

Christianity Today

DECEMBER 2011



Why We Need Jesus

Reason and morality cannot show us a good and gracious God. For that, we need the Incarnation.

+ MY PERFECT CHILD 38
OHIO'S GLOBAL CHURCH 42
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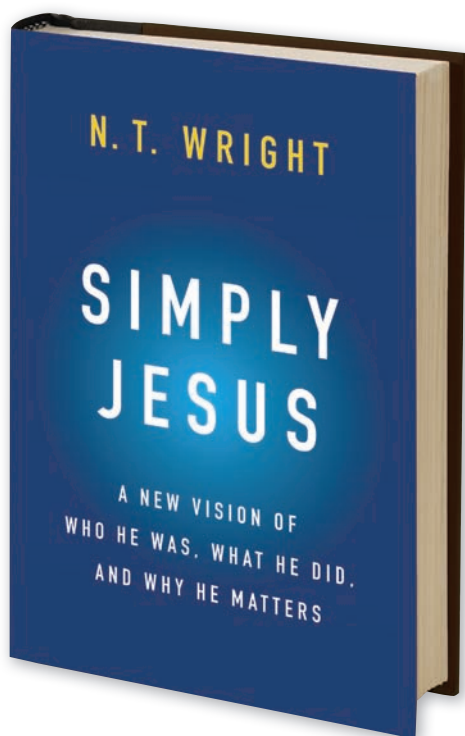
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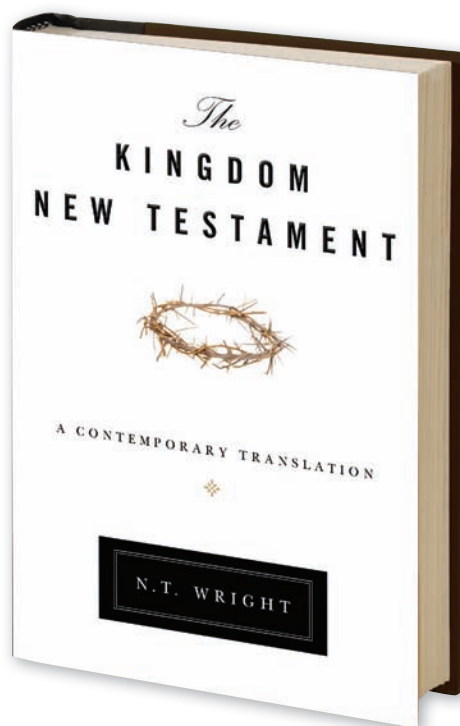
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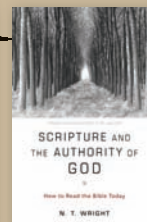
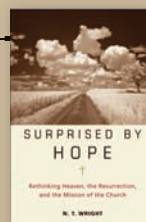
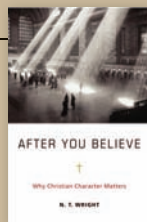
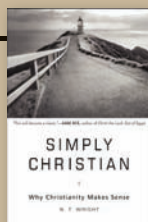
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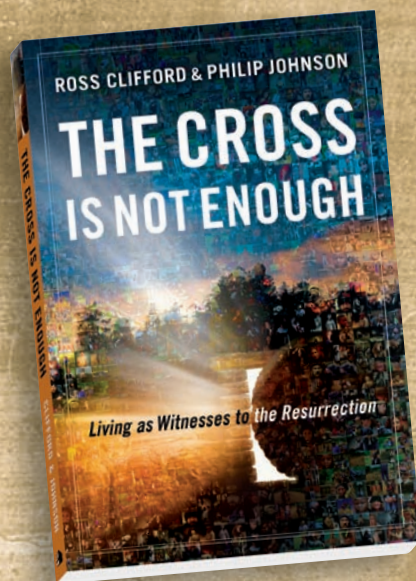
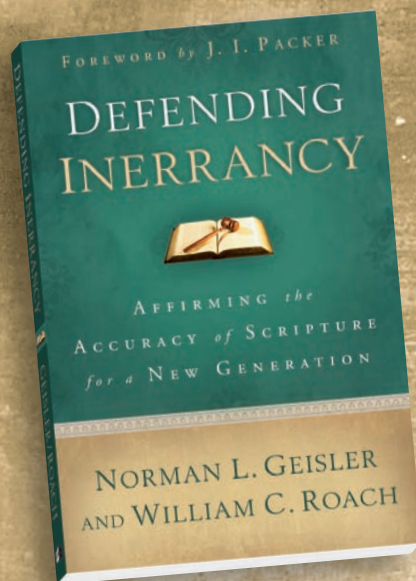
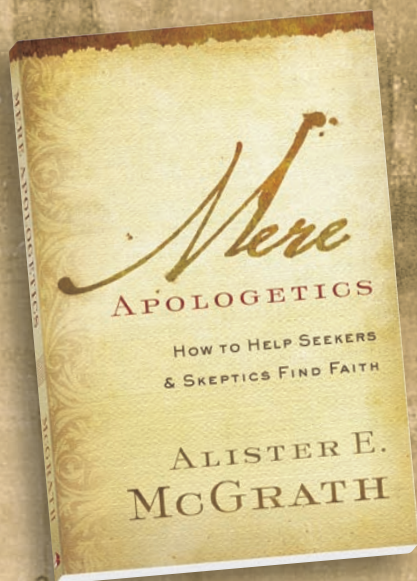
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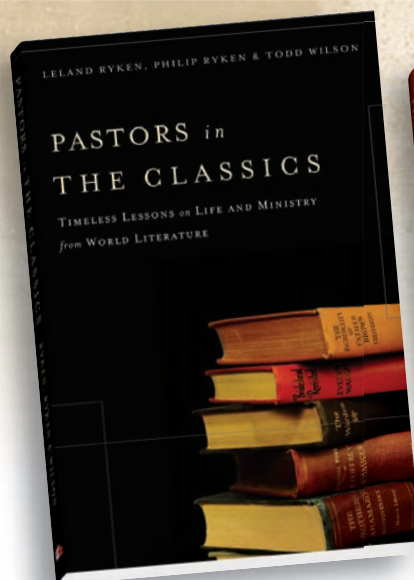
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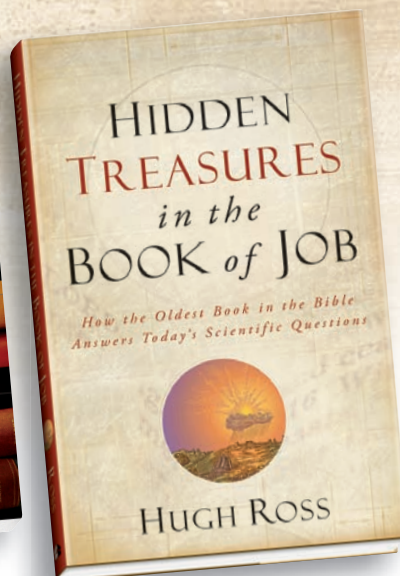
"Have we lost seeing the significance of the resurrection for the Christian? *The Cross Is Not Enough* argues that we have and then fruitfully walks us through the ways we can think about resurrection."

—**Darrell L. Bock**, professor of New Testament, Dallas Theological Seminary



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—**Walter C. Kaiser Jr.**, president emeritus, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

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No New Theology

Theologian Thomas Oden had a dream. It seemed he was walking in the New Haven, Connecticut, cemetery when, like Ebenezer Scrooge guided by the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, Oden saw his own tombstone. Looking closer, he read the epitaph: "He made no new contribution to theology."

Unlike Scrooge, however, Oden liked what he saw. In 1990 Oden told *Christianity Today* readers: "All my education up to this point had taught me that I must be compulsively creative. If I was to be a good theologian, I had to . . . do something nobody else had ever done."

But the dream told him that innovation was not his responsibility. Oden, who turned 80 in October, rejected his "idolatry of the new" and began to synthesize the church's consensus about the Christian faith.

At *Christianity Today*, we pay attention to news, to trends, and to innovation. We are, after all, journalists. But when it comes to our theology, we are a tad like Tom Oden. We want to be rooted in Scripture and in the history of the Spirit's work in the church.

Many Christian leaders today do not grasp the heart of the Christian faith—what makes it Christian, as opposed to nice, helpful, or wise. On page 22 of this issue, Mark Galli explains our comprehensive five-year plan to recapitulate this faith. Read "Making Disciples Today" and capture the vision.

To make this a truly global project and to carry it out in depth will require us to go beyond our normal budget. Already, Mark has traveled to Sweden to network at a major gathering of Pentecostal leaders. Coordinating with the growing church worldwide will require extra funding, and we invite you to invest in this effort.

You can make your tax-deductible contribution—of any amount—by check or online. Make checks payable to *Christianity Today*, and put Global Gospel Project on the memo line, or visit ChristianityToday.com/donate.

David Neff, Editor in Chief

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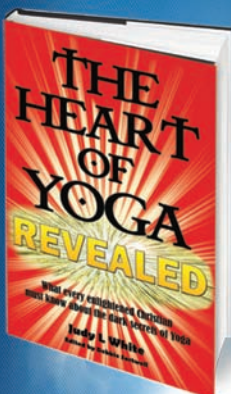
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well-known theologian, after a tour of local churches, was shocked and appalled at the “deplorable, miserable conditions” he found there. He lamented that the common churchgoer

knows practically nothing of Christian doctrine, and many of the pastors are almost entirely incompetent and unable to teach. Yet all the people are supposed to be Christians, have been baptized, and receive the Holy Sacrament even though they do not know the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed, or the Ten Commandments.

The theologian was Martin Luther. And the occasion prompted him to pen his *Small Catechism*. Some would say that the “deplorable, miserable” conditions of 16th-century German Christianity match remarkably those of contemporary American evangelicalism!

I don’t know that I’d go that far, but it seems that every month a new study suggests that some aspects of our movement are deplorable indeed. In a 2004 Gallup study of 1,000 American teens, nearly 60 percent of those who self-identified as evangelical were not able to correctly identify Cain as the one who said, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Over half could not identify either “Blessed are the poor in spirit” as a quote from the Sermon on the Mount, or the road to Damascus as the place where Paul received his blinding vision. Summarizing a 2009 study on spiritual maturity, Barna Group reported that “one of the widely embraced notions about spiritual health is that it means ‘trying hard to follow the rules described in the Bible.’” Barna also found that four out of five self-described born-again Christians concurred that spiritual maturity is “trying hard to follow the rules.”

Many evangelicals know better, but many do not. And as each generation of believers comes forth into the world, so grows the challenge to help the faithful gain a solid footing in the historical faith. Without that footing, we will be tossed to and fro by the winds of culture, and quickly exhaust ourselves in serving God and neighbor.

This has been a concern of *Christianity Today* since its founding. In our first issue 55 years ago, Carl F. H. Henry proclaimed that in CT, “the doctrinal content of historic Christianity will be presented and defended.” And, I would add, presented to show its ongoing relevance for the life of faith.

For the next five years, we will take a more systematic and comprehensive approach to the task of forming believers in the faith. You can read more about the new initiative in “Making Disciples Today” (page 22). If all goes well, we may just cause old Martin Luther to roll over in his grave!

Next month: Wheaton College scholar Amy Black describes what Christian political engagement might look like, Fuller Seminary professor Veli Kärkkäinen outlines what, in light of Jesus, it means to be human, and we’ll announce the annual CT book and music awards.



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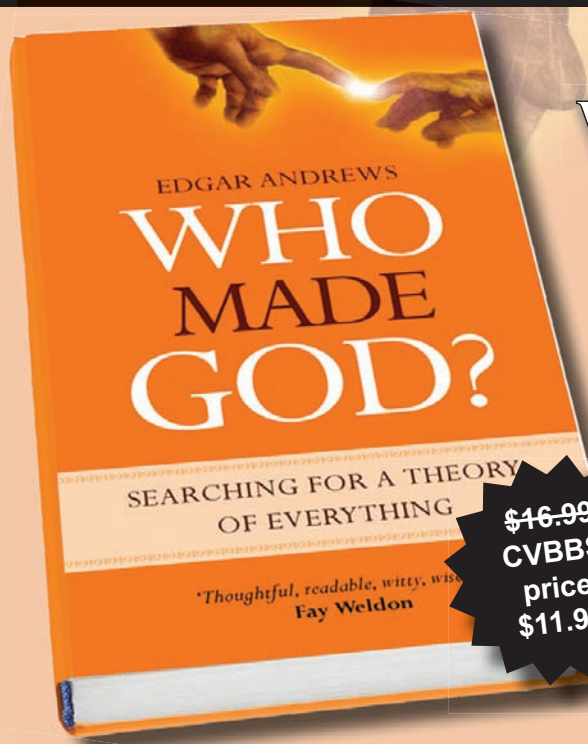
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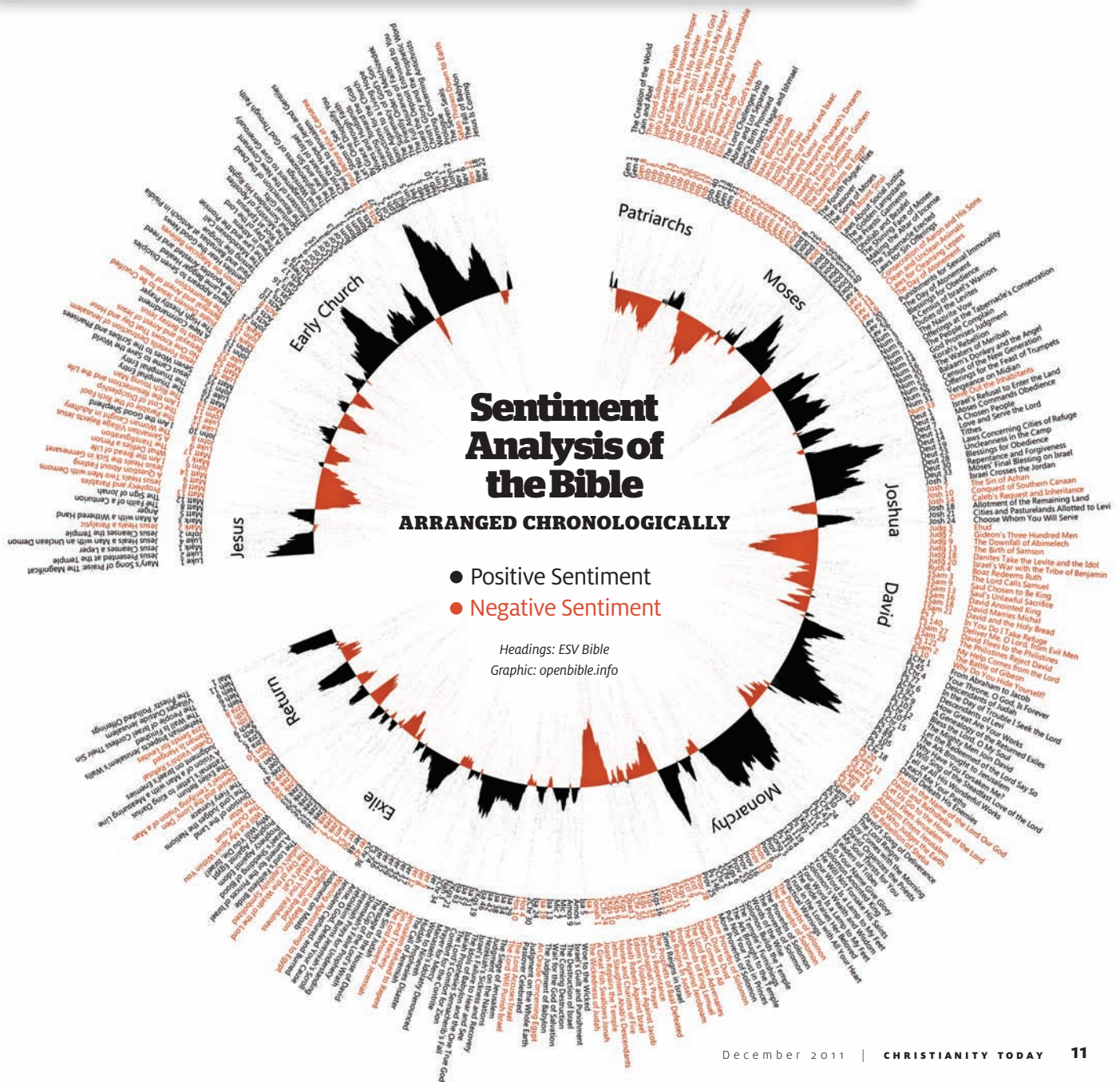
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BRIEFING

REPORTING & DISPATCHES
FROM THE CHURCH
WORLDWIDE

SPOTLIGHT: How the Bible Feels

➤ **BUSINESSES DON'T JUST WANT TO KNOW** when they're mentioned on social media such as Twitter or review sites such as Yelp; they want to know if comments are positive or negative. Hence the rise of sentiment analysis as programmers attempt to quantify feelings, not just facts. OpenBible.info's Stephen Smith ran the entire Bible through Viralheat's code to create one of the most visual Scripture summaries to date. Height represents the probability that a text is positive or negative, not intensity. So with all the references to death, for example, the algorithm puts the Resurrection in the negative.





1



2



7

GLEANINGS

Important developments in the church and the world.

1 Europe restricts stem-cell research

LUXEMBOURG The European Court of Justice barred patents on medical processes that destroy human embryos. Europe's top court ruled against Oliver Bruestle, a German researcher who invented a mechanism to convert stem cells into nerve cells. Bruestle protested that European researchers would still use embryonic stem cells and that their discoveries would be patented by scientists abroad. Roman Catholic bishops and the European Center for Law and Justice supported the court's decision.

relations with Mary, alternative translations that maintain the concept of "sonship" can be used. In June, the Presbyterian Church in America declared that alternative translations for sonship were unfaithful to the biblical text.

4 Court upholds sanctity of life provisions

MEXICO The Supreme Court upheld two state provisions that say life begins at conception. The provisions in San Luis Potosi and Baja California are 2 of 17 similar state provisions enacted after a 2007 Mexico City law legalized some abortions. Seven of eleven judges ruled the Baja measure unconstitutional, but eight votes were needed to overturn it. President Felipe Calderon said in a statement that Mexico is committed to the right to life. Mexico's governing parties have strong ties to the Roman Catholic Church; members of both the National Action Party and the historically secular Institutional Revolutionary Party have visited the Vatican.

2 Military bans religious discrimination

EGYPT Military rulers prohibited all religious discrimination in Egypt after 25 people were killed and 200 injured when soldiers disrupted a Coptic protest march. The measure, demanded by protesters incensed over a string of church burnings, holds a maximum penalty of nearly \$17,000. The Egyptian government also promised to form a commission to examine religious violence, church building permits, and sanctions against demonstrating outside worship buildings. Egyptian human rights organizations estimate that 100,000 Coptic Christians have fled the country since March because of sectarian attacks.

3 Bible translators adopt new standards

SIL International and Wycliffe Bible Translators released new guidelines that affirm literal renderings of "Son of God" in the majority of cases in Muslim-culture translations. But in places where the phrase may imply that God had sexual

5 Candy cane case continues

The U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed that public school students have the right to "private, non-disruptive, student-to-student speech," even if it's religious. But it also granted immunity to two Plano, Texas, principals who told students they couldn't distribute religious-themed candy canes and pencils. The ban was unconstitutional, the court said, but the rules were unclear: "The general state of the law in this area is abstruse, complicated, and subject to great debate." Several other parts of the same long-running lawsuit await rulings.

6 Longstanding missions groups merge

Two flagship evangelical organizations have merged to create a new, 35,000-missionary body reaching every country in the world. The Mission Exchange (formerly the EFMA) and Cross-Global Link (formerly the IFMA) merged to cut down on competition and overlap between their programs, said Marv Newell, CrossGlobal Link's executive director. Last year, Pioneers-USA merged with Arab World Ministries to combine strengths to better plant churches in Muslim-majority countries.

7 Homeless shelter can require religious activity

The Boise Rescue Mission can require clients to take part in religious services and classes, and even require them to convert, the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled. People seeking services at the mission don't have protected rights to its programs, the court said. Janene Cowles and Richard Chinn had sued, saying they were coerced into religious activities. The federal Department of Housing and Urban Development had already rejected the discrimination complaint on the grounds that the rescue mission fell under a religious exemption.

8 Suicide bomber attacks Saddleback affiliate

INDONESIA A suicide bomber injured more than 20 Sunday worshipers inside a sister church of Rick Warren's Saddleback Church. The bombing at the 700-person Pentecostal Bethel Full Gospel Church in Solo City, Central Java, was the nation's first by suicide. A day later, police found a bomb in front of Maranatha Church in Maluku province, which saw religious violence last fall. Indonesian president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said the bombing was a terrorist attack and not sectarian.

GO FIGURE Publishing

50%

Approximate share of the Christian publishing market HarperCollins will control if its purchase of Thomas Nelson is approved. HarperCollins also owns Zondervan.

MichaelHyatt.com, based on 2009 Thomas Nelson figures



10

9 Baptist convention might drop "Southern"

The Southern Baptist Convention may change its name in order to better plant churches by escaping regional associations with the word *Southern*, president Bryant Wright announced in September. New members and baptisms in the 166-year-old denomination have declined in recent years, and a 2006 poll found that respondents liked Southern Baptists but disliked the denomination. A committee considered a name change in the 1970s but recommended against it. Some Baptists complained that Wright formed the unofficial task force without first securing approval from the executive committee or convention.

10 Tourists deported for religious activity

INDIA A U.S. pastor was deported from India and banned from returning after officials claimed he violated his tourist visa by attending a religious music festival organized by the Church of God. William Lee's removal follows the deportation of three women in June for allegedly proselytizing the poor in a coastal town. Jonathan Racho, South Asia manager for International Christian Concern, said many tourists travel to India for religious meetings and ceremonies and are typically not deported.

11 Gay ordination spurs denomination dropouts

A Wisconsin church ordained the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s first gay clergy member after July's denominational vote to approve such actions. The move spurred Sacramento's Fremont Presbyterian Church to vote 427 to 164 to leave the denomination. First Presbyterian Church in Enid, Oklahoma, also withdrew from the PC(USA). Meanwhile, the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta is considering whether to create a new presbytery or



12

12 Churches allowed to host tent cities

Religious facilities in Seattle can host tent cities for the homeless indefinitely without notifying neighbors under a new ordinance approved unanimously by the city council. Churches will not need a permit and face no limit on the number of such communities; two currently exist in Seattle. The city's homeless shelters are full and council member Nick Licata, who sponsored the ordinance, said this is one solution to the problem.

13 Convicts choose between church and jail

The police chief in Bay Minette, Alabama, is giving nonviolent offenders who would normally serve jail time an alternative option: church. Offenders who opt for church can attend a church of their choosing but must show up every week for a year and check in with the pastor and the police department. More than 50 churches in the county are participating. Police chief Mike Rowland said this would save his department \$75 in jail costs per inmate per day.

14 Capitol Bible study groups sue

Bible study group Capitol Commission is suing Bible study group Capitol Ministries for trademark infringement. Both serve politicians in several state capitols. Pastor Ralph Drollinger, leader of Capitol Ministries, started a Bible study in Washington, D.C., three years ago. Capitol Commission president Jim Young claims trademark infringement because Drollinger's group also uses the name Capitol Commission, and claims that donated funds are being diverted because of the confusion. Capitol Commission's trademark application is stalled because it is too similar to another trademark.

split into several smaller governing "covenant communities."

GO FIGURE
Archaeology
1,400
Approximate age in years of a 2.2 x 1.6 cm bone prayer box discovered beneath a Jerusalem parking lot. With a cross carved on the lid and two faded images inside, the box is an "extremely rare" find for the Holy Land.

Israel Antiquities Authority

compiled by Ted Olsen

QUOTATION MARKS

"We need to create a country where people don't feel like they have to leave religion at the door. That means being proud of Christianity, not downgrading it."

Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, the only Muslim member of the British Cabinet.

The Telegraph

"This brings to close a sad chapter in the history of Whiteville that can best be described as terroristic, cowardly and shameful!"

James Bellar, mayor of Whiteville, Tennessee, in a letter to the Freedom from Religion Foundation, which had threatened to sue the town over a cross atop one of its water towers. Rather than remove the cross, the mayor removed one of its arms.

WREG

"His restitution as a viable theological voice within our tradition might encourage a deeper understanding of sin, grace, [and] free will."

Benno Pattison, rector of Church of the Epiphany in Atlanta, in a diocesan resolution to reverse the Council of Carthage condemnation of Pelagius as a heretic.

The Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta

"Our jurisprudence has confounded the lower courts and rendered the constitutionality of displays of religious imagery on government property anyone's guess."

Justice Clarence Thomas, in a dissent to the Supreme Court's decision not to consider whether crosses on the side of Utah highways violate the First Amendment. Because of a lower court's ruling, the crosses will now be removed.

SupremeCourt.gov



PERSECUTION NIGERIA

No Cheeks Left to Turn

Church leaders debate self-defense. By Sunday Oguntola in Lagos, Nigeria

Church leaders in Nigeria are sharply divided over how to react to a surge in violent attacks against Christians and churches in the country's Muslim-majority north.

Hundreds of Christians have been killed and churches burnt in regular attacks launched this year by Fulani herdsmen in Jos and members of the Boko Haram terrorist sect in Kaduna, Borno, and Niger states.

Such attacks increased this spring following the controversial April election of Christian president Goodluck Jonathan. More than 800 people were killed in the violence, mostly in northern states. The Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), a major northern denomination headquartered in Jos, said it lost more than 32 members, three ministers, and 48 churches. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) said 84 of its

churches were destroyed as well.

In November, a series of church bombings killed dozens in Yobe state. In September, a Christian family of eight was killed in Barkin Ladi in Plateau state.

The steady attacks have thrown the Christian community into opposing camps. While some continue to advocate for calm and prayer, others are now urging Christians to defend themselves.

CAN national president Ayo Oristejafor stated that Christians can no longer continue to watch while aggressors attack them. "I have a responsibility to defend myself and my family," he said. "Christians in the nation have suffered enough.

John Praise, general overseer of Dominion Chapel International Churches in Abuja, has called for churches to raise "young people to defend the church because nobody

Eye for an Eye: An increasing number of Nigerian church leaders are suggesting the time has come for Christians to fight back against church burnings and sectarian killings.

GO FIGURE

Church Life

6%

Protestant pastors who say their church will have services only on Christmas Eve, since Christmas falls on Sunday this year.

29%

Protestant pastors who say Christmas is the highest-attended service of the year (55 percent said Easter).

LifeWay Research

has the monopoly of violence.

"People say, 'When they slap your cheek, you turn the other.' We have turned both, and they have slapped us. There is nothing else to turn."

By contrast, bishop Wale Oke, national vice president of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria's South West region, argues that Christians must resist such temptation.

"To fight back is contrary to the position of our Lord Jesus Christ," said Oke. "He said, 'If they strike you on one cheek, turn the other.' He did that when he was arrested. It was what he used to conquer the world."

Dozens of northern churches have been stockpiling arms and training youths to counter attacks from Muslim extremists. A fringe Christian militia named Akhwat Akwop emerged in September vowing to match "blood for more blood." However, these efforts are not supported by the broader Christian community.

Pastors' approval of self-defense has transformed over the past 25 years into angrier rhetoric that has fueled revenge killings, observes a Christian leader in Jos who requested anonymity. But there are signs that such violent mindsets may have peaked.

"Some pastors are realizing that we have taken this 'enemy' rhetoric too far. We've drifted away from the teachings of Jesus and returned to a traditional African worldview of retaliatory violence," he said. "We Christians are not without blame."

Sunday Agang, academic dean at Jos's ECWA Theological Seminary, recently published his doctoral research on the violence in northern Nigeria. He strongly cautions Christians against fighting back.

"Self-defense is engaging the issues of political, economic, and religious injustice and bringing them to public discourse," he said. "Christians must do anything they can to make the Muslims understand our shared humanity. This is what Jesus means when he said that we should turn the other cheek."

POLITICS

Double-Daring the IRS

Punishing church endorsements unlikely.

By Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra

When Robert Jeffress, senior pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, endorsed presidential candidate Rick Perry on his church's website in October, Americans United for the Separation of Church and State promptly asked the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) for an investigation.

Since passage of the Johnson Amendment in 1954, churches "may not participate in, or intervene in . . . any political campaign," according to the IRS.

Churches that don't comply could lose their tax-exempt status.

In theory. But it seems no one, not even Americans United, is expecting a quick response from the IRS.

"Right now the situation is in a holding pattern because the IRS has found its internal policies under fire by federal court ruling," said senior policy analyst Rob Boston.

A 1984 federal ruling told the IRS it needed a regional commissioner to sign off on any audits done on churches. But when the IRS reorganized in 1996, it eliminated the regional commissioner position. A Minnesota church recently argued that its IRS audit wasn't authorized by a high-enough official. In January, a federal court agreed.

Until the IRS sorts out who can authorize church audits, churches are left in limbo, said Alliance Defense Fund (ADF) senior legal counsel Erik Stanley.

"It has become an intolerable system of self-censorship," he said. "Society labels biblical issues as political, and pastors just back away."

Only one church has ever had its tax-exempt status revoked: a

New York church that ran full-page newspaper ads warning voters away from Bill Clinton in 1992.

The IRS may be weak on enforcing the Johnson Amendment because of its questionable constitutionality, said Sally Wagenmaker, a tax attorney who works with nonprofits.

A constitutional challenge is the ADF's goal. It promotes an annual Pulpit Freedom Sunday that encourages pastors to preach on the moral qualifications of candidates. Participation has grown from 33 pastors in 2008 to 539 in 2011.

"The question for the church is: Is it part of what you feel God has called you to do, for such a time as this?" said Wagenmaker. "To push the envelope?"

About 85 percent of Protestant pastors believe the IRS should stay out of policing sermon content, according to an August survey by LifeWay Research. Yet a 2010 survey found that the same majority believe that pastors should not endorse candidates from the pulpit, said president Ed Stetzer.

"It would be a mistake," he said, "to draw the conclusion that because they don't want the IRS in the pulpit, they want politics in the pulpit." ☩

YOUTH MINISTRY

From Age to Age

Church youth need more exposure to adults.

By Ken Walker

As evidence mounts that children would benefit from more integration into adult church life, some advocates face criticism for taking a good idea too far.

Scott Brown, director of the National Center for Family-Integrated Churches, helped spark discussion with the recent release of his book *A Weed in the Church*. An ensuing documentary, *Divided*, has received considerable attention on youth

ministry blogs.

Brown's book—which received endorsements from seminary president Paige Patterson and ministry leader R. C. Sproul Jr.—argues that age segregation is harming young people and labels modern youth ministry a "50-year-old failed experiment."

The thesis has proved controversial. In September, organizers of the influential D6 youth ministry conference canceled a display by the filmmakers, saying the documentary had a non-inclusive viewpoint.

Texas pastor and author Brian Haynes, who echoes some of Brown's concerns in *The Legacy Path*, sees youth ministry as a branch that needs pruning instead of a weed that should be plucked.

"I wouldn't have a problem being a church with family-integrated Sunday school classes," he said. "Where I do have a problem is when you say that's the only way to do that."

Despite the controversy, Brown may have a point: intergenerational discipleship may be the strongest method of strengthening teens' faith.

In their new book, *Sticky Faith*, Kara Powell and Chap Clark of Fuller Theological Seminary cite a six-year-long research project that discovered that out of 13 youth-group variables, intergenerational worship and discipleship correlated the strongest with mature faith among students in high school and college.

Powell says the finding helps explain various studies estimating 40 to 50 percent of teens drift away from congregational life after graduation.

"There is a time when 6-, 16-, and 76-year-olds need to be among people their own age," she said. "But balance is something we swing through on our way to the other extreme. We've ended up segregating those age groups; our research is showing how damaging that can be."

A study published in this fall's *Christian Education Journal* shows only 50 percent of young-adult-oriented churches formed over the last

PASSAGES



Died

Arthur Holmes

Former Wheaton College philosophy professor who advocated the integration of faith and learning in higher education, on October 8. He was 87.



Died

Fred Shuttlesworth

Baptist pastor and civil rights pioneer who co-founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, on October 5. He was 89.



Resigned

Paul Crouch Jr.

Vice president and chief of staff at Trinity Broadcasting Network, in October, in order to pursue new ministry opportunities.

[continued on 16]

Briefing [from 15]

20 years adopt an intergenerational model as founding members age and have children.

"The difference [is] ecclesiology—the way these leaders view what it means to be the church," said study coauthor and Wheaton College professor Scottie May. "I'm not an advocate of 'everyone always has to be together,' but the core has to be inter-generational—where everyone is welcome at the table."

HIGHER EDUCATION

A Private Matter

Campus ministries need different defenses.

By Morgan Feddes

When Vanderbilt University became the latest institution to investigate religious student groups for discriminatory leadership policies, it drew headlines and a congressional complaint. It also underscored the different way such disputes play out on private versus public campuses.

As of November 1, 4 of the

Nashville school's 380 student groups remained on provisional status for being noncompliant with its non-discrimination policy. The student newspaper named the groups as Graduate Christian Fellowship, Christian Legal Society (CLS), Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and Christian sorority Sigma Phi Lambda—all of which require leaders to affirm Christian doctrines.

As a private university, Vanderbilt is not held to the same constitutional requirements as public universities such as the University of California Hastings College of the Law, which survived a Supreme Court challenge to its "all comers" policy by CLS last year. So media attention and public comments are the main defense for Christian groups at a private university, said Jim Lundgren, director of collegiate ministries at InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.

"You're not so much protected by Supreme Court decisions; you're protected by the court of public opinion," he said.

Any attempt at legal action might cause collateral damage for private Christian colleges, said Thomas Berg, professor of law and public policy at the University of St. Thomas. "Religious colleges

DISCUSSION STARTER Church Life

Mars Hill Church in Seattle and unrelated Mars Hill Church in Sacramento recently settled a name dispute. The Seattle church, which is planting multisite campuses across state lines, trademarked its name and logo in August; the Sacramento church will change its logo but retain its name.

themselves have significant interest in making decisions based on religion," he said. "So to prohibit religious discrimination by all private colleges . . . could really have a bad effect on the freedom of religious organizations."

Lundgren said such challenges to Christian campus groups have increased since the Hastings victory. "We're seeing more of these cases than I think we've ever seen," he said.

Such challenges are also becoming more intentional, said Kim Colby, CLS senior counsel. "When the issue arose [a decade ago], it was relatively novel, and one could believe that . . . administrators simply blundered into disrespecting religious groups without thinking the issue through," she said. "Vanderbilt is intentionally leading the way for other universities to adopt the same policy." (Vanderbilt declined an interview but said trend-setting had not entered into its decision-making process.)

Lundgren said InterVarsity approaches each new case with a relational focus. "At each school, there are some real differences," he said. "You can't assume what actually is motivating the schools when you start talking with them. If you do, you just create animosity."

UNDER DISCUSSION Topics in the current debate.

compiled by Ruth Moon

Should churches trademark their names and logos?

YES

"It's a simple and low-cost way to protect against 'identity theft' by preventing others from misusing a church's good name and reputation while protecting its investment in branding. It makes all the sense in the world and is good stewardship."

DAVID

MIDDLEBROOK

attorney, Church Law Group

"To have a name and logo that are unique and have value means to protect them, or others will use and devalue it. Just because it is a church doesn't mean that the congregation doesn't have commercial value, branding rights, and reasons to protect the same."

RONALD KEENER

editor, Church Executive

"The importance of a trademark depends on how distinctive the name is. You would not want another organization that has values and beliefs contrary to yours to confuse the public."

KENNETH LIU

intellectual property partner, Gammon and Grange

"Since most church names are derived from the Bible or commonly used words, it would be difficult to trademark their name only. But it is certainly appropriate to protect a church's name and logo from those who would misrepresent or misuse it."

JIM TOMBERLIN

founder, Multisite Solutions

"This seems like the kind of issue only a megachurch would face. I can't think of a reason the little church I pastor would need to trademark our name or any logo we might come up with, nor am I aware of any legal need to do so."

JIM HAMILTON

pastor, Kenwood Baptist Church (Kentucky)

"A trademark implies the name of the church is more important than the name of Jesus. Jesus reached people without money or marketing, and he was pretty effective. People aren't won over by marketing but by the power of the Gospel, and it has always been free."

DANIELLE SHROYER

pastor, Journey Church (Dallas)

NO



House of Prayer: Pentecostal Christians—who now represent 14 percent of Rwanda's population—gather at a Kigali house church to pray.

CHURCH GROWTH RWANDA

A Haven for Healing

Rwanda's genocide survivors flock to charismatic churches for renewal.

By Catherine Newhouse in Kigali, Rwanda

Pastor Dan Muhire can't forget how his Aunt Anizia withered away long before she died at age 50. She survived the 1994 Rwandan genocide, but her husband and five sons were murdered. Anizia recovered physically after the government replaced the house she had lost. But inside, she still suffered.

"Someone would come to greet her and she would say, 'Why are you greeting me? They have killed my children. Is there hope for me?'" Muhire recalled.

"She would walk aimlessly without knowing where she was going, and then come back in the night." As Muhire spoke

at the Worship Center Church in Kigali, voices in the next room cried out to God in the native language of Kinyarwanda. Their singing, clapping, and drumming seemed to strengthen Muhire's resolve.

"We need to give people [hope] to live today by showing them there is life tomorrow. My auntie died because there was no sense of living again."

The Worship Center Church is one of a multitude of new, independent Pentecostal and charismatic churches throughout Rwanda. Most of them have sprung up since 1994. Recovery from trauma is a central feature of these new fellowships.

Pastor Muhire told *Christianity Today*

about a key distinctive of his church: It is committed to addressing trauma holistically for individuals and their extended family. He learned the hard way about the need for a different approach. After his aunt died in 2003, her 33-year-old daughter mysteriously died in her sleep less than 12 months later.

"If there was a church, or counseling, if my aunt was somehow shown the meaning of living again, of why she survived, I believe she would have stayed [alive] longer," Muhire said.

THE BIG SHIFT

Before the genocide, Rwanda was considered the most Roman Catholic country in

Seeking Hope: According to new research, there is high religious observance among Rwanda's Christians, with 61 percent in daily prayer and 75 percent in church at least weekly.



TYLER HUTCHERSON

Africa. It was 63 percent Catholic with a population of 8 million in the mid-1990s, according to Anne Kubai, former head of religious studies at the Kigali Institute of Education.

In the 18 years since the genocide, the overwhelmingly Catholic demographic shifted quickly and enormously toward Protestant and independent churches. Dramatic population growth has fueled the shift. Rwanda's post-genocide population dipped to 5.4 million; now experts project that it will exceed 11.5 million by the end of 2012. Of 19 sub-Saharan countries surveyed, Rwanda has seen the most significant rise in Protestant faith, according to a new Pew Foundation report. The country is now 38 percent Protestant, and of those Protestants, Pentecostals are the most sizable group.

The genocide changed everything. In 1994, neighbor turned against neighbor as extremist Hutus killed about 1 million minority Tutsis and Hutu moderates who supported them. The church hierarchy, both Catholic and mainline Protestant, emerged with blood on its hands. Catholic priests were among the guilty. Some lured their parishioners into churches, only to let murderers in next. Other priests failed to speak out against ethnic violence in time to prevent the worst of it.

Andrew Rusatsi, a seminary professor in Nyakibanda, Rwanda, said many Rwandans felt betrayed by the Catholic Church's

involvement. "They embraced other churches—Protestant, Pentecostal, and Restoration churches, which have been proliferating like mushrooms," Rusatsi said. Protestant church leaders were also implicated in the genocide, but to a lesser extent.

After the genocide, a new brand of churches emerged: Pentecostal congregations started by Tutsi refugees returning to their homeland after decades of living in neighboring countries to escape persecution. In Uganda, Tanzania, Congo, and Kenya, Rwandan refugees had encountered the emotionally expressive Pentecostal faith.

Gerard van 't Spijker, a retired religion professor and Protestant pastor in the Netherlands, has researched Rwanda's post-genocide church growth. He said refugees wanted to start their own churches in Rwanda for two key reasons: First, the refugees spoke English (Rwanda is a Francophone nation). Second, refugees didn't want to associate with the traditional church, which they said aided the genocide.

The new churches quickly gained momentum. In one year, from 1997 to 1998, the number of new Christian churches in Rwanda doubled, reports Van 't Spijker. And they looked and felt different from traditional churches: People sang loudly, danced freely, spoke in tongues, let tears

stream down their faces, and proclaimed visions from God.

Charismatic expression has shown up in a few Roman Catholic and Anglican parishes. Rusatsi called this fluid and expressive movement "wonderful" because it allows traditional Rwandans to worship in new ways, while retaining much of the liturgical form of existing church services.

Rusatsi said more traditional churches would probably embrace the charismatic style, but leadership has so far been cautious. "We're trying to get out of the formulas to allow more personal spontaneity," Rusatsi said.

PAIN IN PUBLIC

A traditional Rwandan proverb, "The tears of a man flow into his stomach," reflects the cultural norm that pain should be held tightly inside. But since 1994, more individuals have opened up about what happened to them during the genocide.

Jamie Aten, a psychology professor and head of the Humanitarian Disaster Applied Research Lab at Wheaton College (Illinois), has studied how Christians cope with trauma after disaster, war, or a large conflict. He told CT that having a survivor verbally recount the traumatic event can help him heal emotionally and spiritually because it gives him a sense of control over the experience. Individuals have to share that story on their own terms after they become comfortable in a particular environment.

Creating that environment has become a crucial new role for the new churches in Rwanda. Timothy Longman, author of *Christianity and Genocide in Rwanda*, said Rwandan society is tolerant of religious expression, so individuals feel at ease praying aloud, whereas they would not shout or cry out in public for any other reason.

Life-changing testimonials are not hard to find. In Butare, a university town south of Kigali, genocide survivor Claudine Bakayisanga told CT, "This kind of freedom can cause you to dance, to cry. You can do whatever you want knowing you are before the true and loving Father."

The Pentecostal church's emphasis on a personal relationship with God drew Bakayisanga, a former Catholic, to join the Assemblies of God church in Butare five years after the genocide.

Bakayisanga said she was not a committed Christian when she first came to the church in August 1999. She was struck by the spontaneous prayers being poured out at the church. Religion for her had been a formality. She had repeated the same written prayers at every Mass, but said the prayers didn't express her personal needs.

"With this [new] kind of prayer, you just express yourself and say, 'God, I am angry about this,'" Bakayisanga said. "When you say it, you get relief in your heart."

Going to the Assemblies of God church helped Bakayisanga let go of the pain that haunted her. A year after joining the church, she was able to forgive the man who had killed her father, even though he had not asked for forgiveness.

"You can feel pain even if you are Christian, but that pain is covered by knowing there is God," Bakayisanga said.

visions he experienced during and after the genocide lifted his fears and gave him relief. He had become a Pentecostal Christian before the genocide, and in 1999, he started the Assemblies of God church in Butare.

On the last day of the genocide, Gasigi had visions of the battle raging outside his house, and he prayed in tongues when he could not find the right words in his native language. Both the vision and the tongues gave him peace.

But after the genocide was over, Gasigi could not help asking God, "How could you allow this to happen? Did you close your eyes?" He wrestled with anger and pain, secretly taking pleasure when genocide perpetrators were punished and ignoring Hutu orphans on the street. "I was a Christian, but full of pain in spirit," he said. "I had no forgiveness in me."

At 2 A.M. on a summer night in 1995, Gasigi heard his name called three times: "Paul. Paul. Paul." He cried out to God, and said he heard a voice telling him to read the Book of Jonah. Gasigi was struck by how angry Jonah was after finding out God

Gasigi said that when people experience the Holy Spirit, they can leave trauma behind. "Trauma is something that destroys," he said. "When you are filled with spiritual fruits, there is no room for trauma, because you are filled with hope."

'EARTHLY RELEVANT'

Pentecostal and charismatic churches have brought a fresh perspective to many Rwandans struggling with trauma, said seminary professor Rusatsi. At the same time, he said, the movement should "cool down" and mature in order to avoid harmful excesses.

"When you meet people who have been traumatized, they're ready to embrace any god or goddess," Rusatsi said. "But after some time, they have to put the whole thing in balance."

Rusatsi said an overly emotional faith might become harmful if it abandons reason and common sense. He said some Pentecostal Christians are known to open their Bibles randomly and proclaim God is speaking to them without taking the time to study God's Word.

Van 't Spijker said he received credible reports that Christians had prayed to find "troublemakers" in the church—for example, someone who had caused an illness—which resulted in false accusations.

But the more established Pentecostal churches in Rwanda use accountability methods to prevent abuses. In such churches, a member speaks to a group of elders before giving a public testimony, Van 't Spijker said.

Muhire said Pentecostal churches built purely on emotions would not sustain themselves. He said Pentecostal churches in Rwanda preach a message that is "heaven-minded and earthly relevant." This approach connects with Rwandans at their point of need—caring for orphans, counseling survivors, and helping Rwandans find "hope beyond the grave."

"In the church, what we're doing is not fiction. The Pentecostal churches are preaching a true message of the Word of God, and that message changes people." ➤

Catherine Newhouse is a journalism, religious studies, and international studies major at the University of Missouri.

'There is an emptiness in the heart. But with God, this emptiness is changed. Your heart has a hope.'

~ Claudine Bakayisanga

"There is an emptiness in the heart. But with God, this emptiness is changed. Your heart has a hope. It helps to have that hope."

THE SOURCE OF HEALING

Reports of visions and miraculous healings abound in Rwanda's new churches.

Bernard Bucyana, a pastor at Christian Life Assembly in Kigali, said these effects are rooted in a theology that perceives God as tangibly and actively involved in people's lives. Whereas other Christians view visions and miraculous healings as suspect, the Pentecostal heritage carries an expectation that believers will experience God in everyday life.

"People feel that God initiated a way of salvation, a way of redeeming people, and because of that they want to completely immerse themselves in him," Bucyana said.

Paul Gasigi, a pastor in Butare, said the

had forgiven the people of Nineveh, who had repented.

"I asked God, 'what do you want to tell me?'" Gasigi said. "He said, 'Paul, don't be angry with my people who don't know how to differentiate right from wrong. Be angry with the Devil.' It was like a wind of forgiveness blew into my heart. I started crying and said, 'Lord, I forgive them.'"

Aten attributes God as the source of healing, and yet says that physiological changes that accompany such religious experiences help to explain feelings of relief. Biochemicals associated with positive feelings are released in the brain, and stress levels fall.

"You'll often hear people say they feel so much closer to God during those times," Aten said. "It's hard for any of us to imagine what it'd be like to live through genocide, but just imagine the sense of isolation."



A CHRISTMAS FILLED WITH HOPE FOR AT-RISK WOMEN AROUND THE WORLD

Women At Risk, International is a non-profit organization dedicated to creating circles of protection around at-risk women in the name of Christ by rescuing them from many abuses, including human trafficking, and providing safe havens where they can turn stories of tragedy into stories of hope.

WAR, Int'l offers beautiful jewelry, accessories, apparel, greeting cards, and other gifts hand-crafted by the women in our programs in the United States and Overseas in over 30 countries. You can shop these products on our website, in our boutiques or by hosting a home party or WAR event. Your purchase helps empower these women and their families to live lives of dignity in safe places.

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Andy Crouch

- National speaker & conference leader
- Author of *Culture Making*



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- Retired Archbishop of Canterbury
- International speaker & author



James K. A. Smith

- Professor at Calvin College
- Speaker & author of *Desiring the Kingdom*



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- Visual Artist of *The Four Holy Gospels*
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Making Disciples Today

Introducing *Christianity Today's* new five-year teaching venture.

ONGOING CONTROVERSIES over the nature of the Atonement (substitutionary or *Christus Victor*?), the historical Adam (creation or evolution?), the afterlife (heaven and hell or universalism?), the nature of the authority of Scripture (“inerrant” or “infallible” or “trustworthy”?)—among other debates—show how relevant doctrine remains. But the debates also reveal how confused many Christians are about the basic truths of the faith, a confusion that will worsen if we don’t respond to two pressing realities.

First is an increasingly post-Christian world. The rich ideas contained in words like *creation* and *fall*, *judgment* and *forgiveness*, *grace* and *obedience*, *crucifixion* and *resurrection*, *church*, *final judgment*, and *Trinity* are little known to most people. In fact, many outside and inside the church are either hostile to traditional Christian teachings or mix belief systems, religious and not, to create their own.

Second is the challenge of internet technology. Secular and pluralistic worldviews were prevalent before the Internet, of course, but now every idea and worldview, every philosophy and religion is a click away. We are electronic neighbors with atheists and theists, Hindus and Muslims, terrorists and pacifists, secularists and agnostics, New Agers and rationalists. Every idea imaginable is now at the fingertips of every Christian who has internet access. The average Christian toys with an unprecedented range of ideas today, arguably more ideas and worldviews than did Augustine, Calvin, Cranmer, and Wesley. Needless to say, encounters with our electronic neighbors are both fascinating and bewildering.

Add to this the ongoing need to grow “to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13, *ESV*), so that we might more fully love God and neighbor. It’s clear as ever that we need a deeper grounding in Scripture and the great teachings of the faith.

We believe this is the crucial challenge of the 21st century; without being grounded in the gospel, we simply cannot live it out for long.

J. I. Packer and Gary Parrett recently completed *Grounded in the Gospel*, a fresh argument for teaching the faith (traditionally known as catechesis). As Packer put it, “Ongoing learning is part of the calling of the church. It has to be taught in all churches at all times.” Recovering an emphasis on careful, lifelong instruction in faith “will be totally uphill all the way. We shall be challenging the dominant trends in our culture, and it won’t be easy.”

With this issue of *Christianity Today*, we embark afresh on such an enterprise. We are calling it the Global Gospel Project (GGP), resources for a full-orbed discipleship of heart, mind, soul, and strength.

To date, nearly all catechisms have been written with one tradition or another in mind—Reformed or Baptist or Catholic and so on. Given the realities of contemporary worldwide evangelicalism, we also need discipleship resources that embrace a broad, centrist, and historic understanding of the faith, one that recognizes the gifts of our various traditions yet focuses on the gospel message and mission we share. Our mission to spread the gospel in word and deed can only be strengthened as we understand and grow together in what is core to that gospel.

The GGP resources will not replace the catechisms of our different traditions; it will not be able to drill deeply in the unique teachings of these traditions, which bring such richness to worldwide Christianity. But the GGP does have seven emphases that will, we believe, help it contribute to all churches:

Biblical: Every doctrine will need to be set firmly in Scripture. In a world of many holy scriptures and sources of authority, it’s critical that Christians re-ground themselves in the Bible.

Broadly evangelical: Especially in an age featuring a plurality of competing ideas, it is important to show that Christians have a variety of ways of thinking about life’s deepest questions. The GGP resources must be useful to American evangelicals, Latin American



DOUG FLEENER

Pentecostals, the Reformed, African American churches, Korean Presbyterians, Wesleyans, Mennonites, Methodists, Baptists, independents, underground churches, official churches—to name a few! There is much we agree on without question or debate: the divinity of Christ, the hope of his second coming, the final authority of Scripture. When it comes to matters upon which we disagree—baptism, church structure, the relationship of grace and faith, and so forth—the catechism must show charitably and fairly how different traditions have taught on such matters, and the essential truth beneath our disagreements.

Set in the local church: The GGP resources will repeatedly drive people into the church as the community where the fullness of Christ is taught and lived, however imperfectly.

God-centered: One evangelical strength has been our ability to answer practical questions like, What does this Bible verse mean for me today? What is Christ calling me to do today? What we need in addition to that are more resources that help us think about the biblical truths upon which we ground our work. So in the GGP, we will put an emphasis on who God is and what God has done, is doing, and will do for us in Jesus Christ—the objective realities of the gospel.

Question-driven: People will not sign up for a class on “The Doctrine of Revelation,” but they will flock to one on “How We Can Know Who God Really Is.” People are interested in doctrine, they just don’t know that they are. When you find the question they are wrestling with, you have found the entrance to a discussion of a doctrine or two. So GGP resources will try to answer the questions people are currently asking, but do so from the foundation of a biblical theology.

Global: If the world is a global village, the church is a global parish. Especially considering how the church’s growth in the past century has been driven by developing-world evangelicals and especially Pentecostals, the GGP will welcome the insights and guidance of Christians from across the planet.

The average Christian toys with an unprecedented range of ideas today, arguably more ideas and worldviews than did Augustine, Calvin, Cranmer, and Wesley.

Joyful: We evangelicals, with a heritage of warmhearted piety, have sometimes shied away from doctrine, which seems to us dull, dreary, and dry. But English essayist and novelist Dorothy Sayers reminded us that doctrine isn’t the problem:

We are constantly assured that the churches are empty because preachers insist too much upon doctrine—dull dogma as people call it. The fact is the precise opposite. It is the neglect of dogma that makes for dullness. The Christian faith is the most exciting drama that ever staggered the imagination of man—and the dogma is the drama.

The gospel is good news, and the GGP will keep this in mind from start to finish: that we are learning about the most astonishing and electrifying story the world has ever known, a story that has its source in the goodness and love of a great and glorious God.

The series, which begins with Michael Horton’s article on Jesus as the revelation of God, will continue for five years (God willing). We’ll look at a biblically based theology through the lens of the classic creeds, ethics through the Ten Commandments, and spirituality through the Lord’s Prayer, as well as the nature of teaching (beginning in this section of the issue). From these articles, we will develop more resources—curricula, video small-group studies, podcasts, a blog, eBooks, and whatever else we think of!

We trust this will prove to be a helpful resource as the 21st-century church continues to “make disciples of all nations.”

—Mark Galli, *CT* senior managing editor

The Good God Who Came Down

The God revealed in Christ does what reason and morality cannot do. By Michael Horton

A PASSENGER ON A RECENT PLANE TRIP happily divulged his spiritual views. Raised in a conservative religious home, he proudly dismissed traditional Christianity, with its radical claims about Jesus of Nazareth, because it substitutes dogma for reason, he said. Fifteen minutes later, he became an apologist for a sacred cosmos, with tarot cards and astrology. But of course, he said, these were true just for him.

The encounter epitomized what we have all experienced in a culture that identifies reason with naturalism and faith with feeling. And it comes from a deeper problem: the attempt to “climb to heaven” on the rungs of reason, morality, and experience. The “search for the sacred” is what happens when our God-centered nature is taken captive by sin. Religion and spirituality are all about what we feel and think deep within our precious, delightful, individual souls. The true God calls us outdoors into a history that sweeps us into its wake. Yet we prefer to sit inside our own souls and minds, stewing in our own juices.

Biblical faith emphasizes that we cannot ascend to God on our own; rather, the God of the Bible descends down to us. Our inner self is not the playground of “spirit,” but the haunted plains on which we build our towers of Babel. In other words, our hearts are idol factories, in bondage to sin and spin. As Jeremiah declared, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (17:9, *ESV*, used

throughout). We look for a god we can manage rather than the God who is actually there.

In Romans 1 and 2, Paul affirms this. He says that everyone knows God exists and is a sovereign, righteous, and all-knowing judge. Jew and Gentile alike know God’s moral will and so “are without excuse,” but “by their unrighteousness suppress the truth” (1:18–23). Quoting the psalmist, Paul presents the universal indictment: “... all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written, ‘None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one’” (Rom. 3:9–12).

Given all this, we need to receive an external word from outside our hearts and to our hearts—one that stops our spin and gives us new hearts even as it is spoken. That’s just where Paul turns next in Romans:

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. . . . (3:21–24)

In other words, our hearts create spiritualities, therapies, and programs that arise out of our natural knowledge of the law, which we distort. Outside our hearts, and at the core of special revelation, is the surprising God, known uniquely in his Son.



There are, however, strong forces that tempt us to grasp the divine on our own accord.

ENSLAVED TO NATURALISM

Many people today act like someone created a peace treaty between reason and faith after reason won the war. Reason cedes territory to faith, as long as faith relinquishes its rational claims. Reason is in the realm of public, objective truth, while faith is relegated to the realm of private experience and personal therapy. So, responding to my airplane acquaintance, who said faith is “whatever works for you,” I said, “Would you say that about World War II—that it happened for me but not for you?” Of course, the resurrection of Christ is more significant than the Battle of the Bulge, but no less historical.

Several years ago, I had the privilege of sharing a couple days with noted philosopher Richard Rorty. He repeated his claim that religion is a conversation stopper in public arguments, since it rests on private opinion. I asked him if shifting from philosophical and moral claims to a historical one—namely, that Jesus rose from the dead—would make a difference. After hearing me sketch that claim, he replied, “Yes, aside from the merit of the case itself, that would place Christian faith out in the open, exposed to public criticism.”

“And,” I interrupted, “public faith.”

“Yes, of course,” he conceded. “Public arguments of any kind can go either way,” he added. “But that’s not the kind of argument I often hear.” Rorty didn’t profess faith in Christ after our conversation. In fact, he argued that “truth” is a social construction. But he admitted that staking Christian discourse on historical claims was different from basing it on private sentiments.

We live in a world that assumes reason is unbiased, when in fact our reason itself is enslaved to *naturalism*: a denial of the world’s dependence on God for its creation and preservation, much less redemption. Any valid argument or evidence that suggests otherwise must have a naturalistic explanation, even if that explanation is the least reasonable. To be a rational person is to be a practical atheist, whatever spiritual hobbies one takes up on the weekends. Reason rests on public facts; faith, on private values. When it comes to faith, you can believe whatever you want, as long as you don’t think it’s true for everyone else. You can have faith in whatever makes you happy, as long as you don’t presume to evaluate my faith. After all, it’s mine: deeply personal and not open to public inspection. And reducing the gospel to “Jesus in my heart” is going to fit in perfectly on the island of subjective individualism to which our age has relegated faith.

This leaves us paralyzed, unable to understand the faith as more than childish whim, personal therapy, or a leap in the dark. We feel compelled to make faith adhere to naturalism, which our culture calls reason. We may downplay the biblical miracles, or describe prayer as “practicing silence,”

or think of the kingdom of God primarily as a manifesto for social reform and of Jesus as a great teacher. Reason opens its gate to mundane good advice, not to miraculous good news; deeds are authorized, but creeds are dangerous. The pressure to conform our faith to the rules of naturalism is powerful.

And if we share the gospel with others, we’re accused of “proselytizing,” which is code for pushing private beliefs on others. Thus, for many, evangelism is antiquated, replaced by good works that show the love of Jesus. No doubt we should show the love of Jesus in deed. But if Paul is right, people will come to know Christ only through our public testimony—the one thing our culture precludes, except when the likeminded meet as a voluntary association (Rom. 10).

The question for Christians, and anyone seeking to know God, is: On what basis can we know and trust God? And how can we trust that we *know* God, and have a knowledge that emboldens us to speak the gospel in our culture and live in a way that befits it?

Many people today act like someone has created a peace treaty between reason and faith after reason won the war.

THE WAY GOD COMES

The divide between faith and reason is often linked to postmodernism. But it goes back much further, to the Enlightenment. The philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) distinguished between a universal morality (“pure religion”) and particular religions, with their specific creeds and forms of worship (“ecclesiastical faiths”). God cannot be an object of intellectual knowledge, Kant argued, but can only serve as a basis for action (deeds not creeds).

Kant argued that “the moral law” in each of us is authoritative. Therefore, what Christianity calls general revelation—a universal awareness of God’s existence and moral will—is the content of all real spirituality, said Kant. We don’t need special revelation, since we already have everything we need for improving ourselves and our world. Of course, people can go on believing miracle reports and practicing the rituals of their particular religion, but they do so on nonrational grounds.

What is genuinely postmodern is denying even Kant’s idea of a universal moral intuition. That, too, says postmodernism, depends on personal choice and cultural conditioning. So now, not only the gospel but also the law is something we make up in our search for personal meaning and practical living.

Special revelation is precisely where the Christian faith breaks down the wall our culture has erected between faith and reason. We see this uniquely in the Incarnation, as Christ takes on human flesh, and first, by the way in which God delivers this special revelation.

The Incarnation presents to us the odd truth that the particular is not a shadow of the universal, on a lower rung of creaturely things. Rather, the gospel says the most particular thing—a Jewish rabbi in first-century Palestine—is the universal. And we can’t reason, intuit, or experience our way to this reality; we can only meet it first as history.

We hold to this claim for important reasons. First, our

“search for the sacred” is warped by idolatry. God is incomprehensible in his essence: immortal, invisible, eternal, unapproachable Light (1 Tim. 6:15–16), the sight of whose face we cannot survive (Ex. 33:20). God doesn’t contradict reason, but transcends it infinitely (Isa. 55:8–9; Rom. 11:33).

If this were all we knew, then we might throw up our hands and conclude with the radical mystics and skeptics that we cannot really know God, at least in a rational way that we can put into words.

However, Scripture tells us more: God stoops to our capacity, accommodating our understanding. We know him according to his works, not his essence. We know that God is merciful, for example, because he has acted mercifully in history and revealed these actions as well as their interpretation through prophets and apostles. We cannot discover God in his hidden essence. And yet, we find him where he has descended to us, in the humility of a feeding trough, a cross, and frail human language.

John’s gospel especially emphasizes that Jesus, the Son who existed with the Father before creation, came down from heaven. He tells the world what he has heard from the Father, and fulfills the work his Father has given him to do. Jesus knows the Father in a unique way, being one with the Father eternally and coming from the Father (John 6:46, 51; 8:19), declaring the Father’s word: “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am” (8:58), and, “I and the Father are one” (10:30). This is the Creator of heaven and earth, come among us full of grace and truth.

This Jewish rabbi not only shows us the way, but is “the way, and the truth, and the life.” “No one comes to the Father except through me,” he adds. “If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him” (John 14:6–7). After Jesus repeatedly states such things, you can imagine his exasperation when Philip responds, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” To this, Jesus replies, “Have I been with you so long, and you

still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (14:8–9).

I get Philip; it’s Jesus I find strange. We prefer to climb up to God through argument, experience, and activity. But

God has climbed down to us, meeting us not in the “high places” we erect, but in the lowest places: in a barn, suffering our scorn, fellowshiping with sinners, and hanging on a cross. We don’t ascend from particulars to universals. Rather, the source of all universal truth has descended to us in the concrete particulars of human history.

Of course, we see signs of the objective nature of the gospel before the Incarnation. The Old Testament prophets weren’t spiritual prodigies, “special ones.” They were ordinary people, going about their ordinary vocations, when God addressed them and commissioned them to deliver his Word. Their guidance counselors never said, “Hey, you have a real aptitude for religion; have you thought about becoming a prophet?” The truth did not bubble up inside them, but came to them. God’s message surprised them as much as it did their contemporaries. And God’s message chiefly concerned Israel’s judgment

according to the law and the everlasting covenant of grace, which would be fulfilled and dispensed with the Messiah’s arrival.

There is no passable route from us to God. We cannot climb the ladder of mysticism, speculation, or merit. In pride, we try to rise to heaven through reason, but God descends to us in humility and self-sacrificial generosity. We seek the truth within ourselves or in universal laws derived from our moral intuition, but God surprises us—and his name is Jesus.

This is partly why the gospel is scandalous: not because it’s irrational and subjective, but precisely because here, faith refuses to remain on the Alcatraz of private opinion. The gospel is also a scandal because of what it announces: a radical rescue operation amid a radical problem (God’s wrath). The gospel exposes that our claim to be defenders of reason is based on an



Special revelation, especially the Incarnation, is precisely where the Christian faith breaks down the wall our culture has erected between faith and reason.

irrational decision to ignore history and to stand in defiance of our own intuition that we are shipwrecked and need rescue. Left to ourselves, we use reason so irrationally that we determine that God cannot enter history, even before we examine whether he has done so. Again, it's not "neutral reason" running the show here, but a blind faith in naturalism.

While we were looking for "God" in the glorious splendor of our inner lights and universal morality, the Son became the most scandalously particular yet historically accessible revelation of God. It's not private therapy or rational argument, but a public announcement:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1–3, 14)

The problem for devout Jews in Jesus' day wasn't naturalism, of course, but Jesus' assumption of the titles, works, and identity of God. To them, this was blasphemy.

Gentiles had a different problem with Jesus. Their world was shaped by Plato and the Stoics. In their culture, the *Logos*

was the rational principle that pervaded all reality; by rational contemplation, one could ascend from particulars of the everyday "lower world" to the "upper world" of universal ideas. In that environment, John's gospel makes the unprecedented claim that the *Logos* is a person (not merely a principle of reason), that he is God (not a semidivine intermediary), and—especially scandalous—that he *became flesh*. For students of Plato, that cannot happen, because philosophy teaches us so. Yet, it did happen; history teaches us so.

What happens when God grows up in the neighborhood? Or presents himself on the road, as he did with his dejected disciples? This God didn't wait for us to discover him; he spoke and acted first. As a result, the gospel creates not speculative pundits, spiritual gurus, or moralists, but *witnesses*.

CONDEMNED—AND JUSTIFIED

Second, the gospel tears down the wall between reason and faith, public and private, objective and subjective truth, by its very *content*. We need special revelation because we need to be saved. That puts the matter squarely on the historical claims of the gospel: the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. The whole question of a self-revealing God is taken out of the merely private realm; it's public truth.

Those who follow their hearts fashion an idol that never judges or offends. According to Kant and his heirs, we are not

'An Object for the Senses'

An excerpt from the greatest African contribution to the theology of the Incarnation.

The Global Gospel Project seeks to bring both global and historical insights to bear, as in this brief excerpt from *On the Incarnation*, by the great bishop of Alexandria, Egypt, Athanasius (died in A.D. 373). C. S. Lewis said of the African theologian that "only a master mind could have written so deeply on a subject with such classical simplicity." In this passage, Athanasius reminds us that God deals with people . . .

. . . as a good teacher with his pupils, coming down to their level and using simple means. St. Paul says as much: "Because in the wisdom of God the world in its wisdom knew not God, God thought fit through the simplicity of the News proclaimed to save those who believe.

Men had turned from the contemplation of God above, and were looking for him in the opposite direction, down among created things and things of sense. The Savior of us all, the Word of God, in his great love took to himself a body and moved as man among men, meeting their senses, so to speak, half way. He became himself an object for the senses, so that those who were seeking God in sensible things might apprehend the Father through the works which he, the Word of God, did in the body.

Human and human minded as men were, therefore, to whichever side they looked in the sensible world they found themselves taught the truth. Were they awe-stricken by creation? They beheld it confessing Christ as Lord. Did their minds tend to regard men as gods? The uniqueness of the Savior's works marked him, alone of men, as Son of God. Were they drawn to evil spirits? They saw them driven out by the Lord and learned that the Word of God alone was God and that the evil spirits were not gods at all.

Were they inclined to hero worship and the cult of the dead? Then the fact that the Savior had risen from the dead showed them how false these other deities were, and that the Word of the Father is the one true Lord, the Lord even of death.

For this reason was he both born and manifested as man, for this he died and rose, in order that, eclipsing by his works all other human deeds, he might recall men from all the paths of error to know the Father. As he says himself, "I came to seek and to save that which was lost."

From *On the Incarnation*, published by St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.

helpless sinners who need redemption; therefore, we don't need a special revelation delivered to a particular people at a particular time through miraculous means. We have everything we need within, and it's universal, so why base belief on an external word miraculously delivered to a people in a particular time and place? If we follow our best lights, we'll be fine. Like Monty Python's victims of the plague, Kant and his ilk said, "We're getting better."

Paul says that even Gentiles know God's moral law within, but it's not saving knowledge. Rather, God's righteousness revealed in the law condemns all, "so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God" (Rom. 3:19). This revelation doesn't encourage us to "become a better you," but leaves us without excuse. So a religion of law—of general revelation—or even a religion of the holy law revealed to Israel may reliably show us God. But apart from the gospel, it's a God we would want nothing to do with.

And this is where things get interesting: "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe" (vv. 21–22). God's general revelation of his righteous judgment leaves us condemned. But God's special revelation of his gift of righteousness through faith in Christ leaves us justified (vv. 23–26).

Special revelation identifies and intensifies that guilt and alienation we feel when we discern that there's a holy God. Yet it also brings a surprising announcement: a promise that moves history forward, around all the obstacles of human rebellion (even Israel's) to its fulfillment in Christ. From the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, a light has dawned over this dark planet. It revives every blade of grass and reveals the grandeur of general revelation as well.

Modern culture approves the universal element in religion (namely, the search for transcendent meaning and moral improvement). It also leases space to faith, as long as it stays "indoors." The important thing in religion is the moral law within, not external creeds or rituals. But for Christians, it is exactly the reverse. The gospel preached and administered in baptism and Communion does not make a point about something else; it is the point. It comes from God, not from us, and it sweeps us, heart and all, into the new creation. Whatever intuitions and spiritual principles we drag up from the basements of our hearts, however practical, will lead only to ruin, and we will alternate between despair and self-righteousness.

The gospel is wildly improbable—except that it happened. The gospel is not the conclusion of a logical syllogism or an intuition of our universal moral experience. It's not a timeless truth. Rather, it is the announcement that "when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Gal. 4:4–5).

***The gospel creates
not speculative
pundits, spiritual
gurus, or moralists,
but witnesses.***

RELATED THEMES

Like all doctrine, the classic Christian doctrine of revelation closely relates to others.

In Scripture, the gift of faith is always attributed to the Word, specifically to the gospel. "So faith comes by hearing, and hearing through *the word of Christ*" (Rom. 10:17). We "have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God. . . . And this word is *the good news* that was preached to you" (1 Pet. 1:23, 25).

Every word from God's mouth is essential, but Peter marvels at the fact that by his preaching "the Gentiles should hear the *word of the gospel* and believe" (Acts 15:7).

This suggests that this doctrine—Jesus as the revelation of God—is closely connected to another doctrine that answers other questions: How do we come to know the God who lived, died, and rose in Jesus

Christ long ago? How does this historical revelation become a personal reality and not just another personal opinion? Such questions usually relate to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

This teaching also hinges on the reliability of Scripture. It assumes that the Bible is a faithful testimony of what God has done and said through the prophets and apostles. Even aside from the internal witness of the Holy Spirit, we have good reasons to believe in the Bible's trustworthiness (but this, too, we will have to discuss at another juncture).

As we embark on this series on the great doctrines of the church, we must begin at the beginning, especially in light of our culture. It strives to relegate faith to the purely personal arena, or to ground religion on universal premises or moral law. We need to see from the beginning how the gospel transcends these rules, and refuses to play by them.

Yes, there are some great rational arguments for God's existence. The Grand Canyon displays his majesty; the laughter of a child, his love. The universal sense of duty exhibits a justice that transcends positive laws. The myriad ways of pleasing an offended deity—or force, fate, or whatever—in diverse religions testifies, however dimly, to God's righteous character. We may discern someone or something above natural processes: a designer and architect. Numerous constitutions, legal codes, and declarations of human rights affirm biblical commands.

Yet none of this reveals the God of mercy, who has promised and fulfilled our redemption in Jesus Christ. Speaking for myself, I can say that any god who might exist apart from the gospel is not only irrelevant but also dreadful. If such a god existed, we would well wish otherwise. But thank God it is otherwise. The Protestant Reformers may have put it best: "We know God the Father only in his Son as he clothes himself in the gospel"—a revelation of the Good News of who God is. 

Michael Horton is professor of theology at Westminster Seminary California. He is the author of many books, most recently *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Zondervan).

Learning to Read the Gospel Again

How to address our anxiety about losing the next generation.

By Anthony D. Baker

A FEW MONTHS AGO, a graduate student in practical theology asked Stanley Hauerwas for his perspective on new church movements, especially emergent church movements. Disarming and epigrammatic as ever, the man whom *Time* once called “America’s Best Theologian” replied, “The future of the church is not found in things like this; the future is doing the same thing Sunday after Sunday.”

This may seem dismissive. The student certainly took it that way, and indicated as much on his blog. I want to suggest, though, that Hauerwas was essentially right. But first I would point to a legitimate layer of anxiety that underlies the student’s frustration.

The anxiety, briefly, is that the Christian faith is broken. We all know of statistics on the decline of mainline Christianity. To focus on the particular branch where I worship: The Episcopal Church, according to its own publications, lost a third of its membership between 1965 and 2009. A recent article on a Roman Catholic website claims that “within the next 3 to 5 years more than 2,000 churches across the country will be forced to close, merge or be sold.” Sociologists of religion (both the professional and armchair variety) continue to debate the causes of this notable decline. In a recent paper, David Hollinger, president of the Organization of American Historians, makes a persuasive case for two key factors within mainline denominations: dramatically declining birthrates, and a failure in what he calls the “acculturation” of their children.

The first factor is simple enough, and relates to a rise in college and graduate school enrollments among parishioners: Husbands and wives want to finish school and solidify their careers before becoming moms and dads, and end up having smaller families. The second factor, though, is worth exploring. How and why have the mainline denominations failed at acculturation, at incorporating children and young adults into the rhythms and practices of the Christian faith? Hollinger suggests a lingering cloud of mainline guilt as a possible

contributing cause.

To summarize all too briefly: During the 1960s, as Christianity came under attack in an increasingly secularist society, mainliners became bashful about embracing the content of Christian teachings. Instead, they turned to social projects as the “new core” of the faith, leaving their children primed to spend Sunday mornings at neighborhood meetings (or perhaps at home, blogging about politics). Evangelicals, by and large, did not suffer the same embarrassment. Unmoved by the rhetoric of secularism, they taught their children to go on carrying their Bibles and talking about Jesus. For Hollinger, the rise in evangelicalism parallels the mainline decline.

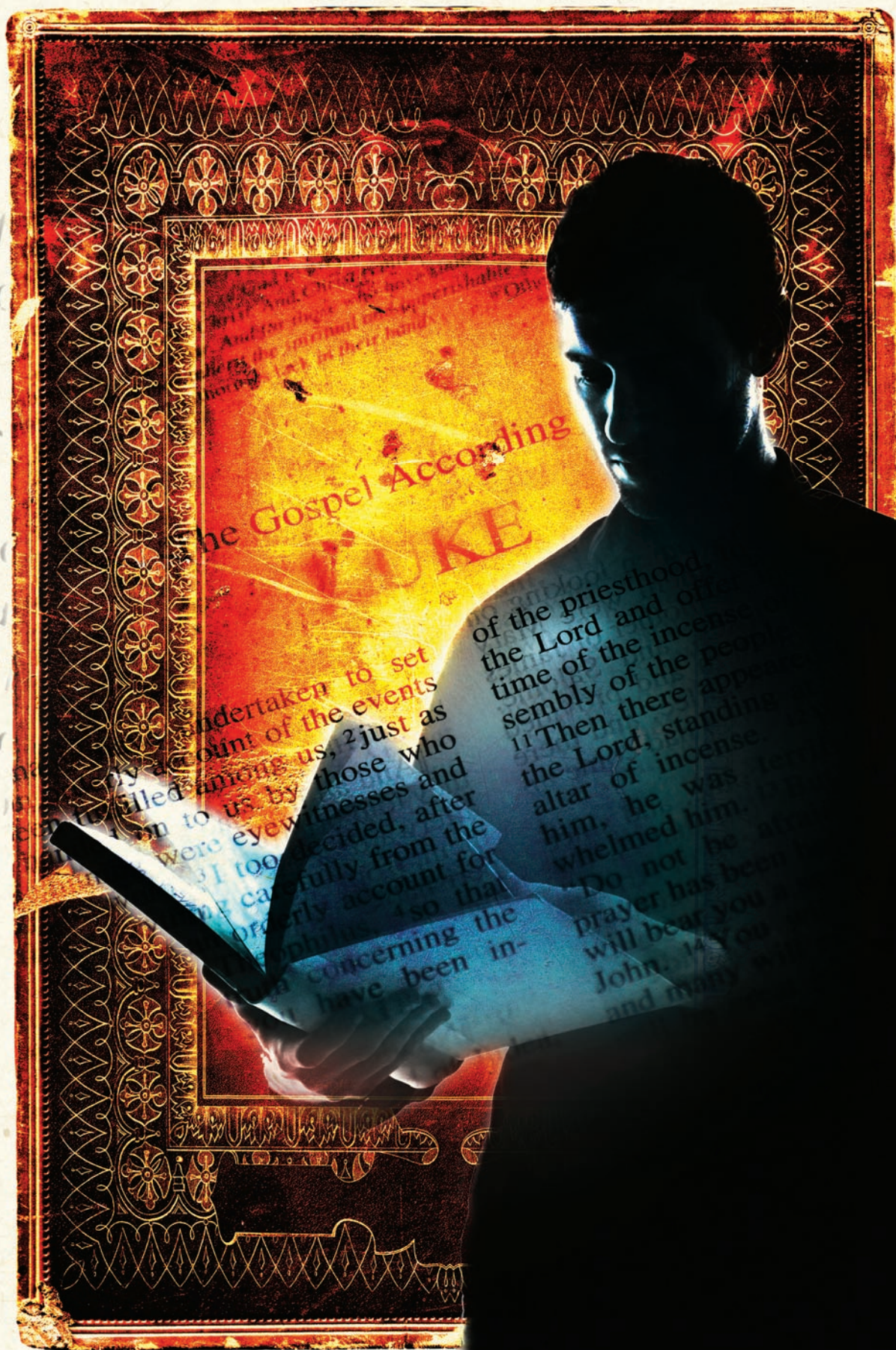
Against this historical backdrop, a degree of anxiety over the appeal of new Christian movements is well founded. If young churchgoers are coming of age thinking they can trade the gospel message for participation in social causes, and demean the creeds and Communion as disposable husks, then something is indeed broken.

VOICING THE GOSPEL

In this respect, Hauerwas’s answer might appear most offensive. Isn’t “doing the same thing Sunday after Sunday” the trouble? Can we afford to engage in business as usual if business as usual is sinking the church?

It all depends, of course, on what “same thing” we are doing. If we mean the same failures of acculturation, then clearly this is wrongheaded: The future of the church very decidedly is not found in coughing with embarrassment during Gospel readings, or in nervous thumb-twiddling during prayer. But if “the same thing week after week” means proclaiming the gospel, forgiving sins, and attending to the various classical practices that form people’s lives within the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, then we must agree: The future of the church is found in doing this week in and week out, Sunday after Sunday, come rain, drought, hell, or high water.

Hauerwas makes this case in a recent book, arguing that learning to “work with words” about God is the central task of Christian formation. In this respect, we are right to critically examine our attempts (or lack thereof) at acculturation. We are misguided, though, if we assume



The Gospel According to LUKE

undertaken to set
an account of the events
fulfilled among us, ²just as
many have undertaken to
relate to us by those who
were eyewitnesses and
from the beginning, after
I too decided, after
examining carefully from the
beginning, to write an orderly account for
Theophilus, so that
you may know the truth
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that getting acculturation right depends on constant novelty. The “words” that Christians work with—the Good News and its interpretation—are the fabric of our ancient faith. Teaching children and adults to work with the gospel’s words about God, to speak the traditional yet constantly new language of the Christian faith, is the only real “fix” for what ails us.

A recent study on youth and discipleship by Slavic theologian Jana Struková suggests that the key to this sort of formation is in renewing a sense of Christianity as a vocation. A vocation is a calling, a “voicing” of the gospel into language that speaks directly to the reader or listener. As Martin Luther argued, the gospel is nothing until I hear it addressed to *me*; once my ears are trained to hear it, I can begin responding, “working with words” to live out an answer to its call.

Reframing Hollinger’s concept of acculturation as vocation shows us that gospel words are irreplaceable in the formation of Christian youth. If they are brought up constantly hearing God’s loving address, they will grow to love the gospel like they love

their friends and family. And this is not just due to the nostalgic familiarity of the “big black book on the shelf.” No, it is the message, the content—the very voice of God in the words of Scripture—that inspires devotion. The challenge of Christian education, according to the early 20th-century theorist George Albert Coe, is to “lead each one to adopt” the words and teachings of the faith “as his very own desire, purpose, and practice.”

PUTTING AWAY THE FAITH

How well are we meeting this challenge? A quick survey of adult classes and Sunday sermons does not paint a pretty picture. Thematic life-management series (finances, parenting, hobbies) dominate the Sunday morning education hour and often the sermon as well. Many sermons seem allergic to the challenges posed by the text, and even those that manage some exegesis tend to offer a mere pinch of historical background before hurrying toward an ethical “life application.”

For the kids, the situation is especially dire. Summer camps feature Jesus on a surfboard, or perhaps in safari gear, while

Sunday morning classes tend to specialize in low-quality group counseling sessions. What we offer is anything but the simple gospel that “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ” (2 Cor. 5:19). On good days, the children humor us by pretending to enjoy themselves, all the time wondering when they get to do something more fun. In our quest to become relevant to children, we risk being pathetically boring, and so denying them the greatest blessing going to church can bring: the love of God expressed in the story of Jesus.

What children today desire, according to Struková’s research, is “the realness or authenticity of faith.” What we give them instead is a hastily painted undersea mural. In the memorable words of Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster, young people “look to the church to show them something, someone, capable of turning their lives inside out and the world upside down. Most of the time we have offered them pizza.”

Even the popular object-oriented play curricula (like *Godly Play*) suffer in this regard. Sensory learning has its place in Christian education, and my own children



There's room on campus for free speech...
...very little room.

This pro-life University student
was arrested for trespassing
on her own campus.

The first thing Muslim children learn about Christians is one of the last things Christians learn about themselves: we are a 'people of the Book.'

have benefited from free play with biblical and liturgical elements. But man cannot live on *Godly Play* alone. In the first place, we risk tying the experience of God so closely to the objects of instruction that when these things go back on the shelf, so too will the gospel. Further, classroom environments for children are so remarkably different from the experience of going to "big church" that we risk giving an impression that faith, like dolls and toy trucks, is something to mature beyond. A steady diet of object-oriented curricula can only reinforce the very problem we are addressing: Once Christian children grow up, they may consider it time to put away childish things like wooden shepherds, miniature baptisms, and, alas, Christianity.

LOVE STORY

So what do we do? Perhaps the answer is much simpler, and more "old-fashioned," than we think: Maybe we ought to be teaching churchgoers to read the gospel. The first

thing Muslim children learn about Christians is one of the last things Christians learn about themselves: we are a "people of the Book." Perhaps we ought to ask how to make this observation from the Qur'an true, once more, among those who fellowship around the Bible. How can we form ourselves as a people of the Book?

Any decent elementary-school librarian knows that getting children to read is about giving them a chance to love a story—to miss it during mundane events like math and dinner, and to fight throughout the day for chances to hide away with the characters and adventures to which they've become attached. Of course, what Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John offer us is a story, but not just a story. It's also the linguistic vessel through which we encounter the loving, creating, and saving God. The central character in this narrative loves us back. After asking, "Do you love what you are reading?" the Christian educator ought to be able to add, "And are

you loved by what you are reading?"

If we could surrender our anxiety-ridden need for novelty, we could think about how to "work with the words" of the gospel in a way that makes God's loving call resound anew for children and adults alike. In learning to read the gospel, we would be giving ourselves the greatest and most formative gift possible: the gift of love for the fundamental story of the world, and a way of receiving and experiencing the divine love that story narrates. Imagine a church in which children and adults of all ages, races, and classes were bound together by their common love for the words of the gospel. If Christians can learn, week after week, to read the story of Jesus of Nazareth—to love what we read, to be loved by what we read—then surely the future of the church would look a bit more hopeful. ✚

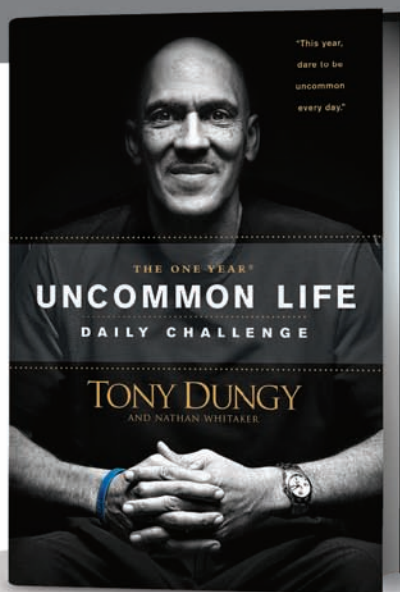
Anthony D. Baker is the Clinton S. Quin Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Seminary of the Southwest (Austin, Texas).

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RAIG KEENER has the brain of a scholar and the hands of an activist. The New Testament professor at Asbury Theological Seminary has authored 15 books, 70 journal articles, and more than 100 articles for religious and general interest publications. He and his wife, Médine Moussounga Keener, are deeply involved in ethnic reconciliation ministry.

In his New Testament commentaries, Keener has investigated biblical miracles. But his newest volume—*Miracles: The Cred-*

ibility of the New Testament Accounts (Baker Academic)—focuses on contemporary miracle accounts, citing hundreds of recent occurrences.

Keener is ordained in a historic African American church and served as an associate minister before moving to Asbury's campus in Wilmore, Kentucky. *Christianity Today* senior writer Tim Stafford interviewed Keener this fall.

Miracles are an unusual subject for a New Testament scholar. What led you to it?

I was going to write a footnote in my commentary on Acts, and was dealing with questions of historical reliability. Many scholars dismiss miracle stories as not historically plausible, arguing that they arose as legendary accretions.

I was familiar with [contemporary] reports of miracles taking place. There must be thousands of such reports. It was inconceivable to me that people would say eyewitnesses can't claim to have seen such things.

What do you want to accomplish with this book?

Primarily, to challenge scholars who dismiss miracles in the Gospels as legends and not historically plausible. Eyewitnesses say these kinds of things all the time. I also want to challenge the bias that says these things can't be supernatural. I believe God does miracles, and I don't see why we scholars are not allowed to talk about it.

You're trying to break open the naturalistic tradition of writing history that scholars have followed for centuries.

I understand the historical paradigms within which we work, and I'm able to work within those by bracketing out certain questions. But I wonder who made up the rule that we have to bracket out those questions, and why we are obligated to follow such rules. The way the

DAVID STEPHENSON

Scholar **Craig Keener** rediscovers the reality of divine

It's Okay to Ex



Touched by a Miracle: Through eyewitness accounts from his wife Médine's family, scholar Keener came to believe in the credibility of such reports.

intervention. Interview by Tim Stafford

pect a Miracle

discipline of historiography has been defined, such questions get punted to philosophy or theology.

How is the world today different from philosopher David Hume's world, or theologian Rudolf Bultmann's, who said that a modern man who turns on an electric light can't possibly believe in a miracle?

In Hume's day, nobody he knew had experienced a miracle. But there were miracle accounts, and he addresses them in a very circular way.

Blaise Pascal's niece was instantly and publicly healed of a running eye sore. Hume cites the documentation for that, which most people would say was pretty good, then dismisses it by saying we know that miracles don't happen. It's a circular argument: We know that miracles don't happen because it's the common experience of humans that miracles don't happen.

It was Hume who first spoke of miracles as violations of nature. But Christians don't believe that the Legislator is subject to any of the laws of nature.

In Bultmann's day, there also weren't a lot of miracle claims. Today, we know so much more. Scholars need to go back and look again. A Pew poll I mention in my book surveyed Pentecostal and charismatic Christians in 10 countries who claim to have experienced miracles. If you total those up, we are talking about 200 million people. To dismiss miracles because they run against uniform human experience is an ethnocentric argument.

Do you think academia is genuinely open to a paradigm shift?

The academy comes to paradigm shifts with great difficulty. People are more open to it today than they would have been in Bultmann's day. In most of the places I've presented this, the response has been very positive. Still, I don't expect skeptics to throw down their skepticism.

What does New Testament scholarship gain from taking miracle stories seriously as historical phenomena?

We have been embarrassed by the miracle stories, and have tended to allegorize them more than other narratives. Accounts from the Temple of Asclepius, the Greek god of healing—nobody allegorizes those.

I agree that the Gospel writers are teaching us broader principles with broader applications. But in much of the majority world, when people read these narratives of healing, they see a God who cares about their suffering, who meets them at their point of need. I think we in the West can learn from the way they hear.

Does your personal background play a role in your views on miracles?

Certainly. I was an atheist before I was a Christian, and for

that reason, I have some sympathy for skeptical perspectives.

When I was working on my historical Jesus book and trying to stay within these historical paradigms, I wouldn't admit things for which I could not offer evidence. Then my wife would say things to me, and I would reply, "Can you give me evidence for that?" I got into a lot of trouble. That approach doesn't work in the rest of life. If you find someone generally trustworthy, you will trust him or her whether or not he

or she can provide evidence for every detail. I was well into this book when, having encountered so much evidence, I stopped trying to be neutral and said, "This is my view."

[As a young man] I had a very dramatic conversion. I had been demanding evidence in the form of an argument. God gave me the evidence of his presence. God's presence was in the room. He wouldn't let me go.

Two days after my conversion, I wasn't sure if I had done it right, so I asked a pastor to pray with me. I was

overwhelmed again by the same awesome sense of God. There was no way I could praise him enough unless he gave me the words. It started coming out in another language. I had never heard of speaking in tongues, I didn't know what it was. It just happened to me.

My ordination is in the National Baptist Convention USA, so technically I'm a black Baptist. My wife does not pray in tongues. But her mainstream evangelical church in the Congo testifies to people being raised from the dead. In that sense, the Congolese church is far more charismatic than almost any charismatic experience I know of here.

How has your wife's family influenced you?

Médine comes from Congo-Brazzaville. She was introducing me to people in the Eglise Evangelique du Congo, her denomination. As she introduced me to people, I asked them for their stories.

It was remarkable. I got seven eyewitness accounts of people being raised from the dead. One was my sister-in-law, Therese. I asked my mother-in-law to tell me about it, with my wife translating from one of the local languages. My mother-in-law described how Therese was bitten by a snake. By the time my mother-in-law got to her, she wasn't breathing. No medical help was available. She strapped the child to her back and ran to a nearby village, where a friend who was an evangelist prayed for Therese. She started breathing again.

I asked my mother-in-law how long Therese had stopped breathing. She thought about how long it takes to get up this hill and down this hill from one village to another. She said about three hours.

I was talking about some of this at a Society of Biblical Literature meeting. We were talking about the Gospel of Matthew, and I said, "Maybe we should listen to some of the majority-world readings of these passages." Sometimes they

It was Hume who first spoke of miracles as violations of nature. But Christians don't believe that the Legislator is subject to any of the laws of nature.'

~ Craig Keener

have experiences that are more analogous to the experiences in the text.

When I finished, a scholar from Nigeria proceeded to give two first-hand accounts of his own—one, a nature miracle, and the other concerning his stillborn son. The midwife pronounced the child dead. They continued to pray, and after a half-hour, the child started breathing. He just finished his master's degree. (And by the way, Therese finished a master's degree.) There was no brain damage. I've heard a large number of such accounts.

In your book, you use the phrase “supernatural causation,” but you seem uneasy with it. Is anything not supernaturally caused? What makes a miracle different in terms of God’s involvement in everything else he does, such as sunrises?

I felt I had to use the category of supernatural because, to address the questions as they exist in our culture, I needed to articulate it in terms that were at hand.

But the category of supernatural really isn't a biblical perspective. It's using Hume's paradigm. If we believe that God is the Creator and is sovereign, then he is at work in the whole world around us.

I would make a theological distinction between gifts of healings and the signs and wonders in the Gospels and Acts. Both show God's compassion. If we prayed for healing (as we are told to in James 5), and somebody experienced it through medical treatment, that's a gift from God. But that's not going to convince anybody on the same level as will somebody being raised from the dead.

One is a gift from God and the other is a sign. Is that the right terminology?

In both cases, God is conferring a blessing, but only one is evidentially persuasive, drawing people's attention to the gospel.

A friend of mine talks about his brother, who had burns all over his body. His father had been praying. My friend looked up to see that his brother's skin was completely pink. God chose to do it immediately and visibly. But he didn't have to do it that way for it to be a blessing. When it's *semeion*—a sign—it gets people's attention.

One of your main points is that non-Western cultures may provide a better paradigm for reading the Gospels than the academic Western paradigm. Can you say more?

Most cultures believe and report experiences that do not easily fit our Enlightenment paradigm. Hume may have been aware of that, because he makes a point of dismissing reports from “ignorant, barbarous” peoples. Hume's ethnocentrism is well-documented. It's not an argument that would fly too well in the 21st century.

Are you suggesting that even in our own era, there is an ethnocentrism in the way scholars read the New Testament?

Yes, though I think there is more openness today. If somebody today said what Bultmann said, that nobody in the modern world believes in miracles, then that would be flat-out having your head in the sand.

Should the church concern itself with verifying miraculous healings?

It's valuable for a couple of reasons: first, for limiting fraudulent claims, and second, for providing supporting evidence.

If miracles are meant to get people's attention for the kingdom, we can continue their attention-getting purposes by getting verification. But it's much easier said than done.

What did you experience in terms of trying to verify miracles?

Most people don't collect documentation, and don't know how to get medical documentation.

Documenting that you have a certain problem is one thing. Documenting that you no longer have it is another. Even if you do that, how can you prove that the change was due to prayer?

I have a pastoral concern as well: How far do you press people? I felt very awkward when I was interviewing people and would press them with hard questions. Sometimes they felt that I was questioning their integrity or even their experience.

Some people have said that since we know that everything must have a natural explanation, we know there will be a natural explanation someday; there, we have solved the problem, it's not a miracle. At Lourdes, there are many cases with plenty of evidence, but not enough to meet very strict standards.

You mentioned that verifications discourage fraud. How concerned should we be with fraud?

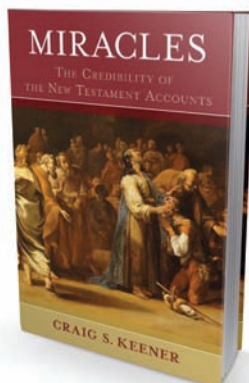
Some people exaggerate. I didn't catch people in that, but other people have. Sometimes there is just no way of knowing, which is one reason I tried to depend on people I know.

Not everything that people claim to be a miracle is one. Certainly before we broadcast people's testimonies, we should try to discern reality. My guess is that people are likely to make fraudulent claims to get attention.

I want to make sure everybody knows that miracles occur and that I believe in them. I'm not claiming that they need to happen every time we pray. My wife and I have been through eight miscarriages. People die. The apostles are all dead. There is not an expectation of people always being healed.

How do the healing and miracle testimonies from the majority world influence the Western church?

We have an explosion of miracles taking place, especially in conjunction with the spread of the gospel. Some things are outside the norm for most Westerners, whatever kind of church we are associated with. It's probably good for us, to shake us up. Extraordinary things are taking place around the world. ☩



What God taught me through my daughter's disability. By Amy Julia Becker

My Perfect Child

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UR DAUGHTER was born at 5:22 P.M. on a Friday afternoon. For two hours, we reveled in the sweetness of new life—her pouty lips and soft skin, her deep blue eyes, her full head of black hair. Then a nurse called my husband out of the room.

When Peter returned, it took me a moment to see that his eyes were brimming. “The doctors think Penny has Down syndrome,” he told me. And the world began to break into pieces.

A few hours later, a woman was giving birth in the adjoining room. “She’s perfect! She’s perfect!” they exclaimed, as

another baby girl was born.

In those early hours, I came face to face with my unspoken assumptions about my child. I had thought Penny would be just like me—a little girl who walked early and taught herself to read, who won academic awards in high school and got in early at Princeton. Peter, who was a high-school teacher and a varsity athlete, had shared many of those assumptions, expecting to see his competitive spirit in his new daughter.

Despite our Christian faith, we had sub-Christian expectations about our children’s appearance, education, and abilities. I would never have stated it so bluntly, but in truth I wanted and even thought I deserved a “perfect” child. God gave me a child with an extra fold of skin around her eyes and floppy limbs and intellectual limitations. I didn’t know what to do.

Doctors consider Down syndrome a birth defect. Other words to describe it include *abnormality* and *disability*. According to the doctors, Penny would have trouble learning. She would probably need glasses and possibly hearing aids. She



would never be even five feet tall. She would have trouble communicating. I quickly learned that many doctors and parents alike believe children like Penny should never be born. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommends that every pregnant woman receive prenatal screening for Down syndrome. Of the women who screen for Down syndrome and receive a prenatal diagnosis via chorionic villus sampling or amniocentesis, 90 percent choose to terminate their pregnancies. From the moment she was conceived, our daughter fell short of our medical and cultural standards of worth.

After Penny was born, I thought I needed to abandon the hope of perfection altogether. Sin will always render me and my children imperfect. But I still wasn't sure how to think of her, how to have hopes and dreams for her once those initial expectations were stripped away.

When Penny was five months old, I was playing with her in our living room. By that point, I no longer saw her in terms of what she couldn't do. My heart skipped a beat when she turned her head at the sound of my voice. I had felt wonder as her eyelashes grew long and dark, when she smiled and cooed, when she nestled against my chest for comfort. That day, as I massaged her pudgy legs and wiped strands of dark hair from her eyes, I remembered a verse from Matthew 5: "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Jesus was vulnerable, needy, dependent, and limited, but I wasn't able to see him that way until Penny illuminated it for me.

I looked it up in my Greek New Testament. The Greek word that was translated perfect is *teleioi*, which comes from the word *telos*, meaning "complete," "whole," "full-grown," or "mature." In other words, this perfection has to do with becoming a certain type of person. It has to do with becoming the complete, whole, mature, full version of ourselves.

A few verses earlier, Jesus offers his description of blessed humanity. A quick glance at the Beatitudes makes clear that being fully human—being "perfectly" human—is not about physique, intelligence, or abilities. It is about meekness, sorrow, and longing for God. Being fully human implies understanding ourselves as creatures. As ones who are not God but rather formed by God, cared

for by God, in need of God. Or, to put it differently, a major aspect of recognizing my humanity meant recognizing that I am vulnerable, needy, dependent, and limited.

Just like my daughter.

These aren't words that naturally resonate with our usual idea of perfection, but they align with the Beatitudes. They are also in tune with other passages, such as Jesus' description of those who will participate in the great wedding feast, a symbol of the kingdom of heaven: the outcast, the disabled, the poor, the needy. In other words, those utterly dependent on God's gracious provision.

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This idea of perfection also lines up with Paul's conception of the body of Christ, that we each have gifts to offer the church, which assumes we each have limitations. We are dependent on one another.

And even Jesus, who was and is the perfect human, had limitations. He needed sleep. He needed to eat. He needed friends to pray for him. He was vulnerable to suffering and even death.

Henri Nouwen, among others, has helped me understand the connection between vulnerable humanity and Jesus. Nouwen, a longtime professor at Yale University, spent his final years living among people with intellectual and physical disabilities in a L'Arche community in Canada. In *Adam: God's Beloved*, his book about the man with whom he spent the most time, Nouwen writes, "I am not saying that Adam was a second Jesus. But I am saying that because of the vulnerability of Jesus, we can see Adam's extremely vulnerable life as a life of utmost spiritual significance." Jesus was vulnerable, needy, dependent, and limited, but I wasn't able to see him that way until



Penny came into my life.

Five years ago, the hopeful and joyous words from the hospital room next door—"She's perfect! She's perfect!"—haunted me. Now they seem prophetic. Penny was not the "perfect baby" that I expected, but she was exactly the baby I needed. I look at her now, giggling with her little sister, complaining that her brother isn't sharing his toys, sitting in my lap and whispering that she's afraid she'll be lonely when she goes to kindergarten. I don't see much that's different from other children.

Penny is both created in God's image and fallen from grace—like everyone else. By giving me a new understanding of God's view of perfection, Penny has offered us a way to participate more fully in the body of Christ as we become

more and more human and more whole. 

Amy Julia Becker is author of *A Good and Perfect Gift: Faith, Expectations, and a Little Girl Named Penny* (Bethany House). She regularly contributes to *Her.meneutics*, *Christianity Today's* blog for women.



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Walk a
DIFFERENT
PATH

The Kingdom in Columbus

Why the world's largest Vineyard church
is drawing people from 104 nations
in central Ohio.

By Katelyn Beaty

THE DAY they arrived at the church's doorstep on a sweltering July morning in 2010, Venant and Nshimira were weary travelers losing faith in God's provision. Refugees from the volatile eastern Congo, the couple had been resettled the previous September in Columbus, Ohio. Among their few possessions was a box stuffed with legal documents, leftovers from their case recently abandoned by a resettlement agent. When they arrived in Columbus, they had joined a French-speaking group for African expats, whose leader, Emmanuel Sotondji, invited them to accompany him to his church of a decade, Vineyard Columbus (VC), in suburban Westerville.

"The first time I saw Venant, his face showed so much fear," remembers Chris Childers, a social worker at VC since 2009. "He wasn't sure where he was in his faith."

And for good reason. Venant had been tortured by soldiers of a Rwandan terrorist group and suffered severe back and neck pain. He and Nshimira spoke zero English. Their furniture was a mattress and chairs with no backs; their six children slept atop blankets strewn across the linoleum kitchen floor of a two-bedroom apartment.

Childers immediately brought her 25 years of social service work to bear. She discovered they were eligible for food stamps and health benefits and could reduce their electric bill, which was burning through 10 percent of their income. She recruited another VC minister to gather layette supplies and furnishings for the couple's seventh child, arriving any day, and e-mailed VC's staff members, who brought a truckload of furniture in two days. She located an ESL class within walking distance of the apartment (learning English is required for continued federal benefits). And, in a gesture unseen at their resettlement agency, Childers, Sotondji, and associate pastor Bill Christensen prayed for complete healing of Venant's scars.

The couple represent 1 of the 104 nations now gathered at the largest church in the Vineyard movement, a loose association of 1,500 congregations that infuse evangelical distinctives with the

"signs and wonders" of the charismatic movement. VC's multicultural push over the past decade marks the next wave of a denomination taking its strong "kingdom of God" theology to the ends of the earth—or, rather, welcoming the ends of the earth to its Western center.

'A SERIOUS TIPPING POINT'

It's no happenstance that VC's international flavor has been driven by a culturally Jewish, formerly atheist lawyer. "My passion for immigrants and racial reconciliation comes from the sense that I'm not an insider to white evangelicalism," says Rich Nathan, 56. The New York City native came to Christ when a friend, Marlene, took him to a Messianic Seder meal his freshman year at Case Western Reserve University. "When the pastor broke the matzo and explained the connection between the Last Supper and the Passover, the Holy Spirit hit me in the chest," says Nathan, whose wiry dark hair and 5'8" frame betray his lineage. Nine months later, Nathan was president of the college's InterVarsity chapter. He eventually married Marlene, and while he was teaching law at Ohio State University in the mid-'80s, they attended a revival in Harrogate, England. John Wimber, a leading founder of the Vineyard and a charismatic church-growth enthusiast, had planned to teach on healing, but at the last minute, sensing a Spirit nudge, spoke on the pearl of great price. "Some of you tonight are wondering about whether God is calling you into full-time ministry. You will know it's the Lord when there is no more time." Nathan says he gripped his seat, knowing God had answered his prayer for a sign.

That was 1986. The following year, Nathan became VC's senior



Grateful Sojourners: Congolese refugees Venant, Nshimira, and their 7 kids are thriving thanks to Vineyard Columbus and member Emmanuel Sotondji (center). "Now I see God's power," says Venant.



NICK FANCHER

pastor, and the fledgling congregation was adopted into the Vineyard. Since then, he has pushed to make sure VC's ethnic makeup matches that of Columbus: currently 64 percent white, 28 percent African American, and 4 percent Latino. Since 2001, VC has gone from 10 percent to 28 percent non-majority persons, and each Sunday attracts people from 44 of Ohio's 88 counties.

"There's been a serious tipping point," says Andy Saperstein, VC's small groups pastor, noting that for over a decade now the church has prioritized reaching international communities and modeling racial diversity. Pastor Christensen says outreach to African Americans began in 2000, and to immigrants and refugees in 2006. Now people from 104 of the world's 196 nations attend weekend services, whose total attendance tops 9,000.

Nathan roots such multiculturalism not in the politically correct

"diversity campaigns" of mainline churches but in the Vineyard's kingdom theology. "Along with signs and wonders and healings and reconciled marriages, one of the great signs of God's kingdom is visible diversity in the local church," he says. "We ought to see Revelation 7:9 right now. There's no way apart from Jesus that this group of people would gather for anything, because naturally, birds of a feather flock together."

But diverse flocks don't always fly in the same direction. "Is there tension? Absolutely," says Christensen. "What do you do when a subcommittee has a highly organized American, a very organized Kenyan woman, and a Hispanic woman from Colombia who says, 'I want to make sure we just feel really loose and let this thing happen?'"

That Colombian, Maria Clayborn, "fell in love with the church" after moving to the United States in 2000 to get married. At VC, she

received English lessons and legal advice. She's taught a "Spanish for Gringos" course at its community center for three years. Now a U.S. citizen, Clayborn feels the church often overlooks Latinos, whose numbers in Columbus have grown 158 percent since she arrived. "The church has a heart for the Muslim people," she says, "but they don't realize there are all these Hispanic people. Hispanics are filling this country with children who are going to be the future."

POLITICAL AND PERSONAL

Yet a Latino like Clayborn couldn't find a more aggressively welcoming white church in Columbus than VC. Nathan himself never shies from politics. He hosted a Sojourners "Justice Revival" at the church in 2008, to the consternation of some members and area pastors. And

had paid a Florida attorney \$5,000 to get the wife's visa renewed. After hearing nothing for a year, they paid an Ohio attorney another \$2,000, only to find that the first attorney had swindled them. The wife was deported back to Port-au-Prince; the husband turned to VC's legal clinic to land a work visa and a job to support their three children. Then the earthquake hit. No word from the wife for months.

"Praise the Lord, she was found. But the chances of her coming back are now slim to none," says Childers, noting that once one of their children turns 18, he has to wait at least 8 more years to apply to bring her back.

"Unless we're willing to turn our backs on evangelical family values, we have to figure out an earned pathway to citizenship," says Nathan, reflecting the denomination's stance. Bert Waggoner,

Persuasive Pastor: An attorney by training, Rich Nathan is a skilled evangelist. 'I've drawn the bridge diagram on barf bags dozens of times.'



'A great sign of God's kingdom is visible diversity in the local church. There's no way apart from Jesus that this group of people would gather for anything.'

~ Rich Nathan, senior pastor

NICK FANCHER

he has pushed for immigration reform, calling it "a biblical imperative" in sermons, op-eds, and speeches on Capitol Hill.

This March, during a sermon on Matthew 25, Nathan asked all those foreign-born to stand. "Our church is not interested in just welcoming you. We want to bless you, whatever your status," he proclaimed. Hundreds flooded the front of the auditorium, where church leaders laid hands on them. A member of Conservatives for Comprehensive Immigration Reform, Nathan advocates a "third way" for the estimated 12 million immigrants here illegally: neither complete amnesty nor deportation, but a pathway to citizenship governed by a system of checks and balances.

"It's not like the church went looking to get involved in policy," says Erin Kutnow, VC's immigration reform advocate, who says it's the Columbus-area evangelical church most engaged on immigration. "Once you're in relationship with [people] and find out the variables that affect their day-to-day lives, you begin caring about things you hadn't."

One Haitian family had such an effect on VC last year. The couple

the Vineyard national director since 2000, says it "took a very strong stand" when it encouraged the National Association of Evangelicals to sign a document calling for more just immigration laws in 2009. "We took the position that we were going to embrace immigrants," he says.

"Vineyard Columbus expresses in macro what is micro in our churches," says Waggoner. "We call ourselves 'Vineyard: A Community of Churches,' focusing on the fact

that one of the foremost signs of the kingdom is the emergence of God's people . . . becoming more multiethnic. All of this comes out of our kingdom theology."

ISLAM NEXT DOOR

From his office, Saperstein watches two fully veiled women walk across VC's parking lot. "This is a normal sight," says VC's in-house expert on Muslim bridge-building in Columbus and abroad. "There's been a paradigm shift in Columbus in the past 15 to 20 years in terms of proximity of Muslims and Christians."

Saperstein and his wife were sent by VC to work in Central Asia, where they led educational development projects among Muslims for 12 years. Then Andy did a stint as associate director of Yale's Muslim-Christian Reconciliation Program. VC hired the extraordinarily well-qualified Saperstein in 2009 to, among other things, help the church engage Muslims appropriately, because it was increasingly apparent how deep the need was. Columbus has the second-largest

population of Somali refugees (after Minneapolis), and most area Muslims are Somalis, some 35,000 by conservative estimates. Fifteen miles from VC is Noor Islamic Cultural Center, one of the largest American mosques built post-9/11, linked to the Rifqa Bary “teen runaway” case in 2009.

VC sees the influx as both an outreach opportunity and a hard lesson in cultural sensitivity. Before joining VC’s pastoral staff in 1996, Christensen and his family worked among Muslims in Morocco for 11 years. “We made efforts a few years ago that were too hard and fast, too aggressive,” he says; “targeting” Muslims backfired among local Islamic community leaders, many of whom connected such efforts with colonial missions in their former countries that were manipulative and culture-destroying. “They are highly sensitive to churches saying, ‘I’ll give you this [social service] if you accept this truth,’” says Christensen.

Since then, VC has “pulled back” and now approaches Muslims the same way it does other internationals: through service, notably ESL classes, a legal clinic, and a food pantry, which this spring added a *halal* section. Rick Love, a Vineyard consultant on Muslim-Christian relations, believes this holistic, “blessing the nations” approach is best for engaging Muslims in a pluralistic society. “*Blessing* refers to God’s gracious favor and power bestowed on those who respond to him by faith. This expression of God’s global purposes refutes all forms of racism or tribalism,” he wrote in a 2011 paper for the Society of Vineyard Scholars.

Mussa Farah, president of the Columbus nonprofit Horn of Africa Rescue Committee, has encouraged fellow Somalis to send their kids to VC’s after-school program. It’s hosted in VC’s 40,000-square-foot community center, which is dotted with signage in Somali. “Vineyard Columbus is the best church in Ohio,” says Farah. “Somalis welcome Vineyard because their kids’ education has changed. I have the highest respect for them.”

But so far, VC’s holistic ministry has not led to many professions of faith in Christ among Muslims. Less than two dozen Muslim-background people have joined the church, and engaging Somali families in the apartment complex across the street has been challenging, says the VC member who started a tutoring program there six years ago (and who asked to remain anonymous). While a few families send their kids to the community center, “it’s like the church parking lot is a barrier,” he says. “Some of the Somalis think if they go to the community center, they are going to church.”



The Mingling Pot: VC’s first international festival last year drew 650. This year’s drew over 1,800.

“It’s easier to engage Muslims with social service” and “more challenging to engage them on matters of the substance of faith,” says Saperstein.

One path forward may be drawing on a core Vineyard conviction: that the Holy Spirit will show up. Wimber, who led the controversial “Signs, Wonders, and Church Growth” course at Fuller Theological Seminary from 1982 to 1985, taught that the works of Jesus—healing the sick, feeding the multitudes, and creating disciples—are available to believers as evidence of God’s in-breaking kingdom. Wimber advocated an “empowered evangelicalism” that combines biblical authority and social engagement with healing, tongues, and prophecy. VC embodies this approach: In a five-week span this spring, it hosted an advocacy training on immigration that drew 450, and a “Holy Spirit Empowerment Night” where the Spirit

was invited to minister through “spontaneous prophetic revelations, gifts of tongues, and other spiritual gifts.”

“I think there’s actually a strong connection between the signs and wonders, and how we engage with Muslims,” says Saperstein. Over the course of a meal with Muslim friends on a trip to visit the Sapersteins in Central Asia, Nathan prayed over a woman whose daughter was thought to be barren, a dismal fate in her culture. “In short order,” Saperstein says, the daughter became pregnant, and her mother came to embrace Jesus “in a way that didn’t extract her from her Muslim culture.

“We serve a *living* God. If we invite God to work in the life of a Muslim friend, Muslims encounter Jesus in contexts like that,” says Saperstein.

Today, instead of averting his gaze, Venant, the refugee from the Congo, greets social worker Childers with, “Hello, Sister Christine! *God is power.*” At VC’s international festival this spring—where 1,800 African Christians, Hindus, Muslims, and nonbelievers arrived at the 250,000-square-foot church to eat, laugh, and learn a bit about Jesus—Venant and Nshimira danced and sang praises in Congolese before the crowd.

“Christians here have so much opportunity to touch the nations without leaving their neighborhood,” Saperstein says. “I don’t know what God has in mind in gathering this range of people to this place, but whatever it is, it’s incredibly exciting.”

Katelyn Beaty is associate editor at *Christianity Today*, where she edits the women’s blog, *Her.meneutics*, and the *This Is Our City* project.

A Senior Moment

The elderly population is steadily growing and will be for years.

How some ministries are embracing the challenge.

By John W. Kennedy

THE RATIO between young and old is changing, and soon the whole world will look like Florida,” observed journalist Gavin du Venage last year. He’s right. A drop in infant mortality, eradication of certain diseases, better medical care, and healthier diets all have helped boost longevity in the developed West to record levels. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 5.8 percent of the population is 75 or older, and 1.5 percent (5 million) is 85 or older—the fastest-growing demographic segment.

There are myriad examples of people living on their own into their 90s and functioning well. But virtually all who live long enough will need help at the end of their lives, whether through the physical assistance of family or a health care provider. If a person lives into the late 80s or early 90s, he or she will likely live in an assisted living facility, skilled-nursing center, or long-term care facility. And, of course, there is no guarantee that those extra years are going to be pleasant and pain-free. Contrary to rosy propaganda, 85 is not the new 65.

The elder population boom will affect everyone, and the church has an important role to play. In understanding the situation and what areas need improvement, congregations learn that they too benefit when they are involved in supporting the frail elderly.

ASSISTING THE CAREGIVERS

Octogenarian Luella “Blue” Koelling gradually required more attention in her Sullivan, Missouri, home from her 64-year-old daughter, Christine Williams. For two years, Williams paid for 24-hour private care during the week, usually from people she knew from church, the First Assembly of God. Typically two parishioners worked 12-hour shifts each day. Williams often dropped by before and after work to hear about new pains her mother wanted to talk about. There was always a new malady.

“Mother really enjoyed the attention,” says Williams. “She would get irritated if I visited only once a day.”

It was difficult to find caretakers for weekends, so Williams would stay at her mother’s home from Friday evening through Sunday evening.

With old age, Koelling’s medical problems—Parkinson’s disease,

osteoarthritis, knee replacements—piled up. She had spinal surgery two years ago, shoulder surgery last year, and a stroke this year. She could no longer stand up without assistance or cut her own food. “I felt no resentment,” Williams says about caring for her mother while balancing other daily tasks. “The hardest thing was I felt like I should be with my husband a lot.”

Daughters’ Love: Arlene Allen and Christine Williams (left and center) continue to care for their mother daily in her new nursing home.



When a parent reaches 85, it usually falls to the children to make decisions on where the parent will dwell during that sometimes long, gradual decline. Determining how to care for loved ones can create a considerable amount of distress for family members.

According to the 2009 report *Caregiving in the U.S.*, 43.5 million (19 percent of the population) are involved in caring for an older adult (someone 50 or older). Only 10 percent of the time does a son handle home care; it is nearly always a daughter, granddaughter, or niece who assumes the role.

However, an unpaid relative quickly faces burnout if daily tasks include helping one get dressed, bathed, and fed. Add shopping, housekeeping, and laundering, and the experience can stress or even harm the health of the caregiver—especially if the person is in the workforce full-time or still raising children.

A whole new industry has developed to assist adult children caring for homebound parents. Warren Heard, a member of the home-care business for 39 years, says the aged overwhelmingly prefer to remain in their residence as long as possible because of the familiar surroundings. Placing a person with decreasing mobility and memory in a facility can cause confusion, anxiety, and fear.

Various companies offer in-home care, with workers paid by long-term care insurance or private funding. The standard national wage for certified home health aides working on shifts ranges from \$16

to \$21 an hour; live-in companions can cost \$175 to \$350 a day. The fees aren't Medicare eligible.

"There is an extreme shortage of caregivers who possess the character and quality to provide the compassion that's needed," says Heard, who recently formed Christian Elder Care in Oklahoma City. "The home-care industry is not a wealth maker. The profit margins are so low."

NO VISITORS

When a family doesn't have the financial means or physical strength to offer care, moving to one of the nation's 16,100 nursing homes may be inevitable. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there are 1.57 million residents in nursing homes, staying an average of 835 days. In 2010, the average nursing home resident paid \$74,270 for a semi-private room or \$83,585 for a private bed. Medicaid covers the costs of around two-thirds of nursing home residents—after they have drained their assets and apply Social Security and pension benefits for care.

Transitioning into a nursing home can be emotionally jarring. All of one's possessions must fit in a single bedroom or, more likely, half of one. Residents are in an institutional atmosphere where they know no one, and mealtimes and dining companions are regimented by strangers. In a diminished physical and mental capacity, residents

frequently believe they have outlived their usefulness and are a burden to their children. On the other hand, many elderly, whose health seems out of control, enjoy the structure and activities of the nursing home schedule.

In April, 85-year-old Koelling moved to a nursing home in Nixa. Older daughter Arlene Allen, who recently retired as director of the Assemblies of God national women's ministry, visits her mother daily to help with bathing, feeding, and laundering. "I had feelings of guilt that my sister was carrying the load. I feel good that I'm able to do it now."

While Koelling's situation seems typical, Allen's regular visits make her experience unusual: Apart from interaction at a church service or Bible study, an astounding 85 percent of nursing home residents never receive personal one-on-one visits, according to Bill Goodrich, executive director of God Cares Ministry in Avon Lake, Ohio. "People in a nursing home cannot have Christian fellowship unless the Christians come to them," says Goodrich. "These truly are the least of these—the weak and disenfranchised."

Goodrich, 52, has dedicated nearly half his life to nursing home ministry. Over time, he has developed principles that have been implemented in over 200 nursing homes. God Cares sponsors workshops and publishes materials to provide basic nursing home ministry training.

Ministry team members first establish a caring friendship with residents. In time, visitors encourage residents to pray, asking Jesus to help them



AARON SCOTT

find faith, hope, peace, and purpose. In addition to one-on-one visits and group church services, God Cares sponsors picnics, birthday parties, and sing-alongs.

Goodrich believes many nursing home ministries falter when the focus isn't on Jesus. Pushing doctrine discourages diverse attendees, such as Catholics, Baptists, Pentecostals, and non-Christians, from participating. Erin Hubbard, who attends Providence Evangelical Free Church in Avon, Ohio, visits a nearby nursing home twice a month with other God Cares volunteers. Hubbard, 30, says it is a rewarding ministry in which to involve her children, ages 6, 4, and 2, who sing for residents and chat with them before services.

"God has a real passion for elderly people," Hubbard says. "I've been on overseas missions trips, but I've never experienced such satisfying feelings as these."

QUALIFYING FOR THE BODY

Goodrich concedes that many churchgoers are apprehensive about going into a nursing



Least of These: Bill Goodrich's ministry God Cares has over 800 volunteers caring for the elderly.

home, because they don't know what to do or say. But he urges people to attempt three ministry visits before they decide that such an outreach isn't for them.

The church, for the most part, has ignored ministry to the elderly because there are no visible results or improvement. Often, the elderly don't get better; eventually they die. Goodrich concedes elderly outreach isn't everybody's calling, but he believes each congregation is capable of sending a handful

of people to share the love of Jesus to at least one community facility.

"It's not glamorous, there's no financial gain, and it won't build membership," Goodrich says. "But the fact that this people group does not have the ability to fill pews, give funds, or serve in a ministry does not disqualify them from the body of Christ."

Kay F. Owen, 72, president of Crossroads Ministries in Colorado Springs, says nursing home residents typically are neglected by both family members and church members. She has encountered children of residents who refuse to visit because they find it "depressing," or claim to be too busy with children or work.

Crossroads supplies trained chaplains and volunteer laypeople in 30 assisted living and skilled care centers in four states. They target the spiritual and emotional needs of residents who never receive visitors.

"Christians can go visit residents, hold their hands, pray with them, talk to them," Owen says.

Jeanie Griffin spent years doing that with

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her mother, Maria Corbett. Corbett died five days after her 103rd birthday, at a nursing and rehabilitation center in Wheaton, Illinois. Before breaking her hip at 101, she lived with Griffin and Griffin's husband for six years.

Griffin was unsure whether her mother, who had advanced dementia, recognized her, but she visited Corbett three mornings a week and would play the piano and tell jokes. On the morning of Corbett's peaceful death in July 2011, Griffin played soothing music and repeatedly touched her.

"Growing up, I didn't really appreciate my mother," Griffin says. "She was task-oriented, not a cuddly type person. But at the end I felt great affection and empathy for my mother. As Christians, the first thing we are to do is to love others."

Although only 5 percent of skilled care centers have staff chaplains, nursing homes are required by Medicare to provide unspecified "spiritual care" to residents. Thus, few administrators object to church volunteers conducting worship services or Bible studies. It relieves the facility from having to pay someone to do it, and it does help the residents.

According to the Population Reference Bureau's February 2011 report, there used to be 14 adults in the U.S. workforce for every person over 65. Today, there are 5 working-age adults for every one over 65. By 2050, that number is projected to drop below 3. For economic reasons, Americans cannot sustain the comforts that Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid now provide the elderly. Church volunteers can ease those financial strains.

EMBRACING THE TREND

The United States has the world's largest population of centenarians, about 72,000, nearly twice as many as two decades ago. The total is expected to double again by 2020.

Many church bodies reflect this trend; Life Center embraces it. The Assembly of God congregation of 5,400 in Tacoma, Washington, has its own 156-unit senior independent retirement community and a 58-unit assisted living facility on its campus, as well as a pastor and a church service specifically for the elderly. Fulton Buntain, 85-year-old pastor emeritus, still works every day and

participates in services. Aged laypeople are key volunteers.

"To some degree you can tell the health of a church based on how they treat the weakest people," says Life Center pastor Dean Curry. "You communicate a lot by incorporating the elderly into services, loving them, and letting them make a contribution."

Ward Tanneberg agrees. The executive director of the Christian Association Serving Adults Ministries in Bellevue, Washington, believes we must respect and care for the elderly because of what they gave in the past. "We don't push them in a corner and say they don't count anymore because they can't produce anything," he says.

Besides, those who dismiss the elderly need to remember that they, too, will be there someday. "The church that fails to take care of the elderly in its quest for youth or for crowds is making a huge mistake," Tanneberg says. 

John W. Kennedy is a CT contributing editor based in Springfield, Missouri. His 93-year-old mother has been in hospice care for a year.

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TIMOTHY MANTEI
Master of Divinity Student

For 20 years, Timothy Mantei made a living painting and installing drywall in northern Michigan. As a Luther Seminary Master of Divinity intern in rural North Dakota, he used these skills to lay new kinds of foundations.

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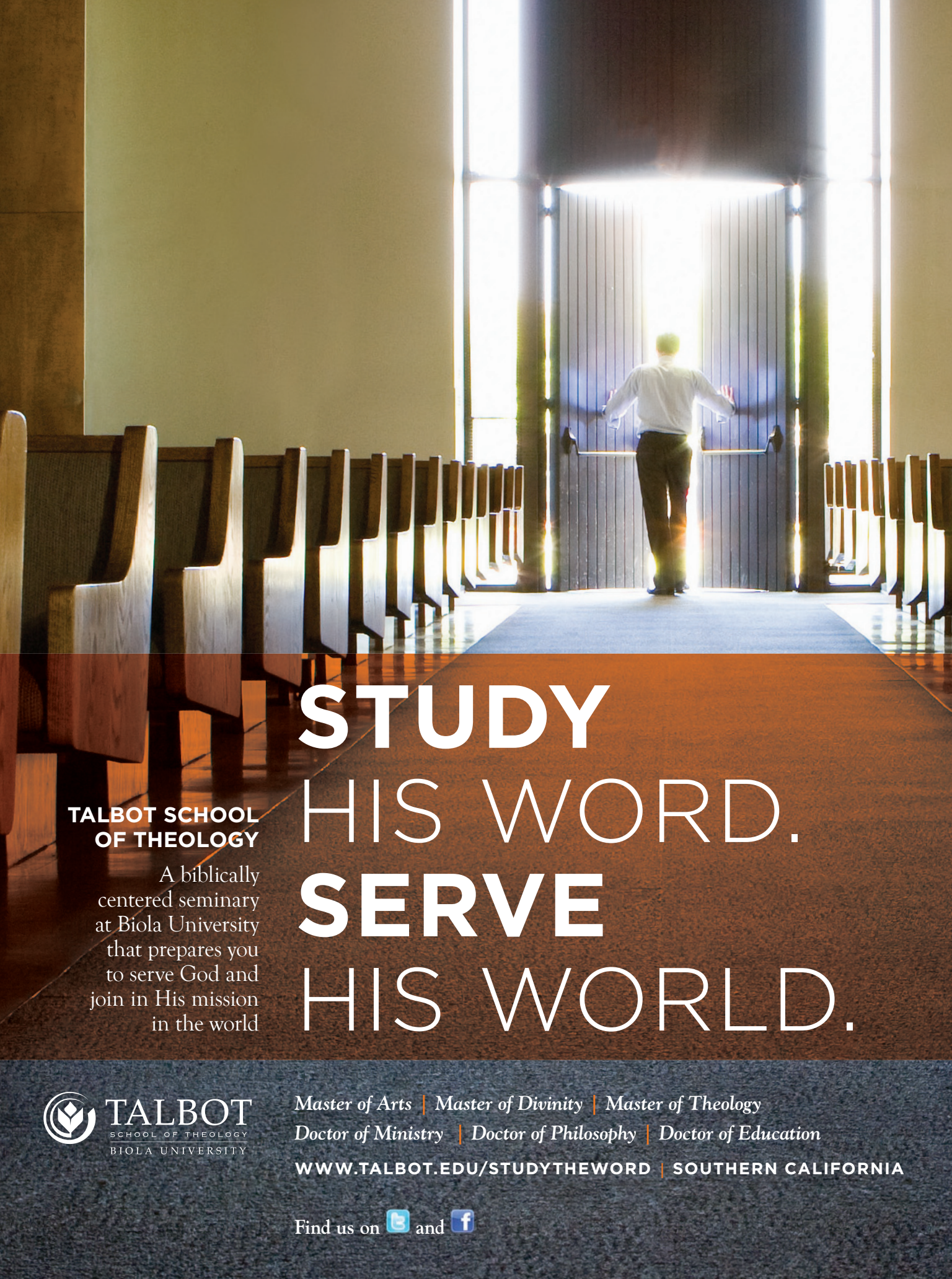
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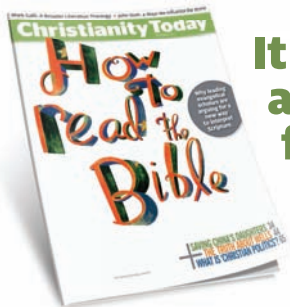
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It is the ability to be self-critical, in any and every reading of the Bible, that makes for powerful, life-altering interpretations.

Kirk Baker
Williamson, New York

Exploring the Word

I read with great interest “How to Read the Bible” [October], and appreciated J. Todd Billings’s emphasis on a theological interpretation of Scripture. But there is a conundrum, as he points out: We derive our theology from our Bible, but our theology drives our interpretation of the Bible.

I believe that if we link a contextual interpretation of Scripture (literary, grammatical, and cultural/historical) and an understanding of genre with a theological interpretation, we will resolve the challenge of bringing God’s ancient, unchanging truths to a 21st-century audience that desperately needs transformation in Christ.

MICHAEL LUNDBERG
Montrose, Colorado

As a pastor, Bible scholar, and Christian, I take issue with Billings’s thesis. He presents a theological reading of Scripture as superior, when it can be either superior or inferior. In fact, he presents one theological read as if it were the only one available.

I wonder if the answer is not preferring one approach to reading the Bible, but rather rejecting a postmodern

attitude that “all readings are equally good.” There is usually something to be gained from every approach, and all have their strengths and weaknesses. A theological reading is no more or less open to abuse and errors than any other kind. It’s the ability to be self-critical, in any and every reading of the Bible, that makes for powerful, life-altering interpretations.

KIRK BAKER
Williamson, New York

Liberal Minds

I’m not at all surprised that people who read the Bible hold to a personal ethos that is often described as liberal [“A Left-Leaning Text,” October]. As a “reading, politically conservative literalist,” I have much in common with people across the political spectrum when discussing societal ills. We part company because my faith demands a personal response, whereas they tend to demand governmental action. If Aaron B. Franzen pushed his research further, I imagine he would find this to be the common point of disconnect.

RAY HESKETH
Fairlawn, Ohio

The subtitle of “A Left-Leaning Text”

TOP 3 What got the most comments in October’s CT

29%

**How to Read
the Bible**
J. Todd Billings

23%

**A Left-Leaning
Text**
Aaron B. Franzen

6%

**The Big Love
Strategy**
Chuck Colson and
Timothy George

READERS’ PICK The most praised piece in October’s CT



**Power Washed
by God**
Carolyn Arends

inspired me to read it and see why Franzen’s conclusion seemed so wrong. I am the poster child of his readers: I have read the Bible every day for as long as I can remember. Apart from his conclusion, I fit his explanation of how I read.

The Bible is hard to read and even harder to understand. People don’t expend the effort on it unless they consider exact meaning important. Thus, dedicated Bible readers like me tend to read everything carefully, including surveys. Words mean what the words mean; they are not necessarily code for political policies, left or right. Unless adequate care is taken to disambiguate code words in surveys like Franzen’s, entirely wrong conclusions might be—and often are—inferred.

TOM PITTMAN
Bolivar, Missouri

Giving Water

I was disappointed in *Christianity Today*’s investigative report “Drilling for Truth” [October]. I’ve known Jim Hocking for decades and support the ministries of ICDI in prayer and dollars, without reservation. I do not know a man of God with more compassion for the people he serves, more integrity in the way he conducts his business, more vision for empowering the Central Africans he’s pouring his life into, or more humility about the amazing things God is doing

COMMENTS? QUESTIONS?

CT’S EDITORS WOULD LOVE TO HEAR THEM.

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through 1CD1. God give us more Jim Hockings!

GLADYS DELOE

President, Grace in ACTION USA
Winona Lake, Indiana

Salute to the Senator

Thank you for your tribute to the late Mark Hatfield ["Unexpected Political Hero," October]. He was indeed a dedicated Christian with strong faith in Jesus. I remember him as a tall, thin teenager at Salem High School, Salem, Oregon. He was a great debater, active in theater and music, and a bit controversial even then. In the Senate, he was always true to his beliefs about "unnecessary wars" and patriotism as a substitute for true worship.

Hatfield was a person of genuine integrity, kind to adversaries, and a true believer—a rare breed in politics today.

CAROLYN CAMPBELL ESTES

Mulberry, Indiana

How We Met

In "The Village Green: Cyberspace Romance" [October], I think Leslie Ludy makes a mistake in dictating how God can or cannot bring two people together, and also in overemphasizing "the story." Since my wife and I met on eHarmony, our story won't live up to the cultural ideal,

but that has never been our goal. We joined eHarmony because close friends and family believed it could be good for us, even though neither of us was actively searching for a spouse. While we resisted at first, we weren't about to tell God how he can accomplish things. Does God not get as much glory from our marriage as he does from Ludy's sister-in-law's?

The manner in which my wife and I met may not be an incredible love story worthy of Hollywood, but how our relationship started is hardly the point.

MATT WISTRAND

Wheaton, Illinois

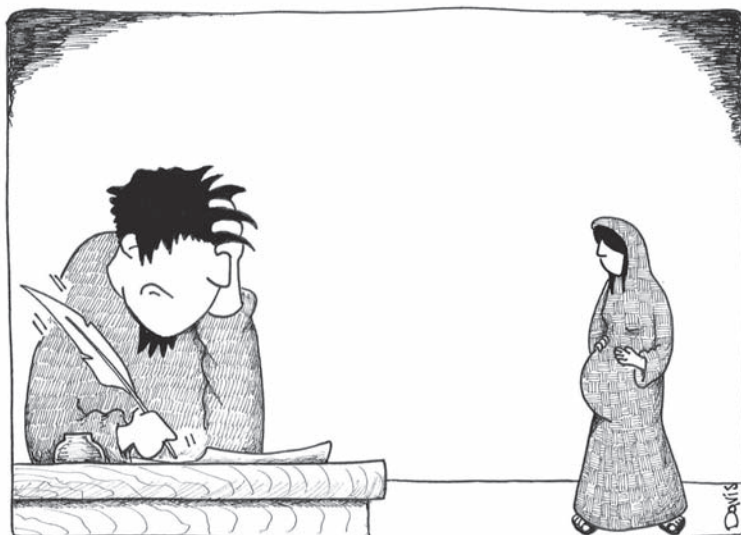
Law vs. Love

For years, we've heard the prediction that the cultural acceptance of feminism, then homosexuality, will eventually lead to an acceptance of polygamy ["The Big Love Strategy," October]. Why do Christians seem so shocked that worldly people will act in worldly ways, and want those ways to be legally sanctioned?

Rather than spinning our wheels trying to litigate these matters in court, perhaps we should focus on proclaiming the gospel and striving to be the agents by which God's Spirit changes hearts and minds.

JOHN MITCHELL

Sparks, Nevada



Now Joseph was a righteous man and had in mind to divorce her quietly, but did not know how to phrase it delicately in his Christmas Letter.

compiled by Elissa Cooper

WORTH REPEATING

Things overheard at CT online.



ONLINE POLL

**SIT IN
OR STAY OUT**
What should a Christian's role be in the Occupy Wall Street protests?

21%

Join the protests.

40%

Engage with the protesters.

39%

Avoid the protests.

Total votes: 290

(Online polls do not represent a scientific sample.)

"These events are unabashedly a part of our culture, not a part of my theology."

Bethany, explaining how women's ministry activities (such as baking) do not fulfill her spiritual needs, and why she avoids them.

Her.meneutics: "Why It's Your Job to Break the Women's Ministry Stereotype," by Sharon Hodde Miller

"An organization does not cease to be a religious organization just because it serves the poor and hungry in material ways and doesn't confine its help to prayer and religious teaching."

Cooker, discussing the conflict between World Vision and three former employees. The case was one of several religion-based hiring cases before the Supreme Court this year.

CT Liveblog: "Supreme Court Won't Hear World Vision Hiring Case," by Ted Olsen

"The idea of sitting down with protestors over pizza isn't a bad one, as long as the ultimate objective is to bring them a Christian witness."

John G., affirming the positive effect of Jim Wallis and other Christians' participation in Occupy Wall Street protests while disagreeing with the purpose of the worldwide event.

CT Politics: "Sojourners Among Those Occupying Wall Street," by Tobin Grant

"Casinos are not the most honorable business, but this just makes Christians look shady too."

Scott, commenting on *Holy Rollers*, a documentary about card-counting Christians in Las Vegas.

CT Entertainment Blog: "What Happens in Vegas... with Christians?" by Mark Moring

TIM DAVIS

No Taxpayer Is an Island

Elizabeth Warren is wrong, and right, about the role of government.

Before announcing her bid to unseat Massachusetts GOP Senator Scott Brown, Democrat Elizabeth Warren delivered impassioned remarks on the social obligations of successful entrepreneurs.

Speaking to a small gathering, she insisted that private prosperity rests upon pillars of public investment. "There is nobody in this country who got rich on his own. Nobody," said Warren, a Harvard law professor, formerly a presidential adviser on consumer finance, and one of *Time* magazine's 100 most influential people in 2010.

You built a factory out there—good for you! But I want to be clear. You moved your goods to market on the roads the rest of us paid for. You hired workers the rest of us paid to educate. . . . Now look, you built a factory and turned it into something terrific, or a great idea—God bless. Keep a big hunk of it. But part of the underlying social contract is you take a hunk of that and pay forward for the next kid who comes along.

Warren's comments went viral on YouTube. Bloggers and pundits pronounced on her argument from every angle. Conservatives spied a worrying pretext for saddling wealth creators with burdensome new taxes, while liberals cheered a full-throated defense of government's role in promoting the common good.

We do not wish to referee this dispute. People who share our core theological convictions can have different opinions on the scope of government. Except by insinuation, Warren's reasoning does not entail expansion of federal taxation. Many commentators construed her remarks as endorsing tax hikes, but she articulated nothing beyond the general principle that public expenditure facilitates private enterprise. That corporate

titans owe something to satisfy the "underlying social contract" does not determine how much they ought to owe, nor what channels they should use to "pay it forward."

No line of logic irrefutably links the ideal of social cooperation with the practice of "soaking the rich." Yet Warren's statement deserves both nods of sympathy and nudges of reproach. In what it affirms, it exposes a blind spot of the tea party conservatism that many evangelicals espouse. In what it omits, it confirms a blind spot in a strain of secular progressivism that evangelicals rightly reject.

Warren reminds us of our indebtedness to others. Too often, tea party rhetoric fuels a cult of the heroic individual. It sanctifies individual achievement and shortchanges the conditions on which such achievements depend. Human flourishing falters without the protections that a justly governed society provides. Evangelical tea partiers can appreciate this basic truth. There is no need to endorse high taxes or over-regulation.

Our applause for Warren's illustrations is tempered by their narrowness. She fails to include essential nongovernmental institutions. Where are the families, churches, independent schools, hospitals, service clubs, and trade and professional organizations, as well as the free press? Warren commits the besetting sin of secular progressivism: reducing the complex workings of society to the actions of government—in her formulation, "what the rest of us paid for."

But "the rest of us" are more than taxpayers. "The rest of us"—Christians, at

least—belong to, and sometimes lead, churches, families, and other "mediating institutions." Have these things contributed nothing to the success of Warren's hypothetical factory owner? If the employees of a factory owner know right from wrong—if they behave honorably, if they do not habitually lie, cheat, and steal—then this may testify to the virtuous influence of pastors and parents.

Evangelicals believe God is sovereign over all. We believe God exercises sovereignty not by manipulating his creatures like so many chess pieces, but by ordaining institutions to which he delegates a caretaking role. Government is one of those institutions. Its responsibilities, though limited, are not

negligible. By its movements, peace, prosperity, and justice can either be strengthened or squandered.

Humans are indebted to government for the things it does. Still more, we are indebted to mediating institutions for doing the things government cannot and should not do. Police can lock up crooks who steal the factory owner's goods. But they are ill equipped to cultivate the conscience that objects, on principle, to thievery.

Fairness counsels against chastising Elizabeth Warren too severely. Her remarks, addressed to America's present budgetary crisis, did not purport to resolve every last question of social roles and responsibilities. We can only invite her to supplement a keen awareness of what belongs to Caesar with deeper reflection on what belongs to God—and to the institutions he entrusts with governing a fallen and fractured creation. ✚



Warren commits the progressivist sin of reducing society's workings to government action.

Virtual
Fellowship

What are we to make of social networking in the churches?

IT DISTORTS REALITY

Matthew Lee Anderson is the author of *Earthen Vessels: Why Our Bodies Matter to Our Faith* (Bethany House) and blogs at MereOrthodoxy.com.

The benefits of social networking are many but require judicious and responsible use to be enjoyed.

When done well, social networking can enhance the fellowship of the church by providing congregants a window into each other's lives. It can mobilize congregants to serve their neighbors and enhance the church's mission by embedding the community of church relationships in the broader community.

But social media can merely offer a short-term, technological solution to deeper, more fundamental problems. Social networking can give the appearance of intimacy and community without enabling the substance of embodied friendship.

The more we wed ourselves to social networking as a strategy for building community, the more we risk forgetting that the problems in our communities do not hinge upon lack of access to shared information about each other's lives. They result from our own reluctance to share space and meals together, and to enter into environments and social situations that require our embodied presence. The comforting arm around a shoulder that comes when we "weep with those who weep" will never have an equal virtual substitute.

In that sense, while not immediately harmful to fellowship, we should ask whether social media undermine our intuitions about what is distinctive and unique about the gathered, embodied fellowship of the people of God.

This is especially true now that social networking is increasingly video-centric. Video social networking seems to make online sharing more like embodied presence. This makes it more difficult to see what is unique about being together in body, and may make us think church gatherings are unnecessary.

Social networking reminds us of our intrinsic sociality, but constantly moves us closer to the point where sociality no longer requires our bodies to be fully human.

As Christians, we serve a God who became flesh and dwelt among us. We have a principled reason by which we can say "stop" when technological expansion

sabotages our humanity.

That does not mean Christians shouldn't use social networks. I continue to use them, both personally and professionally. But in doing so, we need to recognize that social networks hold within them the false promise of purporting to help the church's gathering while at the same time undermining it in future generations.

IT DEEPENS FELLOWSHIP

Brandon Vogt is a Catholic writer and speaker who blogs at ThinVeil.net. He is the author of *The Church and New Media: Blogging Converts, Online Activists, and Bishops Who Tweet* (Our Sunday Visitor).

At its core, the church is one giant social network. It exists as an intricate, interconnected community. Even more, God is a network himself—the Trinity—pulsating with communion.

As social beings created by a communal God, we should take courage and not be afraid of modern social media. There are five primary reasons congregations should embrace these tools to aid



church fellowship.

First, fellowship is not an end in itself, but a means to many other goals: community, mission, evangelization, and spiritual growth. Social media amplify each of these elements exponentially and therefore are a potent aid to fellowship.

Second, social networking transcends geography. These tools extend fellowship beyond the church walls and stretch it around the world. They help us fulfill Jesus' command to Peter, which still echoes for us: "Put out into deep water" (Luke 5:4).

Church fellowship must never be exclusive and closed in on itself. It should always be outward-focused and mission-oriented. Members are ultimately connected in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12), not isolated in local church bodies like disparate tribes.

Third, social media transcend time. Fellowship in the past was typically constrained to the times when people gathered at churches or in homes. But now conversations about Sunday sermons can linger throughout the week.

Fourth, online relationships spark offline community. Social media do not replace personal relationships. They supplement them and cultivate new ones. Ideally, online social networking leads to offline social networking, meeting face to face so that our joy may be complete (2 John 1:12). I have recently met with several friends from other states whom I first encountered through Facebook. Even 20 years ago, these relationships would not have materialized.

Fifth, and most importantly, social media open the doors of Christian fellowship and invite millions of outsiders to join the community. Young secularists who would never darken the doors of a church find themselves dialoguing with Christian bloggers. An atheist YouTube viewer stumbles across a religious debate and becomes intrigued by the idea of God. A Facebook exchange dissolves the distorted images a young mom long held about Christianity.

Of course social media come with potential dangers. For example, they can inflate gossip, encourage narcissism, and reduce people to text. But these dangers are avoidable. Once aware of them, we can prevent or overcome their damage.

When used prudently, social media strengthen more than destroy. They not only tighten the bonds among Christians but also connect them with millions outside the faith. Rather than undermining church fellowship, social networking stands as a powerful tool to both grow and fortify it.



IT GIVES AND TAKES AWAY

Doug Groothuis is professor of philosophy at Denver Seminary and author of *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (IVP Academic) and *The Soul in Cyberspace* (Baker).

Many Americans assimilate and advance new communication technologies without a second (or perhaps first) thought. To invoke Marshall McLuhan, they "sleepwalk through history." Those whom Jesus called "salt" and "light" (Matt. 5:13–16) should wake up and assess the strengths and weaknesses and the nature of the plethora of technologies that assail us daily and hourly.

What place do social media have in the fellowship and evangelism of the local church? Is Facebook a good home for your church? Should your pastor tweet or not?

To answer these questions, we need to attend to two issues: First, what are social media? Second, what is a biblical model of fellowship (or *koinonia*)?

Social media are computer-mediated methods for communication. They enhance human accessibility and the speed of communication between people and groups. I can check Facebook or Twitter to learn how a friend in India (or across the street) is doing.

They extend the reach of text and images far beyond what the un-electrified, unmediated individual may do. However, social media can also restrict the human presence by subtracting the reality of "being there" and "being with." One should not receive Communion while glancing at a text message. One cannot be baptized online.

Social media also clutter our field of concentration, rendering our attention to any one thing at one time with any depth nearly impossible. Thus, multitasking becomes the norm (even though our God-given brains are not designed for it). We become scattered, flighty, not fully engaged in anything.

The Bible prizes the personal and face-to-face dimension of human fellowship that is absent but simulated through social media. John writes at the end of his short epistle, "I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete" (2 John 1:12). Although God had sent prophets and inspired Scripture for centuries, all was not complete until "[t]he Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

God's mission is to make himself known and worshiped as the one true God in all the nations. To that end, Christians have ardently preached and defended the gospel. They have copied and translated the Bible into as many languages as possible. Christ followers have also labored to spread the message through radio, television, and now the Internet, because "how can they hear [the gospel] without someone preaching to them?" (Rom. 10:14). We can evangelize through social media and develop forums of association within the church.

So, social media both give and take away, as do all media. ➤



Lessons From an Usher

What I learned about humility from a gentle greeter.

A

seminarian recently told me about the time he was chatting with a high-achieving classmate after they had both completed a difficult final exam. “You know that question on humility?” his friend asked. “I nailed it!”

The irony got me thinking about my friend Jimmy.

Jimmy is an usher at a church I used to attend; he takes his duties seriously. Every Sunday, Jimmy is a reliably warm, bespectacled, suspended presence in the church foyer, handing out bulletins, clapping hands, and sneaking candy to the kids. Knowing my interest in music, Jimmy is always keen to report to me (even now, when I come to visit) which gospel quartets he recorded off the radio over the past week. Once, he gave my young son a wristwatch he no longer needed, out of the blue, much to their mutual delight.

There is something unusual about Jimmy. I know nothing of his background—there may have been an accident in the past or simply a genetic quirk. I only know that he is what some people call “a little different.”

At a New Year’s Eve service several years ago, I discovered that Jimmy is different from most of us in the best possible way. The church congregation traditionally celebrates Communion together just before midnight, and then invites people to share some of the past year’s triumphs and trials. That particular year, there was a moving mix of thankfulness and heartache—cancer healed and cancer raging, jobs found and lost, relationships mended and some still up for prayer. Eventually, Jimmy stood up and asked if he could tell us about a praise item.

“This year,” Jimmy started, with tears in his eyes, “I learned how much I can count on God. See, I promised him I would pray for a list of people every day. But when I started,

I couldn’t remember who I was supposed to pray for, and I got frustrated. So I asked God to help me remember. After that, all the names came to mind, every time. And I never could have remembered on my own, so I knew it was God!”

And then Jimmy sat down.

That night, Jimmy taught me something important about humility. Richard Foster defines humility not as a “less-than” type of self-abasement, but as an ability to “live as



close to the truth as possible: the truth about ourselves, the truth about others, the truth about the world in which we live.” When we are humble, we are un-fussily realistic about our strengths and weaknesses—about what we are capable of, and what we are not. We are also clear on the fact that we are not God, and that we cannot heal or transform ourselves on our own. Thus, when growth or change happens, it is only in humility that we can identify God’s care and provision for us.

When we are proud, we don’t have an accurate picture of the way things really are, and we end up believing we are engineering our own progress. And then we wonder why

we don’t see God moving in our lives. This phenomenon might be another layer of what the apostle Paul meant when he told us we would best know God’s strength in our own weakness.

A few weeks after that New Year’s Eve, I found myself praying about a financial shortfall my husband and I were facing at the end of the month. Three days later, an unexpected check arrived in the mail, matching almost to the penny the amount we needed. My skeptical mind knew the money could have been purely coincidental, but in that instance I had the unprovable but resolute sense that it was God’s answer to my prayer. I was of course flooded with immediate gratitude, but within minutes I was undergoing mental gymnastics. *What if I hadn’t prayed?* I wondered. *Would God have provided anyway? Do I really have to ask when he knows our needs before we do?*

I don’t generally hear the audible voice of God. But that particular afternoon, I could have sworn I heard a chuckle. *Of course I would have provided*, it seemed God was saying. *But you wouldn’t have had the joy of knowing it was me.*

Jimmy has the kind of humility that allows him to recognize God doing what only God can do in his life. He may never go to seminary, but he has a rather advanced understanding of what James and Peter might have meant when they told us to “humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord.” I have known for a long time that humility is required in order to acknowledge God’s supremacy. But what Jimmy has taught me is that humility not only helps us in the offering of our prayers. It is also essential to recognizing their answers.

When growth or change happens, it is only in humility that we can identify God’s care and provision for us.



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Education Is in Our DNA

We should support every effort to upgrade our failing schools.

It is becoming an all too familiar story: America's public education system is failing. Among developed nations, American students rank 25th in math and 21st in science. And the trend is going south. In September, we learned that the high school class of 2011 posted the lowest SAT scores of all time.

But those statistics don't tell the whole story. In wealthier school districts, American public school students actually perform better on international tests than their counterparts in Finland, Japan, and Korea.

For our public school kids in truly poor school districts, however, their best and often only chance is in the kind of lifeline depicted in the climactic scene of the powerful documentary *Waiting for Superman*.

Hundreds of children and their families, gathered in a school gymnasium, are hoping and praying they will win the lottery. If theirs is one of the few numbers picked, they will escape their neighborhood school and attend a highly coveted charter school.

The drama is intense. The joy on the faces of those kids whose number is picked is palpable. The despair of those left behind is devastating.

No American child should have to win the lottery just to get a decent education. It is a scandal of the highest magnitude and a violation of the most basic precepts of justice.

For many reasons (educational quality, moral environments hostile to faith), many Christian families have fled public schools for Christian and other private schools or even homeschooling. While we must ensure our own children receive a proper education, we must also care deeply about those left behind.

After all, education is in our DNA as Christians.

At a recent conference at the Colson Center, professor Glenn Sunshine chronicled

the history of Christian influence in education. He argued that the Christian commitment to education and literacy literally saved learning in the West.

The collapse of the Roman Empire and the barbarian conquest of Europe drove Christianity to the monasteries of western Ireland. Irish abbott St. Columbanus (543–615) traveled across France and Italy, founding monasteries and scriptoria where



monks copied not only the Scriptures but also the works of Greece and Rome. According to Sunshine, "Education survives in medieval Europe, classical literature survives in medieval Europe . . . because of Columbanus."

In the late Middle Ages, the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life became the great copyists and educators of Europe. Both Erasmus and Martin Luther attended schools they had established. The Reformation is inconceivable apart from the advent of printing—with the Gutenberg Bible (1455) leading the way—and the revival of learning that fueled the rise of literacy and the founding of new schools.

In America, Benjamin Rush (1746–1813), a founding father best remembered for establishing medical schools, was passionate about educating the American people, especially in matters of religion—not just for religious

purposes, but for the moral education of all citizens. He wrote that "the only foundation for a useful education in a republic is to be laid in Religion. Without this there can be no virtue, and without virtue there can be no liberty, and liberty is the object and life of all republican governments." In his view, this in no way abrogated the First Amendment, which he strongly supported.

The two of us attended public schools during our earlier years and are grateful for Christian teachers and educators who work in this arena. Despite the grave challenges we face today, Christians must not abandon our public schools. We must remember, as our forebears in the faith did, that literacy and education are crucial for reading the Scriptures and growing in the faith, and are the source of developing virtue, without which civil society cannot survive.

There is a lot we can do. The ideal solution, of course, is to upgrade all failing schools. We should be supporting every effort to make this happen. But as *Waiting for Superman* shows all too clearly, there are vested interests that will make reform difficult at best.

The next best bet is to ensure that those children who want a good education can escape the dreadfully failing schools the law has consigned them to. Movements are starting in several states to do just that: to allow parents and children, through the help of vouchers and other creative means, to opt out of failing schools.

Mindful of our heritage and the demands of justice, we Christians should do all in our power to support these parents and their children. No child should depend on a lottery to obtain a decent education. ✚

Christian families have fled public schools for many reasons. We must also care deeply for those left behind.

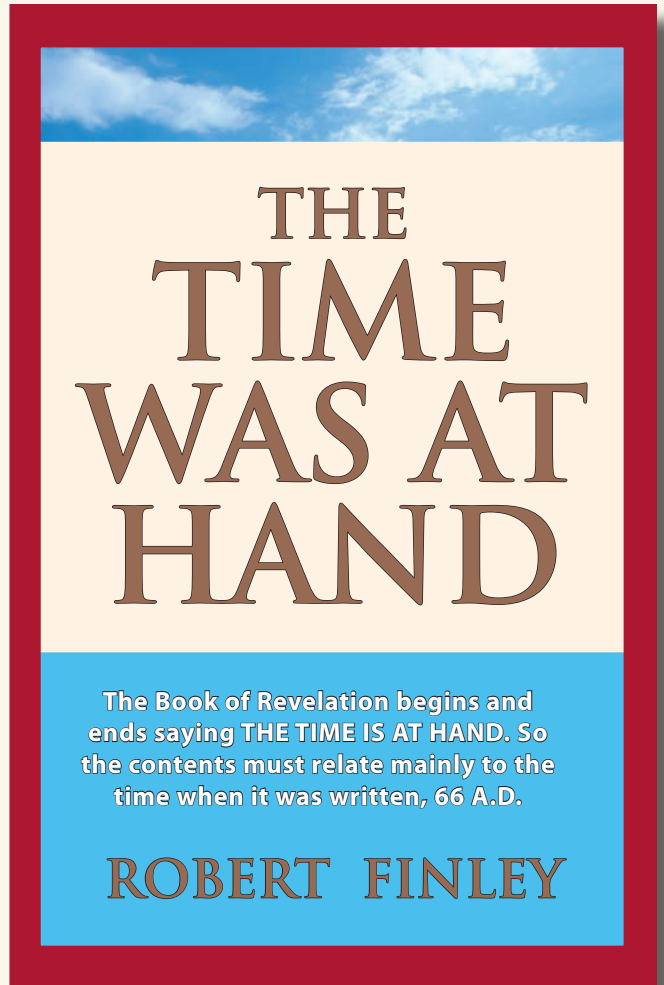
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Some Highlights

1. The author maintains that **Revelation** was written in 66 A.D. to declare **THE TIME WAS AT HAND** for Christ's terminal judgment upon those who condemned Him to death and murdered His followers. This judgment had been delayed for 34 years while God called out an elect remnant of 144,000 Hebrew believers to give the gospel to other nations and plant churches throughout the Roman Empire.
2. The author says that the "Great Tribulation" took place 66-70 A.D. when a million Judaeans were slaughtered throughout greater Palestine while 3½ million others were killing each other inside the walls of Jerusalem. They were trapped there without food until the city was destroyed by Roman armies. The author can find no further (future) "tribulation period" mentioned in Scripture.
3. For 900 years (650-1550) many church leaders taught that Muhammad was the Antichrist. This book suggests that they were right, not that Muhammad was "against Christ," but rather was the one who took His place for a billion people, as an anticlimax follows a climax. The author suggests that Muhammad's cumulative influence over 14 centuries has been many times greater than that of all other antichrists combined; past, present and future.
4. This book maintains that Christ gave only one sign regarding His second coming: He said that His gospel would be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations. Of the 7000 nations on our planet, more than 2000 still have no Christian witness.



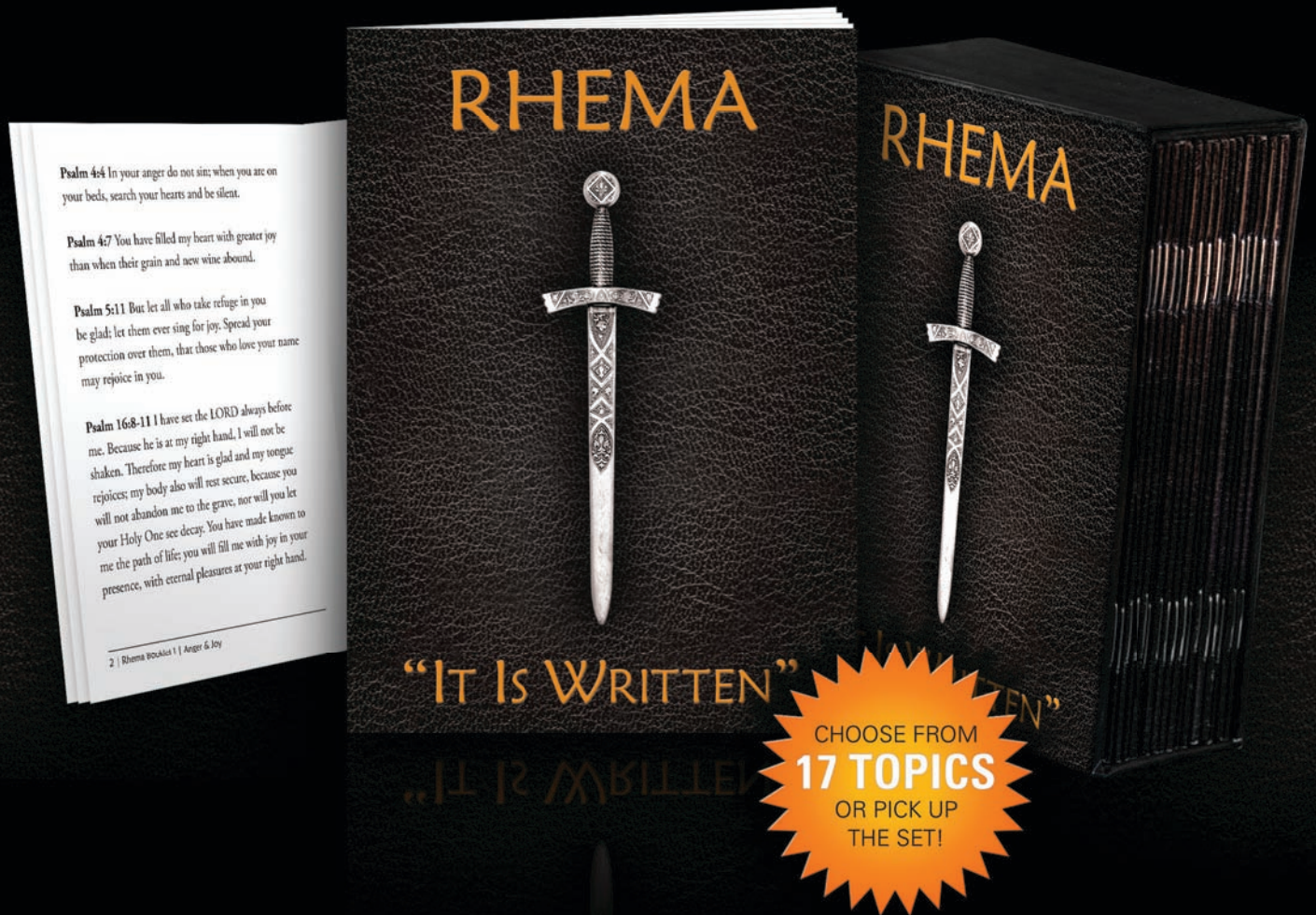
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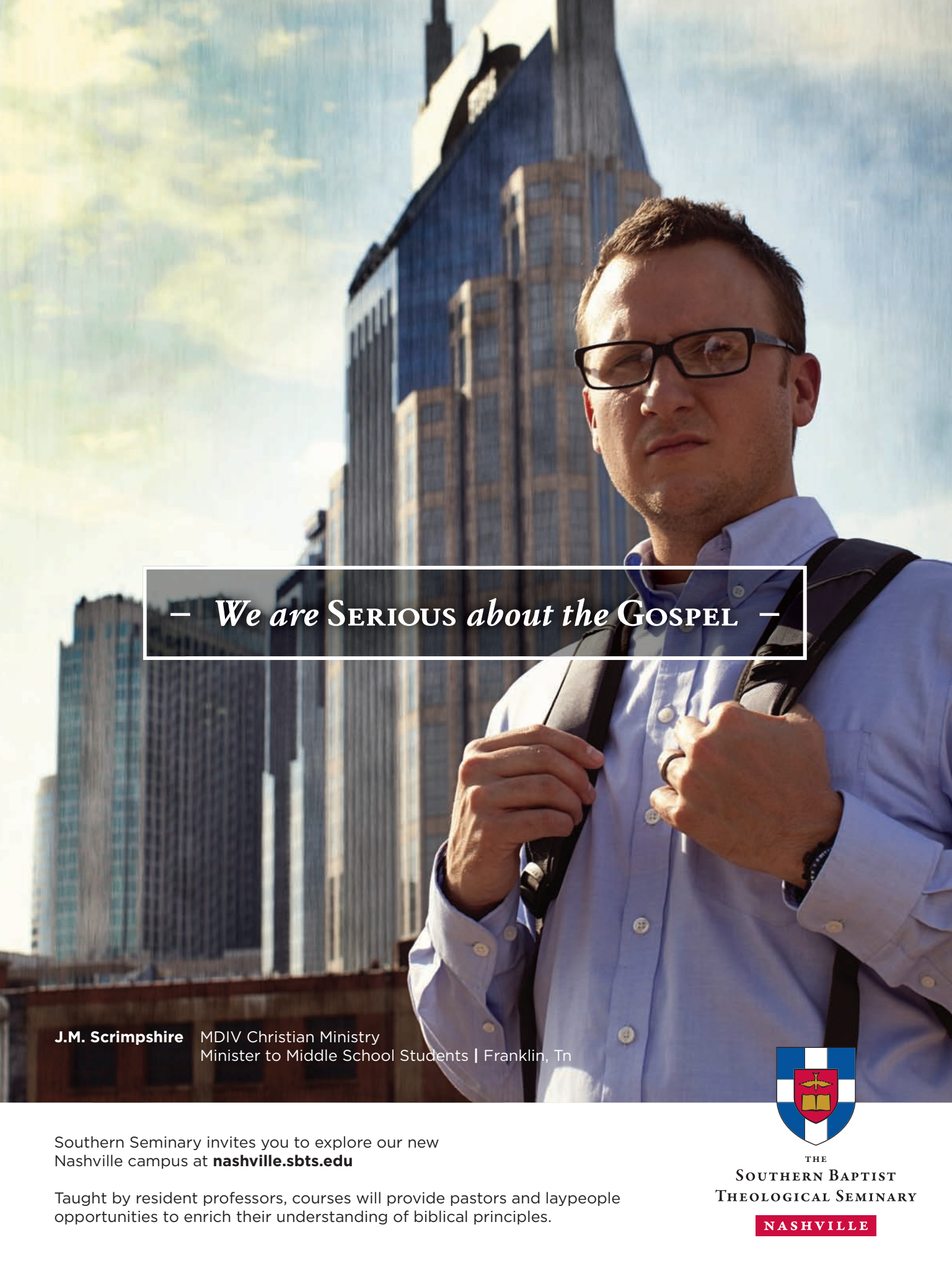
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CT REVIEW

BOOKS, MOVIES,
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Islam's Inquisitors

Muslim blasphemy laws threaten global religious liberty and American national security.

By Thomas F. Farr

Religious freedom is in global crisis. According to two comprehensive studies by the nonpartisan Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 70 percent of the world's population lives in nations where this precious freedom is subject to severe restriction. Many people suffer "mere discrimination" (some serious form of civil, economic, or political disability) because of their religious beliefs or those of their tormentors. Others—tens of millions, in fact—are victims of violent persecution, such as torture, rape, "disappearance" (kidnapping and murder), unjust imprisonment, and execution.

You can be forgiven if you haven't heard much about this crisis from the mainstream press, whether left or right. Neither *The New York Times* and CNN, nor *The Wall Street Journal* and Fox News, have much time for religious persecution, beyond spectacular episodes of mass murder. Even then, the coverage is usually brief, thin, and void of analysis. How often, to cite one egregious area of neglect, has the secular press examined the effects of antiblasphemy laws in the Middle East?

In ***Silenced: How Apostasy and Blasphemy Codes are Choking Freedom Worldwide*** (Oxford University

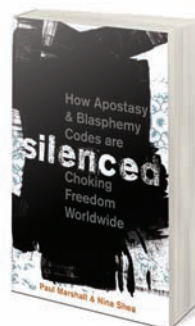
Press) ★★★★★, Paul Marshall and Nina Shea go bravely where the media fear to tread. Based on an extensive examination of Muslim-majority countries, they contend that laws and policies punishing blasphemy and apostasy are not only a major source of religious persecution, but also an obstacle to stable democracy and the defeat of Islamist terrorism.

Having collaborated for several years, first at Freedom House and currently at the Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom, the pair brings to the subject a remarkable background in research and advocacy. Marshall is in many respects the intellectual godfather of the fight for international religious freedom. His 2007 *Religious Freedom in the World* was the first attempt to provide a comparative index of religious liberty that measured the performances of key countries. And Shea has pioneered activism on behalf of the victims of persecution, while maintaining a steady stream of trenchant writings on the subject. Of late, she has directed much of her fire at the failures of Saudi Arabia to remove toxic Wahhabist principles from its textbooks.

DEEPENING ALARM

Blasphemy has been understood classically as manifesting contempt for God or, worse, assuming the attributes of God. In medieval Europe, it was considered a crime warranting severe penalties from the state, usually supported by the Catholic Church. But today—despite the continued presence of anti-blasphemy laws on the books of a few West-

ern states—most Christian denominations believe religious error must be addressed by better preaching and teaching, not by coercion from the state or private actors. One of the key demands of the Second Vatican Council's *Declaration on Religious Liberty* (1965) is that all religious communities



have the right to make their truth claims freely and publicly, and to win converts where those claims are persuasive.

The lands of Islam, however, are still far from embracing this aspect of religious liberty. Blasphemy continues to be criminalized throughout the Muslim nations of the greater Middle East, Africa, and South and East Asia. Converts from Islam—apostates—are often imprisoned, tortured, or murdered. Under the aegis of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Muslim nations have for years attempted to internationalize the treatment of blasphemy as a crime, a campaign Marshall and Shea recognize as a threat to Western democracy.

It should be noted that neither Marshall nor Shea argues in favor of blasphemy or apostasy as religious, social, or political goods. Rather, they contend that government or social restrictions on either category of expression, especially restrictions that involve coercion or violence, cripple religious reform, penalize minorities, and shut off any possibility that democracy can mature in the Muslim world. Worse, coercive legal or social restrictions have the effect of encouraging violent religious extremism and Islamist terrorism.

Nor do the authors argue that the pathologies they describe are intrinsic to Islam. The

It is perhaps providential that this book hits the shelves at a moment when religious persecution is hitting historic levels.

book includes three essays by Muslim intellectuals who defend religious freedom, each drawing in different ways from Islamic texts and traditions. It begins with a foreword by Abdurrahman Wahid, the distinguished Muslim liberal and former prime minister of Indonesia who died in late 2009. Wahid's essay, "God Needs No Defense," contends that Islam is defiled by laws such as Section 295-C of Pakistan's legal code, which mandates death for acts like "defiling the name of Muhammad." Those who would punish others in God's name are guilty, he argues, of the Muslim equivalent of mortal sin—taking on the role of God.

The core of *Silenced*, however, is an eminently disturbing tour through key Muslim-majority states. In chapters on Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, the authors identify the horrors that attend crackdowns on blasphemy and apostasy. One cannot read these accounts without a

deepening sense of alarm. We expect certain pathologies in theocratic states such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, but not in the erstwhile democracies of the greater Middle East. Both the Pakistani and Afghan governments support the arrest and punishment of blasphemers. In Pakistan, Muslim governor Salman Taseer and Christian cabinet member Shahbaz Bhatti were murdered earlier this year for demanding the repeal of antiblasphemy laws. Polls show broad public support for the murderers.

Even in states like Egypt that lack explicit statutory bans on blasphemy and apostasy, the political and social basis for persecution is clearly evident. One Egyptian convert to Christianity—a married woman—was arrested by local police, ostensibly to protect her from family members who had attacked her and her husband. But she was soon transferred to State Security in Cairo, where she was tortured, including with electric shocks, photographed

MY TOP 5 BOOKS ON CONSUMERISM

By Tyler Wigg Stevenson, author of *Brand Jesus: Christianity in a Consumerist Age* (Seabury, 2007)



NO LOGO

NAOMI KLEIN (PICADOR)

Klein analyzes the economic history that has yielded an ascendant corporatism, as well as the real effects of consumerism on global workers. It is necessary reading, as demanding as it is rewarding, even for readers who disagree with her grounding in Marxist thought.



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The Triumph of American Materialism

JAMES B. TWITCHELL
(COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS)

While Twitchell, a former professor of literature and advertising, has overly optimistic conclusions, he offers an unparalleled diagnosis of consumerism as the primary meaning-making practice in Western culture.

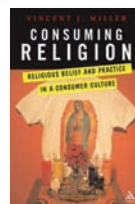


GENERATION X

Tales for an Accelerated Culture

DOUGLAS COUPLAND
(ST. MARTIN'S GRIFFIN)

Coupland's novel about (arguably) the first consumerist generation, whose name his book helped popularize, offers a vivid account of the historical dislocation on which consumerism depends. Read this to better understand the cultural soil that nourishes it.

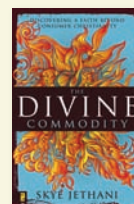


CONSUMING RELIGION

Religious Belief and Practice in a Consumer Culture

VINCENT J. MILLER (CONTINUUM)

The Roman Catholic theologian offers a sophisticated analysis that puts Christian theology, sociology, and critical theory into dialogue with contemporary consumer practices. Especially suited for academic settings.



THE DIVINE COMMODITY

Discovering a Faith Beyond Consumer Christianity

SKYE JETHANI (ZONDERVAN)

Jethani, an incisive thinker, offers a creative critique of contemporary church practices. Especially valuable for an evangelical audience, which may cringe at the reflection in the mirror this book holds up.

naked, and then released to her family, who dragged her screaming from the station.

With such stories, Marshall and Shea pose serious questions for American foreign policy: Can post-Hosni Mubarak Egypt rid itself of these practices, and grant all its citizens and religious groups complete equality under the law? What might the “Arab Spring” mean, in general, for global religious liberty and American national security?

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

Sadly, American politicians and diplomats persist in ignoring the profound relationship between these two ideals. Quite apart from humanitarian considerations, there is mounting evidence that religious liberty is necessary for the stability and longevity of democracy in highly religious societies, and for the defeat of religion-based terrorism. Yet the United States, for the most part, has not encouraged or assisted other countries in reforming their repressive institutions and habits.

Some hoped the International Religious Freedom Act, enacted in 1998, would upset this bizarre lethargy. The law required American diplomacy to combat persecution by advancing religious freedom around the world. Alas, it has failed to elevate the strategic importance of religious freedom, and U.S. foreign policy continues to have little impact on global persecution.

It is perhaps providential, then, that this book hits the shelves at a moment when such persecution is hitting historic levels. One can hope it will garner the attention of reporters, scholars, and—especially—policymakers. Marshall and Shea will not, of course, win acclamation among authoritarian governments or Muslim extremists. Their book will dismay Western “realists” and others who prefer their foreign affairs stripped of religious ideas and actors. But among the victims of religious persecution, and those who see religious freedom as critical to stable democracy and the defeat of Islamist terrorism, *Silenced* will be welcomed and celebrated. ☩

Thomas F. Farr is director of the Religious Freedom Project at Georgetown University's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs. He is the author of *World of Faith and Freedom: Why International Religious Liberty Is Vital to American National Security* (Oxford University Press).

Inherently Valuable

That applies not just to humans, but to all creation.

By Bill Walker

For the vast majority of history, human beings have exercised limited power over nature. With the advent of modern industry and globalization, however, this power has grown swiftly, often resulting in great environmental abuse. In **Living with Other Creatures: Green Exegesis and Theology** (Baylor University Press) ★★★★★, Richard Bauckham writes for the church in this context, mining the Scriptures and the richness of Christian tradition for instruction on creation care. Bauckham's aim is not to address specific environmental problems. Nevertheless, his book does presuppose the reality of climate change, unsustainable consumption, and the imminent extinction of various species.

At the outset, Bauckham reminds the reader that, as Creator, God delights in and cares for all creation. He contrasts the Enlightenment's human-centered project to conquer nature with the Bible's God-centered outlook. In recent centuries, Christians have tended to isolate “dominion” passages like Genesis 1:26–28. As Bauckham argues, however, God did not create the world and other creatures strictly for human use. The concept of dominion implies responsibility and caretaking, much in the way that a king is commanded to respect and treat his subjects as brothers and sisters (Deut. 17:14–20). Bauckham, though, wants to move beyond even the notion of stewardship. He wishes to recover the biblical view of human solidarity with the rest of creation by establishing creation's own inherent value.

In the Genesis account, God creates human beings on the same day as other land-dwelling creatures. Bauckham affirms that human beings are more valuable than other animals (Matt. 6:26), but he argues that the distinction between them cannot be absolute, since they share the same maker and provider. God's careful piecing together of the created order highlights the interdependence

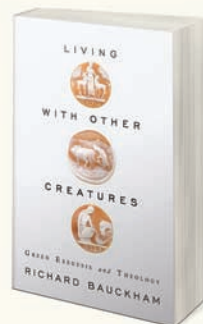
of humanity and nature, and thus the mandate to coexist with other creatures. While God made human beings in his image, they, like the rest of creation, also exist to glorify God. This, Bauckham contends, is one reason why God instructs Noah to preserve species that otherwise would have perished (Gen. 6–8).

Bauckham sees the Jewish Sabbath as an occasion for God to restrain humanity's economic drive. By commanding a division of harvests between man and beast (Lev. 25:6–7), the Sabbath year reminded human beings of their appropriate place within the created order, and their dependence upon the One who endowed the land with its fertility. Humanity—despite great progress in scientific understanding and technological prowess—remains incapable of managing the planet on its own.

The Psalms testify often to the splendid diversity of creation, which God delights in sustaining (Ps. 147:9). Like the birds of the air, human beings are to live by radical faith in the Father's provision. Jesus, however, was referring not to the wasteful excess so prevalent in contemporary culture, but to basic needs. Bauckham warns that our runaway consumption threatens not only other species but also many humans in other areas of the world.

That Scripture reveals all of creation giving praise to God is Bauckham's central theme. The prophecy in Revelation of creation's unified praise of God is not a doomsday forecast, but a foreshadowing of total renewal. Humanity is to worship with all creation, welcoming its participation in the sounding of God's universal anthem of glory (Rev. 19:1). In the meantime, Bauckham implores Christians to go about their labors in such a manner as would please their master upon his return. ☩

Bill Walker is a doctoral student in philosophy of religion and theology at Claremont Graduate University.



BITS & PIECES

Excerpts from recent books.

BE NOT AFRAID

Facing Fear with Faith

SAMUEL WELLS

(BRAZOS PRESS, 224 PAGES)

For some people the big fear beyond death is judgment. For most of Christian history this has been what Christianity was really all about—preparing you to face the finality of judgment, and its bifurcation between heaven and hell. . . . While we may not imagine perpetual fire or gnashing of teeth, it's not hard to imagine being alone forever, a very gloomy prospect. And if one adds to that the possibility of everlasting pain, it's too oppressive to think about.

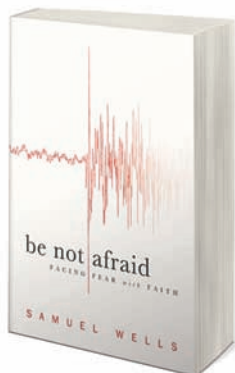
Perhaps the biggest fear for the contemporary imagination, captivated as most of us are by the realization and fulfillment of the individual self, is that beyond death lies simply oblivion. It is rationally hard to square the myriad complexity and texture of human existence before death with total emptiness afterward. But when we witness the mundane biological process of death in animals and plants, there can seem little observational reason for arguing that humans will be significantly different. As Johnny Carson is rumored to have said, "For three days after death, hair and fingernails continue to grow—but phone calls taper off." We're left with just our bodies and the worms. All the restorative qualities of sleep suddenly go out the window, and we are faced with a sleep without end, a complete annihilation of the self. . . .

In the face of this, St. Paul writes these stirring words, which conclude the eighth chapter of his Letter to the Romans: "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Paul is addressing precisely these overwhelming fears—the fear of judgment, or at least of being eternally alone or perpetually in pain, and the fear of oblivion, of one's consciousness being wiped out of the drama of existence. He is telling his readers, "Each one of you is precious in God's sight. . . . You are known, loved, called, redeemed,

chosen. And you will be glorified. A whole set of forces may be against you—hostile others, troubling and extreme circumstances, even yourself—but if God is on your side, none of these will overcome you; indeed, *you* will overcome *them*, with something to spare. No power, nothing in the past, nothing in the future, no biological necessity, no demise of human cells, no amount of pain, and no sense of isolation will separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus."

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WILSON'S BOOKMARKS



From the editor of Books & Culture.

GRACIE

Standing with Hope

GRACIE ROSENBERGER, AS TOLD TO PETER W. ROSENBERGER (LIBERTY UNIVERSITY PRESS)



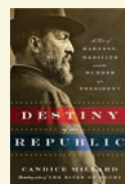
Every day at the office, I receive unsolicited books in the category known as "inspirational." I glance at them all, but almost invariably they end up in the giveaway bin. No disrespect: we simply can't cover every-

thing. This book was an exception. A terrible car accident as a freshman in college. Many surgeries. Unrelenting pain. Out of this suffering came a deepened faith—and a desire to help others. Formulaic? Yes and no. (We're all born, we all die: pretty formulaic, isn't it?) Read Gracie Rosenberger's story yourself. And keep some Kleenex handy.

DESTINY OF THE REPUBLIC

A Tale of Madness, Medicine and the Murder of a President

CANDICE MILLARD (DOUBLEDAY)



At the center of this riveting narrative is James Garfield. Inaugurated as President of the United States in March 1881, he was shot by a self-deluded assassin in July and died in September. In addition to restoring

to public memory the admirable Garfield (a man of deep faith, an ardent abolitionist, and a natural leader who knew grinding poverty firsthand), Candice Millard deftly handles several story lines connected with Garfield's fate. The result is one of the year's best pieces of history writing.

THE BEST AMERICAN POETRY 2011

KEVIN YOUNG, GUEST EDITOR

DAVID LEHMAN, SERIES EDITOR (SCRIBNER)



As the former editor of a series with "Best" in the title, I'm not inclined to be huffy about this annual gathering. Why quibble? I rejoice at the continuing existence of this series, and I'm particu-

larly happy when—as this year—the guest editor is a poet whose work I enjoy. Not that I like all the poems Kevin Young has picked. Who could expect that? But keep this volume by your bed for a few weeks, and you'll be amply rewarded.

Conflict Resolution

Alvin Plantinga seeks to disentangle sound science from naturalistic dogma. Interview by John Wilson

A

lvin Plantinga is among the pre-eminent philosophers of his generation. After a long career, chiefly at Calvin College and the University of Notre Dame (where he is emeritus John A. O'Brien Professor of Philosophy), Plantinga has formally retired, but he hasn't been idle. In his new book, **Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism** (Oxford University Press), he sheds light on a subject that is often obscured by posturing and superficial polemics. John Wilson, editor of *Books & Culture*, spoke with Plantinga about the underlying harmony between scientific and religious accounts of reality.

Most of your book is taken up with the proposition that there's superficial conflict but deep concord between theistic religion and science.

In certain areas, the right word would be *alleged* conflict. For example, I argue that there's no real conflict between evolutionary theory—that is, the scientific theory of evolution apart from any naturalistic spin—and what C. S. Lewis called “mere Christianity.” There's no real conflict, even though conflict has been alleged by people on the Right as well as on the Left. Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, and a host of others claim that there is outright conflict between evolutionary theory and belief in such a person as God, who has created and designed the living world. At the other end, there are Christian thinkers, too—like Phillip Johnson—who think there is irreconcilable conflict between the scientific theory of evolution and Christian belief.

But I don't think there is. What current scientific evolutionary theory says is that the living world has come to be via a certain process

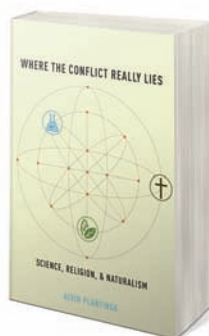
of natural selection operating on some form of genetic variation. And it's clear that God could have made the living world that way if he wanted to. What Christianity tells us, what theistic religion generally tells us, is that God has created the world and created human beings in his image. He could have done that through a variety of means. And that point goes all the way back to the 19th century. Some of the Princeton theologians—Charles Hodge, for example—said exactly that shortly after Darwin's theory of evolution appeared. It's not a new thought at all.

INTERVIEW

That being the case, why does so much of the public debate focus on this alleged conflict?

There may be several reasons. One reason, I think, is that so many of the “experts” declare that there is a fundamental conflict. Another is the deep and pervasive confusion that exists between what you might call “guided evolution” and “unguided evolution.” The theory of evolution doesn't say that the whole process is guided by God. Of course it doesn't say that. But it also doesn't say that it *isn't*. Being a scientific theory, it doesn't make any statements on that point. In the same way, physics doesn't say that Newton's laws are established by God, but it also doesn't say they aren't. It doesn't address that question.

Now some people seem to think that if science doesn't say something happened, what it's really saying is that that thing *didn't* happen. So if science doesn't say that God is guiding the process of evolution, then science is really saying that God is *not* guiding the process. But that's ridiculous. Science doesn't say anything about it one way or the other.



A lot of people—like Dennett, for example—add naturalism onto the scientific theory of evolution, and from that they deduce that the process is unguided and that there isn't any such person as God who's created the living world. But they're just adding that on. It's not part of the scientific theory.

So they're really shuttling back and forth between science and philosophy, and presenting the philosophizing as if it were science.

Yes, I think that's the right way to put it. And it's worth noting that evolutionary theory is ordinarily presented to students as entailing philosophical naturalism. I recently saw a list of biology textbooks at the college level, all of which said exactly that. They just took it that the theory entails unguided evolution.

In the last, much briefer section of the book, you discuss whether there is a fundamental incompatibility between naturalism and the theory of evolution.

I think that's an extremely interesting and important point, though to argue for it properly is quite complicated; it's hard to do in a brief compass. The basic idea, which is far from being original, is that if you are a naturalist and think that we have come to be by evolutionary processes, then you will think that the main purpose of our cognitive processes, our mental faculties, is survival and reproductive fitness, not the production of true belief. Evolution doesn't give a rip about whether your beliefs are true. It only cares whether or not your actions are adaptive, whether they contribute to your fitness. From the point of view of evolution together with naturalism, you wouldn't expect that our faculties would be really adjusted to truth or aimed at truth. They would just be aimed at fitness.

But if this is true, if our minds are aimed at mere survival, not at truth, then it's not probable that our minds should be reliable—that is, produce an appropriate preponderance of true over false beliefs; and if that is so, then one who believes both naturalism and evolution should reject the thought that our minds are reliable. But that's a crippling position to be in. Nietzsche is among the people who have suggested this problem. Some contemporary philosophers—Thomas Nagel, for example—have voiced the same worry, and so did Darwin himself.



Imagination Saves the Day

What might Spielberg's holiday movies bring? By Jeffrey Overstreet

A shark fin breaks the water's surface. UFOs swoop over an awe-struck community. A leathery extraterrestrial lifts a luminous fingertip. Indiana Jones runs one step ahead of a tumbling boulder.

For generations of moviegoers, these are indelible memories. And the man who first imagined them is not finished yet. Steven Spielberg is sending two new Christmas packages—*The Adventures of Tintin* and *War Horse*—this holiday season.

Spielberg films convey a childlike spirit—and a severe distrust of adults. His own parents, a musician and a computer scientist, had a strained relationship. As a child, he sought escape at the movies. As an adult, his movie characters seek escape wherever they can. Betrayed by authorities, they survive through cleverness until they surrender to the gravity of otherworldly wonders. Those wonders sometimes inspire reconciliation and healing. But when compromised by human pride, marvels turn destructive.

His big-screen children find easy access

to enchantment (*E.T.*'s Elliott, *Empire of the Sun*'s Jamie, *Hook*'s Lost Boys). By contrast, his adult characters find illumination only when they humble themselves (Indiana Jones, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*'s Roy). But none of his dreamers—whatever their ages—can save the world.

Redemption comes from mysterious sources, influences that restore us to a posture of humility and awe.

Sometimes it's the miracle of conscience. A German businessman (*Schindler's List*) and American soldiers (*Saving Private Ryan*) risk their lives to save others. A man strives for innocence in the corrupting business of covert operations (*Munich*).

Sometimes, it is an extraterrestrial power—a savior descends from heaven, delights children, suffers, dies, rises, and ascends (*E.T.*).

And once in a while, it is divine intervention. In *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, an Old Testament God judges evildoers, shows grace to a



holy fool (of sorts), and restores order. In *Amistad*, the gospel gives hope to a battered slave.

Occasionally, Spielberg's films get soggy with sentimentality. But the best of them are like extravagant altars to an unknown god. Regardless of their director's views, they point us toward a Mystery

who offers healing through heavenly declarations, human kindness, and selfless sacrifice. As Frederick Buechner wrote, "The world speaks of the holy in the only language it knows, which is a worldly language."

Spielberg's best work may still be ahead of him—a film about Abraham Lincoln next year, and, rumor has it, maybe Moses after that. Who knows what new insights may yet occur within and through his incredible—and unfinished—imagination. 

Jeffrey Overstreet, a novelist and author, blogs at lookingcloser.org. Read a longer version of this essay at ChristianityToday.com/ct/movies.

MY TOP 5 CHRISTMAS MOVIES

By David Roark, a Dallas-based writer and film critic



A CHRISTMAS STORY

1983 | RATED PG

DIRECTED BY BOB CLARK

The modern classic about a boy who wants a Red Ryder BB gun for Christmas never ceases to entertain. Hidden beneath the hilarity lies a familiar world in which a kid's perspective of family and holiday provides insight into the human condition.



ELF

2003 | RATED PG

DIRECTED BY JON FAVREAU

Will Ferrell's holiday comedy is about a clumsy, naïve human raised as an elf at the North Pole. It's not only one of his better films but also an optimistic look at family and faith—believing in what we cannot see—that will never go out of style.



A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS

1965 | UNRATED

DIRECTED BY BILL MELENDEZ

Charlie Brown seeks to discover what Christmas is really about and, through Linus and the scraggly Christmas tree, finds his answer in the birth of Christ. Linus's reading of the Luke passage is particularly worthwhile.



WHITE CHRISTMAS

1954 | UNRATED

DIRECTED BY MICHAEL CURTIZ

A soothing blend of music (Irving Berlin) and comedy (Bing Crosby and Danny Kaye), this classic is a sentimental, fun tale of two friends from the Army who use their entertainment to help save a former officer's business and, essentially, Christmas.



IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE

1946 | UNRATED

DIRECTED BY FRANK CAPRA

Capra's masterpiece is a story of redemption for the common man, Jimmy Stewart as George Bailey. The story recognizes divine intervention, the power of the human spirit, and reminds us to hold on to what truly matters in life.



Christmas Smorgasbord

Plenty of stylistic variety in 2011's new holiday music. By Ted Olsen

Like CCM, Christmas music is defined by its lyrical content, not its music style. And like CCM, it has spun off dozens of subgenres.

On one end of the spectrum are “seasonal” albums that make no reference to the birthday boy. That’s expected from avant-garde jazz musician John Zorn’s **A Dreamers Christmas** ★★★★★ since he usually makes “radical Jewish music.” It’s unsurprising on **A Very She & Him Christmas** ★★★★★, a collection of standards from the M. Ward/Zoëy Deschanel act that plays its ’60s nostalgia pretty straight. Jack Johnson’s **This Warm December: A Brushfire Holiday Vol. 2** ★★★★★ has many strong original pieces, but doesn’t have the nods to transcendence that 2008’s Vol. 1 had.

On the other end of the spectrum, by my count, worship albums outnumbered every other Christmas subgenre in 2011. Is it a reflection of the worship music boom, or does it reflect how much of the Christmas story is worship (angels, shepherds, Magi)? Many of these albums are simply carols played live, as with **Christmas from the Vineyard** ★★★★★ and half of David Crowder Band’s **Oh for Joy** ★★★★★, the band’s least creative effort to date.

From the Belly of a Woman ★★★★★, from the ambient group the Opiate Mass, is unlike any other Christmas album (except 2009’s *Salvation Is Created*, from Bifrost Arts). It’s not festive, and you won’t play it in the background while hanging ornaments; it focuses

attention on the mystery of the Incarnation.

Keith and Kristyn Getty’s **Joy: An Irish Christmas** ★★★★★ is the couple’s most Irish-sounding album yet (albeit heavily orchestrated: think *Riverdance*, not the Chieftains), incorporating traditional and original reels with conventional carols, rewritten Irish standards, and original Christmas hymns.

Christmas Hymns & Carols ★★★★★ brings to mind 2002’s *City on a Hill: It’s Christmas Time*, and not just because it includes Derri Daugherty and Leigh Nash as well as other artists. But ultimately it sounds more like a various artists album than a unified whole.

Nash also appears on TobyMac’s **Christmas in DiverseCity** ★★★★★, which puts the spotlight on his band members to great effect as he steps into the background for what is one of his strongest albums. The mix of originals and traditionals, using electronic, soul, funk, rap, R&B, and at least seven lead singers, is skillfully cohesive. This is the album that will “sound like Christmas 2011” in a decade or two.

Phil Wickham’s **Songs for Christmas** ★★★★★ comes straight from the CCM camp, while the independent folk release **Good People All, This Christmas Time** ★★★★★, featuring three relative unknowns, brims with celebratory reverence.

Matthew West’s **The Heart of Christmas** ★★★★★ includes strong production and his pleasant voice, but it is maudlin schmaltz throughout, from “One Last Christmas,”

about a kid who will die before December, to “Christmas Makes Me Cry.” It is for people who put “Christmas Shoes” on repeat.

Yuletide EPs from Hawk Nelson ★★★★★ and Kutless ★★★★★ will satisfy their fans (they sound like Hawk Nelson and Kutless doing Christmas songs). Better yet is **The Heart of Christmas** ★★★★★ from Smoking Popes frontman Josh Caterer, who’s now a church worship leader. Both silly and sincere, Caterer has put more into these five tracks than you’ll find on most full albums.

Superchick guitarist Dave Ghazarian released **Vintage Christmas** ★★★★★ under the name David Ian, with a straight crooner jazz feel. It’s better than the similar effort on **Most Wonderful Time of the Year** ★★★★★ from Stone Temple Pilots frontman Scott Weiland, whose tongue is too deep into his cheek to sing well. By contrast, jazz fits Kathy Troccoli so well it’s a wonder she didn’t record **Christmas Songs** ★★★★★ two decades ago. I’d pair it with Michael Bublé’s **Christmas** ★★★★★.

If you love Mannheim Steamroller, skip **Christmas Symphony** ★★★★★, the group’s songs played with an orchestra—they sound almost exactly like the originals, synths and all. But pick up Moat Jumper’s **Christmas at the Renaissance Fair** ★★★★★. Every Christmas music playlist should have some instruments and styles you don’t hear the rest of the year. This is one of the best odd albums I’ve heard in years, and I’m sure you don’t have enough hurdy-gurdy in your collection. ➤



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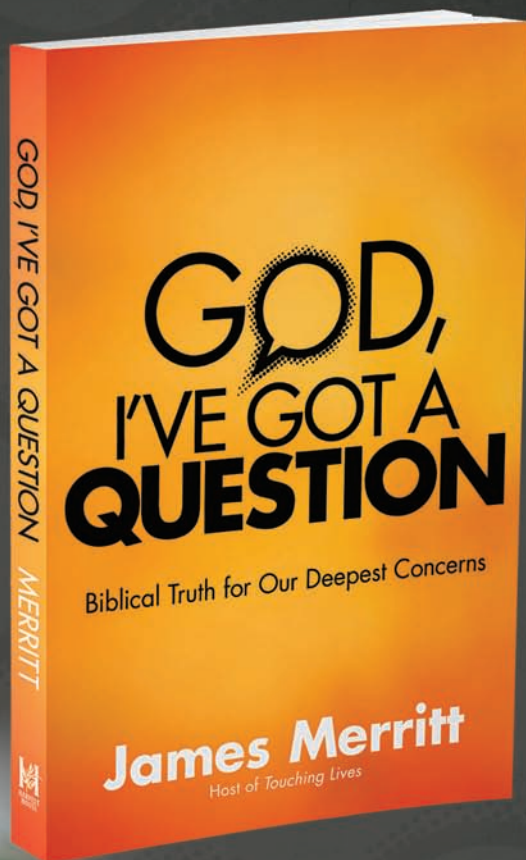
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QUICK TAKES

More media of note.

BOOKS

► GOSPEL

Recovering the Power That Made Christianity Revolutionary

J. D. GREAR (B&H)

★★★★★ Pastor J. D. Greear reflects on why, for many years, he found Christianity to be "wearisome," and on re-discovering the good news that God accepts us after Christ transformed him. *Gospel* challenges readers to obey, not out of guilt or mere duty, but out of a heart of love for the God who saves. In particular, Greear's thoughts on generosity steer a thoughtful course between legalistic asceticism and consumer visions of luxury. Following the lead of teachers like Timothy Keller, Greear seeks to ignite radical obedience to God's commands by rooting that obedience in God's radical grace. —Trevin Wax

► SURPRISED BY OXFORD

A Memoir

CAROLYN WEBER (THOMAS NELSON)

★★★★★ In *Surprised by Oxford*, Carolyn Weber recounts her journey from agnosticism to Christianity while studying at Oxford University. The result is a memoir with apologetic value, rich and varied personalities, and a dash of romance thrown in for good measure. Beautifully written, Weber's memoir is filled with prose that sings and paragraphs that beg to be read a second time. A delightful read. —Trevin Wax

► THE TRIUMPH OF CHRISTIANITY

How the Jesus Movement Became the World's Largest Religion

RODNEY STARK (HARPERONE)

★★★★★ Rodney Stark, the acclaimed historian and sociologist of religion, has long specialized in debunking conventional wisdom. His decades of careful research, distilled into many lucidly written books, have illuminated Christianity's role in building Western civilization, and dispelled persistent myths about its alleged persecution of heretics, suppression of science, and mistreatment of women. In *The Triumph of Christianity*, Stark weaves together several themes from his previous works. The result is both a panoramic narrative of Christianity's historical progress and an excellent introductory resource for readers looking to plunge into Stark's copious writings. —Matt Reynolds

MUSIC

BATSTONE/BENNETT/MACDOUGALL

JESUS MUSIC AGAIN

(INDEPENDENT)

★★★★★ CCM vets Bill Batstone, Bob Bennett, and Alex MacDougall revisit popular songs from the Jesus music era, giving them a new sparkle. Most notable is "Love Broke Through," as Bennett joins Batstone mid-song in a striking minor-key, ethereal vocal round/call-response that becomes an arresting, dusky coda. The Batstone-Bennett vocal blend often bewitches when it pops up from track to track—far and away the highlight across consistently imaginative treatments of already legendary tunes. —*Dave Urbanski*

VARIOUS ARTISTS

THE LOST NOTEBOOKS OF HANK WILLIAMS

(EGYPTIAN RECORDS)

★★★★★ When Hank Williams died in 1953, he left behind many song lyrics without accompanying melodies. Bob Dylan acquired them and farmed them out to the likes of Norah Jones, Jack White, Lucinda Williams, Merle Haggard, and Sheryl Crow, who wrote a dozen new songs in Williams's honky-tonk style. Dylan's "The Love That Faded" is a highlight, and Haggard's "The Sermon on the Mount" is a straightforward hymn. —*Andy Whitman*

ANDRAÉ CROUCH

THE JOURNEY

(RIVERPHLO)

★★★★★ With a stellar career that includes eight Grammys, Andraé Crouch enlists some of the world's most respected soul singers (Chaka Khan, Kim Burrell, Marvin Winans) to concoct a track list of R&B, retrosoul, and classic contemporary gospel. Though some may prefer to hear more Crouch, his masterful musicianship is still on display. —*Andrew Greer*

LAURA MARLING

A CREATURE I DON'T KNOW

(RIBBON RECORDS)

★★★★★ Throughout the project, Sophia and the Beast appear as loose metaphors for wisdom and desire as Laura Marling, just 21, explores the sometimes indistinguishable difference between wanting and needing, especially in terms of love, warmth, and home. Marling addresses these complexities with an unpredictable but entirely accessible folk-rock style. —*Kristin Garrett*

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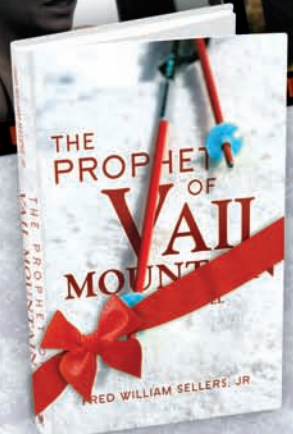
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The Old Is the New

Andrew Peterson sings of Jesus in both Testaments.

The holiday season is upon us, and for Andrew Peterson, that means hitting the road for his 12th annual Christmas tour. Since writing the music for *Behold the Lamb of God* a dozen years ago, and releasing an album of the same title in 2004, the folksy singer-songwriter has performed the popular Yuletide show hundreds of times throughout North America.

This year, Peterson will do 16 shows in 18 days, concluding, as always, with a concert at Nashville's Ryman Auditorium—a must-see event that has featured such guests as Alison Krauss, Phil Keaggy, Fernando Ortega, Buddy Miller, and Nickel Creek.

➤ **Hometown:** Nashville

➤ **Church:** Midtown Fellowship Presbyterian

➤ **Family:** Jamie (wife); Aedan, 13, Asher, 12, Skye, 9 (children)

➤ **Reading now:** *Defiant Joy: The Remarkable Life and Impact of G. K. Chesterton*

➤ **On your iPod:** Bon Iver, Sara Groves, Ben Shive

➤ **Favorite movie:** *Braveheart*

➤ **Favorite Bible verse:** Numbers 6:24–26

➤ **Favorite website:** Rabbitroom.com

➤ **Your hero:** Rich Mullins

Behold the Lamb of God, one of the best Christmas albums in decades, tells the story of Christ's coming with 12 original songs—beginning with Old Testament prophecies and the Passover, all the way through “Matthew's Begats” and the title track.

In recent years, Peterson has also gained notice as a children's author. The second book in his Wingfeather Saga series, *North! Or Be Eaten*, won the 2010 Christy Award for Young Adult Fiction. The third, *The Monster in the Hollows*, released in May, and the fourth and final book, *The Warden and the Wolf King*, will release in late 2012. ➤

question & answer

What inspired your Christmas album?

I took an Old Testament survey class in Bible college in the mid-'90s, and it was the first time I realized that the Old Testament was as much about Jesus as the New. It just lit up my imagination, which sparked this idea: *What if we could convey that through a cycle of songs about the coming of Jesus into the world?*

Did you have any idea that the Christmas tour would become so popular?

No, but we hoped it would. We also dreamed about doing it at the Ryman Auditorium. I wanted it to be a blessing to Nashville. When I'm with some of my best friends on that stage, and we're singing about this thing that unites us—the gospel—it gives me an intense emotional and spiritual high.

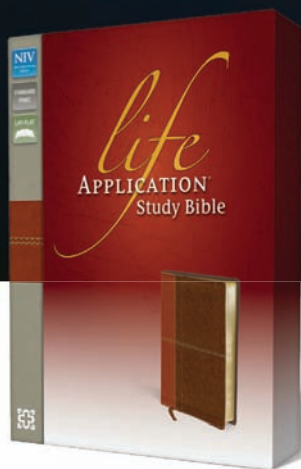
How did you get into writing children's books?

I've always wanted to write stories, but it wasn't until I read the Narnia books to my kids that I thought, *I really have to stop talking about doing this; I have to try it.* It all started one night in 2003 when I got out my sketchbooks from high school and drew a map of Aerwiar, the world where this story takes place. Then I started writing. Between that day and the day the book came out, it was about five years.

What are you doing better now than ever?

I value the people in my life more than ever. I've always had this fear that once people got to know me, they would leave. I don't know where that came from, but it means I really crave the friends I've had for a long time, because I actually believe that they know me and love me. To be known like that is one of the surest signs in my life that the grace of God is real. And I think that being in community with people like that makes me a better writer.

More: Andrew-Peterson.com, Wingfeathersaga.com



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