem."

CARYN RIVADENEIRA, author, *Mama's Got a Fake I.D.*

"One of the biggest threats to theology today is not fundamentalism; it's sentimentalism. Mother's Day appears to be just another occasion to say, 'Christianity is feeling something mushy in your heart.' We all get sentimental about our mothers."

WILLIAM WILLIMON, bishop, North Alabama conference, United Methodist Church



Street Tracks: Dallas police question two suspected prostitutes. In some cities, for every nine prostitutes charged, one pimp is arrested.

JUSTICE

Sexual Slavery on Main Street

Trafficking of teenagers in the U.S. is getting worse. Here's what some Christians are trying to do about it. By Elissa Cooper in Asheville, North Carolina

F

or 72 hours last fall, FBI agents and local police targeted truck stops, casinos, night clubs, and adult entertainment spots in 36 American cities to rescue teenagers being trafficked for sex.

During the October raids, law enforcement rescued 52 minors (children under age 18) trafficked into either prostitution or adult entertainment. Nearly 700 people, including 60 pimps, were charged. Since June 2003, the task force has recovered 886 minors from the sex industry. The raids have resulted in 510 convictions and

\$3.1 million in property seizures.

Despite these victories, new research indicates that the sex-trafficking problem in the United States is more widespread and more severe than previously thought.

Shared Hope International, a Christian anti-trafficking nonprofit group founded by former Congresswoman Linda Smith in 1998, received a federal grant to survey domestic sex trafficking of minors. The survey found that many sex-trafficking victims were being misidentified and wrongly prosecuted as criminals. In some cases, the survey found, children as young as 9 years old were being sold for sex by

parents or boyfriends in exchange for illicit drugs. Organized crime networks are now using sex trafficking because the risk of prosecution is so low. The survey determined that a high percentage of teens rescued from trafficking return to the system due to the strong bonds they form with their pimps.

"Most Americans do not realize that child trafficking is a major problem on Main Street USA," said Ernie Allen, president of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, at a February congressional hearing. "These kids are victims. This is 21st-century slavery."

In some cases, children as young as 9 years old are sold for sex by parents or boyfriends in exchange for illicit drugs.

Researchers estimate that between 100,000 and 300,000 American children are trafficked within the U.S. each year. There is credible evidence, based on arrest statistics and field research, that sex trafficking is getting worse and that U.S. children under age 18 compose the largest segment of trafficking victims in the U.S.

Experts note that one of the greatest unmet needs is effective, long-term treatment for survivors. In one horrific case, authorities mistakenly released a teen victim into the custody of her pimp, who immediately put her back to work.

In recent years, a handful of Christian activists, mostly volunteers, have moved beyond advocacy and legislation, fighting for better enforcement of existing anti-trafficking laws. They play an active role in helping victims leave the commercial sex industry.

Long-term treatment for trafficking survivors—which for some victims takes many years—is where many Christians are also focusing their energy. Late last year, one of the newest residential facilities, located in Asheville, North Carolina, granted *Christianity Today* access to its group home.

Most residential homes for trafficking survivors are secular and draw upon the larger community for volunteers. But Hope House is distinct for being faith-based, running entirely on charitable giving and Christian volunteers.

STILL A KID

Beads and jewelry-making tools litter the dining room table of a well-furnished home in North Carolina. A side table holds finished pieces made by “Jordan,” a 15-year-old girl who lives at Hope House. The seemingly commonplace scene is anything but. Fewer than 50 beds are available in the country for teens escaping sex trafficking, and Hope House has room for no more than five girls. As a teenage survivor of domestic sex trafficking, Jordan has

defied the odds.

A chronic runaway, Jordan was drawn into trafficking by her much older “boyfriend,” who lured her with shelter, food, and affection. He even called her his fiancée. But weeks after they met, he forced Jordan, then 14, into prostitution. She was beaten frequently by family members of her pimp and had a miscarriage as a result. Eventually, she was arrested and thrown into jail, where an agency that works with sexually exploited teens found her and helped place her at Hope House.

International human trafficking often involves crossing a national border. But under U.S. federal law, trafficking is defined as “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining [of] a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act where such an act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age.”

Thus, any child younger than 18 involved in forced commercial sex acts is being trafficked, since the child is below the age of consent, even though the age of consent in most states is 16. Pimps are well aware of the age-of-consent laws and frequently provide counterfeit identification to prostituted children, who are coached to lie about their age.

Pimps also use extreme forms of mind control to force children to take part in sexual activity day after day. Police say repeated rape, beatings, isolation, branding with tattoos, and death threats are some ways pimps maintain their control. Over time these techniques create extreme dependence and form what experts call a “trauma bond.” Such bonds are likened to the Stockholm syndrome, in which a traumatized hostage assumes the perspective of the kidnapper in order to survive.

“Some girls are locked in and can’t leave, and some girls can go out in the streets. But they are scared to death,” Emily Fitchpatrick, founder of Hope House, told CT.

When Jordan first came to Hope House, she put up a tough front. Only slowly did she begin to share more of her life. Today she regularly journals and meets with a Christian counselor but still has nightmares about her past.

“She’s still a kid,” Fitchpatrick says, “but the things she’s been through are some things even adults don’t go through.”

Survivors of sex trafficking are not required to enter residential treatment. Before Jordan arrived, another resident stayed only three weeks. Five other girls were supposed to come but backed out. “It’s such a challenge to even get them to treatment,” Fitchpatrick says.

SUPPORT NETWORKS EXPAND

Hope House is a project of On Eagles Wings, a ministry to hurting women founded by Fitchpatrick in 2007. After a rowdy adolescence involving alcohol, drugs, and sex, Fitchpatrick gave her life to the Lord and was given the idea for a ministry geared toward women. For years she prayed and waited for direction on the ministry’s focus.

Fitchpatrick later joined forces with Kim Kern, a co-worker at the Billy Graham Training Center at the Cove in Asheville. Still unsure of their mission, they initially worked with homeless women, until Fitchpatrick sensed that God was directing them to strip-club outreach and issues related to women at sexual risk.

When Fitchpatrick went on a short-term mission to Bangkok, Thailand, she learned about the extent of human trafficking and the sex tourism industry. When she returned to North Carolina, she researched domestic trafficking and realized how little long-term residential care was available for survivors. That led to the creation of Hope House. Kern continues to work full-time at the Cove in addition to being vice president of On Eagles Wings. Fitchpatrick serves as its paid full-time president.

Trained volunteers make up the core of Hope House’s ministry. Volunteers like Maureen Hagar and Dee Schronce draw on their own traumatic experiences to help trafficking survivors. Hagar belonged to a motorcycle gang in which she witnessed violence towards women, and endured

it herself. After being badly injured in a gang fight, Hagar entered a long period of recovery. During that period, a friend took her to church, and Hagar immediately gave her life to Christ.

"It's very hard to get out of that lifestyle, and that's how I relate to the girls here," Hagar told CT. Hagar still finds that many people struggle to grasp the extent to which prostituted girls are victims.

Schronce was sexually abused as a child and passed through a number of institutions before running away at age 17. If there had been a place like Hope House, she says, she would have gone there. Instead, a couple she befriended drugged her and began trafficking her. She eventually escaped, but it took Schronce 25 years before she could talk about it; there's a "certain stigma and shame that goes along

with being a victim," she told CT.

will never be accepted. Smith says that the church needs to be right there with "open arms, hope, and acceptance."

REAL MEN DON'T BUY SEX

Until recently, researchers largely overlooked the demand side of sex trafficking. In 2008, Shared Hope, with another federal grant, conducted 12 months of field research on the demand for commercial sex in Japan, the Netherlands, Jamaica, and the U.S.

The research on the U.S. reveals a well-established business model for illicit sexual services. It mimics a shopping mall in offering the buyer variety, flexible pricing, and individualized service. Multimedia and Internet technology is the single greatest facilitator driving growth; pimping, for example, is frequently glamorized

Repeated rape, beatings, isolation, branding with tattoos, and death threats are some ways pimps maintain control of prostituted children.

with being a victim," she told CT.

Despite all that she suffered, Schronce says, she is "glad everything [she] went through wasn't in vain." She never thought her experience would be useful.

All over North America, faith-based organizations similar to On Eagles Wings are rising up:

- Near San Diego, Generate Hope, a faith-based organization, opened a safe house in March 2010 for victims of sex trafficking ages 18 and older. It provides residential care, job training, and therapy.
- In the Midwest, the Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation has produced a 34-page toolkit designed to help church leaders take practical steps to fight domestic trafficking.
- In central Ohio, Theresa Flores, a trafficking survivor, Christian speaker, and author of the autobiographical *The Slave Across the Street*, is raising funds to open a shelter, Gracehaven House, for trafficking survivors in the region.

Shared Hope's Smith believes the toughest spiritual battle is that sexually trafficked girls come to believe they are worthless and

in popular music, films, and videos, and prostitution is treated like a recreational activity. "The only way to impede sex trafficking is to end demand—to stop buyers from buying," the report concludes.

Toward this goal, on Father's Day 2006 a group of men from the Pacific Northwest started a campaign, "She Has a Name." Its goal is to raise awareness at truck stops, sporting events, and tourist areas about sex trafficking. The group created a website, *TheDefendersUSA.org*, that invites men to commit to not have any part in the commercialized sex industry. Outside truck stops, they demonstrate with signs that read REAL MEN DON'T BUY SEX.

Elsewhere, similar awareness campaigns are taking shape. Since September 2009, a team of five young Christian filmmakers has traveled across the country to make the documentary *Sex + Money*. Executive producer Morgan Perry said increasing awareness means helping the general public understand that sex trafficking is widespread and market-driven. Film narrator Scott Martin noted that "many Americans look at this as a

victimless crime. What we're realizing is that prostitution is not a victimless crime." The feature-length film is set to debut by October 2010. The filmmakers also provide a state-by-state anti-trafficking online directory to help people get involved in their own area.

In the meantime, Congress has pressed for more resources to fight domestic trafficking. President Obama recently signed legislation that adds \$12.5 million to the fight. In late February, the Senate held a hearing, "In Our Own Backyard: Child Prostitution and Sex Trafficking in the United States."

HANDS THAT HEAL

But while the government's involvement to end trafficking is important, the church's involvement is even more so, says Kern.

"Maybe it's not [God's] plan that the government do more; maybe it's his plan that his church do more," says Kern. "When the government gets involved, you can't talk about Jesus. Maybe instead of lobbying Congress, we need to lobby the church." Even though faith is crucial to Hope House, Fitchpatrick says, "We are not here to shove religion down their throats." Church attendance is encouraged but not mandatory. For the girls who do want religious guidance, the On Eagles Wings board carefully selects its partners, volunteers, and churches for the girls to attend.

At its 2009 Christmas party, an On Eagles Wings board member told Jordan, "If you're the only person to come through this house, and we were able to make some sort of difference, then mission accomplished."

Five months later, Jordan continues her rehabilitation work at Hope House, guided by staff using the Hands That Heal curriculum developed by Christian educators. The curriculum is used by believers worldwide to help trafficking survivors. "She recognizes that God is blessing her and that there's more to life than what she knew on the streets," Fitchpatrick says.

But the man who trafficked Jordan walks free, and has yet to face criminal charges. ➤

Elissa Cooper is a freelance writer in Wheaton, Illinois.

"Let us press on to know the LORD ... who will come to us like ... the spring rains that give drink to the earth." ~Hosea 6:3

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The CEB translation is sponsored by the Common English Bible Committee, an alliance of denominational publishers.

Q.

Who is planting new churches among unreached towns and villages of India?

A.

Native missionaries serving with indigenous evangelistic missions.



Q.

Who provides financial assistance to the indigenous missions of India?

A.

Christian Aid is assisting more than 200 India missions. They are winning souls and planting new churches among more than 400 different tribes and nations.

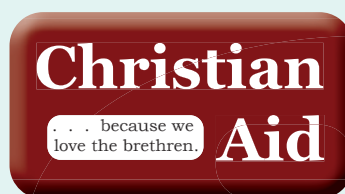
Q. How is Christian Aid financed?

A. Christian Aid is supported entirely by freewill gifts and offerings from Bible-believing, missionary-minded Christians, churches and organizations.

Q. Are other indigenous missions in need of financial help for their missionaries?

A. Christian Aid is in communication with more than 4000 indigenous missions, some based in almost every unevangelized country on earth. They have over 200,000 missionaries in need of support. All Christians who believe in Christ's "Great Commission" are invited to join hands with Christian Aid in finding help for thousands of native missionaries who are now out on the fields of the world with no promise of regular financial support.

For more than 50 years Christian Aid Mission has been sending financial help to indigenous evangelistic ministries based in unevangelized countries. Currently more than 700 such ministries are being assisted in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe. They deploy more than 75,000 native missionaries which are spreading the gospel of Christ among unreached people within more than 3000 different tribes and nations.

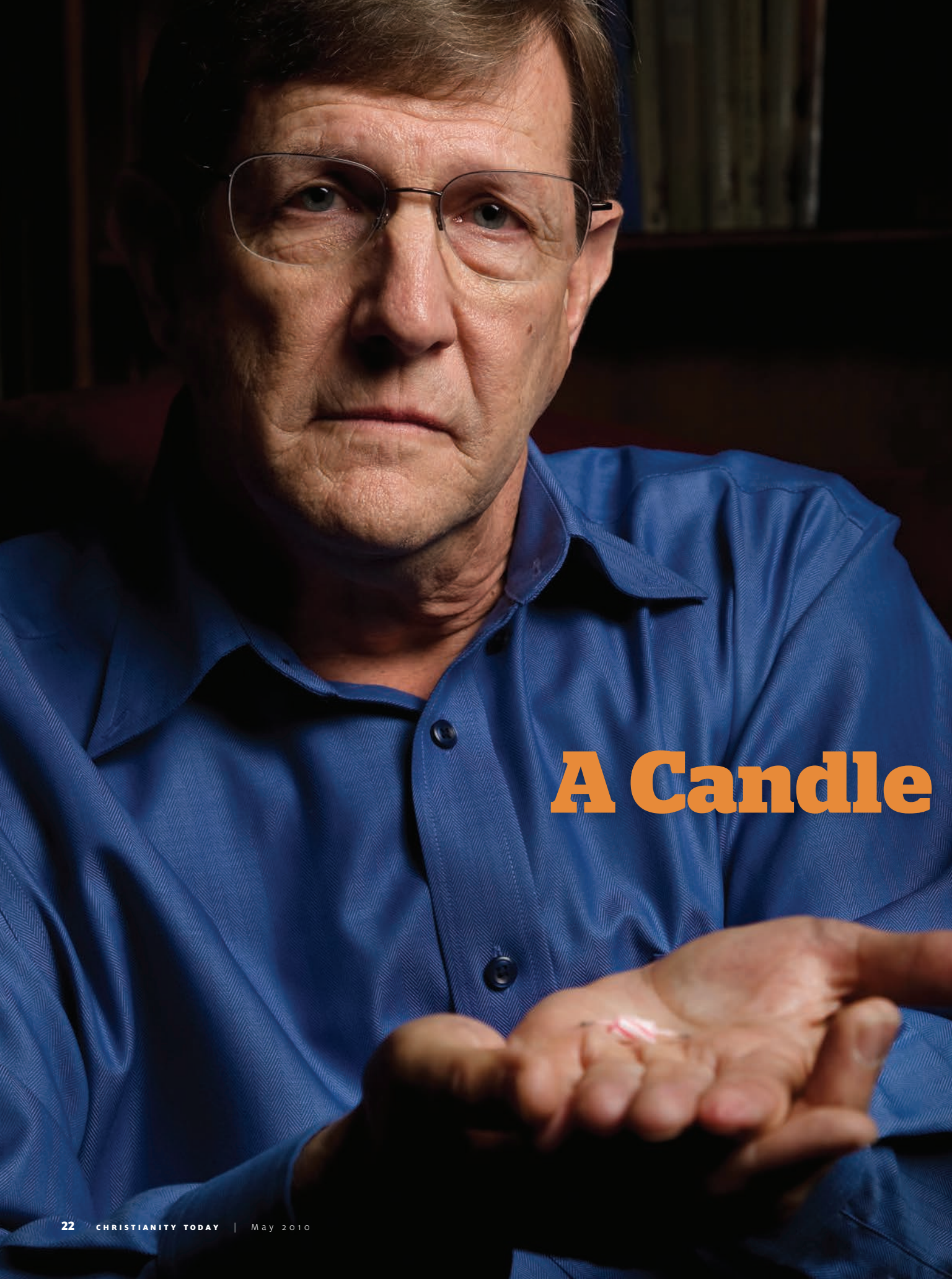


When you contact Christian Aid, ask for a free copy of Dr. Bob Finley's 285-page book, **REFORMATION IN FOREIGN MISSIONS.**

Christian Aid Mission
P. O. Box 9037
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434-977-5650
www.christianaid.org



A close-up portrait of a middle-aged man with short brown hair and glasses, wearing a blue button-down shirt. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. His hands are held out in front of him, palm up, and a small, lit candle is resting in his left hand. The background is dark and out of focus.

A Candle

{ COVER STORY }

A

T A TURNING POINT

in my life in 2007, I realized that I needed to allow God to redeem the story of my childhood. That story was so painfully confusing that I did not speak of it for 35 years. Where did my prayers go, my cries for mercy and rescue screamed into my pillow? Did I have the laziest guardian angel in all of heaven?

I received my calling, my purpose, and my life's mission in my darkest and most painful moment, in about 90 seconds at age 10. The moment involved a pink birthday candle, one that had been trimmed with a pocketknife at the blunt end so that it could burn from both directions. The wicks were lit by the man who had authority over me, the houseparent of a boarding school for the children of missionaries in West Africa. The school had been my home for nine months of each year since I was 6 years old. My whole life can be divided into two parts: B.C. (before the candle) and A.D. (after the damage).

'AFRICANS IN HELL BECAUSE OF WESLEY'

The houseparent had marched me to the school's dining hall, dragged a metal chair across the concrete floor, and slammed it down in front of my schoolmates. He threw me up on the chair and jammed the candle in my hand.

"Children," he said, "you cannot serve both God and Satan. Wesley has tried. You cannot burn a candle at both ends without getting burned. Watch what happens when you try."

Fifty children stared in silence. Nobody dared even breathe.

Striking a match, the man lit both wicks.

"Watch!" Standing on that chair, my knees knocking, I stared incredulously at the candle in my shaking fingers as I contemplated what this would mean. Beyond the two flames, I could see the faces of my friends—children who, like me, had been gathered up from villages and mission stations throughout West Africa.

Mission policy dictated that all MKS leave their parents at age 6 and travel 700 miles (a week by truck) to this isolated jungle school. They, like me, had experienced unspeakable cruelty in this place. The people in charge were missionaries who had gone to Africa to save souls but, I don't know, perhaps did not measure up linguistically or cross-culturally, so instead had been assigned to the least desirable task on the field: taking care of other missionaries' children. Unsupervised, they took out their frustration and rage on their most convenient targets: the children in their charge. I learned early that terrible things can happen when children are deemed unimportant, the lowest of priorities.

The stage for this horrendous moment had been set by four years of abuse.

The president of
Compassion International
tells his story
of childhood abuse
and deliverance in
a West Africa
boarding school.
By Wess Stafford

in the Darkness

For all my young life at the school, I had endured beatings daily. Belt buckles and tire-tread sandals had bruised and torn my flesh since age 6. There were a million ways to earn a beating here—infractions like a wrinkle in a bedspread or an open eye during naptime. At age 9 we learned in math class how to average. The most recurring event in my life I could think of was how many times I had been beaten. For a span of weeks, I kept track of my beatings, hiding the tally under my pillow. When I did the math, I discovered that I was being beaten an average of 17 times per week.

The boarding school staff abused us in every way a child can be abused—not only physically and emotionally but spiritually as well. We were terrified of their powerful and vengeful God, reminded daily that we were little sinners in the hands of their angry God.

I won't dwell on the sexual abuse we endured, but wherever evil reigns unchecked, this favorite weapon of Satan's always lurks. The people who read us Bible stories and beat us during the day prowled the dorm halls at night, preying on the defenseless. Older boys, victims themselves, learned to mimic their elders in that depraved environment to serve their own lustful desires, and they used blackmail and physical pain to silence us.

There was no one to protect us. We had no advocates, no arms to run to. The very people who should have been our defenders were in fact our attackers.

Our houseparent spoke angrily to the children. 'This boy here is Satan's tool. He told, and the Devil used him to destroy his parents' ministry. There will be Africans in hell because of Wesley.'

And now, standing on that chair with the candle gripped between my fingers, I was at my lowest, darkest moment. I cannot describe the cumulative hurt, rage, and hopelessness that welled up and wracked my 10-year-old soul. At this man's hand, I had always lost. Plain and simple, he was bigger and stronger. He was a man; I was a boy.

He spoke angrily to the assembled children. "This boy here is Satan's tool. He *told*, and the Devil used him to destroy his parents' ministry. There will be Africans in hell because of Wesley."

Hearing those words, there arose in me a rage, a passion as I had never experienced before and have not since. I had felt I could endure almost any treatment at his hands—I had for years. But the candle incident was different. Never had words cut so deeply.

Yes, I had *told*. As a desperate boy, I had cried out to my mother for help. For years, 50 of us children had courageously maintained our silence. We were repeatedly told, "If you tell what happens here, you will destroy your parents' ministry." Our abusers used our love



Right-Hand Man: Stafford (middle) helped his mission-ary father (left) bring the gospel to Africans on the Ivory Coast.

for God, for our parents, and for Africans to secure our silence about the horrors of that place.

Oh, we wrote letters home every Sunday. But we couldn't even hint at our loneliness or the abuse. Our

letters were censored, and the slightest attempt to cry out resulted in a beating, then a forced rewriting of the letter. We learned to be as silent as lambs. We had no idea that our silence perpetuated the evil against us. Even during the three months home with our parents every year, we all kept silent. We loved them so much. We knew how passionately they spread the gospel, and I loved my African village friends. If my silence could win their salvation, I would endure anything.

At school, we were not allowed to have pictures of our parents

or to cry from homesickness. Each year, my mind would capture a final image of my parents saying goodbye. For the first month, I could see them every time I closed my eyes, and at the tender ages of 6, 7, and 8, I couldn't help crying myself to

sleep every night, as silently as possible. But by the ninth month of school, I could no longer remember what my parents looked like. I was so afraid I would break their hearts by not recognizing them when I went home.

THE CODE OF SILENCE BROKEN

The crime that led to the burning candle happened at age 10, after a year on furlough in the United States. I found myself at the airport with other MKS saying goodbye to our parents. We were about to board a propeller plane that would take us back to Africa, and our parents would follow by ship.

At the gate, I took my mother's face in my hands and couldn't let go. I stared intently at her beautiful, kind face. "What are you doing, Wesley?"

"Mommy, I just don't want to forget what you look like."

She dissolved into tears, and so did I. I saw a moment of

opportunity, a glimmer of hope for rescue. In 30 seconds, I blurted out my plea.

"Mommy, please don't send me back! Please don't send me back! They hate me . . . they beat me . . . I'm scared." I begged, "Please, please!"

I will never forget the look of horror in my mother's eyes.

"What?" she gasped. She held me tightly. "What . . . what can I do?" I could feel her sobbing in my embrace.

Not a minute later, my sister and I were whisked away with the other children. My friends, who had overheard, looked at me with DEAD MAN WALKING in their eyes. They didn't want to even be near me for fear of sharing in my imminent punishment. I had done the unthinkable—I had broken the code of silence.

During my parents' month-long voyage at sea, my mother, brokenhearted and confused, had an emotional and psychological breakdown. Upon arriving in Africa, she was soon sent back to the U.S. for treatment. Word of her illness and what had caused it spread like wildfire. When the news reached the boarding school, the staff was enraged.

I had resigned myself to the coming humiliation. In minutes I would scream and throw down the candle—until I heard his last phrase: ". . . parents' ministry ruined . . . Africans in hell because of Wesley." That broke my heart more than the humiliation, more than any pain that may come my way ever could.

I loved Africans. In my heart I was African. Every summer my

spirit was restored by the loving-kindness of the poverty-stricken Africans in my village. I never fell down during those three months without an African woman swooping in to pick me up and wipe tears from my eyes. I used to pray every night in that village, "Lord, if you love me, let me wake up black tomorrow, like all my friends. I know you can do this!" I would check every morning to see if I had been turned black, only to be disappointed. But maybe tomorrow.

I was my dad's right-hand man. Together we opened villages to the gospel where no white person had been since the slave trade. I lobbed stones with my slingshot into the trees to keep noisy birds away so that my father's voice could be heard as he shared the gospel. I watched Africans' faces when they first heard the word *Jesu*. And I saw the hope that was built in them. I was a missionary as far as I was concerned. So, Africans in hell because of *me*?

As the flames licked closer to my skin, from deep within me arose a gust of strength I cannot fully explain to this day. I had a desperate thought: *I could win this time*. This time, the houseparent had unwittingly put himself in a place where I could actually win, if I could endure enough pain. I knew in my heart that he was wrong. He was lying, and I felt the evil and injustice to the core of my soul. I was not Satan's tool. I was a little boy with a broken heart who had found his voice and cried out for rescue. So, *enough*—enough shame, enough abuse, enough lies. It had to stop somewhere, sometime. I made my decision: It stops now! I'm not letting go!

Nothing was going to make me cry out or drop that candle. This is

A Badly Broken Boarding School

The story behind the cover story. By Katelyn Beaty

Nestled in the temperate mountains of Guinea, West Africa, Mamou Alliance Academy had all the appearances of a haven away from home. Run by the Christian & Missionary Alliance (C&MA) denomination from the 1920s to 1971, the school boarded over 200 children of missionaries working in the surrounding regions. Starting at age 6, the children lived there for nine months of every year. Defunct for decades, Mamou is remembered, in the words of one alumnus, as "the Auschwitz of missionary kid boarding schools."

In the late 1980s, the Colorado Springs-based C&MA began receiving reports of rampant abuse at Mamou: children slapped and punched, raped and fondled, and threatened with undoing their parents' mission if they told. In 1995, a committee of some 30 alumni approached the C&MA for an investigation and restitution. It responded by forming an independent commission of inquiry (ICI) the following year. After hearing 80 testimonies, the ICI released a report in April 1998 identifying nine offenders—four retired, three dead, and two no longer with the C&MA. It found the denomination negligent in monitoring Mamou and training teachers. Contributing editor John W. Kennedy

extensively covered the story for *Christianity Today* in 1995 and 1998.

Since the report, the C&MA has drastically changed its educational system. Starting in 2000, parents are not required to send children to boarding schools, and today 75 percent of MKs live with their parents year-round. Those who board remotely are mostly teenagers and attend schools certified by the Association of Christian Schools International. The C&MA board of directors drafted policies and procedures should accusations arise. "We've tried to really change so that the sins of our past are not repeated," vice president for international ministries Robert Fetherlin told CT.

Meanwhile, Mamou's survivors have arrived at varying degrees of resolution. Retreats, including one held by the C&MA in 1999, have provided support and forums for truth-telling. A handful of survivors formed the MK

Safety Net, a group that follows the denomination's efforts to change its missions culture. *All God's Children*, a 2008 documentary comprising interviews and live footage of Mamou, reveals that many survivors are no longer believers, though a few are pastors; all have fought psychological and spiritual angst. But going public about the past has helped. "I've always carried in my head a deep shroud of secrecy that allowed the pain . . . to go on," said Beverly Shellrude Thompson, president of MK Safety Net. "[But] the story needs to be told. There's healing in the story." ☪



Unsafe Home: Mamou Alliance Academy was shuttered in 1971 after decades of abuse. The C&MA no longer operates overseas boarding schools.

where I would take my stand—this was my little Masada.

I shook violently, tears brimming in anticipation of burned flesh. He turned his back on me, his tirade growing in intensity. But I could no longer hear his voice. All I could hear was the pulsing of blood in my ears. I clenched my teeth, tightened every muscle in my body, and pinched the candle as fiercely as I could. I stared as the edges of my fingers turned red. A blister popped up. I was transported out of my body. I floated above this terrified boy, watching as if it were happening to someone else. I saw a wisp of smoke rise up on either side of my fingers. I would *not* let go.

Just then, a child in the front row couldn't stand it any longer, and he jumped up and slapped the candle out of my hand. The children scattered in all directions. The meeting was over. But standing there alone on my chair, I had received my *calling*. In an instant, I had gone from *victim* to *victor*. From that day forward, I would protect children. I would forever speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves.

The school was eventually shuttered, and many years later, the abusers were held accountable—not jailed like they would be today

For 32 years, I have fought for little ones who have no voice and no choice. The passion that gripped me at age 10 still rages today.

due to the statute of limitations, but after an official inquiry, when they were “censored” by the mission and no longer allowed to work with children. The school’s mks limped away from their childhoods, many with lifelong scars. Thankfully, for me, my story—a story that Satan intended for evil but that God redeemed for good—has a different ending.

THE ONGOING END

My story finally emerged when I wrote a book, *Too Small to Ignore: Why the Least of These Matters Most*, in 2007. My idea was to present a manifesto—strategically, statistically, and scripturally sound—about the importance of championing children, one that would awaken the church. But my publishers challenged me: “Wess, they won’t care what you know until they know why you care. Are you going to write a book, or are you willing to really fight a battle for children?” At that crossroads, I realized that I must allow God to redeem even the painful parts of my story.

My story is what has fueled my passion against injustice, my crusade against abuse, my fight against poverty. It is what drove me to Compassion International. For 32 years, I have fought for little ones



Friend and Advocate: For 17 years Stafford has been president of Compassion, which uses a 1-1 sponsorship model to provide holistic care to over 1 million children.

who have no voice and no choice. The passion that gripped me at age 10 still rages within me today.

Poverty and abuse speak the same message into the heart of a child: “Give up. Nobody cares about you. There’s nothing special about you. Nothing will ever change. You always lose, so give up!” As I travel across the world, I see the fingerprints of Satan; he is using the same weapons he used on me. In children the world over, I see empty, hollow eyes where the flame of a spirit created in the image of God is reduced to a smoldering ember.

My job now is to champion the cause of these children, to help them understand the love Jesus Christ has for them. Imagine my joy when every day hundreds of children accept Jesus as their Savior, at the knee of their pastor or with a Sunday school teacher under the mango tree. Imagine my joy that we daily vaccinate thousands of children. Imagine my joy that I get to challenge the church about the importance of children—to explain, for example, that budgets that devote 10 percent to children’s ministry make little strategic sense considering that 85 percent of people who come to Christ do so before the age of 14.

All these years later, I am still never more than 10 seconds away from tears. But not all my tears are from sorrow. Just as easily, I can be moved to tears of great joy at what I get to do. I see victories in children’s lives as evil is defeated, just as it was defeated in my own life.

In finally telling my whole story, I have discovered the other side of my life’s tapestry. Where I once saw only knots and tangles, I now see a beautiful picture of God’s grace—his deliberate orchestration in a life lovingly entrusted to me. Sure enough, he had heard every scream, felt every blow, and wiped every tear as, through the pain, he crafted me into a tool he could use, redeemed for his glory. ✚

Wess Stafford is president and CEO of Compassion International, a Colorado Springs–based child development organization that sponsors children. This article was adapted from a talk Stafford gave at Woodmen Valley Chapel in July 2009.

Go to ChristianBibleStudies.com for “Redeeming Suffering,” a Bible study based on this article.



HERE IS THE CHURCH HERE IS THE STEEPLE OPEN THE DOORS?

The doors of the church are being bound. The growing intrusion of government into the affairs of the church poses a profound threat to church autonomy and even to our most basic religious liberties – freedom of speech, freedom to exercise religious beliefs, and freedom of access. Pastors must be willing to speak up to reclaim and secure the right of the Church to be the Church. To learn what you can do, visit us online:

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Mission Fields

The massive global migration we see



on the Move

today presents unparalleled opportunities for ministry. By J. Samuel Escobar



Island of Hope: A boat carrying these African émigrés was captured off the coast of Lampedusa. The Italian island is the transit point for about 15,000 migrants annually. About 2,000 such 'boat people' die each year attempting to reach Europe.

Migration is a major feature of the 21st century. A 2005 United Nations report claims that there are nearly 191 million international migrants worldwide. The International Organization for Migration estimates the number of foreign migrants at around 200 million. Another 100 million are on the move within their own borders.

Migration is enormously complex. Its causes and its effects range from simple economic betterment to the horrors of war, ethnic conflict, and genocide. Whatever the causes, it is an undeniable opportunity for evangelization that the church dare not ignore, says veteran missiologist J. Samuel Escobar in this installment of the Global Conversation.

IN OUR 50 YEARS as missionaries, my wife and I have become familiar with immigration laws and offices in the countries where we have served: Argentina, Brazil, Canada, the United States, and now Spain. Our most recent experience of standing in line for hours, filling out forms and asking God for patience to cope with bureaucratic slowness, was in Valencia in 2007. Standing in such lines, you hear amazing stories of the joys, tragedies, dramatic expectations, and disappointments of migrant people.

Spain is geographically situated between Europe and Africa, and tied to the Americas by three centuries as an imperial power. As such, it attracts migrants from Latin America, Africa, and Eastern Europe. The country's Catholic church and its tiny minority of Protestant churches have faced the challenge of this massive wave. It is a missionary challenge that forces churches to go to the roots of their faith.

In the middle of the night on May 4, 2002, in the town of Arganda just outside Madrid, a group of skinheads painted swastikas and racist phrases on the walls of a Romanian evangelical church. Then they set it on fire. Similarly, Joaquín Yebra, pastor of a Baptist church in Vallecas, a suburb of Madrid, has had services interrupted by young men whom he describes not as skinheads but as hooligans who have drunk too

FRANCO ORIGLIA / GETTY

much. Twice a week his church provides food and medicine for 600 people, mostly immigrants from Morocco and Latin America. Some neighbors have protested the long lines that form for three hours, though most of them are understanding and sympathetic.

At the 2004 Forum for World Evangelization, hosted by the Lausanne Committee in Pattaya, Thailand, the “Globalization and the Gospel” working group heard stories of how churches in Canada and Japan responded to the challenges posed by migration and how they were transformed in the process. “We cannot underestimate the sheer power global migration has on the interdependence of our daily lives and collective fates,

Migrants are people in transition, experiencing the loss of roots and open to new commitments, ready to assume faith in a personal way.

creating our larger common horizon of experience,” the group’s report concluded.

But the challenge and opportunity are nothing new. Migration was an important factor in the 16th-century Reformation. Celebrations of the fifth centennial of John Calvin’s birth bring to mind the fact that he was a migrant who had fled France. He became a refugee in Geneva, Switzerland, where 5,000 migrants joined a population of 10,300 between the years 1542 and 1560. Historian Fred Brown describes “the terrific task facing church and state in Geneva to take care of the waves of people inundating the city.” Calvin launched initiatives for the professional training of young people and the readaptation of adults to new jobs. He also preached clearly against those who wanted to benefit from cheap labor.

MAGNETS FOR MIGRANTS

In the New Testament, we see that migration was a key factor in the advance of the church. Paul ends his Epistle to the Romans (chap. 16) by greeting a long list of people. He had met them on his trips through the Roman Empire, and they all ended up in Rome. Migration was constant in the Roman Empire, just as it is in the 21st century. As a center of cultural, economic, and political power, Rome attracted migrants just as rich countries today draw people from underdeveloped countries who are seeking jobs, security, and a future they do not find at home.

Actually, the whole New Testament shows people on the move. It also depicts Christian missions taking place in that context. People scattered by religious persecution founded the church in Antioch (Acts 11:19). In other cases, voluntary migrants moved with a missionary purpose in mind. Paul describes how, having completed his evangelistic task in the eastern half of the empire, he feels driven to go to the other half to evangelize (Rom. 15:19, 23–24).

Priscilla and Aquila, the first couple whom

Paul greets (Rom. 16:3), provide a key pattern of church formation in New Testament times. Aquila is described as a Jew from the region of Pontus who had to leave Rome due to the persecution of Jews (Acts 18:1–4). Priscilla and Aquila supported themselves through specialized work involving leather. Few tools were necessary for this trade, making mobility possible. It was an ideal occupation for a traveling man like Paul. Acts says that “he stayed with them, and they worked together” (18:3, NRSV, used throughout). After “a considerable time” (v. 18), the trio moved on to Ephesus. By the time Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, the faithful couple had returned to Rome; the apostle praises them as people for whom he and “all the churches of the Gentiles” are thankful (Rom. 16:4).

During their journeys, voluntary and involuntary, Priscilla and Aquila planted churches in at least three cities of the empire. The pattern continues in our time. Employees of a British railway company planted many evangelical churches in Argentina in the early 20th century. I have worshiped in churches in Brazil, Peru, and Spain founded or developed by Korean businessmen. In the 1960s, Spanish migrants planted Spanish-speaking churches in Germany, now attended by Latin American migrants. More recently, Filipino young people have planted churches in the United States, and Ghanaian migrants have done the same in the Netherlands.

A notable case is Sunday Adelaja, a young man from Nigeria who went to study in the Soviet republic of Belarus with a Communist scholarship. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, he moved to Ukraine and with seven others founded the Word of Faith Church in Kiev on February 6, 1994. The church has grown at an incredible pace and now claims 30,000 adherents, mostly white. Today it is known as the Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for All Nations, with 700 branches in 35 countries including the U.S., Germany, and Israel. It runs 217 centers to help drug and alcohol addicts and 27 educational institutions that minister to 170,000 persons.

Paul’s list of greetings in Romans 16 allows us to imagine at least five house churches in Rome. We find names such as Mary (v. 6), Andronicus and Junia (v. 7), and Herodion (v. 11), all evidently Jewish. Other names such as Phoebe (v. 1), Narcissus (v. 11), Ampliatus (v. 8), and Urbanus (v. 9) have Gentile origins. Big cities are melting pots where different races and cultures meet; sometimes the meeting is traumatic. Racism does not target only some people and cultures. All of us are ethnocentric, and the acceptance of “the other,” the one who is different, is not always easy. Social and economic crises bring out racism’s ugly ghosts, as we see in some European, Asian, and African cities today. The reluctance to accept those who are different also affects Christians; we see the problem throughout 20 centuries of church history. In both the writings of Paul and the Book of Acts, we see that the encounter of cultures and races caused many problems in the early church.

Some of the house churches in Rome comprised Jewish believers, and others comprised

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.

Gentiles. Some may have mixed the two groups. In those communities, a degree of mutual acceptance and welcoming took place. Paul encourages these varied Christians to accept one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. His exhortation has a definite theological connotation and a pastoral intent: "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Rom. 15:7). By pointing to the way in which Christ receives those

who come to him, Paul's exhortation gets to the heart of the gospel he has developed in the epistle. Such mutual acceptance included accepting cultural differences such as different eating habits and culturally rooted prohibitions (Rom. 14:1-6). Paul's missionary strategy, outlined in chapter 15, includes actions and teachings designed to foster mutual acceptance between Jews and Gentiles. For example, note the collection

that the Gentile churches gathered at Paul's initiative to help the impoverished Jewish believers in Judea (Rom. 15:25-29).

Such mutual acceptance was also reflected in the practical hospitality that became a mark of first-century Christian churches. Paul's words of commendation for Phoebe, probably the carrier of his letter to the Romans, could not be more specific: "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well" (Rom. 16:1-2).

THREE CHALLENGES

Churches that are in countries flooded with immigrants face similar challenges and opportunities as the early church. This is true in the big cities of every country, not only in Europe and North America. The amazing growth of churches in Latin American cities is explained partly by their welcoming of displaced persons from rural areas. In many cases, a church's embrace of a migrant becomes a symbolic prelude to the experience of being received by Jesus Christ and finding salvation in him.

Migration presents a threefold challenge to missions-minded Christians. The first challenge is *Christian compassion and sensitivity*. Churches need to provide funding and volunteers to respond to the massive flow of humans who face hunger, homelessness, and marginalization. Recent decades have prepared evangelical Christians for that exercise of compassion. This has certainly been a theme of the Lausanne Movement and its emphasis on holistic missions. Churches might also learn

to cooperate with secular nonprofit organizations, which are patterned after the Christian model of volunteer involvement but are usually suspicious of churches.

Second, *churches need to take a prophetic stance against the injustices that immigrants face*. Sometimes churches find it difficult to become mouthpieces for the poor and downtrodden. They don't like to pronounce a critical word to societies that

are panicking about new waves of foreigners. But the church must look back to the sources of her own faith and to an ethical treasure of compassion that is a half-forgotten part of the Western and European heritage.

Third, *churches should see migration as an opportunity for evangelism*. Migrants are people in transition, people on the move who are experiencing the loss of roots. They are usu-

ally open to new commitments and ready to assume faith in a personal way. Historically, missionary Christianity has often flourished in the context of migration precisely because of the two aspects of the migrant experience. One is the pain of homelessness and uprootedness, and the other side is new freedom. The presence of new believers in old communities brings pastoral challenges as the church is forced to face the other in its midst. But since when have evangelism and church growth been without challenges?

In the face of massive migration worldwide, the Book of Romans can have a powerful effect. If European churches reflect the embrace of Christ rather than the exclusion of a frightened society, they may become better bases for a new evangelization. North American congregations can become loving communities that deliver the church from the temptation to imbibe cheap civil religion. If new migrant churches hear Paul in Romans, they will find ways to connect with long-established churches in need of revival and a new missionary spirit. And in places like Latin America, Africa, and some parts of Asia, where the church is growing and vital, enthusiasm will be matched by a striving toward maturity. All in all, God will use migration to accomplish Christian missions, just as he did in the first century.



J. Samuel Escobar, chair of the Lausanne III (Cape Town 2010)

Advisory Council, teaches at the Theological Seminary of the Baptist Union in Madrid, Spain, and is honorary president of the United Bible Societies. A native of Peru, he has served on the staff of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students as both a missionary and a missiology professor.



Entry Point: Immigrants gather outside the Short Stay Immigration Center in Spanish Melilla on the Moroccan coast, where in 2005 guards fired at migrants storming the fences.



Faithful Presence

James Davison Hunter says our strategies to transform culture are ineffective, and the goal itself is misguided.
Interview by Christopher Benson

OVER TWO DECADES have passed since Allan Bloom's famous polemic, *The Closing of the American Mind*, shook up the American academy. The time is ripe for another shakeup. Enter James Davison Hunter, whose latest contribution, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford), promises to shake up American Christianity. An endorsement for Bloom's book applies just as well to Hunter's: It "will be savagely attacked. And, indeed, it deserves it, as this is the destiny of all important books . . . Reading it will make many people indignant, but leave nobody indifferent."

KIRSTEN ROSE

Hunter, professor of religion, culture, and social theory at the University of Virginia, is author of *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* and *The Death of Character: On the Moral Education of America's Children*.

To Change the World comprises three essays. The first examines the common view of "culture as ideas," espoused by thinkers like Chuck Colson, and the corrective view of "culture as artifacts," as recently argued by Andy Crouch in *Culture Making*. Both views, argues Hunter, are characterized by idealism, individualism, and pietism.

Hunter develops an alternative view of culture, one that assigns roles not only to ideas and artifacts but also to "elites, networks, technology, and new institutions." American Christians—mainline Protestant, Catholic, and evangelical—will not and *cannot* change

the world through evangelism, political action, and social reform because of the working theory that undergirds their strategies. This theory says that "the essence of culture is found in the *hearts and minds of individuals*—in what are typically called 'values.'" According to Hunter, social science and history prove that many popular ideas, such as "transformed people transform cultures" (Colson) and "in one generation, you change the whole culture" (James Dobson), are "deeply flawed."

The second essay argues that "the public witness of the church today has become a political witness." Hunter critiques the political theologies of the Christian Right, Christian Left, and neo-Anabaptists, showing that unlikely bedfellows—James Dobson, Jim Wallis, and Stanley Hauerwas—are all "functional Nietzscheans" insofar as their resentment fuels a will to power, which perpetuates rather than heals "the dark nihilisms of the modern age."

The third essay offers a different paradigm for cultural engagement, one Hunter calls "faithful presence." Faithful presence is not about changing culture, let alone the world, but instead emphasizes cooperation between individuals *and* institutions in order to make disciples and serve the common good. "If there are benevolent consequences of our engagement with the world," Hunter writes, "it is precisely because it is *not* rooted in a desire to change the world for the better but rather because it is an expression of a desire to honor the creator of all goodness, beauty, and truth, a manifestation of our loving obedience to God, and a fulfillment of God's command to love our neighbor."



Christopher Benson, a writer and teacher in Denver, Colorado, spoke with Hunter about *To Change the World*. Benson's work has appeared in *The Weekly Standard*, *Books & Culture*, *Christian Scholar's Review*, *Image*, and *The City*. Mark Galli, senior managing editor of *Christianity Today*, assisted in the interview.

Visit ChristianityToday.com/ct to see responses to Hunter from Colson, a CT contributing editor, and Crouch, a CT editor at large.

What's wrong with viewing culture as ideas or as artifacts?

Both perspectives fail to recognize that culture is *also* infrastructure. Culture is constituted by very powerful institutions that operate on their own dynamics independent of individual will. Ideas do move history, and objects do have their place, but only under certain social conditions. When ideas do move history, it's not because those ideas are inherently truthful or obviously correct, but rather because of the way they're embedded within institutions and structures of power. Both perspectives are looking at the tip of the iceberg, overlooking the mass of ice beneath the water.

Why are the principal strategies for cultural change failing?

Evangelism, political action, and social reform are *worthy* undertakings, but they aren't decisively important if the goal is world changing. These strategies don't attend to the institutional dynamics of

Culture is organized according to a framework of center and periphery. *The New York Times* sells fewer copies than does *USA Today*, but *The New York Times* is at the center whereas *USA Today* is at the periphery. Some community colleges and state universities provide as good an education as the Ivy League colleges, but the Ivies are at the center, whereas community colleges and state universities are at the periphery.

By and large, American Christianity has produced a huge cultural economy, but it operates on the periphery of status rather than in the center. The importance of cultural capital is determined not by quantity but by quality. Quality is measured according to the kind of status it attracts, and status is almost always measured by exclusivity. As I note in my book, evangelicalism boasts a billion-dollar book publishing industry, yet the books produced are largely ignored by *The New York Review of Books*, *The New York Times Book Review*, *The Washington Post Book World*, and other key arbiters of public intellectual argument.

Are American Christians not elite enough?

Populism underwrites American Christianity, especially within evangelicalism. That populism speaks to cherished values, but it also works against the dynamics of cultural change. The main reason Christian believers today lack influence in the culture, despite their aspirations,

Evangelism, political action, and social reform are worthy undertakings, but they aren't decisively important if the goal is world changing.

culture formation and cultural change; in fact, they move in exactly the opposite direction of the ways in which cultures do change.

How is it that American public life is so profoundly secular when 85 percent of the population professes to be Christian? If a culture were simply the sum total of beliefs, values, and ideas that ordinary individuals hold, then the United States would be a far more religious society. Looking at our entertainment, politics, economics, media, and education, we are forced to conclude that the cultural influence of Christians is *negligible*. By contrast, Jews, who compose 3 percent of the population, exert significant cultural influence disproportionate to their numbers, notably in literature, art, science, medicine, and technology. Gays offer another example. Minorities would have no effect if culture were solely about ideas, but that's clearly not the case.

You argue that cultural change is not wrought by individuals in isolation from institutions. But why should we not regard William Wilberforce as an individual who changed the world?

What history tells us is that the key actor in history is *not* the individual genius but rather the network and the new institutions that arise out of that network. This is not to undermine or undersell the importance of charismatic figures like Luther, Calvin, or Wilberforce. That kind of genius, courage, and charisma, however, cannot be understood apart from a network of similarly oriented people.

You say that the "parallel institutions" of American Christianity are ineffectual as change agents in culture. Why?

is not because they don't *believe* enough or *try* hard enough or *think* Christianly enough. It's because they've been absent from the arenas in which the greatest influence in the culture is exerted. The culture-producing institutions of Christianity are largely marginalized in the economy of culture formation in North America. Its cultural capital is greatest where leverage in the larger culture is weakest.

But didn't the Vietnam War protests and the civil rights movement, both populist movements, force elites to change?

In the case of the anti-war movement, you must look at the demographic base of that protest. It was overwhelmingly white and upper-middle class, and disproportionately well-educated. This was not a protest that was organized by the working class or poor. In the case of the civil rights movement, it was black intellectuals in the church who mobilized people. The movement didn't gain the kind of traction it needed to really change laws and public policy until white intellectuals and clergy from the North became involved.

Ordinary people in social movements can and do have influence, but rarely do they gain world-changing traction until the overlapping networks of elites operate within the center-most institutions of cultural production.

You say that it is "nothing short of ludicrous" to claim that the culture can be changed in one generation. Why?

Changes in political systems and economic conditions can occur relatively quickly. The most profound changes in culture typically take place over the course of multiple generations, often in ways



Culture is far more profound at the level of *imagination* than at the level of argument. Deep structures of culture are found in the frameworks of our imagination, frameworks of meaning and moral order that are embedded in the very words we use. There's a difference between the weather and the climate. Contemporary politics is like the weather, changing day to day or week to week. But culture, in its most enduring qualities, isn't about the weather at all. It's about the climate. Changes in the climate of culture involve convoluted, contested, and contingent dynamics.

Søren Kierkegaard famously said that “life must be lived forward, but understood backwards.” Similarly, you say that dramatic cultural change “can only been seen and described in retrospect.” How, then, can we evaluate whether our present actions are faithfully changing the world?

Well, the title of my book is ironic, because I'm trying to disabuse people of changing the world. We cannot control history—God alone is its author. We're accountable for our actions as individual believers and as a body of believers. The nature of that accountability is clear from Scripture, theology, and history. The point is *not* to change the world but to serve faithfully in our relationships, tasks, and spheres of social influence.

One of my worst fears about the reception of this book is that my proposal for “faithful presence” will become a bumper sticker for personal pietism. The default mode for Christians is to translate everything into their own experience. Faithful presence is not

we're not even aware of. They penetrate the ways we speak, the ways we imagine the world. They penetrate the structures that organize social life—structures of reward, privilege, and punishment. So the deepest kinds of changes don't happen simply by willing them into being. Powerful changes happen implicitly rather than explicitly.

Would a third Great Awakening change the culture, if two-thirds or half of the American population came to a radical embrace of the Christian faith? There's no question that it would have an impact. But unless the elites of society were similarly impacted or affected, it probably wouldn't change things as much as you might expect. What is more, it would probably take several generations of reckoning with what that faith meant to the people, their children, and their grandchildren before it finally penetrated the warp and woof of the social order.

the work of the individual alone but also the individual in concert with the community.

Might not a lot of “transforming the culture” talk today be a rhetorical device to motivate people to act, rather than a serious affirmation of the ability to change culture immediately?

The rhetoric of world changing originates from a profound angst that the world is changing for the worse, and that we must act urgently. There's a sense of panic that things are falling apart. If we don't respond now, we'll lose the things we cherish the most. What animates this talk is a desperation to hold on to something when the world no longer makes sense.

Does the world-changing rhetoric become pervasive when the

individuals who are trying to change the world cannot do it?

It may be that the amount of rhetoric is *inversely* related to our actual ability or capacity to change the world. Most American Christians believe America owes its greatness to Christianity, which is now being uprooted. Uprootedness brings sadness and nostalgia. The problem here is not just the historical question—was America ever a Christian nation?—but the theological question, *should* America be a Christian nation? If you don't believe that America was ever or should ever be a Christian nation, you will evaluate cultural changes from a different vantage point. Some changes might be destructive, but you will not feel obliged to save America or to save the West. That's not the burden of faithful presence in the world.

What do you mean when you say American public life has become politicized?

All Americans think about power primarily in political terms. We tend to conflate our understanding of public life with political life; they occupy the same symbolic space. Politics involves the mechanisms

structures, jockeying for power.

How should Christians think about power?

There are two tasks for a post-political witness. First, we must disaggregate the life of the church and the life of the nation. Second, we must renew a distinction between the public and the political.

What would a post-political gesture look like in the pro-life movement? Borrowing an example from a friend, imagine ten thousand families signing a petition in Illinois that declares they will adopt a child of any ethnic background and physical capability. If they wanted to do something spectacular, they could go to city hall for a press conference, announcing that in the state of Illinois there are *no* unwanted children. That would be a public—but not political—act. Such an act leads with compassion rather than coercion.

By focusing too much on political power, we overlook how social power plays out in everyday relationships and institutions. There are four characteristics to the social power that Jesus exercised. First, his power was *derivative*—originating from intimacy and submission to

When Christians turn to law, public policy, and politics as the last resort, they have essentially given up on a desire to persuade their opponents. They want the patronage of the state and its coercive power to rule the day.

of the state. Over the course of the 20th century, all Americans—and Christians, not the least—have turned more and more to the state to solve their problems. That's true for the Left as well as the Right. Since law is the language of the state, we should note that law increases as cultural consensus decreases.

What are the consequences of this for the church's public witness?

The state is the sole legitimate source of coercion and violence. When Christians turn to law, public policy, and politics as the last resort, they have essentially given up on a desire to persuade their opponents. They want the patronage of the state and its coercive power to rule the day. What makes this problematic, in my view, is that the dominant public witness of the church is political, rooted in narratives of injury and discourses of negation. The sense of deprivation among Christians leads to an ethic of revenge, or what Nietzsche called *ressentiment*. In different ways and to different degrees, the prevailing political theologies in American society today—the Christian Right, the Christian Left, and even the neo-Anabaptists—partake in that resentment and consequent will to power. And here's the tragic irony: Whenever Christian churches and organizations partake in the will to power, they partake in the very thing they decry in society.

Christian philosopher Carl Raschke has observed that “the emerging Religious Left is just a funhouse mirror of the Religious Right.” Why do you say that the two Jims—Dobson and Wallis—mirror each other?

They both operate with a proprietarian relationship to American culture that obligates them to preserve the nation as well as their faith. They both offer different versions of civil religion. And they have both become instrumentalized on behalf of different party

his Father. Second, his power was *humble*—rejecting the privileges of status and reputation, suffering indignities with joy. Third, his power was *compassionate*—serving the good of all and not just the good of the community of faith. And fourth, his power was *non-coercive*—blessing rather than cursing “the other,” as we can see from his encounters with Samaritans and Romans.

How does your paradigm of cultural engagement differ from the others?

All the paradigms speak to authentic biblical concerns. Yet the desire to be *relevant* to the world has come at the cost of abandoning distinctiveness. The desire to be *defensive against* the world is rooted in a desire to retain distinctiveness, but this has been manifested in ways that are, on one hand, aggressive and confrontational, and, on the other, culturally trivial and inconsequential. And the desire to be *pure from* the world entails a withdrawal from active presence in huge areas of social life. In contrast to these paradigms, the desire for *faithful presence* in the world calls on the entire laity, in all vocations—ordinary and extraordinary, “common” and rarefied—to enact the shalom of God in the world.

Christians need to abandon talk about “redeeming the culture,” “advancing the kingdom,” and “changing the world.” Such talk carries too much weight, implying conquest and domination. If there is a possibility for human flourishing in our world, it does not begin when we win the culture wars but when God's word of love becomes flesh in us, reaching every sphere of social life. When faithful presence existed in church history, it manifested itself in the creation of hospitals and the flourishing of art, the best scholarship, the most profound and world-changing kind of service and care—again, not only for the household of faith but for everyone. Faithful presence isn't new; it's just something we need to recover. 

My Priest
Saved My Life



Father Joe got me to see
that I'm at high risk for diabetes.
Now I'm taking better care of
my health so I won't get the disease.

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Why Johnny Can't Read the Bible



Most Americans—including Scripture-loving evangelicals—cannot name the disciples, the Ten Commandments, or the first book of the Bible. But that's not our biggest biblical illiteracy problem. By Collin Hansen

Americans love their Bibles. So much so that they keep them in pristine, unopened condition. Or, as George Gallup Jr. and Jim Castelli said in a widely quoted survey finding, “Americans revere the Bible but, by and large, they don’t read it.”

Anecdotes abound. *Time* magazine observed in a 2007 cover story that only half of U.S. adults could name one of the four Gospels. Fewer than half could identify Genesis as the Bible’s first book. Jay Leno and Stephen Colbert have made sport of Americans’ inability to name the Ten Commandments—even among members of Congress who have pushed to have them posted publicly.

Perhaps the first step toward improved Bible literacy is admitting we have a problem. A 2005 study by the Barna Group asked American Christians to rate their spiritual maturity based on activities such as worship, service, and evangelism. Christians offered the harshest evaluation of their Bible knowledge, with 25 percent calling themselves not too mature or not at all mature.

And we know it’s not “those other churches.” We are not surprised by a 2004 Gallup finding that a mere 37 percent of teenagers can find the quotation from the Sermon on the Mount when given four choices. And we are not surprised that only 44

percent of born-again teenagers could do the same.

It could be worse. The same Gallup study of 1,002 teenagers found them basically familiar with Adam and Eve, Moses, the Good Samaritan, the Golden Rule, and the meaning of Easter. And the Bible Literacy Project (BLP) now provides resources for more than 360 public schools in 43 states.

“We’ve had no problem conveying the importance of biblical literature for understanding everything from public discourse to reading Toni Morrison,” says BLP general editor Cullen Schippe.

But pastors, professors, and others committed to teaching the Bible have identified a problem far larger than fluency with basic characters and stories. It’s one thing to recognize the reference to the Promised Land in a Martin Luther King Jr. speech. It’s another to recognize biblical references within the Bible itself. Even weekly churchgoers who know the names and places struggle to put it all together and understand the Bible as a single story of redemption.

The problem struck a nerve for Schippe as he sat in a hotel room thumbing through a copy of the Book of Mormon. Some of the characters were familiar, but the overarching story befuddled him. That, he realized, was how a growing number of Americans now see the Bible.

Fortunately, motivated churches, small groups, and even public school teachers are finding ways to take biblical literacy beyond name recognition.

Sunday School 2.0

BibleMesh builds a tech tool for the rest of the church.

COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY has long been a boon to high-level biblical studies. Scholars can instantly search archives of ancient manuscripts, essentially turning their offices into world-class libraries. Pastors likewise benefit from popular software that aids original language studies and sermon preparation. But the gap is widening.

“At this rate,” Emmanuel Kampouris says, “the Bible will be just a historical artifact for seminarians.”

Kampouris is former chairman and chief executive officer of American Standard Companies (now called Trane), the giant manufacturer of air conditioners, bath and kitchen fixtures, and automotive supplies. Renowned for his ability to turn around failing businesses, Kampouris is also the force behind BibleMesh, a web-based tool launching in June. Tim Keller is the program’s primary commentator, who walks Christians through the biblical storyline in a 90-minute video. Other contributors include the late *First Things* editor Richard John Neuhaus, former Anglican Archbishop Peter Akinola of Nigeria, and nondenominational pastor Alistair Begg.

Scholars and pastors such as new Wheaton College president Philip Ryken, Covenant Life Church’s Joshua Harris, and Vaughan Roberts, author of *God’s Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible*, have contributed 300 articles and 200 two-minute reflections.

“The primary selling point is to really teach the gospel as the biblical story and not just disassociated biographical studies, facts, and events,” says project theological editor Greg Thornbury. “That’s the idea behind the name BibleMesh—that the biblical understanding of reality is interconnected with the Good News about Jesus.”

REBUILDING THE BIG STORY

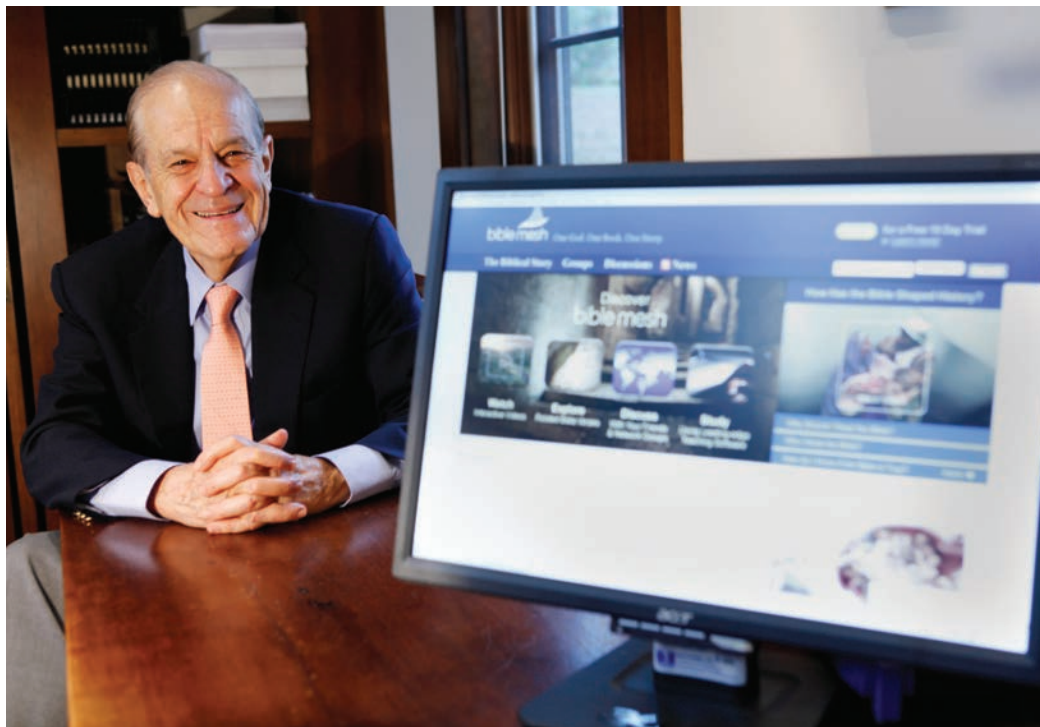
The rise of historical criticism in the 19th century was largely responsible for downplaying the Bible’s overarching metanarrative, says Thornbury, dean of the School of Christian Studies at Union University. But evangelicals have done their part as well. Scholars’ narrow specialization in one aspect of the Old or New Testament can trickle down from seminaries to pastors, then to local churches.

As a result, sermons about King David often amount to little more than moral biography: David committed adultery and murder, and we shouldn’t. Or pastors may search for allegorical meaning behind

the Old Testament figures, matching a sermon point on courage to each of David’s five smooth stones. In either case, churchgoers do not see how David contributes to the messianic pattern fulfilled in Christ.

Bucking the long trend toward academic specialization, Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama, has no departments. No matter their expertise, all Beeson faculty are professors of divinity.

“We’re trying to be sure that students don’t just have a superficial knowledge of Scripture but can explain the Bible as a connected story,” says Timothy George, Beeson’s founding dean. “Just knowing facts and names would be an improvement, but it’s not what is



Casting His Net: Emmanuel Kampouris’s new effort is more than just another social network.

needed . . . in the fragmented lives around us.”

BibleMesh hopes to remedy the problem of fragmented biblical understanding with a personalized learning tool that tracks what users have studied and where they are weak. The site will help users memorize Scripture and remember facts, names, and places from the passages they have read. Another component allows pastors and small-group leaders to shape their own courses. Later channels will teach church history and biblical Greek and Hebrew.

“Every church intuitively knows it needs a discipleship program that goes beyond the preaching event,” Thornbury says. “I hope BibleMesh will be Sunday school curriculum 2.0. It’s an update on what used to be done in Sunday school: taking Christians through the Bible.”

Secret Church

David Platt's congregation has a hunger for Scripture. Obeying it is harder.

AT AN AVERAGE of 55 minutes, David Platt's Sunday morning sermons at the Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Alabama, are already far longer than those of most pastors. But to Platt, they seem awfully short. He has been struck in his travels by underground Asian house churches that study the Bible together, under the threat of persecution, for as long as 12 hours in one sitting. He has imported this practice into a biennial event that Brook Hills calls Secret Church. Starting at 6 P.M., Platt preaches for six hours on a single topic, such

church has impoverished both institutions, he says. So Brook Hills has launched its own training center for lay leaders and is preparing a one-year training program for church planters, with separate tracks for full-time pastors and bi-vocational ministers. Platt recognizes that smaller churches lack the human and financial resources to offer these programs, but he thinks the principles transfer to churches with only 50 members.

"The New Testament pattern is churches raising up leaders and missionaries," Platt says. "We have people begging for this. The

more they taste the Word, the more they want it, and the more they want to minister. We've had about 1,000 each year go overseas making disciples. The more they go, they more they realize they need to be equipped to be a part of what God is doing around the world."

This equipping is crucial for Platt. Disciples of Christ do not merely pursue Bible knowledge for its own sake, he says. It changes the way they live, but not by merely offering them tips for parenting or financial freedom. Rather, the Bible gets them in touch with the Holy Spirit, who conforms them to Christ's image.

One year ago, Platt endured a crisis of belief as he saw how, throughout the narrative of Scripture, God equates faith with care for the poor. Platt believes, preaches, loves, memorizes, and studies the Word. But he wasn't sure if he had submitted his life to



as a survey of the Old Testament. About 1,000 people, mostly college students and young singles, turned out for the first Secret Church. Since then, other Secret Church topics have included the Atonement and spiritual warfare. It is now so popular the church requires tickets.

"It's one of my favorite sights as a pastor to look out at 12:30 A.M. and see a room full of 2,500 people, their Bibles open, soaking it in," Platt says.

Platt believes churches have lowered the bar for biblical and theological literacy by treating it as something for professionals. Equating serious biblical engagement with seminaries rather than the local

No Guidebook: Scripture 'is given to us for one purpose,' says Platt, here leading a Secret Church event: 'to make us look more like Christ.'

its teachings.

"We are ignoring the poor with the way we're living in Birmingham," Platt finally told his congregation. "If we believe the gospel, then our opulent living compared to the rest of the world does not make sense. We need

to make major changes."

The rebuke did not sit well with everyone. But Platt and his wife set an example by selling their house and living more simply. One wealthy church member called him crazy, but soon he too sold his house to invest in needs around the world. Biblical literacy is a precursor to biblical transformation.

COURTESY OF CHURCH AT BROOK HILLS / DANIEL PHILLIPS

A United Effort

British Christians join to read, translate, and champion the Word.

IN 2011, English-speaking Christians will commemorate 400 years since the debut of the King James Version of the Bible. So why does a sense of consternation trump celebration? “More than 200 million people have no access to spiritual food, with no Scriptures in their own language,” says Krish Kandiah, a director at the Evangelical Alliance UK. “Yet we in the West, despite owning more Bibles per household than we will ever use, are slowly starving to death because we have lost our appetite for Scripture.”

Kandiah leads a small team of activists behind Biblefresh, a new initiative promoting Bible reading, translation, and teaching. A diverse collection of the country’s leading Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, and other UK believers have united behind a vision to help Christians experience the Bible in new ways during 2011.

Biblefresh has teamed with churches in Burkina Faso to help

‘We own more Bibles than we will ever use, but we are slowly starving to death because we have lost our appetite for Scripture.’

~ Krish Kandiah, *director of Churches in Mission for the Evangelical Alliance UK*

translate the Bible for a language group that has no access to Scripture. Spring Harvest, the UK’s largest Christian festival, will teach about 50,000 Christians over the next two years how to interpret the Bible. Soul Survivor, the UK’s biggest Christian youth event, is making a greater push for a daily Bible reading program. And a group of pastors has pledged to preach on the so-called “terror texts,” in which genocide, stoning unruly children, and slavery seem to be condoned. (Avoiding them has only hurt confidence, they say.)

“This privilege should unite us at a time when the evangelical church in the UK is increasingly fragmented, with tribal groups raging over debates surrounding the role of women, the definition of atonement, and the place of charismatic gifts, while church attendance figures are in decline,” Kandiah says. “Whatever denomination or tribe we tend toward, all of us know we need to do better with the Bible.”

Collin Hansen is a CT editor at large and coauthor, with John Woodbridge, of the forthcoming *A God-Sized Vision: Revival Stories That Stretch and Stir* (Zondervan).

A Different Kind of Bible Literacy Quiz

So you can name the 12 disciples, the 10 Commandments, and the 7 days of Creation. But do you know how they fit together?

1. What lesson from the life of Jonah did Jesus talk about?
(a) Jonah learned to obey God, because disobedience is punished.
(b) God forgives the repentant as he forgave Nineveh.
(c) God rescues us as he rescued Jonah when he was cast overboard.
(d) Jonah spent three days in the fish as Jesus would spend three days in the tomb.
(e) People are as wicked today as they were in ancient Nineveh.
2. Melchizedek, king of Salem, met with which biblical figure?
How is Jesus like Melchizedek?
3. Besides Jesus, name five biblical figures who rose from the dead.
How were these incidents different from Jesus’ resurrection?
4. Name four biblical instances where the number 40 is important.
5. Whose faithfulness is contrasted with the Israelites’ grumbling in Exodus 16–18?
6. Name the four women besides Mary who are included in Jesus’ genealogy (Matt. 1:1–17), and describe their circumstances.
7. “No prophet is accepted in his hometown,” Jesus said after his inaugural sermon (Luke 4:14–30). He then gave examples from the lives of two other prophets. What were they?

Answers

1. (d) See Matthew 12:40.
2. Melchizedek, “priest of God Most High,” met with Abram (Gen. 14). Jesus is like him in that he is a priest forever (Ps. 110:4; Heb. 5:6), once and for all, and greater than the priesthood of Aaron (Heb. 7). The writer of Hebrews says that he was “without beginning of days or end of life” (7:3).
3. The son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17); the son of the Shunammite woman (2 Kings 4); the dead man who touched Elisha’s bones (2 Kings 13:21); the son of the woman of Nain (Luke 7); the daughter of Jairus (Mark 5); Lazarus (John 11); Dorcas/Tabitha (Acts 9); Eutychus (Acts 20); and the dead raised when Jesus died (Matt. 27:52). Each was resuscitated, not resurrected; they died again. Jesus’ resurrected body was unbound by normal physical properties, though he ate and could be touched.
4. Days Jesus spent tempted in the wilderness (Matt. 4:2); days Jesus spent with his disciples after the Resurrection (Acts 1:3); days and nights of rain in the Flood (Gen. 7:12); Moses’ years in Egypt and then in Midian (Acts 7); years the Israelites spent in the wilderness; Moses’ days on Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:18; Deut. 9:18); days the spies were in Canaan (Num. 13:25); Elijah’s days journeying to Horeb (1 Kings 19:8); Nineveh’s days to repent (Jonah 3:4); the years of rule of many judges and kings of Israel.
5. Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, the Midianite priest (fitting the pattern of the faithful outsider contrasted with the unfaithful Israelites; see also Rahab, Caleb, etc.).
6. Tamar, who masqueraded as a prostitute and slept with her father-in-law (Gen. 38); Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute (Josh. 2, 6); Ruth the Moabite (Ruth 2–3); and Bathsheba, wife of Uriah, who was murdered by David (2 Sam. 11).
7. Elijah’s care for the widow in Zarephath (instead of the widows of Israel), and Elisha’s healing of Naaman the Syrian (instead of the lepers of Israel).



An illustration on the left side of the page depicts a woman with long brown hair, wearing a blue button-down shirt and light-colored trousers, walking away from the viewer. She is walking on a path that is being rained upon, with white lines representing rain falling diagonally across the scene. To her right is a large, leafy tree with a thick trunk. The background is a soft, hazy landscape with a warm, golden-brown tone. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

{ THEOLOGY }

A Family Affair

What would the church look like if it put *we* before *me*?

By Joseph H. Hellerman

S

PIRITUAL FORMATION occurs primarily in the context of community. Persons who remain connected with their brothers and sisters in the local church almost invariably grow in self-understanding. And they mature in their ability to relate in healthy ways to God and to fellow human beings. This is especially the case for those courageous Christians who stick it out through the messy process of interpersonal conflict. Long-term relationships are the crucible of genuine progress in the Christian life. People who stay grow.

People who leave do not grow. We all know persons consumed with spiritual wanderlust. We never get to know them well because they cannot seem to stay put. They move from church to church, avoiding conflict or ever searching for a congregation that will better satisfy their felt needs. Like trees repeatedly transplanted from soil to soil, these spiritual nomads fail to put down roots, and they seldom experience lasting, fruitful growth in their Christian lives.

Despite what we know about spiritual growth, nearly all churches in America are characterized by an unwillingness of members to commit themselves deeply to their respective church. For some, it means church hopping; for most, it means keeping the church at arm's length—that is, living as if the individual's life is primary and that of the church is secondary.

Social scientists have intensively studied the particularly pervasive loss of social capital and lack of genuine community that characterize life in America and its churches. They have concluded that we are a radically individualistic society, oriented toward personal fulfillment in ways profoundly more “me-centered” than any other culture or people-group in world history. It is our individualism—our insistence that the rights and satisfaction of the individual must take priority over any group to which one belongs—that has seriously compromised our ability to stay in relationship and grow with one another as God intends.

As George Barna noted over a decade ago, American Christians are now quite convinced

JONATHAN BARTLETT

that “spiritual enlightenment comes from diligence in a discovery process, rather than commitment to a faith group and perspective.” The faith is all about me—about God’s wonderful plan for me, about my spiritual gifts, about how God can meet my needs and save my marriage. Culture has hijacked Christ. We have recast the wondrous God of salvation history in the role of a divine therapist who aids the individual Christian in his or her personal quest for spiritual fulfillment and self-discovery.

With such meager commitment to the church, it’s little wonder that spiritual life in North America is so stunted.

GROUP COMES FIRST

The early Christians had a markedly different perspective. Jesus’ early followers were convinced that the group comes first—that I as an individual will become all God wants me to be only when I begin to view my goals, desires, and relational needs as secondary to what God is doing through his people, the local church. The group, not the individual, took priority in a believer’s life in the early church. And this perspective (social scientists refer to it as “strong group”) was hardly unique to Christianity. Strong-group values defined the broader social landscape of the ancient world and characterized the lives of Jews, Christians, and pagans alike. Note the second-century historian Josephus’s perspective on activities at the Jerusalem Temple:

At these sacrifices, prayers for the welfare of the community must take precedence over those for ourselves; for we are born for fellowship, and he who sets its claims above his private interests is specially acceptable to God.

Note also Cyprian, bishop of Carthage (circa A.D. 250), and his commentary on the prayer Jesus taught his disciples:

Before all things, the Teacher of peace and Master of unity did not wish prayer to be offered individually and privately as one would pray only for himself when he prays. We do not say: “My Father, who art in heaven,” nor “Give me this day my bread,” nor does each one ask that only his debt be forgiven him and that he be led not into temptation and that he be delivered

from evil for himself alone. Our prayer is public and common, and when we pray, we pray not for one but for the whole people, because we, the whole people, are one.

“We, the whole people, are one”—Cyprian’s strong-group sensibilities could hardly be more pronounced.

Early Christian communities, moreover, represented a specific kind of strong-group entity. Historians have struggled for generations to situate early Christianity in its social world. Were churches like Jewish synagogues or Greco-Roman voluntary associations or what? As it turns out, the social model that best accounts for the relational expectations reflected in our New Testament epistles is the

Commitment to a familial church must remain a decision that is made by each member, not one imposed from above.

Mediterranean family. Most of us are familiar with the surrogate kinship language (*brother, sister, Father, child, inheritance*) that permeates the New Testament. Family remained the dominant metaphor for Christian social organization in the writings of the church fathers, as well.

To illustrate a key difference between ancient and modern family systems, let us think about a popular film from a decade or so ago, the blockbuster *Titanic*.

Rose is a high-society girl engaged to be married to an arrogant, distasteful fellow for whom she feels no affection. In a memorable scene, Rose’s mother reminds her that the arranged marriage is in the best interest of her family. It seems that Rose’s father died after squandering his fortune, so for Rose’s mother and her family, the impending marriage represents the only hope of maintaining their wealth and preserving their social status. Rose has been set up with a man she detests in order to guarantee an honorable future for the group, her extended family.

But then one evening Rose meets a street kid named Jack on the deck of the ship, and the encounter ignites a romantic fling that serves as the film’s main storyline. Rose loves Jack.

But she is engaged to a highly unappealing man whom she is obligated to marry for the sake of her family. Whom will Rose choose?

Jack, of course. If Rose had chosen otherwise, the film simply would not have worked for the tens of millions of North American viewers who followed the tragic tale. We are quite unmoved by the potential social dilemma confronting Rose’s extended family. Our sympathies lie, rather, with the heroine’s personal satisfaction. As I watched *Titanic*, I could almost hear the thoughts of the audience: *Forget your family’s fortune, Rose! Ignore your mother’s wishes! Dump the rich jerk! Follow your heart! Go after Jack!*

If *Titanic* were shown in first-century Israel, the audience would be utterly appalled that Rose would even consider sacrificing the good of her extended family for her relational satisfaction. They would find Rose’s fling with Jack risky and foolish. First-century Jews and Christians alike would expect Rose to marry the rich fellow, if such an arrangement could somehow preserve the honor and social status of her extended family.

TAKING CARE OF THE FAMILY

Stories of the ancient church living out its family values appear throughout early Christian literature. For example, sometime around A.D. 250, a marvelous thing happened in a small church in the rural town of Thena, just outside the Roman metropolis of Carthage in North Africa: An actor converted to Christ. We do not know his name, but let’s refer to him as Marcus. Marcus’s conversion created a stir in the church in Thena.

Theater performances in antiquity were typically dedicated to a pagan god or goddess, and the plays often ran as part of larger public religious festivals. Scenes portraying blatant immorality were commonplace. All this proved rather troubling to the early church. Christian leaders, such as Tertullian, spoke out in opposition to the idea of believers going to the theater:

Why is it right to look on what it is disgraceful to do? How is it that the things which defile a man in going out of his mouth, are not regarded as doing so when they go in at his eyes and ears—when eyes and ears are the immediate attendants of the spirit? You have the theater forbidden, then, in the forbidding of immodesty.

Thus, when an actor converted to Christ in third-century Carthage, the church demanded that he quit his profession.

Marcus did just that. Our new convert now faced an economic dilemma, however, since he was no longer gainfully employed. So, instead of acting, Marcus opened an acting school. This apparently created quite a stir among Marcus's fellow Christians, and the surviving letters exchanged by his pastor and the church's bishop paint a portrait of the church truly living out its strong-group family values.

Marcus's pastor, Eucratius, naturally wondered how it could be acceptable for Marcus to teach others what he himself was forbidden to do. Yet Marcus had already made a tremendous sacrifice to follow Jesus. So Eucratius wrote to his spiritual mentor, Cyprian of Carthage, to ask "whether such a man ought to remain in communion with us."

Cyprian's reaction to Marcus was unequivocal:

It is not in keeping with the reverence due to the majesty of God and with the observance of the gospel teachings for the honor and respect of the church to be polluted by contamination at once so degraded and so scandalous.

No compromise. No drama teaching. Marcus must either leave the church or quit his job—again.

Marcus's story has the "strong-group" aspect of the strong-group, surrogate family written all over it. It is Cyprian's conviction that "the honor and respect of the church" must take priority over Marcus and his acting academy. Marcus, on his part, finds himself answering to the church for his whole vocational and financial future.

Cyprian's handling of Marcus's dilemma grates harshly against modern social sensibilities, since we tend to prioritize the needs and goals of the individual over the viability of any group to which he or she belongs. But for all of his hard-nosed strong-group convictions, Cyprian is not unaware of the suffering Marcus will face. As Cyprian's comments clearly demonstrate, the intense emphasis on personal holiness that characterized the North African church had a beautiful complement: a genuine concern for those whose livelihoods might be adversely affected by assenting to the church's demanding moral

standards. In short, Cyprian tells Pastor Eucratius that the church should provide for Marcus's material needs:

His needs can be alleviated along with those of others who are supported by the provisions of the church. . . . Accordingly, you should do your utmost to call him away from this depraved and shameful profession to the way of innocence and to the hope of his true life; let him be satisfied with the nourishment provided by the church, more sparing to be sure but salutary.

And if this is not enough, Cyprian concludes by telling Eucratius that Cyprian's church will foot the bill if the rural church in Thena lacks the resources to meet Marcus's basic needs:

But if your church is unable to meet the cost of maintaining those in need, he can transfer himself to us and receive here what is necessary for him in the way of food and clothing.

Cyprian made sure that the church would serve as the economic safety net for any brother or sister whose finances were adversely affected by their willingness to follow Jesus. Why? Because the church was a family, and this is what families in the ancient world did.

The conviction that church members should meet one another's material needs is, of course, central to the New Testament understanding of church family life: "How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?" (1 John 3:17, NRSV).

ANCIENT-FUTURE COMMUNITY

Can we recapture in our churches the biblical vision for authentic Christian community as reflected in the strong-group, surrogate family model that characterized the early church? I believe we can, with careful reflection and culturally sensitive contextualization.

First, I am advocating a markedly relational approach to Christian community, not the institutional model that most associate with the word *church*. I suspect, in fact, that our aversion as Westerners to the idea of a strong-group church finds its origins in the

[continued on 46]

LOOKING FOR A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE?



The Navigators, a non-profit, non-denominational ministry headquartered in Colorado Springs, Colorado, is seeking a Chief Development Officer.

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institutional nature of our own church experiences. For the early Christians, belonging to a local church was a commitment to a group of people, not to a highly programmed institution driven by corporate management and numerical growth. First and foremost, then, we must return to the concept and practice of church as a relational entity.

As inspiring as it is, moreover, the North African scenario above will likely prove exceptional in one important sense. Most of us do not belong to church communities where decisions are handed down through the channels of formal church leadership. Rather, the benefits of a strong-group, familial church will accrue informally, in the course of daily life, as we work through conflict, share victories, and endure heartaches together in those relationships that inevitably develop and bear fruit among Christians who determine to stick it out together.

Second, then, commitment to such a group must remain a decision belonging to each member, not one imposed from above. And it will be a decision that will need to be renewed on an almost daily basis. Our friend Marcus had little choice in the matter. He could either assent to the church's demands or lose his place in the community. We have other options. We can simply leave one church to attend another across town. We must choose, instead, to stay. For people who stay grow. And people who stay help others to grow as well. But we had better prepare ourselves at the outset to make the choice to stay, again and again, in the face of cultural pressures—pressures often reinforced by the raging whirlpool of our own emotions that are screaming for us to do otherwise.

There are many other cultural specifics to consider—for example, how to create a strong-group church without turning into a cult, and how to convince strongly individualistic North Americans to make the group a priority. To be sure, the cultural challenges are great. But if we are really serious about spiritual formation, we must become really serious about creating churches that act like real families.

Joseph H. Hellerman is professor of New Testament at Talbot School of Theology in La Mirada, California. He is the author of *When the Church Was a Family: Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Christian Community* (B&H Academic).

Do Short-Term Missions Trips = Christian Tourism?

If we're honest, many of us would admit that this is often true, but it's not what we want.

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VIEWPOINTS

OPINIONS AND
PERSPECTIVES ON
ISSUES FACING
THE CHURCH



As doctrine forms us into fruitful disciples, we are better able to pass through stormy waters, even when God appears to have forsaken us.

Trevor Michael
E-mail

Mind Matters

Darren Marks's cover essay ["The Mind Under Grace," March] deserves to be carefully read and absorbed. As doctrine forms us into fruitful disciples, we are better able to pass through stormy waters, even when God appears to have forsaken us. Those whose faith is propped up by feelings will likely lose that faith when life isn't so rosy.

TREVOR MICHAEL
E-mail

After giving his essay some thought, I believe Marks has the correct treatment but ultimately the wrong diagnosis. The problem with postmoderns is not that we seek a personal, subjective experience over against a universal theology. Rather, we seek a corrupted universal theology to use to justify our subjective hopes and desires. This dynamic would explain why so many are drawn to the health and wealth gospel, even though its promises may be completely outside their personal experience.

In the end, though, the problem is still solved by a cross-centered theology that expounds the depravity of man and the necessity of grace in each believer's life. If this analysis is correct, perhaps the theologian of our age is not Schleiermacher but Pelagius.

ERIK TOLLEFSON
St. Paul, Minnesota

I'm deeply grateful for J. I. Packer and Gary Parrett's direction on teaching doctrine ["The Lost Art of Catechesis," March]. Many churches confuse discipling with service, and thus fail to see that true discipleship is founded on learning and *results* in application. The decline of Western evangelicalism speaks to a failure to ground congregants in the historic faith, seeking "deeds over creeds" and overbroad attempts at ecumenism. Packer and Parrett's work gives hope that some churches will return to making disciples as Jesus commanded.

WES WETHERELL
Glen Ellyn, Illinois

As a faithful *Christianity Today* reader for years, I have sometimes worried about the decision to feature articles on new spirituality and spiritual formation. But the March 2010 issue put everything in perspective. The cover package on doctrine, as well as the review of Brian McLaren's latest book, were cogent, convincing, and balanced the ship. Thanks for a magnificent issue, all 96 pages of it.

HERBERT DOUGLASS
Lincoln, California

How Jesus Viewed Sin

I was thrilled to see Gary Anderson's history of sin engaged and brought to the readers of CT ["The Evolution of Sin," March]. But Jesus' view of sin was not

downloaded to him directly from the Old Testament or simply known by virtue of his divine nature. It was shaped for him in his Second Temple environment. What Jesus thought about the Old Testament, even something as important as the sin he came to deal with, was an expression of his cultural moment. This is certainly an implication of the Incarnation, but not one that normally sits well with evangelical Christology.

PETER ENNS
Senior Fellow, BioLogos Foundation
San Diego, California

What McLaren Wants

Scot McKnight's review of *A New Kind of Christianity* ["Rebuilding the Faith from Scratch," March] does a tremendous job of making Scot's views clear. Regarding my own views, I think Scot gets off on the wrong foot in the first sentence. He asserts that I've grown tired of evangelicalism. In fact, I am deeply grateful for my evangelical heritage, and I know God is doing wonderful things in evangelicalism. He's right—I'm not so thrilled about some facets of some sectors of it. But neither is Scot, and neither are the editors of CT, and neither are most evangelicals.

The term *evangelicalism* never appears in the book, and the term *evangelical* occurs about 20 times in the some 80,000 words of the book. Most of the references are positive or neutral.

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

19%
The Mind Under Grace
Darren Marks

19%
Box Office Pantheism
CT Editors

15%
The Village Green, Immigration
Samuel Rodriguez,
James K. Hoffmeier,
and David Skeel

YAY OR NAY
Readers' response
to "The Mind Under Grace"

80%
20%

My hopes for the future certainly include evangelicals, but they also include Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Radical Reformation folk, and yes, even those liberal mainline Protestants.

There are substantial areas of disagreement (and agreement) that Scot fairly articulates; it's unfortunate that his misinterpretation of my attitude toward evangelicalism frames the whole review. I didn't invent the ten questions addressed in my book. These questions are being raised by thousands of people worldwide, including evangelicals, who can't in good faith be satisfied with the standard answers given to them. Whether I'm counted outside the evangelical fold or not, the questions are here to stay. I hope that we can face the questions without fearing them, and that we can do so in fellowship.

BRIAN McLAREN
Laurel, Maryland

If McKnight describes McLaren's new book accurately, then McLaren has finally confirmed what many of us have suspected for some time. I'm on board with a "generous orthodoxy" that includes many conversation partners figuring out how to best express what's been said for 2,000 years. I cannot support an agenda

that arrogantly presumes we can read Jesus and Paul better than those who knew them.

Respect the great men and women of the faith enough to not presume to fix them, Brian. We want your voice in the conversation, but as one voice in a long conversation.

JEREMIAH GIBBS
Bloomington, Indiana

Weighing Plastic Surgery

Mollie Ziegler Hemingway's ambivalence about cosmetic surgery ["Is Cosmetic Surgery Immoral?" March] is obvious; she "frown[s] on cosmetic surgery" yet sees "some cosmetic surgery as a beautiful gift from God." She correctly notes that the issue is morally complex. When our son was electrocuted and had his mouth surgically repaired, Christian friends saw this as restoration. When I lost 70 pounds and investigated a tummy tuck to restore a "normal" body, my motives were considered suspect.

Thousands of Christians seek cosmetic procedures for God-honoring reasons. The judgment they endure might also be symptomatic of our cultural rot.

SHELLY BEACH
Sparta, Michigan



SIMON COWELL ON JUDGMENT DAY.

compiled by Laura Leonard

WORTH REPEATING

Things overheard at CT online.



ONLINE POLL

HEALTH CARE CRUNCH

Do you support the health care bill that President Obama signed into law?

30%

I support most of it.

9%

I support some of it.

58%

I don't support it.

2%

I'm ambivalent.

Total Votes: 1,567

"They want a Savior who forgives their sins, but they don't want a risen Lord who tells them how to live."

Ruth Gervat, on why some Christians ignore the Resurrection in their daily lives.

Theology in the News: "The Resurrection Changes Everything," by Collin Hansen

"John wasn't called a blastula or a zygote or a fetus or a blob of cells, but a baby."

John Hale, on Luke 1:41's statement that John the Baptist leapt in his mother's womb, and what the Annunciation means for pro-life Protestants.

"More Important Than Christmas?" by Ted Olsen

"What scares me is that many Christians spend more time listening to paid commentators than reading God's Word."

Adrianne Butler, on responses to Glenn Beck's call for his listeners to leave churches that promote social justice.

"Glenn Beck: 'Leave Your Church,'" by Tobin Grant

"'Why don't you just adopt?' ranks high, along with 'you just need to pray more' and 'you just need more faith,' on the list Things Christians Say That Just Don't Help."

Andrew, on how some Christians respond to infertile couples.

Women's Blog: "Why Don't You Just Adopt?" by Ellen Painter Dollar

"I hope they will present the story as it was written—no adding romance where there wasn't any, and letting Narnia be: mysterious, magical, and inviting."

Agatha Villa, on the film *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, set to debut December 2010.

News: "Will 'The Dawn Treader' Float?" by Mark Moring

KEVIN FRANK

The End of Religious Freedom?

The nightmare scenarios could very well unfold, but they are not the last word.

THE U.S. SUPREME COURT hasn't taken on many significant religion cases lately. Perhaps the justices were resting up for what could be one of the biggest rulings yet:

Christian Legal Society v. Martinez, which went before the court April 19, is in some eyes the title fight between anti-discrimination laws and religious identity. It's a case that both sides have long been waiting for.

At issue is an anti-discrimination rule at Hastings College of the Law (part of the University of California). Hastings says the rule means that the Christian Legal Society's (CLS) on-campus chapter cannot make its leaders sign a statement of faith and abstain from "unrepentant participation in or advocacy of a sexually immoral lifestyle." The school said student group leadership positions must be open to all students—even to those who would seek such positions precisely in order to destroy the purpose of the group.

If CLS loses the case, in time it would mean that "religious and other groups that adhere to traditional moral views could be driven from the public square in the name of enforcing nondiscrimination," CLS told the court.

A loss could "effectively remove evangelical organizations from state college and university campuses throughout the United States," according to a friend-of-the-court brief filed by the National Association of Evangelicals and other evangelical groups.

Even more than that, "It is not hyperbole to argue that . . . this case ultimately threatens the future of public education as we know it," said a friend-of-the-court brief from the Rutherford Institute. Hastings is subjecting the freedom of association on campus "to state censorship grounded in political ideology," the organization said.

The American Civil Liberties Union, on the other hand, argued that a CLS win would "considerably weaken our civil rights protections" and set civil rights law back to the days of state-funded racism.

Other friend-of-the-court briefs referenced a related debate that's even more core to the debate on anti-discrimination laws and religious identity: hiring at faith-based institutions.

"If this court determines that CLS does not have any constitutional right to religious association in the context of this case, then there will be little constitutional protection for religious employers, particularly if they receive any kind of government benefit, use government buildings such as schools and convention centers, and/or participate in government-funded programs," said a brief from World Vision, Compassion International, Prison Fellowship, Samaritan's Purse, the Council

for Christian Colleges and Universities, and others. "[H]ow this court characterizes the religious associational policies and rights of religious organizations . . . will likely establish the framework for future deliberations within all branches of government on questions of religious hiring."

The *CLS v. Martinez* decision will be widely cited, no matter the outcome. But as CLS made clear in its own briefs, it's very much a separate battle. (The CLS case is mostly about speech at a university forum, and money is not central.) If CLS loses, it is far from a foregone conclusion that religious groups that partner with the government will lose their ability to consider faith commitments when hiring. And it's a far journey from that step to the much-discussed scenario of protesters joining organizations *en masse* to nullify the groups' religious identity or ethical commitments.

Defenders of religious identity safeguards are not scaremongers. The scenarios they propose are actually quite likely if government entities like Hastings or the Supreme Court treat biblical principles as invidious discrimination and then shun organizations with faith commitments.

But none of these scenarios represent the end of the story. In our 2,000 years of history, this would not be the first time Christian behavior has been treated as bigotry. We have seen states take control of religious organizations and churches. And we have seen restrictions on assembly, speech, and free exercise of religion lead to human suffering. We have also been reminded time and again of God's sovereign rule.

Hastings's lawyers say CLS attendance has actually doubled since it was denied recognition as a campus organization. All's well that ends well? No: justice and legal precedent should prompt a ruling for CLS regardless.

CLS says, to the contrary, that "non-recognition has nearly destroyed the CLS chapter." The light of the gospel that CLS proclaims is in no danger of being extinguished. Some evangelical organizations will meet off campus if they have to—in the catacombs, if it comes to that.

Meanwhile, we will work for justice in the courts, and pray for a day when those who conspire to infiltrate Christian organizations would find the Leader whom our leadership requirements point to, and enter into the relationship that our sexual standards model. Ours is a God whose stories end in redemption and reconciliation, not nightmare scenarios. ✚



A loss in court could 'effectively remove evangelical organizations from campuses throughout the United States.'

Origins and
the Scientific
Community

How can the intelligent design movement gain academic credibility?

FIND A FERTILE IDEA

Karl Giberson is director of Gordon College's Forum on Faith and Science, vice president of the BioLogos Foundation, and author of *Saving Darwin*.

Leaders of the intelligent design (ID) movement—William Dembski, Stephen C. Meyer, Michael Behe, Paul Nelson, Jonathan Wells—write mainly for popular audiences and have a negligible presence—as ID theorists—in scientific literature.

To get credibility in the academy, these theorists need to engage the academy by publishing in its journals and attending its meetings. But first they need a fertile idea—one that generates new scientific knowledge.

ID's central thesis—that biological systems show scientific evidence of intelligent design—has not developed to the point where it can make specific predictions that lead to new knowledge. At the end of the 18th century, William Paley wrote about how the intricate mechanics of a watch provide evidence of a designer. Two centuries later, Behe is making the same argument about the flagellum of the bacterium.

If ID proponents want to update Paley's arguments for the 21st century, they need to show how their version is more fertile.

Paley-era biologists—many of them Christians—did not abandon Paley because his design arguments were refuted; they weren't. They moved on because his ideas were *sterile*. Good scientific ideas, like atomic theory, gravity, quarks, and genetics, are rich. Such ideas are like bags of popcorn in the microwave, exploding with new insights into nature.

Two decades ago, Phillip Johnson launched the ID movement with *Darwin on Trial*. He galvanized the search for a study of biology without evolution. Ambitious agendas were developed.

Promises were made in those early days that ID would produce new scientific knowledge.

It hasn't. ID's ideas are no better developed now than they were in the 1990s. And many of the ideas—like the irreducible complexity of the blood-clotting cascade and the bacterial flagellum—have grown measurably weaker as research has successfully “reduced” the complexity. Little progress has been made on even articulating a definition of design, and different ID theorists look for the definition of design in different places.

ID's own thinkers disagree about such basic questions as common ancestry and the age of the earth. A paradigm so vaguely articulated and inconsistently embraced by its own adherents will not win over a skeptical scientific community.

I would love to see ID redirect its energies to developing a genuinely fertile idea. Stop trying to prove that Darwin caused the Holocaust or that evolution is ruining Western civilization. Agree among yourselves that the earth is old, since science has proven that. Do not call world-class scientists “cranks,” as Meyer implies in *Signature in the Cell*. Do not claim that evolution is collapsing, when everyone in the field knows it isn't. Stop claiming that you cannot get your work published in conventional journals when you aren't submitting papers to these journals.

Instead, roll up your sleeves and get to work on the big idea. Develop it to the point where it starts spinning off new insights into nature so that we know *more* because of your work. Then the academy will welcome you with open arms. Science loves rebels.

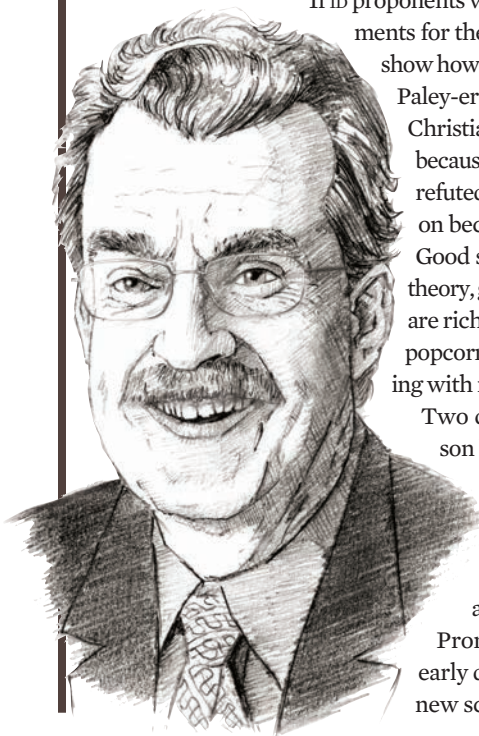
REDEFINE THE QUESTION

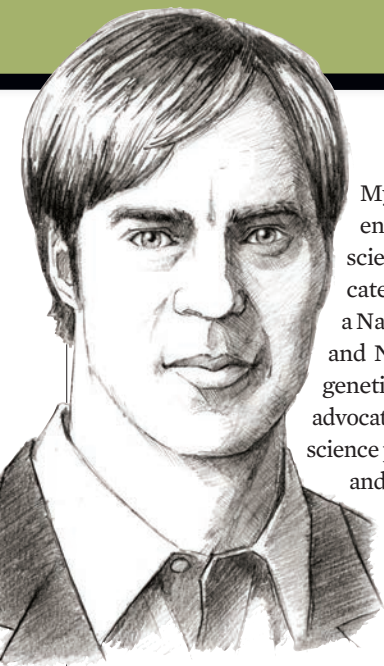
Stephen C. Meyer, director of the Discovery Institute's Center for Science and Culture, is the author of *Signature in the Cell*.

Asking what advocates of intelligent design must do to gain credibility in the academy is a bit like asking a man when he stopped beating his wife. Such a question makes a prejudicial assumption.

When queried about his history of spousal abuse, an innocent man should say, “I don't concede the premise of your question.” Similarly, I would suggest that behind the Village Green question lurk some false assumptions. Indeed, the question seems to presuppose three things: the scientific community is uniformly opposed to the theory of intelligent design; the theory *needs* majority support in the academy to be credible; and there is good reason—such as lack of supporting evidence—for hostility toward the theory within academia.

First, the scientific community is not uniformly opposed to ID.





My recent book on the subject received enthusiastic endorsements from many scientists not previously known as advocates of ID, such as chemist Philip Skell, a National Academy of Sciences member, and Norman Nevin, one of Britain's top geneticists. Further, many longstanding advocates of intelligent design are themselves science professors at mainstream universities and, therefore, already part of the academy. Second, as the recent scandal surrounding global warming suggests, the "consensus" of scientists can often be wrong. What matters is not consensus but evidence. And the evidence for ID is strong. In *Signature*

in the Cell, for example, I show how the information that runs the show in cells points decisively to intelligent design.

DNA stores instructions for life functions in the form of a four-character digital code. Based on our experience, we know that systems possessing such information invariably arise from minds, not material processes. We know that software comes from programmers. We know that information—whether inscribed in hieroglyphics, written in a book, or encoded in a radio signal—always comes from an intelligent source. So the discovery of a digital code in DNA provides compelling evidence of a prior designing intelligence.

Third, those who reject ID within the scientific community do so not because they have a better explanation of the relevant evidence, but because they affirm a definition of science that requires them to reject explanations involving intelligence—whatever the evidence shows. Imagine an archaeologist confronted with the inscriptions on the Rosetta stone, yet forced by some arbitrary convention to ignore the evidence for intelligent activity in the information those inscriptions contain. That is similar to the response of many evolutionary biologists who reflexively reject the theory of intelligent design as unscientific *by definition*, despite the evidence of intelligent activity in the information encoded in DNA.

Thus, to keep building a scientific research community, we ID advocates must expose the prejudicial rules of reasoning that preclude consideration of our theory, and keep explaining ID's strong foundation in evidence. We must also address our arguments to open-minded younger scientists and show how ID opens up many important research questions that Darwinian thought has long suppressed.

ACCEPT A LIMITED ROLE

Marcus Ross is a professor of geology at Liberty University and assistant director of Liberty's Center for Creation Studies.

One of ID's strengths is its philosophical minimalism: the search for patterns in nature that are best explained by intelligent agency rather than by undirected forces.

This big-tent approach allows a broad range of perspectives—

young-earth creationists, old-earth creationists, some theistic evolutionists, as well as design-friendly non-Christian scientists—to work together under the ID banner. That diversity allows ID folks to test ideas among supporters and friendly critics before bringing them to more hostile academic audiences.

But the minimalistic stance of ID is also a weakness that, I believe, renders it unable to fully compete in the academy. While ID proponents have made progress in advancing design-detection methods, and have been modestly successful in applying them to real biological systems, the problem is that ID offers no historical narrative.

It is one thing to argue that an object or organism is designed. But then comes the question of how and when the design was implemented (and also by whom). Because ID is minimalistic, a number of options are available. Was the design implemented over a multibillion-year history of Earth, or in six rotational days several thousand years ago? Was it worked out through a genetic unfolding of a single information-rich cell, or through designed interventions within evolutionary lineages, or by separate, *ex nihilo* creations? Various ID proponents offer different answers, but none speaks for ID itself, because if one perspective were widely accepted, the other members would be forced to leave the tent.

Consider a brief sketch of naturalistic evolution, the dominant perspective in the academy and one that includes a set of postulates about historical events. These postulates say life originated from nonliving chemical interactions, life forms developed and evolved in unbroken ancestor-descendant lineages, and only unguided processes, such as mutation, natural selection, and others, are responsible.

ID, as defined, is a statement about *mechanism*. It addresses only the last of naturalistic evolution's postulates; the first two are untouched. So ID is not a full-fledged contender here. In contrast, each of the various perspectives included under ID's big tent makes historical claims. Young-earth creationists believe that creation happened in six rotational days, and that the geological record is largely a product of Noah's Flood; old-earth creationists posit *ex nihilo* creative events during a multibillion-year history; and so on.

Each of these perspectives is a comprehensive program that offers a full history of Earth and its inhabitants. Only such a comprehensive program, which synthesizes both the present and historical worlds, may compete with naturalistic evolution. So while ID research will continue and, I hope, succeed in developing workable design-detection methods, its academic credibility will be limited by its very nature: ID is not a comprehensive theory of Earth and the history of life. ☪





Same Sex, Different Marriage

Many of those who want marriage equality do not want fidelity.

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE advocates frequently ask, “How would gay marriage affect your marriage?” The question is posed rhetorically, as if marriage is a private institution with no social consequences.

But *The New York Times*, of all papers, argues that gay unions could significantly alter marriage norms. A new study of gay couples in San Francisco shows that half are “open,” meaning that partners consent to each other having sex with other people. The *Times* says that the prevalence of such relationships could “rewrite the traditional rules of matrimony” by showing straight couples that monogamy need not be a “central feature” of marriage and that sexually open relationships might “point the way for the survival of the institution.”

In the gay community, open relationships are neither news nor controversial. Many of my partnered, gay male friends are in open relationships, some of which have lasted for decades. But the *Times* reporter, Scott James, who is himself gay, notes that nobody in an open relationship agreed to give their full name for the story, worrying that “discussing the subject could undermine the legal fight for same-sex marriage.”

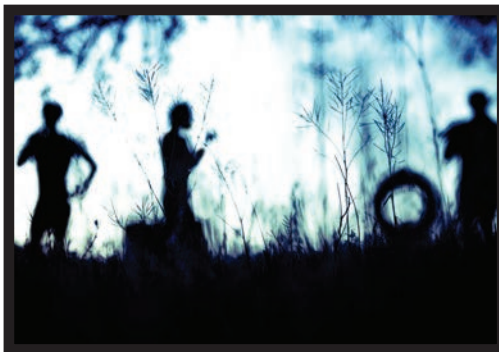
Indeed, some gay activists were upset with the *Times*. Gay political commentator Andrew Sullivan derided the piece and pointed to several critiques of the study. However, Sullivan himself has made the same argument, saying that gay male unions could “help strengthen and inform” traditional marriages.

“Among gay male relationships, the openness of the contract makes it more likely to survive than many heterosexual bonds.... There is more likely to be a greater understanding of the need for extramarital outlets between two men than between a man and a woman,” he wrote in his book *Virtually Normal*.

Other same-sex marriage advocates say a legal change would transform the institution.

New York University professor Judith Stacey, testifying before Congress against the Defense of Marriage Act, said changing the law to allow same-sex partners to marry would help “supplant the destructive sanctity of the family” and help it assume “varied, creative, and adaptive contours,” including “small group marriages.”

Activist Michelangelo Signorile wrote that gays should “demand the right to marry not as a way of adhering to society’s moral



codes but rather to debunk a myth and radically alter an archaic institution.”

To be sure, some advocates of same-sex marriage hope that heterosexual marital norms of monogamy and fidelity would be transferred to same-sex unions. But since these norms are based on the ideal that marriage is the union of a man and woman making a permanent and exclusive commitment for the purpose of bearing and rearing children, it would be irrational to expect same-sex partners—whose sexual relations bear no risk of procreation—to share the same norms.

Whether or not marriage law should change, the fact is that changing it to include same-sex partnerships would teach people that marriage is fundamentally about the emotional union of adults and not primarily

about the bodily union of man and wife (let alone the children who result from such a union). The norms of permanence, monogamy, and fidelity would make less sense under such a change.

Consider changes in divorce laws. The spread of no-fault divorce in the 1970s didn’t just make it easier for men and women to get out of troubled marriages. It also changed people’s ideas about the permanence of the institution and the responsibility parents have to their children.

It had other unintended consequences as well. Studies showed that after divorce laws were changed, spouses tended to invest less in their marriages. Economists found that spouses in states that had passed no-fault divorce laws were 10 percent less likely to put the spouse through college or graduate school and 6 percent less likely to have a child together.

Marriage rates fell and cohabitation rates increased as men and women lost confidence in the institution. Some 20 percent of children are now born to cohabiting couples, the majority of whom will see their parents split up by the time they reach adolescence.

Legal changes have consequences. But no matter how marriage laws may change, we can, paradoxically, find more freedom in chastity—which calls for abstinence when unmarried and sexual fidelity when married—than in any form of open marriage.

As Catholic author Christopher West says, “Chastity is first and foremost a great yes to the true meaning of sex, to the goodness of being created as male and female in the image of God. Chastity isn’t repressive. It’s totally liberating. It frees us from the tendency to use others for selfish gratification and enables us to love others as Christ loves us.”

A new study of gay couples in San Francisco shows that half are ‘open.’



Ardor and Order

The charismatic renewal has disappeared like yeast into bread dough.

A

PRIL 3 MARKED exactly 50 years since Episcopal priest Dennis Bennett resigned from his post as rector of St. Mark's Church in Van Nuys, California.

He knew that his glowing talk about baptism in the Holy Spirit had provoked fear and resentment among some members of his congregation. He didn't know that he was about to become the central character in a new movement—the charismatic renewal of the mainline denominations. Soon, Bennett and his message were the subjects of stories in *Newsweek* and *Time* and the objects of international attention.

In April 1960, I was a seventh grader in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, culturally and religiously as distant from Southern California Episcopalians as an American could be. But by 1974, I had a newly minted M.Div. and became pastor of a church near San Diego. There I became friends with Frank Maguire, an Episcopal priest who featured prominently in Dennis Bennett's autobiographical *Nine O'Clock in the Morning*.

In 1959, Maguire had invited Bennett to meet members of his parish who were experiencing unusual spiritual phenomena. These folk weren't doing anything wild and crazy, Maguire told Bennett. They just glowed "like little light bulbs" and were "so loving and ready to help whenever I asked them." When I met Maguire almost 15 years later, the charismatics I met in his parish still weren't wild or crazy. And they still had the glow and the love Maguire had told Bennett about.

I had been raised in a sectarian atmosphere, trained to distrust Christianity of any stripe but my own. For me, what made the charismatic renewal remarkable was the ecumenical fellowship it created. American Baptists and Roman Catholics in our community were sharing Communion—even serving Communion at each other's churches—until the Catholic bishop put a stop to it. Episcopalians were worshiping with an intensity that

undercut all my prejudices against written prayers and prescribed liturgies. Formerly competing religious communities were suddenly open to common ministry and shared worship. This was not the classic liberal ecumenism with its "Doctrine Divides, Service Unites" motto. This ecumenism flowed from recognizing that the Holy Spirit was animating and transforming others.

Some analysts say the mainline charismatic renewal fizzled. It is more accurate to describe it the way Jesus pictured the kingdom of God: like yeast that spreads through bread dough. You can hardly identify it as a movement anymore, but it has changed the way most churches worship. Repetitive choruses and raised hands are now common. Except in pockets of hardcore resistance, the fact that a fellow Christian may praise God in a private prayer language hardly elevates an eyebrow.

Pentecostalism and the charismatic renewal have jointly given believers what historian Chris Armstrong calls Pentecostalism's chief contribution to Christianity: an awareness of "a deep well of living water from which everything else flow[s]... the personal, relational presence of the living God."

That tide of living water is precisely what New Testament scholar Luke Timothy Johnson is worried might be receding. In a recent *Commonweal* essay, Johnson lamented the clash between the external, public dimension of religion—doctrine, sacraments, church structures (the "exoteric")—and the private search for a personal relationship with God (the "esoteric"). Johnson worries that the

exoteric is whipping the esoteric. But what of the tremendous spread of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity around the globe? Johnson's failure to mention it is puzzling.

Nevertheless, we should take to heart Johnson's point that the exoteric and the esoteric need each other. It reminds me of Charlie Hummel's 1978 book, *Fire in the Fireplace*. The metaphor speaks common sense: fire outside the fireplace is dangerous; a fireplace without fire is useless.

Thus, Johnson writes that "Christian mysticism that finds no center in the Eucharist

or the Passion of Christ drifts into a form of self-grooming." But it is likewise true that when the exoteric fails to acknowledge "the life of individual transformation," it becomes "a system of law"

and "an instrument of social control." Worse, without the transcendent, the exoteric can produce a barren, this-worldly activism, as happened, Johnson says, in both the social gospel and liberation theology movements.

What does the faith have to offer when extreme forms of the exoteric win and transcendence is banished? Society-building forms of Christianity and Islam "must compete on an even plane with other worldly ideologies [that]... can offer a better and more humane society than that proposed by a religion that... lacks any room for the spirit that soars toward God."

The 50th birthday of the charismatic movement is a time to remember that the form and content of the faith need not compete with its transcendence. Christianity offers the watching world its best when the exoteric and the esoteric embrace. ✚



You can hardly identify the charismatic renewal as a movement anymore, but it has changed how most churches worship.

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CT REVIEW

BOOKS, MOVIES,
MUSIC, AND
THE ARTS

Living God's Ongoing Story

N. T. Wright says character matters, but thinks the Reformers disagreed. By Michael Horton

Against the backdrop of the recent economic crisis, N. T. Wright, Anglican Bishop of Durham, opens with a persuasive call to recover character. Many Christians focus on “getting saved,” but what about the rest of the Christian life? Often we get stuck between two extremes: an antinomian (“against law”) spontaneity, and a rule-focused legalism. Instead, argues Wright in ***After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters*** (HarperOne) ★★★★★, we need to develop virtuous character.

At first, the author's prescription sounds like a popular version of Aristotle's ethics: Virtue is

formed by self-consciously adopting new habits, countless daily decisions, with the goal of becoming a just person. Do the right thing (which feels odd at first, not spontaneous) long enough, and it becomes second nature. The main means of attaining this virtue is “following Jesus.”

By the second chapter, however, Wright begins to show how the valid concerns of pagan wisdom are taken up by the New Testament writers (especially Paul) and, in the process, are transformed by the gospel. We do

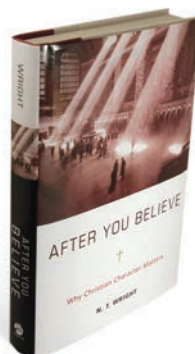
not live toward the human-centered goal of virtue formation for the sake of happiness or even “human flourishing,” but ultimately as priests and rulers who anticipate the restoration of the whole cosmos. “[W]e urgently need to recapture the New Testament's vision of a genuinely ‘good’ human life as a life of character formed by God's promised future, as a life with that future-shaped character *lived within the ongoing story of God's people*, and, with that, a freshly worked notion of virtue.” And “you don't get that character just by trying. You get it by following Jesus.”

Wright points out the tendency of Christians to assume the wider culture's romantic, existential, and therapeutic view of the self. Essentially Gnostic, this view assumes that Jesus came to put us in touch with our inner selves, the divine spark that just does what comes naturally to it: “you have to be true to yourself.” Moral action is therefore all about being “authentic,” “spontaneous,” and “free,” without any connection to habits, rituals, external authorities, and, especially, rules. We see this in the free-for-all approach to worship today. “All of this life of worship is something to be *learned*,” says Wright, and it has to be learned together. It's “a team sport.”

Crucial to character formation, Wright argues, is mind renewal. Prizing “spontaneity,” the “low-grade romanticism” that many Christians have adopted from the culture has colluded “with an anti-intellectual streak in our culture, generating the assumption that the more spiritual you are, the less you

need to think.” In contrast to both rule following and spontaneity, growing up into Christ is hard work, not least of all hard thinking.

There is some tension between Wright's emphasis on character formation by following Jesus' example and his later insistence that “holding up Jesus as an example of how to live a moral life



seems rather like holding up Tiger Woods as an example of how to hit a golf ball.” In fact, “Jesus as ‘moral example’ is a *domesticated* Jesus, a kind of religious mascot. . . . If all we need is a good example, we can’t be in quite such a bad state as some people (including Jesus himself) have suggested.”

He continues: “He doesn’t go about saying, ‘This is how it’s done; copy me.’ He says, ‘God’s kingdom is coming; take up your cross and follow me.’” We do encounter Jesus’ humility and other virtues. “But these are not ‘examples of how to do it.’ They are indications that a new way of being human has been launched upon the world.”

RUFFLED BY THE REFORMATION

In spite of a few quibbles, I was impressed by this book’s popular presentation of themes that I have come to appreciate in Reformed theology. The eschatological emphasis on cosmic renewal (resurrection, not escape) as the impetus for our lives here and now, the emphasis on the church—in fact, just about everything in *After You Believe* was a fresh way of exploring many familiar truths.

Hence my surprise at the jarring, frequent

‘Jesus as “moral example” is a *domesticated* Jesus, a kind of religious mascot . . . If all we need is a good example, we can’t be in quite such a bad state as some people (including Jesus himself) have suggested.’ ~ N. T. Wright

caricatures of the Reformation, even when the author articulates long-standing emphases in that tradition. As in his other works, indictments of the Reformation rarely come with footnotes. Wright seems to read the Reformers through the distorted lens of liberal existentialists (Rudolf Bultmann and company) or evangelical pietism. Oddly, he blames the Reformation for the romantic, spontaneous, and existentialist view of the Christian life.

In spite of the rich and varied discussions of virtue by the Reformers, the Puritans, and a host of Protestants since, Wright asserts, “Basically, the whole idea of virtue has been radically out of fashion in much of Western Christianity ever since the sixteenth-century Reformation.” Since we are justified through

faith apart from works, “why bother with all this morality? . . . That, in fact, is more or less what Martin Luther declared, thumbing his nose at the long medieval tradition of virtue.” A footnote to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is brought in as a witness, but there is no footnote for *Luther’s* alleged proposal.

Grace not only justifies but also renews and transforms, Wright properly insists—apparently unaware that Luther argued precisely the same point, and repeatedly. Undaunted, Wright repeats the charge as if it had been demonstrated with actual evidence: “As we saw earlier, Martin Luther, writing nearly five centuries ago, reckoned that all ‘virtue’ was really ‘hypocrisy.’” And this: “The normal Protestant objection to

MY TOP 5 BOOKS ON PRAYER

By Robert Benson, author of *In Constant Prayer* (Thomas Nelson)



A GUIDE TO PRAYER FOR MINISTERS AND OTHER SERVANTS

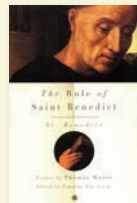
REUBEN JOB AND NORMAN SHAWCHUCK (UPPER ROOM)

This is the book that first showed me that prayer is more than talking to God whenever I want, about whatever I want. In its pages, I met the monks and mystics and poets and pilgrims who have continued to draw me into the mystery of prayer.



THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER

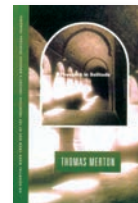
The sheer poetry of this version of the ancient liturgies, psalms, and prayers translated into English remains, for me, the standard for corporate prayer in the Christian tradition. The language itself rises as incense; I suspect the psalmist would agree.



THE RULE OF SAINT BENEDICT

SAINT BENEDICT (VINTAGE)

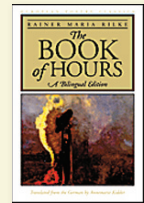
This book taught me that prayer is not an attachment to a life lived *for* God—it is the center of a life lived *with* God. Sometimes a single preposition can make all the difference.



THOUGHTS IN SOLITUDE

THOMAS MERTON (FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX)

“Father Louie,” as Merton was known, is the one who taught me what the fruits of a life of prayer, or at least one in pursuit of prayer, might turn out to be. His is the first book I downloaded to my iPhone when I was dragged across the bridge to the 21st century.



THE BOOK OF HOURS

Prayers to a Lowly God

RAINER MARIA RILKE (NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY PRESS)

Rilke is my favorite poet, and his book of prayers based on the monastic hours opened me up to the way ancient prayer, prayed by the faithful for centuries, might take root in me, that I might finally come to hear and say the “prayer of God that is rising in my heart.”

virtue, as we've seen, is that it's just hypocrisy," that "moral effort is a sign that you're still on the wrong track. All you have to do is to go with the flow of the Spirit!"

Yet the "let go and let God" view of sanctification Wright challenges is the approach that Reformed writers like J. I. Packer (*Keep in Step with the Spirit*) identify as a more Wesleyan-oriented, Keswick movement emphasis. In any case, the view that Wright attributes to the Reformation, and especially to Luther, was actually excoriated by the Reformers as antinomian "enthusiasm." It's true enough that Lutheran views of sanctification seem more passive than Reformed approaches, but in addition to caricaturing Luther's positions, the criticisms lack any nuance in distinguishing between Reformation traditions.

Wright says the goal of sanctification is "to grow in looking away from oneself and toward God on the one hand and one's neighbors on the other." This is nearly a verbatim formula from Luther. So is this one: "The Christianly virtuous person is not thinking about his or her own moral performance. He or she is thinking of Jesus Christ, and of how best to love the person next door." He complains that the Westminster Shorter Catechism's first question and answer is inadequate when it says that our chief end is "to glorify God and to enjoy him forever." Yet he goes on to flesh out what is essentially the same point. The author emphasizes the Christian pilgrimage as a theology of the Cross, suffering with Christ in the hope of the Resurrection, without recognizing that this too was a major theme in Luther's and Calvin's works.

While there are many good biblical-theological studies that make the same points, Wright—ever the master of metaphor and turns of phrase—is especially effective in communicating the richness of the Bible's eschatological horizon to a wide audience. Nevertheless, his imprecision about the views that he targets for criticism is careless, depriving him—and his readers—of resources and allies for a message that is on so many points a vital and necessary corrective. ☩

Michael Horton is J. Gresham Machen Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics at Westminster Seminary in Escondido, California, and author of *The Gospel-Driven Life* (Baker).

Cross-Cultural Manners

Wise advice on dealing with money and relationships when working overseas. By Aaron M. G. Zimmerman

The American megachurch pastor had the best intentions when he promised a fledgling sister church in Eastern Europe to do "everything in his power" to help them build a sanctuary. After he returned to the U.S., the European church scraped and borrowed to come up with \$50,000 and start construction. After all, they were sister churches. In their culture, family members looked after each other. They knew from the American church's website that the Americans were spending \$6 million on a café and vestibule, so surely they would come through on their pledge to help pay for the small building.

Unfortunately not. The American pastor stopped returning e-mails and phone calls. Six months later, the European church got an answer: The pastor had been unable to "sell" his congregation on the idea. The European congregation felt deeply betrayed; their leader began to seriously question his faith.

As the body of Christ has thrived in the two-thirds world, cross-cultural partnerships between churches "here" and "there" are increasingly common. As a missionary in Central Asia for several years, I witnessed many times the fruit of such partnerships. But the pitfalls are real, particularly when money is involved.

In **Cross-Cultural Partnerships: Navigating the Complexities of Money and Mission** (InterVarsity) ★★★★★, Mary Lederleitner tackles these issues with her considerable experience and education. Trained as a CPA, Lederleitner has served long-term with ministries in the U.S. and overseas. As a result, her book is eminently practical, filled with eyewitness stories of successes and failures in cross-cultural settings.

For example, Lederleitner suggests that churches adopt accounting practices that make sense in the ministry's context. If

the cross-cultural partners serve in a country where receipts are practically nonexistent and utility bills are routinely late, it is unrealistic for Western partners to demand financial reports 15 days after quarter's end.

Regarding conflict management, Lederleitner reminds Americans that in some cultures, confronting people head-on is not the best approach. She describes one indigenous ministry in which a person was ignoring financial controls, increasing the risk of fraud. When Lederleitner spoke to the ministry's board, she simply described best practices used by other nonprofits as well as the purpose of financial controls. The ministry leader thanked her and moved on to other agenda items. No one was personally confronted, and a few weeks later, the situation resolved itself.

Refreshingly, this practical book is grounded in a thorough grasp of two central doctrines: original sin and the grace of God.

Lederleitner does not assume that ministry partners from different cultures will just get along. They need to do their homework and learn about the culture they serve. And she knows that missionaries are not immune to money's temptations. She offers clear-eyed advice about financial controls.

And only an understanding of God's grace can make American Christians—with their money, status, and power—able to humbly approach a Ugandan (or Chinese or Ukrainian or Peruvian) pastor with a willingness to listen and learn. Grace is what breaks Western habits of paternalism and colonialism. And God's grace is what will ultimately bring people of every nation together in the worship of Jesus Christ. ☩

Aaron M. G. Zimmerman is a pastor at St. Stephen's Church (Sewickley, Pennsylvania) and a regular contributor to the Mockingbird Blog (Mockingbirdnyc.blogspot.com).



BITS & PIECES

Excerpts from recent books.

A POSITIVE LIFE

Living with HIV as a Pastor, Husband, and Father

SHANE STANFORD (ZONDERVAN, 224 PAGES)

My grandfather broke the silence: “What are you going to do with this thing?” He never used the letters *HIV* or the word *AIDS*, and he never talked about sickness or disease. But I knew exactly what he was talking about.

“I don’t know. There’s no cure,” I said, looking down while messing with a blade of grass. “There is not much of a choice.”

“You always have a choice,” my grandfather said, his voice steady. He was straightforward in his words but not gruff or difficult in his tone. He just wanted me to hear and pay attention.

“What choice do I have?” I asked. There didn’t seem to be many choices on my end. In fact, the doctors had not given any, and most, if not everyone in my life, were walking around as though resigned to the fact that there were no choices available. “Sometimes,” I finally added, “I feel like running as fast as I can. I am not sure where I would go, but just to see if I could outrun this feeling of loneliness and dread in my life.” My grandfather was listening.

“And then there are times when I just want to lie down and let it be over. Some days it is hard to find a reason to feel joyful again. That scares me more than the disease.”

I was trying to be honest with him about where my heart was in this news and in this whole fight. I had gone through a lot in my life, but this was different. The face of this disease was bigger than all of us put together.

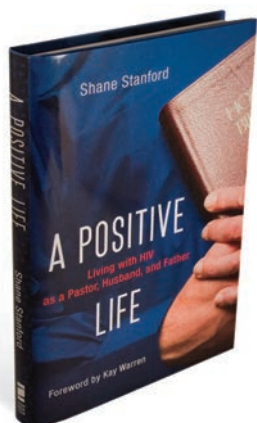
My grandfather shifted to turn more toward me. He leaned against the ground with his left arm so that he could look me in the eye. “If anybody has a right to get in the corner and have a pity party about this, it’s you. It’s a very raw deal, and I can’t tell you that I understand it or have even begun to confront my anger over it. But as bad as this

seems—and I know it’s bad—you have a choice to make.

“I know what is in your heart and deep in your soul, and I think you are going to make a choice other than pity, retreat, or surrender. I think you are going to live each day to the fullest with everything you have. I think you are going to take each day, no matter how many you have, and make something of it. No one can ask any more of you.”

He stopped and looked into my eyes. “And son, I think your making *that* choice will mean something someday.”

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WILSON'S BOOKMARKS

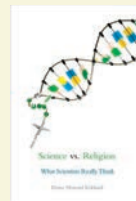
From the editor of Books & Culture.



SCIENCE VS RELIGION

What Scientists Really Think

ELAINE HOWARD ECKLUND (OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS)



Ecklund, a sociologist at Rice University, interviewed natural scientists and social scientists at elite American research universities to probe their attitudes toward religion and the relationship between science and religion. Instead of sweeping generalizations, she gives us individualized voices representing a broad spectrum of convictions. Her moderately optimistic findings suggest that “boundary pioneers” like Francis Collins—who seek to “translate science for a broader believing public”—will have an increasingly important role to play. In evangelical circles, we still have a long way to go, but there are hopeful signs—including the appearance of a book such as this.

SILK PARACHUTE

JOHN MCPHEE (FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX)



“The massive chalk of Europe lies below the English Channel, under much of France, under bits of Germany and Scandinavia. . . .” I was hardly aware of the existence of the “massive chalk of Europe,” but with John McPhee as guide, I happily followed for more than 30 pages. Later in this delightful collection of essays I read about lacrosse and even (against all my instincts) golf, saving as a treat a piece on fact-checking in *The New Yorker*. I start each new McPhee book hoping for signs of an improbable turning toward faith.

THEREBY HANGS A TAIL

A Chet and Bernie Mystery

SPENCER QUINN (ATRIA)



In the gallery of great characters in detective fiction, from Sherlock Holmes and Father Brown to Precious Ramotswe, we need to make room for a newcomer: Chet, the canine narrator of a light-hearted series in which this book is the second installment. With his partner, private investigator Bernie Little, Chet is so palpably real that I cannot believe he exists only in marks on a page (or a screen). His creator, here styled “Spencer Quinn,” is better known as Peter Abrahams, a superb suspense novelist. Long may Chet and Bernie ramble.

Get Thee Behind Me, Insecurity

Beth Moore tackles a menacing issue for many women. Interview by Sarah Pulliam Bailey

Insecurity, Beth Moore says, is the number one issue threatening women. The prolific author and sought-after speaker says she does not plan to battle insecurity—she intends to defeat it. She seeks to help other women do the same with her latest book, **So Long, Insecurity: You've Been a Bad Friend to Us** (Tyndale). CT online editor Sarah Pulliam Bailey spoke with Moore at Living Proof Ministries in Houston about why defeating insecurity is so fundamental.

With all the problems and issues facing women, why did you decide to write about insecurity?

God will use one portion of something I've

INTERVIEW

been working on that I never got to completely exhaust. That happened with *Esther*, the last full-scale Bible study I wrote. I wrote on how much pressure Esther had to have been under as a woman, and how much her story speaks to us so many centuries later. I could not let go of that; day after day it kept occurring to me. I have had 25 years in women's ministry, and I have the outrageous joy of living with women all the time. And I'm telling you, it is the number one issue I see in us right now.

How would you respond to people who say that addressing insecurity is more of a psychological issue than a biblical issue?

We get into the biggest defeats in our personal lives when we keep compartmentalizing things into spiritual and religious categories.

The Lord is the one who addresses everything that has to do with the human psyche and our emotional lives, and we keep setting them apart. So when we doubt and self-destruct in any area, we don't live under the umbrella of his authority, his help, or by the power of his Spirit. The Word of God is so much broader than people are giving it credit for. Look at Proverbs, a book written on how to live.

Why did you venture into something some might call "self-help" writing?

I felt as called to write this book as I felt called to write a Bible study on Esther and a Bible study on Daniel, because the whole person belongs to God. He sees the trap that we are in. He certainly speaks to freedom, of being

out from under the bonds of a stronghold. No one would have trouble if we were saying we're going to go to God's Word about coming out from under the power of addiction. Everybody would say, "Amen. More power to it."

Now why is it that when we get to a matter like insecurity, suddenly people think, *Isn't that self-help?* Well, was [addressing] addiction self-help? Or do we believe that God can deliver us from any area of bondage? Insecurity is just another area of bondage, and it is a whopper.

How would you respond to someone who says, "She's beautiful. Of course she's not insecure"?

When I bring up the topic of insecurity, one thing women will often say is, "What would you have to be insecure about?"

But we have to get out of the stereotypes of who we determine must be secure versus insecure by the way they seem on the outside. That has zero indication. That I need to have my outside completely together may reveal insecurity more than it would indicate security.

You mention that you have felt insecure, worrying that your husband might leave you for a younger woman. How do you combat those feelings?

That is a very common fear a lot of women have, especially coming into those later years [of marriage]: *Will he love me or will he leave me?*

My husband has been a wonderful husband; he has confessed a number of times face to face, with my chin in his hands, "Baby, I will never leave you." But the fact is, I cannot base my security on Keith always

being faithful to me. What if he died tomorrow? I have to know that my God is my security, that he does not change. I believe in my husband.

But what I have to believe in before or beyond anything that man can do is that God will always be with me and will always take care of me. Our conditional trust, our conditional security, is still not security. ✦



Saving the Children, Really

Documentary shows three faiths fighting slavery. By Annie Young Frisbie

There are no limits to the cruelties that humans inflict on one another, and slavery—particularly the trafficking of children—may be at the apex of depravity. An estimated 27 million are enslaved worldwide. Jody Hassett Sanchez's documentary **Sold** (Pointy Shoe Productions) ★★★★★ profiles three rescuers—a Hindu, a Christian, and a Muslim—who are trying to make a dent in that number.

“When we do prostitution, we see only hell,” says Manisha, a sex slave rescued by Sunitha Krishnan, a former Hindu nun. Trapped indoors for two years, Manisha is one of many women and girls rescued from brothels in India by Krishnan, who helps the girls find fulfilling work and dignity. Though she’s been beaten for her work, Krishnan stays driven by righteous anger—an anger that’s refueled when she hears stories like that of an 8-year-old girl locked in a room with a snake until submitting to prostitution. Krishnan jokes that she worships Ganesh (a Hindu god known as the “Remover of Obstacles”), because “he’s like me, very temperamental, very dominating, and loving, too.”



Mercy and healing drive Symphorienne Kessouagni, a Christian working in Togo, West Africa, where she cares for 17 former child slaves, providing shelter, nutrition, education, and more. Painted near the entrance of her home and school is Psalm 34:9: “Fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing.”

Kessouagni rescues mostly domestic slaves, like Moise, whose family sold him into market slavery when he was 4 years old. He

spent years hauling heavy loads as if he were a cart horse. Kessouagni reunited the boy with his mother, who can only say, “There was no other way for us to survive.” It’s not surprising, then, that Kessouagni teaches these forsaken bought-and-sold children that they have a Father in heaven who loves them.

It’s unfortunate that Hassett Sanchez doesn’t offer more religious context for the work of Ansar Burney, a Muslim attorney in Karachi, Pakistan, who rescues camel jockeys in the Middle East. Despite bans in some countries, young boys are taken to the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar, among other places, and forced to race camels to entertain

the wealthy elite. One young boy, taken at age 3, describes how, while crying for his father, he was beaten, starved, and electrically shocked so that he would stay on his camels. Another young boy saw his brother die. When asked what happened to his brother’s body, he simply says, “They bury them under the sand.”

Burney has won financial restitution for many victims. And while he’s driven by a zeal for righteousness, he doesn’t talk about how his faith informs his work—a missed opportunity, since his enemies are other Muslims.

While these accounts are harrowing, Hassett Sanchez eschews images of suffering in favor of those showing hope. Seeing the happy faces of now-rescued slaves makes child slavery that much more horrible. It’s not just the hubris of someone acting like they own another human that galls; it’s also that their actions rob these children of their happiness.

Each of these three lights in the darkness—Krishnan, Kessouagni, and Burney—exemplifies what it means to act with righteous anger, justice, and love on behalf of the least of these. (More: SoldtheFilm.com)

Annie Young Frisbie is a CT movies critic and blogs at SuperFastReader.com.

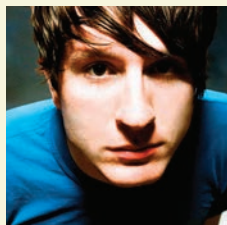
Megachurches, Oh My!

The documentary **The Alpha and the Mega** (Clothespin Films) ★★★★★ is more introductory than groundbreaking. The film, now available on DVD, explores the question, “What is a megachurch?” Director Morgan Mead, a small-town Indiana boy, attended his first megachurch a few years ago, and was so intrigued that he went looking for more, camera in tow.

When someone invokes the label *megachurch*, it’s usually not meant as a compliment. *Alpha* strikes a balanced tone, though, in part because its lead source—Hartford Institute sociology of religion professor Scott Thumma—is relatively sympathetic. As Mead visits churches both mega and mini, he finds that pastors have a spectrum of opinion on the megachurch, from “different strokes for different folks” to “contrary to Scripture.”

Alpha hits on many of the salient questions: Is the church more for believers or seekers? Can a big church care for everyone? Does breadth preclude depth? Should we entertain attendees? If you have already given this debate some thought, you’ll wish the issues were more finely delineated and more deeply probed. But its irenic spirit and pastoral voices make *Alpha* a solid primer to the megachurch phenomenon. (More: MegachurchMovie.com) —Tim Avery, associate editor, BuildingChurchLeaders.com

TWO MINUTES WITH... Owl City



A year ago, few people had heard of Owl City, the one-man synth band masterminded by 23-year-old Adam Young. But when his first major album, *Ocean Eyes*, went online in July 2009, iTunes

chose "Fireflies" as its single of the week—and the term *overnight sensation* was redefined. The song has been played some 30 million times at Young's MySpace page. What many don't know is that he takes his faith as seriously as his music. Painfully shy, Young, now working on his second album, insists on e-mail interviews; CT senior associate editor Mark Moring obliged.

GRANT: KRISTIN BARLOWE

How can such a shy guy put on such a dynamic show in concert?

It really is ironic that such a reclusive hermit like me has landed the job of a social butterfly. Other than pointing out that irony, I can honestly say that when I step onstage and begin to play, something comes over me, and I don't feel a single nervous pang.

What's the source of your creativity?

Faith and imagination. Faith is the reason I do what I do; imagination is the fuel that keeps the creativity flowing. The Lord Jesus Christ is my reason for creating, and I have nothing but gratitude toward him for being allowed to do what I do, and ultimately seize my wildest dreams as if they were just there waiting for me.

When did you become a Christian?

I grew up in a Christian home and came to know the Lord in middle school. From then on, I've wanted to serve Christ in every way I know how, music being the only thing I've ever considered myself any good at.

What's been the best part of your sudden renown?

I walked on the Great Wall of China. That was incredible. The best part of this whole thing is waking up every day knowing that I don't have to put on my boots and drive to work. I couldn't be more thankful for the chance to do what I love and make a living off of it on the side.



Roller-Coaster Life

Amy Grant's latest embraces hard realities and hope.

By Andrew Greer

In August 1999, two months after her well-publicized divorce from husband Gary Chapman was made final, Amy Grant took the stage at the Gospel Music Association's Music in the Rockies seminar in Estes Park, Colorado. The divorce—and the resulting public firestorm, especially in the Christian community—left Grant's emotions raw, and it showed. She broke down crying while singing "'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus," as the audience watched in complete silence.

In that moment, vulnerable with fear and grief, Grant garnered renewed affection as her story resonated with the roller-coaster journey of many. It is with the same honesty that she maps out a song-by-song journey of the past 30 years on *Somewhere Down the Road* (Sparrow) ★★★★★. It's a project rife with pain, struggle, and hope.

The first single, "Better Than a Hallelujah," proposes that our broken pleas to God are "better than a hallelujah sometimes," placing Grant's compassionate vocals within a context both intimately stirring and radio-ready. "Overnight" introduces the vocal gifts

of Grant's daughter, 17-year-old Sarah Chapman, conjecturing the melodic roundness of Frou Frou and Regina Spektor while lyrically proposing that "if it all just happened overnight / you would never learn to believe."

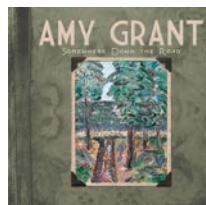
The acoustic rock of "Hard Times," à la Sheryl Crow and Bonnie Raitt, acknowledges that trials and tribulations come for us all.

The equally transparent "Third World Woman," an infectious acoustic blues performance (think Ben Harper and the Blind Boys of Alabama's *There Will Be Light* collaboration), effectively contrasts Western affluence with global poverty while issuing a universal spiritual plea ("Lord have mercy") in the chorus.

Though Grant is smiling more these days—with a happy marriage to country singer Vince Gill—she doesn't shy away from life's realities. *Somewhere Down the Road* bravely broaches the here and now with candor while embracing hope on the other side.

(Read our interview with Grant at ChristianityToday.com/ct/music.)

Andrew Greer is a musician and freelance critic living in Nashville.



BOOKS

► HIDDEN WORLDVIEWS

Eight Cultural Stories That Shape Our Lives

STEVE WILKENS AND MARK L. SANFORD (INTERVARSITY)

★★★★★ Worldview resources are usually designed to equip believers to shoot down rival philosophies in defense of Christian truth claims. *Hidden Worldviews* takes a different approach, reserving its ammunition for Christians. By explaining and exposing “isms” like consumerism, relativism, nationalism, and post-modern tribalism, Wilkens and Sanford deftly demonstrate how we too often live according to “cultural stories” that compete with the gospel. But *Hidden Worldviews* is not a screed against everything associated with these rival beliefs. Instead, the authors claim, each system of thought has aspects we should learn about, learn from, and learn to avoid. —Trevin Wax

► JESUS AND THE LAND

The New Testament Challenge to “Holy Land” Theology

GARY M. BURGE (BAKER ACADEMIC)

★★★★★ Dispensational theology may be in decline, but its key tenet of Christian Zionism still tops the bestseller lists. Enter Gary Burge. In his third book related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Wheaton College professor argues that any sort of “territorial theology”—any intertwining of God’s promises and kingdom with a particular geographical area—is foreign to the New Testament. Burge may not derail the appeal of Christian Zionism, but his careful reconsideration of prophecy and the Promised Land merits attention. —Madison Trammel

► WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

GREG GILBERT (CROSSWAY)

★★★★★ Apart from recent debates about the gospel, this book might bore. Greg Gilbert has absolutely nothing new to propose about the Good News, instead focusing solely on God’s perfection, humanity’s sin, Jesus’ sacrifice, and salvation through faith and repentance alone. With those debates in mind, though, Gilbert’s book provokes. Chapters six and seven shoot down a host of well-known gospel proposals, including any that hint of cultural transformation or a “bigger” gospel. Gilbert commendably defends penal substitution, but he needn’t have overlooked other biblical accomplishments of the Cross, such as Jesus’ victory over Satan. —Madison Trammel

► YOUR CHURCH IS TOO SMALL

Why Unity in Christ’s Mission Is Vital to the Future of the Church

JOHN H. ARMSTRONG (ZONDERVAN)

★★★★★ “God wants to tear down walls that keep you from other Christians.” That’s the basic premise of this new book from John Armstrong, president of church-renewal ministry ACT 3. He tells his own story of how God grabbed his attention about church unity, as well as the New Testament mandate for it. He reveals signs that a new ecumenical (but not liberal) emphasis is already afoot, and then suggests how to deepen that unity and tie it to the church’s mission. —Mark Galli

► THE MEETING OF THE WATERS

Seven Global Currents That Will Propel the Future Church

FRITZ KLING (DAVID C. COOK)

★★★★★ A number of books have been written on global trends that the church is wise to watch. But few do it as simply and succinctly as this one by Fritz Kling. His take on global trends arises out of his work as a foundation executive who travels the world evaluating in practical terms various and sundry Christian projects. He names the trends he has noticed, from migration to machines to memory, and illustrates with ministries and people he has met through his travels. —Mark Galli

► NO STONES

Women Redeemed from Sexual Addiction

MARNIE C. FERREE (INTERVARSITY)

★★★★★ By “female sex addict,” surely we mean the woman who savors a periodic Harlequin romance? In the first major Christian-published book on the topic, Marnie Ferree blows to bits easy assumptions about who gets addicted and why. The Nashville-based clinician delves into the relational and neurochemical roots of sex addiction, calling it an *intimacy disorder* that stems often from family dysfunction and trauma. Craving “affirmation, affection, and approval,” women sex addicts easily fall into affairs and exhibitionism, only to hunker down in shame and sever relational ties, thus hitting “repeat” on the addiction cycle. Blessedly practical and deeply biblical, *No Stones* gives women—and their husbands and counselors—tools to break the cycle and the hope of finding real intimacy. —Katelyn Beatty

► THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LOST

CHRIS SEAY (THOMAS NELSON)

★★★★★ If ever a television show was asking for the “Gospel According to . . .” treatment, *Lost* is it. Seay does not merely project the gospel onto a popular show; he unpacks the

rich Christian imagery already there to address significant ideas: faith vs. reason, fate vs. free will, sin and guilt, brokenness and redemption. While the book, as a result of its pre-season six release, misses out on some of the show’s richest spiritual content, fans will particularly appreciate the chapters on Eko and Jacob—how the show’s most confusing and profoundly spiritual characters demonstrate how *Lost* has elevated the discussion of faith on television. —Laura Leonard

► STUFF CHRISTIANS LIKE

JONATHAN ACUFF (ZONDERVAN)

★★★★★ Yes, the popular blog-turned-paperback *Stuff Christians Like* is a direct rip-off of the even more popular blog-turned-paperback *Stuff White People Like*. And yes, one of the things Christians like is making their own versions of “secular” intellectual property. Acuff’s is not the first book of insider evangelical observational humor (see Patricia Klein, Joel Kilpatrick, Matthew Paul Turner), but his background as a trend hunter for an advertising company makes it sharper than most. It’s also far more accurate sociology than all the sour-faced “explaining evangelicalism” books that came out after Bush’s reelection. —Ted Olsen

MUSIC

JOHNNY CASH

► AMERICAN VI: AIN’T NO GRAVE

(AMERICAN RECORDINGS/LOST HIGHWAY)

★★★★★ Icons inevitably release posthumous albums (Cash has more than most). But this is one of the few that almost sounds—both lyrically and vocally—like it could have been recorded posthumously. In many ways, it’s *American V Part 2*, a result of the same vocal recording sessions just before Cash’s 2003 death (later arranged by producer Rick Rubin). The Cash-authored track (“1 Corinthians 15:55”) isn’t as strong as his other benedictions (“The Man Comes Around,” “Like the 309”), and, strangely, “Cool Water” omits the eschatological last verse. But the album avoids the karaoke excesses of some earlier *American* installments and sounds heartfelt from start to finish. —Ted Olsen

THE HOLMES BROTHERS

► FEED MY SOUL

(ALLIGATOR)

★★★★★ Describing the Holmes Brothers as a “meat and potatoes” band isn’t a slam; it just means that their music is simple, never flashy, and always nourishing. On *Feed My Soul*, produced by Joan Osborne and heavy on greasy organ vamps, they make soul music with rock instruments and gospel overtones.

The songs celebrate love as something enduring, down to earth, and real—except in the final song, “Take Me Away,” in which they leave earth’s orbit and aim for the heavens in a psalm-like prayer for deliverance from these worldly blues. —Josh Hurst

THE WAYSIDE

▶ SPIRITUAL SONGS

(GYROSCOPE ARTS)

★★★★★ In two decades of making rootsy music, John and Michelle Thompson (better known as The Wayside) have always asked questions in their lyrics. *Spiritual Songs*, an album of covers, is born from old-time hymns and timeless truths. With gorgeous harmonies, bare-boned but beautiful instrumentation, and a newfound urgency, the duo especially shines on a breathtaking reading of “Psalm 51” and the Americana-styled “Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior.” Yet the true gem lies in a cover of Kris Kristofferson’s “Why Me, Lord?” soaked in a country-blues sentiment and a surrender-filled sense of fulfillment. —Andy Argyrakis

ORTOLAN

▶ TIME ON A STRING

(SOUNDS FAMILYRE)

★★★★★ Taking melodic cues from the folk and pop of the 1950s and '60s, Ortolan brings girl-group elegance to the eccentric Sounds Familyre roster (Sufjan Stevens, Soul-Junk, and the Danielson Famile). Produced by Daniel Smith, *Time on a String* blends indie-pop quirkiness with dreamy harmonies akin to Easley. Their lyrics do not convey the most profound messages about life, but with the group’s members between the tender ages of 16 and 23, childlike faith is more the point. These four ladies sing bright-eyed songs of joyful whimsy for kids ages 5 to 95. —Ron Augustine

POINT OF GRACE

▶ NO CHANGIN’ US

(WORD)

★★★★★ From Nashville’s Fan Fair to the Grand Ole Opry, Point of Grace used the acoustic flavor of 2007’s *How You Live* to test the waters of country music. And with plenty of mandolin pickin’, fiddle chops, and steel guitar chimes percolating their latest, the Grace girls officially take the plunge. While some may criticize the shift, faith-based candor still permeates catchy choruses of life and love, and the vocals sound more at ease than ever, with a rootsy approach to their signature harmonies. Point of Grace has weathered changes in membership and style in recent years, but *No Changin’ Us* is both a homecoming and a fresh start for one of Christian music’s most popular assets. —Andrew Greer

JENNIFER GRASSMAN

▶ SERPENT TALES & NIGHTINGALES

(INDEPENDENT)

★★★★★ One of the more intriguing albums I’ve heard in a while, Grassman’s 58-minute opus is a unique mix of bombastic prog rock, piano pop, and opera—something between Fiona Apple, Tori Amos, and Evanesence. The versatile Texan says she drew on 1930s influences such as Duke Ellington, Dinah Washington, and Frank Sinatra to write these songs, which she hopes will encourage listeners through the recession as those artists did during the Great Depression. A concept album laden with classical and theatrical flourishes, *Serpent Tales* progresses through songs of confusion and sadness, ultimately arriving at joy and peace. —Mark Moring

IN THEATERS

▶ IRON MAN 2

PARAMOUNT | NOT YET RATED | MAY 7

In 2008’s *Iron Man*, the brilliant Robert Downey Jr. showed his acting chops by giving the title character (Tony Stark) the kind of complexity and depth that Stan Lee intended—a narcissistic, hedonistic, egomaniac with heart . . . even if it was an artificial one. In his newfound desire to do good and fight evil, Stark/Iron Man is revered as nearly divine—an image that villain Whiplash (Mickey Rourke) intends to shatter: “If you could make God bleed,” he seethes in the trailer, “people would cease to believe in him.” Hmm. We do believe in a God who bled. Let’s see how that idea plays out in this film. —Mark Moring

ON DVD

▶ MAKING SENSE OF AUTISM

JONI & FRIENDS | UNRATED

★★★★★ In recent years the church has become better at incorporating special-needs children into its programs, partly because of good resources now at its disposal. Add to the list this two-part series, produced for the Joni and Friends television series and hosted by disability advocate Joni Eareckson Tada. She is joined by experts and parents of autistic children to deliver a helpful primer on the condition and how the church can better minister to these needy kids. Part 1, “Myths That Hide the Truth,” demolishes several misconceptions about autistic children, including the myth that they lack intelligence, and Part 2, “Truth for the Church,” includes practical suggestions for those in children’s ministry. —Mark Moring



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- attends a small group —
- owns 3 Bibles —
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Absent in Body

Is Spiritual Formation Possible in Online Christian Education?

With opportunities for online learning growing by leaps and bounds, many people are now able to take advantage of Christian higher education without having to leave their ministry, family, or work. While course quality may be on par with traditional on-campus learning, questions exist regarding the possibility of significant spiritual formation away from a campus community.

Mary E. Lowe and Stephen D. Lowe of Erskine Theological Seminary, co-directors of the National Consultation on Spiritual Formation in Theological Distance Education, conducted a three-year study funded by the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion. The following article reports on the findings of the study and looks at the question, "Is spiritual formation possible in online Christian education?"

Trends in Seminary Distance Education

Most institutions of Christian higher education are

experiencing an explosion in enrollment for distance and online education. The Sloan Consortium reports that enrollment in the future will probably increase for those institutions that are the most engaged in online learning. Many seminaries and four-year private and Christian colleges are a part of this trend. While the economy continues to take a toll on traditional enrollment, according to *USA Today* (March 17, 2009), more Bible colleges and seminaries are turning to online study as one way to address declining enrollments.

Financial concerns are not the only driving force behind increasing online study at Christian schools. Many of the students at Erskine Theological Seminary are mid-career changers and/or bi-vocational ministers. Most simply cannot afford to move away from their ministry, family, or work. They are determined to find schools offering online courses that enable them to remain where they are while they study.

The Association of Theological Schools has over 200 member institutions, more than a third of which report various

forms of distance education. This figure is likely higher, since many schools offer hybrid programs combining both online and on-campus courses. According to *Baker's Guide for Christian Distance Education*, there are over 500 online programs including schools, colleges, universities, and seminaries that offer Christian education. ACCESS, the Association for Christian Distance Education, has a membership of more than 100 institutions and/or organizations that offer Christian distance education, either nationally or internationally.

The Problem of Spiritual Formation in Online Theological Education

Despite the increase in online course offerings and degree programs, for many seminaries and other institutions of Christian higher education the question of spiritual formation remains elusive and problematic. While many in theological education applaud the technology that enables online learning, they question whether online learning communities foster the kind of student spiritual formation associated with traditional on-campus experiences.

Everyone who has considered spiritual formation has his/her own definition of the term. Each denominational and theological tradition has its own unique take on what the term involves and implies for the Christian life. The Erskine Seminary National Consultation on Spiritual Formation in Theological Distance Education defined spiritual formation as "whole person transformation into the fullness of Christ." One of the major problems identified in the deliberations was the plethora of confusing terms used (spiritual development, spiritual growth, faith formation, spiritual formation, Christian life, faith development, Christian development, etc.) and the delimiting nature of most of the terminology.

The National Consultation began using the term "Christian development" or "Christian formation," preferring to point the language in the direction of a whole person perspective. But even this language does not capture the entire biblical concept since it concentrates on student formation and

neglects, for the most part, any discussion of a corporate perspective, a dominant concept in the New Testament. While fully acknowledging that, in practice, the individual cannot be separated out from the corporate context of the body of Christ, for purposes of theological analysis it was done in order to be more precise and clear.

Any comprehensive treatment of spiritual formation must offer some way to account for both the individual and corporate aspects of development. The National Consultation's idea was to find a point of conceptual agreement between the social sciences and theology; this was based on the model of ecology of human development propounded by Urie Bronfenbrenner and a theological model of ecology of Christian development suggested in the writings of Howard Snyder, in particular his *Liberating the Church: The Ecology of Church and Kingdom* and *Decoding the Church: Mapping the DNA of the Body of Christ*. These models provided insight into the dynamic processes of Christian formation and helped interpret and explain the many references in the New Testament epistles to the interactive nature of Christian formation.

Brief Insights from the Two Models

Bronfenbrenner's ecology of human development model proposes that we cannot explain human development solely from the emergence of innate patterns mapped out in our human DNA. He demonstrates that human development involves interaction between the person possessing these innate patterns and other developing persons in a social ecology.

The key component in Bronfenbrenner's model is social reciprocity and the interaction between developing persons within a large social ecosystem. The result of this reciprocal interaction is reciprocal development. Human beings who interact with one another across a variety of social contexts influence each other for good or for ill developmentally.

This same reciprocal dynamic is present in Snyder's understanding of the church as a spiritual ecology. He

writes, "Ecological thinking reminds us that everything is related to everything else" (*Liberating*, p. 69). He goes on to elaborate that "God has saved us and made us responsible for each other . . . Believers must be ready to take some agreed responsibility for their own lives and for the lives of their sisters and brothers in the faith" (*Liberating*, p. 87).

The National Consultation looked for a similar emphasis in the New Testament on the critical importance of reciprocity for the faith formation of believers. Gordon Fee (1996) tells us that in the communities Paul founded "everything is done *allēlōn*." What Fee means is that Paul established ecologies of faith formation (local churches) and set up the very basic principle of reciprocity as the key ingredient to promote mutual edification or what Bronfenbrenner calls "reciprocal development."

When Christians reciprocally interact with one another they "build up one another" (1Thess. 5:11) corporately and individually, leading to whole person transformation into the fullness of Christ and whole church transformation into the bride of Christ "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (Eph. 5:27). The ecology of the body of Christ as set out by Paul in 1Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4 depicts reciprocity and interactivity among members of the body. The net result of this reciprocal interaction is reciprocal Christian development.

Application to Christian Distance Education

Social ecologies are not limited to physical face-to-face encounters. Online communities offer another kind of social interaction that can be as influential in promoting human development as physical communities.

We were recently in Haiti when the earthquake struck that caused such massive loss of life and demolished the fragile Haitian infrastructure. Our only reliable contact to the outside world for 10 days was via the Internet using email, Facebook, and instant messaging. We were able to create an online community of concerned family members, church members, and friends who supported, encouraged, and prayed for us. We

continued on page 68

STRENGTHENING LIVES FOR PURPOSE, SERVICE, AND LEADERSHIP



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felt their anxiety, concern, fear, love, sympathy, and support. We bonded in a unique social connection not possible through any other means. We were able to influence one another reciprocally for good and to the glory of God because of this electronically mediated connection.

When studying the reciprocal relationship between the apostle Paul and the churches he founded, there is a similar dynamic at work. While Paul ministered to churches in person, a great deal of his ministry was carried out while physically separated from his congregations. He reduced this physical distance through a mediated form of communication: the epistle.

Through his epistles, Paul was able to carry out ministry and to influence the spiritual development of individuals in his churches. He was able to pray for his churches and admonish and encourage them to "excel still more" in their walk of faith (1Thess. 4:1). He was even able to say that through the written form of his epistles they would be able to "comfort one another with these words" (1Thess.

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4:18). The reason for this spiritual impact with mediated communication was the empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit working through the written words in Paul's epistles. Although Paul longed to see the church in person (1Thess. 3:10) and desired that God would direct his way to see them (3:11), until that happened he could still have an effective ministry among them at a distance through his written epistles.

Mark Nichols, E-Learning Specialist at Laidlaw College, New Zealand, and a student in the Ph.D. program at the University of Otago, remarks "The apostle Paul is admired as the first great distance educator; the power of that example is that Paul remains a distance educator to this day."

A similar dynamic is at work in online Christian education. An ecological perspective allows us to appreciate the fact that humans can influence one another across space and time in much the same way as they can when physically present. In much the same way that the apostle Paul mediated his spiritual

influence through written epistles delivered over the Roman road system of the 1st century, we exert similar spiritual influence bi-directionally through online learning communities in the 21st century. Just like the apostle Paul, although we may be "absent in body," we can be "present in spirit" (1Cor. 5:4). Through this mediated online presence Christians reciprocally interact and influence one another toward greater maturity.

Examples of Reciprocal Interaction in Christian Distance Education

Dr. Damon Osborne, Associate Professor of Education at Mount Vernon Nazarene University, notes that one of the critical components in the facilitation of spiritual formation in online courses is required participation by both faculty and students. This intentionality increases collaboration and participation for all involved. The various tools he investigated include content-oriented discussion boards, optional prayer threaded discussions, optional chat

continued on page 71



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rooms, instant messaging, and podcasted chapel services. He found that a community of faith developed in spite of what he calls “intentional, yet optional, faith tools.” He added, “This is not to say that the prayer threads or synchronous tools such as chat are not effective in establishing a community of faith among some students and faculty. However, students have indicated that the discussions that take place in the content-oriented discussion boards provide the connections upon which a community of faith is truly established.”

Dr. Mark Maddix, Professor of Christian Education and Dean of the School of Theology and Christian Ministries at Northwest Nazarene University, identifies practices he finds helpful in ensuring spiritual formation in online courses. Professors select students in each online course for placement in ministry cohorts of 15-20 students. He reports, “The cohort format provides a context that fosters a strong learning community. Students build significant relationships and share life together in these learning communities.”

The school also pairs online students with a spiritual director or mentor who assists in the development of spiritual and personal accountability. Students are also required to keep a reflective journal of spiritual development as they chronicle their journey. Maddix observed, “I have been teaching online courses for over ten years and I am always delightfully surprised by the high quality of community that takes place in online classes.”

Maddix believes that the big question facing online education is whether spiritual formation can truly take place online. The research on social presence and learning communities indicates that it can. A student’s ability to conceptualize learning in their own setting may be more transformative than traditional forms of education. Maddix concludes, “Students have more interaction with a professor in an online course than in most traditional face-to-face courses. Through this social interaction with faculty and students community is developed and formation takes place.”

In the online graduate programs at

Northwest Nazarene University, students indicate that the strength of the program is the online learning community. Students develop significant relationships that support them in ministry and in life. Maddix reports, “Most of them would argue that they experience more authentic community in their online classes than in traditional courses.”

Results of Research on Spiritual Formation in Online Seminary Courses

The assumption that seminary students can grow spiritually in an online seminary course was consistent with the research findings by Dr. Mary Lowe, Director of Online Instruction at Erskine Theological Seminary. A study among Erskine Seminary online students reported enhanced spiritual development because of new information learned in the course and from interaction with peers in online courses. Additionally, online students reported a positive relationship between spiritual development and interaction between faculty members and fellow students.

Students in the online Erskine Seminary courses reported a positive influence on their personal relationship with God. The way in which students teased out this vertical relationship was evident through the terms they used, such as *knowledge*, *growth*, *spiritual practices*, and *progression*. There was increased knowledge and information about God, an awareness of stages of spiritual growth, and a deeper connection in terms of one’s relationship to God forged through understanding and application. One student reported, “I was challenged to think more deeply about the issue of spiritual formation as a result of being confronted with the delivery system [online] and interaction with peers and faculty.”

The issue of one’s relationship to God from a comparative view can be seen from terms such as *deeper*, *stronger*, *broad*, and *more in love with God*, which students used to describe the way in which their relationship with God was different as a result of their online courses. Another participant noted, “My relationship to God was deepened . . . [and] includes more introspection,

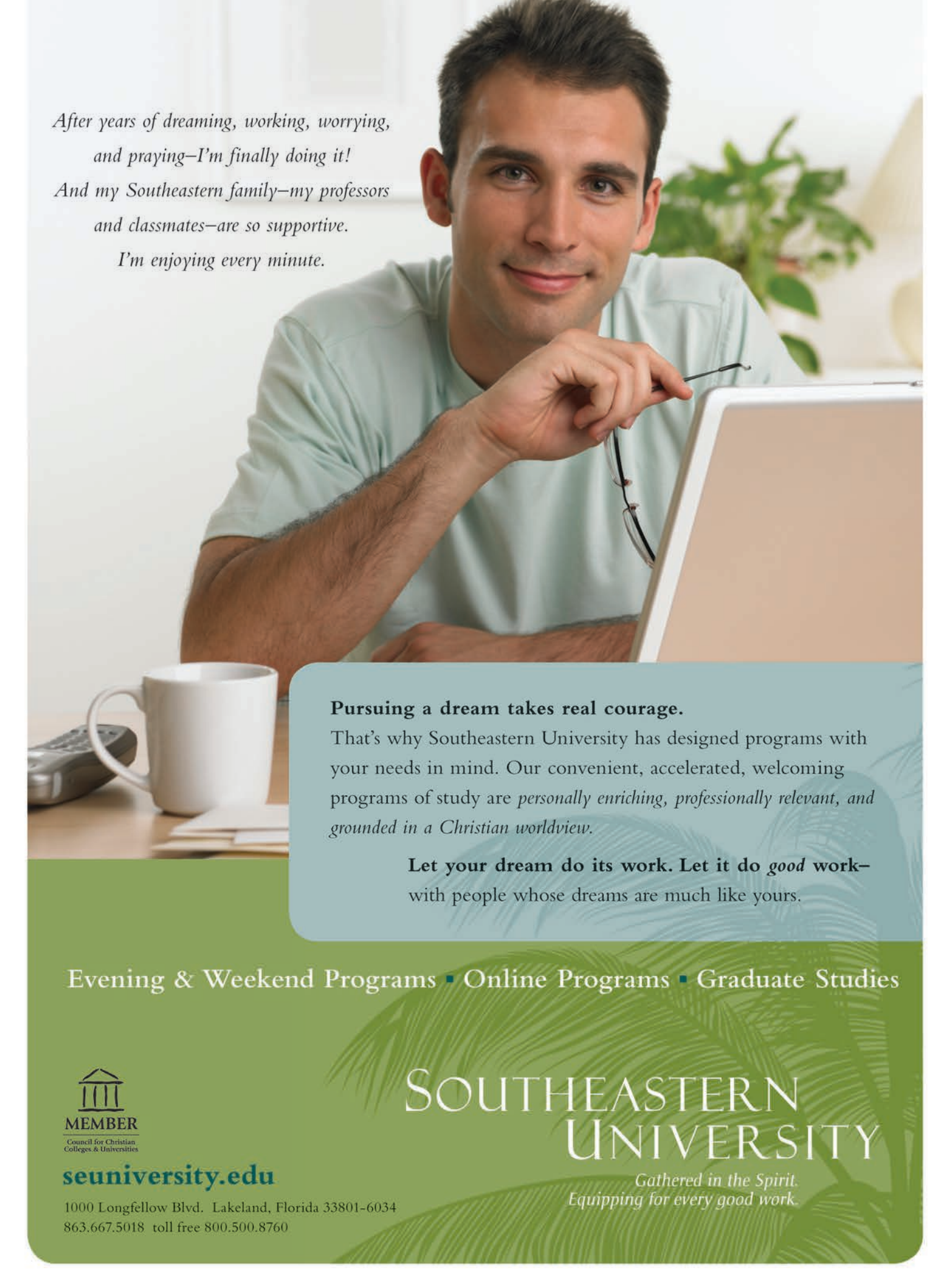
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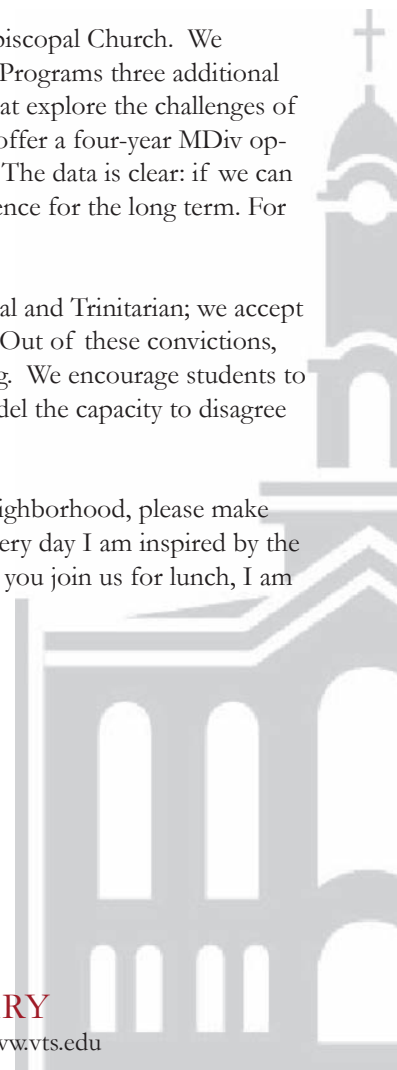
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and my own spiritual growth was greatly impacted.” Students repeatedly remarked that they learned more about God, themselves, and others in the online seminary course they completed.

The importance of peer relationships in an online community cannot be underestimated. With respect to spiritual formation, the community has tremendous influence—it’s how students nurture one another toward greater faith maturity.

Another issue addressed in this study is the notion that faculty must be engaged in face-to-face dialogue to produce formational opportunities. Results showed that faculty members’ geographical proximity to students is not as relevant as whether they intentionally encourage spiritual formation in course development, the quality of their interactions with students, and their own alignment with faith and learning. Because of intentional faculty interaction, participants in online education claim to have grown closer to

God, developed deeper relationships to other students, and expanded their horizons with respect to worship, spiritual disciplines, and course content.

A number of components within the online learning community, such as family, faculty, and fellow learners, also relate to the issue of spiritual formation. Online students in the Erskine Seminary study had connections to a family, interacted with faculty in the online courses, and interfaced with other students enrolled in their course or other online courses. Interaction with peers enhanced the spiritual component of the course through increased awareness of online community, greater diversity of theological views, the development of new relationships with fellow believers, and supportive encouragement during difficult times. A significant number of online students responded positively to the way in which peer interaction nurtured spiritual formation. Several addressed the issue of encouragement, using terms

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such as *uplifting, prayer, support, and reinforcement*.

This study suggests that the previously held notion of geographical location as a primary influence on spirituality may not be as significant as once thought. If validity is given to the perceptions and perspectives of online course participants, then intentionality, regardless of the medium, becomes a critical component in spiritual growth and development.

These findings suggest that theological distance education is providing ways in which students can, at the very least, encounter opportunities for spiritual formation. The research also suggests a cultural shift is taking place in seminaries, demonstrating the influence of the electronic age. The electronic revolution is influencing the spiritual formation of seminary students, especially among younger cohorts. It seems crucial that seminaries and educators address the way in which theological education is delivered beyond the traditional campus classroom and what intentional opportunities they can provide to help students in their Christian development.

Stephen D. Lowe (Ph.D., Michigan State University) serves as Associate Dean of Distributed Education and Professor of Christian Education at Erskine Theological Seminary, Due West, South Carolina. slowe@erskine.edu

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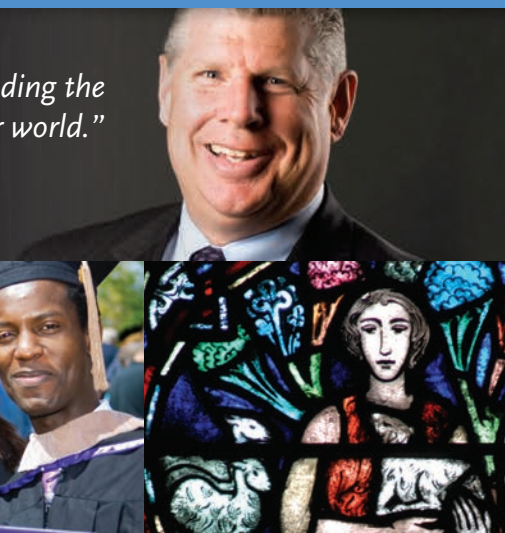
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BY MARK MORING



The Mission of Art

W. David O. Taylor grounds his aesthetic passion in the local church.

Growing up as a missionary kid in Guatemala, David Taylor was learning the meaning of beauty before he even realized it. Taylor names the tropical landscape as one of five key elements in shaping his own identity as an artist. The others: listening to his mother play classical music on her grand piano; watching his father tend orchids in the backyard greenhouse; reading “books outside my tradition” recommended by his Regent College professors, including Eugene Peterson; and “being given permission to try and fail—again and again—by the leadership of Hope Chapel [in Austin, Texas], as I sought to discover what an arts ministry was supposed to be about.”

Taylor, Hope Chapel’s arts pastor for eight years, is now studying theology and liturgy

in the doctoral program at Duke Divinity School, with an eye toward establishing an arts center in Austin. He has just released his first book, *For the Beauty of the Church: Casting a Vision for the Arts* (Baker), with contributions from such culture observers as Peterson, Andy Crouch, Lauren Winner, Barbara Nicolosi, and Taylor himself. He hopes his book will “offer the church a theologically informed, biblically deepened, liturgically sensitive, artistically robust, and missionally shrewd vision for the arts.”

- **Age** 38
- **Hometown** Austin, Texas
- **Church** All Saints Anglican, Durham, N.C.
- **Family** Phaedra Jean (wife)
- **Reading now** George Herbert’s poetry, David Maine’s *Fallen*, Kevin Vanhoozer’s *The Drama of Doctrine*, and Harry Potter (in Spanish)
- **On your iPod** Russian choral music and lots of hip-hop
- **Favorite website** ArtMachineStudios.net

question & answer

What is beauty?

Classically, the approach has been to see beauty in terms of three qualities: unity, complexity, and radiance. The textured parts of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* hold together in a way that keeps us asking for it again and again. But that can also be true of a Texas barbecue, the four beasts of Revelation, and the athleticism of Kobe Bryant. We shouldn’t stop with classical ideas about beauty; we also need to think about beauty Christologically. The moment we sever beauty from the death and resurrection of Christ, we risk sliding toward idealism or pretty-ism. In Christ we can discover the broken side of beauty, and it is in that light that we will find beautiful the self-sacrifice of a Mother Teresa or the terror of a *Schindler’s List*.

I might find something beautiful that you find ugly. Are we both right?

Yes. You might find the German language beautiful; I may find it ugly. But we find it beautiful and ugly for complicated reasons. You may despise bratwurst and German consonants, but that doesn’t mean that the language of Martin Luther ceases to be beautiful. We have to distinguish between the form of the material and our personal response to it.

How can the church better integrate the arts into its life?

It’s not that we haven’t thought biblically about the arts; it’s that we haven’t thought biblically deeply enough. It’s all there, as Andy Crouch points out in *Culture Making*: in Genesis and in the Gospels, in Jesus, the Icon of God and the great metaphor user. My prayer is that the essays [in my book] will stir us to develop a theology—a Christian mind about art—that is capable of sustaining a long-lasting, fruit-bearing tradition of art-making by the church, for the church, and for the good of the world, to the glory of God.

More: ArtsPastor.blogspot.com

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