

Jonathan Merritt, Al Mohler, and Cal Beisner Discuss Creation Care

# Christianity Today

JUNE 2010

**Are Denominations Dead?**



**(Not quite.)**

**+** MINISTRY ON A DIGITAL GLOBE 30  
RESURRECTION CULTURE 34  
ONE CITY, ONE CHURCH 38

# Respite {

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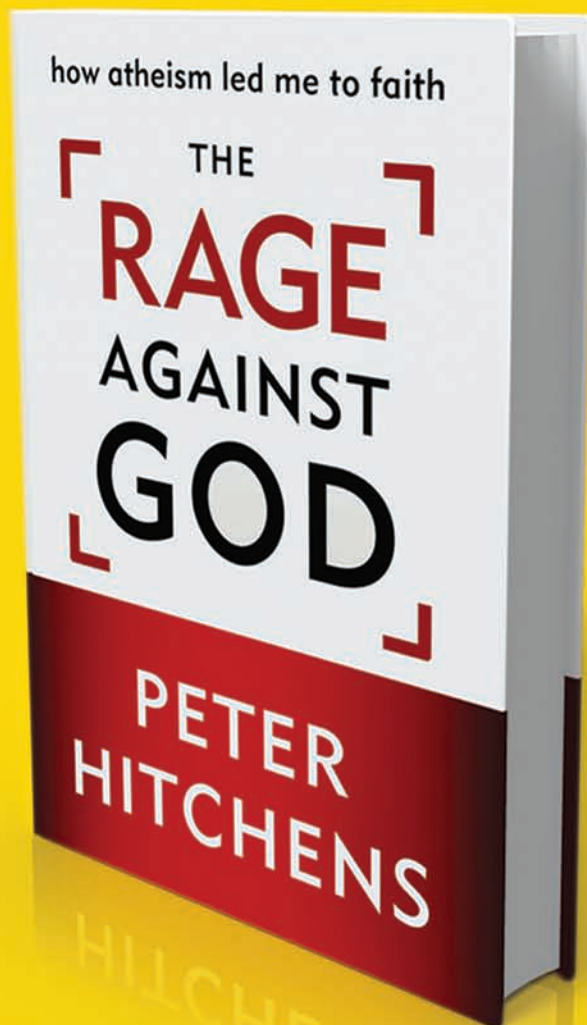
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COVER ILLUSTRATION  
BY JONATHAN BARTLETT

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

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

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# HOW ARE WE DOING?

The church, that is. Congregations have long measured success by “bodies, budget, and buildings”—a record of attendance, the offering plate, and square footage. But the scorecard can’t stop there. When it does, the deeper emphasis on accountability, discipleship, and spiritual maturity is lost. Ignoring those details, we see fewer lives changed by the gospel, more congregations fracture, and the church’s cultural influence wane—a situation that is all too familiar among churches today.

Based on the most comprehensive study of its kind, *Transformational Church* takes us to the thriving congregations where truly changing lives is the standard set for ministry. Having interviewed thousands of pastors and church members, Stetzer and Rainer clearly confirm the importance of the mindset, values, and actions necessary to become a Transformational Church in the midst of God’s kingdom mission. As churches and believers remain faithful to these biblical and statistically informed principles, the world will see the change:

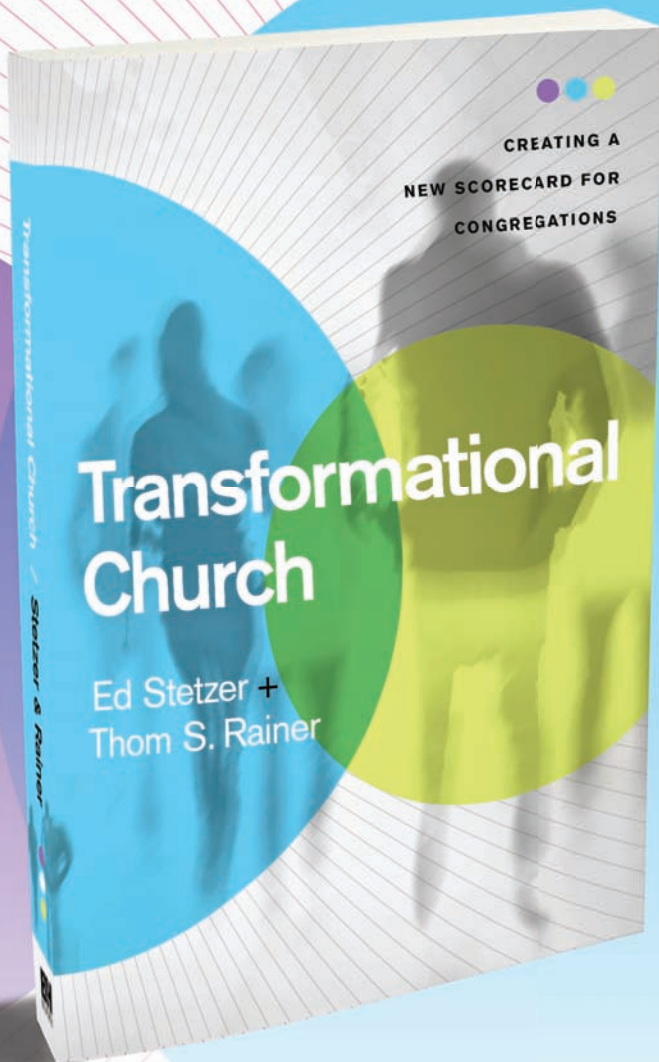
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MANAGING EDITOR,  
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# New Every Morning

A magazine for the scandalous, beloved church.



THE STEADFAST LOVE of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning.”

It's lovely. It's also in a book called *Lamentations*. It's not flowery sentiment; a few verses earlier the writer describes how his “teeth grind on gravel” and reflects on “the wormwood and the gall.” But it resonates here at *Christianity Today*. The first thing we ponder is “new every morning,” and what comes to mind is a compilation of the overnight religion headlines. It's always painful: a day doesn't go by without articles on church leaders philandering, embezzling, or misusing power. Recent coverage of the Catholic abuse scandal has been particularly overwhelming. Such scandal is predictable, but no less shocking. Lord have mercy.

And he does have mercy. Every morning, and every moment, the God who launched a seemingly ridiculous plan to rescue us by becoming one of us identifies with us again. He even calls the church his own body. God works through all kinds of institutions, networks, cultures, and individuals, but it's the church that is his primary agent for doing his will in the world. We see headlines on that, too. And, more frequently, we seek out those stories that never make newspaper headlines, since *CT* is unique in its deep commitments to robust journalism and the local church.

Those commitments are particularly on display in this issue, with Rob Moll's excerpt on how churches can build a culture of resurrection by helping congregants prepare for death (page 34); our editorial on church responses to media scrutiny (page 45); and Jeremy Weber's report on the Buenos Aires Council of Pastors (page 38). Weber's church unity story is not the kind you will find elsewhere, all platitudes and smiles. Argentina's pastors are honest about the issues they face and how they actually make unity happen.

Ed Stetzer's cover story on denominations (page 24) is similarly realistic. Stetzer speaks at more church-leader conferences than anyone we know (don't believe us? Check his Twitter feed. He's probably at one right now), and he advises everyone from the Anglicans to the Assemblies of God. But where one might expect exaggeration (“The end of denominations!” “The end of the independent congregation!”), Stetzer delves into explaining what denominations are good for. It's why we have missiologists and survey researchers, and Stetzer is both.

Speaking of surveys, ours indicate that about one of every five *CT* subscribers is a pastor. But nearly all (82 percent) are in a position of responsibility at church, whether leading a Bible study or running the sound board. So you know the scandal of Christ's identification with the church. And you identify with it, too, in the steadfast love of God. We love waking up to that thought, new every morning. ✚

**Next month:** Russell Moore on the act of compassion—adoption—that most directly connects to our theology, James Dobson on raising girls, and Collin Hansen on what difference place makes to ministry.


# What makes the miracles of Jesus even more miraculous?



Garden of Gethsemane



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**Q.** Who has trained and sent out more than 40,000 native missionaries to plant new churches within every province of Mainland China?

**A.** Indigenous Bible institutes, seminaries and missionary training centers.



**Q.** Who provides financial assistance for native missionary training centers in China?

**A.** During the past 22 years Christian Aid Mission has contributed millions of dollars toward the establishment and operation of 138 Bible institutes and missionary training centers in Mainland China.

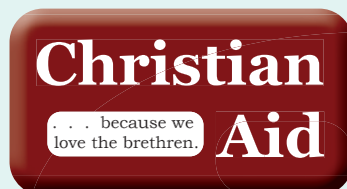
**Q. How is Christian Aid financed?**

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

**Q. Do indigenous missions in other countries also need our financial help?**

**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.



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# BRIEFING

REPORTING & DISPATCHES  
FROM THE CHURCH  
WORLDWIDE

## SPOTLIGHT: What We Learned about Africa

➔ In April, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life issued an extensive report on religious attitudes in sub-Saharan Africa, based on more than 25,000 face-to-face interviews in 19 countries. Most media coverage hit well-worn ground: the continent is the world's "most religious"; both Christianity and Islam have grown dramatically; and one of four Africans fears religious conflict in his or her country. But buried deeper in the 324-page report (*features.pewforum.org/africa*) were more surprising findings.



Tens of thousands have died in recent religious clashes, especially near Jos. But Nigerian Christians are the least likely among surveyed African Christians to have concerns about **religious extremism** in their country (22%), and are unlikely to say Muslims are violent (38%).

About half (48%) of Chad's Christians practice **polygamy**, far more than Christians or Muslims elsewhere in Africa. Chadian Christians also score high in support of **extramarital sex** (31%) and **prostitution** (12%).

Ethiopia and Uganda are the only countries surveyed where more Christians than Muslims practice **female genital mutilation**. Ethiopian Christians also have the lowest support for women in religious leadership (24%). But they are more likely than average to say women have as much right to jobs as men.

Cameroon's Christians want to see **Islam** have more influence in the country, and more than half say they associate Islam with tolerance. Some 77 percent believe many religions lead to eternal life. But they have Africa's lowest rate of cooperating with Muslims (12%).

Rwanda has had the most **switching within Christianity**: the percentage of people who are currently Catholic (54%) is 12 points lower than the percentage who were raised Catholic. Protestant percentages, by contrast, are 12 points higher.

The country has made international headlines for a bill proposing the death penalty or life imprisonment for homosexual acts. But it has one of the highest rates among African nations of Christians who think **homosexuality** is morally acceptable or neutral (16%).

Founded as Africa's first Christian nation but since plagued by civil wars, Liberia (along with Guinea-Bissau) is the only country to have more Christians (20%) than Muslims (17%) who believe that **violence** against civilians in defense of religion is justified. It also has the second-highest rate of Christians who associate the word *violence* with Christians (20%).

Tanzania is Africa's most **syncretistic** majority-Christian country, with many Christians believing in spells and curses (78%) and in sacred objects that protect from harm (44%). (If it's any consolation, the country's Muslims are syncretistic, too.) Ironically, prosperity gospel beliefs are relatively weak here.

Mozambique is home to Africa's few **secularists**: 2 percent say they are atheist and 11 percent describe their religion as "nothing in particular." In most other African nations, the percentage is zero.



## GLEANNINGS

Important developments in the church and the world.

### 1 Court: Day of Prayer unconstitutional

A U.S. district judge in Wisconsin ruled in April that the National Day of Prayer, authorized by federal statute in 1952, is an unconstitutional endorsement of religion. Responding to a suit from the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Judge Barbara Crabb said the statute “goes beyond mere acknowledgment of religion because its sole purpose is to encourage all citizens to engage in . . . an inherently religious exercise that serves no secular function in this context.” President Obama observed the event anyway on May 6, and the U.S. Justice Department said it would appeal the ruling.

pain at that development stage. The law takes effect in October but will likely face a court challenge. The Oklahoma legislature, meanwhile, overrode two governor vetoes and passed five bills related to abortion. The state now requires pregnant women to have ultrasounds within an hour before having an abortion and to provide demographic information for statistical use.

### 2 McAllister's Hopeline cuts ties with Exodus

Dawson McAllister's popular teen advice radio program said it would no longer refer callers to Exodus International after an online campaign against the ex-gay ministry. Clear Channel Communications, the syndicator of *Dawson McAllister Live*, told the show to treat its listeners “in a manner consistent with our corporate commitments to diversity.” Exodus president Alan Chambers called the ministry's decision “troubling” and a “bitter” irony; it was McAllister's message at a 1991 youth conference that led then-high-school senior Chambers to seek counseling with an Exodus affiliate.

### 4 Good legal news for British Christians

**UNITED KINGDOM** Pharmacists will still be able to refuse to dispense drugs that violate their religious beliefs when Britain's pharmaceutical system changes hands later this year. The incoming General Pharmaceutical Council will keep the current conscience clause but may require pharmacists to post lists of drugs they do not dispense. In other news, a UK Catholic adoption agency won a court battle over its exemption to refuse gay couples as potential adoptive parents (most similar groups stopped adoptions or severed church ties in 2009), and Communities Secretary John Denham announced a £1 million fund to help faith-based groups engage government.

### 5 Crystal Cathedral asks creditors for extension

The Crystal Cathedral, delinquent in payments to up to 185 creditors, asked in April for a 90-day extension while staff work out payment plans. The Orange County megachurch has a budget deficit of \$55 million and downsized ministry centers and programs earlier this year. The church's creditors include animal vendors and dry cleaners employed for the 2009 Christmas pageant; three

groups filed lawsuits claiming \$2 million in unpaid services.

### 6 Calvinists must permit female politicians



**NETHERLANDS** The Dutch Supreme Court has ordered the conservative Political Reformed Party (SGP) to allow women to hold leadership roles in the Calvinist party. After the ruling, the SGP released an all-male list of June election candidates; group leaders say they are “bringing biblical values into the governance and organization of the Netherlands.” The court says the party leadership policy conflicts with the 1979 UN Treaty for the Rights of Women.

### 7 Damages reinstated in faith-healing case

In a reversal of an appeals court ruling, the Michigan Supreme Court has awarded more than \$200,000 to a woman who was injured during a faith healing rally at a church. Judith Dadd filed the suit after she was injured in a 2002 meeting. Her pastor at Mount Hope Church in Delta Township said Dadd was faking the injuries, but the original jury awarded her more than \$300,000, including damages for libel, slander, and false light in 2007. The Michigan Court of Appeals overturned most of the damages, but the state's supreme court reinstated the original jury decision.

### 8 Florida mulls lowering church-state wall

Two amendments that would lift Florida's ban on state funding of religious organizations passed the state's House and Senate in April. The amendments allow public agencies to contract for services with religiously affiliated organizations such as soup kitchens and schools; most controversial is a proposal to allow state vouchers for parochial schools. Another bill, which passed a vote in the state's

#### GO FIGURE

##### Giving

**1,238,201**

Nonprofit charities and foundations in the U.S., as of 2009.

**654,186**

Nonprofit charities and foundations in 1996.

*The Chronicle of Philanthropy / Internal Revenue Service*



compiled by Ted Olsen

## QUOTATION MARKS

**“Christianity has deep convictions about what is true, but I don’t think Christians should impose themselves on people. My greatest concern is theocracy.”**

Charles W. Colson, in *The New York Times Magazine*

**“The goal of avoiding governmental endorsement does not require eradication of all religious symbols in the public realm.”**

Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy, in the plurality opinion in *Salazar v. Buono*. The opinion reverses a lower court’s ruling to remove a memorial cross from the Mojave National Preserve. *U.S. Supreme Court*

**“We are encouraging our church members to take care of their community by buying locally. This is an ethical purpose that is beyond profit.”**

Charles Adams, pastor of Hartford Memorial Baptist Church in Detroit, which teamed with General Motors in inviting churchgoers to test-drive new cars after Sunday services. *Detroit Free Press*

**“This stems from a desire to maintain an ecological balance, preserve water quality, and revive fishing.”**

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, on the country’s fishing ban in the Sea of Galilee for two years. *Reuters*

**“I can’t believe I’m saying this—don’t have sex. . . . It’s not really cool any more to have sex all the time.”**

Lady Gaga, eccentric singer. *Daily Mail (UK)*

education committee, would allow greater religious expression in schools, including prayer between teachers and students. If approved, the amendments will go on the state’s November ballot.

Tebow has regularly made headlines for sporting Bible references in his eye black, though players have used the space to communicate other messages as well.

### 9 Dissident sentenced, fined for illegal entry

**NORTH KOREA** One month after missionary Robert Park entered North Korea on Christmas Day, Aijalon Mahli Gomes followed his friend’s footsteps and entered the country illegally. In April the 30-year-old was sentenced to eight years of hard labor and the equivalent of a \$700,000 fine. Gomes, described by friends as a strong Christian, had attended rallies in Seoul in support of Park. Scholars expect the North Korean government to enforce Gomes’s punishment in an attempt to crack down on illegal entry.

### 12 Violence in Karnataka ‘outdoes Orissa’

**INDIA** Christians in the southern Indian state of Karnataka have been attacked more than 1,000 times in 500 days, a former judge said after an investigation. Justice Michael Saldanha said the attacks were worse than in Orissa, a state known for anti-Christian pogroms over the past decade. Saldanha said the state government is responsible; Karnataka’s home minister said claims of persecution are hyped and “politically motivated.” Christians compose 1 million of Karnataka’s 52 million residents.

### 10 Court: Blasphemy law will remain

**INDONESIA** Religious freedom observers held their collective breath when Indonesian activists in February got the world’s largest Muslim-majority nation to reconsider its blasphemy law. But in April the Constitutional Court voted 8–1 to uphold the 1965 law, which prohibits deviations from orthodox interpretations of the country’s six officially recognized religions: Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Confucianism. Human rights groups say the law is often used to restrict religious freedom.

### 13 CCM reacts to Knapp coming out

Many Christian retailers and radio stations faced an easy decision when musician Jennifer Knapp announced she is in a committed homosexual relationship; most had not played her music since she stopped recording in 2003. Houston’s KSBJ radio station dropped Knapp’s music some time ago, but its president said he would pull the music if it were on the current playlist. Christian Book Distributors, LifeWay Christian Stores, and other retailers removed her music from their websites.

### 14 ELCA publisher drops pensions

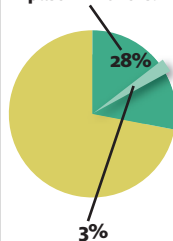
Lutheran publishing house Augsburg Fortress dropped its pension program in January after almost a decade of underfunding. Employees and retirees sued in April. Complicating matters: Church publishers (Augsburg is a unit of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) are exempt from federal laws mandating that pensions be paid in full.

### 11 NCAA bans messages in eye black

College football players can no longer write messages under their eyes with eye black due to a National Collegiate Athletic Association policy passed in April. University of Florida quarterback Tim

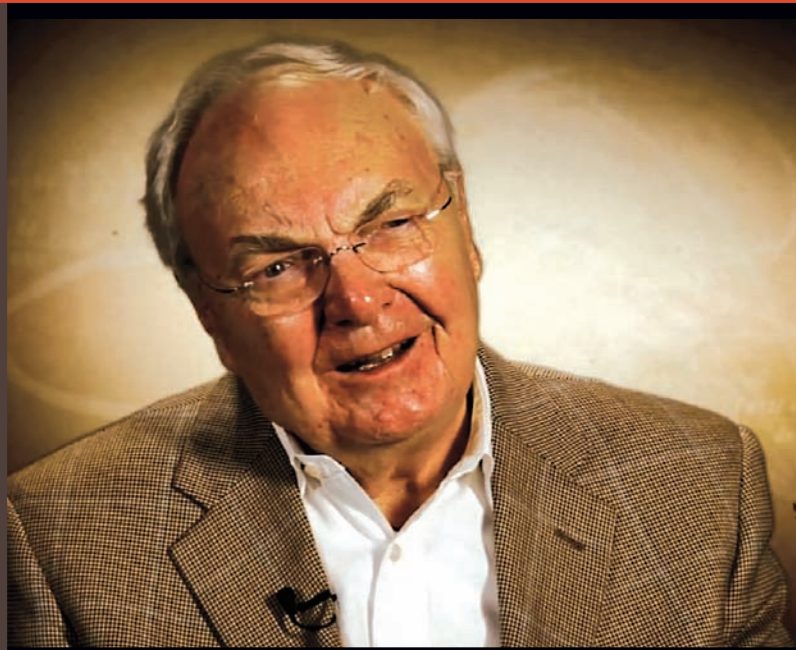
#### GO FIGURE Evangelism

Protestant churches that participated in some way in a church plant in the past 12 months.



Protestant churches that served as the primary (financial) sponsor of a church plant.

LifeWay Research



HIGHER EDUCATION

# Adamant on Adam

Resignation of prominent scholar underscores tension over evolution. *By Charles Honey*

**B**ruce Waltke built a national reputation teaching the Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS) for more than 20 years. But in March, when he seemed to challenge evangelicals in a video interview to consider the possibility of evolution or risk being seen as a “cult,” Waltke’s scholarly life exploded.

Seminary administrators asked Waltke to have the video removed from the website of BioLogos, a nonprofit promoting the integration of Christianity and science. Waltke promptly did so, but the video already had kicked up controversy. In early April, the renowned scholar resigned from RTS’s Orlando campus.

Waltke’s video addressed the barriers evangelicals face in considering the possibility of evolution, a process he believes is guided and sustained by God. Waltke said that “if the data is overwhelmingly in favor of evolution, to deny that reality will make us a cult . . . some odd

group that is not really interacting with the world.”

According to RTS interim president Michael Milton, Waltke’s resignation was accepted because of his “mainline evolutionary” views and “uncharitable and surely regrettable characterizations” of those who disagree with his biblical interpretation.

Waltke said he does not fault RTS—which still praises his scholarship—and that he resigned willingly. But he also does not regret stirring up controversy about an important issue.

“I see it as Providence,” said Waltke, who has been hired by Knox Theological Seminary. “I’m very glad the discussion has come to the fore.”

Tensions continue between Christian scholars and their institutions over how to present the findings of science while upholding theological convictions.

Westmont College biblical scholar Tremper Longman III was disinvited last year from further adjunct teaching at RTS due to questioning in a video whether Adam was

**◀**  
**Viral Video:** Renowned OT scholar Bruce Waltke didn’t expect his video interview on evolution to generate enough controversy to prompt his resignation from Reformed Theological Seminary. But he said he doesn’t regret reviving the origins debate.

a historical person. Biologist Richard Colling resigned last year from Olivet Nazarene University amid ongoing controversy over *Random Designer*, his 2004 book which was banned from Olivet classrooms for arguing that God is behind evolution.

“The general constituency of the evangelical community is lagging way behind the teachers at its own colleges and universities,” said Howard Van Till, a retired astronomy professor at Calvin College who survived an inquiry into his views on evolution and Scripture in the 1980s.

The Internet has needlessly inflamed conflicts that used to be handled internally, said William Ringenberg, a Taylor University historian of Christian colleges.

“Issues and controversies will sometimes be almost created by the process,” Ringenberg said.

Such dustups pressure institutions “heavily dependent upon public reputation,” he added. Theologians take greater risks than scientists in terms of how quickly a school’s constituents are “going to be alarmed or pass judgment.”

BioLogos itself is bringing the issue to the fore, says John Walton, a Wheaton College professor of Old Testament and author of 2009’s *The Lost World of Genesis One*.

“People have to start declaring what they may have just kept to themselves before,” Walton said.

RTS faculty have some leeway in how they teach creation, but Scripture gets the last word, Milton said. It is vital that evangelical schools clearly place science “under the banner of Scripture” so that other biblical teachings are not compromised, he said.

“Science is on a journey; revelation is a destination,” he added. “We begin and end with revelation at RTS.”

Walton hopes the debate pushes Christians to find common ground. “We have to start thinking more about values that we must affirm—biblical values—rather than conclusions [about how God created].”

## GO FIGURE Church Life

**6**  
More times per year that the average American woman attends church than the average American man.

**10**  
More times per year that women attended church than men in 1972.

*Sociology of Religion*

BIOLOGOS



MISSIONS

# Homeward Bound?

Short-term missions may be shifting domestic.  
By Ken Walker

**F**irst Baptist Church of Orlando saw a steady increase in overseas short-term missions come to an end in 2009. Not only did designated giving for missions decline 12 percent, low participation forced the Florida megachurch to cancel two overseas trips and postpone a third.

Global impact pastor Bill Mitchell believes a trend toward more domestic short-term trips might be under way, and expects participation to increase this year.

"It's better to get people doing missions with a \$500 to \$1,000 trip than having to continue to cancel \$3,000 trips because people can't afford to go," he said.

Mitchell's comments reflect a development first noticed by David Armstrong of Mission Data International (MDI) two years ago. His sampling of leading agencies showed that overseas trips have decreased by 15 percent since 2008. That is the first downturn since MDI began measuring in 2000. Further, groups sending people overseas sent fewer and smaller teams, he said.

This paralleled another trend Mitchell noticed over the past four years: inquiries to MDI's search portal about domestic trips have steadily increased, while searches for international trips have steadily decreased.

"I expect to see a further increase in the percentage of people choosing a United States trip over an international trip," Armstrong said.

Georgia-based Adventures in Missions saw participation in its international short-term trips shrink from 57 percent of all mission volunteers in 2005 to 26 percent in 2009. It expects the numbers to rebound in 2010,

primarily because of trips to Haiti.

The impact of 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, and the Great Recession have all played a role in dimming overseas missions, said executive director Seth Barnes. So has drug violence in Mexico. "The statements issued by the State Department have killed what used to be a big destination for projects," he said.

Other experts think the evidence is scant. When missiologist Robert Priest of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School surveyed 405 megachurches in 2007, he found a median of 100 persons going on trips abroad, compared with 70 domestically.

"First you have to convince me there is a trend," he said.

The United Methodist Church, which sends 100,000 volunteers around the nation and world annually, saw no appreciable change across several jurisdictions in 2009. Wycliffe Associates actually saw its overseas volunteers increase by 23 percent last year, thanks to retiring baby boomers.

If domestic trips do become more popular, Armstrong sees mixed results. Such a trend could mean fewer multi-week trips and less exposure of young people to other cultures. "[Yet] it might help people comprehend the needs in the U.S. more," he said. "Coupled with the [ethnic] diversity that's taking place in our country, I would consider that good." ✦

LIFE ETHICS

# Information Overload

Disclosure laws take on crisis pregnancy centers.  
By Sarah Pulliam Bailey

**D**isclosing information to pregnant women—an established pro-life legal strategy—is now cutting both ways.

Pro-life groups have long fought for laws that require doctors to give women seeking abortions an

ultrasound and children to get parental permission for an abortion. In April, Oklahoma passed a bill requiring doctors to conduct a vaginal ultrasound at least one hour before an abortion and explain the results. Nebraska passed a law requiring doctors to evaluate and disclose to patients whether they face risks that could result in physical or mental problems after an abortion.

Now abortion supporters are emphasizing disclosure in their efforts against crisis pregnancy centers. In April, the Austin City Council in Texas passed an ordinance requiring centers that do not offer or refer clients to abortion or birth control services to disclose this on signs posted at their facilities. Violators could be fined up to \$450 per offense.

Pro-life groups are crying foul. "It would be like forcing an abortion facility to say, 'We don't refer to adoption agencies,'" said Mary Spaulding Balch, director of state legislation for the National Right to Life Committee.

In February, the Montgomery County Council in Maryland approved a regulation that requires pregnancy centers that do not have a licensed medical professional on staff to notify clients by posting a sign in the waiting room.

Pro-life groups say the new disclosure laws are different from informed consent laws requiring that women be given an ultrasound.

"This information is typically provided in one-on-one counseling sessions with patients," said Denise Burke, vice president of legal affairs for Americans United for Life. "There's a big difference between counseling and requiring a big sign to be placed on the door."

The Catholic Archdiocese of Baltimore filed a lawsuit earlier this year on behalf of a pregnancy center, claiming the rule is biased against pro-life groups. Baltimore passed an ordinance in late 2009 requiring pregnancy centers to post an easily

[ continued on 16 ]

PASSAGES



**Died**  
**Antony Flew**  
Prominent atheist philosopher who became a deist in 2004, on April 8. He was 87.



**Disappeared**  
**Gao Zhisheng**  
Chinese Christian human-rights lawyer, again on April 20. He was abducted in 2009 and reappeared March 28 after renouncing his activism.



**Retiring**  
**N. T. Wright**  
As Bishop of Durham, on August 31 in order to focus on writing and teaching. He will be a New Testament research professor at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland.

**Briefing** [ from 15 ]

readable sign in English and Spanish stating that the center does not offer abortions or birth control services.

The Greater Baltimore Crisis Pregnancy Center posted a statement on its website saying it does not perform or refer for abortions.

“They’re not against disclosure; they’re against the government compelling their speech,” said archdiocesan spokesman Sean Caine. “What they reject is being told by the government that we have to discuss, through a sign, abortion.”

**RELIGIOUS FREEDOM UNITED KINGDOM**

## Crying Foul

Court cases prompt discrimination debate.

By Steve Holt

**S**ex therapist Gary McFarlane was fired in March 2008 after refusing to counsel same-sex couples because of his Christian beliefs. When his appeal reached Britain’s second highest court this April, it became the focal point of a national debate over whether Christians are discriminated against in UK workplaces.

Six prominent Anglican bishops led by former Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey labeled a string of similar employment disputes “apparent discrimination” against Christians that is “unacceptable in a civilized society.” Lord Carey demanded that McFarlane’s appeal and others be judged by a special panel with religion expertise.

One sticking point: the Court of Appeals’ ruling last December that, under existing equality laws, the rights of homosexuals to receive goods and services take precedence over the rights of Christians to express their faith in the workplace.

Christians aren’t the only ones crying foul. In April, Taj Hargey, imam of the Oxford Islamic Congregation, wrote that “Christianity is under siege in this country,” while human rights leader Shami Chakrabarti said the court “bends over backwards for Muslims and Sikhs while Christians are being persecuted with impunity.”

McFarlane’s appeal was denied April 29. But debate continues over whether these cases truly amount to discrimination against Christians.

The Christian Legal Centre, which represents McFarlane, thinks so. Legal adviser Paul Coleman

**DISCUSSION STARTER**  
**Courts**

Justice John Paul Stevens announced in April his upcoming retirement from the U.S. Supreme Court, prompting waves of speculation on whether the departure of the Court’s only Protestant—six remaining justices are Catholic and two are Jewish—will matter. Few Protestants have landed on the shortlist to replace him.

sees evidence for a “state-enforced morality” taking root in the UK. “The government [is] saying, ‘Unless you Christians accept these points of view, we are going to remove your funding, we are going to limit your free speech, we are going to remove you from the workplace,’” he said.

While most Christians acknowledge a rising secular voice in British culture, some believe discrimination charges are overstated.

“There’s definitely a cultural secularism that we’re in the midst of struggling with,” said Paul Bickley, senior researcher for Theos, a public theology think tank. “But Christians are not being targeted. . . . We’re just feeling the brunt, I think, of changes in legislation that perhaps are not being felt by others.”

The Evangelical Alliance believes the solution lies in mediation, not legislation. The group is engaged in talks with the National Health Service to work out future grievances with nurses outside of court.

“We would like to see a kind of mediatorial, space-giving approach,” said Don Horrocks, head of public affairs. “It is principally getting people to accept that they disagree in public . . . and to respect each other’s space.”

## UNDER DISCUSSION *Topics in the current debate.*

*compiled by Ruth Moon*

# Does it matter if the Supreme Court has no Protestants?

**YES**

“There should be no religious test for a Supreme Court nomination, but religious diversity is valuable because it may help the Court to understand sympathetically the worldviews held by various groups of Americans.”

**MARK SCARBERRY,**  
*law professor, Pepperdine University*

“Who we are affects how we view things. In a small group like the Supreme Court, all of a person’s identity features will affect how that group makes decisions, but it’s not clear if religion will be a principal motivating force in someone’s time on the Court.”

**STACEY HUNTER HECHT,**  
*political science professor, Bethel University*

“No, it doesn’t matter if he or she is a Protestant, but I’m a firm believer that the form-freedom balance we enjoy as Americans is uniquely the product of our Judeo-Christian heritage. Our freedoms are rooted in the notion that we are created in God’s image.”

**KEN CONNOR,**  
*chairman, Center for a Just Society*

“I don’t think it will affect the Court’s work. Those issues concern conservative versus liberal jurisprudence. Protestant and Catholic conservatives share jurisprudential values; so do Protestant and Catholic liberals.”

**THOMAS BERG,**  
*professor, University of St. Thomas School of Law (Minnesota)*

“The category of Protestant is so large, it’s not a meaningful barometer of judicial philosophy. It’s more helpful to know whether a candidate believes the Constitution should be interpreted as it was written or whether new meaning can be ascribed.”

**TOM MINNERY,**  
*senior vice president, Focus on the Family Action*

“The question for this appointee should be, ‘Is the person nominated, qualified?’ Whether the person is Catholic, Jewish, nominally Protestant, actually Protestant, or Muslim is relevant, but the key matter is to have a responsible jurist.”

**MARK NOLL,**  
*history professor, University of Notre Dame*

**NO**



MINISTRY

# Faith-Based Fracas

From the White House to the courthouse, the battle escalates over whether Christian groups have the right to employ only Christians. By Bobby Ross Jr.



When Sylvia Spencer applied at World Vision's U.S. headquarters near Seattle in 1995, she described herself as a committed Christian.

Asked on an employment form why she wanted to work for the international humanitarian aid organization, Spencer wrote, "Because I would love to work for an organization dedicated to carrying on the Lord's work!"

Another World Vision employee, Vicki Hulse, mentioned her 15 years as a Christian in a résumé attachment when she applied a few years later.

"I recently moved to this area and would very much like to find a place of employment with a Christian organization

where I could be of value," Hulse wrote.

Both women signed statements affirming their Christian faith and devoted a decade to World Vision, which serves impoverished children and families in more than 100 countries.

But in November 2006, they and colleague Ted Youngberg were fired. Their offense, as determined by a corporate investigation: The three did not believe that Jesus Christ is fully God and a member of the Trinity.

"They are deeply religious Christians," said Judith Lonnquist, a Seattle attorney who filed a federal discrimination lawsuit on their behalf. "They just don't have the same beliefs that World Vision espouses."

That is the problem, said Steve

McFarland, chief legal officer for World Vision. "The employees were discharged because they no longer met an essential job prerequisite: that they genuinely affirm their belief in a statement of orthodox Christian faith as understood by the World Vision board." He said that if World Vision loses the federal discrimination suit, the consequences will be wide-ranging. "This would be a seismic disruption to religious freedom in the U.S., not to mention to the separation of powers between the legislative and judicial branches of the government."

World Vision U.S. has become one of the nation's largest faith-based charitable organizations. In 1947, founder Bob Pierce became World Vision's first child sponsor.

He started sending \$5 a month to a Chinese girl rejected by her family after Pierce shared the gospel with her and she became a Christian. Six decades later, World Vision U.S. has 1,200 employees and a budget that topped \$1.2 billion in fiscal year 2009. About \$344 million—29 percent of the total—came in the form of taxpayer funds.

And to some people, that's a dilemma.

#### SETTING POLICY

In most cases, Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act prohibits private employers from hiring and firing based on religious beliefs. But a 1972 congressional amendment established that churches and religious associations could use faith-based criteria in hiring. That's true even for a position with no inherently religious duties, such as a receptionist, said Ira "Chip" Lupu, a church-state scholar and law professor at the George Washington University Law School.

## 'Faith is what makes a faith-based organization what it is.'

~ Andrea Kaufmann, World Relief

But can religious groups that receive federal money to provide social services (such as job training or drug treatment counseling) consider a potential employee's religion when making hiring decisions? Lupu said that's the question of the hour.

Some people believe that "hiring on the basis of religion is discriminatory and that the government should never subsidize such discrimination," Lupu said in a church-state primer that he shared with *Christianity Today*. Others, including many faith-based groups, argue that religion must be taken into account "to maintain the distinctive character and nature of [a group's] religious mission."

L. Martin Nussbaum, a Colorado attorney who defends religious organizations, said the phrase "receive federal funding" is confusing, as it gives the impression that the government provides grants or subsidies to faith-based groups.

Such payments to faith-based social service agencies "[are] actually payments under a contract for delivery of services,"

Nussbaum said. "There is nothing in the Constitution that requires a ministry to give up its freedom to staff itself with like-minded employees of faith merely because the government is purchasing the agency's services."

The issue has a contentious history. Under the Clinton administration, the Department of Health and Human Services was allowed to contract with religious groups. President George W. Bush created the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives to encourage faith organizations, including churches, to seek more government social-service contracts. In 2007, the Justice Department produced a memo explicitly exempting World Vision from federal statutes prohibiting faith-based hiring. The memo said the nondiscrimination rules did not apply because of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. The 1993 act prohibits the federal government from

placing "substantial burdens" on religious groups and practices.

The 2008 presidential election hinted at the first signs of a reversal of policy. On the campaign trail, Barack Obama indicated that as President he would take a more stringent approach:

"If you get a federal grant, you can't use that grant money to proselytize to the people you help and you can't discriminate against them—or against the people you hire—on the basis of their religion," Obama said in July 2008. "Federal dollars that go directly to churches, temples, and mosques can only be used on secular programs."

But as President, Obama has yet to push the issue.

Despite the White House's silence, armies of activists and religious leaders are waging an escalating battle. The Coalition Against Religious Discrimination sent Obama a letter in February 2010 calling on him to follow through on his campaign promises. Among the coalition's more than two dozen member organizations: the

American Jewish Committee, the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, and the United Methodist Church's General Board of Church and Society.

Stanley W. Carlson-Thies, president of the Institutional Religious Freedom Alliance, responded with an opposing letter to Obama in early March. It was backed by leaders of organizations such as Evangelicals for Social Action, the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, Catholic Charities USA, and Agudath Israel of America. "You have rightly called for an 'all hands on deck' approach to meeting the needs of the distressed and marginalized," Carlson-Thies told the President, "an approach that welcomes the contributions of the many faith-based organizations that do so much to help those in need."

#### A SECOND FRONT

World Relief—a Baltimore-based charity that last year received nearly half of its \$61 million annual budget from government funding—made front-page headlines in March 2010.

The story broke after the relief and development arm of the National Association of Evangelicals enforced a long-standing policy requiring new employees to sign a statement of faith.

"Help wanted, but only Christians need apply," proclaimed the *Chicago Tribune*. The story focused on several World Relief employees who had quit the refugee resettlement organization's Chicago office over the issue.

"World Relief rejects job applicant over his faith," declared *The Seattle Times* in a similar story. This one looked at a Muslim, Arabic-speaking caseworker who had volunteered at World Relief for six months but learned he did not qualify for full-time employment because he is not a Christian.

Until the policy was rejuvenated in December 2009, a former Chicago staff member said, she loved her job. She worked with Christians as well as Buddhists and Muslims. She considered her work a calling. But the new policy struck her as contrary to Jesus' teachings. "I don't think Jesus would discriminate," the former staff member, who asked not to be identified, told CT.

## In most cases, Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act prohibits employers from hiring and firing people based on their religious beliefs.

For its part, World Relief said it has an established practice of hiring Christians whenever possible while providing services to the vulnerable and needy regardless of ethnicity, beliefs, or gender.

Exceptions are made when a non-Christian possesses unique skills critical to accomplishing World Relief's mission, said national spokeswoman Andrea Kaufmann. Even then, the individual must agree to respect World Relief's vision and values and not impair its Christian character and mission.

The new emphasis came as a result of an internal process to evaluate and reiterate World Relief's mission and strategy, Kaufmann said. The renewed policy is designed "to ensure that hiring managers

understand and have a formal mechanism for what was generally already the practice."

"Faith is what makes a faith-based organization what it is," Kaufmann said.

### AWAITING THE RULING

If World Vision loses its employment discrimination lawsuit before the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, the effects could be significant.

In 2008, a federal judge was asked to determine whether World Vision qualified as a "religious association" under Title VII. Applying a nine-factor test, the court ruled in World Vision's favor. The plaintiffs appealed, arguing that, much like the American Red Cross, World

Vision is a humanitarian organization, not a religious one.

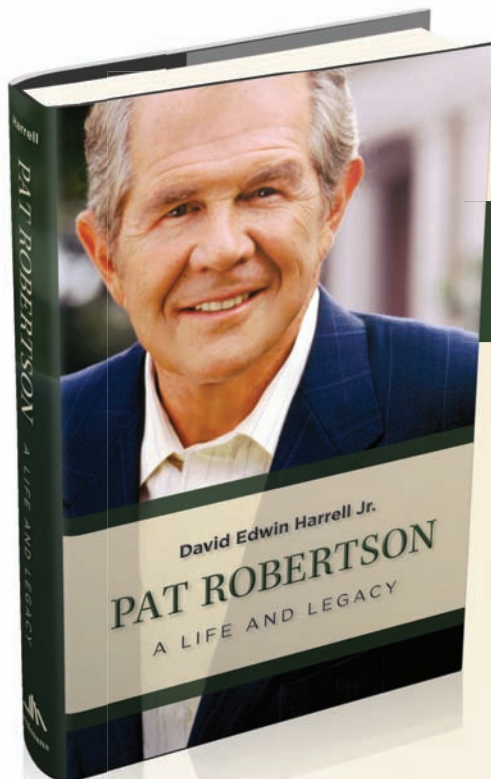
"The vast majority of World Vision's services are centered on the distribution of resources and training to the poor, not on the direct inculcation of religious doctrine or propagation of religion," Lonquist wrote in an appeals brief.

But in the defendants' response, attorneys Steven T. O'Ban and Daniel J. Ichinaga said World Vision performs an essential religious mission first modeled by the founder of the Christian faith.

"Like many Christian churches from most traditions," they said, "World Vision promotes the Christian faith by trying to meet the profound needs of the poorest of the poor in the name of Christ, and teaches recipients about the God who motivates them to serve others."

The plaintiffs—one served as an administrative assistant, one worked in telecommunications, and one coordinated furniture needs—say their central duties

[ continued on 21 ]



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**Faith-Based Fracas** [ from 19 ]

were nonreligious in nature. Nonetheless, they said, they always supported the organization's mission and participated in Bible studies and devotionals on the job.

Hulse and Spencer even started a small-group Bible study during World Vision's weekly employee chapel session—with a supervisor's permission and no objection from the ministry. But when leadership learned of their beliefs about the divinity of Christ more than two years after the alternative Bible studies began, the three were investigated and fired, the former employees said.

Lonnquist told CT, "If Jesus walked the earth today, I think he'd be appalled. To me, 'there are many rooms in my Father's house' means there is room for everyone, whether you're Jewish and you believe in Yahweh, or you're a Muslim and you believe in Allah, or a Native American spiritualist and you believe in a great Buffalo Woman."

Attorney Nussbaum sees it differently. He filed an amicus brief in the Ninth Circuit in support of World Vision. He represents the Association of Gospel Rescue Missions, the National Association of Evangelicals, the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, and other clients with a stake in the case's outcome.

Nussbaum's argument: Faith organizations like World Vision believe they are called by God to perform a task. In doing so, these organizations rely on revelation acquired through sacred texts and religious traditions. Nussbaum notes that the core values statement from World Vision says:

"We are Christian. We acknowledge one God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In Jesus Christ the love, mercy, and grace of God are made known to us and all people. From this overflowing abundance of God's love, we find our call to ministry."

**THE BOTTOM LINE**

McFarland, World Vision's legal officer, said that if it came to it, World Vision

would give up its federal funding before it would change its employment policy.

World Vision will continue to hire Christians at all levels because otherwise, "it would start down a slippery slope that would soon dilute and divert World Vision's mission, character, and witness," he said in an e-mail. "The receptionist may not determine policy, but he or she is the hand or foot of the body of Christ that is World Vision."

Attorney Lonnquist said she's confident that the plaintiffs can prevail in the Ninth Circuit. She's less certain of how the high court might rule.

Church-state scholar Lupu said the Ninth Circuit sometimes produces liberal panels and liberal results, but not always. "If World Vision loses in the Ninth Circuit, the chances of Supreme Court review are high," he said, "and I think World Vision would win if the case goes that far." ☩

**Bobby Ross Jr.** is a writer and editor based in Oklahoma City.

# PRACTICE RESURRECTION

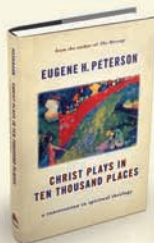
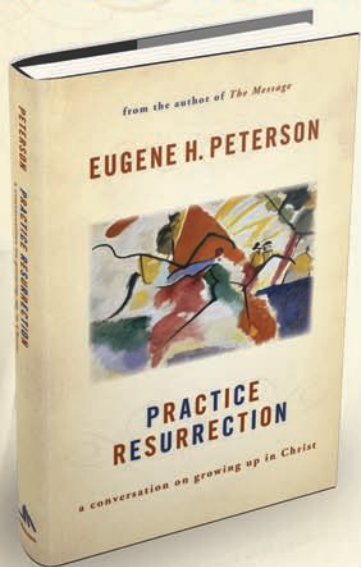
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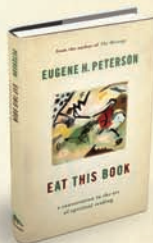
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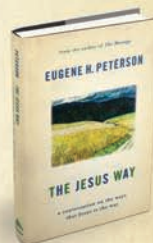
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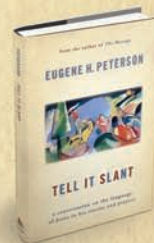
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# Life in Those Old

If you're interested in doing mission, there could hardly be a better tool than denominations. By Ed Stetzer

**D**ENOMINATIONS APPEAR to have fallen on difficult times. Theological controversies over core Christian beliefs have weakened some denominations. Others have succumbed to classic liberalism. A handful of denominations have reaffirmed their commitment to theological orthodoxy, but even many once-growing conservative denominations have experienced difficult days. All in all, membership in 23 of the 25 largest Christian denominations is declining (the exceptions being the Assemblies of God and the Church of God).

The 2008 American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) found that the percentage of Americans who self-identify as Christians decreased from 86 percent in a 1990 study to 76 percent in 2008. Much of the loss does seem located in large mainline denominations. At the same time, the ARIS indicated that nondenominational churches have steadily grown since 2001—and that self-identified evangelicals have increased in number. But it seems that denominations have not shared in the growth.

According to many church leaders, denominations are not fading away—they are actually inhibiting growth. I have heard many pastors denounce denominations as hindering more than helping their churches' mission. Others carp at wasteful spending, bureaucratic ineffectiveness, or structural redundancies; these objections seem to have gained adherents in an economic climate of pinching every penny. Loyalty to a denomination has declined and in some cases disappeared.

Meanwhile, many of the better-known churches in America today have no denominational affiliation. A 2009 study of the 100 largest churches in the United States conducted by LifeWay Research for *Outreach* magazine discovered that half of the churches call

themselves “nondenominational.” In fact, two of the three largest churches in America have no denominational ties: Lakewood Church (Houston, Texas) and Willow Creek Community Church (South Barrington, Illinois). A generation or two ago, that would have been shocking. Today it is the assumed norm.

Meanwhile, we see newly planted churches given nondescript names so as to downplay denominational affiliation. Some established churches are “rebranding” without denominational markings. It surprises many to discover that Saddleback Church, pastored by Rick Warren, is part of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), and that LifeChurch.tv (Edmond, Oklahoma) is an Evangelical Covenant Church.

A few short decades ago, denominational meetings were the most widely attended places to connect and receive training. Now conferences like Catalyst and Exponential draw more attendees. (I speak to more young Southern Baptists at the Catalyst Conference than at the SBC's annual meeting.) Inevitably I am asked at these conferences, “Why are you still in a denomination?” To some, the idea is as old-fashioned as preaching in a suit.

I have been privileged to speak at dozens of national denominational meetings over the past two years.

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Illustrations by Jonathan Bartlett

# Bones



I constantly hear from leaders that they are struggling with lower denominational loyalty among their churches and a path that is unclear at best.

I work in a denomination—the SBC—that is at times dysfunctional and unwise (like me). I grow weary of denominational foolishness and its drama. The idea of working independently is tempting at times.

Given all that, call me a cautious believer in the idea that we can do more for the kingdom of God by doing it together with people of common conviction—which usually means in a denomination—than by doing it alone.

#### A TOOL OF MISSION

In my view, denominations are certainly not the answer to the world's ills, nor are they our last and only hope. But a denominational structure can be a valuable tool for the church to use in her mission.

When I hear about a pastor's revolutionary idea to partner a local congregation with congregations overseas to work together in mission, I say, "Great. Be sure to learn from the Wesleyan Church. They have been doing just that, very well, for a long time."

When I hear about a start-up church-planting network, I'm excited—but hope its leaders know what the Presbyterian Church in America's (PCA) Mission to North America is doing well, and will not try to independently discover what others already know. Many ministries that have gained national prominence in church planting, such as Redeemer (New York City) and Perimeter (Atlanta), have been more effective because of their partnership with the PCA.

Denominational ministry is often much quieter than similar efforts from independent start-ups. (No surprise there: Novelty gets attention, and entrepreneurial networks and churches need to make a splash in order to win people to their new effort.) But make no mistake: The vast majority of world missions, church planting, discipleship, and other forms of ministry are done through denominational partnerships.

For example, when you go out into the international mission field, generally you find two types of missionaries: funded and self-supported. The amount of time a missionary spends on the field can often reveal what type he or she is. Missionaries funded by a denomination are able to spend much more time actually being missionaries, while self-supported missionaries from independent churches and loosely connected networks often need to spend copious amounts of time fundraising.

The largest denominational mission force in the history of Protestant Christianity is fielded by the SBC's International Mission Board. Its missionaries are by no means well paid, but they are found in places too numerous to name. In those places, they are able to stay, minister, and focus on mission—and not fundraise.

#### CREATURES OF COOPERATION

Another reason that denominations are not likely to fade anytime soon: Like-minded people will always find a way to associate with one another.

That impulse can sometimes lead to a tribal,

insular identity, as happened with the Churches of Christ and the Christian Church in the 1800s. Parts of what began as a renewal movement that was determined to bring about ecumenical consensus and unity—essentially an anti-denominational movement—eventually became a narrowly focused denomination that, in some cases, denied the possibility of salvation for those not in its rigorously defined theological camp.

That being said, mission-focused churches are inevitably drawn to organized cooperation. Gripped by the desire to make Christ known to the nations, a church usually realizes it is unable to accomplish this task alone. Current skepticism about denominations, along with the American entrepreneurial spirit and a bias toward novelty, has led many ministers to form new partnership networks.

Newer efforts to cooperate across congregations can best be understood as proto-denominations.

The 17-year-old Willow Creek Association claims over 11,000 member churches in 35 countries from 90 denominations. The Association of Related Churches, led by Billy Hornsby and represented by well-known churches such as Seacoast Church (Charleston), Church of the Highlands (Birmingham), and Healing Place Church (Baton Rouge), provides sermon outlines and mission and social-action activities, and even has a denomination-like annual meeting. The Acts 29 Network, co-founded by Seattle pastor Mark Driscoll, has claimed almost 300 affiliates in its 10-year existence. Acts 29 focuses on a more specific mission of planting churches, but includes strong doctrinal parameters and a full explanation of why it exists.

The denomination-like networks will, I believe, become more like denominations than networks in the years to come, just like the networks of the past

***The best denominations may be understood simply as networked cooperative relationships for mission.***



(e.g., the Methodists) are denominations today.

I like proto-denominations and missional networks. I even belong to a few. But as prominent as these networks may be, local churches still tend to use denominations to accomplish most of the work of global missions. It's not flashy, and the Web pages are not as nice, but as noted above, we should not mistakenly underestimate how God is using denominations.

#### NETWORKED ACROSS TIME

The best denominations may be understood simply as networked cooperative relationships for mission. But they are not just networked across geography and methodology. They are also networked across time—and a group working across time and generations can accomplish more than a group working for one season.

A variety of recent movements among emerging generations demonstrate the need and desire for rootedness and history. The church growth movement in the 1970s and '80s (itself a kind of proto-denomination) perpetuated the mistaken idea that only new and novel methods were effective in reaching the next generation. In exchanging older traditions for newer methodologies, it unintentionally cut itself off from a rich legacy of faith.

A generation later, emerging leaders are yearning for a sense of rootedness. In an age of fragmented social identities, connecting with the past has become synonymous with finding purpose and meaning. We are seeing this passion in a number of current movements: the “young, restless, and Reformed,” the emerging church, and the late Robert Webber's ancient-future movement.

Note how important this all is to California pastor Jim Belcher's “deep church” efforts. He writes, “The vast majority of people are confused by the debate [between the leaders of traditional evangelicalism and emergent leaders]. After all, don't they want the same thing—a deeper, more robust evangelical church that profoundly affects people and the world?” Belcher's book expands on the idea of a “third way,” one rooted in history and contextualized in ministry.

These are sometimes overlapping, sometimes distinct, and sometimes competing movements.

But each has been informed and fueled by a resurgent yearning for historical lineage and religious heritage. Many leaders of the baby boomer generation untied their churches from tradition and charted their own courses; many of the boomers' children have spent the last decades looking wistfully to the shore. Denominations have not done a good job of making the case, but they can provide history and legacy to a generation longing for stability.

The need to connect with our spiritual lineage and Christian heritage drives us

to shine a light on how we have arrived where we are. Historian and futurist Leonard Sweet offers the metaphor of a swing. A swing's physics depends on interdependent motions of leaning back and pressing forward.

Likewise, denominations can tell inspiring stories of pioneering (leaning back) and progress (pressing forward). They can offer a rich sense of theological and ecclesiological legacy that an independent church simply cannot.

#### A THEOLOGICAL TURNABOUT

Nondenominational churches do a better job than denominational ones in responding to the brave, sometimes confused new world of American spirituality. They are flexible enough to identify trends and adapt.

But changes in the American spiritual landscape bring with them the promise of internal conflict and external pressure, which can inflict irreparable damage on a nondenominational church. For example, with the ever-morphing attitudes toward marriage and gender roles, a church disconnected from a denomination lacks access to leaders who have dealt with previous cultural shifts of equally seismic proportions.

A denominational church in crisis has a relational network, experience, and a support system on which to draw. For example, if a dispute arises in a Presbyterian congregation between the pastor and the session (the governing board), it has an entire denominational structure filled with leaders to help guide a redemptive process. Not so with an independent congregation.

Denominations and their leaders have weathered many storms. That's not to say their member churches always survive, but it's more likely that they will. For our youth-obsessed evangelicalism, this is a hard truth. But where some expect to see age, decay, and obsolescence in denominations, you are more likely to find longevity, maturity, and wisdom.

Evangelical denominations often are stalwarts of orthodoxy, while independent congregations more easily shift in their theology—sometimes very quickly. Carlton Pearson's Higher Dimensions Church, a former charismatic megachurch in Tulsa, had few resources to stop its sudden theological shift and eventual merger with All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church.

Also, denominational colleges and institutions have often been better at holding the line of orthodoxy than many large nondenominational institutions such as the YMCA. Lacking a larger body to push against a leftward shift, some churches, agencies, and groups move precariously toward heterodoxy.

That may be a surprising argument to nondenominational churches. After all, the headlines are full of denominational leaders and bodies moving leftward in their theology. But the reality is that these do not represent the majority of denominational congregations or the majority of American churchgoers.



Orthodoxy is more likely to remain established in denominations with clear faith statements. Confessional anchors have prevented drift in such denominations as the Assemblies of God, the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, and the Evangelical Free Church. (The recent debate over changing the Evangelical Free Church’s statement of faith was a helpful exercise in confessional conversation.)

It is worth noting that almost every one of today’s most articulate evangelical theologians is denominationally affiliated. To name a few: John Piper is a member of the Baptist General Conference; his theological rival on some points, N. T. Wright, is a bishop in the Church of England. Tim Keller is a member of the PCA, and Ben Witherington is a United Methodist. And on it goes.

Fifty years ago, Carl Henry and Billy Graham rightly worried that denominational leaders were leading people astray. Today, by contrast, evangelical denominations appear to be the collective standard-bearers of orthodoxy.

When denominations stray, the fault usually lies not with diversity, as some have argued. In fact, the larger the denomination, the more likely it will be diverse in many ways. A denomination should indeed focus on becoming more ethnically diverse, partnering with all kinds of biblically faithful contemporary, traditional, and emerging churches, and working through questions about its future. But it must also maintain a strong confessional consensus in order to

accomplish its God-given mission. Such confessions must be more than a list of beliefs that are given lip service, but instead ones that are both adopted and valued.

We’ve seen more and more loosened ties to confessions of faith in the Episcopal Church, which has led other bodies in the Anglican Communion to distance themselves from it and reconsider how the Communion’s national provinces relate to each other. As a result, the

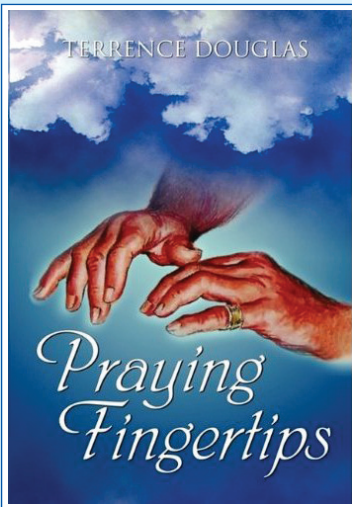
Communion is moving toward a higher level of global confessional consensus, and the American church will probably be left out.

Such confessional statements help to clarify a movement’s understanding of its mission, and, more importantly, the

God who has called it to that mission. We may not exhaustively know what every person in a network believes, but we can explain what the denomination stands for. Likewise, confessional statements build trust for denominational agencies; without them, there is inevitably justifiable concern about whether the agency shares the denomination’s standards. But doctrinal statements are not mere safeguards. They have also long been teaching tools for churches, helping in evangelism, discipleship, and spiritual growth.

The Foursquare Church is a good example. It has a doctrinal confession highlighting components it deems critical for orthodox belief and practice. It enables its churches to understand theological boundaries for fellowship in the denomination. When I led its

**To paraphrase Churchill, denominations are the worst way to cooperate—except for all the others.**



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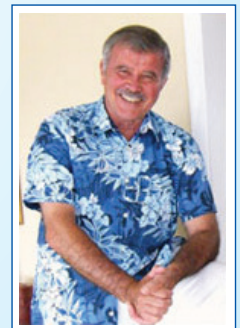
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### About The Author

Terrence Douglas, 70, earned a Master’s Degree in Russian Studies, and a Bachelor’s Degree in English Literature. He has served in the United States Air Force and the CIA before pursuing his international passion in the private sector.

He is now a single parent, raising his adopted son in Virginia Beach, where he teaches intelligence-related courses for an on-line university, maintains a website begun at the publication of Rules for Engaging Grief: A Path to Healing ([www.rulesofengaging.com](http://www.rulesofengaging.com)), and enjoys the visits from his children and twelve grandchildren.



national cabinet through a “missional audit” early this year, the leaders in the room were able to appeal to an authority (Scripture) and a framework that confesses that authority (statement of faith) as they considered what they must do together in the future.

Confessional statements also shield against excessive distinction. Any group that wants to define itself will be tempted to draw boundaries ever tighter. Some will start sniffing around, making sure everyone is using the exact same language and the exact same approach, and that no one has wrestled with new ideas. Others worry when not everyone supports a certain denominational program or emphasis. Still others complain about methods that others are using. Confessional statements make it simple: If it’s not a distinctive of the confession, it is not part of the denomination’s belief system, and churches and individuals can have diverse beliefs and expressions in that area.

There are times when theological differences pose the greatest threat to church cooperation. But in my view, the greatest hindrance in many evangelical denominations today is the inability of insular churches to serve with those who differ on methodology.

Should we discuss the theological implications of methods? Absolutely. But we must guard against letting tertiary issues control the conversation. Nor should we preach against matters that are best left to the discernment of individual churches. Instead, we should use persuasion, like members of Christ’s family, rather than policy, like executives in a corporation. If everything is an essential, churches will never cooperate in mission. If nothing is an essential, there is no reason to cooperate anyway.

## THE BEST WORST WAY

To paraphrase Churchill’s comments about democracy: Denominations are the worst way to cooperate—except for all the others. They are riddled with weak, ineffective, and arrogant leadership, prone to navel-gazing, and often move more slowly than they should. But these aspects are products of human fallibility and sin. Every time churches work together, ego, failure, and inefficiency will arise. And when they don’t work together, ego, failure, and inefficiency will arise. People, not denominations, are the source.

Denominations at their best are not places to get something but places to give and to serve. Our gifts, passions, and experience have greater influence through a worldwide denominational network. Through a denomination, we can provide resources to people we will never meet, reach places we will never go, and preach the gospel to lost souls who are beyond our personal reach. We can find what we need and give as much as we want—because the key to cooperation is to both give and receive.

A healthy denomination ultimately gives us strength. It’s a home, not a prison. It allows us to share specific theological convictions, practice expressions of ministry relevant to our communities, and serve a common mission in the one thing that brings true unity: the gospel. ⊕

**Ed Stetzer** is the director of Lifeway Research and LifeWay’s missiologist in residence. He is co-author most recently of *Transformational Church* (B&H Books).

## Is there mission BEYOND EVANGELISM?

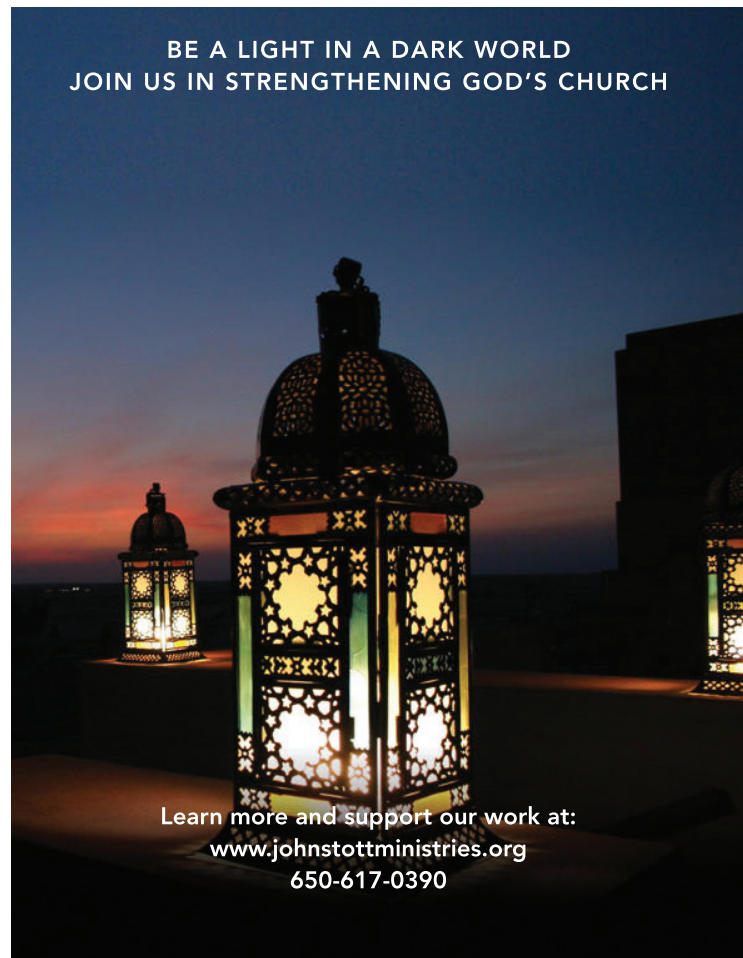
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# Face-to-Face Gospel and the Death of Distance

**Al Erisman** says we need to think about ministry in the digital culture the way missionaries think about the culture of the people they serve. Interview by Tim Stafford

**T**ECHNOLOGY IS CHANGING our lives at breakneck speed and in unpredictable ways. In just one decade, for example, the mobile phone has transformed the daily life of virtually every church leader in the world. Technology also changes the way the gospel gets communicated, whether through PowerPoint slides, websites, or screens at multi-site churches. We sought out a man who has decades of practical experience with technology in business—as well as wide and deep thinking about its significance.

Al Erisman spent 32 years at Boeing, and for the last 11 of those years was director of research and development for technology. He now teaches in the business school at Seattle Pacific University and is co-founder and editor of *Ethix* magazine (*Ethix.org*). He also consults and lectures on faith and economic development, most recently in the Central African Republic and Nepal. He recently spoke with Global Conversation editor and *CT* senior writer Tim Stafford.

## What does technology have to do with the gospel?

A lot. Narrowing our scope just to information technology, we recognize it is all about information and communications, a fundamental element of proclaiming the gospel. It is also about what kind of people we become, and how we communicate to people who are part of the digital generation. We could also look at the broader impact of other technology, such as automobiles, nuclear power, or biotechnology—anything that comes from a step-by-step process or the use of tools. But we have our hands full talking about information technology.

I think of information technology in five layers. The bottom layer is the basic technology—the microchip, for example. Gordon Moore, co-founder of Intel, predicted what is now called Moore's Law: The microchip will halve in size every 18 months. This translates into the chip's performance getting both faster and cheaper at an astonishing rate—a factor of 10 in price and performance

improvement every five years. That enables a fundamental, unending churn.

The second layer is the products the basic technology makes possible. Here we are more directly influenced. In the case of the microchip, our computers regularly become both faster *and* cheaper. This part is fairly predictable, but we also see the unpredictable emergence of new products and capabilities. We have the Internet, Google, social networks, Twitter, digital cameras, the iPhone, and so on. Sometimes we use these devices simply to do what we did before, only faster. But sometimes new products introduce a whole new way of thinking and working.

The third level is where products are put together, made to work, made secure, and all of the things that go into infrastructure. About this layer, users usually only need to know that there are talented people who keep everything working.

The fourth layer is where the lives of church leaders could be changed—where the technology enables fundamental redesign of what we do. For example, a pastor can readily access many more sources and incorporate video into a presentation. He or she can put sermons online and thus reach many more people. Discussion groups can reach across a community, even across the world. More than one author has suggested that this is “the death of distance.” If you have just returned from another part of the world, you can maintain communication with people there in a remarkable way.

## Aren't there risks as well?

Certainly. Every technology has a “bite back” effect. It allows us to do something new and good, but that something is different.

In Acts 2, the disciples were proclaiming “the wonders of God” when some accused them of being drunk. Peter immediately addressed the point, taking his presentation in another direction. How does this happen when someone is viewing a video or downloading a sermon from the Internet?

**In the 1980s, critics panned televangelists' sermons because isolated listeners could not experience congregational life. They also complained that the medium required a flashiness that competed with the gospel. Today video is used to extend a preacher's reach to multiple congregations. Does real preaching require real presence?**

Television [cannot provide] the worship atmosphere that being physically present does. But if we think of previous technology advancements, the written text of a sermon also lacked this key ingredient. Yet we have seen God bless gospel tracts. I recently talked with a pastor in Nepal who had come to Christ through a tract he found in the street. What is gained by the text (compared with both live preaching and television) is the ability to go back over it and study it. What is gained by the television (compared with print) is some nuance (a frown, a smile, a pause). As we move to e-mail or WebEx conferencing, we see similar pluses and minuses. So it will be when we start using holographic images to present the illusion that we are in the same room with a person.

We shouldn't think of these technologies as replacing each other. We should think of them as layering to form an effective pattern of communication. Television, Web conferencing, and e-mail should not replace face-to-face communication but rather complement it. A live small group is wonderful and was our Lord's primary method of discipleship. But he also spoke to large groups. If he had come in the 21st century, I believe he would also have used these new tools, but not to replace the intimate or even large group discussions.

That brings us to the fifth layer, where we consider what technology has done *to* people. We all see that people have shorter attention spans, read less, and try to do two things at once and get distracted. Churches see both the positive and negative aspects of technology every week. It is great to deal with people who can instantly respond to needs since they are always connected. It is challenging to deal with a congregation that is text messaging in church or gets distracted when the sermon goes longer than 20 minutes.

We need to think about the communications challenge similar to a cross-cultural challenge. A missionary would not go to the Philippines without trying to understand the language and culture of the people there. So is it important for both church leaders and missionaries to



understand the culture of the digital generation.

**By dissolving distance, will communications technology undermine congregational fellowship? What aspects of Christian life together can technology extend? What can it undermine?**

Someone suggested that they could program their computer to work through a prayer list every morning so that they could sleep in. "Does that count?" they asked. I think not. But if you put your best into an article and people read it at another time, does that count as communication? We know it does, though it's a different kind of communication than having a conversation.

Former Intel vice president Pat Gelsinger said, "If I go back and forth with someone in e-mail more than four or five times on the same topic, I stop. We get on the phone or we get together face

to face.” You can do some things with a conversation face to face (build trust, get to know each other as people, establish context for remarks, clarify) that would be very difficult to do with back-and-forth e-mails. Still, when I return from a visit to Singapore, I can carry on a relationship through e-mail that makes a very valuable contribution to building community.

In business, where we work globally with virtual teams, we have found that when a team begins its work, it has to define its objectives and make sure team members understand them. Plus, they need to learn how to trust each other. This can best be done face to face. Personal contact is vital.

When you start defining the work and parceling it out, that can be done synchronously over the telephone or through a videoconference. And at the stage of implementation and evaluation, you don’t have to be together in real time. You can use e-mail to update each other. Different forms of communication are best in different contexts.

**This interview is part of a Global Conversation—a virtual dialogue via the Internet with leaders from around the world. Contrast that with the enormously more expensive conversation set for October in Cape Town.**

The virtual forum is wonderful, but we make a mistake if we think that the new technology replaces the old. The value of being present

## ***The value of being present with another person happens over coffee or dinner and through conversations with people we meet unexpectedly. We haven’t found a way to make that happen in the virtual world.***

with another person happens over coffee or dinner and through side conversations with people we meet unexpectedly. We haven’t found a way to make that happen in the virtual world.

**Information overload threatens to cut off communication. Many of us delete messages without reading them. How can congregations make sure their attempts to connect do not become part of the background noise?**

When we live in a large city, we have the same tendency to cut off communication with our neighbors because there are so many of them. Technology simply ramps up the number of those connections. Our Lord dealt with this by leaving the crowds and going off with a small group for weekends at a time. We are no more able than he was to carry on in-depth relationships with everyone. “A servant is not greater than his master.”

**How can church leaders learn about new possibilities and challenges of technology?**

Though I read and consult widely on these matters, I have not seen a systematic look at these things in the context of the gospel—only pieces of the whole. A lot has been written in the secular press related to business and society. Some of this could be *carefully* adapted to the needs of the church. Reading discriminately (for example, Don Tapscott’s *Grown Up Digital* or Robert Reich’s *The Future of Success*) is a good start. Creating Christian study groups around this material is even better.

**Technological innovation is part of God’s world, built up by creative people made in his image. But some see only the Tower of Babel.**

In Genesis 1 and 2, we see Adam and Eve carrying on God’s work in the world. In the first two chapters, that is done under the authority of God. The problem came when people thought they could do this autonomously. Now we have a world in which some people use their creativity under the authority of God, and others use theirs autonomously.

Is technology like the Tower of Babel? *Yes*. Is it also like Eden under God’s authority? *Absolutely*. But by God’s grace, even people who are not Christians develop wonderful technology because they are made in his image.

**Why do so many people, Christians or not, see technology pessimistically?**

These technologies used to affect just our businesses. Now they affect us personally. They hit the ways we communicate with our neighbors and spouses. We have come to depend on the devices we have to carry, and others depend on us depending on them. If you don’t answer your mobile phone, people say, “What’s wrong with you?” Technology has intruded in a very personal way. This has caused many to look at it pessimistically.

Also, people understand that technology is the reason they lost their jobs through outsourcing. The 19th-century cotton mill eliminated jobs for people who were weaving at home. But information technology affects everyone—in their personal life as well as in their business life. It’s disruptive and persistent.

Some digital people feel alienated and alone with their technology. There are well-documented reports on the increase in suicide among young Japanese who are spending long periods of time using technology and are isolated from others. They have lost elements of what it is to be human. I suppose this is like other addictions and must be recognized as such. Just as Paul spoke to those on Mars Hill about the idols in their culture, we can offer something to those trapped by the idols of the digital culture.

In a recent article for *Ethix*, former software designer Rosie Perera noted, “German philosopher Martin Heidegger writes that humans are so immersed in technology that we are rarely even aware that we have a relationship to it that affects us. . . . Taking time away from technology on a regular basis can help transform the way we relate to it and can bring life back into focus.”

We don’t expect these changes to slow down soon. Our challenge will be to continue to unpack the changing culture, communicating effectively with the tools we are given and to the generation we encounter. Years ago Francis Schaeffer warned us not to flee our emerging culture but to embrace it and think it through. We shouldn’t be afraid. ☩

Key Christian leaders respond to this article at [ChristianityToday.com/go/conversation](http://ChristianityToday.com/go/conversation). Post your own comments to become part of the Global Conversation about important issues related to world evangelization in preparation for the Lausanne Movement’s Cape Town 2010 conference.



{ DISCIPLESHIP }

# A Culture of Resurrection

How the church can  
help its people die well.  
By Rob Moll



OUR CHURCH doesn't have enough funerals," associate pastor John Stoltzfus said in his annual All Saints' Day sermon. In his suburban Mennonite congregation, members tend to leave the area after they retire. They move into denominational retirement communities, or they head

south to warmer climates. Sometimes, older members will continue to spend their summers in the Chicago area but winter somewhere in the Sun Belt. So, in his eight years as senior pastor, Todd Friesen has performed just ten funerals. Other pastors he knows who serve at churches where retired members stay in the area perform on average one funeral a week.

Such a lack of funerals, Friesen says, is a missed opportunity for spiritual formation. A funeral, he says, is like the North Star in the sky, so that a navigator knows where the ship is and how to adjust its direction to get to the destination. At a funeral, "you get these coordinates" to position yourself in life, says Friesen.

Funerals are opportunities to measure ourselves by the same stick we are using to measure others. "He was a good dad," we say, "and a loving husband." Or, "She took care of the people who worked for her, and she mentored other young women in church." When we say that about another, we also ask the same questions of ourselves.

We live in a culture that has forgotten how to help people measure their days. Through medicine and science, we know more about death and how to forestall it than ever before. Yet we know little about how to prepare people for the inevitable. The church is a community that teaches people how to live well by teaching them how to measure their days. Put another way, when the church incarnates a culture of resurrection—one that recognizes the inevitability of death but not its triumph—it teaches people how to die well.

Saint Isaac the Syrian put it like this: "Prepare your heart for your departure. If you are wise, you will expect it every hour." Funerals are one way churches can prepare our hearts for our departure. But there are many other things churches can do before that service that teach us how to wisely expect death, and to be ready for it at every hour.

#### MARKERS ALONG THE WAY

Friesen's church helps prepare his congregation by marking significant points in members' lives. For significant milestones, the church combines a service or ritual with a gift or other tangible marker. At a birth or adoption, the baby is dedicated during the service, and a red rose is placed on the pulpit. Beginning in third grade, children have presentations during worship, and at the first, they receive a Bible with inscriptions from members of the church. At age 12, children

***'Prepare your heart for your departure. If you are wise, you will expect it every hour.'***

~ Saint Isaac the Syrian

receive a mentor, an adult member who is a non-parental source of guidance, wisdom, and companionship. This also creates valuable intergenerational relationships. The church marks other milestones when a young person makes the decision to become a Christian, when someone joins the church as a member, at high-school graduation, marriage, mission trips, and retirement.

At death, a member is remembered, but not just at the funeral. Throughout the year, a plaque hangs on a wall in the sanctuary, inscribed with the names of members who have passed away. Every year, at the All Saints' Day service, the church remembers those who have died that year. A young person stands beside the plaque and reads aloud the new names that have been added, members who have now joined the eternal communion of saints.

Testimonies of church members provide another chance for individuals to reflect on their own lives and share that with the congregation. "People at various stages of life give us a vision for our own life at that stage," says Friesen. After Friesen's own grandmother died, at age 99, he was particularly struck by the testimonies from older members.

"My grandmother's influence on me started when she was 89 and extended to 99," he says. "In the eyes of our culture, she's a useless person. But her most productive time in my life was her final ten years." This is something that everyone approaching or in retirement needs to hear, Friesen says. "You think nobody's paying attention" because of your age. "Think again. You can have a tremendous impact on people in your final decades. And you're going

to have more of them than you think.” A major job for the church, Friesen says, is to “give people a vision of the good life in the seasons of fall and winter.”

On occasion, the congregation takes a look at itself. Once, the worship leader asked groups of people to stand according to age, while the rest of the church applauded or otherwise recognized that age group. As the age groups grew older, fewer and fewer people stood up. When finally the oldest members of the church were standing and had been recognized, the worship leader asked the children to stand again. As the congregation looked at the oldest and youngest among them, all saw the link between the two groups. The oldest, who had spent a lifetime as caretakers of the church, were passing on their work and faith to those two or three generations younger.

“At each step in life, we’re trying to give this sense of the with-God life,” Friesen says. And when that life nears its end, its posture toward God does not change. “God is still with us,” as he has been throughout our lives, “right to our final breath.”

**ONLY ASLEEP**

The church also builds a culture of resurrection when it fosters a sense of the universal body of Christ, across geography and through time.

Old church buildings and those Christian communities that maintain their centuries-old traditions provide a stark contrast with modern churches in how they remember—even live among—their dead brothers and sisters. Until the 19th century, church buildings were often graveyards, with walls and floors holding the bones of those who worshipped in ages past. Walking into such a church today

experience to help us attend as fully to his body . . . as we might have or as, perhaps, we should have.”

And the Orthodox maintain their reverent attitude toward the dead long after anyone alive remembers who they are. In the monasteries of Mount Athos, Greece, Cairns describes basements full of bones, and monks who proudly call the deceased “my brothers.”

**NEVER ALONE**

Christians are right to challenge the modern idea that death is a solitary event. Those who are part of the body of Christ are never separated. Theologian Therese Lysaught writes,

Christians do not die alone. Rather, death within the Christian tradition is an experience of ongoing, communal presence. . . . Through a continuous set of rites and practices, the church maintains a constant and unbroken presence to those who are dying beyond the point of their burial.

Though churches these days are likely to run into building codes that prevent them from tearing into drywall to bury members, some churches have found alternative ways of caring for their “sleeping” members. One I visited had a garden outside the building and a marble wall rising beside the church. Walking through the garden, church members could see the names, carved into the wall, where the cremated ashes of church members remained. Some had names but no dates. The future occupant had yet to be called to join her deceased brothers and sisters. These columbaria, places where the ashes of the



**‘Christians do not die alone. Through a continuous set of rites and practices, the church maintains a constant and unbroken presence to those who are dying beyond the point of their burial.’**  
 ~ theologian Therese Lysaught

may seem creepy or morbid, but from a spiritual perspective, these gatherings of the faithful are alive with the prayers, the history, the culture, the faith of generations.

The converted Orthodox poet Scott Cairns writes of his discovery of the Orthodox attitude toward the dead, which more closely resembles that of Christians from nearly any era but this one. “For starters,” he says, “the dead are unlikely to be spoken of as dead. They are asleep. Since the Resurrection, Christian people do not die per se. They fall asleep. They are said to have fallen asleep in the Lord.”

Orthodox funeral services include open caskets with the body in full view. “I was initially startled,” Cairns says, “then strangely moved.” While our culture hides from death, Cairns’s congregation was comfortable, unafraid, and welcoming.

“Throughout the liturgy that followed, family and friends continued to worship by [the deceased’s] side. Children and adults both turned to him throughout the service, as if to see if he was comfortable, attending to him as if he were still present.”

Comparing this loving and respectful attitude with the death of his own father, Cairns writes, “We missed out on most of this.” After a two-day battle in which his father struggled just to breathe, the ordeal finally ended. “We wept, of course, but we had little in our

dead are stored, offer the rest of us a sense of the continuity of the faith and a reminder of our own destination. It is a visible reminder of the culture of resurrection.

A columbarium also offers church members basic help as they grieve. They have the opportunity to prepare the place where their bodies will await the Second Coming and the resurrection of the dead. And they allow loved ones to visit the resting place of their beloved any day of the week, and at least every Sunday.

Such reminders offer an occasion to remember who we are as part of a far larger body of Christians that extends two thousand years. As much as science, medicine, and a rapidly changing society have altered things and imposed new challenges and difficult questions, life and death are still the same. The church, by teaching and living out the values of a life lived with a view to the Resurrection, expresses a culture of resurrection. Such a culture cares for its elderly and their caregivers. It teaches young and old to live and die well. ☩

**Rob Moll** is a *Christianity Today* editor at large and author of *The Art of Dying: Living Fully into the Life to Come*, from which this article is adapted. Used by permission of InterVarsity Press (*ivpress.com*), P.O. Box 1400, Downers Grove, Illinois, 60515.



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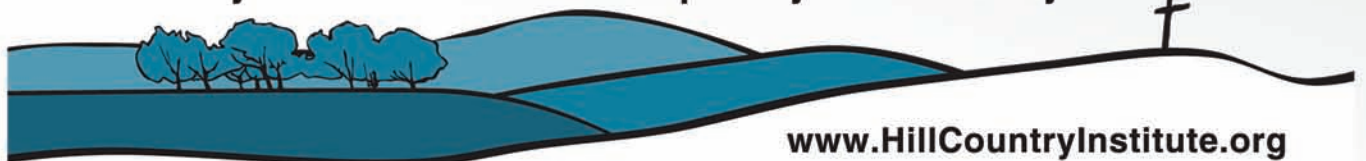
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# 'Something Better

Buenos Aires pastors believe their city of 13 million should have only one church.

By Jeremy Weber in Argentina

**F**ACING ITS FINAL SUNDAY as a church, a small Pentecostal congregation e-mailed Norberto Saracco on a Wednesday in 2007 asking for prayer. They would lose their Buenos Aires property unless the church paid an impossible US\$25,000—nearly a year's worth of offerings—to resolve a long-standing property lawsuit.

Saracco, co-leader of the Council of Pastors in Argentina's capital, sent up a prayer—and sent out an e-mail saying, “We cannot afford for \$25,000 to let a church close in Buenos Aires.” Two days later, pastors from an array of denominations had donated the money.

“When we say there is only one church in Buenos Aires, these are the consequences,” explains Saracco. “If we want a strong church in Buenos Aires, every local church has to be strong.”

This is just one of the fruits of perhaps the most remarkable experiment in citywide church unity today.

## A SIMPLE IDEA

Argentina's unity movement is based on a simple biblical concept.

“Each time the New Testament speaks of the church in a city such as Ephesus, it is always singular, never plural,” says Carlos Mraida, pastor of Del Centro First Baptist Church. “Yet when the New Testament speaks of leadership in a city, it is always plural. The church is singular, but leadership is plural.”

“When we go to the U.S., we cannot understand the division of the church,” says Saracco, pastor of Good News Church. “You can have one pastor on one [street] corner and another on another corner, and they don't know each other. Here we are friends.”

More than friendship is at stake. Mraida estimates that while 90 percent of Buenos Aires churches have grown during his 24 years as a pastor, the city outside the church walls is significantly worse off by almost every spiritual and secular measure.

“So it seems that the church grew, but the kingdom of God has not been established,” says Mraida. “Jesus said the only requirement for us to see revival is that we be one, so that the world may believe [John 17:20–23]. The missionary paradigm of each one doing [his] own thing did not work. We have to go back to a biblical paradigm.”

Porteños—as city residents are known—initially tried to start a unity movement after Billy Graham's 1962 crusade in the capital, and again

after Luis Palau's 1977 crusade, but both attempts fizzled. Churches were never hostile or competitive, said Juan Pablo Bongarrá, Brethren pastor of Church of the Open Door; they just focused on individual projects.

A new spirit of unity arose in the early 1980s, when hundreds of Argentine cities formed pastors councils thanks to the crusades of Carlos Annacondia. The Pentecostal businessman-turned-preacher required the formation of a council before he would visit a city. The decade closed with two national retreats attended by 1,200 pastors.

The Buenos Aires council was founded in 1982 by five pastors: Bongarrá, Saracco, Mraida, charismatic pastor Jorge Himitián, and Baptist pastor Pablo Deiros. Their starting point was creating friendships between pastors, said Saracco, as it's easier to unite people than denominations.

Next came reconciliation over past wrongs. The political tumult during the nation's Dirty War of the 1970s and '80s created a deep divide between mainline churches, which defended human rights, and evangelical churches, which remained silent, says Saracco. At a downtown summit in 1999, the council asked the two sides to forgive one another in front of the 250,000 gathered.

Over time, pastors wanted a formalized structure and created rotating elected offices of president, vice president, and other traditional positions. But functioning as a typical institution did not work well, says Bongarrá, and the council lost momentum. So in 2006 the council invited the founders (minus Deiros, who had left for Fuller Theological Seminary) to come back and revitalize the council. The four agreed—on one condition.

“We changed the mindset and said, ‘Let's not work like an institution; let's work like a church and focus on spiritual gifts,’” says Bongarrá. “Which pastors are evangelists? Teachers? Prophets? Apostles?” Today more than 180 pastors representing almost 150 of the city's 350



MATIAS LIPSZCZ



# er Than Revival'



**Café con Cristo: Leaders discuss upcoming projects for the Council of Pastors of Buenos Aires.**

churches participate in the council.

The unity movement soon shifted from fellowship between pastors to churches helping churches. When an Anglican church

was forced to end its Sunday school program in 2008 for lack of teachers, prompting an exodus of families, Saracco's Pentecostal church sent four volunteers to run the program during 2009. When a suburban pastor faced losing his Christian school in a property lawsuit in 2008, the council paid his tax debt and teachers' salaries until the school got back on its feet.

For the past four years, Mraida has invited pastors from different denominations to serve Communion at his Baptist congregation's monthly Communion service. When Mraida's church was building a new sanctuary, pastor Omar Cabrera's nondenominational Vision of the Future Church 10 blocks away put up the 70,000 pesos for the cement for the building's second story.

"A lot of pastors told me, 'Hey, he's only 10 blocks away,'" says Cabrera. "'Why are you helping to build his church?' And I said, 'Come on, we are all on the same team.'"

In June 2008, the council organized 40 days of prayer, culminating

in a three-night outdoor vigil in front of the nation's Congress. A second 40 days of prayer was observed in 2009, leading to this year's 50-day campaign from Easter to Pentecost.

#### **EVANGELIZING THE CITY**

Then, in November 2009, the unity movement made the significant shift from churches helping churches to churches evangelizing the city together. "Over the years we established relationships," says Mraida, "but we were not able to reach the level of mission."

Pastors incarnated the priesthood of all believers by seeking people to assume "spiritual responsibility" for each of the 12,000 blocks in the city center of 3 million residents. Volunteers pray for their block and pass out Bibles and fliers. Today the council has 7,000 blocks covered by volunteers from 100 local churches. Pastors are confident they will find volunteers for the remaining 5,000 blocks by year's end.

The council also launched a five-year ad campaign based on the Didache, an ancient treatise on Christian living, condensed into 40 propositions in contemporary language. Every two weeks, the city is saturated with a new message promoting Christian values. The

message is distributed by newspapers, television, radio, billboards, taxis, and fliers, all with the catchphrase: "The Argentina that God wants . . . with Jesus Christ it is possible."

Many churches reinforce the ads by pegging their sermons to each week's theme. Congregations have been so enthusiastic that offerings to the council—normally less than 2,000 pesos per month—to cover publicity costs have totaled an astounding 750,000 pesos (US\$196,000) in five months.

The latest example of citywide evangelism was the February 2010 sending of missionaries to North Africa as representatives of the entire church in Buenos Aires. Argentine churches have been actively sending missionaries overseas since the 1987 COMIBAM (Ibero-American Mission Cooperation) conference in São Paulo sparked the Latin American missions movement. But this joint sending (the Baptist family is supported by 20 churches) breaks new ground. "This idea has tremendous potential for mission, a model to make it possible for the economical realities in Latin America," says David Ruiz, former international president of COMIBAM.

The success in Buenos Aires comes at a time when traditional unity groups in Latin America—such as the conservative CONELA (Latin American Evangelical Fellowship) and the mainline CLAI (Latin American Council of Churches)—are dying out or losing relevance, says Ruiz, now associate director of the World Evangelical Alliance Mission Commission. "Most of the evangelical alliances are facing an identity crisis," he says. "The council in Buenos Aires is a very unique body that is bringing an alternative for unity for the church in Latin America."

"The kind of unity structure that Saracco and Bongarrá represent is new. They actually do things together," said René Padilla, a leading Latin American theologian and president emeritus of the Buenos Aires-based Kairos Foundation. He noted that the council is very active but has limited influence outside the heart of the city, and big divides remain between mainline and conservative groups. "There are encouraging signs of people relating across denominations," says Padilla. "But there is still a long way to go."

#### BEYOND BUENOS AIRES

Examples of unity are not confined to Buenos Aires. Pastors in Neuquén established a Christian HMO that provides medical services at low fees; other city councils have jointly purchased property in order to establish Christian radio stations. Yet Buenos Aires has been so successful that ACIERA, Argentina's evangelical alliance, summoned all the other councils in April to the city's Baptist seminary so pastors could learn from their Porteño colleagues.

Churches do not have to abandon their distinctives in order to



**Block by Block: Church representatives pass out Didache ads in iconic San Telmo Market.**

***'Jesus said the only requirement for us to see revival is that we be one, so that the world may believe. We have to go back to a biblical paradigm.'***

~ Baptist pastor Carlos Mraida

Imagine if God made just one flower; that would be boring."

Instead, churches are trading strengths. "Today the mainline churches are helping the evangelical churches do social work, and the evangelical churches are helping the mainline churches do evangelism work," says Bongarrá. Christians now enjoy greater leverage in the public square because they can present a united front when

confronting the government, most recently in November over the issue of gay marriage.

Bongarrá and Saracco say the process for choosing initiatives is simple: The council meets for a monthly meal, one in the morning and one in the evening to accommodate bi-vocational pastors. After eating and social-

izing, they present and discuss ideas, all of which receive a final group vote. Then they search for pastors who have the spiritual gifts to implement the projects.

The loose structure is deemed key to success. Another is having something to do. "For many years we'd meet as a council but didn't have a common project," says Bongarrá. "Now more and more pastors are joining us because it's good to pray together and have a good time, but people are happier to have something to do."

"Most important is the mindset to have unity be a continuous process, not an event," says Mraida. "Unity of the city is a process."

Visitors to Argentina have long talked about the evangelical revival they observe. Bongarrá counters: "We have had growth in the church, but not revival. Revival changes the structure of society. Now we have something better than revival: unity. Unity has opened the opportunity for true revival."

How far can Buenos Aires pastors go with their effort to become one? "Our vision is that one day we will have no separation between denominations, and we work in this direction," says Saracco, citing John 17. "But we are aware of our differences today, and we know we will not see this during our lifetime.

"Yet our vision and our task is one of faith. Maybe it will take 100 years, 200 years, 300 years—we don't know. But Abraham was the father of the faith because he believed, not because he saw." ✚

Jeremy Weber is CT's news editor.

MATIAS LIPSZYC



# 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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# VIEWPOINTS

OPINIONS AND  
PERSPECTIVES ON  
ISSUES FACING  
THE CHURCH



## N. T. Wright, Craig Keener, and Darrell Bock are right: Modern Jesus scholarship provides an appropriate context for faith, not a substitute for it.

Art Witulski  
Nashville, Tennessee

### Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?

Scot McKnight's April cover essay, "The Jesus We'll Never Know," and his March review of Brian McLaren's most recent book reinforce each other: Portraits of the "real" Jesus tend to be self-portraits.

The superb twin offerings brought me back to graduate studies in Toronto, where, in a seminar on Hans Küng's *On Being a Christian*, a professor noted that Küng was recapitulating in his own person the entire history of Protestantism, from the justification debates around the Council of Trent to religious pluralism. The same can be said of McLaren, who is recapitulating the same history as he moves out of fundamentalism to a liberal social gospel.

About *On Being a Christian*, late Catholic writer Ralph McInerney quipped that it portrayed Jesus as "the man who would be Küng"; McLaren's Jesus looks like "the life of Brian."

**JOHN BOLT**  
Professor, Calvin Theological Seminary  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

It's hard to see why McKnight depicts historical Jesus studies so negatively just when those studies are getting exciting again. Perhaps his expectations are too high; as he states near the end of the essay, "Faith cannot be completely based on what the historian can prove." The

quest to base faith solely on historical research is of course doomed to fail. That might have been the aim of Rudolf Bultmann and others, but it is not that of modern Jesus scholars.

N. T. Wright, Craig Keener, and Darrell Bock are right: Jesus scholarship provides an appropriate context for faith, not a substitute for it.

**ART WITULSKI**  
Nashville, Tennessee

McKnight rightly insists on the need for faith in approaching the "real Jesus," but reasons less surely when he suggests that historical Jesus studies are futile because scholars cannot agree. I've heard that reasoning before: "There are many truths; therefore, there can be no Truth." Yet some of the truths from historical Jesus studies helpfully reveal aspects of that multifaceted Truth upon whom our theology and salvation rest.

A big thank-you to those scholars who, without wavering in faith in our Lord or the inerrancy of God's Word, face the facts of history and share them with the rest of us, giving us a surer foundation for and richer experience of faith.

**DWIGHT GINGRICH**  
North Bay, Ontario

### What Haiti's Kids Need

Regarding "210 Million Reasons to Adopt" [April], *Christianity Today's* editorial on

adoption, it's time that Western churches try to look at Haiti's crisis through the eyes of Haitians.

Instead of taking children out of their heritage and country (and, often, away from relatives), why not regularly support in-country Christian programs that provide a nurturing environment and solid education? Haitian children would then grow up among their own people and become leaders in government, commerce, and education—leaders who can lead the nation out of its slump. They would also, by and large, be leaders with biblical convictions. Imagine what this could do for Haiti and for God's mission there.

**GAYLAN MATHIESEN**  
Fergus Falls, Minnesota

As an adoptive parent, I appreciated *CT's* editorial point that a stable family home is more crucial for a child's development than remaining in his or her birth country, only to be institutionalized or live on the streets. The opposite view is preventing many needy children from finding families. My daughter's birth country put a moratorium on all international adoptions shortly after we brought her home two years ago. While the loss of culture, homeland, and all that is familiar must be dealt with compassionately, there is no substitute for a loving family.

Thanks to *CT* as well for suggesting

**TOP 3**  
What got the  
most comments  
in April's *CT*

**38%**  
**Channeling the  
Populist Rage**  
Chuck Colson with  
Catherine Larson

**21%**  
**The Jesus We'll  
Never Know**  
Scot McKnight

**13%**  
**A Resurrection  
That Matters**  
J. R. Daniel Kirk

**YAY OR NAY**  
Readers' response  
to "Channeling the  
Populist Rage"

**44%**  
**56%**

practical ways that individuals and churches can carry out the adoption mandate, even where adoption is not the best solution.

**RACHEL WILSON**  
Wilmington, North Carolina

## Tea Parties and Bad Tempers

I read Chuck Colson's column "Channeling the Populist Rage" [April] with disappointment. His statement that the U.S. government has functioned improperly, causing distrust, is certainly valid, but he ignores the overblown rhetoric and demagoguery of some in conservative media and the tea party movement.

There should be no discussion of that movement without condemnation of the hatred, dissension, and racism that some of its members spread. It is not just a case of Christians "channeling" that rage; it is a case of calling it what it is: sin.

**WILLIAM J. KATT**  
Brookfield, Wisconsin

The photo that accompanied Colson's column on the "populist rage" was unfair, as it depicted only the most extreme signage [of President Obama as the Joker]. What I saw at the April 15, 2009, event in Salem, Oregon, were

thousands of people peacefully protesting the government's attempt to take over more and more of our lives. I saw other signs that specifically addressed abortion as a major moral travesty in our country.

I hope Colson supports Christian Americans who speak out for righteousness—no matter in what forum that may be.

**PETE JOSSI**  
Salem, Oregon

I appreciate Colson's conciliatory tone in describing the tea party movement, but he leaves out some details without which we are led astray. The populist rage did not begin with tea parties; it began in response to the Bush administration and resulted in the election of President Obama. The tea party protests are a reaction to that election by people discomfited by it, and are marshaled and shaped by interest groups like FreedomWorks.

We need to rely on James's words: that our anger never brings about God's righteousness (1:20), and that it's wise to be "quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry" (1:19). We might be surprised at what we find.

**SUSAN GILLESPIE**  
Chatham, New Jersey



ONLINE POLL

**A REBELLION BREWING**  
What do you think of the tea party movement?

18%

I consider myself part of the movement.

32%

I like what they stand for, but I'm not part of the movement.

5%

I'm ambivalent about the movement.

8%

I don't think the movement knows what it is.

12%

The movement makes me nervous.

22%

I disagree with the movement.

3%

I don't know what the movement is.

Total Votes: 1,126

compiled by Laura Leonard

## WORTH REPEATING

Things overheard at CT online.

**"In a world where everybody is trying to escape reality, either through drugs, music, or entertainment, the church should be the one place that tries to ground people in reality."**

**J. R. Houck**, on making worship more about creating Christ followers than about creating worship experiences.

Soul Work: "The End of Christianity as We Know It," by Mark Galli

**"It is the job of the church—not the White House or Congress—to call Christians together in prayer."**

**Mindy**, on the decision of a federal judge that the National Day of Prayer is unconstitutional.

Politics Blog: "Judge Rules National Day of Prayer Unconstitutional," by Sarah Pulliam Bailey

**"The pressure that [Jennifer] Knapp labels as condemnation from the church is in reality the hard truth of the gospel, which is that the gospel requires change."**

**Ryan C.**, on Knapp's statement that she has "struggled" with the church since embracing a gay identity.

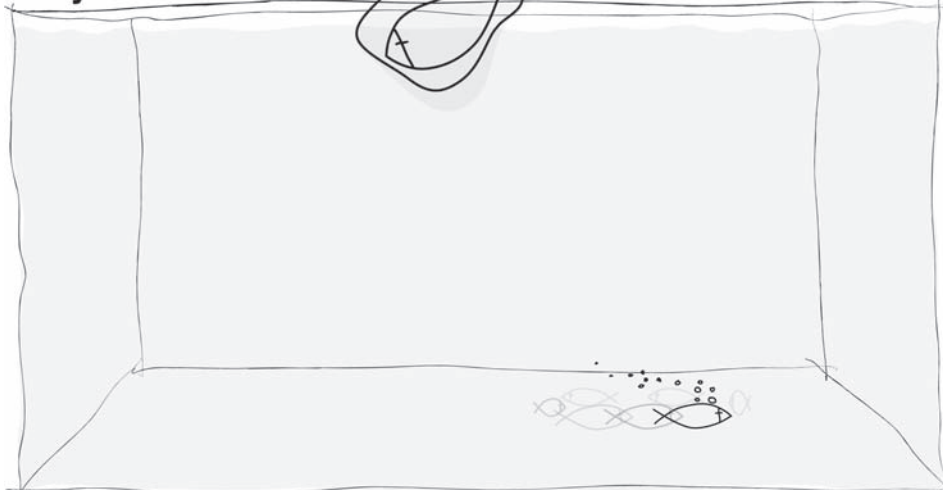
"Jennifer Knapp Comes Out," interview by Mark Moring

**"Paul perhaps writes about unity more often, but he writes about justification most deeply. The core of the gospel . . . must be guarded for unity to have any integrity."**

**Randy Carruthers**, on N. T. Wright's statement at the Wheaton Theology Conference that "nothing justifies schism," in contrast to Together for the Gospel's conference on "The Unadjusted Gospel."

Speaking Out: "Wrightians and the Neo-Reformed: 'All One in Christ Jesus,'" by Brett McCracken

holy mackerel



Little Skippy panics, certain the rapture has occurred.

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# Don't Shoot the Messenger

What all Christians can learn from the Catholic Church abuse scandal.

**T**HIS SPRING must have felt like Long Lent II for the Catholic Church as it faced waves of new sex abuse claims worldwide and media scrutiny. Unlike many Catholic leaders, *Wall Street Journal* columnist Peggy Noonan welcomed the scrutiny as one hard step in church reform. A devoted Catholic, Noonan believes the fire of journalistic inquiry revealed the worth of the institution—and its urgent need for change: “[T]he journalistic establishment in the U.S. and Europe has been the best friend of the Catholic Church . . . The press forced the church to change the old regime and begin to come to terms with the abusers. The church shouldn’t be saying *j'accuse* but thank you.”

That thank you may be a while coming. No one, persons or institutions, likes public criticism, and many Catholic leaders naturally circled the wagons during the recent media blitz. They rightly noted many journalists’ ignorance about church history and teaching and decried sloppy reporting.

“The facts seem to be of little interest to those whose primary concern is to nail down the narrative of global Catholic criminality,” charged Catholic public intellectual George Weigel, in response to a *New York Times* report on a Wisconsin priest accused of abusing some 200 deaf children. “[The media’s narrative] . . . is often less about the protection of the young . . . than it is about taking the Church down—and, eventually, out, both financially and as a credible voice in the public debate . . .” In other words, the secular press has no right to wag sanctimonious fingers when they have at times sensationalized horror stories involving children to sell copy. Surely Christians of all streams have at times felt besieged by reporters seemingly bent on elbowing them out of public discourse.

The rub is, many journalists—even secular ones—are bent not on taking down the Christians but on getting the facts right. *The*

*Boston Globe’s* 2002 series on sex abuse in the Archdiocese of Boston is a case *par excellence* of journalistic integrity in the service of a community. The Pulitzer Prize-winning series is often noted for breaking the dam of global church secrecy and helping the church handle victims and abusers more responsibly. The series led to concrete changes, including a 2004 church-initiated survey of the scope of abuse in the U.S., and tougher measures for handling allegations. It helped clear away the “filth,” as Pope Benedict has called abusive priests, and lead to new life.

Churches—indeed, all Christian ministries—can learn from the Catholic Church’s overall response to media scrutiny. Instead of resorting to defensiveness (as did one bishop over Easter, dismissing new reports as “petty gossip”), believers might carefully listen to media depictions of the church, and prayerfully sort truth from falsehood. *New York Times* columnist

Ross Douthat wisely noted that writing off all news media as anti-Christian hurts the church when actual bias is at work: “Attacks on the media tend to spur journalists to greater unfairness, whereas acknowledging legitimate critiques gives you more credibility, not less, when it comes time to rebut slanderous charges.” Quickly and clearly responding gives believers more leverage to reshape public opinion and protect the bride of Christ against falsehood.

But more than image management is at stake in how Christians respond to media. God, in his zeal for our refinement, can use journalistic truth-telling—even from those who ask “what is truth?”—to sanctify us. Purification rarely feels good, and some critiques are found to be nothing more than hate-filled attacks. But since “there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known” (Luke 12:2), ministries can face journalistic scrutiny confidently,

looking for God’s judgment and grace in unlikely sources. As Catholic theologian Edward Oakes said in an April homily, “[I]f the Hebrew prophets could see the hand of God at work in the attacks on ancient Israel from the Assyrian empire, then Catholics [and all Christians] ought to be able to espy the workings of divine providence when the media bring to light crimes that should have been made public from the beginning.”

Real love for Christ’s bride means acknowledging her stained and tattered dress, even in front of those who are bent on publicly shaming her. Real love “does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth” (1 Cor. 13:6), even if the truth comes wrapped in derision or ignorance. It means living with the Last Day in view, waiting for God bring to light the stains the bride has managed to hide—and to discipline those who unfairly dragged her through the mud. ✚



**Quickly responding to the media gives believers more leverage to reshape public opinion and protect the bride of Christ against falsehood.**

Green Plus  
Christian Isn't  
New Math

## How concerned should Christians be about environmental care?

### AS MUCH AS GOD IS

**Jonathan Merritt** is the author of *Green Like God: Unlocking the Divine Plan for Our Planet*.

If we are concerned about the gospel, we should be concerned about the environment. While the two issues might not immediately strike one as connected, I have come to believe they are inextricably so.

*Creation care is a launching pad for the gospel.* I correspond with missionaries around the world who are glad to see American Christians championing “creation care.” In many foreign countries, missionaries don’t begin with Jesus, an unknown, when witnessing to others. Rather, they begin with creation and the Creator, who is clearly evident to all (Rom. 1).

*Creation care strengthens our gospel witness.* In Western countries like ours, where we see a growing sensitivity to environmental problems, people view environmental stewardship as the mark of a “good person.” When people see Christians selflessly caring for the planet and advocating for those who depend on Earth’s resources, our gospel message becomes convincing. That’s why church planters across the United States are beginning to incorporate environmental stewardship practices into their congregations’ DNA.

Non-Westerners carefully observe the historically Christian West and form opinions about our faith based on our lifestyles and practices. For example, Americans make up only 5 percent of the world’s population, yet consume over a third of Earth’s paper products. How does this influence the gospel message in countries like Nicaragua, Honduras, and Ecuador, where deforestation causes so much suffering and injustice?

*Living out the gospel includes caring for creation.*

It is inappropriate to claim that creation care—or any social issue—composes the foundation of the gospel. But the gospel calls us to a radically

sacrificial, compassionate lifestyle. Jesus commands us to “make disciples of all nations” and teach others to “obey everything I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19–20). This includes the commands to love our global neighbors, care for the least of these, and uphold the creation care mandates throughout Scripture.

*Ignoring environmental problems heaps shame on the gospel.* Part of missional living is telling the truth. That means we must be honest about our world’s problems. When we blindly follow Christian lobbying groups and “alliances” that ignore global injustice, the gospel suffers. Augustine cautioned against this in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*: “If [non-Christians] find a Christian mistaken in a field which they themselves know well and hear him maintaining his foolish opinions about our books [Scripture], how are they going to believe those books?”

I could offer more reasons Christians should care about creation: because the “earth is the Lord’s” (Ps. 24); because it reveals the attributes of God (Ps. 19; Rom. 1); because God asked us to care for it (Gen. 2:15); and because Christ’s death began a process of cosmic redemption in which we are called to participate (Col. 1; Rom. 8; Rev. 21). But more than any of those, we must care about creation because we want the kingdom of God to reign on earth and the gospel of Jesus Christ to take root among all people.

### NO LESS THAN STEWARDS

**R. Albert Mohler Jr.** is president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

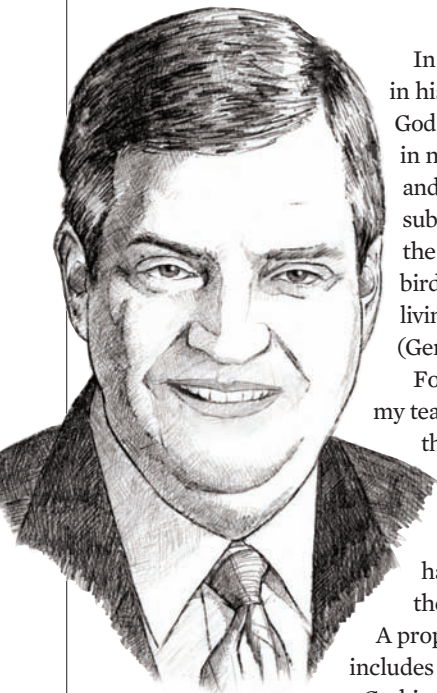
Concern for the environment is one of the most controversial issues facing Christians today. On the one hand, we confront an environmentalism that is often deeply rooted in a naturalistic worldview, sometimes wedded to pantheistic or panentheistic spirituality. On the other hand, we face a painful legacy of silence, apathy, and unconcern among evangelicals.

The larger cultural conversation is often politically and ideologically polarized to the point of meltdown. Evangelicals cannot ignore the political debates and implications of public policy, but our proper concern is prior to the political and deeper than policy.

A proper evangelical concern about care for the environment is rooted in a song many of us learned as children—this really is “our Father’s world.” The biblical themes of dominion and stewardship are essential to our reading of the Scriptures, from creation in Genesis to new creation in the Book of Revelation.







ILLUSTRATIONS: TIM BARON

In Genesis, God creates humanity in his own image. To this creature, God extends a mandate of dominion in no uncertain terms: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen. 1:28, *esv*).

For a long time, I did my best in my teaching and writing to “balance” this verse and its clear declaration of human dominion over the created order with the biblical theme of stewardship. But I have come to the conclusion that they are really one and the same. A proper understanding of dominion includes stewardship.

God invested the only creature made in his image with the power of dominion. There is little room for misunderstanding. Human beings are not blights upon creation. Indeed, creation itself is, as John Calvin famously declared, the theater of God’s own glory. Human dominion over the earth is to be exercised so that God’s glory is most evident in God’s creation. The love and care the Creator invested in the cosmos is to be our model of dominion, rightly fulfilled.

We cannot buy into the implicit pantheism and questionable science of so many environmentalists. We cannot accept environmental apocalypticism. Far too many evangelicals seem to do this while ignoring deeper Christian motivations for proper earth care.

At the same time, we cannot neglect our responsibility to exercise our dominion in a way that treasures the earth, heals its wounds, respects its creatures, and values its divinely given resources.

We know that we will be judged for our stewardship of the earth. This implies a hierarchy of concerns. Our first concern is our gospel commission. But, as we all know, the gospel comes with implications.

A proper environmentalism is one of those implications. But in the end, the keeper of the earth is the Creator himself.

## DEPENDS ON ONE’S GIFTS

**Cal Beisner** is national spokesman for the Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation.

I care for my aunt who has Alzheimer’s disease and for her mentally handicapped daughter. That is, their needs are often on my mind, and I sympathize with them. My aunt’s doctor hardly knows her, but in terms of outward, objective action, he cares for her more than I do. My daughter, who lives with them and manages their household, cares for them both subjectively and objectively, much more than either the doctor or I do.

How concerned should Christians be about care for the environment? It depends partly on what we mean by “care for the environment.” Are we talking about subjective, emotional care, or objective, active care?

I suppose we all are capable of a good deal of emotional care for the environment, for what that’s worth. But our resources are more limited for objective, outward care—time spent removing litter from a streambed, protesting toxic waste at a chemical plant, inventing a more fuel efficient and less polluting engine. Time and money and bodily energy spent on those cannot simultaneously be spent on HIV/AIDS care and prevention, hunger relief, evangelism, fighting human trafficking, or reading Bible stories to our children.

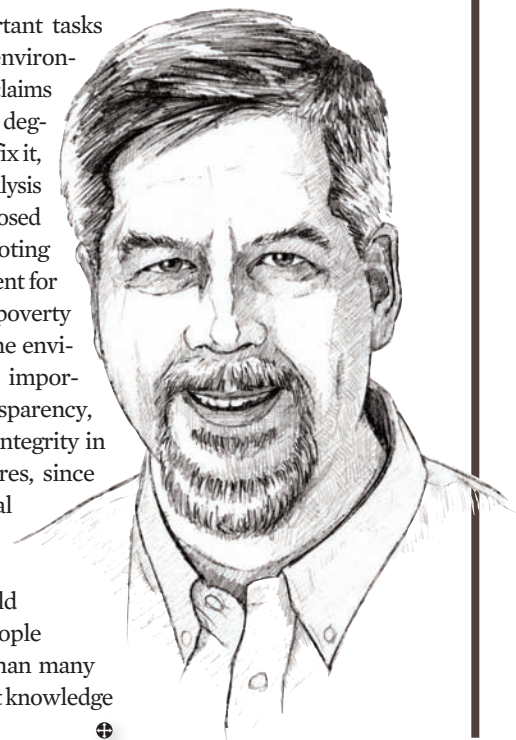
Prioritizing is inescapable. The apostle Paul’s statement about gifts in the church applies: “There are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you!’” (1 Cor. 12:20–21).

Suppose Julie dedicates full-time service to Earth stewardship and no time to her church’s clothes closet for the poor. Ron does the opposite. Jean divides her time unevenly among homeschooling her children, teaching a women’s Bible study, following up on visitors to her church, and contacting her state and federal representatives about public policy concerns. Is one of them wrong? “Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand” (Rom. 14:4).

How concerned should Christians be about caring for the environment? It depends on the Christian and his or her gifts; it’s not something we can generalize about. But we can state some principles, as I did in a monograph for the Institute on Religion and Democracy, *What Is the Most Important Environmental Task Facing American Christians Today?*

The more important tasks in caring for the environment include testing claims about environmental degradation and how to fix it, doing cost-benefit analysis of problems and proposed solutions, and promoting economic development for the very poor, since poverty is a great threat to the environment. It is also important to promote transparency, accountability, and integrity in government structures, since good environmental stewardship depends in part on them.

Finally, we should remember that people are more valuable than many sparrows, and let that knowledge guide our priorities.





# The Risks God Takes

Why a little church history is a dangerous—and necessary—thing.

**M**Y KIDS ARE GROWING UP in North American evangelicalism, just like I did. My husband and I load up the family wagon every Sunday for primarily spiritual reasons, but as a byproduct, we are also marinating our offspring in a specific cultural broth. By the time they leave for college, they will have spent 18 years in a Reformational stew.

Church culture is the norm for our kids. They have no reason to believe that Christendom has ever been different, although they do recognize progress in that they can wear jeans on Sunday mornings.

One of the quirks of growing up in certain streams of evangelicalism is a lack of historical context. In my youth, a church father was a dad on the deacons' board. If we had to summarize Christianity's history, we would probably reference the apostle Paul, Billy Graham, and our congregation's building committee.

I would have remained ignorant if it weren't for books. G. K. Chesterton cajoled me to respect tradition as a way of "giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors." My ancestors, it turns out, are a lively bunch. I discovered them scattershot—Augustine's introspection, Eckhart's mysticism, Therese of Lisieux's humility, Benedict's organizational genius. I began to see church history as a trove of devotional information, a 2,000-year stream to be mined for the golden testimonies of saints who pursued God and recorded what happened.

Hungry for context, I delved deeper—and soon realized why we don't share much church history with our kids.

Yes, there are bright lights in the story. But there are also dark moments when the church and state joined hands to form one iron fist. Sacramentalism (the teaching that God's saving grace comes only through the sacraments) was often turned from a means of grace into a way to secure power (for only

the church could perform the sacraments). To challenge official church doctrine meant consigning your soul to hell—and the church would likely help you get there quickly.

When Tertullian claimed that "the blood of the martyrs is seed," he could not have dreamed how much blood would be spilled at the hands of other Christians. Like that of Jan Hus, a Bohemian preacher who argued that Scripture should be available to the masses and have the ultimate authority in doctrinal matters. Seeking church reform, he preached against corruption.

When Hus refused to recant his positions before the Council of Constance in 1415, he was condemned as a heretic, strangled, and burned. But a century later, his blood helped to seed the ideas of Martin Luther and Menno Simons. Out of the pain of their difficult labor, my own church tradition was born.

Then there's the case of Michael Sattler, a 16th-century Anabaptist who was pronounced an "arch-heretic," tortured, and executed for concluding that Scripture did not advocate infant baptism. A few days later, Sattler's wife was drowned for holding the same view.

How do we process these stories? I open my Bible, and I recognize my debt to those who fought for the accessibility and authority of Scripture. My church holds a baptismal service, and I think of those who were drowned for claiming the right to be baptized as adults.

I recognize, too, that without dissenting

voices, there would have been no Reformation. This tempers my response to fellow Christians whom I believe are doctrinally unorthodox. I disagree with them as my conscience dictates, but I must also respect them as potential sparks in a reforming fire. As long as the church is made up of humans, it will need reform, and reform will require dissent from the status quo.

The story of Christianity ultimately leaves me shocked at the risks God takes with

humans. Even the greatest lights in church history were dishearteningly imperfect. For all his heroism, Luther attacked the Jewish faith so polemically the Nazis later misappropriated his writings for their anti-Semitic cause. Reformer Ulrich Zwingli advocated justification by faith and concern for the poor, but he also endorsed the

executions of two of his brightest disciples because they became Anabaptists. Simons was an inspired Anabaptist leader, but he overzealously excommunicated many who did not live up to his pious standards.

Yet God did great things through these flawed people, much as he did with Abraham, Isaac, Peter, and Paul. As long as there is a human element in his church, it will be prone to corruption. But as long as his Spirit moves, there will be reform and renewal.

When our kids are ready, we will give them context for their religious heritage. For now, they do not understand that the church they file into on Sunday mornings is a place as dangerous as it is holy. But if God is willing to keep taking a chance on it, so are we. ✚



**As long as there is a human element in God's church, it will be prone to corruption. But as long as his Spirit moves, there will be reform and renewal.**



# Who Are Americans?

What Christians contribute to the search for a national identity.

**N**ATIONS AROUND THE WORLD ARE suffering from identity crises. Perhaps it began two decades ago, when the last European holdouts were dragged in and the European Union was finally established, a move described by one journalist as “the triumph of the Eurocrats over the peoples of Europe.” More recently, *The New York Times* reported on France’s efforts to articulate its national identity. Soon thereafter, controversy erupted when Switzerland banned the construction of Muslim minarets. The *Times* and *Forbes* have reported on identity crises facing South Korea and China, as immigration makes largely homogenous nations increasingly diverse.

All these reports raise the question, “Who are we?”—which is also the title of scholar Samuel P. Huntington’s final and most prophetic book. “The more general causes of these . . . questionings,” wrote Huntington, “include the emergence of a global economy, tremendous improvements in communications and transportation, rising levels of migration, [and] the global expansion of democracy . . .”

There’s also an identity crisis bubbling just under the surface in the United States.

Huntington documents several challenges to a cohesive sense of American identity. First, while early settlers and immigrants were never ethnically homogenous, they largely traded in the same Anglo-Protestant cultural currency. But as 21st-century demographic trends increasingly draw people from other quadrants of the world, shared cultural assumptions erode.

Exacerbating the problem is a rise in dual citizenship and more subnational identities, which have created divided loyalties. Meanwhile, in the business community, an increasingly globalized economy has caused leaders to adopt a more transnational identity, what some call “Davos man.” And aside from a temporary resurgence of patriotism after September 11, Huntington documents how

academic elites have led the way in devaluing patriotism and American history.

We rightly pride ourselves on our multi-ethnic, multiracial society. But as our society grows ever more diverse, how will we understand our national identity?

Huntington poses four possible solutions. The first is a creedal community whose identity exists only in a social contract embodied in the Declaration of Independence and other founding documents. This has historically provided cohesion. The next option is a bifurcated America, one that is bilingual and bicultural like Canada or Belgium. The third option is an exclusivist or imperial notion of America. And the last alternative, the one Huntington clearly favored, is a reinvigorated core culture and religion coupled with the earlier solution of a reinvigorated creedal community.

Can a Christian worldview inform us as we wrestle with our national identity?

Any kind of racially or ethnically intolerant society would be incompatible with Christian principles.

Further, we know that the core values of our creeds, which in particular promote the dignity of all people, resonate with Scripture and are worth preserving. American patriotism does not rest on jingoistic nationalism but on a universal creed that says, “All men are . . . endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.”

Liberty is one of those unalienable rights. And this core value, also emphasized in Scripture, teaches us that we cannot force beliefs on others. Our founders understood,

however, that freedom of religion is not synonymous with expunging religion from public life, a problem that I and others addressed last fall in the Manhattan Declaration. So if Huntington is in fact right that the U.S. needs a reinvigorated religious commitment, it won’t come from a nation-mandated religion but rather from a reinvigorated populace.

I believe, then, that for national identity to be salient in the midst of our changing society, we need to promote a recommitment to our creeds, a respect for American history, and a proper role of patriotism, rooted in love of neighbor. Our founders’ Judeo-Christian heritage helped produce a culture in which moral responsi-

bility, transcendent ethical principles, and the dignity of all people could flourish—a culture in which our creedal values made sense. This is why our role as leaven within society is so important, and why we must continue to bring a biblical influence to the public square, reinvigorating society.

As we do so, we must guard against the easy tendency to embrace xenophobic notions or fall into the equally perilous trap of promoting subcultural identities over national identity. People will not live with, let alone die for, a nation that has abandoned its religious moorings and adopted a creed that suggests we simply live together in cosmopolitan bliss. Millions of us, however, have been willing to live and die for beliefs rooted in our deepest convictions about God and man—convictions that were expressed so well in the stirring words of our national creed, the Declaration of Independence. ✚



**For national identity to be salient in the midst of our changing society, we need to promote a recommitment to our creeds.**

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**Dr. Donald S. Whitney**, author of *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, has served on the Southern Seminary faculty since 2005.

# CT REVIEW

BOOKS, MOVIES,  
MUSIC, AND  
THE ARTS



## A Combustible Faith

How politics and religion forged Christian orthodoxy.  
By Roger E. Olson

**A**re you hungry for a rip-roaring tale of theological intrigue filled with conspiracies, Byzantine plots, murder, and mayhem? Or are you longing for a solid, informative, and accurate history of the development of Christian orthodoxy? If your answer is yes to both, Philip Jenkins's *Jesus Wars: How Four Patriarchs, Three Queens, and Two Emperors Decided What Christians Would Believe for the Next 1,500 Years* (HarperOne) ★★★★★ is your book. The church historian's latest is a page-turner for anyone even remotely interested in the history of Christianity and/or the

Roman Empire.

*Jesus Wars* recounts in vivid detail the centuries-long struggle to define and enforce the orthodox doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ. The story begins in fourth-century Constantinople, where Roman emperor Theodosius I made Christianity the official religion of the empire and called a council of all Christian bishops to settle once and for all the controversies about Jesus' humanity and divinity.

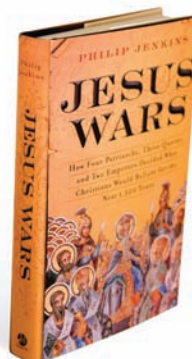
Far from settling the matter, however, Constantinople I (First

Council of Constantinople, A.D. 381) engendered a dispute about Christ that eventually led to the fall of the Roman Empire and permanent divisions between Christians. Jenkins is well known as a scholar of Christianity's rise in the "Global South," a catchall for the non-Western world. In *Jesus Wars*, he explains the origins of some little-known (to Westerners) branches of Christianity, including the churches of Ethiopia, Egypt, Syria, Armenia, and Persia (roughly modern Iraq and Iran).

Virtually all Christians since Constantinople I have agreed that Jesus Christ was and is in some sense both human and divine. But the question of how that truth is to be expressed and defended led to the first killings of heretics by Christians. The great Christian cities of Antioch and Alexandria fell into political and religious rivalry over the fine points of Christology. Each city also wanted stronger influence in the new imperial capital, Constantinople, and so plotted to overthrow the city's patriarchs and replace them with their own favorite sons.

*Jesus Wars* recounts blow-by-blow how bishops, monks, emperors, wives and mothers of emperors (often as powerful as their husbands and sons), and laypeople tortured and killed each other in a long orgy of heresy-hunting that was inseparable from imperial politics. Like many other commentators on these events, Jenkins seems to view arch-heretic Nestorius, Antiochian patriarch of Constantinople in the early fifth century, as

a relatively benign, misunderstood soul who was just trying to protect Jesus' full and true humanity. He was deposed and exiled, with many of his followers killed for their belief in the two natures of Jesus Christ. (Truth be told, Jenkins fails to do justice to the depth of the Nestorian heresy, which amounted to a denial of the Incarnation.)



Alexandrian patriarch Cyril, who almost single-handedly defeated Nestorianism in a controversy leading up to the third ecumenical council (Ephesus I in A.D. 431), comes across as only a little less diabolical than successor Dioscorus, who led a band of monks who killed the bishop of Constantinople at the so-called Gangster Synod at Ephesus in A.D. 449. In trying to be fair, Jenkins inadvertently reveals his sympathy for the Antiochians and his disdain for the Alexandrians.

The great fourth ecumenical council at Chalcedon in A.D. 451 was, like the others, called by an emperor and supposed to settle the controversy over whether Christ has two natures (Antioch's view) or one (Alexandria's view). Out of the council came the Chalcedonian Definition, which articulated the doctrine of the hypostatic union: Jesus Christ was one person of two natures "without confusion, without change, without division, without separation."

But it did anything but settle the controversy. Eventually, through much bloodshed, most Christians in Egypt and the Middle East broke from the churches of Rome and Constantinople and founded rival Christian traditions. One of those traditions is Nestorianism

## Jenkins's prose sparkles with epithets such as 'flaky megalomaniac'—a description of Roman emperor Justinian who, Jenkins says, ruled well only when he listened to his wife, the empress.

(because of belief that Christ's two natures were and are in some sense separate, so that the union was less than complete), the other Monophysitism (because of belief that Christ's two natures merged to form one—primarily if not exclusively divine).

What makes Jenkins's account of these events different from others is its clarity and color—none of that dry-as-dust writing one usually finds in tomes of historical theology. His prose sparkles with epithets such as "flaky megalomaniac"—a description of Roman emperor Justinian who, Jenkins says, ruled well only when he listened to his wife, the empress. As for clarity, readers will not find an account easier to understand, thanks to Jenkins's relatively detailed description of the many sides of the controversy.

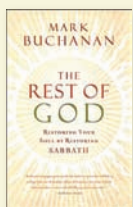
As a historian and not a theologian, Jenkins may be forgiven for attributing the unlikely preservation of the doctrine of the

Incarnation as articulated in the Chalcedonian Definition to "political accident." Some attribute it to divine providence. For example, if emperor Theodosius II, champion of the Monophysite cause who condoned the Alexandrian murder of patriarch Flavian at the Gangster Synod in 449, had not been killed in a horse-riding accident in July 450, the Christian world may have become permanently Monophysite. Jenkins treats this crucial event, which made possible the defeat of Monophysitism at Chalcedon possible if not certain, as accident. Many orthodox Christians view it as divine intervention.

From this theologian's perspective, a flaw in Jenkins's book is its tendency to treat the Chalcedonian doctrine of the person of Christ (hypostatic union) and the Nestorian doctrine and the Monophysite tendency to deny the full and true humanity

# MY TOP 5 BOOKS ON SABBATH REST

By Keri Wyatt Kent, author of *Rest: Living in Sabbath Simplicity* (Zondervan)



### THE REST OF GOD

*Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath*

MARK BUCHANAN  
(THOMAS NELSON)

Finely honed prose conveys the heart of Sabbath, leading us away from legalism through a life-giving liturgy of rest and play. Buchanan argues compellingly and winsomely for stopping, for no other reason than God told us we could.



### RECEIVING THE DAY

*Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time*

DOROTHY BASS (JOSSEY-BASS)

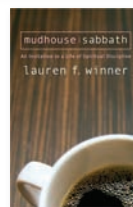
This philosophical yet practical book challenges the reader to think about time as a gift from God. Bass helps us look at our days, weeks, and years from God's perspective.



### THE BIBLICAL VISION OF SABBATH ECONOMICS

CHED MYERS (TELL THE WORD, CHURCH OF THE SAVIOUR)

This book's diminutive size belies its theological wallop. In just 70 pages, Myers explores Old Testament theology, Jesus, and Sabbath, and he links Sabbath to social justice with depth and clarity. It is a life-changing read.

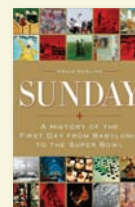


### MUDHOUSE SABBATH

*An Invitation to a Life of Spiritual Discipline*

LAUREN WINNER (PARACLETE)

Though this book has only one chapter on Sabbath, Winner, who converted from Judaism to Christianity, helpfully connects the dots between the two faiths with absolutely beautiful prose.



### SUNDAY

*A History of the First Day from Babylon to the Super Bowl*

CRAIG HARLINE  
(DOUBLEDAY RELIGION)

While not specifically Christian, this book offers an accurate, readable history of Sunday and Sabbath. Harline offers a helpful explanation of how our modern calendar has evolved and changed over the centuries.

of Jesus as equal contestants in the claim to orthodoxy. Even a historian, but especially a Christian one, should be able to see that only the Chalcedonian Definition protects belief in the Incarnation—the central tenet of Christianity.

What is an orthodox Christian to make of the claim that “Chalcedonian ideas triumphed not because of the force of their logic, but because the world that opposed them perished”? In fact, I would argue, Chalcedonian ideas were no mere compromise cobbled together to still strife, but simply new ways of expressing ancient Christian belief in the true humanity and divinity of Christ—something found in the writings of earlier church fathers such as Tertullian. Perhaps the Chalcedonian doctrine deserves more credit than Jenkins gives it.

Jenkins is undoubtedly a scholarly historian and a marvelous writer. Whether he understands Christian doctrine correctly is another question. For example, he wrongly associates kenotic Christology—the idea that in the Incarnation the Son of God gave up his omniscience—with adoptionism. He also seems to contrast Chalcedonian orthodoxy with popular devotion that “unabashedly worships God lying in a manger.” In fact, only a Chalcedonian Christian can worship God as also a real human baby lying in a manger. The Chalcedonian doctrine is that the eternal Son of God, the Logos, equal with the Father, was born, suffered, and died in and through his assumed humanity. “God died” is not an expression of Monophysitism, as Jenkins implies, but a thoroughly Chalcedonian one.

To historians, the strong message of *Jesus Wars* is to take the role of religious faith in political affairs more seriously. To theologians, it is to take the role of politics in theological affairs more seriously. The two have always been inseparable—at least since Constantine. Nevertheless, eyes of faith can see the hand of God at work in and through the acts of sinful rulers preserving the truth of the Incarnation in the churches. ☩

**Roger E. Olson** is professor of theology at Truett Theological Seminary and author most recently of *God in Dispute: “Conversations” among Great Christian Thinkers* (Baker Academic).

# The Heart of Mission

According to John Wesley, that’s the church’s greatest task. By Michael McGowan

**S**ocial justice is all the rage in Western Christian circles these days, and experiencing God emotionally is not far behind. For some evangelicals, the gospel has feet only when it is used in service to the disenfranchised, and worship is considered good only when it fosters fuzzy warmth in the worshiper. But what if changing the culture, transforming the world, and worshipping intensely are not the primary missions of the church? What if they are byproducts of something else?

In his latest book, Gregory S. Clapper gives his perspective on what the church should be about: **The Renewal of the Heart Is the Mission of the Church: Wesley’s Heart Religion in the Twenty-First Century** (Wipf and Stock) ★★☆☆. Clapper explores John Wesley’s view of human “affections” (emotions, passions) and what his view means for churches today.

In exploring Wesley’s relevance for the contemporary church, Clapper draws from many academic disciplines. For example, he dives into contemporary psychology to show how Wesley relates to recent emotion theory. He also shows how Wesley’s views impact teaching, preaching, evangelism, spiritual formation, and other areas commonly placed under the umbrella of “practical theology.” The bulk of the book, however, is about Wesley himself, and Clapper pays great attention to the original source material.

In short, Wesley’s heart religion was a lived Christianity, as evidenced by what he saw as the essential doctrines of repentance, faith, and holiness. In Wesley’s “house of religion,” repentance is the porch, faith is the door, and holiness is the house itself. For Wesley, being a Christian is not merely about believing the right things. A true Christian is marked by her love of God, love of neighbor,

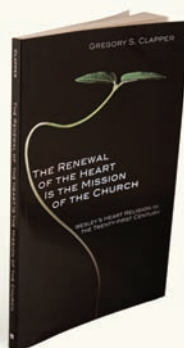
and faith. These qualities yield repentance and good works. And the heart is crucial to this view, since people have their own agency to direct their hearts toward God. When so directed, holiness follows, and Wesley considered holiness to be the strongest evidence of Christianity.

For Wesley, the renewal of the heart is the central “orienting concern” of Christianity. For Christian educators, this might mean first exploring what students love, and then showing how the gospel and traditional doctrines relate. For those in the business of spiritual formation (preachers, counselors, evangelists), offering Christ to people can take a variety of forms. And Clapper effectively illustrates the potential for human change entailed by Wesley’s heart religion, using contemporary film (e.g., *Groundhog Day*), theater (e.g., *The Music Man*), and some of Clapper’s own pastoral experience. If readers can get through the first several chapters—a lengthy discussion of Wesley’s writings—it’s well worth their time.

Clapper’s focus on Wesley’s writings makes it difficult to identify this book’s audience; it seems unlikely that non-theologians or non-Wesleyans will wade through his painstaking exegesis. While I as a theologian appreciated his attention to detail, this is not a book for the casual reader of Christian nonfiction. Even though the book is relatively short (132 pages), it is not until the final two chapters—nearly 100

pages in—that Clapper begins to elaborate on the implications of Wesley’s views for the church. But when he gets there, he writes with all the wisdom of a learned scholar and all the sensitivity of a caring pastor. ☩

**Michael McGowan** is a graduate student in theology at Claremont Graduate University, School of Religion, Claremont, California.



**RADICAL**

*Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream*

**DAVID PLATT** (MULTNOMAH, 240 PAGES)

**W**e all have blind spots—areas of our lives that need to be uncovered so we can see correctly and adjust our lives accordingly. But they are hard to identify.

I can think of at least one glaring blind spot in American Christian history. Slavery. How could Christians who supposedly believed the gospel so easily rationalize the enslavement of other human beings? Churchgoers with good intentions worshipping God together every Sunday and reading the Bible religiously all week long, all the while using God’s Word to justify treating men, women, and children as property to be used or abused.

Not long ago, God began uncovering a blind spot in my life. An area of disobedience. A reality in God’s Word that I had pretended did not exist.

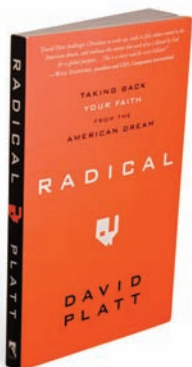
Today more than a billion people in the world live and die in desperate poverty. They attempt to survive on less than a dollar per day. Close to two billion others live on less than two dollars per day. . . . Anyone wanting to proclaim the glory of Christ to the ends of the earth must consider not only how to declare the gospel verbally but also how to demonstrate the gospel visibly in a world where so many are urgently hungry.

What is the difference between someone who willfully indulges in sexual pleasures while ignoring the Bible on moral purity and someone who willfully indulges in the selfish pursuit of more and more material possessions while ignoring the Bible on caring for the poor? The difference is that one involves a social taboo in the church and the other involves the social norm in the church.

We look back on slave-owning churchgoers of 150 years ago and ask, “How could they have treated their fellow human beings that way?” I wonder if followers of Christ 150 years from now will look back at Christians in America today and ask, “How could they live in such big houses? How could they drive such nice cars and wear such nice clothes? How could they live in such affluence while thousands of children were dying because they didn’t have food or water? How could they go on with their lives as though the billions of poor didn’t even exist?”

Is materialism a blind spot in *your* Christianity today? Surely this is something we must uncover, for if our lives do not reflect radical compassion for the poor, there is reason to question just how effective we will be in declaring the glory of Christ to the ends of the earth.

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**WILSON'S BOOKMARKS**



*From the editor of Books & Culture.*

**HARVESTING FOG**

Poems

**LUCI SHAW** (PINYON PUBLISHING)



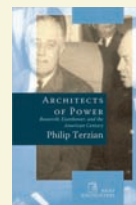
Luci Shaw’s new collection (her tenth volume of poems) has an epigraph from the painter Georgia O’Keeffe: “It is only by selection, by elimination, by emphasis that we get at the real meaning of things.”

Taken in conjunction with Shaw’s “fore word,” a winsome Christian *ars poetica*, O’Keeffe’s dictum suggests why this book belongs on your shelf whether or not you consider yourself a “poetry type.” It teaches, by example, a way of thinking, a way of seeing, that you can take with you anywhere, anytime, wherever you are, and whatever your daily round.

**ARCHITECTS OF POWER**

*Roosevelt, Eisenhower, and the American Century*

**PHILIP TERZIAN** (ENCOUNTER BOOKS)



I dare you to put down this pithy little book once you have started it. And how often can that be said about books dealing with matters of state?

At a moment when blather about the American imperialism has reached epidemic proportions, it’s refreshing to find such a lucid and persuasive account of how American “engagement with the world has evolved.” At the same time, Terzian offers two case studies (Roosevelt and Eisenhower) of “the uses to which historical memory may be put.” All this in just over 100 pages.

**ELEGY FOR APRIL**

**BENJAMIN BLACK** (HENRY HOLT AND CO.)



John Banville is a highly esteemed writer of what gets called “literary fiction.” Three years ago, he debuted as a crime novelist: Benjamin Black is his alter ego, and *Elegy for April* is the third book in a series set

(mostly) in Dublin in the 1950s and featuring as its unheroic hero a pathologist known simply as Quirke. (His first name, we’re told, is so ludicrous that he never uses it.) Although there are signals that Banville/Black is slumming and wants you to know that he knows that, the books are both deliciously entertaining and—like a lot of crime fiction—rather smugly didactic: at the very heart of evil and corruption, you see, is the Catholic Church.





# From Informant to Informer

The 'son of Hamas' sensed God in his life long before coming to Christ. Interview by Timothy C. Morgan

**F**ew 32-year-old Christians write autobiographies that become instant bestsellers. But Palestinian Mosab Hassan Yousef, now living in the U.S., has: **Son of Hamas: A Gripping Account of Terror, Betrayal, Political Intrigue, and Unthinkable Choices** (SaltRiver). And why not: He grew up in radicalized Islam in the West Bank, was imprisoned in Israel, and eventually became disgusted with Hamas, the militant group his father helped create. He then came to Christ while working as an informant for Israel's Shin Bet security service and helped prevent political assassinations. Since the release of his book, he has spoken frankly to American evangelicals about Islam and Middle East peace. Recently he spoke with *CT* deputy managing editor Timothy C. Morgan.

**You describe the ten years you spent as a high-level informant for the Shin Bet, the Israeli counterterrorist agency. Did you**



**ever think your decision was a mistake?**

I questioned myself every time. I knew this was not why I was born, but I was absolutely stuck. Every time I thought about leaving, it meant that it was going to get worse—for my family, my friends, my people, and the Israelis. I did as much as I could, but I reached a level [where] I had to leave.

**How do you now love an enemy?**

I learned all my life how to hate Jews. Now I [had] a golden opportunity to apply love-your-enemy practically, when I saved the lives of people I had never met. I did what I did for my God. When I have a tough decision to make, I ask myself this question: *If Jesus Christ were here today, what would he do?* This is how I survived. I imagined Christ in my position.

**While you were speaking at the National Religious Broadcasters Convention recently, news broke**

**that your father had disowned you. How do you understand this as a Christian?**

Evil is stealing my father from me again. Evil stole my father for many years in prison when I was a child, and today [evil is] still taking my father. I insisted many times that I am going to keep on fighting evil ideas.

**A milestone in your journey to Christ was being invited by a British man to a Bible study. How do you look back on that?**

He was visiting the branch of his church in Jerusalem. They told him, "We are going to invite people to a Bible study." He was inviting people on his own. He had no idea who I was. But I had met God before that. He had been there from day one. He was leading me. I was chosen even before I believed. Even when I was a Muslim in the darkest places, I remember his presence.

**Since your life is so at risk, what does the future hold for you?**

The book is not the end of my mission. I have a great passion for my people. I know their problems. We will talk to them. I am not the only one. There are heroes in the shadows. They have been working for many years in this field. They are individuals who have dedicated their lives to spread the gospel to Muslims.

**Do Christians have a role in moving the Mideast toward peace?**

The Palestinian problem is much bigger than not having a state. A Palestinian state is not going to solve the Palestinian problem. We need to show how important our role—as Christians—is. It is much more important than government and the international community.

**How could American Christians better understand Islam?**

You have to learn the Qur'an [through] long studying and research. Not every Christian wants to make those efforts. It has led to a big misunderstanding. Muslims don't understand the importance of the crucifixion and death of Christ. This is the core of Christian belief. Christians need at least to defend their God, to defend their faith, and to be responsible also for Muslims, because our duty is to spread the gospel to all nations. Our goal is not to encourage Christians to hate Muslims. Our goal is to educate.

## INTERVIEW

# Remembering Malatya

Documentary recalls Christian martyrs in Turkey. By Annie Young Frisbie

**O**n April 18, 2007, five young Muslims broke into a Bible publishing office in Malatya, eastern Turkey, and demanded that three Christians pray the Islamic prayer of conversion. When the men refused, the interrogators tortured them and slit their throats. Necati Aydin, pastor of a church in Malatya, and Tilmann Geske, a German missionary, were pronounced dead on the scene. Ugur Yüksel died later during surgery.

**Malatya** (Voice of the Martyrs) ★★★★★ is a feature-length documentary directed by Nolan Dean, who spent several months in Turkey in 2008. Featuring interviews with the widows of Aydin and Geske as well as members of Aydin's church and pastors of other Turkish churches, *Malatya* offers a close-up of Christianity's precarious position in Muslim-majority Turkey, and a window into how Christians grieve for those who die for the faith. (Dean apparently faced no



barriers or resistance during filming.)

Turkey is officially a secular state, but over 98 percent of its 72 million citizens are Muslim. Experts estimate that fewer than 200,000 (0.3 percent) are Christian, but that number is growing by as much as 3 percent annually. *Malatya* suggests that the murders were motivated by anger over the men's conversion from Islam to Christianity, a religion that many Muslims perceive as poisonous, especially in light of the Crusades. Several interviewees claimed that this viewpoint is

propagated in the mainstream media and taught in schools, but the filmmakers do not provide evidence to support the claim.

And that's where *Malatya* falls short: It never really delves into Turkey's complex cultural, ethnic, and religious issues, thus missing a great educational opportunity. It spends over an hour telling the story of the martyrs; while they certainly deserve to be eulogized, the lack of cultural analysis weakens the film.

The most compelling elements come near *Malatya's* end; namely, the way in which Semse Aydin and Susanne Geske mourn their husbands' deaths. A watching world may think the men gave too much for Christ, but through tears these women proclaim that there's no such thing as giving too much for the Savior of the world. It's a powerful testimony to the profound theological differences between the men who killed and the men who died. ☩

**Annie Young Frisbie** is a CT movies critic and blogs at [SuperfastReader.com](http://SuperfastReader.com).

## MY TOP 5 MOVIES ON MORTALITY

By Tim Avery, CT movies critic and associate editor, [BuildingChurchLeaders.com](http://BuildingChurchLeaders.com)



### DAYS OF HEAVEN

1978 | RATED PG

DIRECTED BY TERRENCE MALICK

On the plains of the Texas Panhandle, a young farmhand and his employer love the same girl. Their happiness is short-lived. But it is the dazzling, relentless drama of nature around them—sunsets, seasons, a locust plague—that makes them seem as ephemeral as “flowers of the field.”



### BLADE RUNNER

1982 | RATED R

DIRECTED BY RIDLEY SCOTT

A band of human-like robots is running from the law through a dystopian Los Angeles. They want to extend the expiration date programmed into them. The detective who hunts them must confront the terror brought by death when it is not sleep but an end.

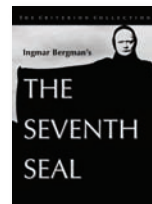


### GRAVE OF THE FIREFLIES

1988 | NOT RATED

DIRECTED BY ISAO TAKAHATA

A brother and sister living in Japan are orphaned during World War II. We know from the start of this anime film that neither will survive, so it is gut-wrenching to follow their tender relationship, drawn with surprising naturalism and moments of quiet beauty.



### THE SEVENTH SEAL

1957 | NOT RATED

DIRECTED BY INGMAR BERGMAN

A knight returns from the Crusades to find the plague ravaging his homeland. He soon begins an iconic game of chess with Death and an existential struggle with God's silence. The images are stark—white-faced Death, a procession of flagellants, and 28-year-old Max von Sydow looking 48.



### THE LORD OF THE RINGS TRILOGY

2001-03 | RATED PG-13

DIRECTED BY PETER JACKSON

Tolkien's story delves into the peculiar nature of mortality by juxtaposing mortal and immortal peoples. As the ring proves, death is not the real enemy. In fact, some wounds, like the ring-bearer's, will not fully leave us until we exchange this world for another.

## TWO MINUTES WITH...

Lynda Randle



Lynda Randle is best known as a regular performer in the Gaither Homecoming family, and as the older sister of Newsboys lead singer Michael Tait (formerly of dc Talk). But her

greatest passion is her ministry to hurting women through her music and conferences. Her new album and her conferences go by the title *Woman After God's Own Heart*. CT senior associate editor Mark Moring recently spoke with Randle.

### "A woman after God's own heart"—what does that phrase mean to you?

After all of David's sins, God said, "He is still a man after my own heart." In my own life, I've blown it many times, but I want to be a woman after God's own heart. And there's security in knowing that God loves us unconditionally. That's the theme of this album, and our conferences. I want women to know that although we blow it, and sometimes we're not sure who we are, we are deeply and intimately loved by the Father.

### I hear that you sometimes take care of troubled young women.

Yeah, I have little sisters around the world. A young girl from Kentucky just lived with us for about a year; I mentored her like a big sister. A young girl from Norway wants to come live with us in 2012. Gloria Gaither recently said to me, "If you could mother the world, you would." And it's true. I don't think I'm the great hope, but I know kids need attention. I'd love to have a youth center full of girls someday.

### What do you want listeners to hear in your new album?

I know all the clichés that believers use, so I try to say things in a different way. The song "I Love You Like This" stems from the fact that in relationships, people give you maybe two or three strikes, and then you're out. But God says, "No, I'm in it for the long haul. And this is the way I love you." That's the message I'm trying to share.

Read the full interview at [Christianity Today.com/ct/music](http://ChristianityToday.com/ct/music).



# A Harrowing Listen

Roky Erickson's latest is a hopeful quest for the divine.

By Josh Hurst

If Roky Erickson's new album is a harrowing listen, it's because it is literally the story of his life—and things have never been easy for Erickson. The Austin native has been making records since the late 1960s, and *True Love Cast Out All Evil* (Anti-) ★★★★★ collects stray songs he's written over those four decades, a period in which he has struggled with drug abuse, mental illness, the penal system, and, darkest of all, electroshock therapy.

*True Love* is Erickson's first collaboration with indie rockers Okkervil River, who inject his fuzzy, woolly psychedelic rock with just the right levels of garage-rock energy and Texas twang. It's an intoxicating sound, not quite like anything else. If it sounds a bit like an exorcism of the singer's demons, you can understand why. It's clear that Erickson finds some solace and relief in singing these troubled songs.

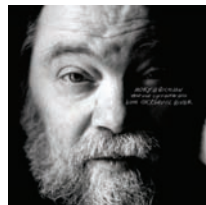
But this isn't just about catharsis: Erickson makes tentative stabs at hope, and at times it sounds for all the world like he's just about made peace with himself and his past. He repeats the album's title like a mantra,

but it's more than just a plea—it's sung with the resolve that true love really *can* cast out evil, and that even a soul as bruised as Erickson's isn't outside the realm of healing. His hardships have filled him with compassion, enough that the natural conclusion for this album is a series of songs on unity and peaceful living.

On paper, Erickson's poetry doesn't always work; on an album, though, it's mesmerizing, an outpouring of a lifetime of darkness and a dogged belief that hope is real—even if he hasn't yet fully grasped its source. The record begins and ends with what sound like prison reels, and both bookending tracks address the Divine: "Devotional

Number One" is a bizarre theological fever dream, but closing number "God Is Everywhere" is more clear, with Erickson stating, with conviction, that God is zealous to bring back the "thought-lost and never-known treasures"—treasures like Erickson himself. Amen, and amen. ⊕

Josh Hurst is a CT music critic and blogs at [TheHurstReview.wordpress.com](http://TheHurstReview.wordpress.com).





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## QUICK TAKES

More media of note.

### BOOKS

#### ▶ THE GOSPEL FOR MUSLIMS

*An Encouragement to Share Christ with Confidence*

**THABITI ANYABWILE** (MOODY)

★★★★★ Former Muslim turned Baptist pastor Thabiti Anyabwile believes too many Christians feel they need a special technique for evangelizing Muslims, when what they really need is more confidence in the power of the gospel. Accordingly, Anyabwile first explains the basic gospel message, then turns to practical ways to witness effectively. He recounts his own story of conversion as well as numerous debates with other Muslims. The proposal relies on the Spirit working through Christian hospitality, Bible teaching, and our willingness to suffer persecution.

#### ▶ THE GOOD NEWS WE ALMOST FORGOT

*Rediscovering the Gospel in a 16th Century Catechism*

**KEVIN DEYOUNG** (MOODY)

★★★★★ Catechisms may be making a comeback, and Kevin DeYoung's new book demonstrates why. It is a collection of pastoral reflections on the Heidelberg Catechism. Working within the framework of guilt, grace, and gratitude, DeYoung takes readers on a journey through the basics of Christian theology in 52 weeks. It's like theology "from concentrate," only the truths here will make your heart soar. Not everyone will agree with all the affirmations of this catechism (and DeYoung doesn't either), but this book is an accessible introduction to the fundamental truths of Christianity.

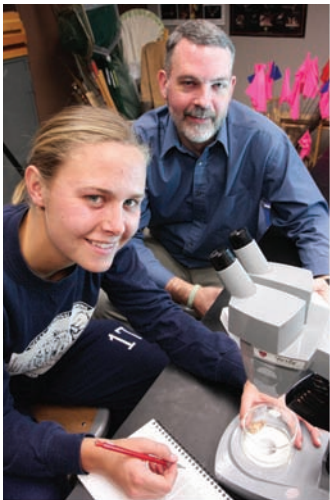
#### ▶ YOU CAN CHANGE

*God's Transforming Power for Our Sinful Behavior and Negative Emotions*

**TIM CHESTER** (CROSSWAY)

★★★★★ Chester leads readers to think about what they want to change and then examine their underlying motivations for such a change. Encouraging us to turn from certain desires to certain truths, he grounds lasting change in daily repentance as a response to the gospel of grace. Best of all, he incorporates individual change into the context of the church and insists that sanctification is a community project. Each chapter ends with a list of hard-hitting questions that lead us to practical application of biblical truth.

—Books reviewed by Trevin Wax



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## MUSIC

ANAIIS MITCHELL

### ▶ HADESTOWN

(RIGHTEOUS BABE)

★★★★★ Anais Mitchell recruited quite a cast for this re-imagined Greek myth and its eclectic mix of styles and sounds. Justin Vernon (aka Bon Iver) sings as the poet Orpheus on a futile odyssey into the underworld to rescue wife Eurydice, personified by Mitchell's endearingly childlike voice (think the Weepies or Julie Miller). And there couldn't be a better Hades than Greg Brown, whose chill-inducing, infernal baritone nearly steals the show. Thematically, there's a strong current of social justice, some thoughts on temptations, and some striving for hope amid the doom. —*Joel Oliphint*

JAKOB DYLAN

### ▶ WOMEN AND COUNTRY

(COLUMBIA)

★★★★★ For his second solo project, the former Wallflowers frontman—and Bob Dylan's son—enlists producer T-Bone Burnett, who introduces a backing blanket of pedal steel, fiddles, and horns that wraps Dylan's smoky vocals like wind dancing across prairie grass. The pairing paints rural soundscapes that conjure sun-scorched barnwood, rusted machinery, and human resignation flint-faced to a sweeping horizon. It's a rich patchwork for Dylan's poetic storytelling, and he deals with epic themes: women, country, and God's place in these earth-stained tales of humanity's struggles. Hope glimmers, but is it merely a mirage on cracked asphalt? —*Jeremy V. Jones*

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(TYNDALE HOUSE)

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BY MARK MORING



# Graceful Justice

Gideon Strauss was shaped by growing up in apartheid-era South Africa.

**G**ideon Strauss has wrestled with questions of justice since childhood—a natural response to being raised in South Africa under apartheid. After his conversion to Christ, Strauss wondered how he could incorporate the biblical call to justice into his life. He says it wasn't easy, and that the journey required “much study, an openness to changing my mind, several false starts in resistance to apartheid, and a recognition that my own efforts were small and flawed.”

Strauss's journey led to a role as an interpreter with South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and as an adviser to the group that drafted the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Today, Strauss finds himself on the other side of the world, as CEO of the nonpartisan Center for Public Justice (CPJ) in Washington, D.C., a role he has held since October 2009.

Strauss frames CPJ's work theologically: If Jesus is truly risen, that shapes how we live out our callings as citizens and office holders. The mission of CPJ is to “to equip citizens, develop leaders, and shape policy in pursuit of our purpose to serve God, advance justice, and transform public life,” and, as Strauss puts it, to do so “gracefully and hopefully.”

- **Age** 43
- **Hometown** Hamilton, Ontario, and Washington, D.C.
- **Church** New City Church, Hamilton, Ontario
- **Family** Angela (wife); Tala and Hannah (daughters)
- **Reading now** Christopher Hall's *Learning Theology with the Church Fathers*, Jonathan Edwards's *Charity and Its Fruits*
- **On your iPod** Béla Fleck's *Throw Down Your Heart*, and an EP by the Northernists (daughter Hannah's band)

## question & answer

### Define justice. How does it differ from public justice and social justice?

In the biggest sense, justice is when all God's creatures receive what is due them and contribute out of their uniqueness to our common existence. We are called to do justice in every sphere of our lives: how I love and educate my daughters, collaborate with my colleagues, interact with neighbors. Public justice is the political aspect—the work of citizens and political office bearers shaping a public life for the common good. Social justice is the civil society counterpart—nonpolitical organizations that promote justice.

### How did serving on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission affect you?

It made me the servant of witnesses to abduction, torture, and murder—victims and survivors, but more frequently perpetrators—and as I spoke their words in the first person, I was forced to reflect deeply on what we South Africans did to each other. I spent much time praying Psalm 137, for God's vengeance on evildoers. It took me more than a year afterward, during a sabbatical, to recover a prayer life that spanned all 150 of the psalms.

### What is the church doing well in the pursuit of justice? What could it do better?

Institutional churches are all over the map, but the Christian community is doing wonderful work through organizations like International Justice Mission and the Institute for Global Engagement. What the church itself can do better is faithfully proclaim the biblical theme of justice.

### How do you find working in the U.S.?

I am vividly aware of the privilege U.S. citizens enjoy in living under the rule of law rather than in conditions of anarchy or tyranny, or being subject to warlords, like so many Africans are. There is so much to be grateful for in American political life, not the least of which is democracy.

More: [cpjustice.org](http://cpjustice.org)

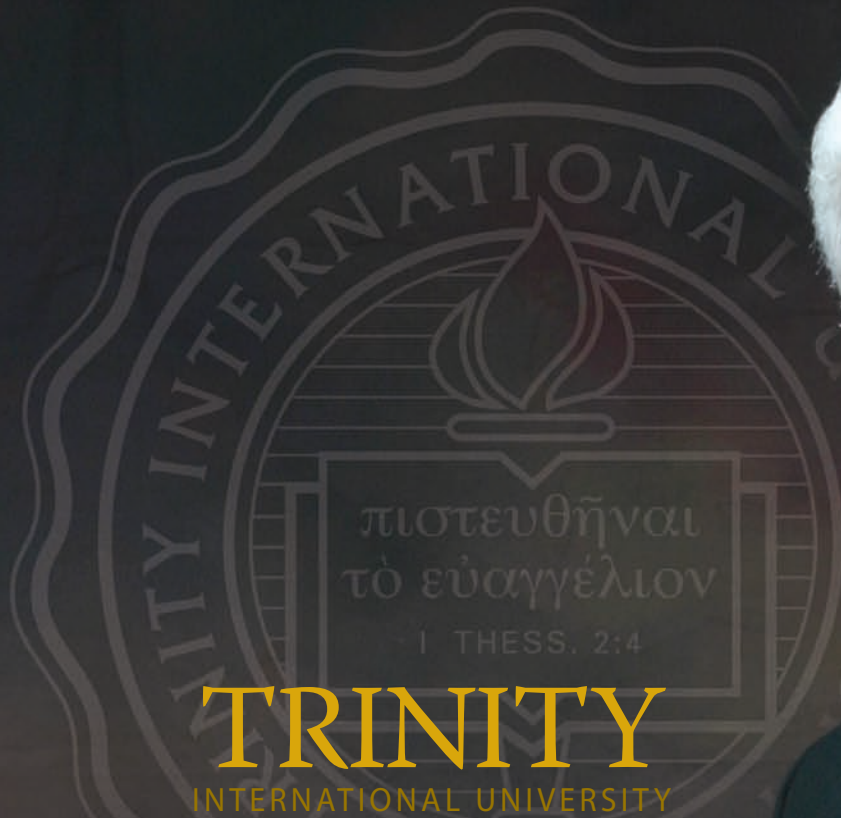
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On April 12, 2010, Ravi (MDiv '76) will again visit Trinity's Deerfield, Illinois, campus to address the community and to inaugurate his new role as university professor at large. Partnership details will be posted at [www.tiu.edu/rzim](http://www.tiu.edu/rzim)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