

Christianity Today

JULY/AUGUST 2012

A TALE of TWO SCIENTISTS



*They agree about
the scientific method—
but not about
what happened
'in the beginning.'*



**JESUS AT
BURNING MAN 52**
**GERMANY'S IRANIAN
CONVERTS 44**
**CHILDREN OF
DIVORCE 70**



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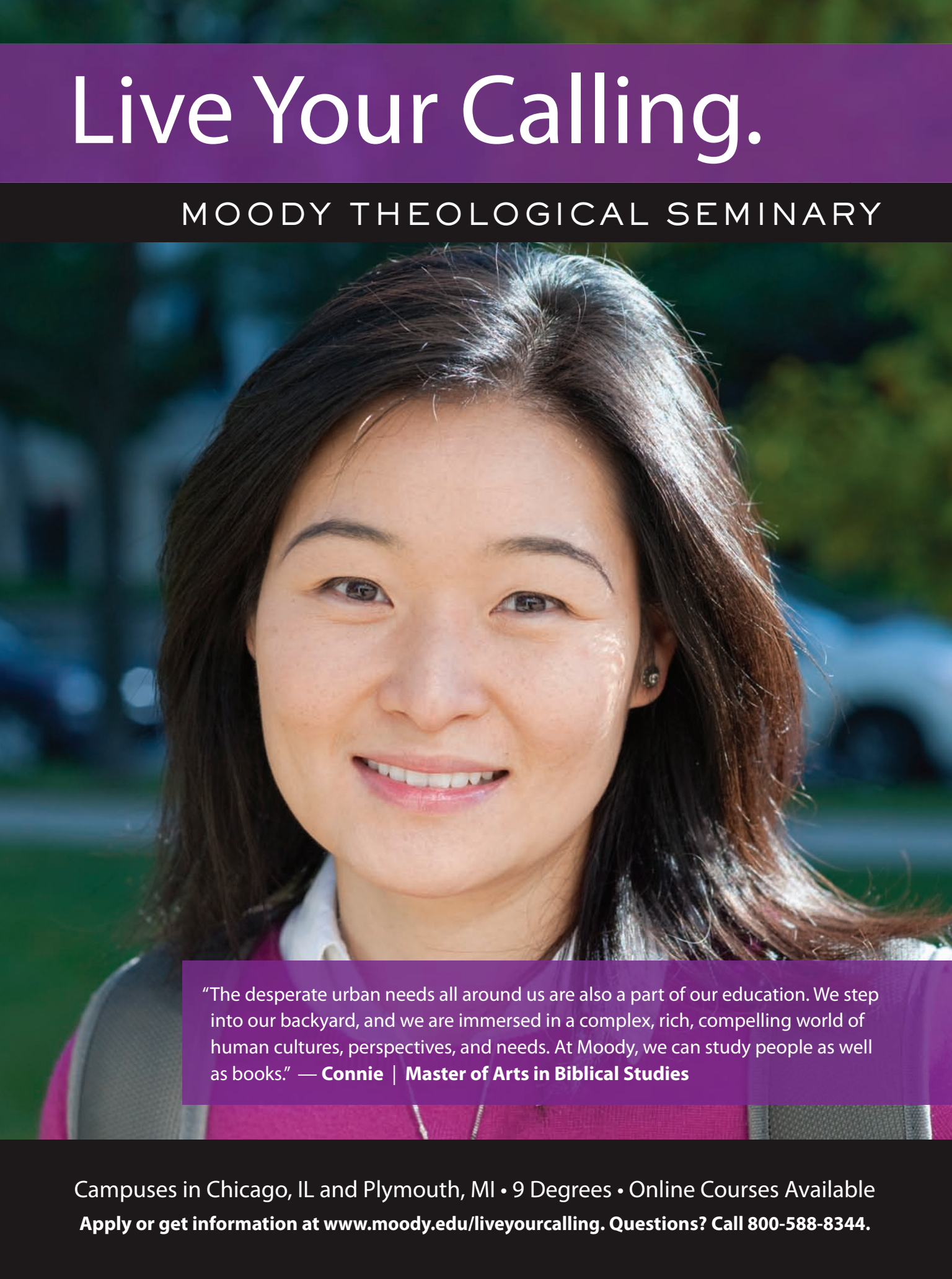
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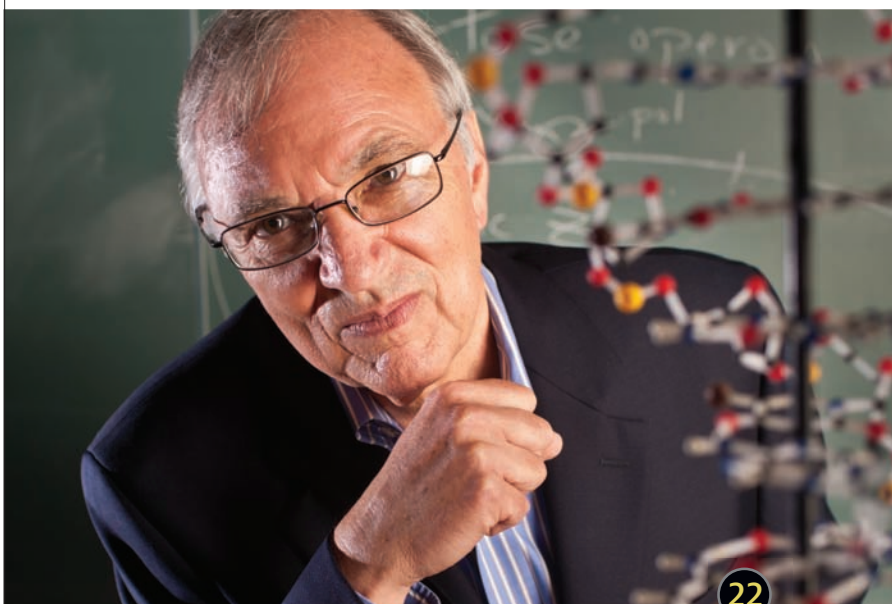
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Engaging Global Readers

Here are a few things I've learned about CT's readers from looking at the demographic data from our digital world:

- The city with the largest concentration of CT's Facebook fans is Manila, the capital of the Philippines. After Manila comes Chicago, then Singapore, then Los Angeles, and then London. In other words, three of CT's top five Facebook cities are outside the United States.

- Twenty-five percent of CT's web visits come from outside the United States. Twenty percent from outside North America. This is 16 times the percentage of our print subscriptions that go overseas.

- Of the print magazine articles that were posted on CT's website during May, the three that received the highest readership were about Christian ministry outside the United States—Mozambique, Croatia, and Francophone Quebec.

How can the CT team continue to serve our U.S. subscriber base while expanding our global reach? I have wondered.

It is hard to predict who wants to read about what, but that is part of our job as editors. In this issue, I suspect that "The Other Iranian Revolution" (page 44) will engage readers both inside and outside the United States. The story is set in Germany, but its focus is on a sudden upsurge in baptisms of well-educated, young immigrants from Iran. Uwe Siemon-Netto and Matthias Pankau track the factors that contribute to this surprising trend.

Also in this issue: A report from Syria, where Christians are working amidst violence to heal sectarian divisions. And a look at Israel's Elah Valley and the 3,000-year-old border between Philistia and Israel.

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David Neff, Editor in Chief

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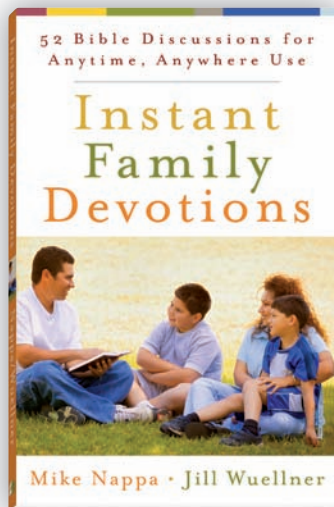
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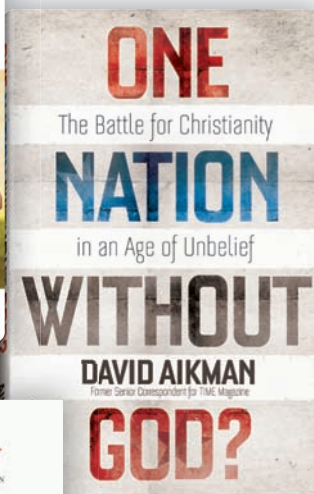
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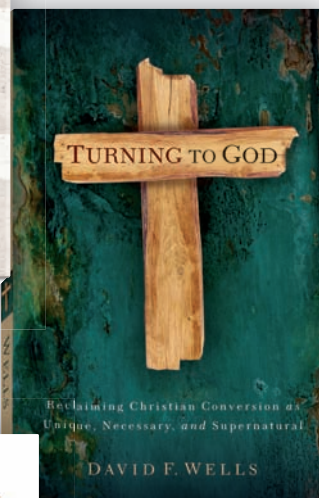
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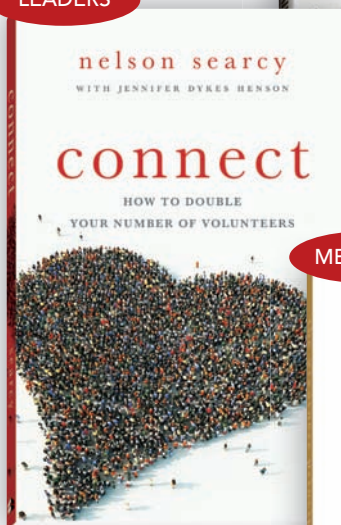


David Aikman turns his journalist's eye to the rise of hostility toward Christian expression in America and the alarming decline of orthodox belief among those who call themselves Christians.

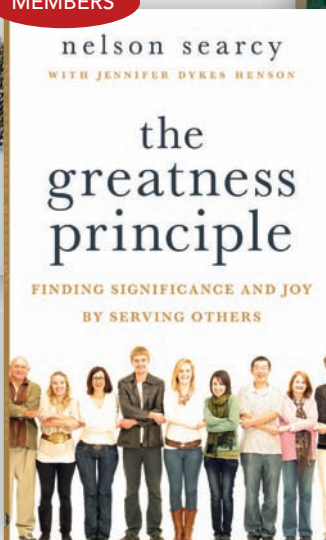


LEADERS

What if your church had more volunteers than you knew what to do with? Sound far-fetched? Nelson Searcy unveils his secret to doubling your volunteer base in as little as one day.



MEMBERS



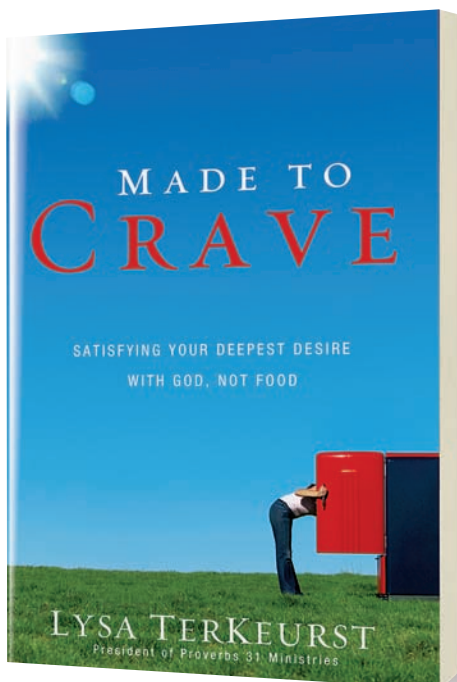
Perfect companion to *Connect*. This little book is full of practical insight and inspired ideas that will energize members and have them clamoring to volunteer their talents for the sake of the kingdom.

Does a person have to “convert” to be a Christian? Can one merely “follow” Jesus by studying Scripture? Does the Bible ever say that conversion is necessary? *Turning to God* explores these fundamental questions about regeneration and conversion.

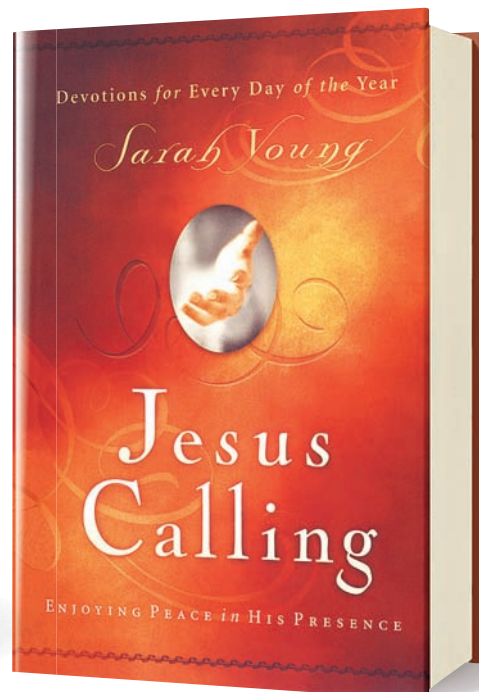




women of faith



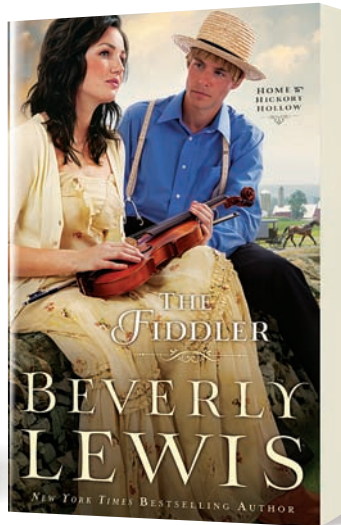
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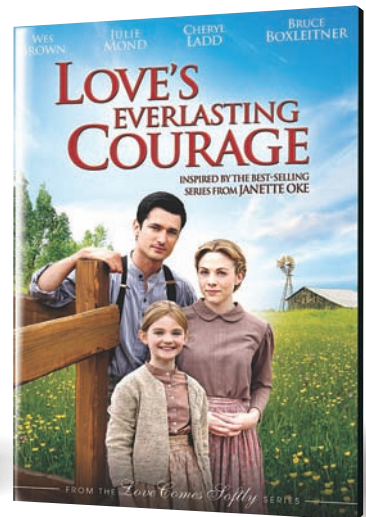
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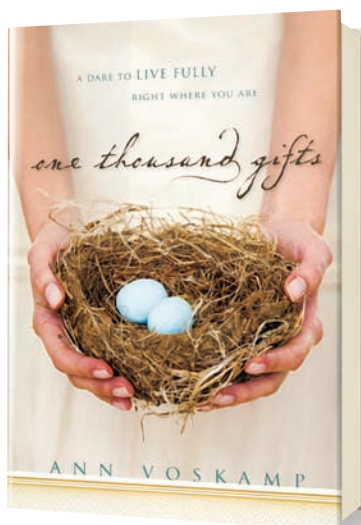
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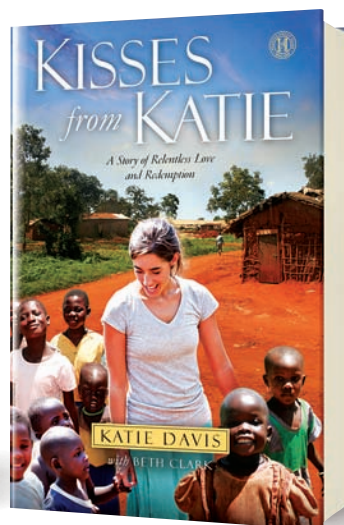
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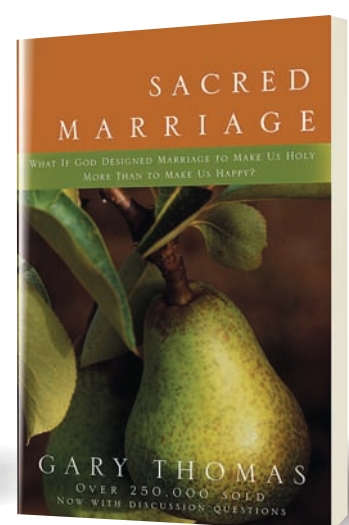
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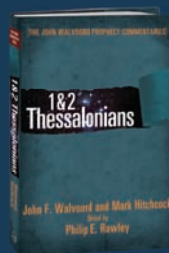
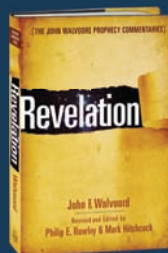
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No 'Lazy Days' Here

Here's what's in the works at CT.



Whoever said summer was lazy? Certainly no one here at *Christianity Today*!

The "vacation" season has already introduced several new and exciting changes to the *Christianity Today* operation, beginning with our redesigned and expanded website that went live in June.

ChristianityToday.com has the same award-winning content you've come to expect every day—only now there's more of it! And it's re-organized so that you can more easily find the stories and commentary you want.

If you haven't checked it out, do so—then let us know what you think.

While I'm effusing over this revitalized site, let me also mention several additional CT digital delights making their way to a device near you.

For starters, we'll expand our international news coverage—a CT uniqueness—to give site visitors even greater access to what our God is doing in and through his church worldwide.

We are also planning several new digital formats for the popular Her.meneutics women's blog (read by a lot of men as well). To get on the front end of this expansion, sign up for the Her.meneutics e-newsletter by clicking the newsletter icon under "Follow CT Anywhere" at our website.

Lastly, a CT iPad app and new mobile website are planned for early fall. You'll have increased access to CT wherever you find yourself.

Complementing the quality of this digital expansion is the fine-tuning that goes into every issue of our flagship periodical. We always want to give you the best, most comprehensive print read possible. Those two goals come together nicely in the issue you're holding.

This issue probably felt thicker when you pulled it out of your mailbox. (A bit of a surprise for a summer issue, as they are traditionally smaller.) But this one is a "twofer"—two issues collapsed into one bigger summer read.

This doubling up benefits both you and *Christianity Today*. It gives you a more substantial summer read. And it allows us to keep your subscription cost stable in the wake of rising paper and postal costs.

Of course, as a subscriber, you always have access to our expanding web content, including nearly 20 years of archival material. You also have access to every new digital outlet we introduce.

All to say, then, that no matter if you're home, at the office, or on the beach this summer, you can read ever more CT content—and at no more cost than what you may have paid three, four, or five years ago. So relax. And enjoy!

Next issue: This Is Our City reports from Phoenix about ministry to migrants, Timothy C. Morgan interviews Chinese human-rights watchdog Bob Fu, and Jamie Smith explains why the Galileo incident is a conversation stopper on science and religion.

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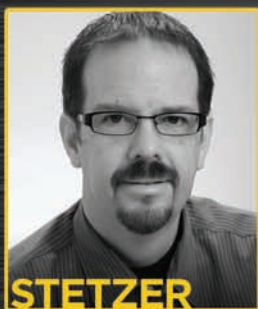
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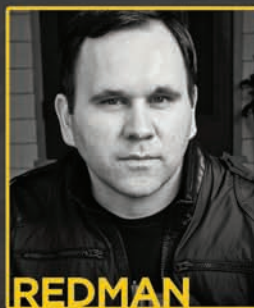
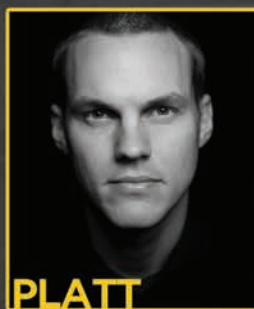
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SPOTLIGHT: Exorcism Routine

➔ Christians have been casting out “unclean spirits” since Jesus dispatched the 12 disciples throughout Israel (Matt. 10). But how do deliverance ministers deal with demons in North America today? A recent study by Michael Mohr, an Ohio pastor, and Kenneth D. Royal, an adjunct professor at the University of Kentucky, found that today’s self-professed exorcists don’t see it as special or complicated. That is, most believe any mature Christian can cast out demons, and that no special items—water, oil, or crucifixes—are needed beyond the authority of Jesus’ name.

How to Drive Out Demons

Survey responses of 170 self-professed North American exorcists.

■ None/Almost Never
■ Occasionally
■ Frequently
■ Almost Always/Always

I use Jesus’ name to cast out and/or bind demons. 1% 99%

I/we use blessed items such as water, oil, salt, a cross, or a crucifix. 43% 13% 11% 33%

I have the demonized person or guardian sign a consent form. 69% 11% 5% 15%

I operate my ministry out of a community/church where follow-up can happen. 11% 7% 9% 73%

I lay hands on a person to cast out a demon from him or her. 25% 28% 15% 32%

People seek me to cast out demons. 6% 27% 30% 37%

The demonized person tells me when the demon has left. 17% 28% 26% 29%

I fast in preparation for casting out demons. 15% 38% 29% 18%

I try to find out the demon’s name. 28% 35% 10% 27%

I/we take breaks during the process of casting out demons. 27% 32% 20% 21%

When casting out demons, I send them to a specific place. 31% 14% 11% 44%

I have other believers with me during sessions. 3% 12% 19% 66%

■ Strongly Disagree/Disagree ■ Undecided ■ Agree/Strongly Agree

I believe that any mature Christian can command demons in Jesus’ name. 2% 2% 96%

The church should confirm and commission or ordain those who cast out demons. 30% 22% 48%

“Dealing with spiritual/emotional ‘garbage’ first is more important than dealing with the ‘rats.’ I’ve clocked well over 2,000 deliverances, and this approach weakens the demons so casting them out is usually quite easy. Demons are ‘the little problem.’”

Charles Kraft, author, *Christianity with Power*

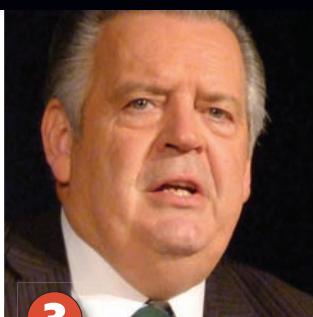
“God is bringing deliverance to the forefront again because he wants us to do it right this time—with love, credibility, and being biblically sound. Jesus spent about one-third of his public ministry casting out demons. Our ministry should be no different today.”

Bill Sudduth, International Society of Deliverance Ministers

“For a group of people who rarely, if ever, have contact with one another, what exorcists from a wide variety of religious traditions share in common is astonishing. Perhaps the Holy Spirit is actually leading us who serve the Lord through this ministry.”

David W. Appleby, president, *Spiritual Interventions, Inc.*





GLEANINGS

Important developments in the church and the world.

1 Faculty leave en masse over lifestyle pledge

At least a third of the faculty at Shorter University, a Southern Baptist school in Georgia, have resigned after being required to sign a "personal lifestyle statement" that condemns public drinking, premarital sex, and homosexuality. The school's Board of Trustees last fall adopted the pledge, along with a statement of faith, after new president Don Dowless arrived. By mid-May, 36 of approximately 100 faculty members had resigned; at least 25 more cited disagreement with the pledge or faith statement. Dowless affirmed the school's decision despite the resignations, citing a desire to "bring the university back to its Christian roots."

and the cancellation of his weekly radio program. Land, the longtime president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) and a key proponent of racial reconciliation in the SBC, apologized twice for the comments. But the ERLC trustee committee, whose chairman resigned during the investigation, said that "damage was done to the state of race relations in the [SBC]." James Dixon, president of the SBC's National African American Fellowship, said in a statement that although the fellowship felt the committee did not go far enough, its members were ready to "work arm-in-arm [with Land] in the cause of racial healing."

2 Court: Try harder to find non-Christian prayers

The Second Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that a New York town board's tradition of opening monthly meetings with prayer is unconstitutional because the town should have tried harder to find non-Christian speakers—even if that required recruiting beyond the town's borders. The court, in its first case addressing legislative prayer, ruled that the Town of Greece's prayer policy effectively associated the town with Christianity because the town didn't actively solicit non-Christian speakers or—given that the town has no non-Christian congregations within it—go beyond its borders to recruit them.

3 Land loses radio show over comments

The investigation into Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) leader Richard Land's racially charged and plagiarized radio commentary on the Trayvon Martin case concluded with two official reprimands

4 Church sues ex-member for blog comments

An Oregon woman's online critiques of her former church could cost her half a million dollars. The pastor of Beaverton Grace Bible Church (BGC) sued Julie Anne Smith, her daughter, and three other former church members for \$500,000 in damages, alleging that Smith's blog, Beaverton Grace Bible Church Survivors, amounts to defamation. After Smith and her family left the church years ago and were subsequently shunned by their church friends, she posted critical reviews of the church online. Within days, BGC filed its lawsuit. Smith wrote on her blog that she doesn't plan to back down.

5 Churches liable for pastors' decisions

A Kentucky jury found a church liable for the 2009 death of a boy killed after a youth minister let the boy drive his vehicle. Big Springs Assembly of God said it couldn't have predicted Derek Coulter would let 13-year-old Jamie Mitchell drive on a

non-church-sponsored trip, but Mitchell's parents argued the church failed in its "sacred duty" to protect children. In Florida, a jury found the state chapter of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) liable for the actions of a former pastor convicted of sexually abusing a 13-year-old boy. The jury ruled the SBC failed to do enough to uncover previous allegations of inappropriate behavior with young boys at Douglas W. Myers's previous churches when it hired him to plant two new churches. However, the jury also agreed that Myers was not a convention employee, prompting two SBC motions asking for a reversal of the "inconsistent" verdict.

6 City can tax church room by room

New Hampshire cities can tax churches on portions of their property deemed not to be used for religious purposes, according to a unanimous ruling by the state's supreme court. The City of Concord taxed Liberty Assembly of God (now Destiny Christian Center) on 40 percent of its property in 2008. The church argued the city couldn't decide "which parts of a church were and were not religious." But the state supreme court disagreed, ruling that "a church's assertion that a building constitutes a 'house of public worship' is [not] sufficient to place it beyond investigation" for an exemption from property taxes.

7 Refugee religious tests criticized—again

CANADA The Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) is under fire once again for its treatment of applicants for religious refugee status. At Haixin Zhang's hearing on his application for refugee protection, an IRB adjudicator ruled the Chinese immigrant had joined a church in Canada to support a fraudulent refugee claim. Zhang knew the names of only two of Jesus' apostles, two of the Gospels, and one prayer—the Lord's Prayer, which

GO FIGURE Prayer

34%

Prayers submitted online to the Church of England that focused on personal needs.

4%

Prayers submitted in churches (as handwritten notes) that focused on personal needs.

Journal of Beliefs and Values





compiled by Jeremy Weber

QUOTATION MARKS

"Just post the bottom six."

Michael Urbanski, U.S. district judge, suggesting how Virginia's Giles County School Board could resolve an ACLU lawsuit over a contested Ten Commandments display at Narrows High School by dropping the four that mention God.

The Roanoke Times

"Our chickens have come home to roost."

Dale Jones, Nazarene researcher for the U.S. Religion Census, explaining how American emphasis on a "personal relationship with Jesus Christ" has contributed to more than 80 percent of Americans claiming to be Christian but less than 50 percent being affiliated with a congregation.

RNS

"They were punching way above their weight."

Robin Sloan, Twitter researcher, noting that messages from evangelical celebrities such as Joyce Meyer, Max Lucado, and Andy Stanley have 30 times more engagement than messages from pop culture celebrities such as Lady Gaga and Justin Bieber.

The New York Times

"Praise the Lord and pass the rattlesnakes, brother."

Mark Randall "Mack" Wolford, one of Appalachia's most famous Pentecostal serpent handlers, on Facebook promoting an outdoor service where he later died of a rattlesnake bite. His father also died while handling serpents.

The Washington Post

"They believed time was going to end [and] Jesus Christ would return."

Robert Webb, attorney, defending Kentucky internet evangelist Ronald Weinland from tax evasion charges. Federal agents say Weinland owes \$357,000 in unpaid taxes; Webb said the evangelist had no "criminal intent" because his church believes the end times began in May.

WLWT Cincinnati

11

he recited incorrectly. But a federal judge sent the case back for review, arguing the IRB should abandon testing the religious knowledge of refugees because "religious knowledge cannot be equated to faith." The IRB has been chastised three times within the past year for similar cases.

③ Churches protest building moratorium

SOUTH AFRICA Pastors in Cape

Town want the city to take a second look at a moratorium on building new churches that both parties signed two years ago to end a crackdown on illegal churches on city land. City administrators agreed to stop demolishing illegal churches as long as no more were built without approval. Now the Western Cape Christian Ministers Forum alleges that the city is not providing land agreements for new churches in a timely manner. However, the city said it regularly works with the forum to identify viable church sites.

⑨ Communion pact unites races

After more than a decade of discussion, the predominantly white United Methodist Church (UMC) has entered a full communion agreement with five historically black denominations. The April vote at the UMC General Conference means the denominations will recognize each other's churches, affirm their clergy and ministries, and share sacraments. The move comes a dozen years after the UMC apologized to African Americans for racist policies that led to the creation of separate African American churches.

⑩ Presbyteries amicably lose third of members

Two Presbyterian regional bodies lost one-third of their members with surprisingly little acrimony compared to many departures from the Presbyterian Church (USA) and other mainline denominations. The

Presbytery of Mississippi approved the dismissal of five churches to the more-conservative Evangelical Presbyterian Church, keeping a hands-off policy toward the property and funds of departing churches. (It renounced the PC(USA)'s property-trust clause in 2006.) Meanwhile, the Presbytery of Tropical Florida approved the dismissal of nine churches but required compensation of \$500,000, reflecting three years of per-capita payments to the denomination and parting offerings.

⑪ Finalists named for free campus

The billionaire owners of a Massachusetts campus founded by D. L. Moody announced two finalists in June in the competition to receive the property free of charge. The Green family, which owns Hobby Lobby, will give the 217-acre campus either to the Southern Baptist Convention's North American Mission Board or to Grand Canyon University, a for-profit Christian college in Phoenix. The campus was first intended to become the home of the much-discussed C. S. Lewis College, but organizers failed to raise enough money for operational costs to make the dream a reality.

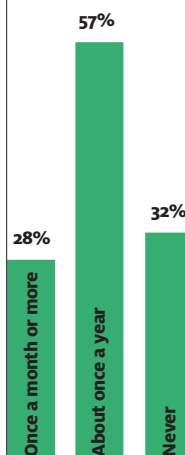
⑫ Industrial sites opened to church use

SINGAPORE Churches seeking worship space in crowded Singapore will now have more options, thanks to new rules that open industrial sites to religious groups. The rules permit services in approximately 40 percent of the island's industrial buildings, but limit religious use to only two days per week, according to the *Straits Times*. Religious groups currently meeting in industrial buildings illegally have a three-year grace period to comply. The new rules also allow religious groups to build bigger facilities on their existing land, subject to approval by the city-state.

GO FIGURE

Technology

Regular churchgoers (who are online) visit their own congregation's website:



Grey Matter Research



MINISTRY

Adoptable Kids in Short Supply

But demand is high as evangelicals adopt wider variety of children than ever. By Ken Walker

Tighter government restrictions have reduced the number of children adopted from overseas to a 15-year low. In response, evangelicals—more willing than ever to adopt—are broadening the type of children they are willing to take in.

More families, for example, are taking special-needs children, older kids, and those in foster care. Meanwhile, agencies are developing child-care subsidies and other programs to facilitate in-country adoptions.

“Constrictions on adoption of younger, healthier children have nudged many Christians to consider situations they may not have otherwise contemplated,” said Jedd Medefind, president of the Christian Alliance for Orphans (CAO).

Bethany Christian Services, which facilitates hundreds of international adoptions annually,

released an adoption kit for HIV-positive kids in 2011. President Bill Blacquiere says churches are responding.

“These children have a big need to have a family,” he said. “Their future is very dim.”

Worldwide, adoptions by foreign parents declined from 45,000 in 2004 to 25,000 last year. The United States saw an even greater drop, from 25,000 such adoptions in 2004 to just over 9,000 in 2011.

The reasons vary. Although the Hague Adoption Convention passed stricter guidelines in 1993, these didn’t take effect in the United States until 2008. Top sending countries like Ethiopia and Guatemala have curtailed most outside adoptions, while Russia now requires three official visits that can cost \$50,000.

There is also the bad taste left by a scandal two years ago, when Haitian officials accused a Kansas



Bottleneck Bypass:
As international adoptions hit a 15-year low, evangelical families are taking in more special-needs, teenage, and foster children.

missionary of trying to sneak children across the border to the Dominican Republic.

However, an official with Dallas-based Buckner International said despite changing conditions, needs are still being met.

“Does the [decrease] mean that fewer children are finding homes?” said vice president Scott Collins. “Not necessarily.”

One example is the new willingness Buckner has seen among families to adopt children from foster homes. In addition, the ministry has helped develop in-country adoption programs in 19 other countries.

Dan Cruver, director of Together for Adoption—the four-year-old “theological engine” of the evangelical adoption movement—believes such programs are a key to resolving the global orphan crisis.

“When looking at the [situation] as a whole, it’s quite clear that international adoption will never be a primary means of addressing it,” he said.

However, this diversification doesn’t mean the world’s orphan problems are near an end, says Philip Wurster, director of the National Association of Christian Child and Family Agencies.

Millions of children worldwide still do not live in a family, and today’s unstable economy, higher costs, and increased bureaucracy makes it tougher for them to find loving homes, he said.

“International adoption remains, to some extent, a political issue,” said Wurster. “Potential adoptive families may be caught in the middle.”

Medefind agrees, saying the bottleneck has grown tighter in recent years amid increasing demand.

“So vast numbers of children are growing up in institutions or on the streets due to the constricted pipeline between unparented children and the caring adults willing to become their parents,” he said.

Even with tighter supply, the evangelical adoption movement continues to grow. Attendance at

GO FIGURE Generations

2.2 million
Gen X members who changed their religious self-identification to “None” between 1990 and 2008.

1.8 million
Gen X members who became non-denominational Christians since 1990.

0.9 million
Gen X members who no longer identify as Catholics since 1990.

ARIS, Trinity College

cao's annual summit mushroomed in the past eight years from 40 to more than 2,000. After a 35 percent decrease last year in Bethany's international adoptions, formal applications in 2012 are up 20 percent.

"I would say God's Spirit is moving," Blacquiére said. "The church is catching up in missions to the world." ☩

HIGHER EDUCATION

Mixed Views on Veto

Student groups divide over Vanderbilt policy.
By Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra

Vanderbilt University will stand by its "all-comers" policy for student groups next fall, after a veto from Tennessee governor Bill Haslam in May stopped popular legislation that sought to block it.

The policy requires student groups to open membership and leadership positions to all. The legislation, which passed both state houses easily, would have instructed Tennessee's public universities—and Vanderbilt—to drop "all-comers" policies or extend them to now-exempt fraternities and sororities.

While Haslam disagrees with the policy, he said government interference in the policies of private institutions was inappropriate.

"It was the wrong decision," said Christian Legal Society (CLS) counsel Kim Colby. Christian groups should be able to require student leaders to be Christians, she said.

CLS is one of 15 Christian groups that refused to sign the new policy. The groups include more than 1,400 students.

But some religious groups at Vanderbilt agreed with the veto.

"If you try to use [legislation] to force a private [school] to do something, that could come back to our evangelical colleges and seminaries,"

said Reformed University Fellowship (RUF) national coordinator Rod Mays. "People aren't really thinking through this process carefully to understand this could hurt us."

The campus ministry is led by an ordained chaplain and doesn't depend on student leaders, so RUF has signed the policy.

InterVarsity Christian Fellowship has recently been challenged at 41 campuses, said national field director Greg Jao. Much of what colleges want in an all-comers policy is laudable, he said. But what has gone wrong is lack of appreciation for the truth claims of faith organizations.

"Our position is informed in part by our understanding of history," said Jao. Student-focused missions—such as the YMCA—were once vibrant; but as they downplayed the need for students to embrace the core beliefs of Christianity, God removed them from campus life, he said.

"We've watched this kind of thing happen before," said Jao. "We're saying, 'Not on our watch.'" ☩

ARCHAEOLOGY

Goliath Gold Rush

Early Israelite dig helps define David and Solomon.
By Gordon Govier

Two small portable shrines are giving Bible scholars new clues about Israelite religious practices during the time of David and Solomon. They also indicate a pendulum swing in the world of biblical archaeology.

Hebrew University archaeologist Yosef Garfinkel showcased the shrines at a news conference in May. They were discovered during last summer's excavations at Khirbet Qeiyafa, a ruin overlooking Israel's Elah Valley dated to 1020–980 B.C.

The Elah Valley was where David brought down the giant Goliath, signaling the beginning of the end

of Philistine hegemony over the Israelites. Similarly, the discoveries at Khirbet Qeiyafa herald the diminishing influence of minimalist Bible critics who have discounted the importance of the biblical kings.

John Monson, an archaeologist at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, is excavating at Khirbet Qeiyafa this summer. He believes Garfinkel's excavations are revealing a fortress built to defend one of the most important routes between the Israelites in the Judean hills and the Philistines on the coastal plain.

"This is a front-row seat to what transpired in that ebb and flow between Israel and the Philistines, as we see it recorded in 1 and 2 Samuel," he said.

Archaeologists have been arguing for decades over whether David and Solomon had the kingly stature described in the Bible or were more like tribal chieftains. Garfinkel is helping clear up the dispute.

More archaeologists are now focusing on this border region. "I see a gold rush mentality now in the lowlands of Judah," Monson said.

This summer, archaeologists are beginning a new excavation at nearby Azekah. Socoh, another site overlooking the Elah Valley, will open up soon. These will join ongoing excavations at nearby Tel Burna, Tel es-Safi (Gath), and Tel Zayit.

Steve Ortiz, professor of archaeology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, thinks Khirbet Qeiyafa may predate both David and Solomon. "As early as the time of King Saul," he said. "[It] represents that change from a tribal society to one with centralized cooperation."

Ortiz excavated with Garfinkel at Tel Mikne-Ekron, a Philistine site, and now co-directs excavations at Tel Gezer, another border site.

Both Ortiz and Monson note the lack of iconography on the two shrines and the absence of idols with them. That would seem to conform to Scripture's admonition against

[continued on 16]

PASSAGES



Retiring
Richard Mouw
President of Fuller Theological Seminary, in June 2013. He has been president since 1993.



Died
Edward Ellis
Pioneer of black campus ministry and racial reconciliation with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, on May 12 in a car accident. He was 63.



Leaving
Shane Hipps
Teaching pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church (Michigan), once a replacement is found. Hipps said the church elders' new job description for him would "dramatically reduce my service to the broader church."

Briefing [from 15]

graven images.

Also intrigued is Wheaton College archaeologist Daniel Master, who directs the ongoing excavations at Ashkelon, a coastal Philistine city.

"We will be trying to understand Garfinkel's finds for some time to come," Master said. "Since this period is not well understood in Judah, it is somewhat difficult to know how representative these finds are for the highlands as a whole." ➤

CHURCH & STATE

Childproofing Churches

Daycare drowning renews regulation debate. By C. L. Lopez

The drowning death of a 1-year-old boy in a church baptismal at an unlicensed Indianapolis daycare has fueled debate over whether state governments should license faith-based childcare facilities.

In February, workers at Fellowship Assembly of God found Juan Cardenas in a baptismal filled with

two feet of water. The church daycare was cited for 18 violations when inspected in November 2011.

Childcare ministries outnumber licensed centers 730 to 601 in Indiana; only about 5 percent meet state licensing requirements. Indiana is one of 13 states that exempt faith-based childcare providers from licensing.

Daycares and government officials have debated state licensing for years. In Missouri, 41 children died in unlicensed daycares between 2007 and 2010. Lawmakers focused on improving safety but rolled back rules for religious daycares in 2009 because of church-state concerns. In Pennsylvania, an appeals court recently settled a 50-year legal battle over the state's authority to regulate religious daycares when it affirmed the 1997 forced closure of a Catholic daycare in Allentown.

Some say states should avoid licensing religious daycares. Clashes of belief are inevitable whenever government insists on supervising religion, said William Cox Jr., a professor of education at Regent University. "[And] to think the state is going to prevent all accidents is making the state out to be a god."

Others say state licensing is necessary for safety. "Safety is

DISCUSSION STARTER Church Life

The General Conference of the United Methodist Church voted in May to stop guaranteeing continuous appointments to ordained clergy. Supporters say the move will allow churches to more easily remove ineffective clergy; opponents argue the practice protects clergy members.

non-negotiable," said Milton Uecker, associate dean of education at Columbia International University. "As soon as you have too many children and not enough adults, it is not even good education."

Indiana's childcare ministries vary in the quality of services they provide, said Ted Maple, director of the United Way of Central Indiana's Success by Six program. Some are hosted by churches as a way to generate revenue from unused space. Others are for-profit ventures housed in strip malls or residential homes.

"Church buildings are not typically designed [with] childcare in mind," said Maple. So his program has provided local childcare ministries with funding for staff mentoring and improvements to facilities. "The faith-based community should be setting the example," he said.

Licensing has not been an issue in other states, advocates say. For example, California requires it; yet Michael Stewart, director of the Central Coast Baptist Association, says this has not affected the religious identity of his association's daycares. "Accountability is a good thing [when] dealing with kids who can't talk or defend themselves," he said. "Safety is not a religious issue." ➤

UNDER DISCUSSION Topics in the current debate.

compiled by Ruth Moon

Should pastors be guaranteed job security?

YES

"A lengthy renewable contract makes some sense, and I can envision a scenario where it might endow a pastor with necessary authority, time, and freedom. But accountability always needs to be in place. Few things are more dangerous in a pulpit than a lack of it."

JASON HOOD

scholar in residence, Christ United Methodist Church

"A church covenant specifying responsibilities of a pastor to a congregation and vice versa—including a biblical process to address grievances—would be appropriate and helpful. I would not support some legal arrangement that spelled out guaranteed terms of office."

RUSSELL MOORE

dean, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

"It's a really good idea for pastors to be at their churches for as long as they possibly can. There's a biblical idea that a long-term relationship is ideal. But I don't think the church has to guarantee that an elder or pastor will remain in residence."

OWEN STRACHAN

professor, Boyce College

"Clearly the congregation needs to be able to get to know its pastor, but setting a specific time limit is like a fixed-term presidency: It could impact the way the pastor behaves just to massage his popularity numbers when the key vote comes down in three or four years' time."

CARL TRUEMAN

professor, Westminster Theological Seminary

"Clergy should have assessments, but the commitment between a pastor and a church should be more covenantal than contractual. For there to be a covenantal bond, there also needs to be an unconditional commitment between them—one not linked to time limits."

MICHAEL GLODO

professor, Reformed Theological Seminary

"Pastors have to be willing to lead a precarious existence. When we no longer are of service to a particular congregation and its mission, or to a living, demanding God, then we must seek ministry elsewhere. Tenure and contracts are out of place."

WILLIAM WILLIMON

bishop, Alabama Conference, UMC

NO



Showing the Cross: In Daraa, Christian Syrians at a protest hold up crosses painted with colors from Syria's national flag. Some Christians in Daraa have joined the protests against President Assad.

RECONCILIATION MIDDLE EAST

Syria's Last Chance

As violence surges and diplomacy fails, Christians, Muslims, and Druze advocate for reconciliation and democracy. By Dale Gavlak in Amman, Jordan, and Cairo, Egypt

In Syria, the pursuit of peace has become a driving passion of the nation's Christian leaders. As violence worsens, longstanding Christian support for the regime of President Bashar Assad is weakening. A growing number of Christians believe regime change is necessary even if they don't dare go public with their views.

Starting in March 2011, Syrians took part in Arab Spring protests against President Assad. Violence soon broke out as soldiers fired at unarmed demonstrators in Daraa. Analysts estimate that in the past 16 months, 14,000 people have died—and the

number is growing. In late May, militias in Houla slaughtered 108 civilians, including 49 children and 35 women. One 11-year-old witnessed his family being murdered.

Christians and other religious leaders are working alongside activists to avert a slide into all-out civil war. Christian leaders say every effort must be made to stop a replay of the kind of sectarian violence that split Iraq along religious-ethnic fault lines. Syria has a Sunni Muslim majority, but the minority Alawite Muslim sect holds most of the power. Christians, mostly Orthodox and Catholic, make up about 9 percent of Syria's 22 million people. Evangelicals compose less than 1 percent of the population.

One large Christian ministry active in Syria is the Catholic Near East Welfare Association. "Christians over the past six months have found themselves a new vocation: to be the peacemakers of Syria," Carl Héту, director of the agency's Canadian office, told a Canadian news outlet. Héту thinks that the warring sects might listen to the Christians' call for a ceasefire and dialogue, "because they are well respected." In comments to Open Doors, the religious freedom ministry, one Damascus pastor said, "The church is praying non-stop. What will happen next? Only God knows the answer, but the church is definitely standing in the gap, praying."



Speaking Out: Bas-sam Ishak (right) joins protests outside the Syrian embassy in Amman, Jordan.

Meanwhile, relief work undertaken by Christians is touching many lives:

- In villages surrounding Homs, the besieged Syrian city of 1 million, Christians are taking into their own homes up to 50,000 fellow believers to provide emergency shelter. Homs is a key city for opposition forces and subject to repeated artillery attacks. Some reports indicate that extremists have forced Christians to flee their homes.

- In Lebanon, there are about 24,000 Syrian refugees. About 75 percent are women and children. World Vision is working with local Lebanese to set up four safe zones for children to play. (About 500 children have died in the conflict so far.)

- In Jordan, there are as many as 122,000 Syrian refugees, according to Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh. Local evangelical congregations as well as Catholics and Canadian Mennonites have started programs to provide housing, medicine, and school kits to thousands of families.

THE MATTHEW 18 MODEL

Syrian Christians are also undertaking what they believe will be a more difficult but potentially more fruitful task: faith-based reconciliation.

In mid-May, 50 Syrians joined a discussion group in Cairo. Druze, Muslims, and

Christians took part. Among the participants were a former candidate for Syria's parliament, a female art enthusiast, a hip 20-something media consultant, and an American globe-trotting professor-peace-maker. They share the twin goals of regime change and democracy for Syria.

Some 22 years ago, Brian Cox, an adjunct professor at Pepperdine University School of Law and senior vice president for Dispute Resolution Training for the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy, developed a model of reconciliation based on Matthew 18. He believes this approach will prove useful in Syria and spoke at the meeting in Cairo.

The relational method that Cox developed works well with both secular and faith-based groups. "It's a unique process that is not interfaith dialogue, not traditional conflict resolution," said Cox, also an Episcopal priest in California.

This approach, he said, is well suited to the Middle East with its populations of Muslims, Jews, and Christians. "It focuses on softening hearts as the first step toward constructive, joint problem-solving," he said.

Over the years, Cox has traveled to the world's hotspots to introduce more leaders to faith-based reconciliation. Cox and others worked for eight years before making significant progress in reconciling Pakistani Muslims and Indian Hindus in

Kashmir. In the Mideast, he has already worked with Israelis, Palestinians, and Muslim Brotherhood members.

This intensive approach has little competition and gains little official support from government diplomats. In a 2010 report, Cox noted that a high-level official in the U.S. State Department paid his Asian program an unexpected compliment, saying, "Well, nothing else has worked in Kashmir. We might as well give faith a chance."

Cox's model of faith-based reconciliation centers on eight core values: pluralism, inclusion, peacemaking, social justice, forgiveness, healing historical wounds, sovereignty, and atonement. In the Syrian context, it potentially lays groundwork to assist activists in creating and implementing a strategic plan for national healing and reconciliation.

In Syria, Cox developed a list of critical questions, including:

- What is the place of God, faith, and religion in Syrian politics and a future state?
- How do we create an intentional pluralistic community in Syria that is inclusive of all ethnic, political, and religious groups?
- How do we foster a spirit of personal and political forgiveness between those who served or benefited from the regime and those who suffered at the hands of the regime?

Cox is planning a follow-up event in the coming months.

SEEKING NONVIOLENT CHANGE

The situation in Syria took a dramatic turn when soldiers fired on unarmed demonstrators in Daraa, killing at least 20 persons. The demonstrators were marching to protest the arrest and torture of boys who had written, "The people want to topple the regime" on town walls in Daraa.

As violence spreads across the nation, some Syrian leaders have come to believe the government is intentionally pitting one group against another. This means the regime has set the Alawite community (an offshoot of Shiite Islam whose members constitute Syria's minority ruling elite) against the majority Sunni population.

"It tells the Alawites that the Sunnis will kill you and does the same with the Sunnis in a bid to divide and conquer," claims Wael,

[continued on 20]



Dr. Scot McKnight
Professor of New Testament

Dr. Cherith Fee Nordling
Associate Professor of Theology



DYNAMIC VOICES

INNOVATIVE SEMINARY

LIFE-CHANGING EDUCATION

Dr. Cherith Fee Nordling and Dr. Scot McKnight are the newest additions to the faculty of Northern Seminary.

a media consultant who belongs to the Druze sect. (He asked that his real name not be used.) “It successfully spread such fears in the poor districts of Homs, the epicenter of the revolution, and in other places.”

Homs has repeatedly come under heavy shelling from government troops, who especially target Sunni Muslim neighborhoods of the northern city. Christians there have not been safe.

‘The danger is that the Syrians are starting to hate each other now.’

~Yara Nseir, Syrian Christian activist

Wael and others believe that documenting violent attacks will be important down the road. Human-rights lawyers are also involved in chronicling torture, rape, and killing. Activists train volunteers to collect personal testimonies, videos, and photos.

“There is a small movement of young people all over the country, in all cities, working on this kind of documentation,” said Wael. Once episodes of aggression are documented, volunteers post images and articles on internet social media sites, including Facebook, which has 18 million users in the Mideast. “Justice must take place eventually according to the law and in courts, not through revenge and retaliation,” he said. Through this network’s efforts, more Syrians are changing their traditional approach to settling scores through reprisals. The goal is to achieve justice through rule of law, Wael said.

Mennonite sources report that Orthodox bishops visit many who have lost homes, livelihoods, and family members to provide them a measure of comfort. They, too, underscored the need for reconciliation to mend Syria. “The most important work for the future is forgiveness and reconciliation among the communities,” wrote Syrian Orthodox bishop Eustathius Matta Roham in a public statement.

While a number of Christians still support Assad, others have feared openly stating their opposition to the regime. They are concerned that their ancient community will fall prey to the same kind of violence that Christians suffered in Iraq.

Other Christians have overcome their fears, taking to the streets for peaceful protests and calls for nonviolent change. One young Christian activist is Yara Nseir, an art enthusiast and networker. The flamboyant 30-year-old works across ethnic and religious lines as well as inside and outside Syria. She and others participated in peaceful protests that were often met with government tank and artillery fire. Nseir, who fled Syria last September, is concerned about more than preventing

civil war. “The danger is that the Syrians are starting to hate each other now,” she said, her voice full of apprehension.

She and her friends have set up awareness campaigns, using nonviolent techniques to encourage people to stick to peaceful resistance. “We totally refuse the militarization of the revolution.” Nseir and her friends acknowledge abuses by both sides and call for “accountability from the regime and rebel fighters alike.”

Her friend Khalil, a young leader of the revolution, said faith-based reconciliation shows much promise. At the Cairo meeting, Khalil, who also asked for anonymity, said publicly to Cox, Nseir, and others, “You have crystallized a vision in our hearts that before was vague and unfocused about the direction of the revolution toward national healing and reconciliation.”

FINDING ANSWERS

The examples of Sheikh Salah Keftaro, a prominent Syrian Islamic leader, and Bassam Ishak, an influential Syrian Christian politician, provide clear evidence that reconciliation is possible.

Years ago, Cox visited Ishak in Syria during the genesis of faith-based reconciliation. During that trip, Keftaro invited Cox to share his message of reconciliation from the pulpit of his mosque in Damascus. Afterwards, Keftaro told the American, “This is not the work of a Washington NGO, but the mission of the prophets.” Keftaro has played a leading role in Muslim-Christian interaction in Syria.

Ishak, a committed Christian, has worked within the Syrian National Council (SNC), the leading opposition group, to foster unity. The 53-year-old ran for parliament twice (in 2003 and 2007), winning by a wide margin, but his victory was not recognized by the Assad regime.

Shortly afterwards, the Assad government put him on a travel ban list. Last September, Ishak had to flee Syria in the dead of night. Appointed to the SNC general secretariat and one of seven elected to its foreign-relations committee, Ishak has been pressing to secure rights for all of Syria’s minorities and for a revision of Article 3 of the Syrian Constitution, which states that the president of Syria must be a Muslim. Ishak argues that citizenship should not be based on religious identity.

Ishak speaks from experience. His father served as president of Syria for a day—literally—in the 1950s before the family traveled to America. “He was a believer in democracy. He opposed the Baath military takeover and its one-party rule and suffered for it,” Ishak said of the regime’s political marginalization of his father.

As a young boy, Ishak used to accompany his father on visits to their ancestral hometown of Qamishli to *diwans*, the political salons held in the Arab world that gather activists, intellectuals, and sometimes common folk to discuss matters of concern. Preferring instead to play soccer with his friends, he went at his father’s insistence. Ishak said it was the best political education he could have received.

Now he believes faith-based reconciliation holds the key to saving Syria. “Reconciliation can play a defining role in the future of Syria because the Syrian people are looking for answers,” he said in a crowded Cairo coffee shop. “It helps to address how we can get out of sectarianism and work together to build a country where people have personal freedom, equality, and a life of dignity.”

Ishak said Syrians want a way out of the violence. Faith-based reconciliation provides a way that “we can come together and resolve our issues with each other, heal our country, and move on.”

Dale Gavlak is a journalist based in Amman, Jordan.

INTRODUCING THE NEW

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A TALE *of* TWO SCIENTISTS

How two evangelicals—
one a young-earth creationist,
the other an evolutionary creationist—
have lived out their faith
and professions.

By Tim Stafford



D

ARREL FALK GREW UP in a “wonderful home and a wonderful church” near Vancouver, British Columbia. A shy, serious child, he had a reputation among his friends for never lying or swearing. He asked Jesus into his heart at age 4, and through an altar call at age 10, asked for a second work of grace, in the holiness language of his Nazarene church. “I feel so clean inside,” he said afterwards in tearful wonder.

Todd Wood was born a generation after Falk in Rives Junction, an unincorporated village in the heart of Michigan. His father was a truck driver, and they lived on 13 rural acres, out of sight of the nearest neighbor. Northwest Baptist, a small, fundamentalist church his parents had helped to start and many relatives attended, was at the heart of his life. He attended a K-12 Baptist school with 25 students in his graduating class. A quiet boy, Wood loved doing

research papers, going far beyond teachers’ expectations in tracking down extensive sources. Few in his acquaintance had been to college, and he had never met a scientist.

Both Wood and Falk grew up with absolute confidence in the Bible, a strong sense of family, and a belief that church was the place to find meaning and community. Both of them had an unusual aptitude for mathematics and an interest in science—though neither one had much idea what science was. They could have followed very similar pathways, and in a sense, they did.

But the controversies over evolution within the Christian community have taken the two scientists on very different journeys

Evolutionary Creationist:
Under Falk's leadership,
BioLogos has become an
important Christian group
advocating a more gradual
creation. Falk holds to his
plea for Christians to love
and respect each other
while advancing different
viewpoints.





in a time when common ground on human origins and the Genesis narrative seems to be shrinking.

AFTER LITERALISM

As an introspective and worrying child, Falk occasionally wondered whether Christianity was too good to be true. “I wanted it to be true because it was so beautiful. Jesus was my best friend. I felt very close to God.”

In junior high he encountered a textbook that pictured humans evolving from apes. He didn’t believe it was true—his church read Genesis with a strict literalism—but he feared that it might be and that his faith would be undone. Consequently, he stuck to chemistry and physics through high school in the 1960s. His one biology class never talked about evolution or DNA. After

a year at a church Bible college, Falk started at Simon Fraser, Canada’s leading research university, based in Vancouver. He had decided to become a doctor, which meant he had to take biology.

He was completely unprepared for the beauty he encountered. “I had known the beauty of Christianity. Now I discovered the beauty of genetics. When I saw how the cell worked, it was unbelievably beautiful. Thousands of protein molecules, intricately folded, each doing a particular job in the cell. This astonishing process was going on in every one of my trillions of cells, making me who I am. Forty years later, I’m still in love with it. It never gets old, never loses its appeal.”

For Falk, evidence that all of life is related due to common origin was clearly written in the cell. Every organism used the same molecules, the same proteins, the same assembly processes. Even for organisms as different as birds and sea slugs, grass and elephants, similarities at the molecular level jumped out at him. In the church of his boyhood, he found no place for this knowledge or this beauty. He only knew how to read Genesis as six-day history, which he could not reconcile with what enthralled him in the laboratory. The beauty of the cell seemed to him evidence of God’s design and providential oversight. But he had no one to help him rebuild his picture of God’s creation.

His slide away from faith took place later, when he went on to complete his doctoral degree at the University of Alberta. It wasn’t

principally because of science. He and his wife attended a church that attracted young people in rebellion against their fundamentalist backgrounds. “Evolution was a side issue. They were questioning everything. Eventually there wasn’t much left of the classical Christianity of my youth.”

RESISTING EVOLUTION

Todd Wood graduated at the top of his high-school class and went on to Liberty University in Virginia, the first of the Woods to attend college. Liberty’s biology department emphasized field studies, and he delighted in the

For Wood, creation science could win its argument if it demonstrated that it explained the creation better than an evolutionary model.

freedom of the woods and waters that he explored as part of his learning.

Quite on his own, Wood found creationist publications in the library, and he soon became expert in the literature. He had read a few creationist books in high school, but the university library opened up a much richer field.

About 30 years earlier, creation science as a movement had been born with the 1961 publication of *The Genesis Flood*, authored by John Whitcomb and Henry Morris. Whitcomb was an Old Testament professor who read Genesis literally. Morris was a professor of hydraulic engineering fascinated by questions of origins. Together they updated the writings of George Price, a Seventh-day Adventist schoolteacher and amateur geologist who believed that almost all geological formations worldwide had been laid down in Noah’s flood about 4,000 years before. Price’s flood geology attracted limited interest until Morris and Whitcomb popularized it for a wider audience. Morris helped to found the Creation Research Society and later the Institute for Creation Research.

Popular resistance to evolution had a much deeper history, of course. The idea that man and monkeys are related had met a steady stream of humor and invective since the publication of Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. Creation science, however, was an attempt to build a kind of hybrid discipline of science and biblical interpretation based on the literal reading of Genesis.

Wood loved biology. When his professors explained that graduate schools would pay him to study science, he could hardly believe it. He applied to just one school, the University of Virginia. He was one of five students accepted to begin graduate study of biochemistry in the mid-1990s.

But the adjustment to graduate school proved traumatic. “I was blown away, socially and emotionally,” Wood says. “I was completely ignorant of big science and labs of the kind they use. I am amazed they didn’t just throw me out. I was so overwhelmed.”

He rented an apartment far out of town and realized that, on his budget, he could eat just one meal a day. Usually that was a frozen dinner. Only one godsend kept him together in his utter loneliness: Wayne Hills Baptist Church. Wood joined the choir. “That church is why I didn’t quit.”

MOMENT OF TRUTH

After graduation from Simon Fraser in 1968, Darrel Falk went on to postdoctoral studies at the University of British Columbia. “I thought I was going to be a great geneticist,” he says.

Until key experiments didn’t go well. “I didn’t have much left when people didn’t think I was smart.” As often happens in academia, he sank into despondency.

At this time, a tour of the musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* came to Vancouver. One day, Falk overheard some of his lab partners discussing it in the department lounge. None of them were Christians. They were pooling their meager knowledge when suddenly one of them turned to Falk, known to be a Christian. “Who were his disciples? Can you name them?”

“I had the strangest sensation when he turned to me, because I recognized that although there was a time when Jesus was my best friend, now he was not only *not* my best friend but was on the verge of becoming a distant memory. I had not opened my Bible in months. I had no right to be consulted.” Shaken by the realization that he had lost his faith, he was wrenched by the thought of his daughters, ages 1 and 3. “I felt sad for them, that I wasn’t going to be a good father to them, giving them what I had been given. I was 27 years old, and I wanted to be a Christian again.”

A few days later, a Christian professor



Young-Earth Creationist: Wood remains fully committed to a six-day creation—he says he never doubted it for a minute—because he sees no other way to read the Bible. But that doesn't keep him from recognizing that evolution has powerful attestation.



at the university invited him to lunch. He encouraged Falk that faith and learning were meant to grow together. That night, Falk knelt by his bed to pray, just as he had been taught to do as a child. He offered a classic doubter's prayer, telling God he was not even sure that he was there, but that he was going to try to live as though he were.

Falk began to read books by Christians that expressed faith in a far deeper way than anything he had previously read—books by journalist Malcolm Muggeridge, theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Leo Tolstoy, and accounts of Mother Teresa. Privately, his devotion to Christ grew. Publicly, he had no way to express it. Occasionally he attended church but was unsatisfied. He found churches either theologically liberal and impersonal, or else narrow and anti-intellectual. In the first, he missed the warmth and devotion that he treasured from his childhood; in the second, he felt sure he would always be viewed with suspicion.

He took a postdoctoral fellowship in Southern California. On one memorable day, he was at the beach with his family when he saw a church bus arrive in the parking lot. From the lettering on the side, he could see the bus was from a Nazarene church, the denomination of his boyhood. "This church family, I reasoned, was having a picnic, just like I used to love so much." The sight prompted deep sadness, as he thought of his daughters. They would never go on a church picnic. They would never gain the richest part of his heritage. "I longed to go back, if only for the sake of my daughters. But I could not go back—the chasm that separated us was too great. One of the widest sections of the gulf was my belief in gradual creation."

CAREER SUICIDE

For Wood, laboratory science at a major university was overwhelming. He was not talented as an experimentalist, but his love for research and his mathematical abilities paid off in the classroom.

Computational analysis was just beginning to become a significant part of biology, as decoding the genome offered reams of data that required computer analysis. Wood was at home with this. "It clicked. To this day I get a nice little charge of happiness when I see sequence data."

He remained very much alone. He didn't discuss his creationist beliefs; he believed that he was in graduate school to learn, not to argue. "I went in fully aware of the stereotype of creationists as bellicose. I didn't want to be anything like that." His professors, he soon realized, were hardly the enemy; they were brilliant men introducing him to a wonderful world where he knew he could thrive.

The first human genome sequence was published the year that Wood began graduate

Falk only knew how to read Genesis as six-day history, which he could not reconcile with what enthralled him in the laboratory. He had no one to help him rebuild his picture of God's creation.

school, providing strong evidence for evolution. The DNA for chimps and humans was virtually the same. Traces of common origins were everywhere: Humans even possessed a broken version of the gene that lizards and birds use to produce eggs. Wood remained fully committed to a six-day creation—he says he never doubted it for a minute—because he saw no other way to read the Bible. But that didn't keep him from recognizing that evolution had powerful attestation.

While enthralled with biological research, he also became an active participant in the creationist movement, which had taken off, partly due the Internet's ability to help creationists find each other and engage in ongoing discussion.

Wood joined some of the earliest e-mail discussion lists. As a graduate student at a top-ranked school, he helped refine creationist thinking. Gradually Wood spent less time trying to prove that evolution was wrong. Many of the assertions creationists made were missing the point, he realized, knocking down straw men. More fundamentally, science didn't move forward by disproving theories but by advancing better ones. Creation science could win its argument if it demonstrated that it explained the creation better than an evolutionary model.

The most obvious fact about created life was its extravagant variety, along with its fundamental similarity at the molecular level. Evolution explained this as the product of

gradual variation from some original organism. Creationism explained the same facts as the product of a designer who repeatedly used the same basic designs. But Wood didn't find that assertion particularly illuminating. It could be applied to any facts that came along, and it didn't help Wood understand God's creation more deeply. "I want to understand what God is thinking. Why did he make chimps almost the same as humans?"

As he probed for answers, a small group of biology grad students who had connected via e-mail emerged. They met informally for the first time in 1997 at Bryan College, a small Christian school on a hill overlooking the Dayton, Tennessee, courthouse where the infamous Scopes Monkey Trial took place in 1925.

The group agreed that in order to give a scientific account of creation biology, they first needed to

identify the units of God's creation, the "created kinds" of Genesis 1. They believed that God had created life in certain limited forms, which had since diversified. If they could work backwards to those original forms, they would have the basis for understanding similarity and diversity in today's life forms. This basic work, known as "baraminology," would become Wood's research focal point.

But not yet. After finishing his doctoral dissertation, Wood took a postdoctoral position at Clemson University, part of a team that was decoding the rice genome. The multimillion-dollar grant solidified his dislike for big science. At Clemson, he lived the high-pressure lifestyle that comes with large teams of scientists working under time and budget constraints. Wood remained a solitary character. He loved science when he could explore problems in his own time and in his own way. He didn't like being a laboratory manager.

After a year at Clemson, Wood did the unthinkable: He applied for a position at tiny Bryan College, to work with creationist geologist Kurt Wise. It was career suicide, but Wood did it with a sense of grateful calling. Finally, he would have time and opportunity to work at science in the way he believed in.

A ROBUST FAITH

Following his research assignment in Southern California, Darrel Falk gained a tenure-track position at Syracuse University. This constituted real success.

But he was stymied in his reviving faith. He and his wife visited several churches in Syracuse, finding none that offered the deep devotion they craved.

As a last-ditch effort, he drove across town one Sunday morning to visit a small Nazarene church. Six months before, he and his wife had driven to this same church just to park on the street and watch people leaving. They had seen people taking time to speak warmly; they had noticed two girls about the same ages as their own—were they the pastor's daughters? *Maybe we can go here*, they had thought. But as the week went on they decided no, they shouldn't get their hopes up. There was too much pain in the thought of rejection.

Now, Falk went alone, like a spy, into the church for a worship service.

After the service, he found himself surrounded by friendly faces. They seemed delighted that he was a professor at Syracuse. Falk went home and told his wife, "We might have a church after all."

So it proved to be. Though the church certainly didn't believe in evolution, and came to know that Falk did, they never bothered about it. "That church, God's gift to us, built a bridge to us and welcomed us just as we were, gradual creation perspective and all." The pastor helped Falk as he found his way to a fuller, more robust faith, eventually asking him to teach a Sunday school class for young adults.

Falk also worked hard to build a Christian fellowship among faculty and grad students at Syracuse. Working on the genetics of the fruit fly, Falk gained tenure. He loved teaching. Gradually, though, he began to long to work at a Christian community. Through a series of dramatic answers to prayer, he looked for a position at a Christian college. He went to Mount Vernon Nazarene in Ohio for four years before landing at Point Loma Nazarene in San Diego.

THE TIDAL WAVE

Eleven years before Todd Wood arrived at Bryan College in Tennessee, the school had established a creation research center. The

director was Kurt Wise, a brilliant, Harvard-trained paleontologist who had pushed the initial concept of baraminology.

A computer was all Wood really needed to do fundamental analysis of "created kinds." That was a good thing since the tiny institute had no lab, virtually no research funds, and only one research assistant. Wood began to do careful statistical analysis of data drawn from published scientific reports. He hoped to find distinct groupings within a cross-section of species; a cluster might represent one of the "created kinds" of Genesis 1. (For example, foxes, wolves, dogs, and coyotes, while distinct species, might represent the

divergent offspring of a single pair from Noah's ark. Many young-earth creationists believe in very rapid evolution of species since the great flood, thus creating the immense diversity of species we see today.)

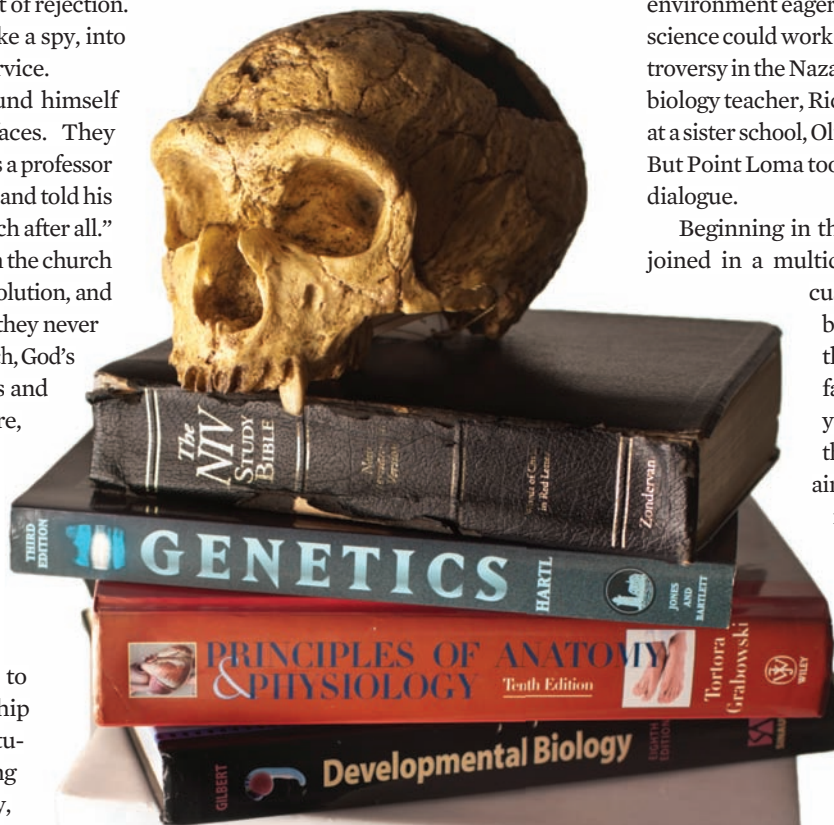
"I want to redeem science," Wood says. "I don't want to refute science." Many creationists focus on apologetics, which needs convincing answers. Wood wants to do science, which is more invested in asking the right questions. Wood believes that the questions he poses based on his reading of Genesis will lead to greater illumination.

Meanwhile, at Point Loma Nazarene University Falk found a wholesome, faith-filled environment eager to discuss how faith and science could work together. There was controversy in the Nazarene denomination—one biology teacher, Richard Colling, lost his job at a sister school, Olivet Nazarene University. But Point Loma took the lead in stimulating dialogue.

Beginning in the summer of 1991, Falk joined in a multidisciplinary faculty discussion group that read books together and talked through many areas of faith and science. After years of discussion, he felt that he should write a book aimed at students, explaining to them how biologists see the world. He tried writing a chapter, but it was stiff and awkward. One student who read it said, "If you could only write like you teach!" Falk put the idea aside and shortly afterward became provost of the university.

While in that position, administrators asked him to talk to a young-earth creationist who was volunteering to teach science classes. Point Loma had no courses on either evolution or creation, and the volunteer teacher aggressively pushed for his position. "You're going to have to deal with this issue," he said. "A tidal wave is going to come."

"I felt we had nothing to point to





that says, 'here's what we believe,'" says Falk. So he returned to his writing, pretending he was in his classroom teaching genetics or comparative anatomy, answering questions posed by students.

When he had a manuscript, he offered it to students for their reaction. One showed it to a parent, who copied it and sent it to denominational leaders and others. The same parent later wrote to the college's president with a series of accusations, demanding a response. Falk responded as graciously as he could. The parent was not satisfied; he accused Point Loma of deliberately destroying young people's faith. It became a crusade, pulling in pastors and higher denominational officials. Finally, in the fall of 2000, the college president called Falk in and showed him a detailed, multiple-page letter from Focus on the Family founder James Dobson.

Dobson is a Point Loma graduate—one with great influence over evangelicals. Falk composed an 11-page response to Dobson's letter, and was invited to a nail-biting summit with Dobson in Colorado Springs.

"The key accusation," Falk says, "was that I was destroying the faith of my students."

He asked 31 students to write anonymously about the role of the Biology Department in their faith. Almost all wrote very positively. He took those letters to Dobson. To Falk's great relief, the meeting went well, ending in a cordial agreement to disagree.

In *Coming to Peace with Science*, Falk lays out the evidence for an ancient earth and the gradual development of its creatures over millions of years. He speaks of the message of

'I want to understand what God is thinking. Why did he make chimps almost the same as humans?' ~ Todd Wood

Genesis—indeed, the whole of Scripture—as a testimony to God's goodness and his plan to save the world. However, "I expect that many persons in our churches will read this book and put it down still believing in sudden creation. From my perspective, that will be fine. My prayer is that each person who reads it will respect that one should be able to be accepted as an equal partner in Christ's body even if he or she believes that God created gradually."

In recent years, Falk has found a new role

through interactions with Francis Collins, the world-famous geneticist who headed the human genome project and now leads the National Institutes for Health (NIH). After publishing the bestselling book *The Language of God*, Collins received so many e-mailed questions that he decided to create BioLogos, a small organization to help answer them. But when Collins was asked to head the NIH, Falk, already involved, took over as president of BioLogos.

Under Falk's leadership, BioLogos has emerged as an important group of Christians advocating "evolutionary creation." Falk has held to his plea for Christians to love and respect each other while advocating different points of view. In bearing this

out, BioLogos recently invited a number of Southern Baptist biblical scholars to publish essays critical of the BioLogos perspective on the BioLogos website, in order to foster mutual understanding.

"We must be patient with each other and allow each other to follow truth as we see it in Scripture," Falk wrote. "We must recognize that we will never reach the point where we all see Scripture the same way. When there is division in the church, it will be difficult for

The Evolution of the Debate

It is certainly not necessary to think that the six days spoken of in that first chapter of the Bible are intended to be six days of 24 hours each. We may think of them rather as very long periods of time."

These are not the words of a progressive Christian, desperately trying to make room for evolution in his biblical worldview. No, this comes from the pen of the famous opponent of liberalism, J. Gresham Machen. Writing in 1937, he was not alone among the conservatives who vigorously contended with liberalism. The great apologist of biblical inerrancy, B. B. Warfield, said much the same thing decades earlier: "I do not think that there is any general statement in the Bible or any part of the account of creation, either as given in Genesis 1 and 2 or elsewhere alluded to, that need be opposed to evolution." While he rejected naturalistic evolution, he did believe that evolution was one method God used (along with creation-out-of-nothing and "mediate creation," a combination of creation and natural process).

However, for many Christians today, denying the literal reading of Genesis 1 would be to deny inerrancy and open the door to heterodoxy. How did we get to this point?

QUARREL ABOUT RELATIVES

Before Jesus was "conceived by the Holy Spirit," Aristotle, Plato, Ptolemy, and Galen had written wise treatises on scientific questions. As these books entered medieval Europe, Christian scholars recognized their genius in treating science. While they spotted some theological landmines (e.g., Aristotle argued for the eternity of the world and had no room for divine providence), these scholars argued vigorously for the classical sciences. Roger Bacon, the outstanding scientist of the 1200s, borrowed a theme from Augustine when he said science could be the faithful handmaiden of theology.

Fast-forward half a millennium: geologist James Hutton postulated in 1785 that the Earth must be much older than previously supposed for mountains to have eroded and sediment to have formed new ocean rocks. Important works by various authors followed, each in one way or another suggesting a slower development of the earth. Then came the blockbuster, Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, in 1859.

But as the views of Warfield and Machen suggest, many conservative Christians had no problem with the theory of evolution if God's providential hand was involved. The problem began when people started applying the biology to society, advocating social Darwinism, and when human

the thirsty to find their way to Jesus.”

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

At Bryan University, Todd Wood’s office is located in the science museum, a small and eclectic collection of fossils, animals preserved by taxidermy, dead snakes coiled in bottles, and other science arcana.

Anna, a student, approaches Wood to discuss her research project. “Do you have ‘R’ on your computer?” Wood asks. She has no idea what “R” is—a computer program for analyzing statistical data—and he instructs her on downloading it. Then he walks her through her project while she takes word-for-word notes on her laptop.

It has to do with analyzing the ratios between two kinds of genetic mutations, transitions and transversions. Wood has noticed that the ratio between the two varies by organism, and he wonders whether this could signal a different “created kind.” In a previous research project, Anna looked at the fossil record of flowering plants. Since most fossils were laid down in Noah’s flood, according to six-day creationists, these fossils should be close to the original created kinds. The idea for Anna’s project is to check

‘I had known the beauty of Christianity. Now I discovered the beauty of genetics.’

~ Darrel Falk

whether these “created kinds” might also show their differences in the ratio of transversions to transitions.

“If you look at all the flowering plants,” Wood says, “sunflowers to lilies to oak trees, very different plants, you find that their genes are almost the same. It’s challenging. How do we draw the line, and where do we draw it? If we’re ignoring 97 percent of the data, does the line mean anything? Evolutionists would say we are grasping at straws. But it’s possible that the differences may harbor a signal.” Wood discusses with Anna some of the statistical issues. For example, “the sample size could be a meaningful problem” as Anna zeroes in on particular families of flowers. “It’s good to be aware of these details so we don’t go off and prematurely claim that we have solved the

problem of identifying the created kinds.”

Anna is doing serious scientific research, but it’s impossible to miss that Wood leads only handfuls of undergraduates like her without laboratory equipment or funding. Compared with thousands of high-tech research labs filled with scientists, it’s a pea shooter facing the U.S. Army.

Wood is not daunted. In order to be a young-earth creation scientist, you have to be stunningly independent. Wood worries that no new generation is rising up to advance creation science. “I’m searching for someone willing to help me develop the next generation of baraminology.” At the same time, he’s less and less interested in fighting against evolutionary creationists. “I’m beginning to think the war is detrimental to the church.

“We all have enormous unanswered questions, whether scientific or biblical. We all see through a glass darkly.”



Tim Stafford is senior writer for *Christianity Today*. To read the best *Christianity Today* articles on creation, evolution, and intelligent design, check out our latest eBook, *The Origins Debate*, at CTeBooks.com/ct/origins-debate.

We haven’t always been deeply divided about origins.

ancestry was increasingly tied to apes. This struck many Christians as a stab at human dignity, the notion that we were created in the image of God. As one 1896 tract put it,

I do not wish to meddle with any man’s family matters, or quarrel with any one about his relatives. If a man prefers to look for his kindred in the zoological gardens, it is no concern of mine; if he wants to believe that the founder of his family was an ape, a gorilla, a mud-turtle . . . he may do so; but when he insists that I shall trace my lineage in that direction, I say “No Sir!” . . . I prefer that my genealogical table shall end as it now does, with “Cainan, which was the son of Seth, which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God.”

This was one concern that prompted the State of Tennessee to ban the teaching of evolution in its schools. The subsequent suit, argued by two lawyers savvy in public relations and media and uncompromising in their own divergent views—William Jennings Bryan and Clarence Darrow—made the 1925 Scopes Trial a national sensation. Though upheld in appeals courts, the Tennessee law lost in the court of public opinion. This seemed to signal

the larger culture’s rejection of the Christian faith altogether. Ever since, many Christians have been deeply concerned that evolution is the crack in the rock of faith that eventually shatters it into a pitiful pile of sand.

DEBATE RENEWED

The origins discussion lay dormant for three or more decades, but in 1961, Henry Morris and John Whitcomb Jr. published *The Genesis Flood*, which argued for a literal reading not only of the Flood account but also of Genesis 1 and 2, reinvigorating the creationist movement. That movement has since split into six-day creationists and old-earth creationists, as well as other finely tuned variations. In 1991, Phillip Johnson entered the fray with *Darwin on Trial*, initiating the intelligent design movement—which has its own supporters and detractors in Christian and scientific communities.

Today, the devout of various persuasions continue to argue their views, each believing that the future of the faith hinges on the outcome of this battle. If it were merely a question of science, it would not be so contentious. But each scientific fact shapes some theological point, and every theological truth requires us to examine the meaning of every scientific breakthrough. The debate may be with us always, at least until that day when we learn how all truth is one in Christ. —*The Editors*

AMERICA'S

VIEW ON

EVOLUTION AND CREATIONISM

ONE OF THE MOST CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS AROUND IS THE EVOLUTION AND CREATIONISM DEBATE. SCIENCE AND RELIGION OFTEN CONFLICT, THOUGH A SURPRISING PERCENTAGE OF AMERICANS FIND THEIR BELIEFS SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN WHEN IT COMES TO WHERE WE CAME FROM.

THE BELIEFS

THERE ARE MANY THEORIES, INCLUDING:

SCIENTISM

SCIENCE HAS SHOWN THAT THERE IS NO DIVINE CREATOR THAT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR LIFE AND ITS DIVERSITY.

THEISTIC EVOLUTION

GOD CREATED THE DIVERSITY OF LIFE WE FIND TODAY THROUGH THE PROCESS OF EVOLUTION.

INTELLIGENT DESIGN

SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION HAS TESTED AND SCIENTIFICALLY VERIFIED THAT THE INPUT OF AN EXTERNAL INTELLIGENCE IS REQUIRED TO EXPLAIN THE DIVERSITY OF LIFE.

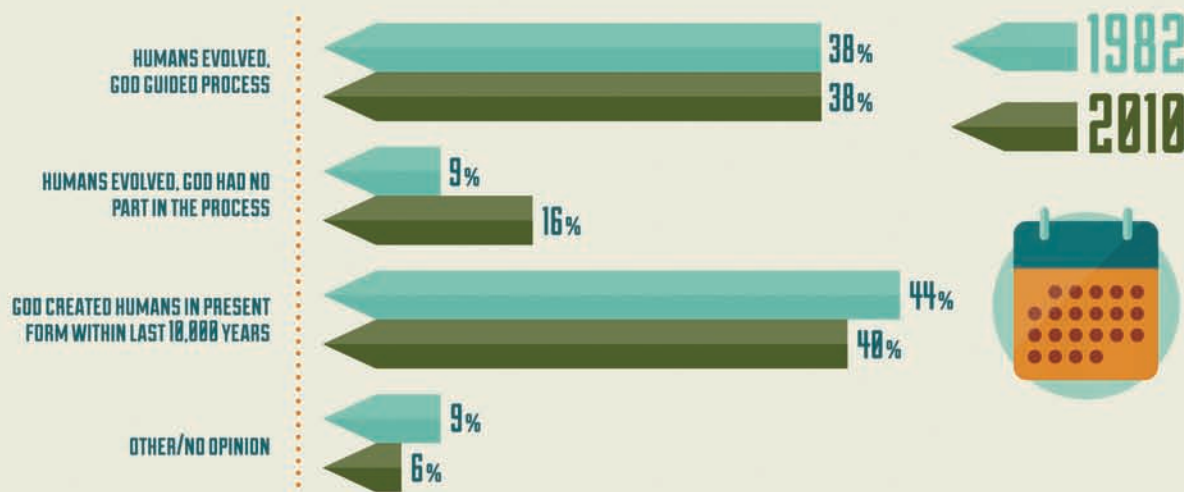
CREATIONISM

THE CREATION STORY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IS A HISTORICALLY ACCURATE DESCRIPTION OF THE ORIGIN OF LIFE'S DIVERSITY.

SHIFT IN BELIEFS

WHILE THERE HAS BEEN SOME CHANGE IN BELIEFS ABOUT HUMAN ORIGINS OVER THE PAST THREE DECADES, THE MAJORITY OF AMERICANS STILL BELIEVE THAT HUMANS WERE CREATED BY GOD. HOWEVER, THE PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE THAT GOD HAS NO PART IN THE ORIGIN OF HUMAN LIFE HAS INCREASED SUBSTANTIALLY SINCE 1982.

HOW HAVE BELIEFS CHANGED BETWEEN 1982 AND 2010?

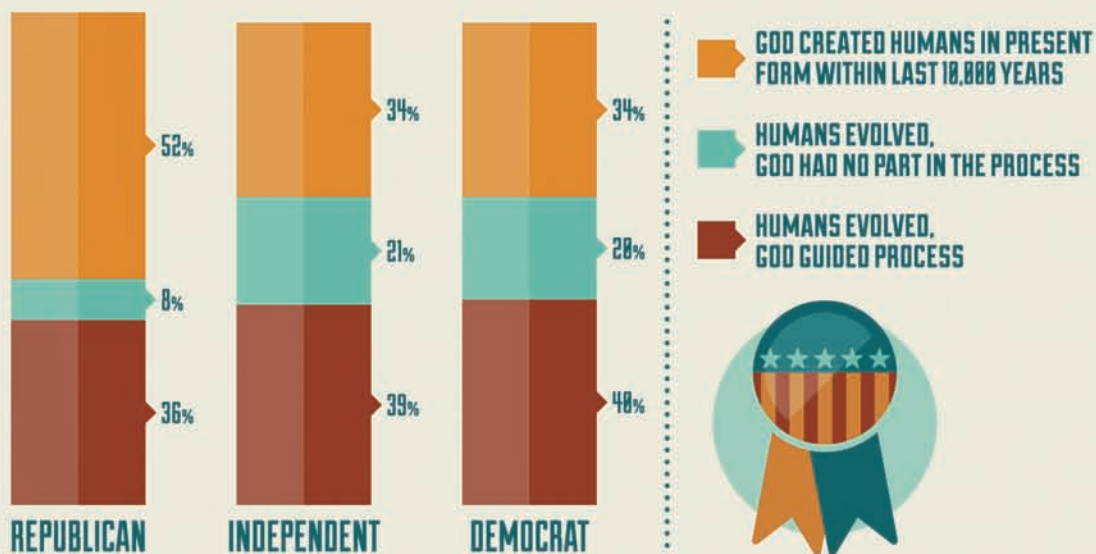


28 PERCENT OF HIGH SCHOOL BIOLOGY TEACHERS FOLLOW STRAIGHTFORWARD EVOLUTION LESSON PLANS. 13 PERCENT TEACH STRICT CREATIONISM. THAT LEAVES ABOUT 60 PERCENT WHO DON'T TEACH EVOLUTION OR CREATIONISM.

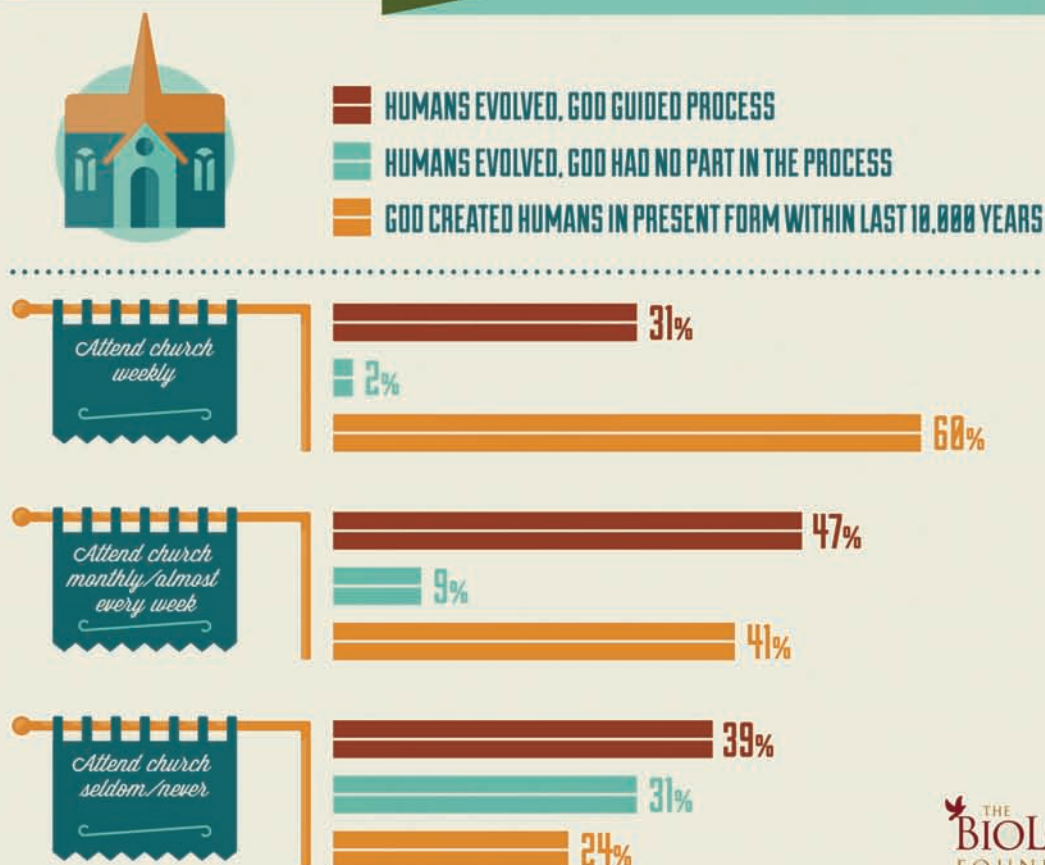
BREAKDOWN OF BELIEFS

HOW DO POLITICAL PARTIES, AND CHURCH ATTENDANCE AFFECT AMERICANS' VIEWS ON EVOLUTION AND CREATIONISM?

BY POLITICAL PARTY



BY CHURCH ATTENDANCE



THE
BIOLOGOS
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Marco Rubio's Faith



A

S SPECULATION HAS GROWN over who Mitt Romney will pick as his running mate, Florida Senator Marco Rubio has topped nearly every list. Rubio has also drawn attention with the release of his memoir, *An American Son*, as well as his brief time in the

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, his baptism into the Roman Catholic Church, and his ties to an evangelical church. *Christianity Today* online editor Sarah Pulliam Bailey spoke with Rubio about his diverse faith background, how his faith influences his policy positions, and why Christians should be involved in the public square.

TOM WILLIAMS / GETTY IMAGES

of Many Colors

The Florida senator's religious background takes many shapes, but he knows how it translates into policy.

Interview by
Sarah Pulliam
Bailey

You were baptized as a Mormon and then as a Roman Catholic. Can you describe your faith journey?

My mother desperately wanted to give her kids a wholesome environment, and we were born into a traditional Catholic family. We had extended family members who were and remain active members of the LDS church,

which does provide a very wholesome environment. We joined the church for a little less than three years when I was very young, after we moved to Las Vegas in 1979. I'm not sure my mom ever fully understood the church theologically. As a family we were never fully immersed in it because my father didn't buy in, so there are many intricacies to the faith that we never really got involved in. By the time I was in sixth grade, we had left the Mormon Church and gone back to Catholicism, and I did my First Communion on Christmas Day 1984.

And you attended an evangelical church for a period of time?

Sometime in 2000, I unfortunately got really busy with my political stuff. I perhaps didn't do a good job of spiritually leading my family, which is one of the roles I play alongside my wife. In the meantime, my wife and my sister found an excellent local church, Christ Fellowship. It does a phenomenal job on two fronts: bringing people to Jesus, and teaching the written Word through phenomenal preachers. And it has a fantastic children's program. For a period of time, it became our church home almost exclusively. I felt called back to Catholicism around 2004, but have maintained the relationship with Christ Fellowship and attend their services often or listen to the podcasts.

Did you have a conversion moment when you acknowledged your sins and Jesus' death on the cross?

There has never been a moment when faith hasn't been an important part of my life. There have been moments when I've been more alive in my faith than others. There have been times when I've been more involved in my faith, dedicating more to it, and giving it more importance. Like everybody else, unfortunately, it's usually in time of need that we tend to turn to our faith.

It would be unfair to say I had a moment of conversion. But one moment when my faith journey took on a different aspect was when my children became a bit older.

I recognized that perhaps the most important part of my job in raising them is that I have only a handful of years to influence them and to inspire in them the knowledge of Jesus, Christianity, and what it means for salvation. If I fail in that regard, everything else becomes less meaningful.

Would you describe yourself as an evangelical?

I'm a Roman Catholic. I'm theologically in line with the Roman Catholic Church. I believe in the authority of the church, but I also have tremendous respect for my brothers and sisters in other Christian faiths. I recognize, as the Catholic Church does, that there are excellent teachings of the Word throughout other denominations. The elements of salvation are found in these churches as well. Some unifying principles bind all Christians: that God became a man and died for our sins, and that without that sacrifice, all of us would be doomed.

Since your faith has come up on occasion as a political issue, what would you say to those who suggest President Obama is a Muslim or not a "real Christian"?

I really don't endorse criticisms of the President's faith. I don't think they are fair, to be honest. One key thing about Christianity is that it requires voluntary acceptance of faith. If someone says he is a Christian, it is a sign of Christianity in and of itself. Christianity calls us to our salvation, and it also calls parents to contribute to their children's salvation. It calls us to be a light in the world. It doesn't call us to go around pointing other people out, saying so and so is deficient in their faith. It does call us to hold each other accountable. It's really asking us to look at *ourselves*, and that's really the only responsibility of Christianity. We're responsible for our own response to God's call in our life, and our own family's response.

When Obama uses his faith to defend same-sex marriage or other policies, do you think he's misinterpreting it?

I certainly don't reach the same conclusions he does. I've never criticized anyone for having their faith influence their public-policy decisions. If your faith is real, burning inside of you, it's going to influence the way you view everything. That belief influences your job and the responsibilities you have.

Are Christians who oppose gay marriage fighting a losing battle?

In terms of the Bible's interpretation of marriage, what our faith teaches is pretty straightforward. There's not much debate about that. The debate is about what society should tolerate, and what society should allow our laws to be. I believe marriage is a unique and specific institution that is the result of thousands of years of wisdom, which concluded that the ideal—not the only way but certainly the ideal—situation to raise children to become productive and healthy humans is in a home with a father and mother married to each other. Does that mean people who are not in that circumstance cannot be successful? Of course not.

It's not a discriminatory thing. I'm not angry at anyone because of it, but I also have to be honest about what I believe marriage should be in our laws.

Republican leaders seem to be shying away from the issue. Is that a strategic move, or should they address gay marriage more directly?

In the short term, the number-one issue threatening our country is the economy. We have to remain focused on the primary issue before us, the fact that millions of Americans have been out of work and that's what they look for their next President to help lead the way out of. That said, culture always matters. You can't have a strong economy or a strong country without strong people. Just like the issue of life, it will always be important, but because the President has presided over such failed economic policies, he is deliberately looking to have a debate about anything other than the economy. From a strategic point of view, we need to be cognizant of that. After all, our faith teaches us to be as gentle as lambs but as wise as serpents.

You proposed legislation on whether employers should have to provide contraception. Do you see the Obama administration as hostile to religious freedom?

In order to make that kind of decision, you have to believe that somehow the wisdom of the government and what you believe government should do is more important than the constitutional protection of religious liberty and religious expression. They're basically saying they believe it's such a good and important idea that they think it is more important than what the Constitution protects. To me, it's not even a religious argument but a constitutional one. If it were any other constitutional principle being violated, I'd be just as adamant about it.

'I really don't endorse criticisms of the President's faith.'

~ Marco Rubio

You have also proposed

legislation on immigration. From a policy perspective, should Christians emphasize compassion or the rule of law?

I don't think they're mutually exclusive. You can do both. At no time does our faith call us to violate legal principles—on the contrary. We have to recognize that when we're talking about immigration, we're not talking about statistics. We're talking about human beings, the vast majority of whom, the ones who are here legally, are here in search of jobs and a better life. That's where the debate comes in: how do we balance those two things? That's what I hope any future conversation about immigration reform will be balanced by—the balance between our compassion for our fellowman and the need to have rules that are followed.

As we see banks take high risks, how should the government be involved? Is market regulation a moral issue?

It certainly calls into question why the government was involved in bailing out these institutions that a couple years later are making the same risky decisions they were before. On the other hand, it reminds us that while J. P. Morgan lost \$2 billion, the federal government this year will spend close to \$1.5 trillion more than it takes in.

Given Christians' view of human nature and depravity, is regulation a necessary part of policy? Can corporations be trusted

to create optimal outcomes?

We want to make sure people cannot harm others by their irresponsible behavior. We have regulations on everything from how you treat your workers to how people should drive on the streets, regulations that say we can't dump poison into our water system or pollute the air. My individual rights end where other people's rights begin. I can't exercise my rights to hurt other people.

Like everything else, there has to be balance, and that balance is usually in the form of a cost-benefit analysis. What is the benefit of the regulation, and what is the cost of the regulation? Sometimes the costs of the regulation are economic; sometimes there's a cost to our personal freedom. People are willing to sacrifice a certain level of personal freedom in exchange for a public good, but there are limits to that. While government regulations are necessary, they're not *always* necessary, and they're not *always* good.

In this cost-benefit balance, how should the United States promote international religious freedom? What happens if it conflicts with our strategic interests?

We need to be clear that we stand for these principles. Any time America looks the other way for short-term economic or political benefit when these principles are being violated somewhere in the world, we lose a little bit of who we are and what makes us special. There's always a temptation to make some pragmatic decision that we should tolerate some decision in some country because they're an ally, or that we should look the other way because they're too big and powerful and we need them for business. From the long-term perspective, we can't afford to do that. We need to be consistent in what we stand for, principles that all men are given by our Creator.

I have to ask about your possible vice presidential nomination.



I'm not going to discuss the vice presidential nomination process. I know Mitt Romney is right now going through a process with the people he's considering, and I am in no way going to comment on that, because it wouldn't be fair to them.

Some have cited irregularities in your record as reasons you might not be asked to be vice president. What would you say to those who claim you have made financial slip-ups?

I'm not above criticism. I'm sure people will find fault with what I've done or failed to do. I would be the first to recognize that I'm not perfect. Sometimes these things are exaggerated. There are things I wish I had done differently because of perceptions. Most of these issues have been talked about extensively during my campaign in Florida. I confronted those issues and answered questions repeatedly, and I'd be more than happy to answer them again if people want

to ask them specifically. Ultimately, I've lived a life with real mistakes and real successes. I'm proud of what we've been able to accomplish thanks to the opportunities this country has given me and the sacrifices my parents made.

In preparation for the 2012 election, how should Christians engage in the public sphere?

Well, there's the spiritual activism, which saints are called to and which is separate from the political realm. If you're living out your faith, it influences every aspect of your life. It teaches us to glorify God in everything we do. In everything we do in our lives, we're called to bring glory to God, primarily by the way we live our lives and the things we do so people will look to us and say, "That's what it means to be a Christian; that's what it means to be ambassadors of Christ." If our faith influences every aspect of our lives, then if we decide to become politically active, it

should influence that as well.

You distinguished spiritual activism from political activism. Do you see political activism as a ministry?

You can if that's what you're called to, for example, with how we treat the less fortunate. I believe in a safety net, not as a way of life, but as a way to help those who cannot help themselves. But I also believe the number one economic system that's ever been created that allows people to rise above the circumstances of their birth and accomplish things beyond what they were born into is the American free enterprise system. My faith influences me in believing that. I don't think everyone's called to political engagement. No matter what we're called to do, we are called to glorify God in what we do. For those of us who have been called to political action, we're called by our faith to glorify God in the way we carry ourselves in these roles.

The Gos





pel IS MORE THAN A Story

Story is all the rage. Everyone pants to tell their personal narrative or to give the Bible a simpler and more relevant plot. Maybe all this isn't such a good idea.

By Leslie Leyland Fields

I AM HALFWAY THROUGH a new version of the Bible, a much-hyped story version that's streamlined to highlight the overall plot: God's story of redemption. I'm so busy trying to follow the narrative, I hardly miss the Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and all the non-narrative books that have been largely excised. But as a university teacher of narrative, I find the plot too slow and convoluted.

I'm disappointed until I remember: *Oh yes! There are already novelized versions! Many of their narratives are better!*

Just 18 years ago, Robert Weathers noted that most evangelicals were "baffled" by the growing literary interest in the Bible. The bafflement is over. Journals are abuzz with narrative theology. Church mission statements are increasingly presented as "narratives."

In the past ten years, especially in the past five, dozens of authors have called for readers to see the Scriptures as narrative and particularly to read the Bible as a single story. Their books include *The Story*, *The Heart of the Story*, *The Bible in Brief: The Story from Adam to Armageddon*, *The True Story of the Whole World: Finding Your Place in the Biblical Drama*, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*, and many others. A growing number of pastors and theologians attack doctrinal and propositional readings of Scripture. Derek Flood, in his 2011 *Huffington Post* article "Why Faith Is a Story, Not Doctrine," sums up for many the new slant on Christianity: "Christian faith is not primarily about arguing over right beliefs and doctrines, it is about letting the story of God's grace become our story and shape our lives."

How have we traveled so far and so fast into narrative, from bafflement to bestsellers, to urgent call, and to replacing doctrine? What's behind the sudden and unprecedented swoon into narrative? And, most important: Will the church survive it?

A BAPTIZED IMAGINATION

I will not retract my enthusiasm for narrative entirely. It is about time that Christians value "Once upon a time . . ." For generations, many Christians viewed story and its various forms—fairy tale, novel, myth, legend—as

JONATHAN BARTLETT

contrivance at best, products of the fallen imagination at worst. In our recent past, Lewis, Tolkien, and Chesterton among others have rescued the church from its suspicion of “pagan” stories. They have dissolved the great divide between sacred and secular narratives. All our human stories of heroes, monsters, journeys, and sacrifice give voice to our universal quest for identity, purpose, and deliverance. Instead of competing with God’s story, these stories gesture toward it. Writer Frederick Buechner presents the gospel story itself as fairy tale, comedy, tragedy, as “a tale that is too good not to be true.” Or, in Lewis’s words, “In the story of Christ . . . all the other stories have somehow come true.”

We are story creatures who live in a God-made “story-shaped world” that itself began with the words, “In the beginning.” Thus, writing narrative—and reading it—is an act of faith that places us in time and space, locating us in a chronology that suggests by its very order both the cause and meaning of our lives. Narrative affirms that the felt randomness of our lives is not the final word. Instead, beneath and among it all is a coherence, a unity, a “mattering.”

I’ve watched people write stories from their lives where they discover patterns and designs and meanings they had not seen in living them. “Like so many characters, we are lost in a dark wood, a labyrinth, a swamp, and we need a trail of stories to show us the way back to our true home,” writes Scott Russell Sanders in his essay “The Most Human Art.” We in the church have done this for generations: We stand and give our testimonies, narratives of God’s presence in our lives. And in the telling, we are safely placed within God’s and our own story.

But the evangelical church’s discovery of narrative has a more direct and immediate source: our narrative age. Our culture is saturated with “the power of story.” The phrase and approach have penetrated nearly every discipline and discourse, from architecture to zoology. In the book *The Triumph of Narrative*, journalist Robert Fulford says storytelling stands at the very heart of civilized life. Narrative, he says, is how we explain, teach, and entertain ourselves (and often how we do all three at once). Story has unquestionably become the dominant means of understanding our world, ourselves, and each other. When neighbors and strangers meet today, they often ask not, “What do you do?” but “What is your story?”

And why not? In the broadest terms, narrative—specifically personal narrative, “this-is-my-story” that is its prime expression—restores the value of the personal in the face of impersonal science and technology, as well as the gods of our age, which privilege reason and fact over the personal and experiential. Narrative is quintessentially democratic. It insists that everyone has a story and that all are valued.

WHO WILL NARRATE THE WORLD?

Yet the rise of narrative in our culture and our churches, for all its good, has a dark understorey.

At the risk of oversimplifying what is both familiar and hopelessly complex, here’s a thumbnail: Our culture’s love affair with story corresponds to its dismissal of the One Story. Western society has rejected both the God of the Scriptures and his master narrative. In the absence of a universal storyline, we must make one up. No, we must make many up, because no single story can contain all that is real and true for all people, or so it’s believed. Language and narrative now are used not to discover meaning imbedded in creation by an omnipotent Creator. Instead, they are used to create personal and subjective meanings in the face of non-meaning.

The church, then, is faced with a plethora of narratives that oppose and compete with God’s story. Which story or stories will believers choose and follow? Too many believers are choosing the wrong one, say theologians Stanley Hauerwas, Michael Goheen, and Edith Humphrey, among others. Christians are increasingly accommodating the culture’s counterstories, its plots of consumerism, idolatry, and self-fulfillment. And they’re doing it largely because they don’t know God’s master story.

Hauerwas recalls asking a classroom of theology students, most of whom had grown up in the church, “What is the story of the Bible?” He was met by blank stares. Goheen, professor of religious studies at Trinity Western University, found his students could neither relate the story of the Bible nor explain why it was important. Goheen has become one of the most vocal and urgent advocates of “reading the Bible as One Story.” Robert Webber, a pioneer in narrative, continued his wake-up call to the church with the book *Who Gets to Narrate the World?: Contending for the Christian Story in a Age of Rivals*.

Apologists have issued the same warning. Lesslie Newbigin, one of the most prominent missiologists of the 20th century, argued that Christians cannot effectively speak the gospel to our culture without “a sense of the Scriptures as a canonical whole, as the story which provides

the true context for our understanding of the meaning of our lives.”

These are serious charges, yet they ring true. How have believers failed to grasp and articulate the overarching story of Scripture, God’s redemptive plan from Eden to the New Jerusalem? Some throw stones at the Sunday school movement, which teaches kids the Bible piecemeal, rarely attempting to contextualize baby Moses in the Nile, brave Daniel in the lions’ den, and the annual parade of other fragmented and fatigued Bible characters into the whole gospel story. Others blame a catechetical and moralistic approach, which turns real characters and stories into abstract, lifeless doctrine or ethical “lessons.”

These practices are part of a deeper tension identified in Hans Frei’s groundbreaking book, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in 18th and 19th Century Hermeneutics* (1980), generally considered to signal the narrative turn in theology. Frei argues that our willingness to read texts out of context goes back to the Enlightenment

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and Newtonian science, which sought knowledge by breaking everything into its smallest pieces. The historical-critical method, the grammatical method, higher criticism, and systematic theology became the dominant means of interpreting Scripture. All of these methods intellectualized and subdivided the texts, and located their meaning outside the text. Frei contends that any interpretation of the Scriptures that discounts the realistic, historical narrative will result in distortion.

Since Frei's book, others, such as literary scholars Leland Ryken

us across the desert is overloaded and stumbling.

LOSING THE STORY IN NARRATIVE

Back to my own Bible reading: I never made it through that one-story version of the Bible, despite the removal and/or abridgment of Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and all those other non-story parts, such as the lists of genealogies and laws. I confess to impatience—whether with God or the editors, I am not sure. If this is Story, why is it so long and convoluted? Why is the plot so twisted?

Others, apparently, have had the same response. The two editors of this version created their own spinoffs (both using the word *story* in the title). Both paperbacks condense the Scripture's story yet further and rely on the authors' own stories to illustrate the Bible's stories.

I went on to read the *100 Minute Bible*, written for "people who want an easy access into the central Christian story." (Shockingly, Joseph's portion, a page and a half, omits the theme of forgiveness and God's sovereignty.) I tried a novelized form of the Bible and a few other books named earlier. Some enterprising people have even condensed the Bible's story into a three-minute video. Astoundingly, in all but the most cryptic and badly written versions, I am still moved by God's audacious love for humankind. But I do not mistake much of this storytelling for God's words.

It's depressingly ironic. Though the larger narrative theology movement revives a deep respect for the Bible's language and literature, many of the commercial products show little respect for Story. Story, as all high-school English students know, relies not simply on what happened but also on the language and literary devices used to tell it: metaphor, description, analogy, repetition, parable, image. Nor does this larger narrative movement pay heed to the other literary genres God chose to speak his words through—poetry, lament, epistle, proclamation, prophecy.

WRITING A 'BETTER STORY'

Despite what I hope are good intentions, some of the one-story Bibles are in danger of committing the same reductionistic error mentioned above. Using Peter Leithart's metaphor, many of these story versions treat the language of Scripture as simply a "husk" that can be disposed of to access the "kernel" of meaning. Whether the kernel is a point of theology, a poetic image of God, or an event that does indeed advance the narrative, the language and figures of speech God inspired appear to be dispensable. In his brilliant book *Deep Exegesis*, Leithart warns that "Scripture once transformed the world precisely because Bible students clung to the letter. Once the letter is reduced to a malleable vehicle, Scripture loses its potency."

Somehow, in pursuit of the larger story, we've empowered ourselves to reorganize, distill, edit, and rewrite the actual Scriptures. We have failed to recognize that each of these activities not only interprets but also reduces Scripture.

In pursuit of Story, we've abridged the Bible. We've edited out the



and Robert Alter, have awakened us to the significance and artistry of the biblical narratives as well as the other genres present. One of the exciting gains of narrative theology is its potential to heal the divide between doctrine and application—how we actually live our lives. Critics of the doctrinal approach to Christianity charge it with cultural irrelevance and a disembodied intellectualism, and embrace the return to biblical narratives of flawed blood-and-flesh men and women like us. As we identify with their stories, reading them holistically with our minds, hearts, and spirits, we are encouraged to live out God's story in our own.

Many theologians have celebrated this turn. *The Promise of Narrative Theology* was not only a book but also a phrase spoken by many. Its influence upon the church can hardly be overstated. But narrative—even a larger literary approach—cannot right all ills. It's past time to identify what narrative cannot and should not do. This enterprise, still new, is already in danger. The camel that will carry

non-narrative parts. We've reworded the text. We in the church have been committing such acts of revision comfortably for some time. And for postmodern churches and pastors who are calling for a "new kind of Christianity," this is not enough. Some high-profile pastors are forming a Christianity defined purely by Story. "Story" is a near-exclusive category that rejects traditional formulations of the Christian faith: apologetics, doctrine, systematic theology, propositional truths. The Christian faith is first, last, and always a story. And we've not been telling the story right, say Rob Bell, Brian McLaren, Doug Pagitt, and other leaders in the emergent church. All are looking to tell a "better story" than the one they accuse evangelicals of telling.

"[T]elling a story about a God who inflicts unrelenting punishment on people because they didn't do, or say, or believe the correct things in a brief window of time called life isn't a very good story," Bell complains in *Love Wins*. Bell defines even hell in terms of story: "Hell is our refusal to trust God's retelling of our story." McLaren calls the church's message "the six-line Greco-Roman narrative (Eden, Fall, condemnation, salvation, heaven, hell)," which is rooted in Plato and Aristotle rather than Jesus, he claims. Reading McLaren's three-book fable series fleshing out his new vision of the Christian life, many complain that original sin, creation-fall-redemption, the deity of Christ, God's holiness, God's sovereignty, the offense of the Cross, worship, justification, and divine inspiration of the Bible—among other elements—are nowhere to be found. The worst enemy in these stories, as in every creative writing class, is dogma, moralizing, and certainty.

McLaren's and Bell's stories end appealingly without wrath, judgment, or any unpleasant inequality, with "everyone enjoying God's good world together with no disgrace or shame, justice being served, and all the wrongs being made right." This is "a better story," says Bell, not because it is more biblically accurate, but because it is "bigger, more loving, more expansive, more extraordinary, beautiful, and inspiring than any other story about the ultimate course history takes."

And why wouldn't we choose the better story? In the postmodern view, stories are not fixed or absolute. They are fluid, changing shape and form with each teller, shifting in the mind of each listener. Pagitt, pastor of Solomon's Porch in Minneapolis, writes, "What we [Christians] believe is not 'timeless.'" Theology will be "ever-changing," thus "complex understandings meant for all people, in all places, for all times, are simply not possible."

FASCINATED WITH OURSELVES

Even among evangelicals, unfortunately, we find unsettling parallels in our embrace of Story. The emphasis on understanding God's metanarrative and placing our story within God's story has so affirmed our own stories, we've begun to displace the scriptural narratives with our own "better stories." Christianity has always had a taste for sensational testimonies. But a recent string of books from Christian

publishers, all best-selling—*Heaven Is For Real: A Little Boy's Astounding Story of His Trip to Heaven and Back*; *90 Minutes in Heaven: A True Story of Death and Life*; *23 Minutes in Hell*; and, a more recent addition to the new genre of children-going-to-heaven stories, *The Boy Who Came Back from Heaven*—should give us pause. The heaven books, two of which sold more than 1.5 million in less than a year, have launched ministries and speaking careers in conservative, Bible-proclaiming churches where the authors share their "testimonies." Yet each book makes claims that conflict, often significantly, with



the Bible's account of death, judgment, heaven, and hell.

Nor do we require stories about God and the afterlife to be true. *The Shack*, which has sold more than 15 million copies worldwide, making it one of the best-selling books of all time, is a fictional narrative that doesn't claim experiential truth—"this happened to me"—but does claim to teach truth about God and the Christian life. Numerous churches and Christians have embraced William Paul Young's portrait of God as a chuckling African American woman and Jesus as a perky, flannel-clad carpenter. One Christian television interviewer gushed to the author, "God has used you to shatter the preconceptions a lot of us have about God."

Many of our "preconceptions," of course, are formed by God's Word itself. When pastor Todd Putney convened an enthusiastic community discussion of *The Shack*, it didn't go as he had hoped. "I thought that book would be a bridge to the God of the Scriptures, but it wasn't. No one wanted to go there. They preferred the story

and the god of *The Shack* over the God of the Scriptures.”

The group A Call to an Ancient Evangelical Future wisely recognized in its fifth tenet that “spirituality, made independent from God’s story, is often characterized by . . . an overly therapeutic culture . . . and a narcissistic preoccupation with one’s own experience.” As Eugene Peterson has observed, “the ‘text’ that seems to be most in favor on the American landscape today is the sovereign self.”

As a writer and creative-writing teacher, I see a parallel movement in the halls of memoir, a genre plagued by scandals. As writers recount events from their lives, they hear the siren call to craft a “better story” than the one actually lived. Many answer the call. Some of the most egregious deceptions (he wasn’t a Native American orphan but a middle-aged white guy; she wasn’t raised by a gang in L.A., and so forth) are explained by a thirst for fame and fortune. But some are undoubtedly the consequence of the postmodern shrug toward truth. The text, and truth itself, is forever malleable by the supreme authorial self. Narcissism and solipsism abound in our literature. Patricia Hampl, one of the seminal contemporary writers and critics of memoir, advises writers to overcome their egocentrism. The purpose of memoir, she reminds us, is not “the fulfillment of the self, or its aggrandizing, but the deft insertion of the self into an overwhelming design.” But in a time when the possibility of objective truth is a fiction, the writer-storyteller sees the *self* as the overwhelming design. We don’t submit to a larger story because we *are* the larger story.

LITERARY THEOLOGY

Before we knew the terms “narrative theology” or “emergent church” or “postmodernism,” we knew the stories and events: “In the beginning was the Word . . .”; “Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah . . .”; “A farmer went out in his field . . .”; “The rich man died and was there in Abraham’s bosom . . .”; “There was a man who had two sons . . .”; “So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross . . .”; “And then I saw a new heaven and a new earth . . .”

We must re-turn to these stories and events to remember not just the Bible stories, but the story that contains them all—the One Story of God’s incomprehensible, outrageous acts of redemption, the stories of a God gathering a people for his name. Here in its pages appear fierce and unlikely heroes, terrifying battles, pilloried prophets, resistant saints, miraculous healings, a foot-washing King, a bloodied God on a cross, a hollow tomb, the final wrath and glory judgment, and a denouement that ends more miraculously than anything we could imagine: the coming of a new city with open gates and a purified people now called sons and daughters who, needing no other light, will enter and walk by the light of the Lamb.

Not everyone will be there. It is not a safe or simple story. Yet the story is for all of us to hear and to heed. We are invited into these pages, not as editors with red pens in hand, but as supplicants seeking

understanding and truth. We are invited to live into this narrative, but not to rewrite it, either to gut it of its offense or to reshape it for short attention spans and better sales.

When we read the Bible through the lens of any single genre, agenda, or need, distortion will result. It is critical to grasp the Scriptures’ narrative unity to resist our culture’s counterstories, but we need not reduce the Scriptures to a single genre to grasp its One Story. God gave us stories indeed, but he also gave us proverbs, poetry, law, exhortation, prophesy, lament, riddle, letters, visions, genealogies, and prayers. Man lives by every word that proceeds from God’s mouth. All Scripture makes us wise unto salvation. We need to say, with the apostle Paul, that “we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word” (2 Cor. 4:2, *ESV*).

For reasons we will likely never know, God, who could have placed in our hands any kind of book he wanted, chose to give us a plurivocal, polyphonic, multilinear anthology, a magnificently irreducible book that contains as many rhetorical forms and voices as we have temperaments and experience. God knew—of course!—that we need them all. It’s time, then, to replace the term “narrative theology” with “literary theology” to include all the literary genres God chose to speak through.

Clearly, God’s truths are both propositional and incarnational, both theological and experiential. Each is necessary to the other. Each interprets the other. In *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind*, Mark Noll reminds us that doctrinal creeds are needed now more than ever because they “concentrate with fearsome energy on the themes that define the heart of Christianity.” Doctrine can do what Bible stories alone cannot: take us beyond the time-and-place limits of human events to encompass the full scope of God’s magnificent redemption.

Finally, following the concern of Edith Humphrey, professor of New Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary: All of us must examine ourselves, that our human love for God’s story does not obscure the God of the Story, that our love for the written word does not displace our love for the Word of God himself. We can be so distracted and dazzled by narrative theology that we neglect the living, indwelling presence within and beyond the story. “We don’t participate in a story,” she writes, “we participate in *him*.”

It is not the story but the living Christ who saves us. ✚

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Go to ChristianBibleStudies.com for “The Gospel Is More Than a Story,” a Bible study based on this article.

**God gave us
stories indeed,
but he also
gave us
proverbs,
poetry,
law,
exhortation,
prophesy,
lament,
riddle,
letters,
visions,
genealogies,
and prayers.**



The Other Iranian Revolution

In 'godless' eastern Germany, Iranian refugees surprise pastors with their interest in Christianity.

By Matthias Pankau
and Uwe Siemon-Netto

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OD MUST HAVE BEEN LAUGHING up his sleeve," muses Jobst Schöne. The retired bishop of the Independent Lutheran Church in Germany is applying a German paraphrase of Psalm 2:4 to the baptism of seven former Muslims from Iran. Early Easter morning, the seven were baptized in the Berlin parish where Schöne serves as associate pastor. The baptisms were an emblem of something bigger—a nationwide surge of such conversions in several denominations and a spate of reports of Muslims seeing Jesus in their dreams. But Martin Luther's Bible translation, now nearly 500 years old, also played an important role in their story.

The group baptism happened at an unsettling time for European Christians. During Lent, radical Muslims handed out large numbers of Qur'ans on street corners and announced plans to distribute 25 million German-language copies of their holy book in order to win Germans to their faith. But on the night before Easter, some 150 worshipers filed silently into St. Mary's Church in the Zehlendorf district of Berlin to witness conversions in the opposite direction.

Until midnight, the sanctuary was dark. Then Gottfried Martens, senior pastor, chanted from the altar: "Glory to God in the highest." All at once the lights went on, the organ roared, and the faithful broke jubilantly into song: "We praise you, we bless you, we worship you." Like Christians everywhere, they celebrated the Resurrection of their Lord.

For the six young men and one woman in the front pew, the moment had additional significance: They were placing their lives in danger in exchange for salvation. Under Islamic law, apostasy is a capital crime, a fact brought home to the German public by press reports about Iranian pastor Youcef Nadarkhani, an ex-Muslim, who was sentenced to death in Tehran.



Some of the converts at St. Mary's were themselves persecuted before fleeing to Germany, now home to the largest Iranian community in Western Europe, numbering 150,000.

"These refugees are taking unimaginable risks to live their Christian faith," says Martens, who ministers to one of Germany's most dynamic parishes, which has grown from 200 to over 900 members in 20 years. He views the conversion of a growing number of Iranians in Germany as evidence of God's sense of irony. "Imagine! Of all places, God chooses eastern Germany, one of the world's most godless regions, as the stage for a spiritual awakening among Persians," Martens exclaims. According to a recent University of



Conversion by Candlelight:
At an independent Lutheran church in Berlin, refugees from Iran seal their newfound faith in Christ at an Easter Eve baptismal service.

Chicago study, only 13 percent of all residents of the formerly Communist part of Germany attest belief in God.

THE VISION THING

The Berlin baptism is a small piece in a mosaic of faith covering all of Germany, crossing denominational barriers and extending into Iran itself. Some German clerics speak of a divinely scripted drama that includes countless reports of Muslims having visions of Jesus. According to Martens and others interviewed for this article, most of these appearances follow a pattern reported by converts throughout the Islamic world: Muslims see a figure of light, sometimes bearing the features

of Christ, sometimes not. But they instantly know who he is. He always makes it clear that he is Jesus of the Bible, not *Isa* of the Qur'an, and he directs them to specific pastors, priests, congregations, or house churches, where they later hear the gospel.

Thomas Schirmacher, chair of the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance, comments on this pattern: "God sticks to the Reformation doctrine that faith comes by receiving the Word through Scripture and preaching. In these dreams, Jesus never engages in hocus-pocus, but sends these people to where the Word is faithfully proclaimed." This is why Martens says he cannot dismiss such narratives: "As

a confessional Lutheran, I am not given to *Schwärmerei*," he says, using Luther's derogatory term for religious enthusiasm. "But these reports of visions sound very convincing."

Martens's experience with Muslim converts goes back to when he began catechism classes for Persian immigrants five years ago. The classes quickly expanded, and on Easter Sunday 2011, Martens baptized ten converts. Ten more converts are expected next Easter, and another ten the following year, plus more in between.

As news of the Easter baptisms at St. Mary's spread, churches across Germany reported similar experiences: Across Berlin in Neukölln, a district with a nearly 20



New Identity: Educated Iranian refugees (many of whom prefer the term 'Persian') are coming to Christ at the rate of about 500 per year, according to one report.

THOMAS KRETSCHSEL

could well be a thousand, perhaps thousands."

Actual numbers are hard to determine because of the theologically liberal leadership of the regional Protestant bodies linked to the state. Their leaders tend to steer clear of mission, says Schirmacher: "They worry that it might interfere with their interfaith dialogues." Götz agrees: "I suspect that this is why the parish pastor around here, a woman, has never visited our congregation."

Therefore, says Schirmacher, only "free churches," such as the Baptists and independent Lutherans, and semi-autonomous congregations like

percent Middle Eastern immigrant population, deaconess Rosemarie Götz baptized 16 Persians on Easter Day in her modest house of prayer, *Haus Gotteshilfe* ("God's Help"). The baptisms doubled her tiny congregation, which belongs to the *Landeskirchliche Gemeinschaft*, a pietistic group within the otherwise liberal Protestant church of the Berlin-Brandenburg region.

"The new members brought along 50 others whom we are now instructing in the faith, and 8 to 10 of them will be baptized in August," says Götz, whose involvement with the Iranians started 19 years ago, when a social worker introduced her to Nadereh Majdpour. Majdpour had fled Iran after suffering torture for declaring that she loved Jesus more than Muhammad. "She lost all her hair from being beaten savagely on her head in jail," recounts the deaconess. Majdpour brought the other Persians to Götz and now acts as their interpreter.

Two weeks after Easter, four more Iranians were baptized in the Baptist *Friedenskirche* (Church of Peace) in the fashionable Charlottenburg district. Meanwhile, not far from Götz's chapel, Sadegh Sepehri, an Iranian-born minister of the Presbyterian Church (USA), was preparing substantial groups of former Muslims for baptism in the *Bethlehemkirche*, a German Reformed Church hosting a congregation of 150 native Iranians. "I have already baptized more than 500 Persians in my 20 years here in Berlin," Sepehri reported before pointing to an American pastor who has done four times as well numerically in the

southern city of Nuremberg.

Mark A. Bachman, founder of Nuremberg's independent Word of God Baptist church, returned to the United States two years ago. Speaking by telephone from Hyles-Anderson College in Indiana, where he is training missionaries for work in Islamic countries, Bachman estimates that he baptized some 2,000 former Muslims during his 23-year ministry in Nuremberg; most were Persians.

In yet another part of Germany, Baptist pastor Helmut Venske baptized 13 Iranians on Easter Sunday. Venske serves a congregation in Mülheim in the industrial Ruhr District in northwest Germany. "This is happening in many parts of the country, wherever there are Persian communities," he says.

In a rural Lutheran church in Bavaria, for example, several dark-skinned strangers surprised the Communion assistant during Lent when they showed up at the altar. "Who were they?" he later asked his pastor. "Oh, they are just another family of Persian converts," the minister answered.

MISSING DATA

"Something significant is taking place here," says Max Klingberg, an official with the International Society of Human Rights (ISHR) in Frankfurt. But when questioned about a radio report that in Germany alone, at least 500 Persians become Christians every year, he cautions, "As a trained scientist, I prefer to be very careful with numbers." However, Schirmacher suggests, "The real figure

Götz's, joyfully report conversions. "We know that faithful ministers of the state-related churches also baptize ex-Muslims, but we are left in the dark about the numbers." Albrecht Hauser, a former missionary and retired dean of the Lutheran Church of Württemberg, adds, "We are aware of faithful Catholic priests doing likewise." But, observes Schirmacher, "The Catholics are just as hesitant to release statistics. They don't want to jeopardize interfaith dialogues."

However, the number of baptisms of Persians and, to a lesser degree, other Muslims in Germany outweighs the conversion of Christians to Islam. "According to a report by the central archive of Germany's Islamic organizations in Soest, approximately 500 Germans became Muslims in 2010," says Schirmacher. "Yet those were either German girls marrying Muslim immigrants or nominal ex-Christians hoping for good business opportunities in other Islamic countries. The conversion of Persians is of a totally different quality, usually following long instruction in the Christian faith."

In Gottfried Martens's congregation, for instance, the catechumens from the Middle East spend four or more months studying the Bible, the church creeds, Martin Luther's *Small Catechism*, the significance of the liturgy, and the hymns. "They are very attracted by the liturgy, which was absent in their previous faith," Martens explains. Wilfried Kahla, an ex-missionary from Germany's state-related Lutheran church and a veteran in evangelizing Muslims, told the Protestant

news magazine *ideaSpektrum* that he made his candidates study a 62-page brochure on Christian doctrine and administered a written exam to them. Then, at the baptismal font, he made them abjure Islam.

Martens, Venske, and Götz follow similar curricula; like Kahla, they carefully explain to converts the difference between the Allah of Islam and the God of Christianity. "Islam is like a rope ladder on which people try to reach God," Kahla likes to say. "They manage to climb a few rungs, but with each sin, fall off the ladder and must start all over again. Christians, by contrast, need no ladder because Jesus comes down to earth for them. Christians have salvation. Muslims don't."

AN EDUCATED PEOPLE GROUP

Why is it that, of the 4 million Muslims living in Germany, Iranians are the most likely to turn to Christianity? The ministers interviewed attribute this fact in part to their high level of education. They say that most

fact that every day 17 million of its 79 million people listen to programs via Christian satellite radio and television from abroad. Speaking on condition of anonymity, a U.S. Lutheran pastor involved in clandestine missionary work in the theocratic nation speaks with awe of the intensity of exchanges between the expanding Christian communities in exile and in Persia itself.

WHY DO THEY DO IT?

Clergy interviewed for this story reject the suspicion held by some German government officials that many refugees from Iran convert solely for refugee status. They point out that many converts had to exchange material comfort for poverty. "You don't do this simply for material reasons," says Götz. "Neither would you study so hard for your baptism and attend services so faithfully."

Martens admits he gets angry when testifying before immigration tribunals on behalf of Persian congregants. "Can you

language. Intrigued by what they read, several exiles asked to be baptized. They brought along friends who also wished to learn the basics of the Christian faith. "Today, one third of our 150 members are Persians," says Markus Fischer, Trinity's pastor.

Those members include 28-year-old "Amin" (not his real name) and his young family. Amin says he is a direct descendant of the prophet Muhammad. He was a successful corporate executive in Tehran until an Armenian friend introduced him to the Christian faith. Amin and his pregnant wife then fled to Europe. Their story is much like that of "Hamid," former owner of a Tehran shopping center. He was arrested and tortured after a raid by Iran's religious police on the house church he attended.

"In this congregation, I heard for the first time that God is a loving Father who desires a personal relationship with every human being. This was news to me, because Islam had taught me the image of God as a distant, punishing deity," says Hamid. He was one of the ex-Muslims baptized this Easter in Berlin, where he had moved after the German authorities granted him refugee status.

Other Persian converts from Leipzig also moved to Berlin. Others still moved on to Hamburg, Dresden, and Düsseldorf, where they joined the local congregations of the Independent Lutheran Church, according to Hugo Gevers, the denomination's special representative to migrants. Wherever they went, they started evangelizing fellow refugees, which helps to account for the surge in conversions.

Meanwhile, in Leipzig, Trinity's success among immigrants has caught the attention of German-born seekers. The congregation is outgrowing its minute makeshift building in a cemetery and negotiating a permanent lease of a large but little-used sanctuary of the state-related Lutheran Church, a shrinking denomination.

Schirmacher finds stories like this engrossing. He says, "Isn't it odd that the Ayatollah Khomeini has turned out to be one of modern Christianity's greatest missionaries?"

Matthias Pankau is a Lutheran pastor and an editor of *Idea*, a Protestant wire service and magazine in Germany. **Uwe Siemon-Netto**, a journalist, directs the Center for Lutheran Theology and Public Life in Capistrano Beach, California.

'In this congregation, I heard for the first time that God is a loving Father who desires a personal relationship with every human being.'

~ 'Hamid'

of the Iranian refugees are businesspeople, physicians, scientists, engineers, lawyers, economists, teachers, and other professionals or students. In coming to Germany, they followed a centuries-old pattern of cultured Persians in a country where German-Persian professional organizations have existed since the 19th century.

"Iran is suffering from a big brain drain as a result of its fanatical religious policies," observes Schirmacher. Hans-Jürgen Kutzner, who ministers to 1,000 Persians on behalf of the state-related United Evangelical-Lutheran Churches in Germany, agrees: "As far as the university-educated elite in Iran is concerned, Islam has lost all moral integrity, especially among the young."

Citing a report by the nationwide Deutschlandradio network, Martens wrote to his parish that perhaps half of all young, educated Persian urbanites sympathize with Christianity these days, while Klingberg of the ISHR cautions that such estimates might be exaggerated.

Still, Bachman ascribes the rise of underground Christianity in Iran partly to the

imagine?" he growls. "Here we have judges whose knowledge of Christianity is at best on the superficial level of cultural Protestantism, and they presume to judge the sincerity of someone else's Christian faith." Like his German colleagues, Bachman says, "I have always made it clear to ex-Muslims asking me to instruct them in the Christian faith that baptism would not automatically save them from being returned to Iran by German authorities."

Perhaps the most convincing argument supporting Bishop Schöne's image of a laughing God at work is found in the genesis of the Persian awakening at St. Mary's. It began in Saxony, the birthplace of the Reformation, where Christians have become an endangered species. Twelve years ago, Trinity Parish in Leipzig, a tiny congregation of the Independent Lutheran Church, began teaching German as a second language to asylum seekers awaiting government approval of their refugee status.

Trinity used Luther's Bible translation as a textbook. Linguists credit that translation with having created the modern German

Rejoicing in the Wrath

Why we look forward to Judgment Day.

By Trevin Wax

JOHN LENNON'S 1971 SONG "IMAGINE" encouraged a generation to imagine there is no heaven or hell, and to instead embrace "living for today." Over 40 years later, many evangelicals are following Lennon's advice.

It's commonly said that the gospel is not really about the after-life. The gospel answers much bigger questions than a person's eternal state. It's about life today—not so much about tomorrow.

And slowly but surely, we have begun to let the promise of divine judgment that appears in the Apostles' Creed—"He will come again to judge the living and the dead"—slip by unnoticed. Many Christians talk a lot about justice and very little about judgment. Justice here and now is a popular subject. Judgment there and then? Not so much. But justice and judgment are two sides of the same coin. You cannot have perfect justice without judgment. God cannot make things right without declaring certain things wrong. It's the judgment of God that leads to a perfectly just world. Try to take one without the other, and you lose the Good News.

DOWNPLAYING JUDGMENT

Why do we feel pressure to downplay the notion of judgment in the first place? What bothers us about this section of the Apostles' Creed?

Maybe we're embarrassed by the idea of eternal hell, and we think that if we remove the obstacle and offense of eternal judgment, we will be able to make Christianity more palatable to a society that has no room for judgment in its understanding of God. Unfortunately, when we downplay or deny judgment, we lose one of the reasons to

MICHAEL MULLAN

MULLAN



share our faith in the first place. Our desire to remove the obstacle actually removes the urgency.

Or maybe our neglecting the truth of divine judgment is a way of easing our conscience when we fail to evangelize. Rejecting the traditional Christian understanding of hell may help us deal emotionally with the fact that we have unsaved friends and family members who have died. We don't want to imagine that Grandpa is in hell. Downplaying judgment helps us to cope.

Or perhaps downplaying judgment keeps us from having to come face to face with our own evil. Most of us in the West have been shielded from the atrocities of humanity. If we had experienced Cambodia's killing fields, or Auschwitz, or Rwanda, we might be more concerned about justice. Once we admit that justice is necessary, we open the door for our own sins to be dealt with. Perhaps downplaying judgment is attractive because there is a part of us that would like to suppress the reality of injustice rather than admit it and our role in perpetuating it, thus indicting ourselves.

But what are we missing when we neglect that uncomfortable line of the Apostles' Creed? Expounding on it, the Heidelberg Catechism asks: "Why does this knowledge bring comfort?" Upon first glance, this seems like a strange question. "Jesus is coming back to judge," we say. So why take *comfort*?

I don't know what you think of when you hear the phrase "Judgment Day," but it sounds dreadful to me. My mind races to end-of-the-world movies that describe an apocalypse of epic proportions. And even when I remember that I need to let the Bible, not Hollywood, shape my understanding of judgment, I find many reasons to be terrified. Just think: *God's holy and righteous judgment being poured out on all that is wrong with us and the world.* Yikes!

But there is something comforting about God's judgment, something that the writers of the catechism recognize as integral to the gospel storyline. It's something we don't want to miss.

JUDGMENT AND JUSTICE

Humans are united by a desire for justice. We realize that life isn't fair. And yet for some reason, we also think it *should* be fair. The Bible teaches that life isn't fair *now*, and yet Scripture still points to a day when wrongs will be righted and justice will be served. God will straighten things out once and for all.

That's why the idea of Christ's return in judgment brings comfort. To those who suffer at the hands of the unjust, it is comforting to hold on to the promise that one day all will be made right. This upside-down, crazy world will not go on in its current state forever. God will execute justice. The righteousness of God will be evident for all to see, and the knowledge of the Lord will flood the earth as the waters cover the sea.

But there is also a scary side to the idea of a world of perfect justice. Just think: If God were to return and purge the world of evil, what would happen to us? Would we be able to inhabit a perfect world? What happens when we realize that we are part of the problem, not just the ones longing for a solution?

When we imagine our place within the cosmic story of redemption, we come to realize we are more than passive victims of evil's

consequences. We are evil insurrectionists, rebels against the good and loving authority of God our Creator. In *The Gulag Archipelago*, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who suffered at the hands of the Soviet Communists, put it well: "Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either—but right through every human heart." We thirst for justice, but once we consider the fairness of God, we quickly discover that Christ's return can only be good news if we have found mercy in God's sight.



You cannot have perfect justice without judgment. God cannot make things right without declaring certain things wrong.

REASONS FOR REJOICING

Though the entire tide of our culture is turning toward a type of pluralism that would deny the reality of (and even the need for) divine justice, there are solid, biblical reasons for maintaining our belief in the traditional Christian understanding of final judgment:

Judgment is good news. Once we understand God's judgment as putting an end to all that is wrong with the world (war, famine, disease, and so on), then we can understand why even the apostle Paul viewed judgment as part of his gospel (Rom. 2:15–16).

The Old Testament also sees God's judgment as good news. Look at Psalm 96:13: "Let all creation rejoice before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness."

Apparently the writers of our Bible had no problem celebrating judgment as good news. The idea of Jesus coming to judge the living and the dead was cause not only for comfort (as the Heidelberg Catechism states) but also for celebration.

Take away the notion of judgment, and you rob Christianity of any hope of satisfying our longing for justice, a longing built into us by our just and wise God. Without judgment, the gospel fails to deal with the problem of evil and the detrimental way that we humans treat each other—and, by extension, God. Once we take away judgment, we lose the gravity of our sin. Once we lose sight of our sinfulness, we short-circuit our experience of the powerful gratitude that comes from receiving grace.

Judgment demonstrates the holy love of God. God is not a bipolar deity, one side wrathful and angry, the other loving and merciful. Love is his essential attribute, but this love is not like the sentimental love we think of today. God's love is holy. It is jealous. The wrath of God

is based in his love. The idea of biblical judgment not only assures us of future justice; it also gives us a clearer picture of the love of God.

When we do away with the notion of God as Judge, we are left with a one-dimensional God—a sappy, sanitized deity whom we can easily manage. He nods and winks at our behavior, much like a kind elderly man who is not seriously invested in our lives. But the evil of our world is much too serious for us to view God as a pandering papa.

The Bible's picture of God is much more satisfying. He is angry because he is love. He looks at the world and sees the trafficking of innocent children, the destructive use of drugs, the genocidal atrocities in Africa, the terrorist attacks that keep people in perpetual fear, and he—out of love for the creation that reflects him as Creator—is rightfully and gloriously angry.

The god who is truly scary is not the wrathful God of the Bible, but the god who closes his eyes to the evil of this world, shrugs his shoulders, and ignores it in the name of “love.” What kind of love is this? A god who is never angered at sin and who lets evil go by unpunished is not worthy of worship. The problem isn't that the judgmentless god is too loving; it's that he is not loving enough.

Eternal judgment makes sense only if we understand that we live in a good world created by a loving God. When we sense the inherent goodness of the world God created, we are then able to see—with God's eyes—the destruction and heartache that sin has unleashed in the world. We see why creation is groaning for redemption and judgment—not the destroying fire of God, but the purging fire that will lay bare everything in this world that defaces it and leave room for God's presence to fill it once again.

Our sin angers God personally. God hates sin because of what it does to us. He hates sin because of what it does to his good creation. He rages against sin because of his great love for his children. But it's not enough to say that God will judge sin and restore creation for our benefit. This is a step in the right direction, but it leaves out a crucial component of sin and judgment. God is wrathful toward sin not only because of what it does to us, but also because of what it does to him. It dishonors his name.

When we depersonalize God's judgment, treating divine punishment as a dispassionate response to generalized wrongdoing, we wind up with a lopsided view of sin. Sin is not merely bad for us. All the sins we commit against one another are ultimately committed against God.

When Joseph is tempted by Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39:6–12), he refuses to go to bed with her because it would be a great sin against Potiphar and against God. Joseph realizes that sinning against his master—in effect stabbing him in the back—would also be plunging a dagger into the heart of God. He realizes that sin, even sin against other humans, is directed toward God.

Why must God deal with us personally in judgment? Because our sin angers him personally. It is directed to God and must be dealt with on that basis.

The concept of judgment is good for society. We should not keep judgment as part of our gospel presentation merely for pragmatic reasons. We believe in judgment first and foremost because we find the

concept clearly taught in the Bible. Nevertheless, judgment is good news for society. In *Life After Death: The Evidence*, Dinesh D'Souza makes a powerful case for an afterlife—including the possibility of judgment—and he appeals to the idea that societies function better when there is the expectation of divine judgment after death.

Take a Communist regime like that of Ceausescu's Romania. My wife grew up in this environment, and she witnessed firsthand the injustices that took place there. Ceausescu was an avowed atheist. Because he had no fear of what might occur after death, he could live in luxury while systematically starving his people. Without any fear of standing before his Maker, Ceausescu was able to justify any selfish craving that he had.

We all sin and deserve to be judged.

When we downplay or deny the notion of judgment, we don't have to come face to face with our own sins. That's why we are good at spotting evil in the world while remaining blind to the evil in our own hearts. The best way to hold onto the traditional belief in Christ as Judge is to humble ourselves by admitting our own sin and that we too deserve eternal condemnation.

When we stand before the God of the Bible, we are frightened by the perfect

righteousness we see. Yet, we are also astounded by the grace of God shown to us in Jesus Christ. It's not divine judgment that is so surprising; it's divine favor!

HOPE FOR REBELS

In his radio and television interviews, Larry King would often ask Christian preachers whether they believed Jesus was the only way to God; he also asked them about the murderer who trusts Christ: Does he get off the hook? Can a murderer enter heaven?

Indeed, the idea that a criminal could go free is astounding, but God has acted in a way that upholds justice and lavishes grace at the same time.

There is hope for rebels who desire justice and yet don't want to suffer. We see justice and mercy most clearly in the cross of Jesus Christ. The cross of Christ vindicates God's name. God is the Just One and the One who justifies. Christ's resurrection is the vindication of his innocence. God the Father overruled the verdicts of the earthly courts and declared his Son to be innocent. With Jesus Christ as our substitute we are vindicated—“declared innocent” because we are united to Christ the Righteous One.

God the Judge has promised to completely wipe out the evil of the world. And yet, he loves us. In his grace, he is the righteous judge and the gracious redeemer. His judgment against evil is poured out upon his only Son on the cross. Justice and mercy are not at war with one another. They meet at the cross. And we can find both judgment and mercy as good news once we recognize our guilt in light of God's holiness, and then bask in forgiveness in light of God's grace. ✚

Trevin Wax is the author most recently of *Counterfeit Gospels: Rediscovering the Good News in a World of False Hope* (Moody), from which this article is adapted.

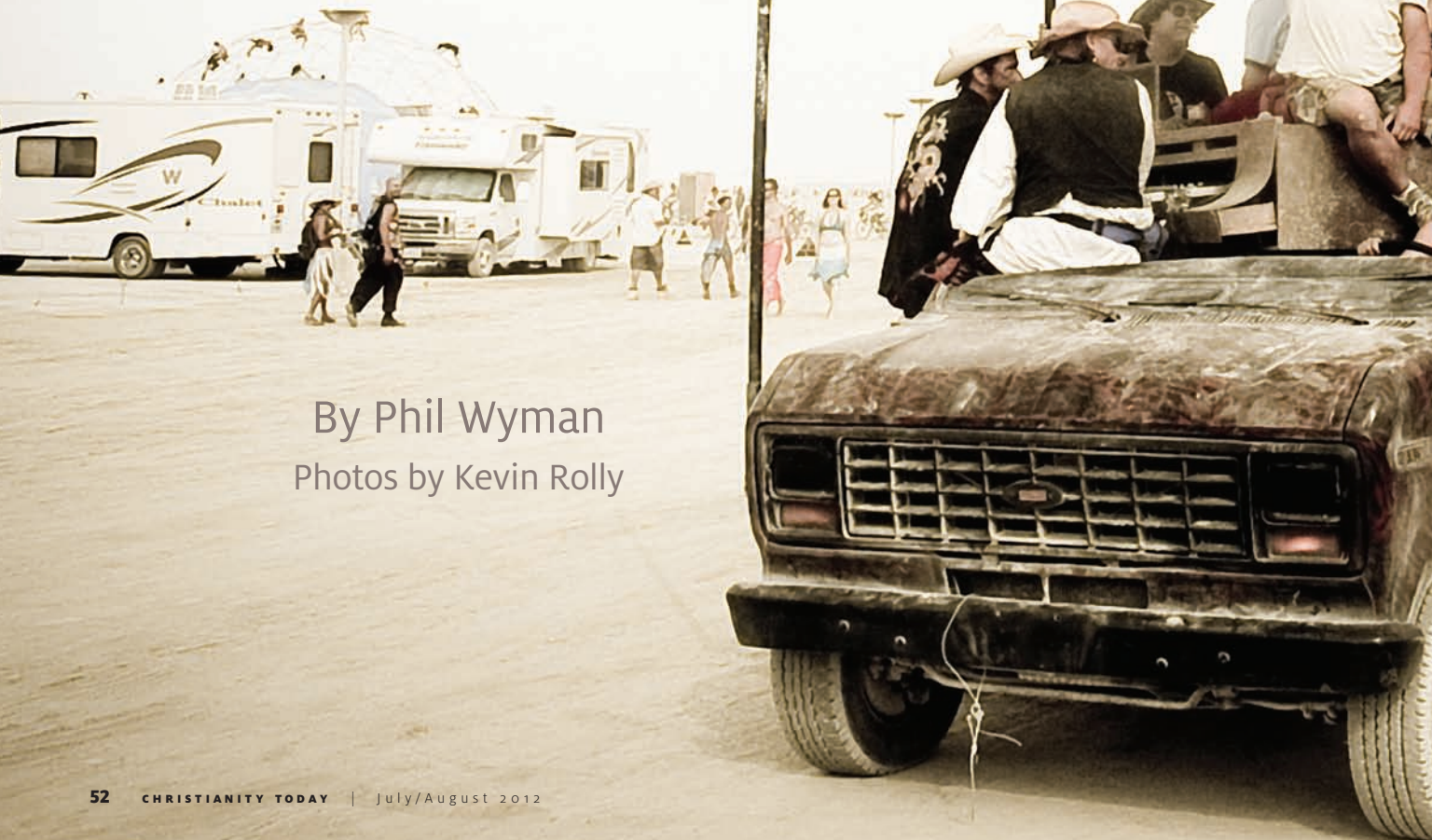
Finding Jesus at Burning Man

How God
made himself
known at one of
America's
most hedonistic
gatherings.

By Phil Wyman

Photos by Kevin Rolly

JESUS PHOTO • HOPE DEIFELL



JESUS WAS WALKING across the barren landscape, carrying a cross. I shouted to my friends, “Look, it’s Jesus! Let’s get a picture of him.”

The three of us started walking across the desert toward Jesus, but he turned away, walking further into the nothingness. I hastened my pace and left my friends behind.

When I finally caught up to him, I said, “Hi, my name is Simon, and the Romans sent me to carry your cross.” I hoped he’d get the reference. He did. Relieved, he handed me his cross, saying, “Oh, thank you. It’s not too heavy, is it?”

I walked and talked with Jesus, and I told him my real name. “My friends and I created an art installation in honor of one of your saints, Simeon Stylites. We’d love to show it to you.”

Jesus stopped. He looked me in the eyes and said, “Are you Phil Wyman?”

“Um, yes.”

Jesus teared up. He said, “I’ve been looking for you. I was lost and couldn’t find you.”

Okay, that’s weird, I thought. Jesus was lost, and now he’s found. How often does that happen?

But this was Burning Man. And anything can happen at Burning Man.



HEDONISM AND SPIRITUAL SEARCHING

Burning Man is a late-summer festival held annually in the bleak Nevada desert north of Reno. Fifty thousand people gather on the barren alkali lakebed called Black Rock Playa to camp, party, create art, and burn things—big things—culminating in the immolation of a large effigy, the source of the festival’s title. During the week it exists, it is Nevada’s fourth largest city.

Touting the dual values of radical self-reliance and radical self-expression, Burning Man is a notoriously hedonistic event. There are some naked people, but not as many as the urban myths suggest. There are campsites that are adult playgrounds for a variety of sexual activities. Burning Man has drugs and an excess of free alcohol. By night the event becomes a series of large raves and dance parties, with walls of woofers and tweeters thumping and squealing until dawn. It might be expected that even angels would fear to tread the dust of this nomadic adult party. But art and hedonism are not



WYSIWYG: What you see is what you get at this annual event—and you might even see Jesus (upper right with the author).



with about 40 Christians from all over the country, with the common goal of outreach. And at least two other Christian-themed camps were under way at the festival.

WITCHES AND OTHER DEVELOPING CULTURES

Since beginning pastoral work at a small California church 26 years ago, I've always sought unique opportunities to share the gospel, envisioning newly developing American cultures as part of the mission field. I brought that vision with me when I moved to Salem, Massachusetts—"Witch City USA"—which half a million people visit for the activities formed around Halloween, the history of the 1692 trials, and modern-day witchcraft. Every October since 1999, our church has been one of the city's most active organizations. We seek to be the hands and feet of Jesus among these visitors, and our Burning Man outreach is an extension of this approach.

I see Burning Man as a developing festival culture in American society. Like the children of Israel, who gathered for holy days like Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles, millions of people throng to festivals such as Burning Man, the Rainbow Gatherings, and Mind Body Spirit. Such events are imbued with a hedonistic party culture, but they often foster a search for deeper spirituality. That spirituality is typically not Christian—it's not specifically or predominantly anything. Rather, it's at root the search for meaning. Like the Jews running out to the desert to see John the Baptist, these spiritual seekers run to festivals and find new crazed prophets.

But I believe these "developing cultures" cannot run far before finding that God is running with them, embedding hints of the gospel into the DNA of their own creative momentum. Discovering the hidden work of God in their midst is like discovering a reluctant prophet of the living God.

I found the grace of God in Burning Man's "gifting" principle. I found the heart of Martin Luther's "priesthood of all believers" in its emphasis on interactivity and encouragement for every person to create. I saw my Creator God in the innovative art being erected on the playa. I saw a call to a primitive simplicity in the location of the event: the barren desert, a wilderness.

Like a missionary among unreached people groups, I trusted that God was already at work. The Jesus who has adeptly embedded his presence into the myths and histories of cultures around the world is also at work in newly developing ones. He is not surprised to find 50,000 people running around the desert acting crazy, burning massive art installations. He was there 25 years ago, when they first burned a small wooden man on the beach in San Francisco.

And he preceded us to Burning Man last year. It was as if he had been walking the playa for years, lost and invisible to the eyes of the church, yet hoping we would find him. In finding him, it seemed that all we needed to do was offer people an opportunity to search for Christ themselves—to hear his voice, to sense his gentle urgings, and to see his handiwork laid out on the desert canvas.

If You Build It . . . They will come, as they did to the Pillars of the Saints, where many reportedly had encounters with the divine.

the only things one finds at Burning Man.

For many, Burning Man is a spiritual pursuit, about finding a countercultural, nonmonetary way to live. You cannot buy or sell things at Burning Man. "Gifting" is the prime value, and most Burners bring enough supplies and gifts to give a great deal away to others—art, food, skills, and crafts. At our camp, espresso was being gifted, and when the espresso machine broke down, a 70-ish "Mr. Fix-It" gave us the gift of repairing it.

That wild combination of hedonism, art, and spiritual pursuit is what dragged me and four adventurous friends to Burning Man late in the summer of 2011. We wanted to see if Jesus was there. Like missionaries to an aboriginal culture, we were hunting for hints of the witness of God's Spirit in the midst of it all. If it is true that "where sin abounds, grace does much more abound," it seemed that Burning Man would be on fire with great grace. Opportunities for sharing the gospel could be limitless.

I wondered why Christianity had not typically embedded itself into these festivals, why we weren't among the leaders of new cultural developments and wildly creative thought. Certainly God is wildly creative—enough to find his way into human hearts in other cultures around the world. But at these festivals, and in the newly developing cultures of postmodernity, there seem to be so few people of Jesus. Yet, as the five of us would discover, we were not alone. We camped

Tower of Babel? Burning Man's participants build all sorts of structures and art exhibits as a means of self-expression.

So we decided to create something that would allow people to “listen for the voice of the Spirit” without our mediating the process, and we believed God would show up. Or at least we hoped and prayed he would.

PILLARS OF THE SAINTS

Like others at the festival, we devoted ourselves to building a large art installation—one of more than 300 built on the playa that week. Ours would be something of a sociological experiment. We were looking for people who were hoping to hear something—a still, small voice, perhaps.

I found some friends to help me—Hope Deifell, Dennis Huxley, Scott Veatch, and Matt Bender—and we built something we called Pillars of the Saints. It was an interactive meditation project based on the life of Simeon Stylites, the 5th-century Christian desert father and ascetic mystic. Simeon lived on a pillar for 39 years, seeking God and sharing wisdom with the multitudes who sought him out. Even popes asked for his advice, and Simeon’s work started a small movement of “pillar saints.”

Alone atop the pillars, they would ‘listen for the voice of the Spirit.’ Some sat for a few minutes, some for hours. Some cried. Some laughed. Some sat silently and seriously. Many had spiritual encounters.

It took us four days to build the installation: three pillars 10 to 12 feet tall and three blank walls with a flame altar in front of each. Each of the elements—the pillars, the walls, and the flame altars—had its own purpose.

Tens of thousands of people began arriving at the festival. At first slowly, then in droves, Burners began to visit the Pillars of the Saints. Standing at the altar flame, we would say, “This is not an art installation. It is merely a blank canvas for the art. Your experience, and the things you write on the walls, will become the art.”

At the flame altar, Burners were instructed to write on a piece of magician’s flash paper words describing things that hindered them from hearing the voice of the Spirit. They tossed the paper into the fire and watched it suddenly flash and disappear. They gasped. They cried. They often stood at the altar a long time, considering necessary changes to their lives. This was the beginning point in the process of hearing from God.

The pillars were designed for people to climb up from the inside, step out onto the top, and close



a trap door behind them. Alone atop the pillars, they would “listen for the voice of the Spirit” while looking out over the desert. They were encouraged to remain on the pillars until they heard something. Some sat for a few minutes, some for hours. Some cried. Some laughed. Some sat silently and seriously. Some lifted their voices and their hands to the heavens.

Many people had spiritual encounters upon the pillars.

When they were done, they would climb down and write upon the walls, giving public expression to what they had heard. Some of the writings were founded in pantheistic New Age perspectives, others appeared to be driven by personal struggles or pop philosophies. But many of them evidenced the true God’s influence.

A VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS

A week later, toward the end of the festival, the walls were filled with scores of simple, graceful, and intensely personal expressions. Sayings covered the walls like holy graffiti:

Why do people hurt others only to hurt themselves?

You can stop an invasion of armies, but you cannot stop an idea whose time has come.

It’s no good measure of health to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick society.

Let go of everything you know and all will be revealed.

Joy is a community that loves. Love heals.

Discipline is Freedom. Laughter is Medicine.

And darkness has no tickets for this event.

To find God one must forgive.

The truth will find you.

On the first day of the event, a man named Daniel came down from the pillars in tears. “This,” he said, waving at the Burning Man city, “is not what my life is about any more. It’s time for me to move on with my life and make some changes.” Dennis told Daniel the meaning of his name: “Beloved of God.” Hope prayed with Daniel for some time, and both she and Dennis hugged him before he wandered off into the desert.

A young woman wrote with her fingers in water letters upon a black tablet we provided during the hot days. The word *me* evaporated into nothing. I asked her what significance it held. “I’ve got some changes to make,” she said, adding that she knew she was the one who was in the way, hindering the voice of God from speaking into her life.

These are just two of hundreds of meaningful interactions we experienced at Burning Man. People cried for joy. People thanked us profusely. People returned daily to find peace. People sat upon the pillars each morning to watch the sun rise.

We prayed with people. We spoke blessings over them. We



Burning Man is notoriously hedonistic. There are naked people, and a lot of sex, drugs, alcohol, and all-night raves. But for many, Burning Man is also a spiritual pursuit.

Spirit and had written on our walls burned and rose in the smoke to heaven, but some of those words had already reached heaven before they went up in smoke.

A LAST WORD FROM JESUS

It was the middle of the week when the man dressed like Jesus arrived. We learned that his name was Bert Flaming; he was a Christ follower and a bookseller from Canada. Flaming had seen a video about our project before coming to Burning Man and wanted to find us, but we found him instead. He spent about an hour with us. He meditated upon the pillars and wrote this on our walls:

I love you. Be kind to one another, especially to people who hate you. I’ll help you, and when you can’t do this, I’ll forgive you.

Jesus was already at Burning Man. We found him there, and like our friend, the Canadian Jesus, he was looking for us all along.

Editor’s Note: At this year’s Burning Man in late August, Wyman and his team are building a yurt and a large interactive theremin (an eerie electronic instrument that is played without being touched). Wyman says it will “highlight the capacity of individuals to connect with God,” and that “it is the attempt to find God that carries a sense of holiness, not the perfection with which we accomplish that connection.”

Phil Wyman pastors the Gathering, a small, independent church in Salem, Massachusetts. He blogs at squarenomore.blogspot.com.

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The Problem with ‘Incarnational Ministry’

What if our mission is not to ‘be Jesus’ to other cultures, but to join with the Holy Spirit?

By J. Todd Billings

IN RECENT DECADES, scores of books, manuals, and websites advocating “incarnational ministry” have encouraged Christians to move beyond ministry at a distance and to “incarnate” and immerse themselves into local cultures. Some give a step-by-step “incarnation process” for Christians crossing cultures. Some call us to become incarnate by “being Jesus” to those around us. Indeed, many of these resources display valuable insights into relational and cross-cultural ministry. But there are serious problems at the core of most approaches to “incarnational ministry”—problems with biblical, theological, and practical implications.

I encountered these problems myself as a practitioner of “incarnational ministry.” At a Christian college, I was told that just as God became flesh in a particular culture 2,000 years ago, my job was to become “incarnate” in another culture. Eight months later, equipped with training in

cultural anthropology, I set about learning the language and culture in Uganda. But I quickly ran into doubts about the “incarnational” method. Would the Ugandans necessarily “see Jesus” as a result of my efforts at cultural identification? Was I assuming that my own presence—rather than that of Christ—was redemptive? Is the eternal Word’s act of incarnation really an appropriate model for ministry?

My questions multiplied as I continued my theological education. Biblical scholars and theologians assured me that the Bible and orthodox Christian theology taught nothing about us “becoming incarnate.” Going back to my professors of missiology and ministry, I heard a quite practical response: If not the Incarnation, what is the alternative model

for culture-crossing ministries? Over the past decade, I have come to see that incarnational ministry actually obscures the much richer theology of servant-witness and cross-cultural ministry in the New Testament: ministry in union with Christ by the Spirit.

TWO DISTORTIONS

Viewing the Incarnation as a model for ministry leads to a dangerous imbalance in two ways. The problem is not the doctrine of the Incarnation, which is central to Christian faith. Rather, the problem results from a distortion of that belief—turning the uniquely

need to bear witness to Christ. Instead, they were simply called to become “incarnate” in the second culture. The slogan in these circles is to “live the Good News rather than preach the Good News.” Surely it’s important to offer a ministry of presence to those in need. But when the gospel is reduced to identifying with others, the uniqueness of Christ’s incarnation becomes an afterthought, and the Good News becomes merely a personal ethic.

In contrast, on the conservative evangelical side, advocates of “incarnational ministry” bear witness to Christ without hesitation.

It’s important to offer a ministry of presence to those in need. But when the gospel is reduced to identifying with others, the uniqueness of Christ’s incarnation becomes an afterthought.

divine act of the Word becoming incarnate in Christ into a “method for ministry” that is repeated in our own lives. Let me offer two examples of this distortion—one more common in mainline Christian circles, the other more common among conservative evangelicals.

At a two-hour workshop on urban ministry, leaders began by quoting Eugene Peterson’s artful rendering of John 1:14, which describes the incarnation of Jesus Christ: “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.” If moving into the neighborhood and immersing oneself among the people is God’s strategy for ministry, I was told, then certainly it must be ours. Throughout the workshop, I heard many techniques for adopting a second culture, listening to others, and immersing myself in an urban neighborhood. But there was apparently no need to mention Jesus any further. Jesus provided the model for how to immerse oneself in another culture, but the specific content of his life and teaching, and his death and resurrection, were beside the point.

The workshop’s approach—seen in other segments of the church—reduced “incarnational ministry” to its core metaphor: The point is to identify with another culture rather than to testify to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Indeed, at a recent missions conference for a mainline denomination, missionaries claimed they did not

Whether in youth culture, urban culture, or any other environment, the ultimate goal of immersion is witnessing to Christ. This approach rightly recognizes that, as Jesus said before his Ascension, “you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). To be Christ’s witnesses goes beyond “witnessing” by handing out tracts to people we don’t know. But by using the Incarnation as a model, they miss the implications of what comes earlier in the passage: that the commissioning depends not on a second incarnation, but on receiving power from the Holy Spirit.

In the same way, these evangelicals often quote John 20:21, where Jesus says, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” They assume this means imitating the act of becoming incarnate. But they leave out the next verse: “And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” It is not our own “incarnation,” then, but the Holy Spirit who makes Christ present in us and beyond us. The Spirit makes our witness effective.

Yet because they take the Incarnation as their “model” of ministry, these evangelicals often assume that *they*—rather than the Holy Spirit—make Christ present in the world. In these circles, one often hears the slogan that “you and I may be the only Jesus that others will ever meet.” Youth leaders are admonished to go out and “be Jesus” to youth, wherever

they are. Church planters are told to “be Christ” to the people they meet. The burden of incarnation—and revelation—is on the shoulders of the individuals. Such a theology often leads to burnout. In spite of its motive to be relational and evangelistic, this approach functionally denies the adequacy of Christ’s unique incarnation and the Spirit’s work as the supreme witness to Christ (John 15:26). We forget that we are not equipped to represent Christ to the world without being united, as a community, to Christ through the Spirit.

UNITED TO CHRIST

Union with Christ is one of the most widespread and comprehensive images the New Testament uses to describe salvation, the Christian life, and ministry. Christians do not simply believe in Christ or imitate Christ from a distance; we have been united to Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit. We are united to Christ as branches are united to the vine (John 15), and we are “in Christ” as ones united to the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus (Rom. 6:3–11; Eph. 2:6). We have already died to sin, yet we are called to put to death the old self (Rom. 6:6; 8:13). All of this happens through the Spirit, for “if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ” (Rom. 8:9).

The theme of union with Christ relates to the forgiveness of sins, new life by the Spirit, our identity as adopted children of the Father, the church as a body of diverse people made one in Christ, the practical life of witnessing to Christ, loving our neighbor, and walking by the Spirit. And that is just the beginning. It’s no wonder that biblical theologians in many traditions have boldly declared the centrality of union with Christ. For example, while commenting on Paul’s letters, Richard Longenecker exclaims, “Being ‘in Christ’ is the essence of Christian proclamation and experience.”

Regrettably, “incarnational ministry” approaches fail to recognize key New Testament passages about union with Christ. The New Testament makes strong claims about the “missions” of the Son and Spirit in the world. This makes the “sending” of the church fundamentally derivative and subordinate. We are *adopted* into Christ by the Spirit; we do not have a divine nature, like the incarnate Christ, but only a human nature. The Spirit brings us into the benefits of Christ as ones who belong to him;

fundamentally, the church is sent as witnesses to Christ and ambassadors of reconciliation in him. We are always to point beyond ourselves, as witnesses.

Christ lives in us by the Spirit. But a biblical account of union with Christ is clear that *we are not Christ*; we are not an “ongoing incarnation” in the world. While John’s gospel speaks about how we are sent into the world (John 20:21), the gospel uses different language for the sending of the Son. As New Testament scholar Andreas Köstenberger points out, terms such as “‘coming into the world’ or ‘descending’ or ‘ascending’” are “reserved for Jesus.” The way we are sent, he writes, is “not the way in which Jesus came into the world (i.e. the Incarnation), but *the nature of Jesus’ relationship with his sender* (i.e., one of obedience and utter dependence).” We are not sent into the world to perform another incarnation, but as disciples who bear witness to Christ and his reign by the Spirit.

The New Testament considers God’s act of becoming incarnate in Christ to be utterly unique. Thus, it calls us to *follow Jesus Christ*, the God-man—not the preincarnate divine Word. This is particularly pertinent in interpreting Philippians 2:5–7, the scriptural text used most frequently to support the idea of imitating the action of becoming incarnate: “In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.” This passage might seem to say that we should become incarnate just as Christ took on a “human likeness.” Such a reading, however, moves against the larger context of the passage. In Philippians 2:1–4, Paul has just admonished believers to be “of one mind,” acting toward one another with humility and harmony, exhorting them to

look not “to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.” Then, in verse 5, Paul says to “have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.” Paul is concerned with the attitude or disposition of believers. He wants them to serve each other with Christ-like humility, not to imitate every detail of Christ’s uniquely redemptive life and work.

Must we somehow imitate the act of being exalted and receiving a “name that is above every name,” so that “every knee should bow” to us (Phil. 2:9–10)? Surely not—exaltation as an object of worship is reserved for Christ alone, just as God’s taking on “human likeness” occurs in Christ alone. Having the “mindset” of Christ, as Philippians 2:1–11 spells out, means displaying a life

of service, obedience, and harmony in Christ—not imitating the act of incarnation. All major streams of biblical scholarship agree on this: Paul does *not* ask us to imitate the act of becoming incarnate.

Only in light of our union with Christ—the servant who lives a life of self-sacrificial obedience—does Paul write about his missionary strategy in 1 Corinthians 9:22: “I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.” Advocates of incarnational ministry often claim that Paul’s cultural identification imitates the Incarnation. But scholars such as Richard Hays have pointed out that the passage is framed in the context of union with the incarnate Christ, the self-sacrificial servant.

In the end, not one New Testament passage suggests that we should imitate the divine act of becoming incarnate. Instead, the passages used to support “incarnational ministry” illustrate the pervasive New Testament theme of union with Christ by the Spirit. We actually become united to Christ the Lord by the Spirit’s power.

A NEW HUMANITY

Approaching cross-cultural ministry in light of the Bible’s

teaching about union with Christ draws our attention anew to the work of the Spirit in community. Unlike the often individualistic “incarnation” model, ministry in union with Christ points to the final purpose of all cross-cultural ministry: to participate in the Spirit’s work of creating a new humanity in Christ, in which a culturally diverse people gathers to worship the triune God.

In engaging other cultures, the New Testament church did not draw on a theology of “incarnational ministry,” but instead responded to the Spirit’s work of creating a new people in Christ. This began at Pentecost, when the Spirit came upon the followers of Jesus and gave them the ability “to speak in other tongues” about the powerful deeds of



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incarnation’ in the world.***

God (Acts 2:4–12). Not only does the Spirit overcome linguistic divisions among the Jews; the same Spirit gives visions to both Peter and Cornelius, a Gentile, that lead to their meeting and the disclosure that the Good News is for Gentile as well as Jew (10:1–33). At the council of Jerusalem, Peter points to God's "giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us," for in this God "did not discriminate between us and them" (15:8–9). In light of

this revelation, the council makes significant cultural concessions to allow for the united fellowship of Jew and Gentile (15:22–29). Early Jewish followers of Jesus were asked to honor the cultures of the Gentile followers (and vice versa) because the Spirit had made them one people in union with Christ.

Given this, it's no surprise that Revelation's final vision of redemption involves a culturally diverse gathering of humanity

worshiping Jesus, the crucified Lamb. "And they sang a new song, saying: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation'" (Rev. 5:9). But this vision is not limited to the future. In Ephesians 2:13–18, Paul indicates that the present reality of union with Christ anticipates the final oneness of God's people by breaking down the dividing walls between people groups. For "now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ." Given this key context—of being "in Christ Jesus"—Paul continues in verses 14–18:

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

This is what the Spirit's corporate work in union with Christ looks like: Christ is the peace who breaks down the dividing walls between hostile groups, reconciles them into one body through the Cross, and by one Spirit gathers those far and near to serve the Father. God adopts them into a new family, a "new humanity," in which dividing walls are broken down in Christ.

What are the implications of being sent as Christ's witnesses to discover and participate in the Spirit's work of creating a new humanity? It means that while evangelism is essential, it cannot be done simply by delivering a message from a distant missionary compound, or setting up a new "program" at church for youth. It means we are sent into the diverse cultures of the world to bear witness to Christ in a way that discloses the new, united humanity. Thus, we do need to be learners of other cultures, with patience enough to listen, be present, and display love with our actions. Yet, in contrast to "incarnational ministry,"

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we need not pretend to “incarnate” into that culture or to “be Jesus” to that culture, for this displays a lack of trust in the Spirit’s work, which mediates the presence of our living, ascended Lord. Theologian Andrew Purves warns us to “beware of all teachings that suggest it is your job to incarnate Jesus,” for that is to “render Jesus an absent mythic Lord” rather than recognize that Christ is the living Lord who acts in and through the Spirit.

Moreover, the church is not only sent but also gathered by the Spirit to worship the Father. This is a weakness of many “incarnational ministries”—individuals reach out to youth, city-dwellers, or foreign cultures, but because the metaphor of “incarnation” is about sending, there is little emphasis on gathering. Many youth reached through incarnational ministry do not join a multi-generational community in worship; indeed, some advocates of incarnational ministry treat corporate worship as a distraction from real ministry—which is to walk alongside individuals in their various contexts. While this relational emphasis has value, focusing only on the dispersed church ends up promoting individualism and devaluing the ways in which Jesus presents himself by the Spirit through word and sacrament in corporate worship.

The eschatological image in Revelation 5:9 is of people from “every tribe and language and people and nation” in corporate worship. The Spirit unites peoples of many cultures and tribes precisely so that they might “have access to the Father by one Spirit” (Eph. 2:18). Communal worship is essential if the church is to display its reconciled yet differentiated oneness as a witness to the world (John 17:23).

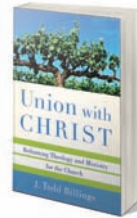
REDISCOVERING THE INCARNATION

At the center of the Christian faith is a bold affirmation: that in Jesus Christ, the Word became flesh. Many people may live lives of service—and some even die self-sacrificing deaths. But Jesus is not the first of many incarnations. Jesus alone is God incarnate—and apart from this unique divine act, Jesus’ work on our behalf would have no saving value.

The time is ripe for evangelicals to rediscover the many implications of the astonishing fact of the Incarnation. We often evince a gnostic attitude toward our bodies and the material world, acting as if physical things don’t really matter if you are a “spiritual”

person. But in the Incarnation, we see how God acts in and through the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. Because of this unique action, the location of being “in Christ” is one of communion with God and fellowship in the body of Christ, the church. We need to champion the uniqueness of the Incarnation, and see how it leads to a dynamic theology of union with Christ—where

the Spirit gathers us for worship and service as an embodied, culturally diverse, yet unified new humanity in Christ. ⊕



J. Todd Billings is associate professor of Reformed theology at Western Theological Seminary and the author of *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church* (Baker Academic), from which this article is adapted.

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[PROFILE]

Moore

Basketball star
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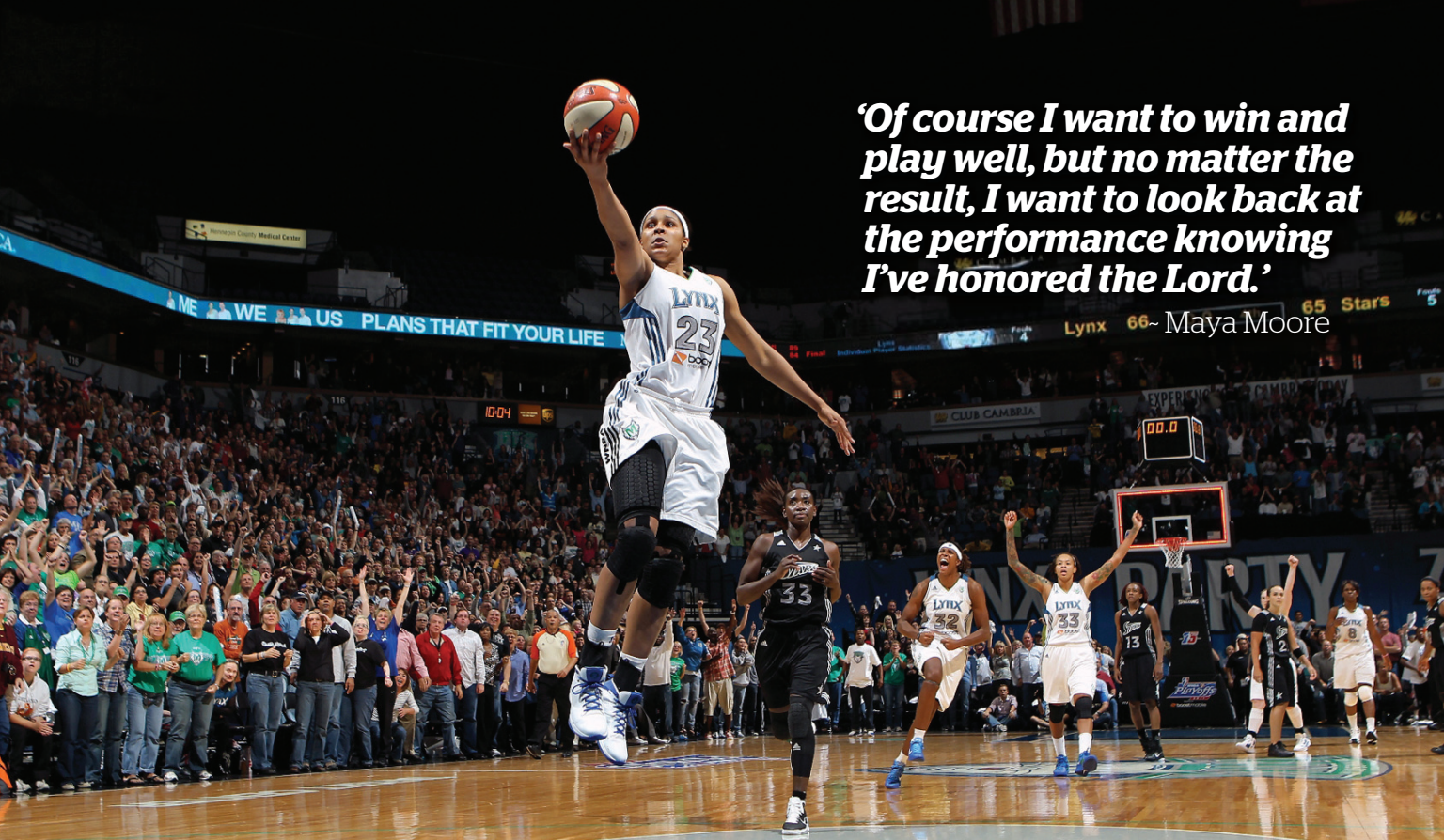
Take the Twitter page of Maya Moore. Her mini-bio at the top is a good place to start:

Basketball player, daughter, & drummer. Friend & red velvet cake lover. So few words, so much meaning.

Basketball player. And how! The youngest member of the U.S. Olympic team—now in London for the 2012 Games—Moore, 23, is not only one of the world's best but perhaps the winningest. Ever. Since ninth grade, the 6-foot forward has played almost 400 games, winning 97 percent of them. That includes three high-school state titles, two NCAA championships and a 90-game win streak at the University of Connecticut (as a two-time national player of the year), a WNBA crown with the Minnesota Lynx as the league's rookie of the year, and most recently, a EuroLeague championship with a pro team in Valencia, Spain. Now she hopes to add Olympic gold to the list.

Daughter. Moore can't say enough about her mother, Kathryn, who "has helped me to grow into a smart young woman who keeps things in perspective." Kathryn taught her only child—named after Maya Angelou—the value of faith, family, and hard work. When Moore was 11, Kathryn and her daughter left the comfort of extended family in Jefferson City, Missouri, and moved to Charlotte, North Carolina, where Kathryn was starting a new job. "It was a hard, lonely time," Maya tells *Christianity Today*, remembering how middle-school kids mocked her height—she towered over everyone—and her size 13 shoes.

"It was tough," she says. "My mom and I had to figure out how to do things on our own. Like, were we going to go to church because we'd always done it before, or were we going to do it for ourselves because we want this in our life?" Moore says that around that time she began to "own" her faith, and has considered herself a Christ follower ever since. (Her father, former Rutgers basketball star Mike Dabney, left before she was born. They have reconnected in recent years, though Moore doesn't like to discuss it. "It's a relationship in progress, and God is faithful," she says.)



'Of course I want to win and play well, but no matter the result, I want to look back at the performance knowing I've honored the Lord.'

Lynx 66~ Maya Moore 65 Stars

Drummer. Moore has been playing since age 9, and her love of music is second only to basketball. Her Twitter page includes retweets from TobyMac, LeCrae, and Chaz Miles, and links aplenty to hip-hop and gospel. She's forever wearing ear buds, constantly in motion, always in rhythm; spontaneous dance moves are inevitable. And singing, singing, singing. Moore led hundreds of fans in a chorus of "Glory to God Forever"—dividing the audience into three groups—at a Faith and Family Night following a Lynx game last summer. "The sound was like angels singing to our Lord," says teammate Taj McWilliams-Franklin, who believes that if Moore ever blew out a knee, she could pursue a second career as a singer.

Friend. Those closest to Moore say this is her greatest asset. They describe her as selfless, sensitive, and ever encouraging. Tina Charles, who shared an apartment with Moore while they were teammates at UConn, says, "Maya is an extraordinary person, humble, giving. Living with Maya, I grew as a young woman. I looked up to her on and off the court. As a friend, she's going to be there for you in every possible way." Because of Moore's faithful witness, Charles says, she gave her own life to Jesus at 19.

Red velvet cake lover. We'll take her word for it.

Looking down Moore's Twitter page, one

gleans more from the tweets. Like this one:

Thanks! Will represent! RT @UConn: @ MooreMaya UConn is 100% behind you this summer! Good luck. #olympics <http://s.uconn.edu/3k>

That first word sums up Moore's grateful spirit. She says she's been "blessed with great people throughout my life. Great coaches, great teams, great opportunities. I just try to make the most of them and to be obedient to God. It's all a gift from the Lord."

Will represent! She cares about how she lives out her faith; Moore signs her autographs with Colossians 3:23: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord..." But that also goes for whatever team she's playing for—which is now the United States. "I'm super excited," she says. And she's thrilled to be reunited with her college coach, Geno Auriemma, who is helming the American squad: "To be able to play under him again, with some other former UConn players and teammates, is a joy." (Half of the 12 members of the U.S. team played for Auriemma at UConn.)

In that tweet, Moore links to a brief video that NBC filmed for its Olympics coverage. She talks about her childhood, her mom and extended family, her goal to play professionally. She mentions playing one-on-one with

President Obama ("He's got a funky release on that jump shot," she says, "but that sucker goes in!"), the world stage of this month's London Games, and her faith. She looks into the camera and asks, "Am I glorifying God in everything I do?"

Other tweets capture more Olympic excitement—at meeting champions past (Carl Lewis and Gail Marquis) and present (Bryan Clay), and at giving an American flag to 88-year-old Raymond Lumpp, who played for the U.S. men's team in 1948: "Blessed to present flag to bball history," she writes.

COMPETITIVE EDGE

Moore frequently tweets about prominent evangelicals—a news report about the death of Chuck Colson, a pithy remark from Rick Warren, a timeless truth from C. S. Lewis. There are retweets from Oswald Chambers, John Piper, Louie Giglio, and Joni Eareckson Tada, and Moore says she's currently reading books by Randy Alcorn, Max Lucado, and Skye Jethani. She's always looking to grow—in faith, in life, in her game. Life is a series of competitions, and she's always looking for an edge. She says those middle-school years were like "facing a team I'd never faced before, and they've just flattened us in the first half. How am I going to respond?"

On court and off, she usually responds victoriously.

"Maya is a winner all around," says Auriemma, who recruited Moore as a high-school All-American out of Atlanta. "She tries to win *everything*. If we're running a sprint, Maya tries to win. If we're trying to find out who's singing that song on the radio, Maya wants to be the one to get it. If we're doing a crossword puzzle, Maya wants to be the first one to get it. If somebody asks, 'Who's got the highest grade point average?' Maya wants to be that person." (And she often was; Moore graduated with a 3.67 GPA in sports and media promotion, and was a three-time academic All-American.)

When Moore says she's "super-competitive," I ask, "So, if we played just a friendly game of cards, would you absolutely hate it if I beat you?" She doesn't hesitate: "Absolutely. And I would make you play me again until I beat you."

I ask if friends and family ever ask her to lighten up. "No, they never say that. They just don't play me. Because they *know*."

Auriemma says that when Moore first arrived on campus, her confidence came with a dose of attitude. "As good as she is and as smart as she is, she was also very stubborn," he says. "This is what all winners do: They think they're never wrong." He says Moore "always had an excuse" when she'd make a mistake. "Finally, we just said, 'Maya, you'll be a lot better if you just *listen* rather than talk all the time.' I only had to say that once, and we never had to worry about it again."

When the game was on the line, Auriemma wanted the ball in Moore's hands.

"Some people make three-pointers when the team is already up by fifteen; Maya makes threes when you're down one in crucial times of the game," he says. "Some people get a steal when it doesn't mean anything; Maya gets a steal when it saves the game. That's what I mean when I say she's a winner."

SERVANT LEADER

Scroll down Moore's Twitter page, and you'll come across nuggets like these:

As we read Your Word, Lord, romance our hearts with an awareness & insight of your presence and Truth! Amen

Thankful for so much. Overwhelmed by God's grace!

I just want to do what God graced me to do. How 2 figure this out? Read His word &

fellowship with Him & the people he's placed in my life.

When Michelle Backes, team chaplain for the Lynx, learned that Minnesota had picked Moore No. 1 in the draft, she contacted a friend who worked with Athletes in Action (AIA) at UConn. Moore had been active in AIA, and Backes's friend gave a promising report: "You are in for a treat. Maya is awesome."

Backes says it's true. "She's the real deal. And as serious as she is about basketball, she applies all of those disciplines in her spiritual life. And she's humble."

Big-name players—especially No. 1 draft picks—often think they're All That. Not Moore.

Players often grumble about rookie initiation rites, but Moore weathered hers with a smile. When veterans would kick balls all over the arena after practice, forcing the rookies to pick them up, Moore chased hers down as quickly as possible with nary a gripe. When teammates made her dress up like an old lady on a road trip, Moore "laughed and played along, and got into her character with gusto," says teammate McWilliams-Franklin. "She even made up a voice and a name for her old-lady persona. It was classic Maya, and it was hilarious. She could have been like, 'I'm Maya Moore, and I don't have to do this,' but she was very gracious, and it endeared her to us even more."

Even as a rookie, Moore was beginning to lead. Backes calls her a "servant leader. She's young and fun, but she has a very mature disposition, a depth that is noticeable. She knows that God has given her these gifts. She has basketball; it doesn't have her."

A few Lynx players meet regularly for Bible study, often at Moore's apartment, where she plays the roles of both Mary and Martha. Says Backes, "Here's the WNBA Rookie of the Year, winner of all these awards, and she's running around, 'You want water? Something to eat? Can I get you anything?'" And when the study begins (last year they went through the Book of Acts), Moore becomes a sponge, soaking it all in.

At the end of the season, Moore and a few teammates took Backes and another chaplain out to lunch. "She could've just given us gift certificates," says Backes, "but she wanted to spend time with us." And then Moore literally gave Backes the shirt off her back: When the restaurant cranked up its air conditioning and Backes started to shiver, Moore took

off her jacket and put it over the chaplain's shoulders. "How about that?" marvels Backes. "She's always putting others first."

HER LIFE DOES THE TALKING

Moore embraces being a role model, hanging out after games and spending time in the community with fans. "She is always waiting with a smile, a handshake, an autograph, a kind word," says McWilliams-Franklin. Moore works with the NBA's Hoop Troop program, which helps young kids learn about the game. And she hosts an annual Very Maya Christmas—a free basketball clinic and community celebration at her old high school in Atlanta.

She is also working with her mother to create a foundation that will "give back" in some way. But female basketball stars are rarely rich: an NBA first-round pick might earn \$5 million as a rookie; Moore earned a reported \$45,000. The real money for women is in Europe, where they often quadruple their WNBA salary; one star, Diana Taurasi, reportedly earns \$500,000 a year with a team in Moscow. And Moore—with her winning smile and affable manner—also earns an unspecified amount in endorsements; she is the only female athlete contracted with Nike's Jordan Brand. Says Michael Jordan, Moore's sports idol, "Not only has Maya proven to be a prolific winner on the court, her hunger and determination to make an impact off the court makes her a valuable addition to the Jordan family."

McWilliams-Franklin is certainly glad she's with the Lynx family.

"Often in the WNBA, with players who call themselves Christians, their words and actions do not match up with their faith," she says. "Yet Maya truly loves the Lord and shows it in her demeanor. She lets her light shine through her actions. She lets her life do the talking."

Which brings us back to Moore's Twitter page. Always tweeting. Free as a bird.

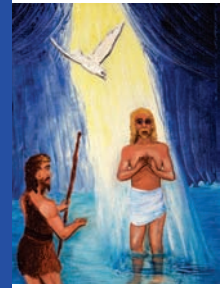
"I often use the word *free* to remind myself that God wants me to live my life and compete on the court free in him," she says. "Free to play great, free to make a mistake, free to learn from them. Of course I want to win and play well, but no matter the result, I want to look back at the performance knowing I've honored the Lord."

Whatever happens, you can bet she'll tweet about it.

Mark Moring is senior associate editor at CT.



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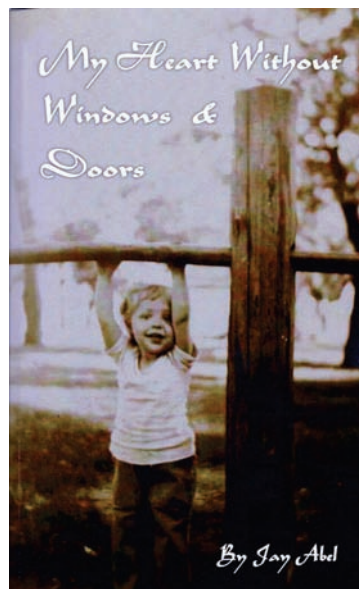
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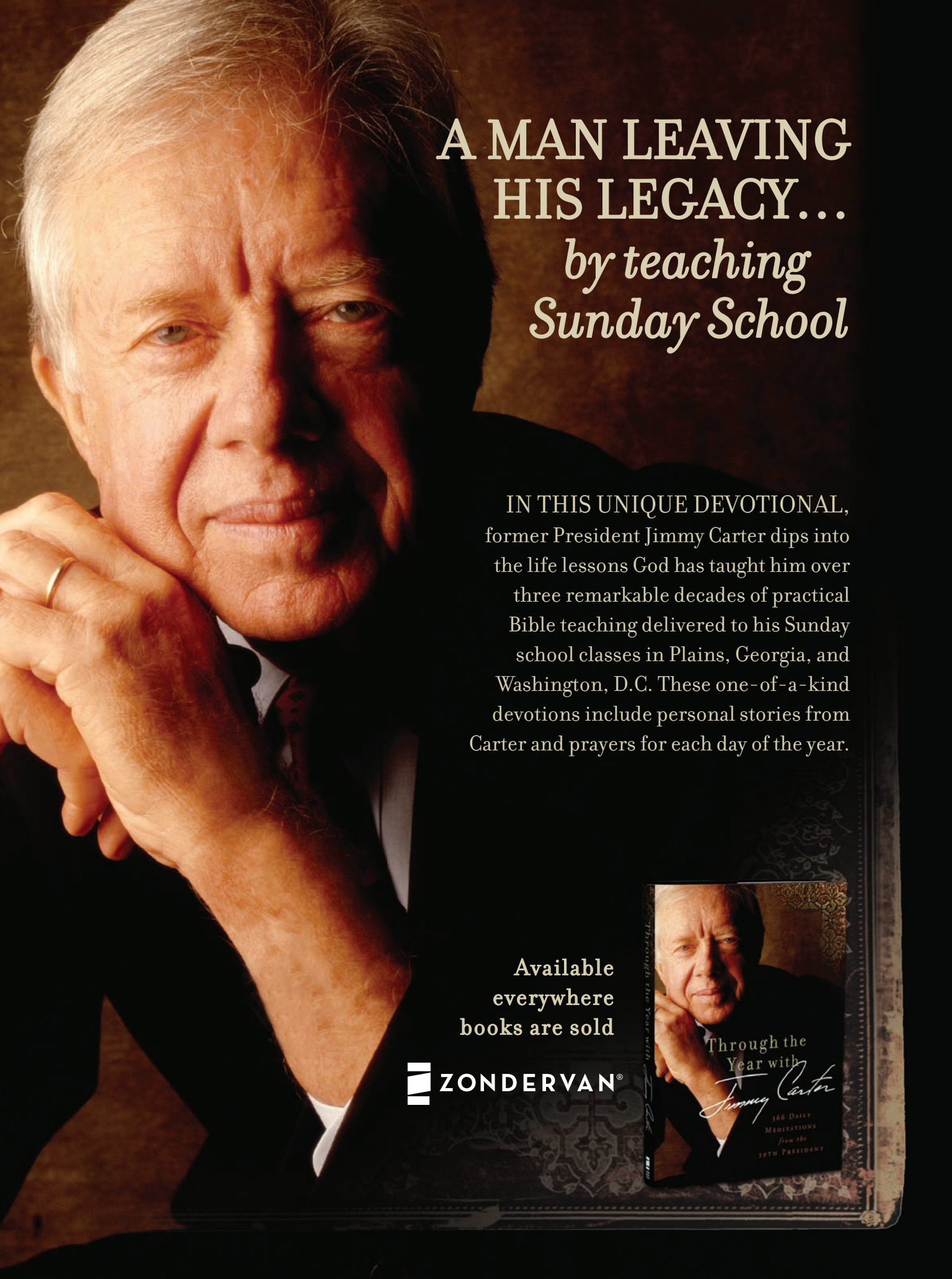
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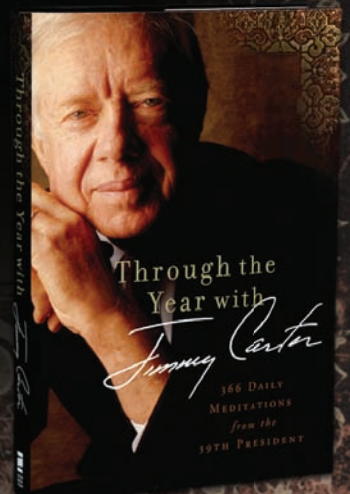


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[CULTURAL TRENDS]

Fading *from* *the* Family Portrait

If we truly are
social animals,
nullifying a family
through divorce calls
our very existence
into question.

By Andrew Root

TWO YEARS AGO was the 25th anniversary of one of the most epic movies of all time. Every American not in a coma or an Amish community has seen Steven Spielberg's *Back to the Future*, and if they haven't, they can easily catch it on television, as TBS and TNT seem to rerun it every few hours.

The last time I caught a rerun of the 1985 science-fiction adventure, instead of switching the channel, I lingered and watched. I realized that the 25th anniversary was significant because Doc (Christopher Lloyd) had planned to travel 25 years into the future—to 2010—before those pesky Libyan plutonium dealers opened fire in the mall parking lot, sending Marty (Michael J. Fox) speeding off in the DeLorean back to the year 1955.

Once he arrives in 1955, Marty has to make his way “back to the future,” and must avoid any contact with any person to avoid irrevocably altering the future in a single encounter. But it just so happens that Marty has already befriended his dad and, oddly, has become his mom's crush.

When Marty explains this to Doc, he asks to see the 1985 family photo Marty carries with him. Examining it, Doc points out that Marty's oldest brother is already disappearing from the photo. Now that Marty's mother has a crush

on Marty and not on George (his father), his brother is being erased from existence. Marty must do all he can to make sure his parents fall in love in 1955 so that he might not disappear from 1985.

A FRIGHTENING ANALOGY

I had seen these scenes dozens of times before they solidified as a frightening analogy for my own family's story. Just months before my own wedding, I sat with my mom in the living room of the home I had grown up in, as she explained that divorce was the next exit on the highway of our family's history. It had been several weeks since she had told me that her and my father's marriage was in serious trouble. Now, she told me more: They had gotten married way too young, noting that if she could do it all over again, she would have chosen another route for her life, someone other than my father to share life with.

I couldn't help feeling a shadow come over me. I looked at our family portrait hanging on the wall across from us, and wondered if I might be disappearing. I glanced at my hand, wondering if I was becoming translucent like Marty did.

My parents' impending divorce made me

feel thin, as if now that my parents' marriage was disappearing, the divorce was becoming our shared identity, and I too was disappearing.

I existed only because my mother and father had become one, creating me out of the abundance of their covenant community. Now, standing amid the debris and shock of the collision that ended their marriage, all this felt up for grabs. If I was through their union, who could I be in their division? If I was because of their coming together, who would I be if they nullified the community that gave me life? Could I be at all?

A TRIUNE RELATIONSHIP

As so many psychologists, philosophers, and theologians have stated—most recently cultural commentator David Brooks and sociologist Christian Smith, but also theologians Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Karl Barth, and Stanley Grenz before them—we are social animals with the mental ability to ponder our existence. The community of people we call family—those who made us and welcome us into their community of love—assures us that we rest secure on safe ground in this world. It is no wonder that so many happily adopted children will nevertheless embark on intense journeys to find their birthparents, whom many of them call their “real” parents. We desire to be found, to know and encounter those who brought us into the world.

As Jewish philosopher Martin Buber said, “In the beginning was relationship.” God, himself in triune relationship, spoke creation out of nothingness for the sake of relationship. In the same way, in his or her beginning, every child is meant to be welcomed into the beauty of existence through the embrace of mother and father.

Of course, when abuse and extreme neglect fester, the embrace is broken or becomes so contaminated that it wilts the humanity of everyone in it. Here, divorce may be a tragic necessity. But we should remember that such awful realities remain the minority among divorces in the United States.

Reportedly, about two-thirds of divorces end low-conflict (i.e., no abuse or neglect) marriages, like that of my own parents.

As from relational community comes creation, so from the communion of husband and wife comes a child. A person is because the two have become one. While the



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into the topic.***

child, no doubt, knows her parents as distinct persons, she never knows them outside the reality of their communion. She is the mysterious, finite other, born from their union. She can know them as individuals, but it is their union that is her home, because that is the place where her being is secure in community.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND DIVORCE

I offer all this philosophical musing to underscore why divorce—which affects about 40 percent of Americans under age 21 today—is so devastating for young people. Our society assumes in conversation about divorce that the real issues are ones of knowledge and advantage. Popular psychologists and TV talk-show doctors tell us that divorce need not be a big deal as long as children know it's "not their fault." Such youth just need to know that Mommy and Daddy are voiding their union for their own reasons, ones that have nothing to do with them.

Further, our university-based number counters tell us that divorce should be prevented because it quickly takes away economic and social capital, so young people need structures and programs to keep them from losing their economic advantages.

I don't wish to diminish the psychological and economic impact of divorce. But if we truly are relational beings, then divorce is centrally an issue not of psychology nor of economics but of *ontology*—an issue of our very being. It therefore feels a little like being erased, like losing our being in the deep divide that separates our divorcing parents.

When a young person is informed of her parents' divorce, it might be that her deepest questions are about her being: *How can I be at all now that Mom and Dad aren't together?* Now that they are two, she is unavoidably divided. She has one room at Mom's and another at Dad's, one schedule at Dad's and another at Mom's. As philosopher Martin Heidegger said, we have our being in our practical way of living, in our actions. And now post-divorce, because this young person's action and living is divided, so too is her very being. Her parents are seeking to reverse, to go back, to be as if the two never became one. But she can't do this because she belongs (in the very material of her person that acts with and for them) to both of them.

THE CHURCH AS FAMILY

There is no easy answer, no magic pill to take to secure one's shaken being after the divorce of your parents. Even now, 14 years after my parents' divorce, I have significant moments of feeling raw, of wishing during the holidays that my mom and dad were together, that I didn't have to explain to my children why they aren't.

If divorce has this profound an impact on children's spiritual

groundedness, the church needs to think more deeply about how it supports those in marriages, helping young people wisely choose spouses and foster mutual love and partnership between them, so that divorce is unlikely to happen.

This won't primarily happen through a packaged program offering practical information. Rather, what we need to sup-

port those in marriages, and in turn care for children of divorce—whether they're 6 or 56 years old—is for the church to be a community of being that shares in the being of each other by sharing in the being of Christ.

According to Paul, the church is a body that shares in the communal union of the Father and Son through the union of its members. Sharing in each other's being in this way makes the church a new family. It is not a new family that can deny or ignore our individual experiences of suffering and pain, like the divorce of our parents, but a community that suffers with and for us. In so doing, the church community confesses that God has taken us into a new union that is stronger than all death and brokenness, a union that connects our being with God's own through the Holy Spirit.

We can be the kind of community that children of divorce need only if we are brave enough to face into the topic. It is amazing how few places there are for young people to talk about their experience of divorce, and how scared churches often are to give a space for young people to speak of the ontological binds that this experience puts them through.

This, then, is what churches need to do for children of divorce, something that is really not *doing* at all, but *being*: being together. The youth group, the children's ministry, and the worshiping community on Sunday mornings all can be the community where children of divorce find ontological security, because the church, as theologian Edward James Loder once said, "knows of love greater than a mother's or father's."

All of this begins with seeing the reality of children of divorce and empathetically acknowledging the complexity and difficulty of the situation in which they find themselves.

When my wife's mother remarried, one of the 150 guests at the wedding approached my wife's sisters and said, "I am very happy for your mom. But I know this day is really hard for you, and I am so sorry for what you must be going through today." Ten years later, the siblings still talk about the profound importance of having just one person *see* them. The church can be the community that *sees* children of divorce, acknowledges their reality, and embraces them in the fullness of their experience. ☩

Andrew Root is associate professor of youth and family ministry at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, and author of *The Children of Divorce: The Loss of Family as the Loss of Being* (Baker Academic).

God, himself in triune relationship, spoke creation out of nothingness for the sake of relationship. In the same way, in his or her beginning, every child is meant to be welcomed into the beauty of existence through the embrace of mother and father.



Gospel Goes Glo

Soul Children choirs are popping up everywhere, even in the most unexpected places. By Elissa Cooper

VOICES, MUSIC, SOUND CHECKS, and the joyful hum of mingling children echo throughout Chicago's AFC World Outreach Center on a rainy morning—until a man named Walt Whitman takes the microphone.

"Time for us to come together now in Jesus' name," Whitman says, and nearly 100 kids repeat the line several times. Then, at Whitman's command, they shout in unison, "I have something very special to bring to the world!"

The event is a gathering of two youth gospel choirs—the Soul Children of Chicago, led by Whitman, and the Soul Children of Oslo, led by Ragnhild Hiis Ånestad. The Norwegian contingent visited Chicago in October 2010 for a workshop and concert, and the Chicago choir traveled to Oslo the following May for an event that included an additional 1,700 European children.

Together, the two Soul Children groups represent a growing movement throughout the world. In Norway alone, 80 Soul Children

choirs have popped up since Ånestad founded the Oslo chapter in March 2001. Other groups gather throughout Europe, Indonesia, Japan, and Bangladesh. "It's spread so fast," Ånestad says.

It all started in 1981 in Chicago, when Whitman founded the Soul Children at St. John De Salles Catholic School. Steady growth has resulted in eight CDs, concerts around the world, millions of viewers (billions, if you include a televised gig at the 2010 World Cup), and some 1,500 alumni. When Whitman met Ånestad at an event in Stockholm about 12 years ago, he encouraged her to start a similar group in Oslo. She says that Whitman planted the seed, and God gave her the vision.

Though Whitman's resume says he's the founder and director of Soul Children, he refers to himself as a "motivator." He often travels internationally to visit choirs—or those interested in starting one. "I spark ideas and inspiration into other groups, and help develop groups," he says.

Ånestad does the same throughout Norway. Years ago, she noticed that kids ages 10 to 15 were missing in choral workshops, so she launched the Oslo Soul Children to reach that age group. As

LISA BETH ANDERSON



bal

Follow the Leader: Walt Whitman directs the choirs—and audience—in worship. ‘Performance-wise, they went far beyond my wildest imagination,’ says the Chicago native.

word spread, demand for other Soul Children choirs grew, even beyond that age group. So Soul Teens (for older teens) and Pre Soul Children (under age 10) were established; today, there are about 1,500 members in various Soul Children choirs throughout the nation.

The Chicago and Oslo groups share more than just a name; they share a love for Jesus and for giving God the glory. “We don’t perform, and we don’t entertain,” says 20-year-old Artelious Tyler, a member of the Chicago choir for over six years. “We worship.”

BUILDING CONFIDENCE, GROWING FAITH

Both choirs also see their music as a ministry to others—and for some of the choir members, that outreach started with themselves. Tyler, for example, was sexually abused as a 10-year-old, and says, “I felt like I was worthless, like I should never be touched.” He continued struggling with self-esteem issues until joining Soul Children at 14, when Whitman’s encouragement—and the healing power of music—helped him

move beyond the pain. “God broke that,” he says. “He taught me how to forgive.”

Today, Tyler helps others who are hurting by sharing his own story: “I told the Lord, ‘No more!’ No more would I be somewhere crying and hiding my face. I don’t care who knows. They see this story now, and that’s the Artelious who’s going to minister to you, ‘cause it’s not about me. It’s all about God.” In concert, Tyler sings with his whole body, eyes shut, hands moving with the music then lifted heavenward. “There’s a story behind my praise,” he says. “I went through that with the Soul Children. These people are like my family.”

Shani Phillips, 18, has a similar story. She says she was abused as a 7-year-old and suffered deep depression as a teen. Joining Soul Children helped in the healing process: “It’s been a positive influence in my life,” she says. “Once [the music] became real to me, and once my feelings started to show—oh man, power just came over my life.”

While American children are encouraged to have confidence and self-esteem, such is not the case in Norway, where uniformity and conformity are more the cultural norms. But director Ånestad is

trying to change that. “In the United States,” she says, “you can say, ‘I’m proud to be myself and I have this talent.’ This is not normal in Norway. And that’s not good.”

When the Oslo and Chicago choirs rested during their rehearsal, one Norwegian boy took the microphone and quietly spoke about how he used to walk around with his head down. But now, since joining Ånestad’s choir, he holds his head high, he said.

Ånestad “is always teaching us to be as un-Norwegian as possible,” laughs Marianne Dyremyhr Tyvand, 17. “As a people, we’re scared of showing what we can do. I think it’s important to be aware of that gift that you have and then use it for something good.”

What these children have learned is supported by research: A study from Chorus America showed that choir involvement benefits other parts of a child’s life, such as discipline, teamwork, and involvement in civic matters like volunteering. The study also showed that children in choirs often improve in social skills, confidence, and academics.

Meanwhile, kids from both Oslo and Chicago say there’s another benefit to being in these specific choirs: They’re growing in faith, too.

Tyvand was raised in a Christian family and professed to be a Christian, but felt her faith was based on going to church. “When I came to Soul Children, it taught me a lot about God’s love. It has made me a lot stronger in my faith and has made me believe that God really does exist.”

“I don’t think I would call myself a Christian if I hadn’t been in Soul Children,” says Marianne Bremnes Ottersen, 18. “Now, I have a relationship with God.”

HARD WORK, POPULAR MUSIC

Chicago’s singers rehearse for up to three hours on Thursday nights and from three to eight hours on Saturdays. Whitman promotes a strong work ethic not only for the choir’s sake, but also for its members, paving the road for the future. Darvell Jones, 15, says, “God has called us to be leaders. I’m taking the boldness and authority that God has given me and that Mr. Whitman has instilled in us, to take the extra leap—to not just want to work as a chemical engineer, but to be the owner of an international enterprise.”

Ditto the Oslo group, where some choir members say it’s pretty much all they do outside of school, with two-hour rehearsals every Wednesday and frequent travel for concerts. But Tyvand and Ottersen say despite the demanding schedule, they consider rehearsal “the best time of the week.”

The leaders work hard too, but under different circumstances. Chicago’s group has always been independently run by unpaid volunteers, including Whitman. But Ånestad and her assistant are financially backed by Normisjon, a Lutheran mission organization, to oversee the Oslo group and its national offshoots—and some of those branches are run by specific denominations, including Pentecostal and Presbyterian.

The religious backing is remarkable, as Norway is one of the most secular nations in the world. Although almost 80 percent of Norwegians are members of the official state church—the primarily Evangelical Lutheran-influenced Church of Norway—only about 20 percent consider religion important, while only about 10 percent attend church more than once a month.

When asked why non-Christians would want to join her group, Ånestad chalks it up to the popularity and influence of American pop culture, citing TV shows like *Hannah Montana* and *Camp Rock*.

Your Way in Norway: Ragnhild Hiis Ånestad tells her Oslo choir, 'You can sing wrong, but just sing like you mean it.'



She notes that when local kids see the Soul Children perform, they want to be part of it as well.

But why would gospel music take off in such a secular culture? For many in Norway—and in many parts of the world—appreciation of the genre is about its energetic style more than its message. Helge Simonnes, editor in chief of *Vårt Land*, Norway's largest Christian daily newspaper, says gospel music "hasn't the same influence today, but it's still very popular." Indeed, the Oslo Gospel Choir was the top-selling artist—Christian or secular—in the nation in the 1990s.

The Oslo Soul Children have performed on primetime TV, at major events (including for the king and prime minister), and with popular secular artists like Josh Groban. They're able to participate in secular culture in a way that the church has not. Says Ånestad, "All of Norway knows who we are."

GROWTH IN NORWAY, BUT NOT IN THE STATES

Norway's appreciation of gospel music took off in the 1970s, when the Jesus Movement swept much of the Western world. Hilde Løvdal, a humanities fellow at the University of Oslo specializing in American evangelicalism, told *Christianity Today* that Norwegians have long cherished music and choirs, and that gospel music is a "safe

Choirs are spreading rapidly throughout a secular nation with the help of the church, but not in a nation where there are churches on many street corners.

version of popular culture that churches can use to be hip and Christian at the same time."

Johann Buis, associate professor of music history at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois, adds that gospel music thrives worldwide because it allows the audience to release inhibitions. Elements of gospel build what Buis calls "an emotional temperature." "An audience will release itself into

responding through rhythmic calls and responses, through shouts and through yells, that they would not do under normal circumstances in public," says Buis.

Gospel music in the United States is cultivated among youth in order to preserve a cultural practice of some African American communities: "Youth choirs are not just an added frill," says Buis.

So why has the Soul Children concept spread so quickly throughout Norway and other countries, but not in the States, the birthplace of the gospel choir? Whitman believes it may partly be a lack of administrative structure, or perhaps because the Chicago chapter wasn't built into an existing system like it was in Norway through Normisjon. Talk about irony: Gospel choirs are spreading rapidly throughout a secular nation with the help of the church, but not in a nation where there are churches on many street corners, and where many citizens consider religion and regular churchgoing integral parts of their lives.

Whitman clearly appreciates the spread of the Soul Children model, saying it "makes me work harder, because what we have is something that's really good and it's happening in other parts of the world. But it needs to happen more here."

Besides finding a supportive administration and continuing to build international chapters, Whitman wants to see more Soul Children groups across the country—starting in Chicago, where he'd like a "North Side version" to go along with the existing choir on the city's predominantly African American South Side. "I'd like to create that cross-cultural experience," he says, noting that Soul Children has broken down cultural and racial barriers in the past. "That is the key part of success, when we start expanding into other cultures, other communities. That's when the growth will take place."

Whatever happens, Norway's Tyvand and Ottersen plan to do this for a long time. They joke that Ånestad created Soul Teens "because we weren't going to quit" after aging out of Soul Children, and they'll just seek out the next opportunity when they go away to college—unless Ånestad decides to form a Soul Adults group.

Either way, Ottersen laughs, "We'll be in a choir until we're 80, because we can't stop."

Elissa Cooper is assistant editor at *Christianity Today*.

LISA BETH ANDERSON

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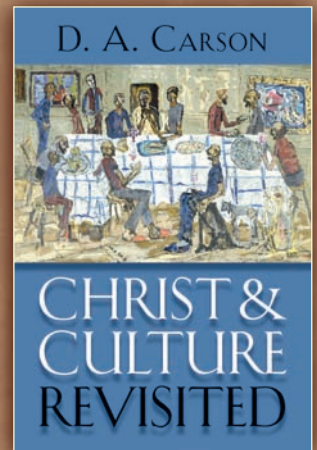
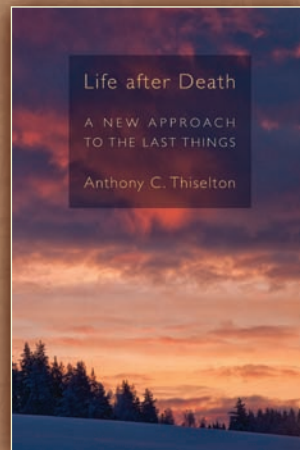
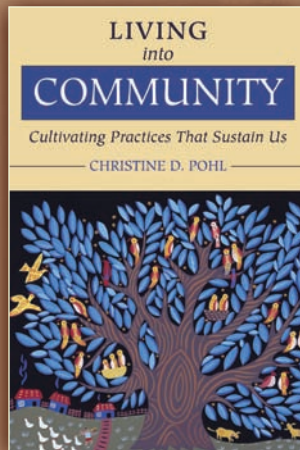
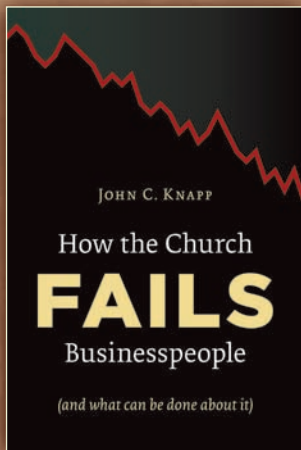
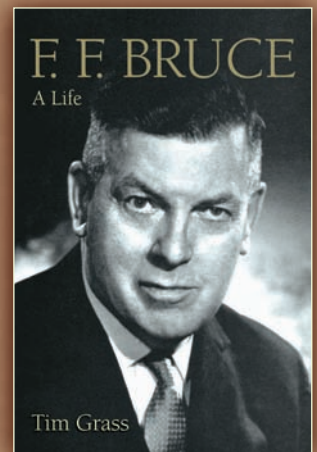
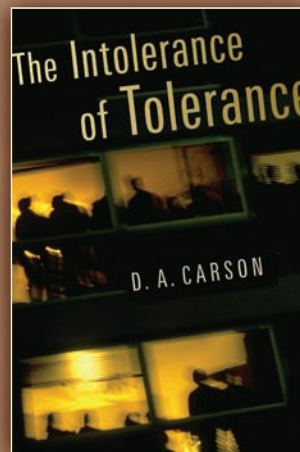
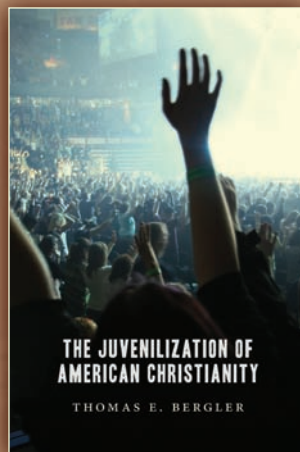
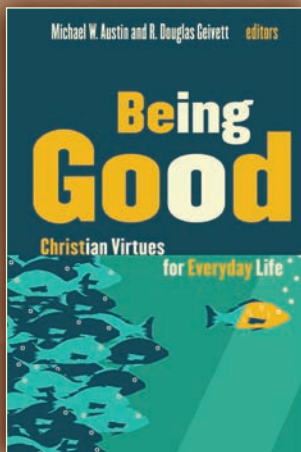
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VIEWPOINTS

OPINIONS AND
PERSPECTIVES ON
ISSUES FACING
THE CHURCH



This is the power of the gospel. We all need to be like Mama Heidi.

Dale Yancy
Paducah, Kentucky

Everyday Miracles

In "Miracles in Mozambique" [May], you gave us a real-life exposition of Paul's understanding of the gospel coming with power and great signs (Rom. 15:19), words of knowledge, a better understanding of "true riches," laying on of hands, and so on. This is the power of the gospel. May it catch fire in my life and in the lives of everyone who reads this article. We all need to be like "Mama Heidi."

DALE YANCY
Paducah, Kentucky

Appeasing Love

Perhaps young pastors would not be so quick to discard substitutionary atonement if scholars would not link God's wrath to the crucifixion of Christ, such as in "Why *Christus Victor* Is Not Enough" [May].

John stated that Jesus died to satisfy God's love (John 3:16). Paul added that Jesus died to satisfy God's righteousness (Rom. 3:25). Why? Because God wants to forgive sinners, but animal sacrifices did not conform to his righteousness. Because the sacrifice of animals could never take away sin (Heb. 10:11), Jesus gave himself up as an offering. His atoning sacrifice was a fragrant offering to God (Eph. 5:1) and satisfied his righteousness so that

God would be just in forgiving sin and in justifying those who have faith in Jesus (Rom. 3:22–26, 1 John 1:9).

Remove the eisegetical theory that God poured out his wrath upon Jesus and replace it with God's abiding love for his Son, and maybe young pastors will embrace the substitutionary atonement.

DON SAILER
Assistant Professor, Liberty University
Lynchburg, Virginia

Struggling to Serve

Thank you for publishing "From Powerlifter to Powerless" [May]. I've been plagued by illnesses for over 40 years. Like the author, I can provide a litany of accomplishments throughout this time. I have learned valuable lessons and drawn close to my Lord. I have even been able to minister to others because of my experiences.

Yet it is extremely frustrating when the frailty of the body limits me from doing simple tasks. At what point do I just sit back and do nothing? When does "service" end and who decides? A quadriplegic pastor who was forced by his denomination to retire told me, "I don't see 'retirement' in the Scriptures." He now has a growing

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

24%
Miracles in
Mozambique
Tim Stafford

22%
The 'Monsters'
Among Us
CT Editorial

17%
You Can't Preach
the Gospel with
Deeds
Duane Litfin

READERS' PICK
The most praised
piece in May's CT

Christian fellowship with plans under way to build. His service is in no way over.

FLO VANCE
Whitewright, Texas

Pandering Politics

In "Rooting Out Bad Religion" [May], Ross Douhat says, "[I]t has to be possible to be Christian on contentious cultural issues without making it seem like Christianity is just an appendage of the Republican Party." Ugh! Voices from both sides of the political/theological spectrum want to co-opt the gospel to suit their purposes, not just the Right.

It now appears that the political focus is to challenge the people on the conservative side of the dialogue but to give a pass to the ideologues on the Left, whose attitudes are often just as condescending and dogmatic. Dialogue becomes impossible when one side is vilified and its positions are not respected or considered valid.

ALAN MILLER
Tifton, Georgia

Say and Do

Thank you for "You Can't Preach the Gospel with Deeds" [May]. I would add that one of the great weaknesses of only trying to live the gospel and not speak the gospel is what happens when you are successful! If a person could truly live the gospel, and those around him or her were impressed



You Can't Preach the
Gospel with Deeds
Duane Litfin

COMMENTS? QUESTIONS?
CT'S EDITORS WOULD LOVE TO HEAR THEM.

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by the display, what would their conclusion be? That mankind is hopelessly lost and in desperate need of a Savior? No, probably not. Probably they would conclude that being a Christian means living a perfect life. The emphasis of the gospel would again be manmade works rather than miraculous grace. As a missionary among Muslims for more than 10 years, I know the necessity of living a life of selfless love toward my neighbors—because Jesus said to, and because it did open doors for the spoken message. But we dare not send the message that Jesus' Good News was "save yourself."

MATTHEW CARR
E-mail

Confronting Sin

Thank you for your May editorial, "The 'Monsters' Among Us." I lived through the effects of these things being covered up in Christian circles. It is hard to connect to God as someone who cares when you see Christian leaders pretend there is no problem and sacrifice others for their reputation. Very few of my peers who grew up with me in Christian circles have any interest in God. They don't believe in him or want nothing to do with him, pointing to the abuse and its cover-up as the reason. Your openness about your connections to these people gives me great hope that other groups will perhaps follow your example.

NAME WITHHELD BY REQUEST
E-mail



Imperfect Love

I cannot tell you how moved I was by Paul Shrier's opinion in the Village Green [May, "Should we stop adoption/foster-care programs if the law requires them to work with same-sex couples?"]. He is a much-needed prophetic voice. I have met numerous Christians with strong views on this subject who have done nothing to provide homes for the very foster children they claim to care so much about.

To our shame, we have little faith that God can actually work in and through the lives of those who happen to be gay. Meanwhile, we trumpet King David, a murderer, adulterer, and dysfunctional father, as a hero during Sunday school lessons. Those who don't believe God works through imperfect people and circumstances haven't read the Bible.

KAREN KEEN
Durham, North Carolina

CLARIFICATION

In the article "Miracles in Mozambique" [May], *Iris Ministries* indicated its association has approximately 10,000 congregations. The current number is 10,562. About 92 percent are in Mozambique. The total includes churches that *Iris* founders Heidi and Rolland Baker planted as well as pre-existing churches that are affiliated with their ministry. There are member congregations in 12 other nations, including three churches in the United States.



ONLINE POLL

PASTORAL GUIDANCE
Do clergy need a formal code of ethics?

42%

Yes, like other professions, clergy should have a widely accepted code.

26%

Yes, clergy should follow one set by their specific church or denomination.

10%

Maybe, depends on the code.

5%

No, clergy already know what's right and wrong, even if they don't always follow it.

17%

No, the Bible is clear enough.

Total votes: 207

(Online polls do not represent a scientific sample.)

PETER MUELLER

compiled by Elissa Cooper

WORTH REPEATING

Things overheard at CT online.

"We must stop seeing critiques as personal affronts. They are part and parcel of the body of Christ stretching one another as iron sharpens iron."

HGS, on why it's important to examine others' teaching and theology. Many admired Ann Voskamp's grace-filled reaction to Tim Challies's negative review of her book and how the two were able to reconcile their differences.

Her.meneutics: "Ann Voskamp, Tim Challies, Beth Moore: Dinner and a Defense of Earnestness," by Micha Boyett

"It's not their job to promote anything but Christian values."

Original Anna, applauding Shorter University for its new lifestyle statement for employees, which includes a ban on alcohol. Readers were mixed on whether or not it was appropriate and biblical for a Christian college to restrict alcohol use.

CT Liveblog: "Baptist University Loses Third of Faculty Over Lifestyle Statement," by Adelle M. Banks

"While humility is a quality to promote in one's Christian life, going along with the crowd is not."

George E, approving Richard Land's apology to Trayvon Martin's family in regards to his comments about the case, but disagreeing that Land had to make other apologies.

CT Politics Blog: "After Meeting with Black Southern Baptists, Richard Land Apologizes Again over Trayvon Martin Comments," by Adelle M. Banks

"The hypocrisy is purposeful, itself a commentary not only on our stupid culture but also on our own pride in how we deal with it."

David, sharing his observations about the trailer for the upcoming black comedy *God Bless America*.

CT Entertainment Blog: "'God Bless America' ... With a Bang," by Paul Pastor

More Than a Legal Issue

The gay marriage debate shouldn't drive us to outrage or panic.

Two recent volleys in the gay marriage debate demonstrate afresh our national anxiety and divisions over homosexuality.

On May 8, North Carolina citizens voted to ban gay marriage by a hefty margin of 61 to 39 percent. The next day, President Obama said on national television, "I think same-sex couples should be able to get married."

The comments following both events were predictable. From gay marriage advocates, there was talk about civil rights and history being on their side. Proponents of traditional marriage, meanwhile, resonated with this statement from Cardinal Timothy Dolan, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops: "We cannot be silent in the face of words or actions that would undermine the institution of marriage, the very cornerstone of our society."

To sum up what we at *Christianity Today* have said before: We believe gays and lesbians should not be denied fundamental rights granted to every other American, nor should they suffer slurs or intimidation in any shape or form. Further, we continue to believe that marriage should be defined in our nation as a moral and legal bond between a man and a woman. For, among other reasons, societies that fail to shape themselves by the most basic and universal of divine laws and institutions cannot have a happy future. This seems built into the very order of creation by our loving Creator.

Careful readers will notice that we do not get panicked or outraged when gay marriage sometimes gets the upper hand in the ebb and flow of national debate. As much as we want the state to recognize and protect traditional marriage, we're not depending on the state to do so. In fact, the state has already done plenty to undermine traditional marriage—no-fault divorce law being perhaps

the most egregious example. Since its advent in 1970, this policy has destabilized marriage like no other.

Nor do we think that the future of marriage or the American experiment hinges on how we as a nation decide the gay marriage debate. The on-the-ground understanding of marriage was weakened long ago. While the formal conversation around marriage is often about making a commitment to love and



serve another for life, in practice it is clear that the cult of self-fulfillment drives many if not most of today's marriages.

It is impossible to find accurate numerical data that report the reasons for divorce, due to states having different requirements, terminology, and reporting methods for divorcing couples. But reasons commonly cited on legal and counseling websites include infidelity, communication breakdown, sexual incompatibility, boredom, and differences in priorities and expectations. The clichéd response, "We grew apart," is not a bad summary of all these reasons. It strongly suggests, "I'm not interested in pursuing this relationship if you're not interested in what I'm interested in."

Far more than the protection of the legal definition of marriage, what our society needs

is a fresh understanding of marriage. One does not have to be a Christian to see how much richer and deeper marriage can be if it is primarily entered into *for the sake of others*, certainly the spouse but especially for the offspring of a marriage.

Nor does one have to be a theist to recognize that there is something fitting, unique, and precious about the sexual union of a husband and wife. For the Christian, of course, marriage is more than all this (a sacramental witness to God's covenant with his people, for example). But we can happily join hands with people of other faiths or no faith who recognize the tangible, natural dimensions of marriage that seem to be built into the very order of things.

We must not get discouraged on the legislative front. While proponents of gay marriage will make it sound like history is on their side, in fact, history

keeps surprising us. Not long ago, many thought that communism was the inevitable future, others, that religion was on its last legs. No, our nation's formal definition of marriage still hangs in the balance.

But rather than put all of our eggs in the basket of constitutional amendments or judicial opinion, we Christians would be wise to shore up marriage in our churches. Doing this would be both an act of repentance for our narcissism (for we Christians succumb to this temptation as much as the next sinner) and a witness to what marriage at its best can be. That calls for continued efforts by church and parachurch ministries to strengthen marriages, and to offer winsome public arguments for a deeper and richer understanding of marriage than our culture can possibly imagine. ✚

Far more than the protection of the legal definition of marriage, our society needs a fresh understanding of marriage.

*Patriotic
Piety*

Should churches display the American flag in their sanctuaries?

JUST DON'T DO IT

Douglas Wilson is pastor of Christ Church in Moscow, Idaho, and author of many books, including *Letter from a Christian Citizen* (American Vision, 2007).

A Christian church has absolutely no business displaying a national flag in the sanctuary, at least not as it is commonly done. The church born at Pentecost was a reversal of Babel, not a doubling down on the fragmentation of Babel.

Our churches should not place any unnecessary barriers to the worship of visiting Koreans, Russians, or Portuguese. We already must deal with natural and providential barriers, such as differences in language. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile (Gal. 3:28). I wouldn't want to worship in a sanctuary with a Scythian flag up front (Col. 3:11), and the Golden Rule requires that we not do to the visiting Scythians what we didn't very much like when they did it to us.

The New Testament is all about this principle. Where customs interfere with transnational fellowship, those customs must give way (Acts 15:29).

Of course, I do want to note that this should be taken as a general principled stand, which is not the same as a perfectionistic one. I am not interested in applying any strictures to churches that are renting space in American Legion halls or in high school gyms, where a flag would already be displayed in the ordinary course of things. I am simply arguing that the flag up front should not be part of how the church as the church arranges things. When we in the church have a decision to make, we shouldn't decide in favor of displaying national flags.

If the church places an American flag in the front of the sanctuary, this becomes part of our sacred architecture, and therefore says something. It becomes a shaping influence.

Important questions should come immediately to mind: What is this saying? And is it scriptural? It should not be too much to ask for some kind of scriptural agreement with what we are saying before we say it. Placing a flag in a sanctuary has many possible implications. It could convey the idea that we claim some sort of "favored nation" status. It could imply we believe that the claims of Caesar extend into every space, including sacred spaces. It could imply that our version of Christianity is similar to some kind of syncretistic "God and country" religion, where patriotism and religion are one and the same.

It is unlikely that we as Christians would display another country's flag, such as the flag of communist China, in a sanctuary. So we should seek to be consistent in our choices. One last caution is

in order: Many don't like the national flag in the sanctuary because they have no natural affection for it anywhere. But being a Christian doesn't mean we should hate our home country, just that we should know how to rightly order our allegiances. This is why, in my ideal scenario, the elders who vote in session to remove the American flag from the sanctuary should all have that same flag on their pickup trucks, right next to the gun rack.

IT'S ALL RIGHT BY ME

Lisa Velthouse is a Marine Corps wife and author of the memoir *Craving Grace: A Story of Faith, Failure, and My Search for Sweetness* (Tyndale, 2011).

In recent years, I have become one of those people who can get choked up at the sight of a rising American flag. Hats with "Veteran" stitched across the front and yellow-ribbon magnets can have a similar effect. I am neither a nationalistic person nor an especially patriotic one, but I have two years under my belt as a military wife. Those two years have caused me to see different things now when face to face with our country's symbols. I see many reasons to display our flag proudly.

The most common argument I hear



for not hanging flags in churches is that flags fly over armies at war, and that under God's rule war will not be necessary. We will beat our swords into plowshares. Peace will be our banner.

Yes. But a flag is not war and war is not a flag. A flag is a symbol, and symbols are strong. The range of ideas and realities represented by a single symbol can be vast and broad. If we are going to say that a flag calls to mind terrible things, we must be willing to accept that a flag can call to mind greatness too.

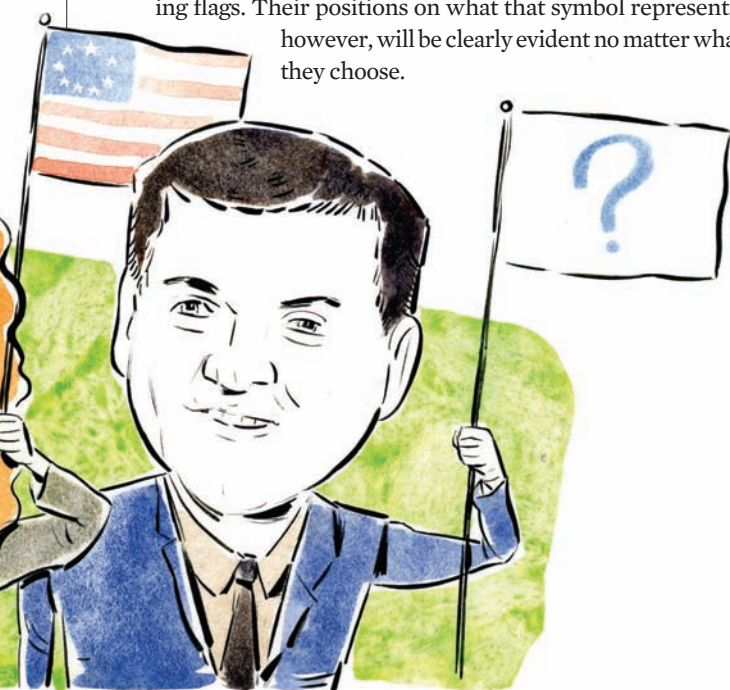
It is no small thing, for instance, when a man or woman commits to serve in the United States military. It is a powerfully real idea, not a cliché, when you realize that someone—a real person—would be willing to pay what is often called the ultimate price.

Less than a week before I sat down to write this, a man my husband had served with was killed in combat, and several others from their company were seriously wounded. The rest of us do not have to bear the costs those men paid because they volunteered to pay them on our behalf. Every day they went to work knowing the risks.

In the military, such sacrifice is so common that at times it almost ceases to seem extraordinary. But it has echoes and glimmers of what is most incredible in Christian faith: that one would willingly lay down his life for his friends. Greater love has none than this, and even the extreme pacifist doesn't scorn it. This is one of the reasons why our flag is not out of place in a church.

There is the risk that some will confuse this perspective with the belief that America is Christianity and vice versa. But putting the flag in our local church does not mean we have made religion bow to nation. The symbol cannot be blamed. A flag on its own cannot display a community's full point of view; it is up to the community to do that. Different local church bodies will hold differing views and will mean different things when they hang or keep from hanging flags. Their positions on what that symbol represents,

however, will be clearly evident no matter what they choose.



FLY IT RESPONSIBLY

Russell D. Moore is dean of the School of Theology at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and a contributor to *First Freedom: The Baptist Perspective on Religious Liberty* (B&H Academic, 2007).

Every so often I hear of a pastor embroiled in controversy over his removing the American flag from the church sanctuary. The most memorable incident to me was the pastor who simply secreted the flag away in the middle of a Saturday night, as though the flock wouldn't notice the next morning. But, by dawn's early light, they saw the flag was not there. And that's when the metaphorical bombs started bursting in air.

I agree with the impulse behind such a pastor's concern. The church, after all, isn't an outpost of American society but instead a colony of the kingdom of Christ (Eph. 1:22–23; Phil. 3:20). Christian worship isn't a routine act of mere civil society, like a parent-teacher association meeting or a union gathering, but instead a gate between the covenant body and the larger gathering of the redeemed of all ages in heaven (Heb. 12:22–24). Your church is a “satellite campus” of the Mount Zion sanctuary, and the vast majority of worshipers at that sanctuary are not, and never were, American citizens.

The flag can be a perilous thing in an American evangelical subculture so infected with civil religion. Sometimes patriotism for the United States seems easier than patriotism for the New Jerusalem because it's so experientially immediate. This doesn't mean that we should treat Old Glory like an Asherah pole. Patriotism is dangerous, yes, but that's because it's a strong natural affection that's rooted in something good and right. When rightly applied, patriotism is akin to what God commands us to do in showing honor to our father and mother.

When we honor our country, we are recognizing that we are not self-made or self-situated. We are here, placed by God in a particular plot of land because of the sacrifices of forefathers and foremothers we haven't known. We have a responsibility to our neighbors of all faiths for the generations to come. Patriotism can become idolatrous, sure. So can family affection. But the gospel doesn't evaporate family love. It just re-narrates it, and situates it in a right context, in which we seek first the kingdom of God.

The same is true for the flag. Removing a flag doesn't remove the tendency to idolatry or triumphalism; it just leaves such things unaddressed and untroubled. If a congregation already has a flag in the sanctuary, the first step might be for the pastor to use it as an object lesson in a right-ordered patriotism.

The flag can prompt the church to pray for and honor leaders. The flag can prompt us to remember that national identity is important but transitory. There will come a day when Old Glory yields to an older glory, when the new republic succumbs to a new creation. Until then, let's reorder all our affections, including our flag-waving. But let's do so maintaining the paradoxical tension of “resident aliens.” There is no need to play “Rapture the Flag.”



The Cosmos's Best-Kept Secret

Who we really are in Christ.

Recently I rested on a church pew—at the boat harbor. It is a gorgeous oak pew, the kind you sit on in a Baptist church, which is precisely where this pew had come from. The church replaced the pews with padded chairs in order to fit 30 more people into its sanctuary. My sister-in-law, spying beauty and spirit, bought one of the homeless pews and was taking it out to her fish-camp island in Alaska.

It took six muscular men to hoist the pew onto the truck and then walk it down the ramp onto the dock floats. There it sat for an hour, waiting its turn to be loaded. God on the dock. But the job wasn't done. The men soon hoisted it onto the deck of our barge. Hours later, the pew went sailing all night on the Pacific out to our island. God yet nearer: God on the deck.

These days I am reading Colossians, the book of Scripture that proclaims the "fullness of Christ." As I read the first chapters, I feel the strain of language as the writer attempts to tether to the page the incomparable majesty of Christ: he who is in all and above all, who is before all things, who holds all things together. We discover that the fullness of Christ's gospel has been a mystery, something "kept hidden for ages and generations." But now that mystery is made clear.

Here it is, the deepest secret that our forbears and even angels longed to hear and know but were not told: "Christ in *you*, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27, emphasis mine).

I hope the parallels here are not trivializing: the mobility of it! Who could imagine a church pew on the deck of a barge, sailing the ocean? Who could imagine God inhabiting people, inhabiting *us*? The very Son of God, a tabernacle in sneakers. It is so bizarre that most who have heard the claim throughout the ages have rejected it.

Not long after the pew sailing, I watched

"The Most Astounding Fact about the Universe," a video gone viral, narrated by the famed astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson. Against stunning imagery of the cosmos, with an infectious soundtrack provided by the Cinematic Orchestra, Tyson explains in a deep lyrical voice that the atoms that make up our bodies came literally from the stars themselves, who exploded their "enriched guts" into the universe, creating our world and providing the elements that compose our bodies. The most astounding fact is this, says Tyson: "We are part of this universe, we are in this universe, but more importantly, the universe is in us. . . . We are made of star-stuff."

Tyson, a self-described agnostic, ridicules the notion that human beings are special, that the universe was built for us by some Creator. Yet he finds meaning and significance in our star-shared atoms: "I feel big because my atoms came from those stars."

I'm moved and inspired by Tyson's cause. He has good news! This shared makeup, however random and impersonal he believes its cause, is not reason for despair or disvalue, but rather grants all human beings significance, belonging, and nobility. "I feel . . . ennobled, I feel a connectivity. I bask in the majesty of the cosmos," he says evangelistically on late-night shows and in university lectures, to energetic applause.

I recognize in his stirring messages that

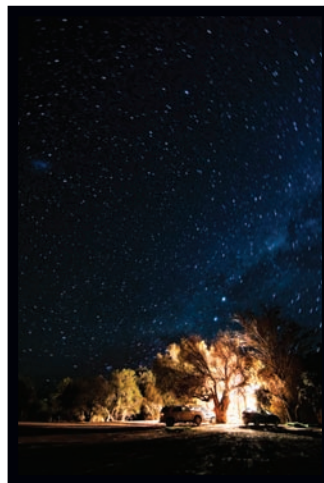
science and faith have a common enemy: apathy and meaninglessness. Lives so sunk in the quotidian, the mean, and the small that we fail to look up and recognize who we really are. *The stars are within us!* I am moved and awed already by Tyson's message.

But the Christian message takes an unprecedented and audacious step further: *The Maker of the stars is within us!* And not only that: *We will live with the Maker of the stars—forever.* We will bask in his majesty. Connected. Ennobled. *God on our deck.*

How will anyone believe these truths when we as God's people appear to forget them ourselves? Along with the rest of the world, we so often lapse into apathy, forgetting who we are and whose we are. We end up heightening the absurdity of our claim rather than lessening it. When God's people forgive

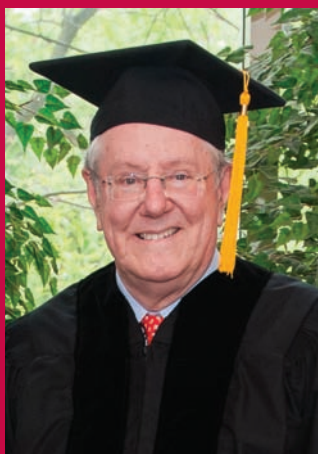
their persecutors, befriend the unlovely, bless their enemies—when our lives are characterized by a love that cannot be explained by physics or astronomy or any other branch of science—our claim of an indwelling Savior is suddenly less ludicrous.

We *can* live this way, all of us. We've been given everything we need to do it, through the Holy Spirit. Go out under the night sky. Look up at the stars, be astonished, then remember the truly most astounding fact about the universe: "Christ, the star *maker* in us, the hope of glory!"



Who could imagine God inhabiting us? It is so bizarre that most who have heard the claim throughout the ages have rejected it.

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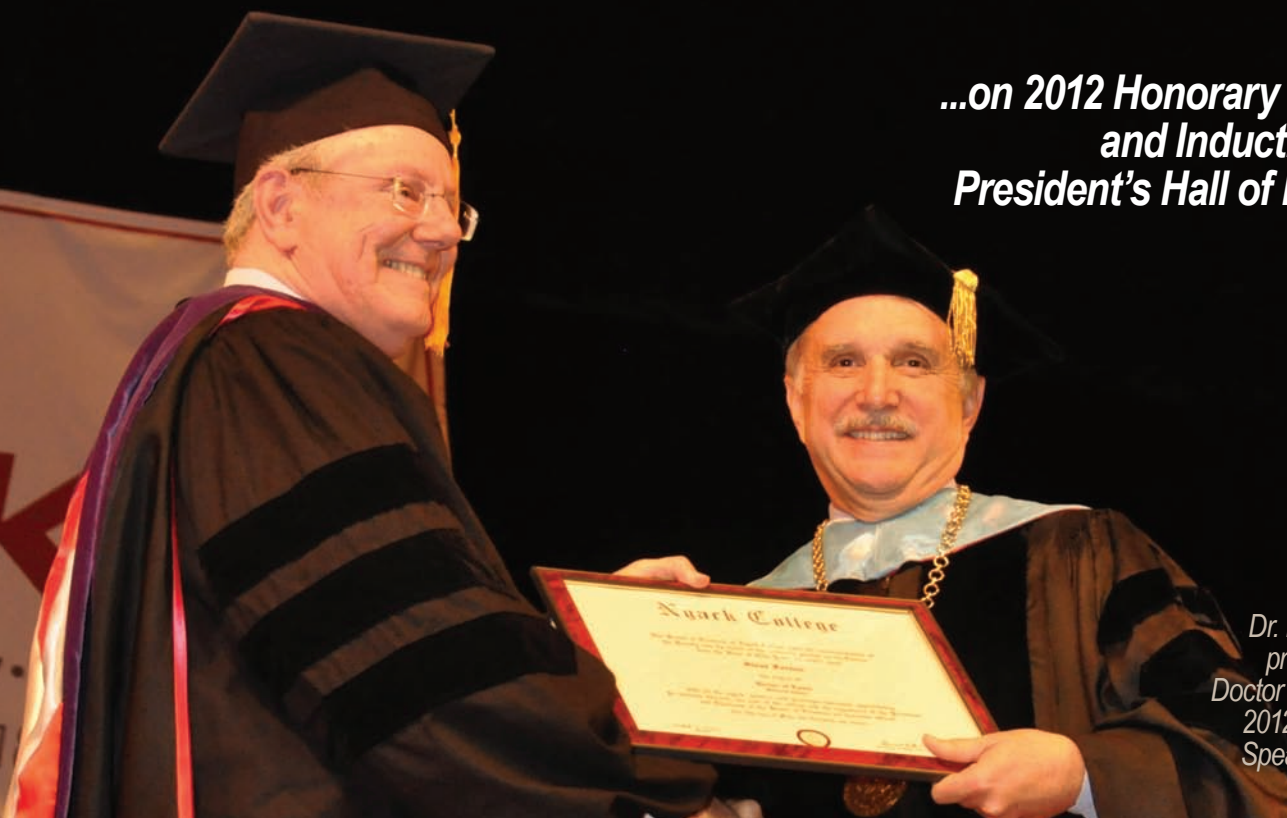


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The Hymns That Haunt Us

A newborn atheist just can't get the church's music out of her head.

Earlier this year, NPR told the story of Teresa MacBain, a United Methodist pastor who had stopped believing in God. In March, when she just couldn't keep it to herself anymore, she told the American Atheists Convention that she was one of them.

Coming out as an atheist felt good. But when she got home to Tallahassee, Florida, she discovered that a video of her coming-out speech had gone viral. Her church and community shunned her.

I was saddened but not surprised. Many people attend seminary because they are seeking answers to serious questions about the faith. When they do pastoral care, those questions become sharper.

What really caught my attention about MacBain's story was this: "I miss the music," she told NPR. "Some of the hymns, I still catch myself singing them," she said. "I mean, they're beautiful pieces of music."

After I posted a Facebook comment about the way hymns sneak up on this born-again atheist, a friend reminded me of comedian Steve Martin's comic tune, "Atheists Don't Have No Songs." At the New Orleans Jazz Festival, Martin waved a single sheet of paper and told the audience, "This is the entire atheist hymnal, right here."

Among the song's more memorable lines: "Romantics play 'Claire de Lune.' / Born agains sing, 'He is risen.' / But no one ever wrote a tune / for godless existentialism."

Martin is clever, but wrong. John Lennon wrote just such a tune in 1971. Lennon's tune for "Imagine" is indeed inspiring. But Lennon's text posits an existence with "nothing to live or die for." With no countries, no possessions, no heaven or hell, no religion, Lennon promised, the world would live as one. Not likely. Perhaps Martin was right to ignore the song.

• • •

MAYBE "atheists don't have no songs," or perhaps they have two or even ten. But the

early Christians didn't have many songs either. Christians were slow to develop a body of their own songs. According to Calvin R. Stapert's *A New Song for an Old World: Musical Thought in the Early Church*, it wasn't until the fourth century that Christian hymns came into their own. That was when Ambrose of Milan and Ephrem of Syria responded to the popular ditties of Arian



heretics by writing orthodox hymns for the faithful. Ephrem wrote over 400 hymns. He titled one of his song cycles "Against Heresies." Ambrose, by contrast, wrote only 14 rhyming, metrical hymns. But he gets credit for holding the first hymn sing in history. Under military threat from the Arian mother of King Valentinus II, his people huddled in their church and at his direction strengthened their courage by singing.

Why did it take so long for hymnody to develop? As the Christian faith spread from its Jewish context, it took root in a hedonistic pagan culture. Christians reacted by emphasizing asceticism, and no early church leader was a greater champion of that path than the North African theologian Tertullian (c. A.D.

160–c. A.D. 225). He condemned his culture's music because of its strong associations with idolatry—particularly in the service of Venus and Bacchus, the deities of sex and wine—and the immorality of the theater.

Not all Christians of the time were ascetics. Clement of Alexandria (who died 10 years before Tertullian) tried to build bridges between the faith and the best of his contemporary culture. Like Tertullian, Clement saw dangers in pagan music, but rather than abandon music wholesale, he urged Christians to exchange pagan tunes for biblical psalms.

Clement believed that music could build (or destroy) character. The pagans of his day sang at banquets and at domestic dinner tables. In the years before "church music" was invented, music had a place in the Christian home—as a way to welcome guests, to unite husband and wife in the same melodies, and to improve the character of the whole household.

Clement said Christians ought to sing because of gratitude. In the place of "intemperate and disorderly revelry, the Christian's meal should be a 'thankful revelry.'" (In our home, we've been known to sing Sunday school songs to our dogs after dinner.)

Indeed, we should sing out of gratitude to God in all of life, not just when we eat. We should make our whole lives a "holy festival." And when we do, says Clement, we unite ourselves to the "divine choir," with Christ as "the one choir-leader."

Back to Teresa MacBain, whose favorite hymns still sneak up on her as she goes about her duties. Perhaps the one choir-leader is sneaking up on her. When I heard her story, I prayed that those hymns would keep her in gratitude and would ultimately draw her back into the divine choir.

Clement of Alexandria said Christian meals should be a 'thankful revelry.'



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CT REVIEW

BOOKS, MOVIES,
MUSIC, AND
THE ARTS

The God Who Is (and Isn't) There

Joseph Loconte contemplates the mystery of our Lord's hidden presence. By John Wilson

Forty-five years ago in a college English class, the professor was talking about literary genius. To illustrate a point, he told us about the poet John Keats's notion of "negative capability," which Keats had described in a letter to his brothers George and Tom: "at once it struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after

fact and reason..."

A student asked the professor for an example of the *opposite* of negative capability. The professor answered without hesitation: "Religious beliefs." He smiled. It was 1967, and we all knew that religion was fading away.

A lot has changed in the years since that classroom discussion. English professors don't talk so much about genius nowadays, let alone Men of Achievement. Religion, it turns out, hasn't faded away. But misconceptions about

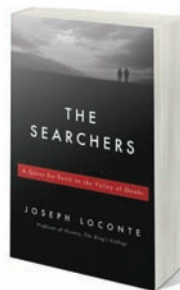
faith persist—especially the notion that religious belief functions primarily as a refuge for people who are desperately trying to escape from reality, from the dazzling and sometimes unsettling multiplicity of human existence, from uncertainty and change.

In *The Searchers: A Quest for Faith in the Valley of Doubt* (Thomas Nelson) ★★★★★, Joseph Loconte gives a very different account of Christian faith—not at all contemptuous of "fact and reason" but grounded in mystery, holding opposing truths in tension, alert to the limits of our knowledge but unhesitatingly affirming the hope that we share. This is a good book to give to someone who is looking at faith from the outside, but it will also be helpful to believers who have been led to expect tidy answers and neat resolutions and have come up hard against disappointment, absurdity, and loss.

Loconte, who teaches at the King's College in New York City, is best known for his commentary on foreign affairs and public policy, published over the years in *The Weekly Standard*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and many other outlets. He is a tough-minded observer, as you might gather from the title of a book he edited several years ago, *The End of Illusions: Religious Leaders Confront Hitler's Gathering Storm*, wherein he gathered pieces written by Christian leaders who argued against the United States' involvement in the "European war" and juxtaposed them with pieces by Reinhold Niebuhr and others calling for the United States to engage.

GRAPPLING WITH MYSTERY

The Searchers is a very different proposition. Here, Loconte's point of departure is one of the most striking passages in the Gospels, the conversation on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35), quoted in full at the outset. From this episode, several recurring themes in the book unfold. The



two followers of Jesus walking together toward Emmaus—disheartened by his death on the cross, hopeful yet confused by reports that he is alive—stand for all of us, grappling with a world in which so much is clearly awry. Loconte is uncompromising in his accounts of the ways in which faith itself is so often perverted, from the tortures of the Inquisition to the deadly toll of Islamic radicals.

Then there is that striking detail in the Emmaus story: When Jesus joined the two men, walking and talking with them, “they were kept from recognizing him.” What? The Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, behaving like a . . . trickster? If that offends you, you’d better close your Bible and enroll in a seminar where you’ll read learned thinkers deciding what God can and cannot do.

But God isn’t bound by our expectations. “Perhaps Pascal got closest to the truth of the thing,” Loconte writes, “closer than either the scientific skeptics or the religious dogmatists: ‘What can be seen on earth indicates neither the total absence, nor the manifest presence of divinity, but the presence of a hidden God,’ he wrote. ‘Everything bears this stamp.’”

We are the searchers, looking for home, looking for some kind of order in the apparent chaos of our lives and in the history of our species. But the triune God is also searching for us.

The presence of a hidden God: talk about negative capability! But if God only rarely manifests himself “with a flash of light or a Voice from Heaven” (as he evidently did, in time, to Pascal), he is not indifferent. Tweaking a phrase from Sally Lloyd-Jones’s *Jesus Storybook Bible*, Loconte speaks of “God’s Secret Rescue Mission,” which can also be described (and here he acknowledges Dallas Willard’s inspiration) as the “divine conspiracy.”

More negative capability! A divine conspiracy? Such anthropomorphic fantasies are unworthy of a God suitable for modern minds, are they not? You can imagine those fastidious thinkers we met earlier adjusting their ties and pursing their lips. But there’s worse—much worse, from their point of view—to come. You may have wondered about the title of Loconte’s book. If you

are a movie lover, his title probably made you think of John Ford’s 1956 Western starring John Wayne. If so, you’re on the right wavelength.

THE RESCUER

Loconte’s title has a double meaning. We are the searchers, looking for home, looking for some kind of order in the apparent chaos of our lives and in the history of our species. But the triune God is also searching for us, the way John Wayne’s Ethan Edwards searches relentlessly for his niece Debbie, who was taken by Comanches after they murdered the rest of her family and burnt the ranch to the ground.

No, we’re not to think of God as John Wayne somehow magnified. That would be silly and blasphemous at once, a bad combination. But the “God of Jesus, as we are led

MY TOP 5 BOOKS ON SPECIAL NEEDS

By Amy Julia Becker, author of *A Good and Perfect Gift* (Bethany House)



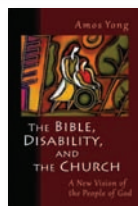
RECEIVING THE GIFT OF FRIENDSHIP

Profound Disability, Theological

Anthropology, and Ethics

HANS S. REINDERS (EERDMANS)

Reinders uses a Trinitarian lens to push readers to consider whether friendship—a voluntary and mutually self-giving relationship—is possible with individuals with profound disabilities.

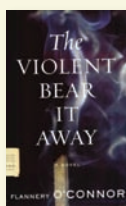


THE BIBLE, DISABILITY, AND THE CHURCH

A New Vision of the People of God

AMOS YONG (EERDMANS)

Using specific scriptural texts, Yong exhorts the church to re-imagine the body of Christ as a body that not only includes people with disabilities but also understands these people as central to the church’s mission.

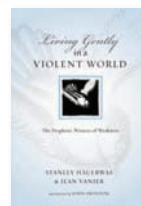


THE VIOLENT BEAR IT AWAY

A Novel

FLANNERY O’CONNOR (FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX)

In this haunting novel, O’Connor considers the spiritual implications of a child with a mental disability. The child’s presence forces individuals around him to believe in or reject God.



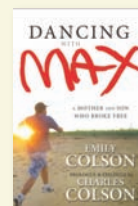
LIVING GENTLY IN A VIOLENT WORLD

The Prophetic

Witness of Weakness

STANLEY HAUERWAS AND JEAN VANIER (INTERVARSITY)

Everything Hauerwas and Vanier have written about disability deserves inclusion in this list, but this slim volume of the two in conversation introduces readers to theology and ethics surrounding disability in the context of the L’Arche communities.



DANCING WITH MAX

A Mother and Son Who Broke Free

EMILY COLSON (ZONDERVAN)

This memoir, about Colson’s son Max, who has autism, offers a mother’s insight into family, the church, and disability. Through it, we come to understand what Colson means when she says that Max, autism and all, is a gift.

to believe from the Bible, is something like this—fearsome and yet forgiving, a God who does not rest until he recovers those who have lost their way.” And yet “we are still left with the mystery” of his presence in our lives, the presence of a hidden God. That’s the divine conspiracy. Jesus is the Rescuer.

“Why might God work this way? Why doesn’t he just announce himself and get on with his agenda?” Perhaps, Loconte suggests, because he refuses to coerce us. Ultimately, though, we can’t answer such questions. We’re left, again, with mystery—not a secret for initiates only but rather an irreducible fact of our common condition.

“Mystery” doesn’t mean we are left in the dark. Remember the last paradoxical twist of that *pensée* from Pascal? “Everything bears this stamp”—the stamp, that is, of a hidden God. Loconte quotes a wonderful passage from C. S. Lewis, often quoted but worth hearing yet again: “Apparently, then, our lifelong nostalgia, our longing to be reunited with something in the universe from which we now feel cut off . . . is no mere neurotic fancy, but the truest index of our real situation.”

We have glimpses, hints, foretastes of a new heaven and a new earth every day—in the flash of a bluebird’s wing, in a fleeting song, in the Eucharist. In this new home, Loconte writes, we will “see the face of the hidden God and . . . walk with him as a man walks with his friend.”

One caveat: Talk about mystery and paradox can easily morph into yet another way of putting God into a box. You can write a book explaining why God utterly exceeds our grasp—and by the time you’re done, you may be feeling pretty smug. Then your dear friend and fellow believer comes along: “What’s all this about a ‘hidden God’? He’s not hidden at all!” Your friend isn’t angry—just baffled. And he has a point, doesn’t he? The hidden God—that trickster!—is right in your face as well as in your heart. He wants to know what you’ve done lately for his kingdom. The problem, in this instance, isn’t an excess of mystery: it’s an uncomfortable clarity. Someone is thirsty. (Remember who said, “I thirst”?) You’d better bring a cup of water. The Lord of Negative Capability said so. ☩

John Wilson is editor of *Books @ Culture*.

Tell Them a Story

Narratives, personal and otherwise, can prepare hearts to receive the gospel. By Jerry Root

There is a limit to the telling of stories. No astronaut would like it if those setting the trajectory for a launch into space contrived to do it by reciting *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. Stories, like most things in life, have their place. Yet, as C. S. Lewis once observed, “Sometimes story says best what must be said.” Stories can get past “watchful dragons”; that is, they can penetrate the resistance put up by rationalized bad behavior; they can pierce the heart and gain a hearing even when ears might otherwise be dull. As Christine Dillon points out in **Telling the Gospel Through Story: Evangelism That Keeps Hearers Wanting More** (InterVarsity) ★★★★★, storytelling is how Jesus most frequently proclaimed the gospel. All who look to Jesus to learn how to share the gospel and announce the kingdom of God would do well to adopt the storytelling approach.

Dillon’s background and experience in both Western and non-Western environments led her to a method of communicating the gospel by unashamedly proclaiming the true story of the Bible. That Dillon learned “storying” within a missionary context, where others often had no biblical background whatsoever, makes her book all the more relevant in the West, where the biblical narrative seems, in many quarters, to be nearly forgotten.

Dillon’s method seeks, as all methods of evangelism should, to understand a hearer’s worldview. She shapes her telling of the biblical story of redemption in a way that listeners will grasp and remember. She builds narrative richly and robustly without compromise. Furthermore, she understands how to get past the barriers and preconceptions of her hearers.

At times, she embodies the approach of the prophet Nathan, who was assigned to deliver God’s message to David after he had committed adultery and murder. It was story that breached the barrier, penetrated the heart, and led to David’s repentance. Furthermore, Dillon does a more than

adequate job of training her readers to do storying in a wide range of contexts. She also advises them on how to multiply their efforts by training and motivating others.

There are many valuable features in Dillon’s method. Among them are personal metaphors, analogies, and stories that weave her experiences into the book. These reveal vitality in her instruction. They awaken the imagination and validate the method with real-life examples, giving it the air of authority. Clearly, she has practiced what she preaches. She recognizes the supernatural nature of her work and sees prayer as essential to undergirding her use of story. Dillon’s method is also helpful for contextualizing the gospel story by setting what she says in the larger context of the biblical narrative from Creation onward. It is a process, but one that captivates the hearers and awakens in them the childlike wonder that asks for more.

There are also a few liabilities in the book. At times, Dillon seems to over-egg the pudding by making judgments that partake unnecessarily, and irritatingly, of unconditional categories like “only” and “always.” Furthermore, some of her anecdotes swell into unsupported and universalized applications. These drawbacks, however, need not distract from Dillon’s overall point that storying is an important, even vital, way to share the gospel—especially in the present age of biblical illiteracy.

Telling the Gospel Through Story provides a fresh approach to all who take evangelism seriously and seek proficiency at making Christ known. Storying is another method one might use effectively and powerfully. The apostle

Paul told the Philippians that he rejoiced in however Christ was preached (Phil. 1:18). There are many effective methods for proclaiming the gospel—and the more, the merrier. ☩

Jerry Root is coauthor of *The Sacrament of Evangelism* (Moody).



ASHAMED NO MORE

A Pastor's Journey Through Sex Addiction

T. C. RYAN

(INTERVARSITY PRESS, 240 PAGES)

God creates us as sexual and spiritual beings, and when we are fully integrated, we function well. But few of us are fully integrated beings, so we often misunderstand and misuse our God-given desire to connect with others. . . .

If we're disordered in our hearts, our approach to connecting is fractured. This brings us to lust. We lust when we co-opt something or someone to meet a legitimate desire we have in a way that honors neither us nor the person/thing we desire. Lusting is fragmented living. Lusting comes out of desires that are normal—even God-given—but our bent vision and short-cutting strategies mean that even when we attain what we desire, we do not find fulfillment or contentment.

For us to live lives of wholeness and goodness, lust must be surrendered to love. And that means a death of sorts. If lust has become our way of expressing our desire to connect with others, we must die to it so that we may take up a healthier way of living. C. S. Lewis wrote, "Lust is a poor, weak, whimpering, whispering thing compared with that richness and energy of desire which will arise when lust has been killed."

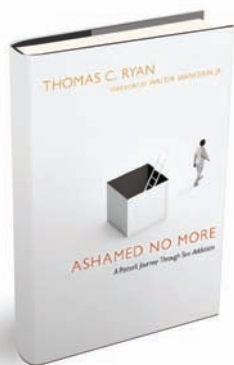
Pornography is a tool for facilitating lust. I discovered the realities of sexual attraction and sexual imagining, and then learned I could cultivate those thoughts into an imaginary world of my making. It was powerful and intoxicating. And when I discovered images that excited my erotic imagination, it was like pouring gas on a fire.

Pornography takes something very real, very human—something everyone can relate to—and distorts it. Our sexuality is meant to be lived and expressed in the context of a healthy, integrated life, and pornography is never an expression of good health or integrated living. Pornography is dis-integrating. While our sexuality is but one aspect of who we are as human beings and needs to be integrated with our other aspects, pornography isolates that one human dimension and distorts it by magnifying and minimizing it at the same time. . . .

Saying that porn cheapens our sexuality doesn't go far enough. Porn magnifies human sexuality, distorts it, makes it larger than reality, isolates it for trade—I'll show you this and you give me that. At the same time, it makes the magnificence of being a creature made

in the image of God something as insignificant as a sheet of paper or a glob on a screen. It's a most malicious smearing of the divine image in us. Simply put, porn is uncompromising, progressive, destructive evil.

Taken from *Ashamed No More: A Pastor's Journey Through Sex Addiction* by T. C. Ryan. ©2012 by T. C. Ryan. Used by permission of InterVarsity Press PO Box 1400 Downers Grove, IL 60515. www.ivpress.com.



FOUR VIEWS ON CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

EDITED BY STANLEY N. GUNDRY AND BRUCE DEMAREST (ZONDERVAN)



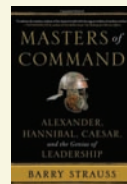
This helpful volume features Eastern Orthodox (Bradley Nassif), Roman Catholic (Scott Hahn), "progressive mainline" (Joseph D. Driskill), and evangelical (Evan Howard) scholars in dialogue. By far the most

readable essay is Hahn's. The others require a reader determined to slog through or skim, but all reward attention. Another volume in the Counterpoint series gives *Four Views on the Lord's Supper*. Still, it's surprising that the Eucharist doesn't figure more prominently in this volume.

MASTERS OF COMMAND

Alexander, Hannibal, Caesar, and the Genius of Leadership

BARRY STRAUSS (SIMON & SCHUSTER)



Usually I avoid books with chapter titles like "Ten Qualities of Successful Commanders." But Barry Strauss is one of my favorite historians, and I enjoyed this book.

Comparing and contrasting the strengths and weaknesses of these three great generals, Strauss also draws enduring lessons: "In spite of many changes in technology, since ancient times the principles of war have changed as little as human nature has."

ROADSIDE PICNIC

ARKADY AND BORIS STRUGATSKY, TRANSLATED BY OLENA BORMASHENKO (CHICAGO REVIEW PRESS)



First appearing in English translation in 1977, this classic of Russian science fiction (the inspiration for Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Stalker*) has been newly translated by a professor of mathemat-

ics, Olena Bormashenko, whose version reads more fluently than the earlier one. Many novels involving contact with aliens have what might be called a theological dimension, and that's certainly true of *Roadside Picnic*, in which the Strugatskys took some familiar conventions of the genre and applied a lot of torque.

Quick to Listen

Why Richard Mouw believes evangelicals should open their ears to Mormon believers.

Interview by Peggy Fletcher Stack

Richard J. Mouw startled many in the Christian world with a seven-minute speech in November 2004 that detailed how evangelicals had “sinned against Mormons.”

By that, the president of Fuller Theological Seminary meant evangelicals had misrepresented what Mormons believed in order to critique them. Mouw, a longtime participant in Mormon interfaith dialogues, has spent endless hours defending his statements to evangelical friends and colleagues.

He continues this outreach in **Talking with Mormons: An Invitation to**

Evangelicals (Eerdmans). *Salt Lake Tribune* religion reporter Peggy Fletcher Stack spoke with Mouw on the evolving nature of Latter-day Saint (LDS) theology, where it touches and where it diverges from historic Christianity, and how believers can systematically consider faiths outside the Christian fold.

Why do you think understanding LDS beliefs is more than just being nice but about being obedient to God?

One thing that really upsets me is when evangelicals say, “We don’t have time for dialogue with Mormons and all the niceties. We have to stand up for the truth and denounce error.” They fail to recognize that if we are to be people of the truth, we need to be sure we are criticizing Mormons for what they really believe, lest we commit the serious sin of bearing false witness against our neighbors. To be concerned about the truth means we ourselves better be sure we are being truthful, to listen to others and really understand before we tell them that they’re wrong.

What are your chief theological differences with Mormons? Have those changed over years of discussions with Mormons?

Mormons deny the Trinity, but they talk about “the three Persons

of the Godhead.” They say that God has a humanlike form, but they sing “How Great Thou Art” (which is in the Mormon hymnbook). Other basic differences include issues like baptism, temple worship, and authority. Evangelicals emphasize the Bible alone, while Mormonism not only adds scriptures, but also sees the scriptures themselves as an expression of a prophetic office restored in the early 19th century.

We have to make a distinction, though, between the “working theology” of Mormonism today and its previous declarations. In the past, they put much more emphasis on good works. The most important development in recent decades has been an increasingly strong emphasis on the substitutionary atonement of Christ on the cross.

Why do you not classify Mormonism as a cult?

Cult often connotes secrecy, duplicity, and a rigid “one true church” mentality. None of that really fits present-day Mormonism, which scholars instead call a “new religious movement.” Ordinary Mormons love Billy Graham. They read *Christianity Today* as a helpful resource for their own growth in faith. Many Mormon scholars enjoy attending evangelical-sponsored theology conferences. None of this is true of Jehovah’s Witnesses, Scientology, or Hare Krishna, which are typically described as “cults.”

How have you come to understand Mormon founder Joseph Smith?

The Joseph Smith topic is the most difficult one for evangelicals. Many see him as Satan-inspired, or—with equal hostility—as a deceiver or a deluded person. I obviously do not see him as an inspired prophet delivering

messages from God. To focus on the character of Smith and his claims about himself diverts us from talking about the central issue of what Mormons have taught about sin, redemption, and the person and work of Jesus Christ. I find those teachings to contain some elements of biblical orthodoxy—along with other teachings that I find off the charts.



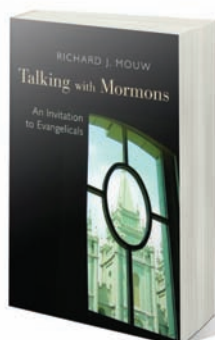
Richard Mouw

What do you say to those who believe that understanding Mormonism is tantamount to legitimizing or even endorsing a heretical faith?

Mormonism is not historic orthodox Christianity—that is true by its own admission. I like the assessment of Jan Shippo, a Methodist who has written much about Mormonism. Mormon thought, she says, is to Christianity what Christian thought is to Judaism—some continuity and much discontinuity. To engage in probing dialogue with Mormons about matters of eternal importance is not “endorsing” or “legitimizing” their system of thought. But it is to take it seriously as a movement that we need to understand better—and to be more truthful about.

How would you craft a better theology of interfaith engagement?

I have two rules for interfaith dialogue: First, don’t tell people what they believe; ask them and listen carefully to what they say. Second, don’t pit the best things in your perspective against the worst things in their perspective. For me, that has meant acknowledging to Mormons some of our evangelical defects, as well as admitting to some good things in Mormonism. We need to account for the many wonderful people in other religious traditions. Instead of just criticizing religious movements and their founders, we need to understand their teachings and the communities built around them.



Self-Critical Commentary

There's a message to the madness in the oft-crass *Louie*. By Jessica DeCou

In the pilot episode of *Louie* ★★★★★, which begins its third season June 28 on FX (10:30/9:30c), Louis C. K. appears at a comedy club: "I think a lot of people who think they're good people are living a really evil life without thinking about it. . . . There are people who just starve to death, and that's all they ever did. There's people who are born and they go, 'Oh, I'm hungry,' then they just die, and that's all they ever got to do. And meanwhile I'm in my car having a great time, and I sleep like a baby."

It's a common thread running throughout Louis C. K.'s work—namely, the question of how to be a good person in a superficial and self-absorbed world, and how to recognize and respect the humanity of others. Most importantly, he never exempts himself from criticism—in fact, he is most often its object.

TV critics and fellow comedians have lauded Louis and *Louie* for this humanness; he deftly addresses a range of complex topics from bullying, child neglect, terrorism, and suicide to race relations, sexuality, and religion. Indeed, after his series premiered, many questioned whether *Louie* was really a comedy or whether it would be more accurately described as something quite different. There are occasional dramatic segments intended to elicit few if any laughs, but these often represent the series at its best, offering



penetrating analyses of human nature and experience that are at once both critical and sympathetic.

The series tackles religion too. In an episode titled "God," a 10-year-old Louie clowns around during a lesson about the Passion, leading his teacher to fear that she has failed to adequately convey Jesus' suffering. So she brings in a local doctor for a "theoretical autopsy" of the murder victim, Jesus. He ends by inviting Louie and a classmate up front to reenact the scene, instructing Louie to drive a nail into his friend's wrist. Louie refuses. The doctor asks, "You can't do it? Well then, why'd you do it to him? You drove in his nails with your sins . . . and you won't nail them into this brat?"

That night, Louie is plagued by dreams

of past misdeeds. He wakes up, grabs a pair of pliers, and runs to the church, where he approaches the statue of Jesus on the cross, confessing his guilt and yelling desperately, "I'm sorry! I'm sorry!" He removes the nails and crown of thorns and sits holding the statue in a pose that evokes the Pieta, whispering, "It's all right" in an effort to soothe the dying Christ. The segment ends with the image of an apathetic maintenance man

who smokes a cigarette while nailing Jesus to the cross once more. Scenes like these, though often controversial, engage religious questions with a complexity rarely found on television today, especially in comedy.

In another episode, adult Louie meets Ellen Farber, leader of a fictional Christian "anti-masturbation group." After first lashing out at her, he and Ellen go for a stroll together. She laughs at his report of the embarrassment and humiliation that accompanied his first sexual experience, and she then makes her surprisingly winsome pitch for "purity." Louie now appears the debased fool by comparison—and here, Louis C. K. once again turns his critical comedic sensibility on himself. In short, rather than simplistically portraying Ellen as an "extremist" or "fanatic," the show presents a well-formed character whose point of view Louie comes to respect, even if he vigorously disagrees.

Louie is as much about masturbation and fart jokes as it is about social issues. But the humor serves as a meditation on human relationships and mutual understanding. Many find his raw brand of comedy offensive; it's certainly not for everyone. But for those who watch, *Louie* will yield candid insights into the contemporary experience—and quite a few laughs to boot. ⊕

Jessica DeCou recently earned her Ph.D. in theology at the University of Chicago Divinity School, where her research included theology of culture/popular culture.

Miraculous but Meandering

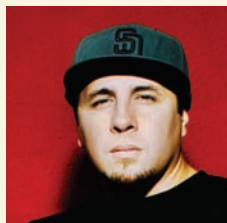
Filmmaker Darren Wilson recently finished the last of a trio of documentaries about God and his work in the world. The first two, *Finger of God* and *Furious Love*, included compelling footage of miracles across the globe. **Father of Lights** (Wanderlust Productions) ★★★★★, now in limited screenings and releasing to DVD in October, is much the same. The knock against the first two films was that they meandered, but there was no doubt that the star of both movies—God himself—is good and loving and almighty . . . and very much making himself known.

Ditto *Father of Lights*. In some ways, it feels like Wilson has made the best of footage that was left on the cutting-room floor from the first two movies. It wanders here and there—and everywhere, with footage from India, Africa, and other "ends of the earth"—without a fluent narrative. But that's overcome by some jaw-dropping miracles that occur—a Hindu shaman coming to Christ, a witch doctor cowering at the name of Jesus. Wilson also wanted to communicate that God is love, and through these scenes and interviews, he succeeds. (More: FatherofLightsFilm.com)

—Mark Moring, CT senior associate editor

TWO MINUTES WITH...

Sonny Sandoval



Though rock band P.O.D.'s popularity has ebbed and flowed, their love for Jesus remains constant. As they celebrate their 20th anniversary with

the July release of a new album, *Murdered Love*, CT's Mark Moring spoke with Sonny Sandoval, 38, the band's lead singer and lyricist.

The best part of the past 20 years?

Seeing the impact our music has on people. It's always been my heart that God would save people through this crazy music somehow, some way, his way. When some kid comes up after a show and says he [is no longer] contemplating suicide or he got saved as a result of our music, that's the only reason I continue to do it. That's like fuel in our tank. There were times I wanted to quit, to get a real job, to go home and be with my family. [He and wife Shannon have three young children.] But then there's that kid with his story—and not just one kid. It's over and over.

And the hardest part?

Being on the road so much. We don't have the luxury of being in a home church. We have to walk out our faith out there in the real world, where everybody wants a piece of you. There are temptations. Our flesh is tested—our strengths, our weaknesses. But at the end of the day, I have to work out my own salvation with fear and trembling, to walk out my faith with God and with my brothers.

The new album is the most explicitly "Christian" one you've ever done.

That wasn't intentional; it just came out that way. As I read Scripture and prepare for the return of the King, it's like, "This is the reality. This is the truth." With kids and culture as extreme as they are, they need a lot of truth. So we give it to them, and we don't sugarcoat it. We're all living in a dying world, and without faith in God and his redemption, we're lost. These kids realize that.



Precious Remedies

For the Welcome Wagon, old is new. By Joel Oliphint

Four years after their acclaimed 2008 debut, the Welcome Wagon releases its sophomore project, **Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices** (Asthmatic Kitty) ★★★★★. While producer (and label owner) Sufjan Stevens's fingerprints were all over that debut (vocally, instrumentally, and stylistically), his presence is much more subtle here. Recorded at an old rectory in Brooklyn, New York, with warm production from Alexander Foote, *Precious Remedies* continues the band's folksy style but belongs wholly to Vito Aiuto—pastor of Resurrection Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn's Williamsburg neighborhood—and his wife, Monique.

The couple loosely structured this album after the type of liturgy you're likely to see at Resurrection or any other Presbyterian church—which is to say, it's something like a picture of the gospel itself. The beauty of a good liturgy is the way it walks a participant through the message: confession of sin, promise of redemption, joyful response, and so on.

Precious Remedies has all those elements and more. There's a gorgeous cover of the Cure's "High," here serving as a love letter

from Vito to his wife. "Would You Come and See Me in New York?" finds him asking that question to his late father in plainspoken yet heartbreaking fashion. "Rice and Beans (But No Beans)" is a meditation on community, done with pedal-steel guitar, saloon piano, and a walking bass.

Aiuto reworks old hymns ("Lo He Comes with Clouds Descending," "The Strife Is O'er") while also covering "Remedy," a 2007 worship song by David Crowder. Some songs get quiet, tender arrangements; others boast a full choir and brass.

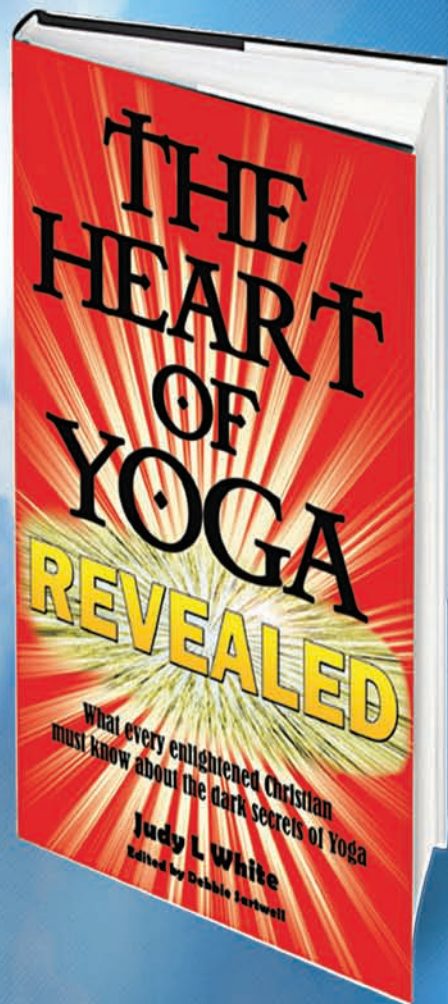
The Welcome Wagon is no mere export of hipster Christianity from Williamsburg (the national epicenter of self-conscious irony). *Precious Remedies* is utterly sincere and devoid of pretense. Aiuto doesn't include old hymns or name his album after a 17th-century Puritan devotional because "vintage" is in. It's because he believes these words. He preaches them every week. He sings them with his wife—and, often, some friends—in their living room. And they're inviting us to sing along. ✚



Joel Oliphint is a CT music critic and a freelance writer in Columbus, Ohio.

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WILL DAVIS JR. (REVELL)

★★★★★ Pastor Will Davis Jr. wants American evangelicals to quit chasing the American Dream—to scale back our lust for consumer goods and reject the false allure of secure prosperity. Who could disagree? But Davis's prophetic voice also utters some dubious assurances. Is it really true that "you'll be happier" without the burdens (and blessings) of wealth? Does the sacrifice of luxury really promise more time, peace, contentment, simplicity, and joy? Better relationships and greater intimacy with God? Fewer financial frustrations? Surely—eventually—all these things will be added unto those who seek the kingdom first. Just don't expect them prematurely. —Matt Reynolds

GO AND DO

Becoming a Missional Christian

DON EVERTS (INTERVARSITY)

★★★★★ Don Everts used to live as a "Safe Christian": doubtlessly committed to Christ, yet maintaining an introvert's comfortable distance from the earthly mission to which Christ's disciples are called. (It's a portrait to which this writer, who would sooner retire to his books than follow Christ to the ends of the earth, bears an uncomfortable resemblance.) In *Go and Do*, Everts summons natural-born retreaters like himself (and me) to robust missional engagement, while challenging world-affirmers to shift their focus from the mere pursuit of success and happiness. —Matt Reynolds

WHERE SIN ABOUNDS

A Religious History of Las Vegas

STANLEY A. STEWARD (WIPF AND STOCK)

★★★★★ As any Pentecostal Christian will readily attest, the Spirit blows where it will. Stanley A. Steward does not think it incongruous that the Spirit's gusts would flutter amid the decadence of Las Vegas. In *Where Sin Abounds*, Steward, for 15 years a pastor in Sin City, tells the remarkable story of Pentecostalism's flourishing within America's casino capital. Much good has happened in Vegas on the Spirit's account. Let's hope it stays there. —Matt Reynolds

MUSIC

THE CHOIR

THE LOUDEST SOUND EVER HEARD

(GALAXY 21)

★★★★★ Fans of the Choir—especially of vocalist Derri Daugherty's ethereal, echoing guitar sound—will love this album. *Loudest Sound* recalls the dark, Euro six-string vibe of latter '80s underground rock (the sonic pool where the Choir was spawned), a very good thing made even better by hooky melodies, crackling musicianship, and Steve Hindalong's better-than-ever lyrics. "Takin' the Universe In," a rare unabashed love song, has the drummer declaring to his wife: "I want to ride the train that keeps rumbling your floor / I want to feel the draft that seeps under your door / I want to be there for your hereafter and your here before." —Dave Urbanski

MERCYME

THE HURT AND THE HEALER

(PROVIDENT)

★★★★★ It's been over a decade since MercyMe made Christian music history with their platinum megahit "I Can Only Imagine," which set a bar so high that even MercyMe has yet to top it. Their latest includes a foundation of uplifting melodies and lyrics grounded in biblical themes; whether singing these songs in corporate worship or alone in the car, it's music that will remind listeners why God is good. And yet, for all of the album's high moments, nothing comes close to the groundbreaking emotional power that "Imagine" boasted. But it might not matter. Singer Bart Millard's voice sounds as rich and strong as ever. —Ron Augustine

MEWITHOUTYOU

TEN STORIES

(INDEPENDENT)

★★★★★ mewithoutYou fully embraces its literary leanings with the anthropomorphic fiction of *Ten Stories*. The rollicking narrative kicks off in "February, 1878" with a circus train wreck, then follows the escaped animals through physical, philosophical, and theological wanderings. The gnostic tiger, hedonistic owl, prophetic fox, and others move the introspective material past navel-gazing to insightful pondering about the cycles of human life. Aaron Weiss's unique vocals range from raucous yawping to mumbling to melodic crooning. Get out your dictionary to go deep, or just hang on for an entertaining ride. —Jeremy V. Jones

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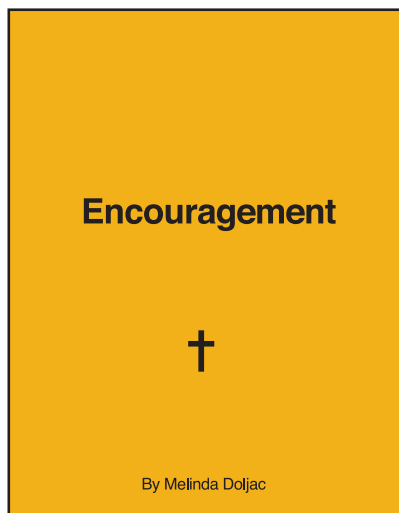
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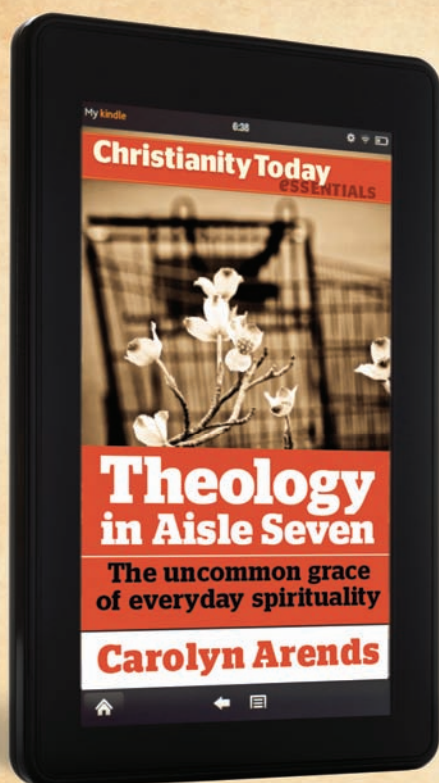
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Running the Race

NASCAR driver **Blake Koch** takes a stand for Jesus.

The TV spot was innocuous enough: NASCAR driver Blake Koch, 26 and a rising star, looks into the camera and urges viewers to register to vote, to “rise up and make our voices heard.” But ESPN rejected the ad, citing “political and religious overtones,” particularly on Koch’s personal website, where he’s open about his Christian faith. (ESPN later retracted its “religious” objection, but still declined the ad for violating its guidelines on “advocacy messaging.”)

Without the national exposure, Koch’s sponsor, Rise Up and Register, withdrew its support, worth over \$1 million, leaving Koch scrambling for sponsors. Koch, who races in the Nationwide Series (sort of a training ground for NASCAR’s popular Sprint Cup Series), says he has “complete peace” about his circumstances, which leave him seeking sponsors

week after week—at a minimum of \$35,000, just to get the car in racing condition. “But God always provides, and something will happen.”

Rick Ware, owner of the team for which Koch drives, recognized the driver’s potential even before he barely missed winning Nationwide’s top rookie honors in 2011. “He’s a good kid and a great driver, and only going to get better,” says Ware. “But as a Christian business, we’re also excited to have him on our team, because of his faith and his openness about it.”

- **Hometown** Huntersville, North Carolina
- **Family** Shannon (wife); Carter (son)
- **Church** The Cove, Mooresville, North Carolina
- **On your iPod** Chris Tomlin, Jesus Culture, Andy Cherry
- **Favorite movie** *Invincible*
- **Favorite verse** Philippians 2:3–5
- **Favorite website** IamSecond.com
- **What makes you laugh?** *America’s Funniest Home Videos*
- **What makes you angry?** Lying
- **Hobbies** Hunting, racing remote-control cars

question & answer

Tell me about your spiritual journey.

I grew up in a Christian family, but I didn’t really start living a Christian lifestyle until my early 20s. I prayed and went to church, but I just didn’t have that relationship. Then one day a few years ago, I just decided I had to re-surrender my life to Christ, and I’ve been growing closer to him ever since.

How much of racing is risk-taking?

A lot, but you weigh the risk against the reward. Sometimes the risk gets you ahead, and sometimes you spin out and hit the wall.

What’s it like to drive a car 220 mph?

Not much different from driving 80 miles an hour on the freeway, at least until things go bad. When you start wrecking or spinning that fast, that’s when you realize how fast you’re going.

How did losing the sponsorship affect your season?

I haven’t had anything consistent enough to build momentum. The first part of the year was going well; I was top 10 in the points standings. Then when my primary sponsorship deal fell through, we weren’t able to continue racing like we had been. We had to race on old tires and with worse equipment, and we slowly started falling down in the rankings. So we’re in a little rut, waiting for something to happen.

Any hard feelings for ESPN after all this?

No. Obviously, somebody there made a mistake, but I have no intention of bashing them or fueling the fire. I could have ridden that media wave for months until I had a big sponsor, but that’s not why I’m here. I live my life based on what Christ would do, so I completely forgive ESPN. I did my part of standing up for my faith, and the rest is out of my hands.

So, you still watch SportsCenter?

Oh yeah, all the time!

More: BlakeKoch.com, WareRacing.net

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