

Christianity Today

DECEMBER 2012

THERE AND BACK AGAIN

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Your Eyes On God's World

God's world is a big place, and at *Christianity Today*, we have committed to doing everything we can to give you a front-row seat on what God is doing around the globe.

In this issue, Moses Wasamu reports from Nairobi, Kenya, on the growth of voluntary adult male circumcision as a way of lowering the HIV/AIDS rate (page 19). He also relates the moving story of a pastor who was catapulted into advocacy when his virgin bride tested positive. And on page 32, Marian Liautaud reports on the battle to save baby girls from sex-selective abortion. In Asia, cultural and political forces have combined over three decades to abort the equivalent of the entire female population of the United States.

We live in a time when American pastors are taking cues from clergy in Rwanda, Ukraine, and South Korea. Because Christ-followers need to connect with fellow believers worldwide, we are constantly expanding our global vision and yours.

Can we continue to increase this unique international coverage? Like many of you, we at CT have felt the pinch of recent economic uncertainties, and travel to unfamiliar cultures takes much more of our writers' time and emotional energy.

Fortunately, some organizations give us help with international reporting—though not for this issue. Indeed, in every issue, your direct contributions help underwrite the costs associated with such stories.

Such assistance encourages us as we plan future reports of gospel growth in the uttermost parts. That is why I want to encourage you as a CT “fellow traveler” to prayerfully consider what you can do to invest in this expanding work.

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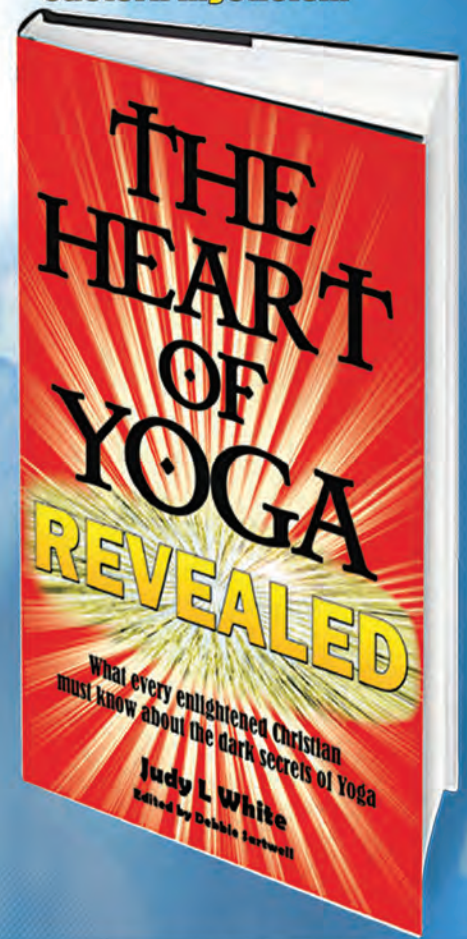
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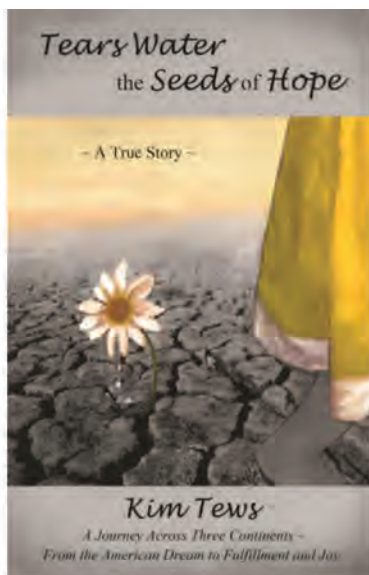
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Chapter 2 Excerpt The Price of a Boy's Eyesight

On our first day on the Santa Elena Peninsula, we settled into Manglaralto, a small oceanfront fishing town where we would be based as we spent the next few days visiting villages being considered for water systems. Frank took us to a local hospital to illustrate the contrast between the health care in rural Central America and that of the urban United States. We were appalled. The floors of the few small dingy rooms were caked with dried blood, and the striking lack of medical equipment and supplies called into question what, if any, medical care could be provided in the facility. A lone nurse passed from patient to patient, but there were no doctors present. We happened upon a nine-year-old boy whose eye socket was swollen to the size of a tennis ball with infection. His mother sat helplessly by his side in a state of despair, having been told that her son needed an antibiotic costing nearly a month's worth of her husband's wages, which she did not have. Without the medication, the infection would most likely spread to the other eye, and the boy could be left without sight in either eye.

To make matters worse, the boy's mother was living with the remorse of having tried various home remedies that had worsened the condition. The situation was translated to English for us since we then spoke very little Spanish. Tears welled in my eyes as my thoughts turned to our own daughters and how easily we would have been able to solve this problem for them. I thought of the life-threatening illnesses common in this country and how often parents must watch their children suffer and die for lack of resources to purchase medications that would have saved their lives. They loved their children as much as I loved mine, and it occurred to me that I had done nothing to earn my lot in life. My life of privilege was a result of the geographic location of

Tears Water the Seeds of Hope is the inspiring true story of a Midwest husband and wife that become disenchanted with the relentless pursuit of the "American Dream" and embark on a journey that spans six countries and redefines their hearts and lives. The story begins in a small town in America's heartland and weaves its way through South and Central America as the couple gathers an army of supporters, and eventually establishes a non-profit organization to save the lives of children in the end stages of starvation in eastern Guatemala. The narrative is filled with action-packed adventure and heart-warming victories as the characters face incredible odds and seemingly hopeless situations, while hundreds of volunteers join mission teams to offer help and hope through the programs of the ministry. Readers of all ages will enjoy the roller coaster ride of emotions—from laughter, to tears, to sheer joy—as they realize that it is possible for ordinary people to make a difference, one life at a time.

my birth and the opportunities that my country had afforded me. I had always been aware that thousands of children around the world died each day due to unsafe drinking water, starvation, and preventable disease. But now the problem was becoming real and personal to me in ways I could no longer ignore. Apathy, preoccupation with "the good life," and the responsibilities of home would never again be sufficient as an excuse to live as if the suffering in the world was not my problem.

The medication the boy needed was available in a neighboring town, and we asked the nurse to determine the cost and send word to us at Manglaralto's small rundown ocean front hotel where we would be waiting at a table outside. The sun was setting over the sea as a few tattered fishing boats returned to shore, their captains unloading meager rewards for a long day's work. The sound of rhythmic waves lapped upon the shore while wild dogs searched the beach for food. They, like the fisherman, survived from day to day on the outcome of their quest for sustenance. Eventually we noticed the boy's mother slowly approaching us, her downcast eyes expressing no hope or expectation of the miracle she needed. In her hand she held a scrap of paper on which was written the cost of the medication needed to save her son's eyesight. She handed it to me without making eye contact. Twenty-five dollars was the insurmountable sum of money that would save her son from a lifetime of blindness. I stood up, reached into my waist pack, pulled out \$25, and handed it to her unceremoniously. She burst into tears. Randy was next, followed by the members of the hotel staff that had been standing on the front steps of the hotel observing. As all within earshot watched in tears, the boy's mother gushed expressions of appreciation in Spanish, most of which we could not understand. Her repeated phrase, "Que Dios les recompense," were the only words I could

decipher, which meant "May God repay you." After several minutes exuding heartfelt expressions of gratitude, she hurried off to purchase the medication. We were amazed to find ourselves overcome with emotion over such a miniscule contribution given at so little sacrifice. The \$25 would have been spent without hesitation on a few scones and lattes back home, but here it meant the difference between vision and blindness for a child.

We were invited to the humble home of a local family for dinner and were honored to be their guests. Then we roamed the dusty roads of the small village visiting with families in broken Spanish and using charades to offer small gifts as tokens of our friendship. When weariness finally caught up with us, it was time to return to our tiny hotel room, joyfully exhausted, to collapse and try to sleep. As we approached the dwelling, however, we realized that our rest would be postponed a bit longer. The dark silhouette of a thin man on a bike in front of the hotel caught us by surprise. When we were within earshot, softly spoken words of gratitude poured forth from the visitor, at which point the communication barrier became a serious problem. I vowed that my top priority upon returning home would be to become fluent in Spanish. The man was the father of the boy who had received the benefits of our paltry \$25 donation. He had ridden his bike into town from his mountain village eight miles away, after ten hours of work, to personally thank us for our generosity. His family had been praying for a miracle for his son, and he considered us to be the answer to their many prayers. Tears streamed from his eyes as we again heard the phrase, "Que Dios les recompense." I wished I had been able to communicate to the man that God had paid us in advance. He had blessed our lives immensely, and we were there to express our gratitude to Him and to be a sign of His love for this family.

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For many of you, your *Christianity Today* read begins with a cursory look at our editorial and corporate mastheads: the long listing of women and men who get this publication to you month in and month out. This issue's mastheads are on pages 5 and 7.

The mastheads are our way of telling you that our collective and individual reputations are on the line every time you pick up an issue or read something on our site. Such "recognition," after all, has its costs.

And few have borne those costs as brilliantly as David Neff.

A CT veteran with over 27 years of service, David has led as "capital e" editor (later editor in chief) for a dozen of those years. Through it all, David has embodied the theological preciseness and journalistic excellence that marks this magazine. And he has consistently done so with Spirit-led humility and fairness that have positioned him at the forefront of evangelical leaders.

The sheer weight and reputation of David's name is but one—albeit big—reason why I've asked David to redirect his attentions to the launch of our digital Hispanic edition of CT, *Cristianismo Hoy*. With the edition debuting in March 2013, David is immersed in setting up editorial staff and structure, and finding funding dollars to ensure that *Cristianismo Hoy* has a long and healthy life.

David will also work with me on several partnership possibilities that can both strengthen CT's content and creatively see that that content reaches more international readers in the days ahead.

What all this means, of course, is that David's direct oversight of the flagship has come to an end. But waiting in the wings are two gifted leaders whose names are already well established with our readers.

Former senior managing editor Mark Galli is now CT editor. And working closely with Mark will be newly named executive editor Andy Crouch. This progressive "dyad" will not only build upon CT's editorial excellence but will also creatively find new ways and means of giving shape to this award-winning content in print and in its various online and digital formats.

Ensuring that the dyad's dreams see the light of day will be Katelyn Beaty as CT's new (and first female) managing editor. A five-year CT "vet," Katelyn has shown her colleagues time and again that she can tirelessly direct projects—such as *This Is Our City* and the successful *Her.meneutics* site—and bring them to timely completion, all with excellence.

So for all you masthead watchers, this month's listing will prove to be a delightful treasure trove. And for those not quite used to such a detailed read: Enjoy the treasures within.

Next issue: A Christian talks exclusively to CT about following Jesus while remaining inside his Islamic community; Katelyn Beaty finds out why Christians are staying in Detroit (sometimes called a "failed city") when most everyone has left; and we pick the best reads of 2012 in our annual book awards.

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Bob Welch takes us deeper into the bedrock values of the holiday classic *It's a Wonderful Life*. From the lightheartedness of George and Mary's floor-parting dance to the poignancy of a community that rallies to save a desperate man, *52 Little Lessons from It's a Wonderful Life* will inspire you to live for the deeper stuff that, as George Bailey finds, matters most.



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True Enlightenment: from Natural Chance to Personal Creator

Many people today blindly trust in nature and worship creation/Mammon/Baal, not the Creator. The result: darkness, anxiety, debt, and individual sexual competition corrupting the family.

True Enlightenment, a history of modern science (1500 A.D. to present) reveals that the basic scientific paradigms in all areas of science were founded by the early reforming scientists who had faith in Christ as Creator. But there was a biased philosophical shift in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to a deistic and pantheistic belief that all things were evolved by a natural determined process that man could understand by sense perceptions, and he could also control for material progress. The theory of this process of evolution first called the nebula hypothesis was formed by men who heard voices and saw visions, and not by scientific findings. Millions of years were added by conjecture for this myth of nature to unfold. Science histories omit these questionable beginnings. One hundred years later after this view gained widespread acceptance, Charles Darwin's ideas removed intelligent design from nature, and promised greater and higher progress by inheriting improvements. Science has shown this does not happen. The continued expansion to other theories to support evolution is reviewed, showing these and all basic evolutionary theories were unsupported by facts. This materialistic hope in evolution is now causing darkness from the blind eyes of mammon worship destroying western economies, freedom, and the break down of the culture. Proper science reveals biblical creation, not evolution.

Commendations by significant Christian leaders

A Good Christmas Gift for Thinkers

"Carl Wilson's book tells the story of science history in a way that exposes some of the frailties and intentional errors of well known scientific movements. Christians who want to be responsible in their response to modern theories about evolution will be greatly aided by this massive, documented work."

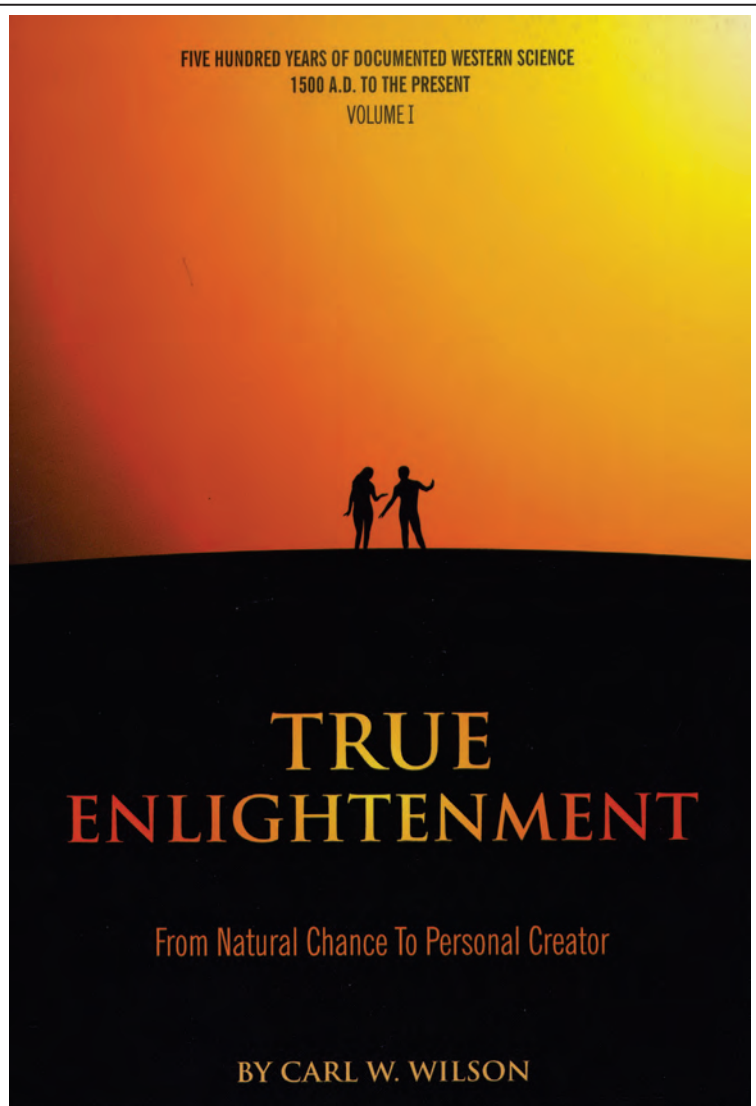
— Dr. Richard L. Pratt Jr., President of Third Millennium Ministries and professor at Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminaries.

"This book really represents the core of our faith—a super job! Carl Wilson has made a major contribution to Christian literature and I pray that God will disseminate it around the world."

— Dr. Howard G. Hendricks, chairman of the Center of Christian Leadership of Dallas Theological Seminary

"I hope True Enlightenment from Natural Chance to Personal Creator will become a standard textbook in colleges, universities, and especially Christian institutions charged with teaching the truth and from a Kingdom world and life view perspective. It is not light reading, but each page will reward your efforts and expand your appreciation for the triune God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. This could be one of the most important books for this time in history when so much biblical truth is being challenged and Christians have a responsibility to give a reason for the hope that they hold dear."

— Charles H. Dunahoo, coordinator of the committee of Christian Education and Publications of the Presbyterian Church in America



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No child deserves to suffer.



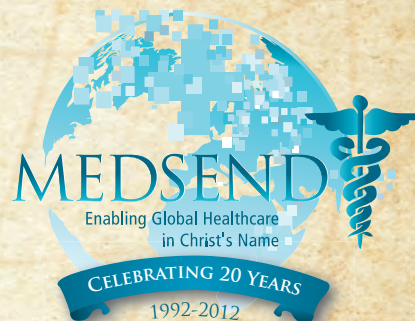
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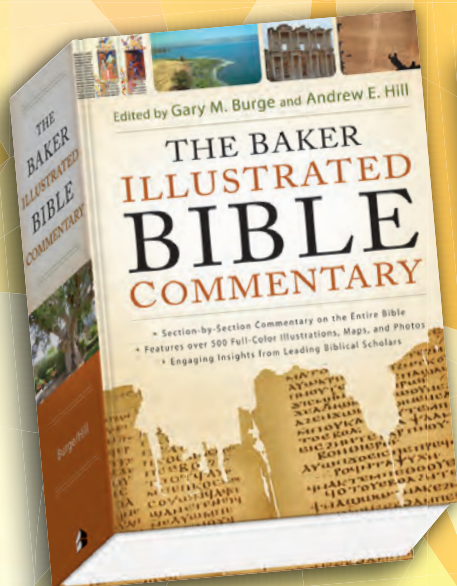
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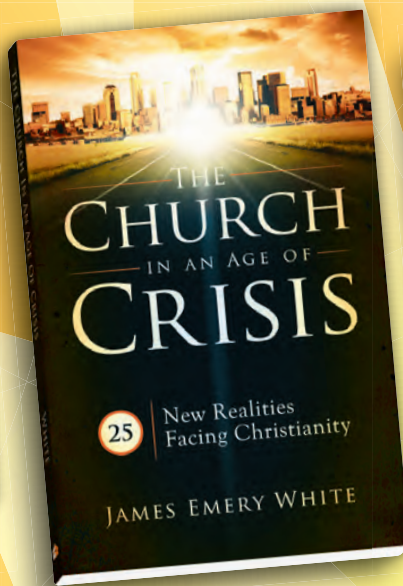
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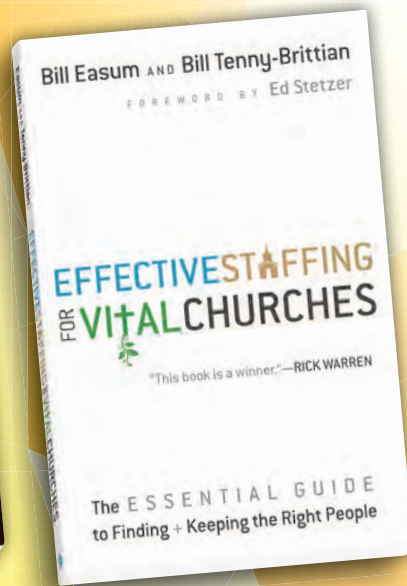
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REPORTING & DISPATCHES FROM THE CHURCH WORLDWIDE

Briefing

SPOTLIGHT: The End of Nominal Protestantism

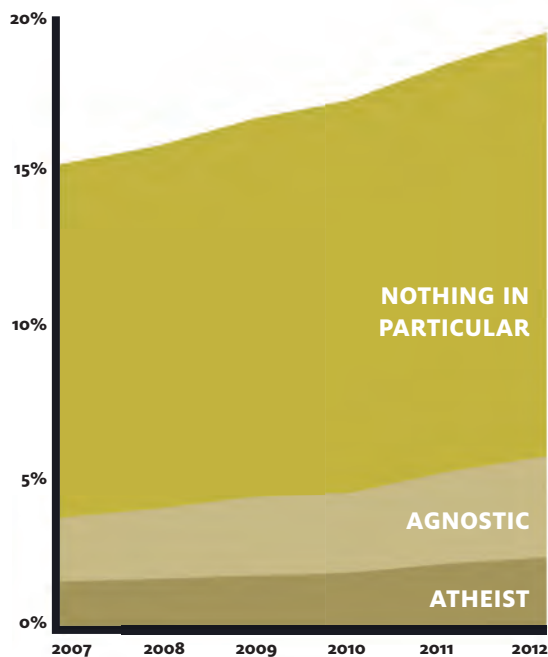
➔ An October poll from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life drew attention to the rise of the religiously unaffiliated—now 1 out of 5 adults and 1 out of 3 adults under 30. Because the survey also found a precipitous fall in Protestant affiliation—the first time it's ever dropped below 50 percent—it looks like bad news. But the decline is almost entirely among people who had identified as Christians culturally. Even among 18- to 29-year-olds, evangelical identity and church attendance are up, according to the General Social Survey.

“The nominals are becoming the ‘nones.’ As the cultural value of identifying as Christian decreases, Christianity is no longer the first choice of many seeking spiritual meaning. But it also means more vibrant congregations.”

~ Ed Stetzer, missiologist and president of LifeWay Research

RISE OF THE 'NONES'

Not all the unaffiliated are unbelievers. Two-thirds believe in God, and 21 percent say they pray daily.



Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life

WHERE THE UNAFFILIATED CAME FROM

While not all “nones” were mainline Protestants, mainline decline strongly correlates with unaffiliated growth.

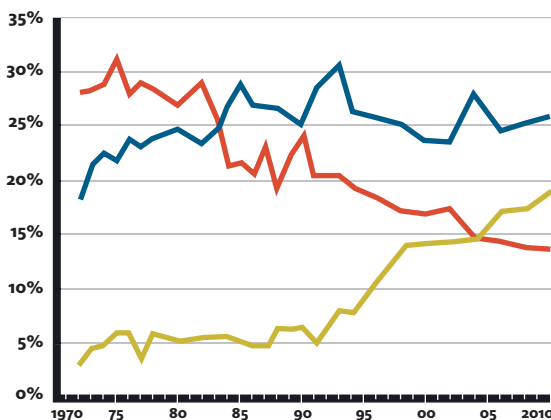


Evangelical

Mainline

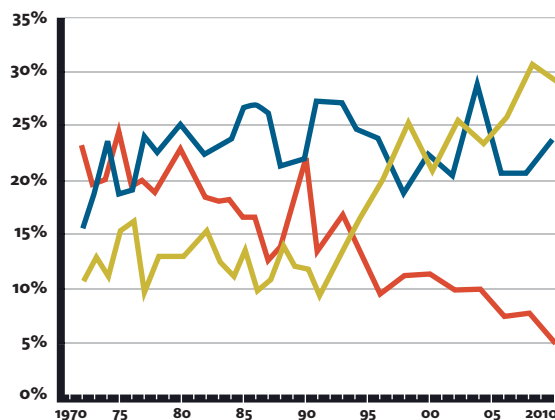
Unaffiliated

General
Social Survey /
Ed Stetzer



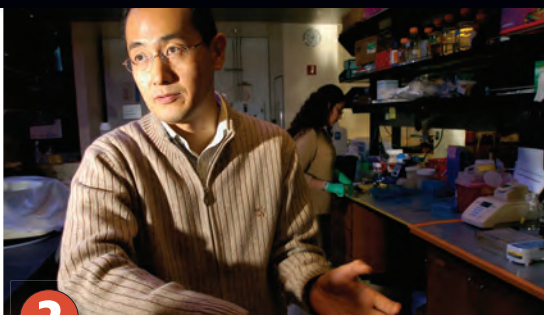
MILLENNIAL HOPE

Among adults under 30, the unaffiliated are growing faster than evangelicals. But evangelicalism is still growing.





1



2



8

GLEANINGS

Important developments in the church and the world.

❶ Sovereign Grace charged with sex abuse

A lawsuit filed in October alleges that leaders at Sovereign Grace Ministries (SGM) covered up sexual abuse committed by church members for more than two decades. The lawsuit alleges founder and president C. J. Mahaney and seven other leaders failed to report incidents of abuse. It also says they tried to “mislead law enforcement into believing the parents had ‘forgiven’ those who preyed on their children.” SGM, a network of Reformed churches in 21 countries, is still dealing with the aftermath of a 2011 internal investigation of Mahaney’s leadership.

TCF to move its belief-based requirement from its constitution to its nonbinding mission statement. TCF refused. InterVarsity faced similar problems at Vanderbilt University earlier this year.

❷ Cubans will soon travel more freely

CUBA Beginning in January, Cubans will be able to travel in and out of their island country without first needing to obtain permission from their government. Authorized Cubans will no longer need an exit visa, which required a letter of invitation from a host in another country, and can travel for up to two years without losing their citizenship rights. The change will allow Christian leaders in Cuba to interact more frequently with church leaders abroad, noted HCJB Global.

❸ Islamists delay Christian inauguration

INDONESIA This fall, the capital of the world’s most-populous Muslim country elected a Christian as its deputy governor. But the Jakarta inauguration of Basuki Tjahaja was delayed 10 days due to protests by Islamists “who want non-Muslims banned from all key positions of responsibility,” AsiaNews reported. Hundreds of members of the Islamic Defense Front rioted in Jakarta’s streets, making good on their earlier promise to protest the election of Tjahaja and of governor Joko Widodo, a moderate Muslim.

❹ Southern Baptists refuse to sell property

LifeWay Christian Resources announced that it will not sell its Glorieta Conference

Center in New Mexico to Olivet University. LifeWay’s decision came after a National Association of Evangelicals-run panel studied Olivet’s theological compatibility with the Southern Baptist Convention’s resources arm. CT earlier reported that reliable sources claim that the spiritual leader and founder of Olivet, David Jang, heads a movement that teaches he is a new Christ; however, it was unclear whether those accusations played any role in the report, which was not made public.

❺ Adventists: Ordaining women a mistake

Leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church said recent decisions by two regional bodies to allow ordained female pastors were “serious mistakes,” and women who were ordained won’t be recognized—at least for now. The decisions by the Maryland-based Columbia Union Conference and the California-based Pacific Union Conference came as the worldwide church body is in the midst of a broad study of the “theology of ordination.” The denomination will discuss the study at its 2015 general conference. Many Adventist female pastors merely hold “commissioned” status, which does not allow them to be ordained; most male pastors hold a “ministerial” credential, which does allow ordination.

❻ Lawmakers legalize abortion—barely

URUGUAY In predominantly Catholic Latin America, where abortion is largely considered a worse crime than rape, laws permitting abortion are gaining ground. Both Uruguay and Argentina’s capital, Buenos Aires, recently voted to approve bills legalizing some forms of abortion. The bills passed legislatures by one-vote margins in each country. Buenos Aires now allows unrestricted abortions in cases of rape or when the mother’s life is

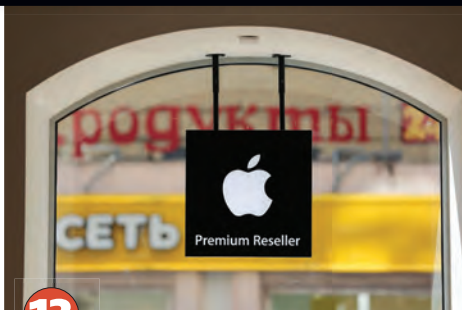
GO FIGURE Discipleship

1 in 5
American churchgoers who disagree that Christians must learn to deny themselves in order to serve Christ.

LifeWay Research



12



13

in danger. Uruguay now allows abortions up to 12 weeks after conception, though only after a five-day waiting period.

9 Pharmacists not required to sell Plan B

Two Christian pharmacists in Illinois have won a long-running legal fight to dispense contraceptives in accordance with their religious beliefs. The state's Fourth District Appellate Court has agreed that the Illinois Health Care Right of Conscience Act protects Glenn Kosiog and Luke Vander Bleek from being required to dispense "morning-after" drugs even in cases of "emergency medical care." However, the court did narrow a lower court's injunction; now, only pharmacists who claim a religious exemption are allowed to deny Plan B to customers.

10 Canada cuts non-Christian chaplains

CANADA The Canadian government announced it will cancel all contracts for nearly 50 part-time prison chaplains—many of whom represent non-Christian religions—in March 2013. The federal prison system will still employ 80 full-time chaplains—79 of whom are Christian. The government said it will use a multifaith model like the one used by the Canadian military, in which full-time chaplains minister to all inmates and coordinate pastoral care for those of minority faiths.

11 Christian cost-sharing must stop

A ministry that enables 50,000 Christians in 49 states to share medical costs has lost a decade-long fight with the Kentucky Department of Insurance. The Bluegrass State has argued since 2002 that Florida-based Medi-Share should be regulated as insurance; in 2010, the Kentucky Supreme Court agreed. Meanwhile, Medi-Share—which argues that

its members engage in charitable activity and publishes disclaimers stating it should not be substituted for an insurance policy—has continued to operate and advertise in the state. But in October, a Franklin County circuit court judge ruled Medi-Share must indeed acquire approval from the Department of Insurance and, until then, post on its website that it is not authorized to operate in Kentucky.

12 Conservative diocese leaves Episcopal Church

Theological differences over homosexuality have prompted four dioceses to secede from the Episcopal Church (TEC) since 2007. In October, one of the largest and longest-remaining conservative bastions, the Diocese of South Carolina, became the fifth. The decision follows disciplinary action taken against the diocese's bishop, Mark Lawrence, whom a TEC disciplinary board recently found guilty of abandoning the denomination and renouncing its rules. TEC voted in July to bless same-sex unions; Lawrence labeled the decision the "false gospel of indiscriminate inclusivity," but refused to leave. However, he also loosened denominational legal claims on parish properties.

13 Activists say Apple logo promotes original sin

RUSSIA Some conservative Christians in Russia are using crosses to cover up Apple's iconic "bitten apple" logo on products and advertisements. Several groups of Orthodox activists, including priests, called the logo "anti-Christian and insulting [to] their belief," according to the Interfax news agency. The campaign could cause problems for Apple sales; the predominantly Orthodox nation's parliament is weighing a blasphemy ban (in the wake of protests against anti-Islam film *Innocence of Muslims*) that would allow lawsuits for insults to religion.

QUOTATION MARKS

"The general public would be subjected to this unwanted intrusion of the petitioners' religious beliefs."

Philip Stranieri, a New York civil court judge, denying a Nigerian American couple's request to change their last name from Nwadiuko to ChristIsKing. Stranieri also said it was "troubling" that the couple changed the name of "impressionable, dependent minors" (their children) to Rejoice and JesusIsLord.

ReligionClause

"We could not convince [Europe and the United States]. . . I know this will never happen."

Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, secretary general of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, on reports that the group of 57 nations would resume its United Nations campaign for a global blasphemy ban.

Reuters

"As Christ has instituted the Lord's Supper in two sacramental actions, the communicants are to eat the bread and drink the cup in separate actions."

The Presbyterian Church of America's Blue Ridge Presbytery, in a 26-24-1 vote to ban Communion by intinction.

The Aquila Report

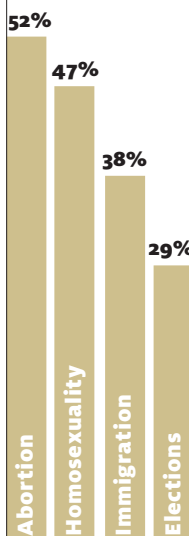
"I did not have any idea that it is seen as wrong in Christian circles to be engaged prior to being divorced even though separated."

Dinesh D'Souza, Christian apologist, anti-Obama filmmaker, and president (until his October 18 resignation) of The King's College. D'Souza denied published reports that he was having an affair with his fiancée while still legally married.

Christianity Today Online

GO FIGURE Church Life

Latino evangelicals who say their clergy talk about:



Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life



CHURCH LIFE NIGERIA

Do Pilgrims Progress?

Government reviews subsidized religious trips.

By Sunday Oguntola in Lagos

Modern-day pilgrimage made world headlines this fall when Saudi Arabia deported more than 1,000 Nigerian Muslim women for attending the annual Hajj without male chaperones.

Nigeria has sponsored its citizens to undertake the religious ritual—required once in a lifetime by Islam if health and money allow—since its independence in 1960. This year, it sent nearly 90,000 pilgrims. But overshadowed is the fact that the oil-rich West African country also sponsors Christian citizens on their own pilgrimages.

An estimated 30,000 Christians visited Israel, Rome, Greece, and Egypt between October and December. (While the government sponsored many of the trips, churches and nonprofits backed others.) Thanks to increased awareness and funding, this number has skyrocketed in recent years—tripling since

2010 and up from 2,000 a decade ago. Until last year, the government had only sponsored Christians' trips to Jerusalem; the city is still the preferred destination for 80 percent of the travelers.

Many Christians in Africa's most populous nation take huge pride in being pilgrims, adding the title Jerusalem Pilgrim, or the initials JP, to their names.

The Nigerian government sponsors pilgrims on the premise that they experience spiritual rebirths and return better Christians and better citizens, said John Opara, executive secretary of the governmental Nigerian Christian Pilgrim Commission (NCPC). "Pilgrimage is serious business, and not a travel jaunt as envisaged in some quarters."

But now church and government officials are working to assess whether pilgrimage actually delivers on this promised return on investment. To answer the question, the commission will subject pilgrims to a



Spiritual Sojourns: Nigerian pilgrimages to the Church of the Nativity and other Christian sites in Israel, Rome, Greece, and Egypt have tripled to 30,000 in recent years. Many are sponsored by the government.

series of tests and gather testimonials to measure improvements in character and spirituality, Opara said.

"There will also be postpilgrimage forums where they can relate life-changing experiences and encounters as well as how they have become better as citizens," he said.

Opara hopes the results of this assessment will encourage the government to continue its sponsorships.

But church leaders are themselves divided on the effect of such pilgrimages.

"The fact that someone has attended does not make him a better Christian than someone who has not been there," said Toyin Kehinde, pastor of Lagos's Agape Generation International Church. "There is no specific Holy Land with the advent of Jesus. Wherever two or three are gathered is a holy land."

Dennis Inyang, senior pastor of Sure Word Assembly Lagos, agrees. "It will make you a more informed Christian—deepening your understanding of the Bible—but never a better Christian," he said.

But Magnus Atilade, president of the Gospel Baptist Conference of Nigeria and Overseas, argues pilgrims never return the same.

"[Pilgrimage] strengthens one's faith and enriches one's encounter with God," he said. "You cannot but emerge from the experience completely awed and transformed."

Asoliye Douglas-West, parish priest of Lagos's St. Peter's Anglican Church, agrees. "You leave feeling reinvigorated and more committed to God, having seen the physical sites where Jesus operated," he said. "It could mark a turning point in one's . . . walk with God."

For many Nigerians in the past, such trips have been life-changing in another way: They've skipped the flight home and illegally emigrated. The NCPC has successfully curtailed much of such activity by enacting age thresholds (30 years old for Israel, 50 years for Rome) and strict economic and personal checks.

GO FIGURE Politics

17%
Americans who think Barack Obama is a Muslim.

12%
Americans who thought this in 2008.

Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life

HIGHER EDUCATION

'A Christian College. Period.'

The King's College reconsiders its politics.

By Melissa Steffan

The King's College (TKC) raised eyebrows in Christian higher education circles when it selected Dinesh D'Souza as its president in 2010. The author and pundit had little administrative experience, but TKC saw his potential to raise the school's profile (and funds).

Two years later, D'Souza—now best known for two books and a film criticizing the presidency of Barack Obama—resigned. This followed reports of his appearance with a new fiancée while still legally married to his wife of 20 years.

The day of the resignation, one TKC student asked interim president Andy Mills if the college would distinguish itself from D'Souza's approach to politics.

"[TKC] is a Christian college. Period," Mills said. He reiterated the point in an interview with CT. "We are reaffirming the reason students came here. Students come here for the [Christian] mission and vision."

In the presidential search that led to D'Souza's hiring, TKC published a list of "true ideas" that distinguish King's within . . . higher education," including "biblical competition" and the right to "seek prosperity and risk bankruptcy." TKC no longer lists these on its website.

TKC was not the only Christian school to include economic and political theory among its core commitments. But changes have been afoot at similar schools that have positioned themselves as conservative in more than just theology.

Gene Edward Veith, provost at Patrick Henry College, says his school's conservatism has become "more sophisticated" since its founding in 1998. What he described

as a "meltdown" in conflict between faculty and administrators six years ago "was mainly a matter of the institution maturing and going through some disillusionment struggles," he said. "I see that happening across the board. Christian activists who get involved with politics soon find that things are not so simple as getting Christians elected."

Meanwhile, Colorado Christian University includes in its strategic objectives support of "traditional family values" and "sanctity of life," but also "limited government," "free markets," and "original intent of the Constitution." But spokesman Ron Benton says the school wants "to be known as a Christian university first and foremost."

Many more Christian schools used to have explicit ties with cultural and political conservatism, says Allen Guelzo, professor of history at Gettysburg College. But some have tried to "return to center."

"There are many pressures against being known as a conservative institution," he said.

But Guelzo says it is good news if TKC students truly want more doctrine instead of politics. "Doctrinal integrity is number one," he said. "There will be issues that lead politically from that."

Mills agrees. "We've got to be careful not to set up a false dichotomy between the idea of being faith-based on the one hand and the idea of engagement on the other," he said. "I don't think we want to set the two against each other."

But the D'Souza incident serves as a warning for administrators at other Christian colleges, said David Dockery, president of Union University and author of *The Future of Christian Higher Education*.

"We have to be reminded that our calling is to serve the kingdom of God and the church through Christian higher education, first and foremost," he said. "When the focus is only in the cultural sphere, we run the risk of missing our calling." ☪

MINISTRY

Exodus from Exodus

Ex-gay coalition fragments over focus.

By Weston Gentry

When California became the first state to ban reparative therapy for minors this fall, the public scrutiny of the treatment drew attention to Exodus International, the nation's largest ex-gay ministry. But Exodus had already stopped promoting the practice, saying it was largely ineffective.

Exodus's shift on reparative therapy has been only one of several therapeutic and theological controversies that divided the ministry this year. Top leaders and dozens of affiliate ministries have defected from the 37-year-old umbrella ministry as it has attempted to reshape its mission and public image.

Board member John Warren, a 53-year-old Florida banker who publicly defended Exodus president Alan Chambers in the face of this summer's criticism, reversed course and parted ways with the Orlando, Florida, ministry in September. Warren said he became uncomfortable with the "ambiguous messaging" on sexual identity and salvation that Chambers was disseminating in both secular and Christian contexts.

Warren described Chambers's series of talk show appearances, such as September interviews with the Oprah Winfrey Network's Lisa Ling and Salem Communications' Janet Mefferd, as "death by a thousand cuts" for him.

"That messaging didn't say to me that we [Exodus] clearly believe in the gospel, and I couldn't support that," he said. "I needed to resign."

Warren wasn't alone. Days before, executive vice president Jeff Buchanan resigned after four years

[continued on 18]

PASSAGES



**Retiring
Ron Sider**

Founder and president of Evangelicals for Social Action, effective June 2013.

His 1977 book *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* invigorated the evangelical social justice movement.



**Elected
Craig Barnes**

As the seventh president of Princeton Theological Seminary, Barnes, currently pastor of Shadyside Presbyterian in Pittsburgh, will start January 1.



**Died
Frank Moore Cross**

Emeritus professor of Hebrew at Harvard University renowned for interpreting the Dead Sea Scrolls, on October 17. He was 91.

Briefing [from 17]

of service. They joined a steady stream of affiliates.

The largest of Exodus's 250-plus affiliate ministries, Kansas City, Missouri-based Desert Stream Ministries (DSM), left in April after three decades of partnership. DSM leader Andrew Comiskey said Exodus was once a support venue for a plurality of approaches toward same-sex attraction, but now is nothing more than the "mouthpiece of a particular man."

In response, Comiskey and Exodus cofounder Frank Worthen (among others) established an alternative organization called the Restored Hope Network (RHN), which gathered for its first conference in September.

"We want this to be about ministry again at a very basic level," said Comiskey. "Not about sound bites, press conferences, and drama TV."

RHN began to catalyze after Chambers disavowed reparative therapy at the annual Gay Christian Network conference last January. Chambers put more space between Exodus and the practice in a June interview with *The Atlantic*.

As a result, many members of the

Exodus old guard felt ostracized. Oklahoma City-based First Stone Ministries and Outpost Ministries in St. Paul, Minnesota, whose relationships with Exodus both spanned five decades, followed DSM and cut ties.

While Chambers said he's grieved that so many of his long-time partners have left, he believes that sharpening Exodus's focus was long overdue. Moreover, he doesn't believe the mission of Exodus has fundamentally changed.

"We're here to pursue holiness and encourage people in the midst of trials," he said. "That is what Exodus has always been about."

In Chambers's estimation, the Exodus metamorphosis has simply meant shifting from a therapy-centric model to one focused on discipleship. The transition has earned him more than a few heated theological interactions, especially over his repeated statements that sinful behavior does not affect or interrupt one's relationship with Jesus. But it has also won him some defenders within the Christian counseling community.

"Openly rejecting change as an objective [in sexual orientation therapy] is more in keeping with the evidence," said Warren Throckmorton, a Grove City College professor

and outspoken critic of reparative therapy. "I don't think it does any violence to any cardinal doctrines of [evangelical] faith."

Regent University professor Mark Yarhouse is also optimistic about Exodus's trajectory, and cautions against false dichotomies.

"There's a difference between distancing yourself from a particular model . . . and saying, 'We don't believe people can experience meaningful change,'" he said. "I don't hear Alan saying the latter."

Yarhouse and Wheaton College provost Stanton Jones studied almost 100 Exodus members undergoing reparative therapy. Their report, published in 2007, found that only 15 percent experienced "conversion" to heterosexuality.

Jones said he hesitantly supports Exodus's changes if the ministry is simply loosening its ties to change-focused therapy and not arriving at a "point of pessimism" about all forms of reparative treatment.

"My research supports the idea that some people do experience clinically meaningful change," he said. "And I think the anecdotes of personal change, like Alan's own life, suggest that experientially meaningful change can happen." ➤

GO FIGURE Spirituality

18%
Americans who describe themselves as spiritual but not religious.

12%
Evangelicals who describe themselves this way.

Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life

UNDER DISCUSSION Topics in the current debate.

compiled by Ruth Moon

Should churches discourage belief in Santa Claus?

YES

"The key word is belief. Emulating Saint Nick is awesome, but I have problems with parents duping their children into believing that Santa exists. A church could acknowledge in a family context the historical person of St. Nicholas. But the figure the culture has created does not belong in church."

SCOTTIE MAY
professor, Wheaton College

"The true meaning of Christmas is sacred. No matter their choices, when it comes to Santa and other traditions, families should make it their main goal to tie every practice to the true meaning of Christmas."

LEON WIRTH
executive director of parenting and youth, Focus on the Family

"The true story of St. Nicholas is about a life lived radically for Jesus. Santa teaches us how to give with joy and to receive gifts with gladness. Don't discourage belief in Santa; instead, spend time encouraging people to put their belief in God."

MICHAEL CHANLEY
executive director, International Network of Children's Ministry

"Churches should be in the business of encouraging belief in Jesus, not micromanaging which bits of folklore parents choose to include in their family holidays. Santa gives us opportunities to show our kids the love Jesus brought into this world."

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

"Have Santa join the children to celebrate the birth of Jesus, since it is *Santa's Favorite Story* (by Hisako Aoki). The more we invite into the story, the less we will have to worry about the competition. All can bring their gifts to the King—even Santa."

DENNIS OKHOLM
professor, Azusa Pacific University

"The notion of getting back to a 'pure Christmas' is misfounded; the holiday was a hodgepodge from the beginning. We should take those fun Santa traditions and link them back to St. Nicholas rather than getting rid of the fun part of Christmas and stick with the somber part."

PHIL VISCHER
creator, *VeggieTales* and *What's in the Bible?*

NO

Free Surgery: In Kisumu, a Kenyan man awaits his counseling appointment. Behind him a large poster promotes voluntary circumcision. Health officials plan to perform 7,000 free circumcisions per month.



MISSIONS KENYA

The Circumcision Crusade

African church leaders join effort to circumcise 20 million adult men in fight against HIV. By Moses Wasamu in Nairobi, Kenya

F

or the past 15 years, George Karambuka, a Pentecostal pastor and health worker, has fought against HIV/AIDS.

Like many Kenyan church leaders, Karambuka believed premarital abstinence and marital fidelity were the key to preventing new infections.

But Karambuka, fellow African pastors, and other religious leaders have recently joined a new, controversial effort to stem the deadly virus: circumcising adult African men, by the tens of millions. About 70 percent of men in Africa are already circumcised. So an estimated 20 million uncircumcised adult men, many of them living in sub-Saharan Africa, could potentially benefit from this surgery.

Though skeptics remain, recent research indicates that circumcision helps prevent the transmission of HIV from women to men. Edward C. Green, the renowned HIV/AIDS researcher and author of *Broken Promises: How the AIDS Establishment Has Betrayed the Developing World*, is one champion of voluntary medical male circumcision. In an interview, Green said, "From a purely public health standpoint circumcision is beneficial, especially in southern Africa where infection rates are the highest.

"We talk about a perfect storm of factors. There are more men and women having multiple and concurrent sex partners in southern Africa than any other place in the world. You have high rates of

uncircumcised men, and a couple other factors that together make the perfect storm for high HIV rates."

Green has encouraged religious leaders to support adult male circumcision. "The evidence is so strong and the church is so powerful. It's essential. If more than half of the male population of a country becomes circumcised, and certainly if it went up to closer to 80 or 90 percent, we would see the infection rates go way down. Having the church behind it would be great."

JESUS WAS CIRCUMCISED

Churches have significantly stepped up their efforts to fight HIV/AIDS. Karambuka had an early encounter with the AIDS epidemic that changed his life. In 1995,

Karambuka and his wife were tested less than two years after they married. He was negative, but she tested positive for HIV.

"We were dumbfounded. How did she get the virus, yet I was the first man she slept with all her life, and I was still negative? We did not know how to break the news to friends and relatives.

"We were counseled on how to cope. We continued to live together and even have relations. We had our second child, a baby boy." Two years later, his wife died due to complications from AIDS. The cause of her infection was never determined.

Karambuka then immersed himself in HIV/AIDS ministry. When he first began speaking out about the HIV/AIDS epidemic in 1998, some in the church shunned him. Others believed he was HIV positive himself. But slowly families sought him out for help in caring for their infected parents and orphaned children. Kenya alone has 1.2 million AIDS orphans.

In time, Karambuka remarried, and his two sons from his first wife are virus-free today. All are active in HIV/AIDS outreach. "One of my greatest moments in life," he said, "is when I see people coming for HIV tests, and those who are found positive adhere to the prescribed treatment, embracing behavior change and living positively." His ministry has three goals:

- Help individuals see their need for HIV testing, treatment, and counseling;
- Integrate the gospel into all levels of care;
- Train Christian leaders to care holistically and through the church.

Karambuka is a leader at the Loco Health Center in Nairobi, where voluntary circumcisions take place nearly every weekday. On average, 20 procedures are performed each day. But that number frequently surges much higher for the

Annette

I AM PROUD I HAVE A CIRCUMCISED HUSBAND BECAUSE WE HAVE LESS CHANCES OF GETTING HIV.

Stand Proud. Get Circumcised.

For more information about Safe Male Circumcision visit the nearest health facility where you see the SMC sign or call the National Health Hotline on 031 2 500 600 or 0800-200 600 OR Type SMC (leave a space) your question and send to 8196.

Ministry of Health Advisory: Even with circumcision, having sex without condoms puts you at great risk of contracting HIV/AIDS.

15-minute surgery.

The steady stream of patients is partly due to Christian organizations now referring their members to Loco and similar clinics for circumcision. Referrals are coming from Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians, independent Pentecostals, and Zinduka Afrika, an organization linked with a megachurch in Nairobi. Some 500 young men from the Presbyterian Church of East Africa signed up for circumcisions late this fall.

One way to convince men to agree to the procedure, said Green, is to point out that Jesus as a Jew was circumcised. Also, health officers inform uncircumcised men that their spouses would now have a lower risk for cervical cancer.

SCALING UP

Several years ago, three randomized clinical trials in Africa revealed for the first

time that male circumcision reduced female to male infections by about 60 percent. In one study in South Africa in 2006, the results were so startling that researchers halted the trial and immediately offered circumcision to the so-called control group.

In 2007, the World Health Organization and the UNAIDS agency issued official recommendations, saying, "The efficacy of male circumcision in reducing female to male HIV transmission has now been proved beyond reasonable doubt." According to UN projections, if 20 million men aged 15–49 are circumcised by 2015 in 14 target nations, there would be 3.4 million fewer HIV infections by 2025.

After these findings, dozens of health agencies added male circumcision to the arsenal of treatment and prevention, including condoms, antiretroviral drugs, voluntary testing, and support for faith-based prevention programs focused on

sexual abstinence and marital fidelity.

In January 2008, Kenya officially published policy guidelines on male circumcision. A phased rollout of the national program began in November 2008. The goals were to increase the proportion of 15- to 49-year-old Kenyan males who are circumcised from 84 percent to 94 percent by 2013. Four U.S.-based organizations signed on: the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief; the U.S. Agency for International Development; the independent Family Health International, a North Carolina nonprofit originally involved in contraceptive research; and the Gates Foundation.

Male circumcision is offered as part of a package rather than just a surgical procedure. This minimum package includes HIV counseling and testing, treatment for other sexually transmitted diseases, provision of condoms, and counseling on risk reduction and safer sex.

From the faith sector, the Catholic Medical Mission Board has been one of the largest service providers in Kenya. In addition to providing sterile, safe, medical surgeries for adolescent males, the initiative incorporates HIV/AIDS and life skills education for parents and siblings, counseling and testing, and ongoing mentorship for young men.

Karambuka told CT that most Kenyan evangelicals are willing to work with Catholics, government agencies, and other groups from overseas to cope with the large number of families devastated by HIV/AIDS.

In Kenya, a nation of 43 million, 1.5 million people live with HIV. That's the fourth

think these programs do more harm than good.

Matthew Okeyo of the African Inland Church and the chief executive of AIC Child Care Kenya said the campaign's intention is good, but the implementation is not helping. "Male circumcision as a means to fight HIV is, to me, practically a fallacy, and it is just a matter of time before we see the side effects of it," Okeyo said.

He added, "Sex is a powerful thing because it is not just a good feeling, but it involves the mind, soul, and body. So the fact that people are told that circumcision will reduce the infection and enhance performance has done disservice to the

According to UN projections, if 20 million men aged 15–49 are circumcised by 2015 in 14 target nations, there would be 3.4 million fewer HIV infections by 2025.

largest case load among all nations. By comparison, the United States, a nation of 311 million, has 1.2 million people with HIV.

Church leaders teach those who are already infected how to live with their situation. When pastors preach sexual abstinence, that message may work for some but not for others. Karambuka believes such individuals should be told how to protect themselves. He said that even as the church discourages promiscuity, it should be practical. "We should remember that before the kingdom of God finally comes, we are still living in this world," he said.

As a result of efforts in his own church, which include drugs and basic health care, some people with HIV have regained their health, married, and even given birth to virus-free children.

But he says that one of the most significant changes has been that the church has accepted those living with HIV, and their families. "They have cared and shown them love without judging them," he said.

MORE HARM THAN GOOD?

Amid the enthusiasm for circumcision, some Bible scholars and church leaders

campaign." He said he knows men who changed their behavior before they were circumcised. "But now they are back to their careless lifestyle because they feel safe. They say that they have now sharpened themselves."

Okeyo said he feels the campaign's supporters did not take into consideration all of the social forces at work in the persistent spread of HIV. He said the church should focus on what the Bible teaches and not offer alternatives.

"We need to teach the truth about sexuality and its beauty," he said. "The problem we have is that we tend to believe that people cannot change, so we go for the easy option."

Martin Wesonga, academic dean at the Bishop Hannington Institute of Theology and Development in Mombasa, Kenya, agrees with Okeyo. Drawing from the New Testament, he said that Paul argues that people need to "circumcise" their hearts.

"Christianity does not condemn the uncircumcised since it is about the heart, not works. Salvation is by faith. To my understanding, circumcision does not stop the spread of HIV. It is morality of the heart, which is brought out by Jesus

Christ, that can help stop the spread of HIV/AIDS."

TIME IS SHORT

Kenya is among a handful of nations with a generalized HIV epidemic. This means the virus, predominantly spread in Africa through heterosexual contact, is well established in all sectors of society.

New field research reveals that members of Kenya's Christian community may be responding to HIV/AIDS prevention programs better than the general population. According to a 2007 survey, religious men and women have lower rates of infection. Among Roman Catholics, the prevalence rate was 5.4 percent; among Protestants, 5.7 percent; and among other Christian groups, 5.5 percent.

The same survey revealed that the prevalence rate among adult Kenyans aged 15 to 64 was 7.1 percent. The report revealed that the prevalence was higher among uncircumcised men (13.2 percent) than among circumcised men (3.9 percent). Peak HIV prevalence among uncircumcised men was among those men aged 30–39 (29.7 percent).

Many regional variations exist. Nyanza Province in western Kenya has the lowest prevalence of male circumcision (47 percent) and the highest HIV rate (15.3 percent). Nyanza is the first province to implement the male circumcision program. Its goal is to increase the proportion of circumcised males in the target age bracket from 47 percent to 80 percent by 2013. This translates into 84,000 circumcisions a year.

In light of this intensive new program, George Karambuka and his family recently expanded their outreach beyond Nairobi. They are bringing with them one of their most meaningful new family traditions: Every January, they go together for an HIV test in memory of his late wife and his children's mother. Karambuka said this gesture makes visible the African saying about HIV: "All are not infected, but all are affected." 

Moses Wasamu, based in Nairobi, Kenya, is associate editor of *Christian Times*, Juba, South Sudan. Additional reporting by CT news intern Bryn Sandberg.



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[COVER STORY]

INCREDIBLE



By Mark Galli

JOURNEYS

Does it matter that people who have had near-heaven experiences are confused theologically, so long as good news is preached?



M

ARY NEAL WAS white-water rafting in Chile with her husband and some friends when she got pinned under a waterfall. She tried to raise her head out of the water to get some air, but the surging water was so powerful, she says, “I quickly realized I was not in control of my future.”

The current twisted her body violently and began pulling her out of her kayak. At the same time, she says, “I felt as though my soul was slowly peeling itself away from my body.” Just as her body was freed from the kayak, she felt a “pop”: “It felt as if I had finally shaken off my heavy outer layer, freeing my soul.”

Neal says that when her soul broke through the surface of the water, she was met by some 20 human spirits. Sent by God, they greeted her with “the most overwhelming joy I have ever experienced.” They had “formed shapes,” but not with the distinct edges of physical bodies, blurred because each was “dazzling and radiant.” They did not speak using mouths, she says, but simultaneously communicated their thoughts and emotions to one another.

Mostly Neal experienced a “feeling of absolute love” as the spiritual beings hugged her and danced with her. She was now in “God’s world,” she says, where everything “is exponentially more colorful and intense. It was as though I were experiencing an explosion of love and joy in their absolute and unadulterated essence.

“The intensity, depth, and purity of these feelings and sensations were far greater than I could ever describe with words.”

Before she began the journey with her new companions, she looked at her earthly companions trying to revive her body. They looked “so terribly sad and vulnerable” as they begged her body to take a breath.

She and the human spirits soon came to “a great and brilliant hall . . . radiating a brilliance of colors and beauty.” She felt her soul pulled toward the entry. As she approached, she says, “I physically absorbed its radiance and felt the pure, complete, and utterly unconditional absolute love that emanated from the hall. It was the most beautiful and alluring

thing I had ever seen or experienced.”

She knew with “profound certainty” that this was “the last branch point of life. . . . The place where each of us is given an opportunity to review our lives and our choices, and where we are each given a final opportunity to choose God or turn away—for eternity.”

Though she was filled with the longing to be “reunited with God,” her spiritual companions told her that it was not time for her to enter the hall; she had not completed her time on earth. This filled Neal with deep sadness and she protested, but “we shared our sorrow as they returned me to the river bank,” where, she says, “I was reunited with my body.”

Such was the experience of the orthopedic surgeon from Wyoming, as told in *To Heaven and Back: A Doctor’s Extraordinary Account of Her Death, Heaven, Angels, and Life Again* (WaterBrook Press). As of this writing, Neal’s book has sat on *The New York Times* best-seller list for 20 weeks.

When it comes to books about visiting heaven, it is not



alone. *Heaven Is for Real: A Little Boy's Astounding Story of His Trip to Heaven and Back*, by Todd Burpo (Thomas Nelson), has been on the best-seller list for nearly two years. Don Piper's *90 Minutes in Heaven* (Revell) began its epic sales adventure in 2004, with some 5 million copies sold to date. These three books are by evangelical Christians, but religious pluralists also report such experiences. Eben Alexander's *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife* (Simon & Schuster) hit bookstores in late October, eliciting a cover story from *Newsweek* earlier that month.

This is not the only time in recent history when near-death experiences have fascinated the public. Earlier attempts to understand the phenomenon include Raymond A. Moody Jr.'s 1975 classic *Life After Life*, for which he interviewed in

of *Near-Death Experience in Medieval and Modern Times*, has noted, "conservative Christians" have seen these books "as a Satanic trick, designed to lull us into a false sense of security about the future life . . . to sell us a secular . . . bill of goods about salvation without Christ." When people do encounter Christ in their experiences, evangelicals have tended to examine this Christ closely. And they usually conclude, as did Christian philosopher Douglas Groothuis in the pages of this magazine in 1995 about Eadie's book, that the Jesus Christ portrayed by her is "not the same one the New Testament attests"—and therefore must be false.

NEUROSCIENCE SKEPTICISM

Among Christian theologians, the skepticism has been consistently severe. With only a few exceptions (Zaleski, for example; see her *The Life of the World to Come* especially), they have largely ignored or repudiated such experiences. Some consider the whole thing a childish interest, a narcissistic preoccupation that distracts people from the church's mission in a hurting world. Others think that if true, such experiences would make

Every few years, such books have been a regular publishing phenomenon. But the recent spate of afterlife books is new in two respects: they feature visits to heaven, and in increasing numbers, they are written by orthodox Christians.

depth 50 people who claimed to have experienced "near death." In 1980, psychologist Kenneth Ring published *Life at Death*, which studied the phenomenon as objectively as possible. As far as first-person accounts, the 1990s saw books like Betty J. Eadie's *Embraced by the Light* and Dannon Brinkley's *Saved by the Light*. So every few years since the 1970s, such books have been a regular publishing phenomenon. But the recent spate of afterlife books is new in two respects: they feature visits to heaven, not just tunnels of light (thus my reason for using the term "near-heaven experience" throughout this article). And in increasing numbers, they are written by orthodox Christians.

This is a remarkable shift. Up until Piper's book, most evangelicals had been suspicious of near-death experiences. As theologian Carol Zaleski, author of *Otherworld Journeys: Accounts*

the resurrection of Jesus superfluous, since as the titles of the books seem to argue, these experiences are what assure us that "heaven is for real." As Notre Dame of Maryland University philosopher Stephen Vicchio says, "[T]he empty tomb for . . . [Raymond] Moody is superfluous if not redundant. There is no need for Easter if we are immortal."

Those who try to integrate the findings of neuroscience with Christian theology believe they have even more reason for suspicion. Some, such as Fuller Theological Seminary's Nancey Murphy, have concluded that neuroscience proves we have

Heaven Sweet Home: After her powerful near-heaven experience 13 years ago, Mary Neal told only a few people about it. She told CNN that one reason she delayed making her story public sooner was her concern about her young children: She didn't want them to think she was ready to desert them. But she says she felt so much love during her experience, she didn't want to come back, because where she was "truly felt like home."



no soul. In her *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?* she defends a Christian version of physicalism, saying that “we are our bodies—there is no additional metaphysical element such as a mind or soul or spirit.” As a Christian, she is no materialist, and naturally believes in “the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting,” as the creed puts it. But in the end, there is no dualism of body and soul for Murphy and a few other theologians. So any claims of a “soul” escaping the body to travel to heaven, as in the case of Neal, are dismissed.

Since we’ve been able to locate where in the brain spiritual experiences are enjoyed, many neuroscientific theologians conclude, these experiences are merely electrical and chemical reactions as the brain tries to deal with impending death.

This argument is not convincing to everyone. And it’s particularly interesting that Alexander, the neurosurgeon who had a near-death experience (NDE), argues vigorously for a new kind of body-soul dualism. He was a materialist before his experience, but now is a vigorous apologist for the existence of a spiritual world. In an appendix to his book, he explains why he rejects nine purely neuroscientific hypotheses regarding NDEs, doing so in technical terms and concepts meaningful (I trust) to those in that intellectual stratosphere.

It’s not hard to grasp that people experience these spiritual realities in certain parts of the brain. We also know that, given the right instruments—drugs or electrical probes, for example—scientists can stimulate parts of the brain that cause the subject to have something not unlike a spiritual experience. But does this suggest that spiritual experiences are *merely* physical responses in the brain?

Not necessarily. It could simply mean that God uses certain parts of our brains to communicate spiritual realities.

Does it suggest that an induced spiritual experience is the same as one caused by an outside spiritual entity?

Again, not necessarily. When I make love with my wife, some parts of my brain are deeply engaged in this extraordinary erotic experience. Then again, I also know that if I look at pornography, those very same centers of the brain are activated. It’s also true that a neuroscientist could artificially stimulate that part of the brain while I lie on a table in a hospital, so that I again would experience sexual passions. But I don’t know by what calculus one could say these three experiences are the same simply because the same parts of the brain were stimulated, or that the experience of making love to my wife is *merely*



Publishing Phenom: Katie Couric (left) interviews Colton, Sonja, and Todd Burpo on *Katie*. The father's book about his son's experience, *Heaven Is for Real*, has nearly 1 million copies in print (with another 1 million sold as ebooks). Matt Baugher, senior vice president for publisher Thomas Nelson, said the book is “the highest-selling trade book in the history of Thomas Nelson.”

something happening in my brain.

To be fair: Christians have known for a very long time that one can have experiences that seem spiritual but are just abnormalities of the body. Spiritual directors are alert to diet, sleep, and adrenalin—to name three factors—that can lead to experiences

that seem spiritual but are not. We call it the discernment of spirits.

So there seems to be no definitive scientific grounds for outright dismissal of near-heaven experiences. But given the church's experience, there's no reason to take each one at face value either.

RELIABLE WITNESSES

One reason this writer is disposed to believe many of these stories, at least initially, is because they fit with what I as a historian have come to trust as real and true.

I was asked a few years ago to moderate a panel in which Don “90 Minutes in Heaven” Piper was to participate. After speaking with him before and after the session, and hearing him explain his near-heaven experience during the panel, I was struck with this thought: *Piper is a reliable, trustworthy witness.*

I have been a student of history since my undergrad days, and was editor of *Christian History* magazine for a time. One significant source of evidence for historians is personal testimony—people who have witnessed a historical event. Historians comb through these testimonies to help us understand what really happened. Naturally, not all testimonies can be trusted, so historians have to weigh their reliability. One way to decide whether an eyewitness testimony is to be trusted is to examine how the eyewitness talks about other things, how they comport themselves in life, and how their contemporaries view their character. If the eyewitness is shown to be a habitual liar or not in his right mind, historians won't grant much credence

to his account. If the person seems otherwise trustworthy, mature, and wise, historians tend to trust the person's testimony as coming from a reliable witness.

Piper struck me as a reliable witness. As a Christian who believes there is more to this existence than the material, I do not dismiss out of hand the possibility of someone having an extraordinary heavenly experience. All manner of miracles have and continue to happen in our world. But a lot depends on the trustworthiness of the individual involved. And Piper simply had the look and sound of sanity, of someone who was telling the truth, whose word was his bond. If he said he had visited something like heaven, I would give him the benefit of the doubt.

Still, many Christians balk. A 1991 Gallup poll concluded that 13 million Americans (about 5 percent) have had such experiences, but the experiences are varied. While a large number follow the classic pattern articulated first by Moody (traveling through a tunnel toward a brilliant light, for example), many do not. Some see something resembling pearly gates, others open fields of flowers. Some hear music, others don't. Some see beings in human form, others see emanations of light.

Skeptics also point out how culturally and religiously unique these experiences are. Some people say they met Jesus, others God, others Vishnu, and so on. At points, traditional Christian orthodoxy is challenged in the experience. For example, Neal

really have no choice but to try to describe what happened in the language of their time and culture, and it is no wonder that so many of the descriptions seem to be at odds.

As for the confused theology, we have to remember that those who experience these things are not theologians. We are not required to accept every one of their insights as dogmatic statements of received doctrine. What they experienced is, at best, the anteroom to heaven. We have no idea what happens after the initial 90 minutes or so, what their experience of God will be like, what will be revealed to them if they remain.

And we must guard ourselves against the Prodigal Son's elder brother syndrome. Too many of us are troubled when non-Christians enjoy an overwhelming experience of unconditional love in NDES. I would hope that we would all hope that the God we preach is in fact the God of prodigals, and that he reveals himself to us while we are yet sinners, sometimes on earth, sometimes during NDES.

So, while we needn't be skeptical of these experiences, neither are they new revelations that dictate sweeping changes in theology. Like any miracles, these can at best merely confirm and illustrate that which has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

In this vein, the silliest claim made in the current wave of books is that because of such experiences, we now know, as some of the titles suggest, that *Heaven Is for Real* or that there is *Proof of Heaven*. Christians believe that "heaven is for real" not because of the testimony of a 4-year-old boy or even of a neurosurgeon, but because Jesus Christ testified to such and rose from the grave to vindicate his testimony. He tells the thief on the cross, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43, ESV). His teachings not only assumed

Combine our yearning for something more than empty materialism with first-person testimony that suggests 'heaven is for real'—well, you'll soon have a publishing phenomenon on your hands.

said she was about to enter a hall where she would be given one last chance to accept or reject God. Traditionally Christians have taught that this momentous decision is called for in this life, after which comes judgment (Heb. 9:27). Alexander had lived a life indifferent toward God, and yet when he meets God, whom he calls Om, he is told, "There is nothing you can do wrong." So much for the doctrine of sin.

Because these experiences do not line up with traditional Christian teachings, many Christians dismiss them as mere hallucination or a deceptive work of the Devil. I, for one, find the latter unconvincing. In most cases, people who have had near-heaven experiences return to earth and give themselves in love and service of others. If the Devil is inspiring such godly work, he's confused about his job description.

As for the cultural and theological anomalies: First, it is hardly surprising that people interpret their experience through a particular cultural or religious lens. What other way do they have to process what is happening to them? Besides, all who've had this experience acknowledge Neal's point: Words are inadequate to describe what they saw and heard. They

a tangible, bodily existence known as the kingdom of heaven, but also an intermediate glorious state of bodiless existence.

The apostle Paul affirms this reality when he says he would rather be away from the body "and at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8). Paul himself has his own NDE, apparently, wherein he was "caught up to the third heaven" (2 Cor. 12:1-4).

These passages and others point to a heavenly reality that we will enjoy after death, and what they tell is all we need to know, which is more than enough.

MATERIALISM IN TWO FORMS

It's just at this point that we may gain insight into why Christians in particular are increasingly enamored with these visits to heaven. To be sure, any complex social phenomenon—like the megapopularity of a certain genre of book—is driven by many factors. In the end, it is pretty difficult to prove causation. But I believe we can discern trends that should get our attention.

First, we live at a time and in a culture in which the spiritual is under assault by the cultural and academic elite. It's a time when many people get really nervous if high-school



testimony that suggests “heaven is for real”—well, you’ll soon have a publishing phenomenon on your hands.

The fascination with this material we see in our culture corresponds to one within the walls of the church, certainly within Christian academia. It began with New Testament scholar Oscar Cullman’s 1956 book, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?* Cullman argued that the immortality of the soul was not only the “widely accepted idea” among Christians about their destiny, but “one of the great misunderstandings of Christianity.” It is a doctrine shaped not by the Bible but a “Greek concept.” Instead, he argued, the New Testament proclaims not the eternal life of the soul, but the resurrection of the body. This has increasingly resonated with evangelical theologians, especially as we have emerged from our fundamentalist days. Those days were characterized by sermons and songs that moved more along the lines of Platonic dualism. The 1920s classic folk hymn is as good an example as any. The first verse and chorus give us the picture:

*Some glad morning when this life is o’er,
I’ll fly away;
To a home on God’s celestial shore,
I’ll fly away (I’ll fly away).*

*I’ll fly away, Oh Glory
I’ll fly away; (in the morning)
When I die, Hallelujah, by and by,
I’ll fly away (I’ll fly away).*

Such songs were sung and such themes preached in many fundamentalist churches that had backed off of social engagement, especially after the fundamentalist-modernist controversy ended with the sound defeat of fundamentalists in the Scopes trial (though fundamentalists won the trial, they lost the culture, thanks to the media’s portrayal of them). Add to this the rise of premi-

lennialism, a view of the last days in which the evils of this age are perennial, and the only hope is for rapture out of this evil life and into the realm of a bodiless, spiritual heaven, by and by.

The ground became fertile for a new appreciation of bodily life in 1947, with Carl F. H. Henry’s *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. If Henry sparked a new passion for dealing with the very earthly and social ills of today, Cullman’s thesis become increasingly influential among theologians who deeply distrusted all talk of immortality of the soul.

What has happened since then is a certain hardening of Christian theology. In this case, it has created a deeper and deeper distrust of spiritual readings of the afterlife. As N. T. Wright has said, he’s not so much interested in the afterlife, but in the life after the afterlife—meaning bodily life in the new earth (Rev. 21).

cheerleaders put Scripture verses on banners to encourage their football team. They couch their objectives with concerns for the constitutional separation of church and state, but many such cases brought to court are thrown out because they are shown to be nothing more than a profound prejudice against religion.

Secularism was conceived in part as a way to make for a neutral playground for a democratic society, but it is increasingly perceived as hostile toward religious sensibilities. The ruling philosophy of our culture is materialism—the belief that only what can be known through the five senses is real. In this philosophy, God may play a supporting role, but only in the very private lives of individuals.

Skepticism and materialism are thin gruel, and it never surprises Christians when people show signs of longing for something more. Our culture’s fondness for testimony has a long history—from the Puritan requirement that to become a church member one had to recount one’s experience of grace, to revivalism and its love of the born-again testimony. This is deeply embedded in our national psyche. Combine our yearning for something more than empty materialism with first-person

Quiet Witness: Don Piper’s *90 Minutes in Heaven* has sold over 5 million copies in all its editions, but Piper takes a decidedly low-key approach regarding his near-heaven experience. You’d never know about it by only visiting his Don Piper Ministries home page: “Our goal is to meet individual needs and affect positive changes for our Lord Jesus Christ locally, nationally, and internationally.”

Those enthusiastic about these theological themes have little patience with spiritual and soul talk. They wax eloquent about what might be called a kind of Christian materialism, about the new heaven on earth, when justice will reign globally and we'll enjoy bodily life in a redeemed state.

All this is true as true can be. The resurrection of the body is indeed the best and final way to talk about our ultimate state in the *eschaton*. And we can be grateful that a generation of evangelical scholars has made this clearer than ever.

But here's the pastoral rub. In general, when life-after-the-afterlife folks talk about this future state, the language gets global and the

distant and vague for many Christians to grasp emotionally as good news. For many, it's just interesting news. What they want to hear more than anything, especially when they or a loved one is on the threshold of death, is this: "Today you will be with me in Paradise."

That, for better or worse, is the gospel that the current spate of books about near-heaven experiences is preaching. To the plethora of burning questions most people ask—Is there a God? Does he love me? Will I be reunited with the people I love? Will I ever know boundless joy? Is there life after death?—the near-heaven narratives say, "Yes, yes, yes, yes, and yes!"

To be sure, while these narratives preach a key aspect of the Good News, they fail to preach the full gospel. There is little that points to the centrality of Jesus Christ in the scope of redemption. No mention is made of Christ's life, death, or resurrection in these accounts. But I think it fair to say that from a Christian perspective, it is only because of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection that anyone can have such extraordinary divine encounters in the first place.

Despite their varied accounts and sometimes confused theology, there are moments when it is apparent that many of these people have had a remarkable encounter with the living God revealed in Jesus Christ.

vision abstract. There is a lot of talk about how "justice will reign," and "evil will be defeated." There are sweeping statements about "the culmination of history" and "the coming reign of God" and "the renewal of the whole earth." This is heady stuff, and, as stated above, true as true can be.

But it doesn't always connect with the widow whose husband was struck by a fatal heart attack. It doesn't always speak to the 10-year-old whose mother just died of cancer. It doesn't necessarily help those who wrestle with a question that troubles millions: "What happens when I die?" Some of us (usually the highly educated among us) may be most interested in life after the afterlife, but most people in the pews are deeply concerned simply with the afterlife—the one that comes right after this one. Their highest existential priority is not that justice will reign in all the earth, but to hear some good news about "what will happen to me next."

THE GOOD NEWS OF NEAR-HEAVEN EXPERIENCES

One of the great attractions of these near-heaven experiences—and a crucial aspect of our eschatological hope—is how utterly personal and loving the picture is. It is personal in two ways.

Colton Burpo meets his grandfather, as well as his sister who had been lost in a miscarriage. Mary Neal doesn't meet a relative but the people she did meet, she felt she had known "for an eternity. I was part of them." The near-heaven narratives are full of such encounters.

Vertically, they also have an encounter with God himself. As such, they find themselves immersed in love as a baby is enveloped in a mother's womb. That's the impression one gets especially in Eben Alexander's experience. And part of the message he kept getting was, "You are loved and cherished."

The kingdom of God will be a just world order that will bring history to a glorious conclusion. But day to day, that hope is too

And that's precisely what the church can bring to these narratives—a full-orbed gospel, one centered on Jesus Christ, the revelation of God, and the hope of the world. In fact, some of the narratives beg for such. Take Alexander's description of God, whom he calls Om:

One of the biggest mistakes people make when they think about God—or Allah, or Vishnu, or Jehova, or whatever you choose to call that Source of absolute power, that Creator that rules the universe—is to imagine Om as impersonal. Yes, God is behind the numbers, the perfection of the universe that science measures and struggles to understand. But—again, paradoxically—Om is "human" as well—even *more* human than you and I are. Om understands and sympathizes with our human situation more profoundly and personally than we can even imagine. . . .

As they say, that will preach. Alexander may be confused about which God he ran into, but we certainly aren't.

This to me is the great redeeming characteristic of near-heaven experiences. Despite their varied accounts and sometimes confused theology, there are moments when it is apparent that many of these people have had a remarkable encounter with the living God revealed in Jesus Christ. In the end, these are not so much near-death or near-heaven experiences, but, as a friend noted, near-God experiences. And when we see that people, even those who do not share our biblical assumptions, experience the God revealed in Jesus Christ—that is, the God of unconditional love—we cannot help but be thrilled and gratified. And to see it as an opportunity to talk about the full counsel of God.

Mark Galli is editor of *Christianity Today*.

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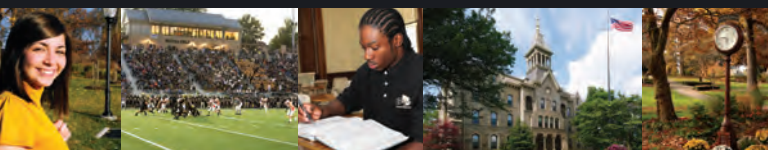
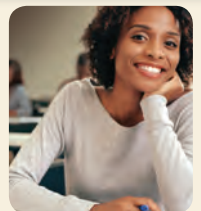
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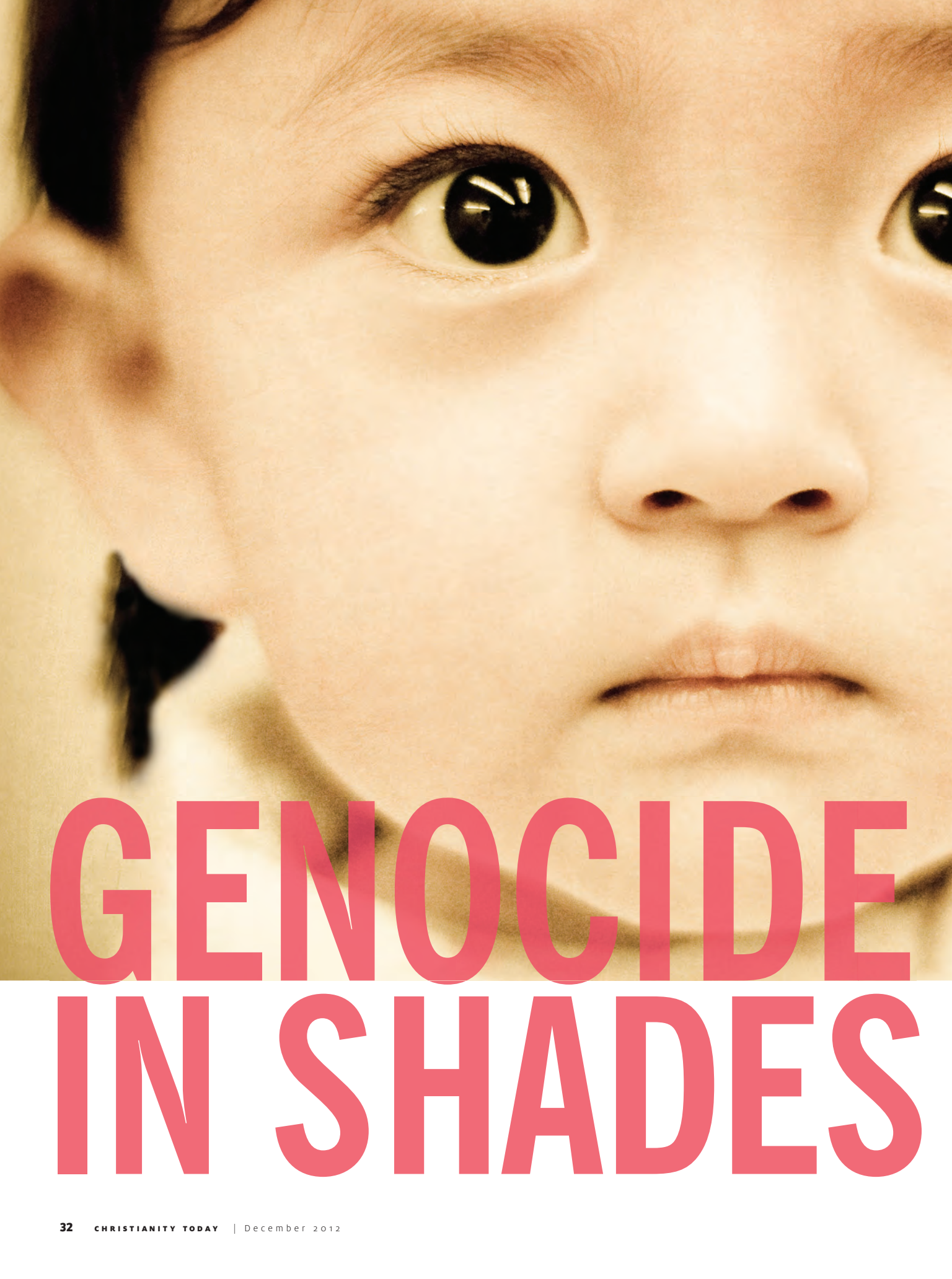
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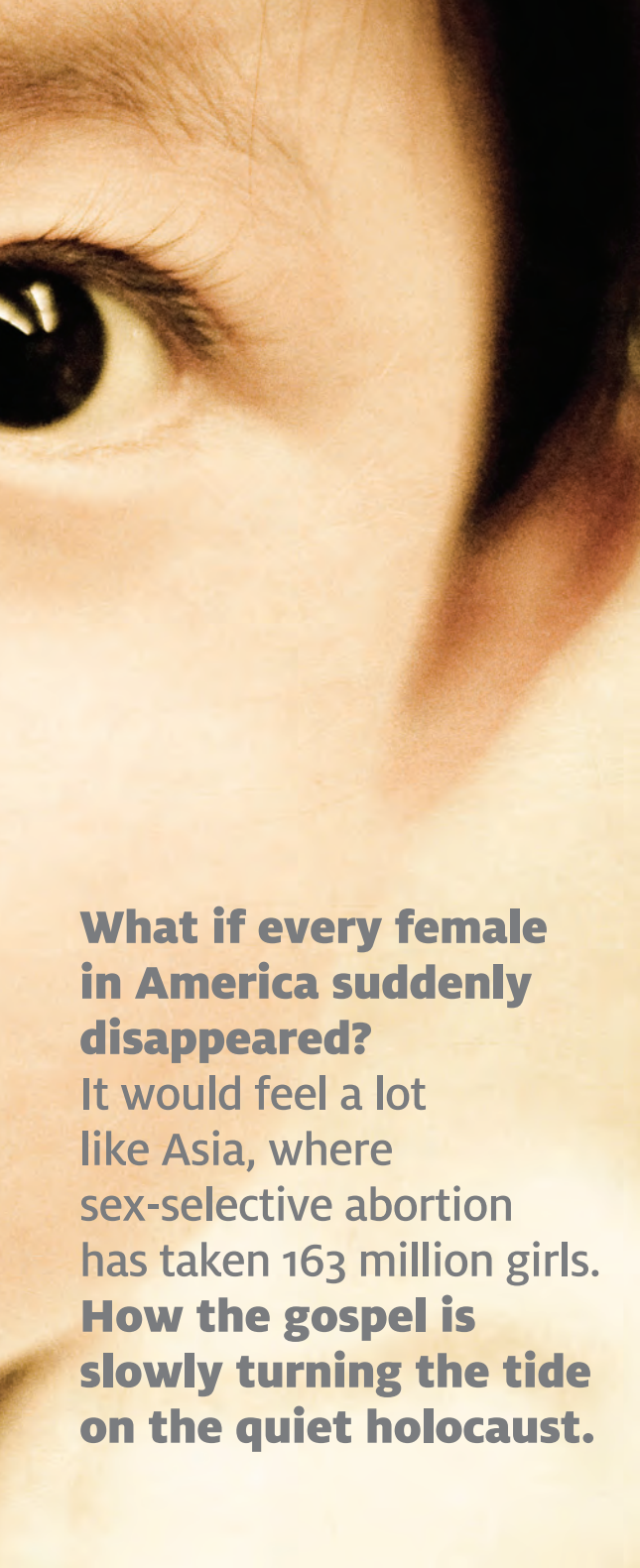
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GENOCIDE IN SHADES



What if every female in America suddenly disappeared? It would feel a lot like Asia, where sex-selective abortion has taken 163 million girls. How the gospel is slowly turning the tide on the quiet holocaust.

By Marian V. Liautaud

ON HIS FIRST NIGHT of rotation at a Delhi hospital, Puneet Bedi was assigned to the obstetrics ward. A wide-eyed 20-year-old medical student, he was excited by the prospect of becoming a doctor responsible for human life. He hoped to witness a birth that night.

Minutes after catching a glimpse of the labor room, Bedi was intercepted by a cat with something bloody dangling from its mouth. It wasn't until he saw a five-month-old fetus discarded on an uncovered tray, lying in a pool of blood, that he realized what the cat had eaten.

As the night wore on, Bedi witnessed more abortions than births. All of them were performed on women who were at least four months pregnant. When he worked up the nerve to ask why so many fetuses were being discarded, and why he had seen a cat eat one, a staff member explained tersely: "Because they are girls."

Three decades later, Bedi, an ob-gyn consultant at a New Delhi hospital, recounted this experience to Mara Hvistendahl, who last year persuasively demonstrated a chilling reality in her Pulitzer-nominated book, *Unnatural Selection*: There's a gender-based genocide afoot the world over, and it's having profound implications—none of them good.

For starters, there's the skewed sex ratio. Demographer Christophe Guilmoto has calculated that if Asia's sex ratio at birth had remained at its natural balance of 105 boys to 100 girls (boys are slightly more vulnerable to childhood diseases, and this ratio provides for equal numbers at marriageable age) over the past three decades, the continent would have an additional 163 million females. That's how many females he estimates have been aborted—the equivalent of every female in America today.

"No more girls at the mall or in supermarkets, in hospitals, boardrooms, or classrooms," says Hvistendahl. "Imagine this, and you come close to picturing the problem."

In *Half the Sky*, Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn confirm the scope of the problem: More girls have been killed in the past 50 years than men in all the wars of the 20th century. In countries like China and India, hearing "It's a girl" is not cause for celebration; it's a death sentence.

Why, then, if one of the largest crimes against humanity is happening under our noses, have we heard so little about it? And what, if anything, is the church doing to slow down the holocaust?

BIAS FROM BIRTH

Hvistendahl, a science journalist based in Beijing, says sex-selective abortions have gone underreported largely because of where they are happening the most: Asia and Eastern Europe.

"Gender imbalance has been treated as a local problem, as something that happens to other countries," says Hvistendahl. But "the gender imbalance is

GARY GNIDOVIC

OF PINK

'Few people seem to realize that three little words—one child policy—resulted in what amounts to an hourly Tiananmen massacre, for the past 30 years, in broad daylight, right under the world's nose.'

~ Chai Ling, president, All Girls Allowed

dowries have been illegal there since 1961, families are still expected to provide a handsome compensation to future sons-in-laws and their families, which creates intense financial pressure. As a result, millions of Indian families choose abortion to ensure they don't have to bear the burden of more than one daughter. The result? Only 914 girls for every 1,000 boys under age 6 in India, according to the 2011 census—the greatest gender imbalance seen in the country of 1.2 billion since its 1947 independence.

But cultural preference alone doesn't bring about the disparity in birthrates. For a skewed gender ratio to take hold, sex-selective technology—which reveals a baby's sex before birth—must be widely available. Ultrasound technology, according to Hvistendahl, is one of the primary reasons why girls have also gone missing from Albania and Azerbaijan, for example, and why millions of girls are missing throughout Asia and parts of Europe.

Sex selection, she contends, has grown out of a drive to control population, using technology, primarily ultrasounds, and abortion as our servants. For example, since China instituted its one-child policy in 1980 to control a massive population, couples have increasingly relied on the illegal use of ultrasound technology, which moved into mass production in 1982, to determine the sex of their unborn children.

Amniocentesis used to be an expensive way for parents to learn the sex of their child. An ultrasound, however, costs about \$12 in China. People will pay technicians up to \$150 in bribes for a black-market baby scan, which is only one-tenth the fine they would have to pay for having a child without a birth permit—and far less than the cost of raising a daughter. Under the one-child policy, each time a woman wants to try for a baby, she has to apply for a *shengyu zheng* (birth permit). Unmarried women and those who already have a child are typically denied permits unless they're willing to pay a fine for an "out of plan" birth.

Daniel Wang, honorary vice mayor of a province in China, explains that local family-planning agents are financially incentivized to prevent "out of plan" births. "If the local official wants the money, they enforce the policy more strictly," he told *Christianity Today*. Agents use informants and random searches to find pregnant women and forcibly terminate their pregnancies.

One lonely voice that's challenging the one-child policy and its attendant injustices is Reggie Littlejohn, president of Women's Rights Without Frontiers, an organization advocating against forced abortions in China. She says, "China's cruel and barbaric forced abortion policy causes more violence towards women and girls than any other official policy on earth. It is China's war against women and girls. Women are forcibly aborted up to the ninth month of pregnancy. It

a local problem in the way a superpower's financial crisis is a local problem. . . . Sooner or later, it affects you."

In America, sooner or later was this spring, when House Republicans put to vote the Prenatal Nondiscrimination Act (PRENDA), a federal law banning sex-selective abortions. The vote came on the heels of media attention to census data that suggested that Korean, Indian, and Chinese communities in the United States were importing their cultural preference for boys, given the skewed sex ratio among their second- and third-born children. The House bill failed in large part because the Republicans opted for a voting procedure that all but assured too few votes to move it to the Senate. But it succeeded in one sense: Americans were now talking about gender-based abortion (dubbed "gendercide" by feminist Mary Anne Warren in the mid-1980s).

For girls, the fight to stay alive begins in the womb. Culturally speaking, boys have always been favored over girls throughout the world—even, until recently, in the United States. Boys carry on the family name. They become their parents' retirement plan in many cultures. They cost less to marry off and often have better access to education and political influence. Religious beliefs often bolster the preference: Some Asian communities persist in the deep-seated belief that ancestors are worshiped in the afterlife through the male line.

The deeply held preference for sons persists in India. Although

Stolen Life: On the night of September 7, 2000, Jin Hani was dragged from her home by Chinese officials to an abortion center. This photo was taken after her forced abortion. She was nine months pregnant.



NATALIE BEHRING / BLOOMBERG / GETTY

is official government rape.”

Littlejohn’s description proved to be not so hyperbolic this June, when photos of Feng Jianmei, a Chinese woman, circulated on the Internet. Feng, 23, who was seven months pregnant, is seen lying dazed next to her bloody aborted child in a hospital bed. After media including the BBC and CNN picked up the story, China’s family-planning commission launched an investigation, concluding that the local family-planning agency had forced Feng to have the abortion.

In China, it’s estimated that 1.2 million forced abortions of this nature occur each year—not including the sex-selective abortions willingly performed by couples. “Though no one could forget the Tiananmen movement, even more than 20 years later, few people

Margaret Datiles, associate fellow for the Culture of Life Foundation, thinks a tighter ban is needed. “Although bans on sex-selection abortions are helpful and increase public awareness, they are not the real solution. Bans and restrictions on abortion *itself* are the only way to stop gendercide,” says the legal scholar.

And this is where the pro-choice camp has fallen silent, charge Datiles and other cultural commentators. To argue that abortion itself should be restricted would be to cede ground won since *Roe v. Wade*. In a brief on gendercide, Datiles says, “Now, when we are faced with data showing the severe adverse effects that abortion has had on women worldwide, the feminist movement has failed to stand up for these women and continues to ignore the fact that 163 million girls are missing because of sex-selective abortion.

“This conflict pinpoints the fundamental error of the feminist and reproductive health rights movement: You can’t promote or protect women while at the same time promoting abortion.”

Littlejohn, meanwhile, is trying to find middle ground. “Gendercide is neither a pro-life nor a pro-choice issue—it’s a human rights issue.”

Which is where the church may have the most influence: teaching the God-bestowed dignity of every human being, and, in a hopeful and ironic twist, using ultrasound technology—along with old-fashioned hands-and-feet ministry—to reinforce that teaching.

“The issue of female feticide is basically an issue of human dignity, not just discrimination against women,” says Raaj Mondol, CEO of Salt Initiatives, a nonprofit promoting the dignity and equality of women in New Delhi. Mondol believes church leaders can effectively transform the mindset on girls. “Our intervention cannot just focus on the issue of female feticide alone without addressing the man-woman relationship in the home, church, and society. The call for the church is to demonstrate a biblical model for these relations.” In particular, says Mondol, the idea that men and women are created equally to serve as partners to rule over creation provides a spiritual framework that challenges sex-selective abortion in his country.

But farther east, getting Chinese pastors to preach against abortion could be a tall order. Since the Chinese church began to blossom in the two decades following the Tiananmen Square movement, an entire generation of Christians has grown up in the shadow of the one-child policy. Abortion is commonplace and part of the Chinese experience, and the church in China has been virtually silent on the issue.

John Ensor, former executive director for global initiatives at Heartbeat International and author of the book *Innocent Blood: Challenging the Powers of Death with the Gospel of Life*, has seen openness to the gospel on the sanctity of life—a message that is spreading organically throughout China. Since 1992, he has been sharing the gospel at pregnancy help centers in the United States, along with using visuals—including ultrasound—to show pregnant women the stages of fetal development. Ironically, though ultrasound has been



Girls Welcome: A medical missions group signals to clients that it won’t do sex-selective abortions—an all-too-common crime in India.

seem to realize that three little words—one child policy—resulted in what amounts to an hourly Tiananmen massacre, for the past 30 years, in broad daylight, right under the world’s nose,” says Chai Ling, a Chinese activist twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize as a student leader in the Tiananmen Square movement.

At its current rate, India’s on track to exceed the 1.2 million number this decade. As Sabu George, a New Delhi activist for unborn girls, told *The Times of India*, “We will then have the dubious distinction of being the country eliminating the largest number of girls every year.”

According to Kristof, ultrasound technology hasn’t reached much of rural India and some of the interior states yet, but it will. “If you think the situation is bad now, wait 25 years. It’s going to be much worse.”

BABY STEPS

Kristof believes that increasingly easy access to ultrasounds may be the biggest challenge in stemming gendercide globally. He warns that India in particular is “going to get worse before it gets better. It’s a long, slow effort to change culture, while ultrasounds are rising rapidly in areas”—particularly in rural areas, *The New York Times* journalist told CT. “The change in ultrasound access is going to swamp the change in valuing daughters.”

Further, Hvistendahl says, legal enforcement against sex-selective abortions, including police surveillance and punishment by imprisonment, have not yet made a real dent in the sex-ratio imbalances in India and China. The challenge with imposing such laws, as Hvistendahl discovered, is that doctors and family-planning agents have financial incentives to keep performing illegal abortions. According to Bedi, the Indian ob-gyn, “Almost a third of Indian gynecologists’ income comes from abortion. . . . The doctors are very greedy. They are behind the money. It has become a big business, this business of sex selection.”



KAREN BLEIER / AFP / GETTY

of fetal development. Ironically, though ultrasound has been a major accomplice in sex-selective abortions, Heartbeat International and his new organization, PassionLife, are tapping into its redemptive power.

“As women and men in China see the tiny images of human hands and spine and femur bones, and they hear Scripture that describes being fearfully and wonderfully made and a God who sees our unformed bodies in our mother’s womb, they are beginning to grasp the value of life,” says Ensor.

Using Scripture, visuals, and models, Heartbeat International recently trained more than 100 Chinese church leaders about God’s love for all life. The majority of the leaders in attendance were women, and nearly all of them had either had an abortion or assisted a friend in getting one. The men present had encouraged the practice of abortion as a form of birth control and obedience to the government. According to Ensor, the response to the teaching was powerful, as the church leaders entered a period of sorrow, grieving, and repentance. Following that, they prayed for forgiveness and healing. The word has spread quickly, and as more churches receive this training, more and more women and men are responding to the gospel message.

SHOWERS OF GRACE

Chai Ling agrees with Ensor: Ultimately gospel transformation is the only long-term solution to the injustices brought about by the one-child policy.

Chai’s organization, All Girls Allowed (AGA), recently initiated a baby shower program that financially supports enrolled couples in poor Chinese villages during the first year of their daughter’s life.

“We give \$240 to save a mother and her daughter’s life,” Chai told CT. “The showers encourage them to keep their baby daughter—to help the mothers know their baby girls are valued and worth keeping. We’re seeing a remarkable work by God of girls being more cherished and welcomed.”

“When the West supports girl births,” says Chai, “the news spreads throughout the village and becomes a powerful message of value that the Chinese families begin to grasp.”

At the end of 2011, AGA had raised enough money to rescue 1,000 unborn babies from being aborted. The baby shower program is being

Testify: Chai Ling (far left) and a victim of forced abortion pray before a House Foreign Affairs Committee meeting on the one-child policy. Chai drew from Isaiah and the example of William Wilberforce to exhort Congress.

implemented in small countryside villages where fewer than 50 babies are born each year. “We believe that as the decision to keep baby girls becomes normative, these villages will begin to naturally produce even at-birth gender ratios,” says Chai. “As gender ratios balance out in these small villages, we expect that other villages, towns, cities, and provinces will follow suit.”

Chai’s goal has gotten a hefty boost from Saddleback Church, which committed to sponsoring 5,000 baby shower gifts in 2012 after Chai shared her testimony at the Orange County campus early this year. Chai hopes to see more churches do likewise. Saddleback leader Rick Warren explains his support: Girls are “the single-most vulnerable people on the planet. You’re young and female. In most places, this means you have zero rights.”

Along with supporting the AGA baby shower program, Saddleback also has committed to support families that choose to adopt—a way to rescue the estimated 1 million children, mostly girls, who would otherwise be abandoned each year in China alone. “There are 146 million orphans in the world,” Warren told CT. “You can’t build orphanages fast enough to take care of all the orphans.”

Plus, says Warren, “Kids don’t need an institution; they need a family. The most natural organization to support those families is the local church. If . . . support is given in, to, and through the local church, we can do far more than we could ever do any other way.

“The only organization big enough to stop this issue is the church. In 10 million villages, they may have nothing else, but they will always have a church. If we’re going to stop something at the grassroots level, it has to be done through the church. It has the most volunteers, and the local pastor, who’s marrying and burying his people, his beloved. He has more credibility in his community than any NGO or I could ever have.”

Kristof agrees. “The rapid rise of Christianity in China is going to have far-reaching effects. I can see the pro-life attitude gaining more traction,” he said, noting that South Korea, whose widely Christian culture has helped balance out its sex ratio at birth, is a hopeful example of a culture headed in the right direction.

Meanwhile, Saddleback has committed to supporting 500 families who opt to adopt domestically, and another 500 who adopt overseas.

It’s hard to imagine that gendercide could ever be redeemed by God for his good purposes, but Chai believes ending this atrocity will be the most effective way to advance the gospel.

“We are confident that as the church turns from death toward life, and as they witness to others about the abundant life that can be found in Christ, the kingdom of God will advance all the more.”

Marian V. Liautaud is editor of church management resources at Christianity Today. Check out *War on Women* at CT eBooks.com on December 1.

Go to ChristianBibleStudies.com for “Abortion and the War on Women,” a Bible study based on this article.

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Why *Mere Christianity* Should Have Bombed

By John G. Stackhouse Jr.

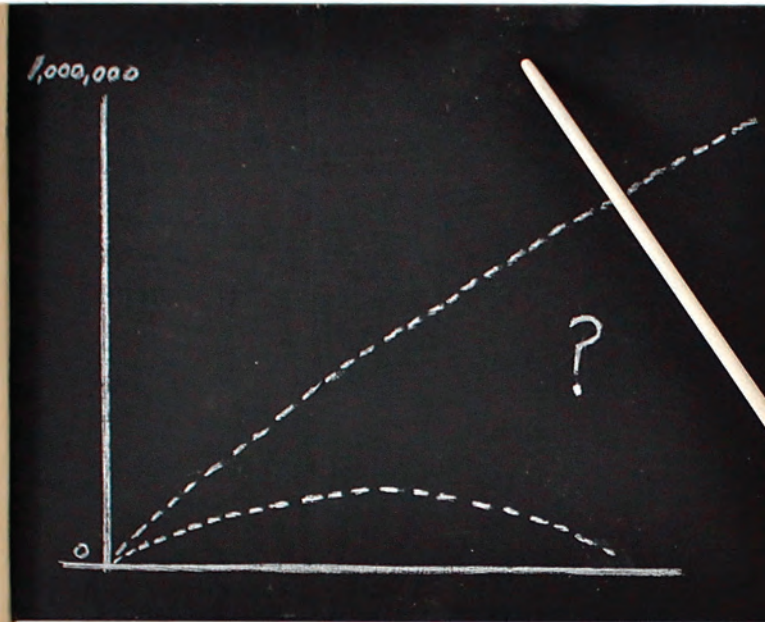
SIXTY YEARS AGO, London publisher Geoffrey Bles first released a revision of three sets of radio talks by an Oxford literature don. The book was called *Mere Christianity*, and there was nothing “mere” about it. A somewhat disjointed set of C. S. Lewis’s views on a wide range of theological, philosophical, and ethical matters, the book became the most important and effective defense of the Christian faith in its century.

As *Mere Christianity* (henceforth “MC”) goes into its seventh decade of publishing success, rivaled still by no other apologetic, it’s worth taking a look at its unlikely success.

WHY IT SHOULDN’T HAVE WORKED

The first reason why *MC* should not have worked is rather basic: It doesn’t deliver what its title promises. It does not do even what John Stott’s classic *Basic Christianity* does—namely, outline at least the basics of evangelicalism’s understanding of the gospel. Given the title’s own promise and Lewis’s express intent of offering “mere Christianity,” we get something substantially less than that, as I think Puritan pastor Richard Baxter, from whom the phrase comes, would affirm.

Furthermore, *MC* offers not only less than “MC,” but also more: Lewis’s own opinions about domestic relationships, marriage, and gender; and his particular take on the vexed question of God and time (which, in my view, has powerfully perpetuated Christian Platonism and its “timeless God” among many people who have never read Plato). The danger here is the danger that resides also in C. I. Scofield’s dispensationalist notes to his famous *Reference Bible*. (I recognize that this is perhaps the first time anyone has claimed that Lewis and Scofield are peas in a pod, but they are both remarkable publishing successes.) The danger is that the secondary and idiosyncratic are bundled



**Knowing
why it didn't
can help us
strengthen
our witness
today.**

[APOLOGETICS]



RICK BEERHORST

with the primary and universal, and taken in together by the trusting reader as being “simply Christian.”

A second reason why *MC* should not have worked is that it is, after all, an extended set of philosophical and theological arguments. Even worse, it is front-loaded with its densest material, a reworking of the moral argument for the existence of God: briefly, all human beings have a strong sense of moral obligation that cannot be explained on purely naturalistic grounds and instead requires a God very much like the Christian God to explain properly. This argument’s distinguished heritage goes back through Immanuel Kant to Thomas Aquinas and beyond. It is among the most powerful and controversial of apologetics.

Hard as it is to believe that contemporary readers will sit still for such things, it strains plausibility to contend that modern people a few decades ago would enjoy following such an argument listening to a crackly radio, as *MC* was first introduced. And while lots of people didn’t, and wouldn’t, find such exposition interesting, lots of people apparently did—with enough positive response to have Lewis return to the BBC for the subsequent sections that made up the eventual book.

Sixty years on, however, we all know that people nowadays don’t want such arguments. Our audiences demand snappy stories and quick changes of subject, in a kind of literary or homiletical MTV.

Oddly enough, this observation leads directly to our next set of considerations.

WHY IT DID WORK

MC works because Lewis was a master at two rhetorical arts, which he combined fluently: argument and depiction. Indeed, his friend Austin Farrer emphasized the latter as his chief talent, and Lewis himself spoke, not only of creating Narnia in terms of “seeing pictures in his head,” but of his entire writing career in this way. In the last months of his life, he explained to a friend why he was no longer generating new work. He was ill, but he was not old: only in his mid-60s. The situation was simple, he said: “The pictures have stopped.”

Despite Lewis’s protestations that he was not a theologian and his profession was a scholar of literature, it must be remembered that his first training was in philosophy and that he evidently took a subsequent degree

(and a job) in literature only when he failed to obtain a position in philosophy. Thus we happily find a keen philosophical mind in harness with a lively literary mind—and a literary mind both critical and creative, which is another unusual combination.

MC works, then, because Lewis can both show and tell. He can tell us what he thinks we should think, and then make it appear for us in an image that usually lasts long after the middle steps of the argument have vanished from memory.

writings, a form of the faith that appeals to modern people and especially to Americans, arguably the world's most modern people. But we also must not overlook three other factors that, in combination, help boost sales on this side of the Atlantic: The combination of Lewis's British accent plus his Oxford professor status plus the aura of Anglicanism virtually guarantees big numbers, as others who possess this triple treasure have found to their delight. (No, I'm not thinking of N. T. Wright or Alister McGrath. Well, okay, I am.)

Whichever side of the Atlantic you're on, Mere Christianity gives you permission to be both intelligent and Christian.

MC also works because Lewis pulls off another extremely difficult balancing act: adopting a persona of "just plain folk" who also has a first-class mind. He comes off to most audiences as a likeable chap "down the pub" who lives the same sort of life that the rest of us do, who feels what we feel and speaks to the issues we care about, but who just happens to have the ability to sort out knotty questions of theology, philosophy, and ethics into everyday categories, vocabulary, and illustrations.

This "act," furthermore, is authentic. In the preface to *MC*, Lewis describes himself as "a very ordinary layman of the Church of England." This is patently untrue, of course. Lewis was, after all, a brilliant scholar. But he was also a war veteran in a generation of war veterans, a family man in a very odd and demanding family system, a late convert who could sympathize with others who were not yet or not yet fully Christian, and a *bon vivant* who enjoyed beer, laughter, salacious jokes, and tramping about the countryside. Let me offer an American phrasing I suspect is not common among scholars of Lewisiana: he was, I suggest, the Ulster-cum-Oxonian equivalent of a "good ol' boy with a Ph.D."

What seems effortless for Lewis is actually extraordinarily difficult to emulate. The market is now flooded with books by Ph.D.s who cannot write an interesting and intelligible paragraph, and by wannabe pop apologetists who just aren't very smart.

Lewis's common touch was nevertheless very British. What explains *MC*'s popularity particularly among Americans? Lewis depicts a highly individualistic Christianity in all his

The more serious point here is that, whichever side of the Atlantic you're on, *MC* gives you permission to be both intelligent and Christian. That is its subtext, and it is crucial to understanding its success.

Having celebrated something of *MC*'s mysterious power, let me offer two warnings to fans who like to plunk a copy on anyone who shows a spark of thoughtful interest in the faith.

First, Lewis's remarks in *MC* about gender are off-putting to many women and men today. He comes across to many people, frankly, as a sexist. Note particularly the end of the section on "Christian marriage," which fairly bristles with troubling statements and concludes with the assertion that men should handle disputes with the neighbors because women tend to be too protective of their families while men usually are more levelheaded and just.

It doesn't matter that lots of women like *MC* and aren't offended; what matters is that *MC* contains pockets of annoyance or even outright offense that render it tactically unwise to give to people who otherwise are willing to consider a good book about Christianity.

Second, weaknesses come packaged with strengths. The very voice of the Oxford don that so many find attractive is also repellent to some. I had a very bright Christian student at Regent College tell me that, as an English working-class girl who had subsequently graduated from a good public university in Britain, she found Lewis to be insufferably condescending in just the way Oxbridgeans can be. (Surrounded as I am on the faculty of Regent College with Oxford and Cambridge graduates, I have nothing whatsoever to say on the matter.) So to the problems of gender

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an orphan
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Food
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Her
Christmas List
is Simple

www.WarmBlankets.org

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.
James 1:27



sensitivity we must add class consciousness as well.

But now let's look at the staying power of *MC*—and books like it.

Argument plus depiction still offer a potent combination. Argument without depiction risks being dull to all but highly motivated specialists, while depiction without argument risks confusion and even appropriation by contrary convictions.

The combination of a casual, common persona and high intellectual quality is still appealing, even if it is also hard to pull off. Two contrary currents affect apologetics in this respect. The tug of popular culture on intellectuals and academicians has been tremendous in this last generation. Titles of papers at scholarly society meetings now routinely include attempts at hip references to popular culture. Yet academic discourse, paradoxically, has become more arcane than ever—indeed, perhaps precisely in areas of cultural studies, in which artifacts of pop culture are submitted to endless high-altitude games (without sufficient oxygen, to be sure).

People today do want arguments, but they want them the way Lewis delivered them: in plain language, about issues that matter, in a methodical step-by-step fashion, and with illustrations that literally illustrate and commend the point being made. For scholars to write this way today is at least as much of a challenge as it was in Lewis's day.

MC therefore will continue to work. But it shouldn't have to do it alone, nor should Lewis's apologetic corpus in general. I've tried my hand at it, as have Wright and McGrath and Tim Keller, among others. We need more such efforts, and I hope that reflection on *MC*—and its genesis as radio talks—will inspire some of us to write blogs, op-eds, and books, and perhaps also create podcasts and videos that communicate with publics outside Christian subcultures.

Missiologists like to talk about targeting “people groups,” and I will conclude with this thesis: The category of “thoughtful inquirers”—whether inside the church or outside it—still denotes the “people group” least well served by contemporary Christianity. It is the group best served by C. S. Lewis, and can be better served by us. +

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Three Is *the* Loveliest Number

Why 'that Trinity stuff'
is not a philosophical headache
but a captivating picture of
the Good and the Beautiful.

By Michael Reeves

T

HERE IS SOMETHING IRRESISTIBLE about overhearing your name being whispered in a private conversation. Usually (of course) I try to stop my ears, but once I could not help taking in this little snippet, which has tickled me ever since:

"Yes, well, Reeves does love that Trinity stuff." (Picture eyes being rolled.)

It was the way this Christian man put it that fascinated me: not "Reeves does love *God*," but "Reeves does love *that Trinity stuff*." His choice of words seemed to sum up perfectly a common perception: that there is the God we know and love—and then, in some mental ivory tower far, far away, there is *that Trinity stuff*.

KEITH NEGLEY
That mathematical mystery. That mind-bending oddity. That strange, even embarrassing idea. Yes, deep within the Christian psyche today seems to be the notion that the Trinity is an awkward and odd irrelevance, an unsightly wart on our knowledge of the true God. And so, when it comes to sharing our faith, we speak of God's offer of salvation, we speak of God's free grace, but we try not to let on that the God we are speaking of is a Trinity. We wax lyrical about the beauty of the gospel, but not so much about the beauty of the God whose gospel it is.

It is time to stand up and say, "No!" to such nonsense, to turn our backs on the absurd notion that our beautiful gospel could ever come from a God who is not the very perfection and essence of beauty. For the health of the church and our faith, we must be proud of who our God

is. And since the Trinity is no mere theological icing resting atop our God—since the living God *is* Trinity—we must be resolutely and thoroughly Trinitarian in all our ways and thoughts.

Only then will we truly enjoy what sets the living God apart from the gods of human imagination. Only then will we know a God good enough to offer truly good news. And this, in fact, is the nature of the very eternal life for which we have been saved: knowing God. As Jesus prayed, “[T]his is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3).

WHERE TO START?

The trouble is, the Trinity seems to be completely surrounded by the most intimidating mental razor wire. For the average Christian, the word *mystery* is enough to halt all further inquiry. If the Trinity is a mystery, why even bother trying to understand? (Modern connotations of “mystery” don’t help. In the New Testament era, a mystery was not a riddle to be solved, but a truth revealed to the faithful—something disclosed, not kept hidden.) Then, for the more intrepid, there is a regiment of supposedly helpful illustrations to negotiate: God is like a three-part leaf, like the three states of water, like the three branches of the U.S. government. They leave one, at the very least, feeling that this God is rather bizarre.

But Christians have not come to believe that the God of the Bible is a Trinity because they have sensed his resemblance to some leaf, drink, or political structure. Christians insist on the Trinity because of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As the *Son of God*, Jesus reveals a God

who is a Father. Before anything else, that is the eternal identity of the God revealed in Jesus. “Father,” says Jesus in John 17:24, “you loved me before the creation of the world.” Before all things, the God made known in Jesus was a Father loving his Son.

This is precisely why the apostle John can write that “God *is* love” (1 John 4:8, emphasis added), for this God would not be who he is if he did not love. If at any time the Father did not have

a Son to whom he gave his life and love, then he simply would not be a Father. To be who he is, then, this God must give out life and love. And so we begin to see why the Trinity is such good news: God is love *because* God is a Trinity, because for eternity this God has been giving out—positively bursting with—love for his Son.

How the Father loves and delights in his Son is something we get to see in the baptism of Jesus. There the Father declares his love for his Son and his pleasure in him *as the Spirit rests on the Son* like a dove. For the Spirit is the one who makes the love of the Father known, causing the Son to cry “Abba!” (see also Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6 for how he does the same for the adopted children of God). Thus Jesus is called “the Anointed One” (“the Messiah” in Hebrew, “the Christ” in Greek), for the Father loves, blesses, and empowers him by anointing him with his Spirit.

All of which is to say, briefly, that when you start with the Jesus of the Bible, you inevitably arrive at a triune God. John wrote his gospel, he tells us, “that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). But even that simplest call to faith in Jesus is an invitation to a Trinitarian faith: Jesus is described as the Son of God. God is his Father. And he is the Messiah, the one anointed with the Spirit.

Yet while Jesus does reveal a triune God, this triune God that he makes known does not come across as anything like a philosophical headache. Here is a God who is delightfully different from all others, a God who is love: a Father, loving and giving life to his Son in the fellowship of the Spirit.

A FAR SWEETER GOSPEL

To taste the difference the triune nature of God makes, let’s step back for a moment and imagine something. What if God was *not* Father, Son, and Spirit? What if God was really just a single person? Well then, for eternity before Creation he must have been all by himself: no relationship, and nobody and nothing else for him to love. For eternity. This God simply could not have love at the very core of his identity. So would he be the sort of God inclined to be gracious toward us? Most unlikely. And, not having ever known fellowship himself, would he want to have fellowship with us? Would he even know what fellowship means? By definition, a single-person God is not inherently about love and relationship; its “gospel” must be a very poor thing next to the gospel of the God who is love.

But with the triune God, what good news we have! The eternally beloved Son, the delight and joy of his Father, comes to share with us the same love the Father has always given him. He comes from “the bosom of the Father” (John 1:18, NASB), announcing his desire that believers might be with him there (John 17:24), that we might be brought before the Most High—not just as forgiven sinners, but as dearly beloved children sharing the Son’s own “Abba!” cry. Because God is Father, Son, and Spirit—and *only* because God is Father, Son, and Spirit—we can bask in those gorgeous words of the Son to his Father: “you . . . have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17:23). The Father’s eternal love for the Son now encompasses us. Thus with *this* God we have a gospel better even than forgiveness—we can have the security and intimacy of children. Beloved children of the Most High! No other God could bring us so close and have us so loved; no other God could so win our hearts.

In fact, with this God the good news doesn’t stop there. In stunning contrast to all single-person gods, who must remain isolated in their divine transcendence, this God comes to us—comes into us!—to share with us and bring us into the life that is his. The Spirit opens my eyes to who Christ beautifully is, in all his loving kindness. He wins my heart so that, for the first time, I begin to enjoy the Son as the Father has always enjoyed him. In other words, through the Spirit, the Father brings us to share in his own joy, in the delight he has always had in his Son. The Spirit also gives us the mind of Christ, enabling us to share in *his* deep delight in the Father. Thus the Spirit makes us godly: Fatherlike, we enjoy the Son; Christlike, we enjoy the Father.

Now if God were a single person, godliness would be entirely different, and not about such outward-focused love and enjoyment. If for eternity he had only himself to consider, then surely

Deep within the Christian psyche today seems to be the notion that the Trinity is an awkward and odd irrelevance, an unsightly wart on our knowledge of the true God.

self-obsession would be the highest form of godlikeness. But self-love and self-obsession are the very antithesis of this other-centered God: He offers liberation from our slavery to self, opening us out to love others as he loves. Only because God is triune can he offer us such freedom.

In the triune God we have a magnetically attractive God of overflowing love and radiant joy, the Father, Son, and Spirit finding their happy satisfaction and everlasting delight in each other. And since we become like what we worship, if we press in to know this God better, we will become delighted, friendly, and winsome, like our



God. Just imagine what the world would make of that.

And it is not just the *Christian* life as such: The triune nature of God imbues *all* of life with a beauty it could never otherwise have. Because God is a relational God, the Father eternally knowing and loving the Son in the Spirit, relationships and love make sense. Indeed, this God is why they exist at all. What solitary God would imagine such things, except out of envy? Because the Father, Son, and Spirit have eternally existed in thrilling harmony, a world of harmonies makes sense. With this God it makes sense that different musical notes should come together pleasingly. The loving unity of the Father, Son, and Spirit gives us a rationale for why men and women, black and white, introvert and extrovert should come together, not to be identical, but to be united in love.

We have seen so little here, it is as if we have but smelt the banquet from afar. Hopefully, though, it has been just enough for us to sense that the triune nature of our God is not an encumbrance on Christianity but the very undergirding truth that makes it good, lovely, and beautiful. Nor is it some airy, impractical truth. It is something we can revel in every time we pray. Instead of nervously calling, “O Distant Creator,” we can pray “Our Father,” enjoying the Son’s own

relationship and privileges. And we can do so with the Son’s own boldness, secure in him and enabled as he is by the Spirit.

WHICH GOD WILL WE HAVE?

It doesn’t take the insight of a prophet to notice that hostility to the idea of a personal God is widespread and growing apace in the Western world today. Spirituality of a sort, fine. God? Not so much. Every author knows it: Write a book against God and you’re on the fast track to securing a place on *The New York Times* best-seller list.

But might it just possibly be that the world is actually reacting against a certain *sort* of God: the concept of a loveless dictator-in-the-sky? Could such popular antitheism be the rumblings of an unknowing hunger for a better God? Certainly in my own experience, when I ask atheist or agnostic students to describe the God they don’t believe

If for eternity God had only himself to consider, then surely self-obsession would be the highest form of godlikeness. But self-love and self-obsession are the very antithesis of this other-centered God.

in, I am usually treated to what sounds like a good description of Satan: a self-obsessed, merciless bully. And if God is not an ever-loving Father, eternally pouring out his Spirit of life and blessing on his Son, then their descriptions are probably pretty accurate. If God is not Father, Son, and Spirit, then he must be an eternally solitary being who has managed to get through eternity without love.

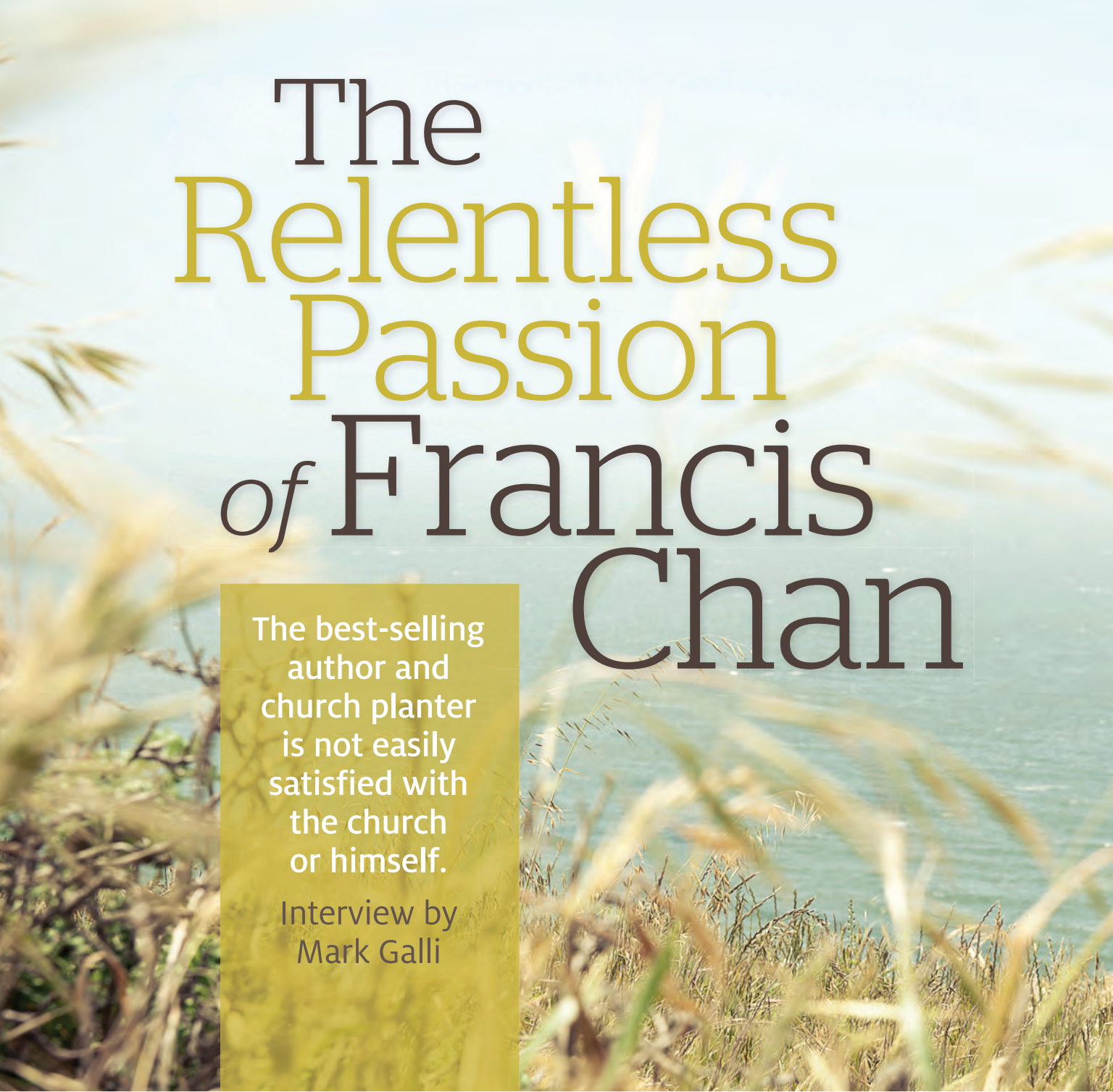
None of this should really surprise us. John Calvin, in his *Institutes of*

the Christian Religion, wrote that the fallen human mind is like “a perpetual factory of idols,” in that we all persistently pervert the nature of God in our minds, imagining him to be less beautiful and good than he truly is. But today, given the widespread poverty of knowledge of God, it is especially important that we Christians are not heard to be speaking of “God” vaguely. Christians and non-Christians alike will instinctively shy away from such a being, suspecting a God more Devil than Father.

If we do not expressly proclaim Father, Son, and Spirit, then we do not expressly proclaim a God of love, the sort of God who would have any fellowship to share with us. The gospel we proclaim would then be essentially rootless, disconnected from the God whose gospel it is. And that must ultimately spell catastrophe: No church can survive for long on a superficial gospel, and few outsiders will be persuaded by one.

But if we are specifically and robustly Trinitarian in our talk of God, if we’ll start with the Spirit-anointed Son who reveals his Father, then what a God we’ll have to know and offer to the world! A God more delightful than human mind has dreamed, a kind Father who draws us to share his eternal love and fellowship, a God who *is* love. ✚

Michael Reeves is head of theology for the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship in the United Kingdom. He is the author most recently of *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith* (InterVarsity Press).



The Relentless Passion of Francis Chan

The best-selling author and church planter is not easily satisfied with the church or himself.

Interview by
Mark Galli

FRANCIS CHAN exploded onto the evangelical scene a few years ago when podcasts of sermons he gave at his flourishing, 4,000-member Southern California church went viral. But then in late 2010, he up and quit, saying, “I just want to disappear for a while.” One thing that bothered him, he said, was that “even in my own church I heard the words ‘Francis Chan’ more than I heard the words, ‘Holy Spirit.’”

Two years later, he finds himself in San Francisco, where he says he’s thankful that “no one really knows who I am.” He leads a small fellowship that meets weekly, and then goes out to share the love of

Christ in the neighborhood and city.

His latest book, *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples* (David C. Cook; co-written by Mark Beuving), didn’t start out as a book, but as a manual of discipleship. The book reveals the passions and character of the best-selling author and church planter. CT editor Mark Galli spoke with Chan by phone recently.

What are you hoping to accomplish in your new book?

I try to explain the most important things a believer needs to know. It’s an attempt to teach the basics of what I feel needs to be passed on to new believers. I know there’s other stuff out there, but I needed to be faithful to what I felt needs to be out there.

DALEY HAKE



Unlike many other discipleship manuals, yours does not begin by explaining about how to pray or have personal devotions and other personal disciplines. Instead, you begin by talking about the importance of church, which often comes late in other discipleship manuals.

In our culture, people have a very low view of church, and I didn't want readers to forget the church. For a person to be truly disciplined and growing in their faith, they need more than one person discipling them. They need to see the gifts of the body; that's how God created it and intended it. I wanted early on to explain that this is very, very important, and that it is God's agenda, that this is how he's going to reach the world.

Your book is also not topical but mostly a journey through the Bible, where you let the biblical narrative shape the content of chapters.

One weakness in the church is that we can make things too formulaic, with a blanket statement for every situation about what you do. I want to help people understand how to study the Scriptures with other people, to give them an overview of Scripture and assume that by understanding the Scriptures better, the Holy Spirit will bring to mind the right stories, the right teachings.

I guess it's putting more of a burden on the person. I want to give them a jump-start but also help them understand Scripture, so that when they do talk to someone, they can now pull from this knowledge and scriptural understanding.

You say that every disciple needs to disciple others. If discipling is essentially teaching—in word and example—why is it everyone's job, and not just those with the gift of teaching?

There is a gift of teaching. I absolutely believe that. That's not what we're talking about. It has more to do with, for example, the older women teaching younger women. Parents are supposed to instruct their kids. It doesn't mean they necessarily have that gift of teaching. The teaching in the Great Commission is about obedience to Jesus. It's not necessarily, "Now let me teach you what this means in the Greek." It's, "Let me teach you how to obey this."

So often we teach these great lessons but we don't push it to the point of obedience. And Satan loves that because we're deceiving ourselves. The teaching I'm talking about is like walking alongside someone—rebuking, exhorting, and getting them to the point where they realize they need to repent or they're living in disobedience.

In places, you say the church's mission is for the sake of the world; the church exists to help us each fulfill that mission. But Revelation 4—where the church in heaven gathers in joyful worship of God—suggests that the church is not a means to

an end, but the end. So is the church a means or an end for you?

I definitely don't think it's an either/or. I really do believe it has to be both. I know that there's no direct command to go plant churches. There is a command to make disciples. As we make disciples, churches form, because that's what Christians do together. Together they form a body. There's a unity of love for each other that should develop as we have the Holy Spirit enter us, and as we strive together for the gospel, like Philippians 1 talks about.

If I had to lean one way, it really seems like you start with the mission and then the church forms, and then the church continues the mission. Sometimes we just get so focused on creating a gathering that mission becomes optional. That hurts the church.

For example, in the gatherings I have in San Francisco, everyone knows that we're on a mission because that's such a big part of what we do. Our gatherings involve the mission. We gather and go out and gather back again. It creates an incredible sense of unity, because these people I consider my brothers and sisters, because they're serving alongside me. I've seen how the mission really makes the church so beautiful because the mission is so central.

We teach these great lessons but we don't push it to the point of obedience. And Satan loves that. I'm talking about walking alongside someone—rebuking, exhorting, and getting them to realize they need to repent or they're living in disobedience.

Your writing has what I'd call a "relentless intensity" to get readers to do more for Christ. One example among many in this book: "Being a disciple maker demands your entire life. . . . It requires everything. It means following Jesus in every aspect of your life, pursuing him with a wholehearted devotion. If you're not ready to lay down your life for Christ, then you're not ready to make disciples. It's that simple." Where does your intensity come from? Is that a family trait? Something you learned as a Christian?

(Laughter.) A family trait. Oh, that's funny. It could be. I don't know. When I read the statements of Christ, there seems to be this urgency

and intensity. I guess that's what I get out of it when I read the tone of the Scriptures, which is very different from the tone of our culture.

Let me ask it another way. When you read the Scriptures, the verses that grab you run along the lines of "Go and make disciples" and "Sell all you have." Others are most taken with verses like "Come to me, all you who are heavy laden and I will give you

rest" and "Your sins are forgiven." Do you ever wonder why you are taken with the former more than the latter?

Well, I wouldn't say the latter don't engage me, because there are times when they do. I just preached on the faithfulness of God, and I was bawling my eyes

out. I was memorizing Ephesians and got to chapter two, and I was just screaming out to God when it says, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us..." (ESV). It's like, aaah!

But I try to consider my audience and what they hear all the time. I see Christ doing that; he preaches one way to the Pharisees and another way to the woman caught in adultery. I speak primarily to an American audience involved in a consumer-driven culture.

Right now I'm speaking to a lot of drug addicts and people whom the world has discarded, people who just feel like they're of no worth. My message is very different to them. It's, "You are of worth. You've

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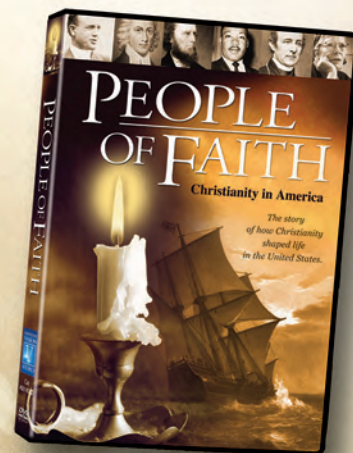
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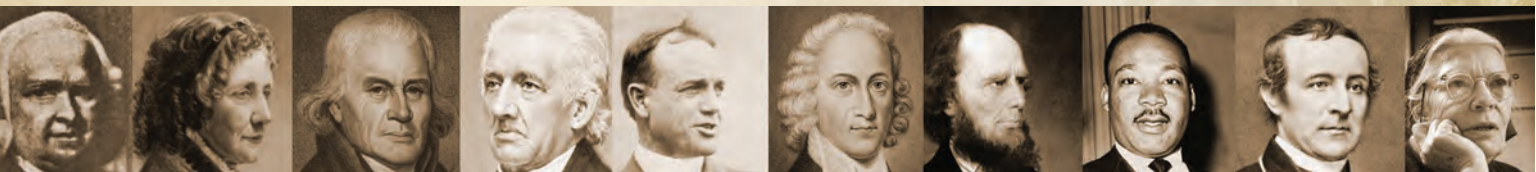
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been lied to, and you bought into the lie. It led to death. But here's the truth. The truth will set you free. You are the ones who are going to change the world. You're the very ones God would choose."

In every congregation, there's going to be both kinds of listeners. But to generalize, in my perception, the majority is unruly and rebellious. Look at the different Barna stats of how many people claim to be Christian and yet their lifestyle is absolutely no different from the rest of the world. So that's what I tend to attack, rather than believing people are too diligent and that they are way too works oriented.

Do you ever find that after you've worked with someone for a time, they'll say to you, "Francis, I don't know if I can handle you being my pastor anymore, because you're just intense all the time"?

Yeah, definitely. And I apologize. To try to write a message to everyone is so hard. And that's why I emphasize discipleship, to get people to look through the Word for themselves, because I don't do a great job with everyone. I'll be the first to admit it. Man, if I were to walk into a church and hear myself preach certain messages I've preached, it would just overwhelm me. I would bug myself!

That's one reason I think there is an overdependence on preaching sometimes. Now that we've got the Internet, what's the point in spending millions of dollars to get a big building just to preach the sermon? You can watch the sermon just as easily on the Internet and then say, "Hey, let's gather together. Man, tell me what I said wrong. Help me if I've confused you in some areas. Let's have some discussion over this." And we can spend more time discussing. I

wish I could talk to everyone and talk through their specific situation rather than just giving a monologue. That's why discipleship is so necessary, because you can't expect one preacher to really minister and teach people to obey. You need tons of people shepherding.

I assume that the Francis Chan who is intense and passionate about biblical obedience obeys the command to take a Sabbath.

What do you do with your Sabbath?

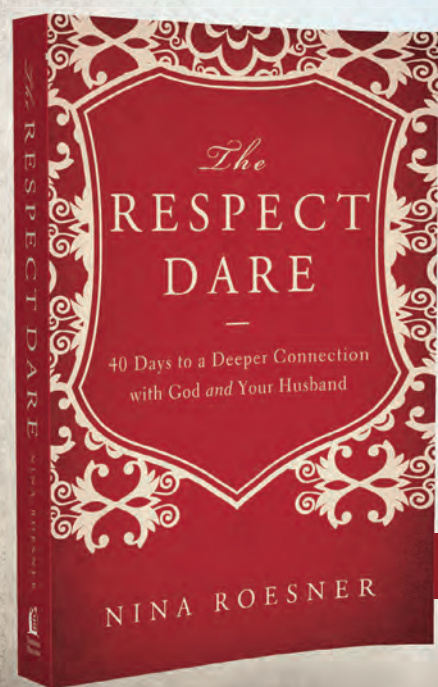
I love anything active. I've got five kids (ages 17 to 1), so I do whatever they all want to do. My one daughter had to drive on the same day that I taught my other one how to walk. So it's a weird, weird phase.

There's a sermon illustration in there somewhere.

Yeah. I love them all. I play with them. I love the guys I minister with. Playing basketball with them or going out surfing. I enjoy golf. I love laughing with people. I love just being with the guys and laughing. I love just going out to dinner with my wife and talking and hanging out.

If Francis Chan were to die tonight, what would be one thing you'd regret at "being called home" sooner than later?

I'm pretty happy with my life, but there are still some fears in me. I'm still a coward when it comes to sharing my faith. I've gotten better, but as far as character, that would be the one thing that stands out to me. I don't love people as much as I would like to, the way I see people in Scripture doing it. I'm just not as bold as I should be at times. And so I wish I could grow in those character qualities. +



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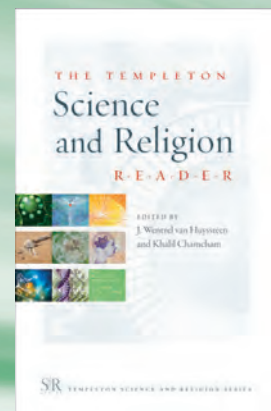
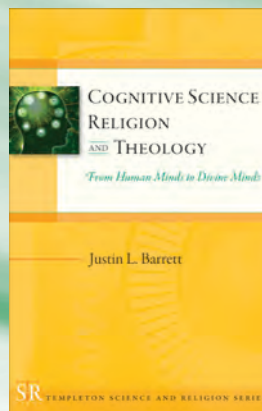
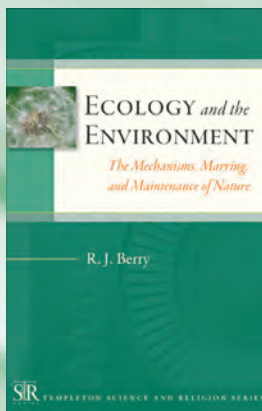
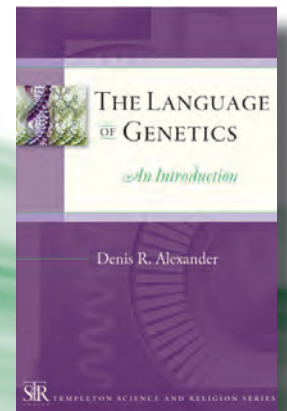
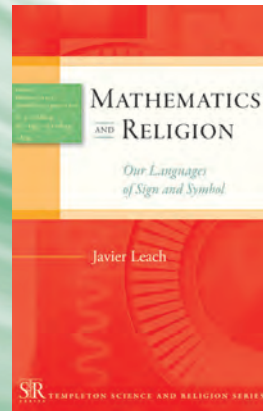
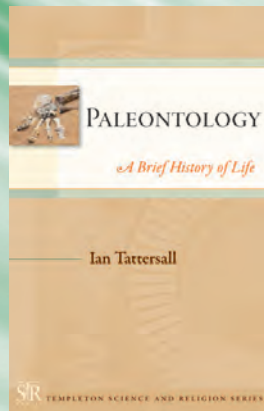
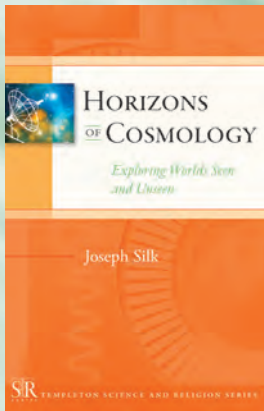
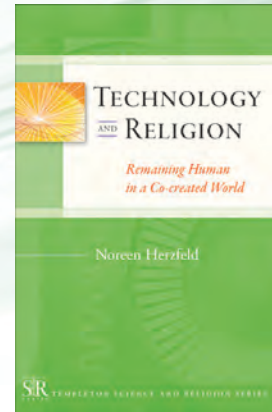
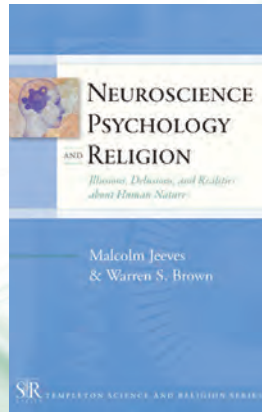
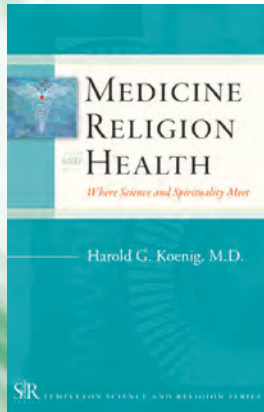
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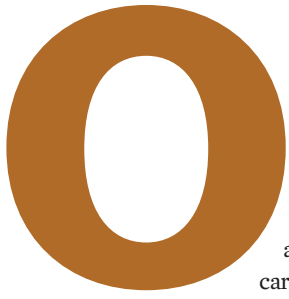
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[MEDITATION]

Because of the Incarnation,
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with tender love. By Ryan Salyards

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ON THE DOWNHILL SLOPE of a dirt road, west of a small one-room cabin, there flows a creek whose memory winds through the minds of those who have grown to love that place. Strung between a tree with the names of many a relative carved in its bark and an ancient pine, a bridge hangs above the water and the rocks below.

My great-grandfather had a farm there once, and left the ground for his family to love as he once had. He loved that place and made it his home, and his love echoed through the lives of his children. His daughter married a man of meager means. That man became my grandfather, and the place shaped the young couple as much as their work shaped the place.

My grandfather headed to the woods after his shift at the factory and on the weekends, hauling whatever scrap lumber and used nails he could scrounge so that he could work on the cabin that stands there now. When my grandmother became ill, the place became his sanctuary and the work his restoration. For the 10 years she lay in a coma, the place was in many ways a home for my grandfather and my mother.

As he is now older and unable to do much, the upkeep of that place has fallen to me. I rebuilt that bridge last summer. My grandfather's bridge had begun to sag and creak with each crossing. The water is not deep there, and there's no real need for a bridge. Nevertheless, the place that had given me much beckoned, calling me to make an offering of thanks for the beauty and the love it has inexplicably sewn to my memory. There by that bridge, I first kissed a girl with our feet dangling in the water. There I went camping with friends when we should have been at school, dunked my cousins in the swimming hole, caught wary trout in the cool of a spring morning, and sat around a fire talking about life, love, and faith with friends. A sense of obligation and responsibility for the well-being of that place drew me there to rebuild the bridge and it draws me there still. No longer creaking and sagging, the bridge stands as a path to the woods beyond, a memorial of those who have loved it in the past, and an invitation to those who love it still.

I haven't invested in a place as I should. But I am blessed by an attachment to a place that I always can call home. Few of us have planted roots and truly invested in a place. Nevertheless, we have been shaped inevitably by some place and will remain attached to it.

All too frequently, Christians strive to achieve much and answer the call to do some great thing, but we forget to be somewhere. We forget that a place that is loved, whether a small hometown or a city on the far side of the globe, is just as legitimate a concern as a cause that we love. We frequently see attachments, subjectivity, even sentimentality as weakening and confusing; however those very things and the places they involve are often our greatest sources of strength and clarity.

CALLED TO MAKE HOMES

Humankind's original task was to make a home. I'm convinced that deep down in the midst of the human design, we are fundamentally home makers. Since the beginning, people have glorified God by living and being at home. Genesis 1 says God blessed the first people and commanded them to "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it." This speaks of our responsibility as those who live on this earth created for God's glory. Jeremiah 29:4-7 says,

"This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 'Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.'"

As human beings, Christians are called and created to make homes, to invest in places. Furthermore, if God made people in his image, and if Christians are to conform to the image of Christ, then we have an even greater example of the call to invest in a place and to make a home.

Last year, I had the opportunity to speak in my college's chapel. As Advent began and I worked on my talk, I was struck by the magnitude of the Incarnation and the joy of celebrating Christ's coming to earth. Isaiah 7:14 says, "'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel'"—that is, God with us. This Christ whose birth we celebrate has the name *God with us*, and he made his home with us. As John 1 says, the Word "moved into the neighborhood" (The Message).

Christ's primary message during his ministry was about God's kingdom. Christ came to establish his kingdom, to build a home for the family of God. Scripture says that in the present time, the already and the not yet, the kingdom of God is among us, and Christ is King of all. Colossians 1:15-20

offers this expansive vision:

"The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all

things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."

Redemption is an act of totality. It is salvation from sin, and it is the divine and gracious renovation and restoration of a place where God once walked in the cool of the evening with the first humans at his side. If we view the work of Christ in its fullness, and if we answer the call to follow him, we must look to our investment in place, to our love for home. For Christ has invested, and has paid a greater price than can ever be imagined, so that those who believe in him may call his kingdom their home. Knowing that his kingdom is now among us and all will someday be reconciled to him, we Christians must live as members of that kingdom, as children of the King, and make ourselves at home.

Too frequently, Christians strive to achieve much and do some great thing, but we forget to be somewhere.

Ryan Salyards is a senior philosophy major at Geneva College. After graduation he plans on writing, taking seminary classes, and working on his family's farm.

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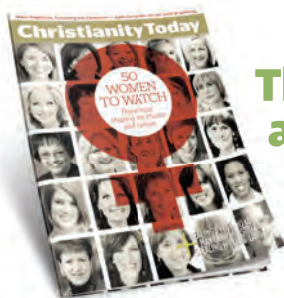


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OPINIONS AND PERSPECTIVES ON ISSUES FACING THE CHURCH

Viewpoints



Their holy boldness and God-given gifts are indeed changing the world.

Mimi Haddad

President, Christians for Biblical Equality

A Woman's Issue

Thank you for an intentional celebration of women's leadership in the October issue. It was wonderful to see so many friends mentioned, and to meet new ones as well. Their holy boldness and God-given gifts are indeed changing the world. It was a great beginning to what I hope will become a tradition at *Christianity Today*.

MIMI HADDAD

President, Christians for Biblical Equality

I should have been thrilled to see the October issue. But the cover title, "50 Women to Watch: Those most shaping the church and culture," sounded alarm bells. My concern is with the idea that anyone would or could "shape" the church. The only one who should be shaping the church is Jesus Christ. "Shaping" is what has caused so many divisions in the church and the watering down of sound biblical teaching.

Should our goal as Christians be to shape culture? Did Jesus call us to make our society more "Christian"? Does it help the ministries of those women to splash them across a magazine much in the style of *People's* "50 Most Beautiful People"? Or does it perpetuate America's

obsession with celebrities and trivialize the work the Holy Spirit is doing through everyday men and women?

ANN-MARGRET HOVSEPIAN
Montreal, Canada

Of course, our list of women to watch was in no way comprehensive. Here's who we missed, according to our readers: Phyllis Tickle, Kay Arthur, Stormie Omartian, Michelle Obama, Katie Davis, Sherry Surratt, Jenni Catron, Cathy Morris Rodgers, Nancy Leigh DeMoss, Katharine Jefferts Schori, just a mom, Hillary Clinton, Hispanics, and Native Americans.

Correction: Priscilla Shirer does not have a doctorate from Dallas Theological Seminary, nor was she the first African American to attend the school.

Not Risking Hell

"The Spiritual Sex" [Spotlight, October] states, "[W]omen are better Christians than men are." The explanation of this supposed superiority lies in the risk-averse nature of women when compared to men. This "insight" concludes: "They don't like risking injury, jail—or, it seems, hell."

The foundational flaw in the analysis is making the results about "better or

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

44%
50 Women You Should Know
CT Cover Package

16%
The Village Green: Calculated Generosity
Gary Moore, Amie Streater, and Douglas LeBlanc

9%
The Spiritual Sex
CT Spotlight

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



The Light in My Lit
Karen Swallow Prior

worse," which blossomed into a more serious flaw that reports an insulting and unproven hypothesis to "explain" the apparent "superiority." Even worse, women's faith is not seen for the shining example that others in the body of Christ can learn from.

HEIDI C. LEE
Belle Chasse, Louisiana

Irrelevant Freedom

"The Bonds of Freedom" [October] observed that the concept of "true freedom" or "real freedom" can be confusing to the average Christian. Therefore we should abandon those terms.

The difference that others have tried to explain is the difference between relevant and irrelevant constraints. If my local government tells me I can't build a factory on my land, that's an irrelevant constraint; I don't want to build a factory.

But if my doctor tells me I can't drink coffee anymore, that is very relevant. I love my coffee.

"True freedom" is the process by which the constraints that God asks us to observe become irrelevant. Technically, we are still constrained. In reality, we aren't. We have chosen to exercise our freedom in good rather than bad ways. And thus the truth of God's will makes us free.

WAYNE SHOCKLEY
Brooklyn, Wisconsin

COMMENTS? QUESTIONS?

CT'S EDITORS WOULD LOVE TO HEAR THEM.

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The Men of YFC

As a former member of Youth for Christ (YFC), "The Choice" [October] brought back fond memories of working with men like Ajith Fernando, men who toiled among young people, often sensing the suspicion of church leaders and smarting from their criticism, for extremely low wages, while seeking to identify with the pain of the youth they were serving. Directors like Fernando are revered for their personal integrity, constant faithfulness, and fierce devotion to Christ and service. These are men for whom unsaved youth are glad and the church should be justly proud. Unfortunately, not much is heard about them. Thanks for the kind, thoughtful, and very gracious appreciation of a modern saint.

STEVE SKEETE
E-mail

Against the Flow

Thanks for the excellent interview with sociologist Mark Regnerus ["The Regnerus Affair," October]. Most published research on this subject is biased by those who want to support the current politically correct tolerant view. The postmodern trend says, "Do what you like—there are no consequences."

Blessings (in the family and in society in general) can only flow from behavior that flows with God's flow. To go against that flow is to invite negative consequences. Like driving against the flow of the traffic on the highway: you may come through unscathed, but you're

more likely to have an accident.

HUGH WETMORE
E-mail

What Grace 'Dictates'

I regret that October's Village Green ["Is it stealing from God to split your tithe between the church and other charities?"] chose to avoid the issue of whether tithing for New Testament Christians is biblical. Tithing was obviously instituted under the law; we are now under grace.

The New Testament clearly indicates that stewardship is a matter of the heart and not of the law. While 10 percent is still an excellent guideline for stewardship, under grace, we give in response to what God has given us, not what the law dictates.

TOM JOHNSON
Amarillo, Texas

Lit Lessons

"The Light in My Lit" [October] brought back memories of when my love for literature drew me into the works of Ernest Hemingway. As I relished his style, I grew increasingly aware of how vastly different his worldview was from all I treasured in Christ and Scripture. I have never forgotten the fright that gripped my soul as I pondered what awaited a life lived on the path his enticing prose beckoned. I believe God used Hemingway, along with other literary greats, to stay my course and steady my faith, drawing me closer to him.

THOMAS J. RAMUNDO
Superintendent, Southern Michigan Conference of the Free Methodist Church USA



ONLINE POLL

GIVING BACK
How do you interpret tithing?

36%

Ten percent of your income should go to the church.

17%

Ten percent should go to the church or a faith-based charity.

5%

Ten percent should go to the church or a nonprofit group.

27%

You should give to the church and other causes, but it doesn't have to be ten percent.

10%

All giving is optional and we shouldn't consider percentages.

5%

Tithing is unbiblical.

Total votes: 244

(Online polls do not represent a scientific sample.)

compiled by Elissa Cooper

WORTH REPEATING

Things overheard at CT online.

"Why don't we admit that this election is a choice between two men who are not evangelicals?"

Laura C Steel, amid a reader debate about which of the two presidential candidates is a better fit for their religious beliefs.

Speaking Out: "The Real Differences Between Mormons and Orthodox Christians," by Gerald R. McDermott

"Maybe they are learning that creating something that changes people is just as important, if not more important, than complaining that culture isn't moving in the direction that you want."

Adam Shields, commenting on Liberty University students' relaxing activism. Today's students are more likely to try to change society by buying a pair of TOMS Shoes rather than being involved in politics.

"Liberty University's Flip-Flop Moment," by Karen Swallow Prior

"I want my brothers and sisters to be protected from the bitterness and snark of the world for as long as they can."

Charity Jill, hoping to shield students from being mocked. A website displaying pictures of awkward-looking couples on the Christian campus is meant to be funny but raises questions about voyeurism and meanness.

Her.meneutics: "The Problem with 'Awkward Couples of Liberty University,'" by Karen Swallow Prior

"Speak truthfully. Live truthfully."

David Jongewaard, urging Dinesh D'Souza to "be transparent" about his actions. After reports that the married president of The King's College was engaged to someone else, D'Souza resigned.

CT Liveblog: "Dinesh D'Souza, Married President of The King's College, Faces Questions Over New 'Fiancée,'" by Melissa Steffan

CULVER BLACK

Subverting the Taliban

Some things Christians can do to stop terrorists in Pakistan from shooting girls.



When the Taliban attempted to assassinate 15-year-old Malala Yousufzai in Pakistan on October 9, the world responded with outrage. Starting at age 11, she began to blog anonymously on the BBC website, advocating for education and rights for Pakistanis, especially school for young girls. Even before the shooting, Yousufzai was a hero among Pakistanis and people globally.

As Yousufzai recovers at a British hospital, the Taliban has issued fresh death threats. They say she is speaking against Islam and promoting Western ideals. But the people of Pakistan, united in anger and grief, have pushed the government to prevent such terrorist attacks and to educate more women and girls.

In addition to Taliban assassination attempts, other problems exacerbate the situation in Pakistan. Discriminatory law and lack of law enforcement are two problems. Official inaction during the Mardan church burning, false accusations of blasphemy against Rimsha Masih, and the 2011 assassination of Christian leader Shahbaz Bhatti are unforgettable recent examples. Pakistan's laws, amended by Islamic fundamentalists starting in 1978, make all religious minorities (Christians, Sikhs, Hindus, Baha'i, and Ahmadi Muslims) second-class citizens in the courts and during elections.

Despite the challenges, North American Christians are having positive influence. Several sources who spoke to CT said that Christians (Pakistanis and Westerners) are building durable new relationships and trust through a quieter approach with both Pakistanis and their leaders. Christians are also working at the grassroots, especially in their efforts to promote literacy.

The need for effective school-based literacy and education programs is huge. The Taliban has destroyed hundreds of school buildings, which Pakistan cannot afford to rebuild. A 2012 fact sheet says 49.5 million

of Pakistan's adults are illiterate, the third highest percentage in the world. In Pakistan, 69 percent of women do not work, but a working woman with high literacy skills earns 95 percent more than one with poor literacy skills.

Literacy, education, and language programs also promote understanding. In Pakistan, there is no one language spoken by more than 44 percent of the 176 million people. The national language, Urdu, is spoken by only 8 percent. One source told CT that the goal of educational programs is for Pakistani students to be "multilingual, multi-literate, and multicultural—that's when people can live in peace, when they understand and respect people around them."

There are several tangible ways to support reform in Pakistan and fuller religious freedom for its 2.8 million Christians. Here's one: The Presbyterian Education Board, Punjab, is a well-known organization that actively partners with American churches. Since 1998, it has reopened 14 church-run schools that a previous Pakistani government had closed. This past summer, children at a church in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, donated books, stuffed animals, and the proceeds from their lemonade stand after Veeda Javaid, head of the Education Board, spoke about her schools.

Churches can also support North American organizations that engage Pakistani leaders. Minhas Majeed Khan, an international relations lecturer at Pakistan's University of Peshawar, wrote her dissertation on evangelicals' influence on U.S. foreign policy. In

an e-mail interview, Khan said American Christians can play "a positive role by engaging local partners—for example, moderate religious leaders who have contacts and influence within Taliban factions, academia, and political leaders."

An example is the Virginia-based Institute for Global Engagement (IGE), which started new outreach in Pakistan in 2005. This think tank's connection with the University of Science and Technology in Bannu has drawn local people into fresh conversation.

The Taliban has major influence in Bannu. But IGE president Chris Seiple says his organization is warmly received as it provides schol-

arships and forums to discuss how to apply one's faith in society. Seiple and IGE offer to help Pakistanis think through issues without ignoring his Christian faith and their Muslim faith. IGE also partners with Faith Friends, a new Pakistani organization including Christians, Muslims, and others, which advocates for greater religious freedom.

As Christians, we are called to tread carefully but not lightly in Pakistan. Our quiet efforts—which always include winsome evangelism—won't overthrow the Taliban immediately and uproot terrorism tomorrow. But they can subvert injustice and terror over time.

In an interview last year, a CNN reporter asked Malala Yousufzai how she would inspire others to be brave like her. "God will ask you on the Day of Judgment," she replied firmly, "'Where were you when your people were asking [for] you?' Your people need you. You should come and stand up for their rights."✚



The Face of Change: At a candle-light vigil, Pakistanis protest the attack on Malala Yousufzai.

Christians are called to tread carefully but not lightly in Pakistan.

*Theology
on the Ground***Do American Christians need the
message of grace or a call to holiness?****PICK HOLINESS**

Will Willimon is a retired bishop of the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church and professor of Christian ministry at Duke Divinity School.

While we always need grace—grace defined by us Methodists as the gratuitous power of God to enable us to live transformed lives for God—Americans today are in desperate need of the disciplines of holiness. As a pastor, I know firsthand the morally chaotic, sadly devastated lives of those who thought it was possible to be good without God. The wreckage and superficiality of undisciplined lives surround us—and I’m not just talking about Donald Trump.

We Wesleyans believe that holiness is evidence of grace working in us. Too often, popular evangelical Christianity has stressed grace as what God in Christ has done for us; holiness churches stress grace as what God is daily doing in us and through us. Holiness is a name for what happens to us when a powerful, life-changing God commandeers our lives.

Grace is more than some benign, sweet syrup poured over us by a God who only says, “I love you just as you are; promise me you won’t change a thing.” Holiness of heart and life demonstrates to the world that Christ is able to not only love us as we are but also change us into what he would have us be. Holiness is Christ not only forgiving our sin but also redeeming us and utilizing us for his work in the world.

In other words, holiness is God’s grace in action, enlisting us to work for God’s will in the world.

Holiness gives us the courage to be in but not of the world. Flaccid Christians reduce Christianity to a personal feeling and are thereby left defenseless against the lures of American consumerist, militarist paganism. Holiness graces us with that which we do not naturally have—the ability to say, “No!”

The Christian faith is too demanding for lone individuals who only practice the faith’s requirements when they feel like it; community commitment is essential. I’m encouraged that some, especially young adults, recognize this today: There has been an outbreak of holiness groups on college campuses—small cells of Christian students who covenant to routinely practice the same five or six disciplines (prayer, confession, Scripture study, and others).

Some of my neo-Calvinist and crypto-Calvinist friends are suspicious of this Wesleyan talk of moral, spiritual transformation. Is it really possible for sinners, even

saved ones, to grow morally and spiritually while we inhabit sinful bodies? I grew up in South Carolina in the segregated South of Strom Thurmond and George Wallace. I know the pervasiveness and unavoidability of personal and social sin firsthand. True, even after 60 years of God’s work on me and in me, I lack a fully sanctified life. Even so, I can see the fruits of sanctification and holiness practice in my life. Trust me: You wouldn’t have wanted to know me before the grace of God commandeered me and made me more holy than if I had been left to my own devices.

ALWAYS AMAZING: GRACE

Halee Gray Scott is a professor and author who studies spiritual development and moral formation. Her book *Brave New Women: A Survival Guide for Christian Women Leaders* is due out next spring.

We need grace to see the need for holiness, and grace to desire holiness. Without grace, we get legalism, Christianity-by-rote—hardly



worth anything, much less something that can change the world. Without holiness, we get the cheap grace Dietrich Bonhoeffer spoke of: “grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.”

Grace provides us with a vision of holiness, of what constitutes a holy life and our need—the world’s need—for holiness. We need holiness not just because we’re called to it, but also because it’s the way people see we’re different from the world.

We need a better understanding of holiness. Probably no word in English needs clarification so badly as the word *holiness*. In 2006, the Barna Group conducted a study analyzing the concept of holiness among Christians. When asked what holiness means, the most common reply, given by nearly one quarter of the respondents, was simply, “I don’t know.” Holiness (*hagiasmos*) literally means “set apart to God.” The word is both spiritually and morally significant. Through Jesus’ work on the cross, all believers stand in a position of holiness before God. As God’s holy ones, we are also called to be personally holy, rooted in love and demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit.

We need grace to turn from sin and desire holiness. Right now, in many churches, we set the goal of attracting more people rather than creating deeper people. We substitute social justice advocacy for genuine inner transformation. We follow hard after therapists and self-help gurus rather than God and his holiness.

We need grace to stare down the sin in our lives, and grace to grieve it. Our desire for holiness is thwarted by the simple refusal to acknowledge the reality of sin. Recently, the Twitter feed of a popular spiritual formation ministry called upon their hundreds of followers to pray this prayer: “Lord Jesus, have mercy on me.” But the ministry left a key line out of the prayer; the whole prayer is, “Lord Jesus, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Why are we afraid to be candid about sin?

The aftertaste of the legalistic fire-and-brimstone sermons of the 20th century remains embedded in our consciousness. But what if

we were honest about sin and connected it to the horrors of our time—poverty, domestic violence, sex trafficking, drug abuse, sex abuse, and child abuse? What if our answer is not just reactive but also proactive—becoming a holy people so that holiness spreads? C. S. Lewis wrote, “[Jesus] came to this world and became a man to spread the kind of life he has—by what I call ‘a good infection.’ Every Christian is to become a little Christ. The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply nothing else.” Contrary to what many of us have believed

at one point or another, real holiness isn’t boring; it’s so compelling it’s contagious.

The beginning and end of holiness is grace. It’s grace that cultivates our appetite for holiness and grace that moves us along, inch by inch, toward the kind of person God has called us to be.

WE NEED ‘GROLINESS’

Margaret Feinberg is a popular speaker and author. Her latest book, *Wonderstruck: Awaken to the Nearness of God*, is out this month.

American Christians have misgivings about both grace and holiness, and for good reason. This dynamic duo is often misunderstood.

Grace is all too often portrayed as a pushover. He seems to drop in on a whim, never asking or requiring anything of anyone. He’s the toll-free number to call in every situation. Did you break any of the Ten Commandments or have a bad day that you took out on the checkout clerk? Call 1-800-GRACE, and he’ll get you out scot-free. No bills. No cost. But such an understanding of grace as an unlimited get-out-of-jail-free card reduces its richness.

Meanwhile, holiness is viewed as dated and out of style by many Americans. Picture him in a polyester, buttoned-up-to-the-collar shirt and thick glasses perched on a hawkish nose. Holiness is often seen as an uptight prude, vacuuming every last drop of fun out of the room.

Both portrayals fail to capture the wonders of grace and holiness.

Grace is unmerited favor. It is the assurance that God remains committed to the work he has begun in us. Grace gently reminds us that the reservoirs of God’s goodness will never run dry. Grace greets us with open arms when we finally realize our performance-based lifestyle will never work. Grace reminds us that everyone is invited to God’s party—no one is beyond redemption or restoration.

Meanwhile, holiness reminds us that though God loves us just as we are, right where we are, his love does not end there. God’s love wants to transform us and take us to higher places. Holiness confronts us when we’re tempted to take shortcuts, compromise, or tell ourselves that the “little” things don’t really matter.

Holiness provides a quick kick in the rear when we begin to settle in our journey with God. Holiness reminds us we can always become more Christlike. Holiness calls us to live in the world but act set apart.

So are American Christians in need of a message of grace or a call to more holiness? What we need is a message of “groliness”—a rich, textured blend of both. Grace and holiness are best friends meant to walk hand in hand in our lives. Holiness reminds us of our need for grace. We will always fall short of the call to holiness without God’s free gift. Grace calls us to greater holiness and turns our eyes from self-righteousness to Jesus’ self-sacrifice.

Remember the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15. On the days we find ourselves with the big brother’s holier-than-thou attitude, we need to be reminded of the message of grace. And on the days we find ourselves like the little brother, tempted to abuse our freedom in Christ, we need to be reminded of the call to holiness. The message of groliness invites us to experience the loving embrace of our Father and to grow into the fullness of all God has for us.





Breast-feeding in the Back Pew

Why are we so uncomfortable when nursing mothers imitate God in church?

This Christmas, many of us will strive once again to reflect on the significance of the Incarnation. We will try to remember, amid the usual busyness, the strange wonder of God coming to earth as a baby, of an unwed teenager carrying God-in-the-flesh in her flesh.

If it is remarkable that an ordinary woman carried our Savior in her body, it is equally so that she nourished him with that same body—specifically with her *breasts*.

Our world looks so different from first-century Palestine. Today an unmarried pregnant woman does not fear the public embarrassment that Joseph spared Mary, and a baby would be born in a stable only in an absolute emergency. If he had followed the customs of the time, Joseph wouldn't have attended Jesus' birth. Yet for all the ways modern Western culture seem brazenly relaxed compared with the culture of Jesus' time, there is one act we're more squeamish about, especially in our worship spaces.

Early this year, a Georgia woman claimed she was kicked out of worship for breast-feeding her infant. I know a bit of what she must have felt: On a family trip to St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City, as I started to breast-feed my son in the sanctuary, I was whisked away by a security guard to the bathroom. Countless other Christian women, trying to feed their children without having to miss a sermon, have faced the disapproval of others who think breasts have no place in the sanctuary.

How widespread the no-breast-feeding rule is in U.S. churches is hard to say. But one thing's clear: Our squeamishness over breast-feeding has little precedent in the church. Instead, Christians have long celebrated this aspect of Jesus' early life. Church father Ephrem the Syrian wrote a collection of hymns on the Nativity, including this, which connects the humble picture of Jesus nursing from Mary's breasts to Jesus' generous provision as King of all creation:

*The Lofty One became like a little child,
yet hidden in Him was a treasure of
Wisdom that suffices for all.
He was lofty but he sucked Mary's milk,
and from His blessings all creation sucks.*

Ephrem's comfort with a breast-feeding Mary appears in much devotional art through the centuries. Tender images of Mary nursing Jesus, known as *Maria Lactans*, flourished after the 13th century, when theologians and artists began contemplating a fully *human* Christ. But in the 16th century attitudes changed, and the Council of Trent condemned nudity in church art; Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel nudes summarily received painted loincloths and other strategically placed cover-ups. With Pope John Paul II's approval, the coverings were removed during the chapel's renovation: "The human body," he said, "can remain nude and uncovered and preserve intact its splendor and its beauty." It's not just Catholic thinkers who have gone this route. Martin Luther celebrated the physical bond between Mary and Jesus, noting in his famous Christmas sermon that Mary "nourished the child with milk from her breast and not with strange milk . . . her breast being filled by heaven, without injury or impurity."

Following in the footsteps of the church fathers, our sacred spaces should likewise embrace the human body in all its mess. In a culture where breasts are perennially on display—but where breast-feeding is often regarded with disgust or at least embarrassment—allowing mothers to breast-feed

in worship would counter how sexualized breasts are in modern culture. It would also communicate respect for mothers, many of whom feel shunned or outlawed when asked to use segregated rooms to feed their babies. The earthy eloquence of breast-feeding, even in church, would also remind us of both the

humanness of our Savior and of God's loving sustenance of us through all the seasons of our lives.

Indeed, God himself describes his sustaining love using images of a nursing mother:

Can a woman forget her nursing child,

that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb?

Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. (Isa. 49:15, ESV)

[A]nd you shall nurse, you shall be carried upon her hip, and bounced upon her knees. As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. (Isa. 66:12–13, ESV)

May we come to see the breast-feeding women in our midst not as sacrilegious temptresses but as living icons of God's own care for us.

Rachel Marie Stone is author of the forthcoming book *Eat with Joy: Redeeming God's Gift of Food* (InterVarsity) and blogs at RachelMarieStone.com. Visit *Her.meneutics* at ChristianityToday.com/women.



Our sacred spaces should not exclude but embrace the bodily aspects of our humanity.



Misreading the Magnificat

It's hard to find hymns that embody Scripture's sharp critique of the rich.

W

hen Mary came to visit, Elizabeth's child leaped in her womb. Mary's spirit, too, jumped to a higher plane. In the inspired exchange between the cousins, the pregnant virgin sang a prophetic hymn of praise for God's salvation. In that prophecy, Mary praised God for filling the hungry with good things and sending the rich away empty. We call her hymn the "Magnificat," and we Christians have been singing it as a regular part of worship since about the year 500.

For most of the 1,500 years since, congregations and cloistered monks and nuns chanted the straight, unadorned biblical text of Mary's song. In the latter half of the 20th century, however, musical paraphrases of the Magnificat flourished. One of my favorites is Timothy Dudley-Smith's bold four-square hymn, "Tell Out, My Soul." Others inhabited the folk idiom: Christopher Idle's "My Soul Proclaims the Greatness of the Lord," Rory Cooney's "Canticle of the Turning," and John Michael Talbot's "Holy Is His Name."

As a worship musician who tries to fine-tune what we sing with the Scriptures we read, I have felt frustrated by the way musicians blunt the Magnificat's protest against the 1 percent (to borrow Occupy language). Take Dudley-Smith's otherwise excellent "Tell Out, My Soul" as an example. Five years younger than his Cambridge friend John Stott, Dudley-Smith was part of the circle that renewed English evangelical hymnody midcentury. But in "Tell Out, My Soul," he focused on the first half of Mary's poetic parallelism that contrasted the powerful with the humble and neglected the second half that counterpoised God's treatment of the hungry with the rich. Talbot and Cooney commit the same sin of omission. Idle's text is the refreshing exception.

It is easy to spiritualize power and turn it into pride. Thus Dudley-Smith's rendering: "Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight."

Now, we know that pride and stubbornness are not the exclusive province of the rich. If the Holy Spirit had wanted to talk about these vicious habits of the heart, he would have inspired Mary along those lines only. But he didn't, fingering the rich along with the powerful. As a Church of England bishop, Dudley-Smith may have thought wealth too delicate a matter for his Scripture song.

It is hard to find Christian hymns that embody Scripture's sharp critique of the rich and the dangers of wealth. There are positive songs about simplicity ("Simple Gifts") and exhortations not to cling to earthly goods (the German Lutheran chorales "A Mighty Fortress" and "Jesus, Priceless Treasure"), but not much on the actual dangers of wealth.

Scripture's sharp-edged message about the danger of wealth is not restricted to the Magnificat. One of my favorite gospel songs adapts Jesus' story of the rich man and Lazarus—"Rusty Old Halo" by Hoyt Axton. Unfortunately, Axton of "Joy to the World (Jeremiah Was a Bullfrog)" fame blunted the parable by reducing the fires of hell to "a rusty old halo, skinny white cloud, robe that's so wooly it scratches."

There's a refreshingly unusual folk ballad on Keith and Kristyn Getty's new album, *Hymns for the Christian Life*. Think of "Simple Living" as the musical equivalent of Shane Claiborne and Tony Campolo's *Red Letter Revolution*. Unlike Axton's

soft-pedaling, the Getty-Stuart Townend songwriting team gives Jesus' dialogue with the rich young ruler a transparent treatment. They hone the sharp edge of Jesus' advice: "Sell all you have; give to the poor. / Then heaven's treasure shall be yours." Francis of Assisi couldn't have said it more pointedly.

The last lines of the song's first verse are also close to Jesus' original: "How hard for those who are rich on earth / To gain the wealth of heaven." The second verse focuses on the widow's mite story. It concludes, "Not what you give but what you keep / Is what the King is counting."

Keith recently told me that with this album he wanted to join worship to everyday life. Thus it addresses work, suffering, community, family, doubt—and money. "A more quotidian approach to theology," he calls it. Props to the Gettys and Townend for giving us lyrics that present Jesus' message unabated.

I don't want to argue here about what Jesus meant in his criticism of mammon and his threats toward the rich. That's a debate for a different space. But however you interpret those statements, they are harsh and wounding. Keith says that he wants to make us traditionalists uncomfortable with songs like this.

Those who paraphrase Scripture have a special duty to let it speak with its proper force. Add a good tune, and you've fortified those words to shape our lives. ✚



As a worship musician who tries to fine-tune what we sing with the Scriptures we read, I have felt frustrated by the way musicians blunt the Magnificat's protest against the 1 percent.

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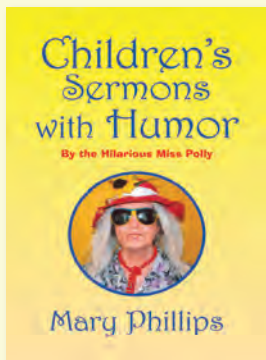


THEY DEFEND **ME.**

In Louisiana, Christian students were denied equal access to school buses. In fact, as Christians, our rights are threatened every day. That's why Alliance Defending Freedom—formerly the Alliance Defense Fund—is dedicated to the unyielding legal defense of religious liberty, the sanctity of life, and marriage and family. Help protect our shared right to freely live out our faith. Learn how at AllianceDefendingFreedom.org



Books to Lift Your Spirit



Children's Sermons with Humor

Mary Phillips

Softcover | 9781441511560

Price: \$15.99 Pages: 53

The Bible has a wealth of life lessons that each can benefit from. Teaching kids about these biblical principles, however, can be quite challenging. Author Mary Phillips takes on this challenge as she presents a fun new twist in exploring the Bible through *Children's Sermons with Humor*. By The Hilarious Miss Polly.



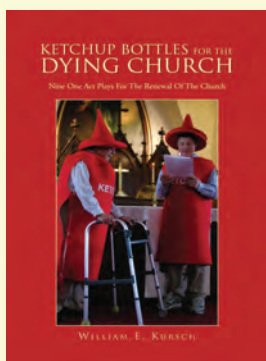
Life's Funny Ways

Angela Davis

Softcover | 9781477101179

Price: AU\$29.99 Pages: 153

Life's Funny Ways aims to aid the reader in reconnecting with their inner spirit. Each finely crafted piece in this ruminant volume acts as a travel companion to life's journeys. Divided into three parts, the recurring theme throughout the book includes love and compassion sprinkled with humor.



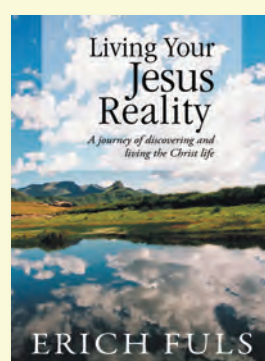
Ketchup Bottles For The Dying Church

William E. Kursch

Softcover | 9781450083409

Price: \$15.99 Pages: 84

William E. Kursch brings some truth and reality back into the Christian church with his *Ketchup Bottles For The Dying Church*, nine one act plays with the crystal clear vision of Soren Kierkegaard's dilemma with the church. Kursch promotes hope for dying churches as he addresses some of the systemic problems they unknowingly face.



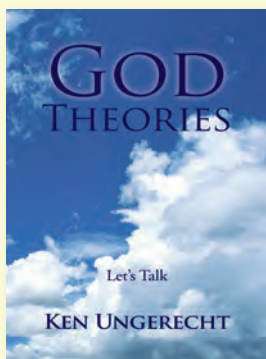
Living Your Jesus Reality

Erich Fuls

Softcover | 9781469153995

Price: AU\$29.99 Pages: 231

Living Your Jesus Reality presents Jesus in Person incarnated in Spirit-birthed children of Father God as one's Divine Reality. As a person lives from Jesus and through Jesus, one's life reflects the glory and works of Christ in action. For more information about this life changing book please visit www.JesusForReal.com.



God Theories

Ken Ungerecht

Softcover | 9781453544167

Price: \$12.99 Pages: 104

Author Ken Ungerecht explores the primary theories of life's origins on our planet with the key intent of promoting more open dialogue in our efforts to sift out the nuggets of truth that can be mined from all of them. A reasoned conversation around the question of "God" begins in *God Theories*.



With Peace in Mind

John Stephens

Softcover | 9781456891695

Price: \$22.38 Pages: 140

Looking for a much needed dose of optimism to start your day right? Look no further as John Stephens shares *With Peace in Mind*. This anthology of prose and poetry are concise but sharp; the insightful messages strike directly to the heart and soul, immersing you in an inspiring journey.



The Three Greatest Needs In A Home

Deacon Walter James

Softcover | 9781462871575

Price: \$15.99 Pages: 50

This book offers enlightenment on what makes a house a happy and ideally complete home. Walter James provides honest and dependable insights that would surely work on anyone's marriage. He explains the value and importance of the three great things that will transform one's house into a great home—those are Love, Faith, and Patience.



The Seventh-Day Sabbath and its Redemptive Function in God's Everlasting Covenant of Grace

A.M. Simataa

Softcover | 9781477105498

Price: \$22.38 Pages: 227

At turns indispensable and illuminating, *The Seventh-Day Sabbath and its Redemptive Function in God's Everlasting Covenant of Grace* imbues a comprehensive view of the pervasive truths about the Bible Sabbath and other topics relevant to the faithful of the Seventh-Day Adventists. This enlightening piece befits those who seek spiritual guidance and salvation in Jesus Christ.

BOOKS, MOVIES, MUSIC, AND THE ARTS

CT Review



Home Away from Home

Lamin Sanneh has journeyed from Africa to the West, and from Islam to Christianity. By Paul Marshall

A

t this time in history, the gulf separating the worlds of Islam and the Christian West can sometimes seem unbridgeable, the conflicts between them unsolvable. The time is ripe, then, for Lamin Sanneh, someone intimately familiar with both worlds, to tell his improbable life story.

Sanneh, though of royal lineage, grew up in a poor Muslim family in the colonial Gambian village of Georgetown, on an island in the Gambia River. “There was no church,” he writes, “in the town where I

was growing up; I had never seen a Bible in my life; I had never heard anyone teach or preach about Christianity; there was no mention of Christianity in the books we read at school.”

Today, however, Sanneh is an accomplished Christian scholar whose influence traverses multiple continents. Teaching and researching posts with Yale Divinity School, the University of London, and two Pontifical Commissions are among this distinguished man’s many titles and honors.

From Islam to Christianity, from provincial poverty to global intellectual pre-eminence—Sanneh has indeed been on quite a journey. In ***Summoned from the Margin: Homecoming of an African*** (Eerdmans) ★★★★★, he reflects on the many steps and decisions that shaped this unlikely of biographies.

At first, the title is likely to suggest to a Western reader, as it did to me, that the margin from which Sanneh was summoned was his birthplace, and that his homecoming was to the Christian world—ultimately to Catholicism, where he has found his spiritual home. But the image also suggests the opposite: the Christian world as the margin to which he was summoned—a strange, distant world, remote from the world of his childhood. The homecoming, in this vein, is his return to Georgetown with his children, which first fueled his autobiographical reflections.

THREE LEVELS OF REFLECTION

Sanneh, who seldom allows anything of his own or others’ lives to pass without careful analysis, reflection, and contemplation, writes on at least three levels.

One is autobiography, the story of a fascinating life—growing up in a traditional African culture being transformed at once by Islam (or the Arab world) and by Christianity (or the Western world). We learn of the dynamics of polygamous families—not in the abstract, but based on direct experience. This family structure drove a wedge between

his paternal and maternal siblings, with the former emerging as rivals and the latter as allies. Sanneh’s Muslim father, experienced more as a distant patriarch than a loving caretaker, forbade him to attend a “Western,” “infidel” school. His equally Muslim mother, in the manner of mothers, evaded that order, though that meant



that young Lamin would have no money for school fees, books, supplies, clothes, and sometimes food.

Summoned from the Margin, then, is not the dramatic biography of a soldier or statesman. Instead, it's the story of a scholar and thinker who, through very long, patient, and disciplined work, rises to the highest reaches of his profession. Driven by a hunger for education and learning, Sanneh clawed his way into an outer world that repeatedly rejected him on account of his conversion, his new faith, and his race. Most of the story concerns his inner life—spouses and children enter only intermittently, though lovingly.

Another level is a kind of personal anthropology, wherein his life's experiences and choices are weighed and connected. Sanneh analyzes his thoughts and carefully compares the multiple languages that he needed to make sense of his life's journey. There are many references to scholars, but his purpose is not to enter scholarly debates. Sanneh is after something deeper: an examination of his own heart. To wit, he chooses more quotations from poets, novelists, and other literary figures (Virgil, William Wordsworth,

Not only is Sanneh highly regarded as a scholar of both Islam and Christianity, he has also lived reflectively within cultures profoundly shaped by both faiths.

William Shakespeare, John Keats, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Gustave Flaubert, Thomas Gray, Elizabeth Browning, John Masefield, Oscar Wilde, Helen Keller, and C. S. Lewis) than from scholars. The largest source of quotations is the Psalms.

A third level is confession, in the sense of Augustine's confessions: how a boy raised in a Muslim family, in a Muslim village, almost in a Muslim world, came, with little human intervention, to become a Christian. This story deserves careful consideration, since it comes from a man with a doubly unique vantage point. Not only is Sanneh highly regarded as a scholar of both Islam and Christianity, he has also lived reflectively within cultures profoundly shaped by both faiths. His conversion narrative shows a sharp awareness of what he has come from, and to—and why. Clearly, Sanneh has loved

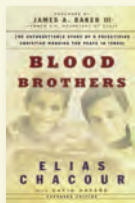
his Muslim family and friends. He is deeply aware of what draws them to Islam, and keeps them within it.

Sanneh writes critically, however, of the church's relation to Islam, portraying with keen sensitivity the formidable pressures that confront converts to Christianity. At the risk of making his perspective on Christian-Muslim relations seem unduly harsh, it's worth exploring some of his trenchant observations.

"Islam," he writes, "encourages conversion—just not *from* it. . . . Muslims honor and celebrate their converts as trophies of faith, while Christians take their converts as charitable rations with a pinch of shame. It forces Christian converts underground to keep their faith quiet, or else makes them propitiatory tokens of a grateful church for Muslim forbearance. This arrangement gives Muslims the confidence that they hold the high ground

MY TOP 5 BOOKS ON ISRAEL & PALESTINE

By Gary Burge, professor of New Testament at Wheaton College and author of *Jesus and the Land* (Baker)



BLOOD BROTHERS

ELIAS CHACOUR WITH DAVID HAZARD (CHOSEN BOOKS)

Perhaps no book in English has opened the thorny problem of struggle and reconciliation in Galilee to more people than Chacour's personal story, told from the perspective of a Galilean native. This is always the first book I offer someone who wants to explore the roots of the conflict and hear personal stories of what it has meant for Christians living there.



WHOSE PROMISED LAND?

The Continuing Crisis over Israel and Palestine
COLIN CHAPMAN (BAKER BOOKS)

A poignant and compelling history of the Israel-Palestine conflict, told by a British Christian scholar who now resides in Cambridge. Chapman was for many years a professor in Beirut and, thanks to his fluency in Arabic, can see this struggle from the inside unlike many others.



I AM A PALESTINIAN CHRISTIAN

MITRI RAHEB (FORTRESS PRESS)

In every part of the world, it is vital to hear the authentic voices of those in the local church. Raheb is a pastor in Bethlehem and one of the leading Christian intellectuals in the Palestinian church. American Christians barely know that a Palestinian church exists; here we can meet one of its pastors.



ON THE ROAD TO ARMAGEDDON

How Evangelicals Became Israel's Best Friend
TIMOTHY P. WEBER

(BAKER ACADEMIC)

Weber is an evangelical historian who has penned perhaps the most important history of Israel's relationship with the Christian church in America. Winsome, anecdotal, and just plain compelling, Weber tells us why America and its evangelical communities are so ardently pro-Israel.



COFFINS ON OUR SHOULDERS

The Experience of the Palestinian Citizens of Israel
DAN RABINOWITZ AND KHAWLA

ABU-BAKER (UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS)

Two sociologists, one Israeli and one Palestinian, tell their personal stories growing up near each other in Haifa. They recount how the history of the last 50 years has utterly shaped their families, their identities, and how they view the world.

vis-à-vis Christians; after all, only the inferior religion would agree to such terms.”

As a convert to Christianity, Sanneh felt the crushing weight of these dynamics. Churches, beset by the “Western guilt complex,” welcomed former Muslims only reluctantly, as they threatened to “upset the status quo.” Between Islamic self-confidence and Christian self-doubt, “the border crossing with Islam was a one-way street,” and Sanneh was “moving against the flow of traffic, and in the process setting off alarm bells all around the ramparts.”

The West’s relationship with Islam is likely to remain a major issue in coming decades, and perhaps well beyond that. This struggle will have many dimensions, and Lamin Sanneh’s story, analysis, and confession can be an indispensable aid in our attempts to understand it.

REJECTION AND HONOR

One of Sanneh’s many themes is rejection—rejection from the academy because of his beliefs, and rejection from churches because of his race and his conversion. Many in the universities, especially in the Ivy League, were apparently uncomfortable with his clear devotion to the truth of Christianity. And because of his race and culture, he did not fit their New England ethos; he was not one of them. In American churches, he often faced raw racist paternalism. Both African and American Christians frequently regarded him as a potential source of embarrassment. As a convert from Islam, they worried he could pose an obstacle to their programs for interreligious dialogue.

Sanneh closes with words from John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*: “[A]nd though with great difficulty I am got hither, yet now I do not repent me of all the trouble I have been at to arrive where I am. . . . My marks and scars I carry with me, to be a witness for me that I have fought his battles who will now be my Rewarder.”

Of course, Sanneh wears not only scars of rejection, but laurels of honor. It is a testimony to the depth of his oft-embattled faith that, having experienced both rejection and honor in great measure, he perseveres in his homecoming journey. ➤

Paul Marshall is senior fellow at the Hudson Institute’s Center for Religious Freedom.

Rest Works

For Matthew Sleeth, Sabbath-keeping furthers both our happiness and holiness. By Leslie Leyland Fields

We’re overworked, stressed, constantly on the move. More than 90 percent of Americans stay connected to their mobile phones—which is to say, to their office—24/7.

Old news. In **24/6: A Prescription for a Healthier, Happier Life** (Tyndale) ★★★★★, Matthew Sleeth, M.D., dashes off a prescription that is 3,500 years older: a return to the fourth commandment (“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy”).

As someone who has taken the dose, I have unexpected news to report. Halfway through, I felt so convinced of Sleeth’s arguments for rest (and so exhausted from my previous Sabbath), I took a nap. Without guilt. My testimonial, then: 24/6 works!

Sleeth makes a winsome case for a return to Sabbath “rest, renewal and reverence.” As the director of Blessed Earth and the author of *Serve God, Save the Planet*, he brings his dual expertise in eco-theology and medicine to the subject. A Sabbath, after all, is given to the land itself, and who would know more about workaholicism than a former ER physician?

His diagnostic skills are on full display. We take comfort from our work obsession, he notes, because “[i]f work is the meaning of our lives, then more work equals more meaning.” To balance hard work, we engage in hard play. But there’s a biblical solution to our collective freneticism: work hard—then stop, a rhythm where “the work takes on more meaning and the stopping takes on holiness.”

God’s holiness is the very ground of the fourth commandment, the longest and most detailed commandment of the ten, Sleeth reminds us: “He rests because he is holy and everything that God does is holy. . . . Rest shows who God is.”

He does address the usual issues around Sabbath-keeping: Which day? What constitutes work and rest? Does Jesus’ grace nullify the commandment? He sketches these issues helpfully without getting stuck in the usual

ruts of legalism or, on the other side, a casual libertinism that reduces the Sabbath to any personal moment of diversion.

For all this good, I confess to a few queasy moments along the way. The subtitle itself threatens a Joel Osteen–like “live your best life now.” The vibe continues in the preface, which highlights a business owner who closes his store on Sunday and ends up, yes, a multimillionaire. Thankfully, Sleeth makes few prosperity promises beyond that lapse, but he clearly knows it will take some pragmatism and marketing to sell the Sabbath to a horde of workaholic pragmatists. Overall, though, the theologian in me is slightly disappointed. More should have been done to address the sacred/secular divide that the fourth commandment appears to establish and sanctify. The seventh day is named holy; does this imply the other six days of work and commerce are not? It’s not until the last third of the book that the author enlarges the Sabbath from a single day to a “sabbatical way of life,” but even to the last, I sense a dualism that isn’t fully reconciled.

Admittedly, it’s easy to find gaps in a small book that tackles a weighty topic. In the end, Sleeth made the right call. In resting on the seventh day, he notes, God showed restraint, which is “not doing everything that one has the power to do.” The doctor has shown a similar restraint. Would an exhaustive theological treatise on the Sabbath urge fatigued readers toward a fuller life of reverence, balance, and faith? Not likely.

I expect and hope the doctor’s prescription will lead to ditched cell phones and outbreaks of walks, family dinners, naps, and a furious shuffling of to-do lists, which may feel a lot like work at first. But not for long. ➤

Leslie Leyland Fields, an author and CT contributing editor, lives on Kodiak Island, Alaska.



Everyone's a Theologian

from **A LITTLE BOOK FOR NEW THEOLOGIANS:
WHY AND HOW TO STUDY THEOLOGY**

KELLY M. KAPIC (IVP ACADEMIC, 126 PAGES)

Whenever we speak about God we are engaged in theology. The term “theology” means a word (logos) about God (theos), so when anyone speaks about God, whether that person dropped out of high school or completed a PhD in philosophy, he or she is engaged in theology. Theology is not reserved for those in the academy; it is an aspect of thought and conversation for all who live and breathe, who wrestle and fear, who hope and pray.

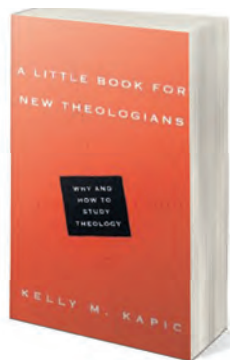
Theological questions surround our lives, whether we know it or not. A wife and husband facing infertility inevitably struggle through deep theological questions, whether or not they want to voice them. College students working through issues of identity, culture, politics and ethics struggle—in one way or another—with theological convictions and how to live them. Our concepts about the divine inform our lives more deeply than most people can trace. Whether we view God as distant or near, as gracious or capricious, as concerned or apathetic, the conclusions we reach—whether the result of careful reflection or negligent assumptions—guide our lives.

Christians must care deeply about theology. If the true God is renewing our lives and calling us to worship him “in spirit and truth” (John 4:23), then such worship includes our thoughts, words, affections and actions. Do we want to worship Yahweh or waste time and effort on a deity we have constructed in our own image? Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872), a nineteenth-century atheist philosopher, argued that talk about God is no more than amplified talk about ourselves: “God” is merely the projection of human thoughts and desires. Surprising as it may seem, Christians share a fundamental concern with Feuerbach, for we recognize the temptation to create our own gods, gods that belong to us rather than to respond faithfully to the One who is. . . .

Theological reflection is a way of examining our praise, prayers, words and worship with the goal of making sure they conform to God alone. Every age has its own idols, its

own distortions that twist and pervert how we view God, ourselves and the world. . . . We aim not to escape our cultures, however, but to recognize that God calls us to respond faithfully to him in our place and time, whatever our particular social and philosophical climate. ⊕

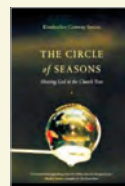
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THE CIRCLE OF SEASONS

Meeting God in the Church Year

KIMBERLEE CONWAY IRETON (IVP)



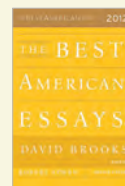
First published in 2008, this lovely book is now out of print. But it's still readily findable—and worth seeking. Like the author, I was raised in churches in which the “liturgical year” was

deeply alien, associated with the mummery of Catholicism. In *The Circle of Seasons*, Kimberlee Conway Ireton tells how she and her husband were introduced to the arc of the church calendar and reflects on the story it tells: “[P]aying attention to the circling of the seasons has deepened my faith, grounding my life with Christ in time, in Scripture and in community.”

THE BEST AMERICAN ESSAYS 2012

EDITED BY DAVID BROOKS

SERIES EDITOR, DAVID ATWAN (HOUGHTON MIFFLIN HARCOURT)

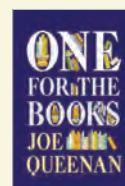


There are many fine essays in this collection. One of them, “My Father/My Husband,” by David J. Lawless, first published in *Prism*, particularly stood out for me. Unlike much of what I've read about severe dementia—in Lawless's case, afflicting his wife of more

than 50 years—this account rings true to my own experience. Note: Though at least a couple of the writers represented (Lawless included) are Christians, God and faith are almost entirely unmentioned in the 300+ pages of the book.

ONE FOR THE BOOKS

JOE QUEENAN (VIKING)



A book about books and reading. Step 1: Open at random. Step 2: Read a sentence or two: “Several years back, literally overwhelmed by the flood of material unleashed each year by the publishing

industry, I decided to establish a screening program, whereby I would only read books that at least one reviewer had described as ‘astounding.’ Thus, I was overjoyed by the great news that Alice McDermott's new novel . . .” Step 3: Look up from the page, realizing that you have been reading steadily for an hour.

Better Than Santa

What do we know about the real St. Nicholas?

Interview by Elissa Cooper



When Adam C. English visited Bari, Italy, he found an archive library full of primary sources on St. Nicholas—the *real* man behind the jolly, red-suited legend. St. Nicholas lived around the fourth century, during a “critical moment in church history” in which he witnessed—and helped—Christianity transition from persecution to popularity. Yet St. Nicholas’s story is not well known. English, an associate professor of religion at Campbell University, talked with *CT* assistant editor Elissa Cooper about setting the record straight with his new book, **The Saint Who Would Be Santa Claus: The True Life and Trials of Nicholas of Myra** (Baylor University Press).

What were some of the most surprising things you found out about St. Nicholas?

That he existed. The three most important Nicholas experts of the 20th century expressed grave doubts about Nicholas’s existence. And that verdict trickled down to popular works on Santa Claus, like the *Oxford Dictionary of Saints*. Many people even now think of him as only legendary. But when you study the documents and the evidence, it’s surprising to find there’s a wealth of evidence that attests to his deeds and his existence.

Still, the stories of St. Nicholas sound a lot like many fables told about other saints.

There are many parallels between the St. Nicholas stories and other saint folktales. To me, the story that stands out as unique is of St. Nicholas’s gifts of the dowries. He visits the home of three girls who are in desperate financial straits, and he delivers a bag of gold so that they have money to get married. And he does it anonymously and at night. You don’t find anything like it in the

stories of contemporary saints of the time, nor in other folklore.

What do you mean by writing that Nicholas is an “every saint”?

He became popular with many people groups in so many countries. Even during the Reformation, when saints were disparaged, St. Nicholas was able to rise above that and remain popular.

He’s appealing, too, because he’s an ordinary guy. Many saints are biblical saints, or they’re usually remembered because they were martyred or they performed some tremendous miracle. But Nicholas stands out because he didn’t do supernatural miracles. He wasn’t martyred. He was more of a social activist, politician, businessman, lawyer, judge, and protector.

What about his legend or reputation is forgotten today?

He also was a man of God who stood up for his faith, who challenged pagans, who was willing to confront people. Into the Middle Ages, he’s depicted using the whip against Christians who have fallen astray. He may bring punishment as well as good things—to determine, in other words, whether we’ve been “naughty or nice.”

We tend to downplay this side of him—a true and faithful judge of character and someone who is standing for the faith. We won’t tell our kids any longer that if you’ve

been naughty, Santa Claus is going to put coal in your stocking. But that’s a tradition that was with us up until 50 years ago and is still carried on in Europe. In many European homes, the tradition is that St. Nicholas will come to the house and visit with the children, and make a record of their behavior and test them on points of their

faith. But those things no longer connect with an American celebration of Santa Claus.

How did he move from being “St. Nicholas” to being “Santa Claus”?

His association with children is a much later development. There is a story that arose in the Middle Ages about him saving three youths from death: Three young children go into an evil innkeeper’s inn and are butchered and pickled in barrels, and then Nicholas comes along and restores them to life. It’s with that story that his association with children begins.

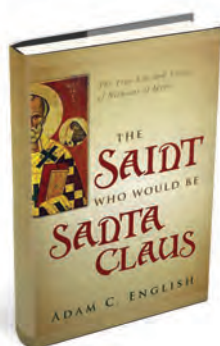
Given this rich history, should Christians continue to play the charade with their children about Santa Claus bringing gifts?

I resonate with that concern. But at Christmas, we have an opportunity to highlight a core Christian value, which is loving our neighbors. By highlighting St. Nicholas, we can recover an alternative to commercialization and greed, celebrating the life of a true Christian example, who gave of his own, who helped the less fortunate, and who shared the love of Christ.

When it comes to telling children about Santa Claus, we tell our daughter the truth: That there was a good pastor who existed many years ago and did many wonderful things, and that mommies and daddies like to carry on his tradition by giving secret gifts to their children. I certainly don’t blame parents for wanting to play along with Santa, but I think you can do it just as well and enrich the season by telling the truth about Santa Claus and St. Nicholas.

What’s the future for Santa Claus—and St. Nicholas?

The 20th century has been Santa Claus’s century. You think about how popular Santa Claus has been—the number of movies and TV shows, and his ubiquitous presence in people’s yards, in their homes, and in shopping malls. But I think people are ready for something more substantial. The original person is much more interesting, because he was real and his deeds are based on goodness rather than on greed and acquisition. I think that we’ll see a revival of St. Nicholas’s traditions and practices that incorporate this true and historical person into our holiday season.



This American Christian Life

Series shows why we need to know our U.S. church history. By Elesha Coffman

Toward the end of the first episode of **People of Faith: Christianity in America** (Vision Video) ★★★★★, an attractive, nicely paced video series, several voices weigh in why Christians need to know their history.

One scholar says it's impossible to understand American history without an understanding of the nation's Christian history. Another suggests that it can lead to church renewal. A third says it helps us interpret Scripture, shape our mission, and appreciate God's grace. *People of Faith* serves most of these needs well.

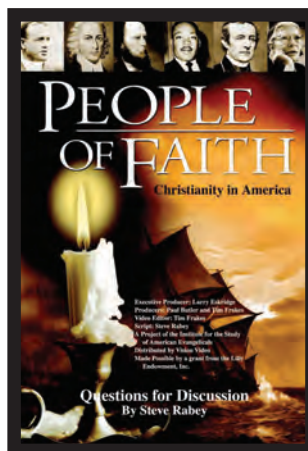
The series—produced by the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals at Wheaton College (Illinois), with support from the Lilly Endowment—shows Christians engaged in public life during the European settlement, the founding of the nation, the Civil War, the 19th-century social reform movements, and the civil rights movement. Christian activity is portrayed as predominantly positive, though not entirely so. For example, the series points out that Christians made arguments both for and against slavery, and that Prohibition began as a public health crusade against a devastating social problem but quickly turned punitive and

counterproductive. Subjects that Christians got mostly wrong, notably the treatment of Native Americans, are touched on lightly, if at all.

One episode profiles 10 American “saints,” ranging from Jonathan Edwards and Charles Grandison Finney to Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King Jr., and, curiously, Norman Vincent Peale. More broadly, the series tracks forces in American religious life—religious freedom, immigration, voluntarism, social reform—looking at pioneers in these areas as well as their modern-day offspring. These episodes present some heroes, a few cautionary tales, and much perspective on how Christians over the years have taken different stances toward the larger culture.

Clocking in at just three hours, the series necessarily omits much. This would be less of a complaint if all six episodes contributed equally to the stated series goal, to tell the story of how Christianity shaped U.S. life.

Episode four, covering mass media, is



well done, but more focus on the production, reception, and interpretation of the Bible—or on missions—would have helped. Both of these subjects encompass a longer, more complex history that made a much greater impact on American life.

Episode six, on the future of faith, feels disconnected from the rest of the series. It asks how Christians today should

live out their faith in public, balance tradition and change, care for the environment, and promote a culture of life, among other questions. Most of the historians quoted in earlier episodes are missing here; instead we hear from a political philosopher, a sociologist, and a biologist.

This is a missed opportunity, because other episodes effectively link historical developments with current issues. There are connections between colonial competition and market-sensitive churches like Willow Creek, for example, and episode one draws those out. Perhaps if the series-ending questions had been posed as “What wisdom can Christians glean from the past as they face this issue?” the historians would have had more to say.

People of Faith comes with a discussion guide for groups. Portions could also be used in Christian high-school or college courses. I would be tempted to juxtapose this series and the 2010 PBS series *God in America*, which attended more to pluralism and progressive religion, both to give students a fuller picture of the country's religious past and to demonstrate how historical narratives shift depending on how they are framed. Overall, *People of Faith* is a worthy effort to make historical scholarship accessible and relevant to a wide audience.

Elesha Coffman is assistant professor of church history at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary.

A Veggie Good Time

It's been almost 20 years since a quirky league of extraordinary vegetables burst into the Christian imagination. Bob the Tomato, Larry the Cucumber, and their friends have long since become cultural icons, and they're throwing a party with a boxed set re-release of their first 10 episodes: **VeggieTales: All the Shows—Volume One 1993–1999** (Big Idea) ★★★★★.

The shows have been hit-or-miss in recent years, but these originals are timeless classics, packed with great messages for kids, winks at pop culture, increasingly impressive animation, and truly ROTFL moments, especially in the absurd Silly Songs with Larry. “The Hairbrush Song” (from 1995's *Are You My Neighbor?*) was an instant earworm, and who can forget the Brit-accented narrator describing Pa Grape as “shocked and slightly embarrassed at the sight of Larry in a towel”?

Hilarity aside, I am among millions of parents grateful that these videos came alongside us to teach our children about forgiveness, fear, peer pressure, gratefulness, and, most of all, the deep-seeded (pun intended!) love of a God who clearly has a sense of humor. —Mark Moring



TWO MINUTES WITH...

Josh Wilson



Though he's had some Christian radio hits, Josh Wilson may be best known for his "loopy" music—playing multiple instruments on the same song. On

stage, he uses a "loop pedal," which enables him to record a segment on one instrument; he then taps the pedal to play it back while recording another segment, and so on, building a complete song. He plays as many as 24 different instruments in his live Christmas show, and this year, he's incorporated many of them into his first holiday project, *Noel*. Wilson recently spoke with CT editor at large Mark Moring.

How did you decide which songs to include on the album?

For the traditionals, I just chose my favorites, but I wanted to create unique arrangements of these songs. When people hear a fresh arrangement, I think they listen to the words again. How many times have we sung "Silent Night," but forget the meaning of the words because it's so traditional, so routine?

Tell me about an original on the album.

"Christmas Changes Everything" comes from my fascination with the fact that the life and death and resurrection of Jesus literally split history in two. It changes everything, from our calendar to our hope in Christ, and that affects how we live every day.

What's the best Christmas present you ever received?

My guitar. When I was in 11th grade, I went to the store every day to play this Taylor guitar, but I could nowhere near afford it. I told the store owner, "Please don't sell this." But he said, "If someone comes in and buys it, I can't help it." About two months later, it was gone, and I just was devastated. But on Christmas morning, there it was. For 12 years, it's been with me all over the world, and it's beat to shreds. But it's absolutely the best Christmas present I've ever received.

Christmas Cheer

The best new music of the season. By Robert Ham

Santa's playlist this year includes everything from Arkansas folk to Celtic harmonies, from R&B to the Polyphonic Spree, from SCC to Cee-Lo G. Light the fire, put on the lights, pour some wassail, and enjoy this year's best Yuletide tunes.

On *Noel* (Sparrow), Josh Wilson drums up the holiday spirit with bold strokes of bright color on this charming collection. The Arkansas native mixes up carols, spirituals (check out his funk-up version of "Go Tell It on the Mountain"), and originals that could easily become part of the Christmas canon.

Tinsel and Lights (Merge), the first holiday release by self-proclaimed "bedsit disco queen" Tracey Thorn, is more of an ode to wintertime. But don't let that keep you away from this beautiful disc that finds Thorn wrapping up well-chosen cover songs and carols in her warm blanket of a voice.

Admittedly, long-running vocal ensemble Celtic Woman does cover some of the same ground that they handled on their previous two Christmas releases. Yet it's hard to deny the joy and power found in the quartet's crystal clear harmonies and buoyant performances on *Home for Christmas* (Angel).

There's nothing like a little soulful swing to put you in the Christmas mood, and no one does that better than Mandisa. The R&B singer even adds a little Latin flavor to the mix, while also showing off her stunning vocal range on heartfelt ballads and traditional carols on *It's Christmas* (Sparrow).

Jason Gray's rich vocals bring more emotional depth to carols we've heard a dozen times over, but it is the original material on *Christmas Stories: Repeat the Sounding Joy* (Centricity) that really shines. Through his songs, Gray brings the story of Christ's birth alive once again.

A hypnotic, slowly building version of "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" sets the tone for this absolutely stunning collection by Bay Area songwriter Jill Tracy. *Silver Smoke, Star of Night*

(Projekt) is the album you put on at night, after wrapping gifts, as you drink up hot chocolate and the warm glow of the Christmas lights.

You have to love any soul/R&B artist who will lend his pipes to a straight-faced cover of the Charlie Brown Christmas classic "Christmas Time Is Here." Thankfully the rest of vocalist Kem's first holiday disc, *What Christmas Means* (Universal Motown), is as jazzy and delightful.

The idea of a metal-core band recording a disc of holiday tunes sounds preposterous.

But Pennsylvania-based August Burns Red pulls it off on *Sleddin' Hill, A Holiday Album* (Solid State), leaving the gruff vocals behind and focusing on window rattling instrumental takes on everything from "Little Drummer Boy" to "Frosty the Snowman."

It's hard to decide which side of Francesca Battistelli is best on *Christmas*

(Fervent): the impassioned worship singer who lends gravitas to beloved spirituals or the sassy imp who sashays through a fun take on the '50s pop classic "Marshmallow World."

A puckish edge infuses *Holidaydream: Sounds of the Holidays Vol. One* (Good/Kirtland), the first holiday effort by the Polyphonic Spree. But it's hard not to get caught up in the folksy instrumentation that emphasizes harps, acoustic guitar, and pianos, as well as the hearty swirl of the mass vocalizing done by the group's choir.

Joy (Provident) is absolutely apropos as Steven Curtis Chapman imbues every song here with a charming lightness of touch and an audible grin. As great as the holiday standards are, the best are his originals that showcase his ability to be playful and heartfelt in equal measure.

In *Cee-Lo's Magic Moment* (Elektra), the soul-crooning media icon takes to the spirit of the season with a sense of humor (a necessary attribute when singing a duet with the Muppets) and moments of pure sublimity, like his gorgeous rendition of "Silent Night." ➤



QUICK TAKES

More media of note.

BOOKS

► BRIGHAM YOUNG

Pioneer Prophet

JOHN G. TURNER (BELKNAP PRESS)

★★★★★ Academics rarely lay the groundwork for feature films. But George Mason University's John G. Turner might consider retaining an agent, given the quality of his new biography of Brigham Young. A page-turning drama, Turner's story explores everything in the Mormon leader's life, ranging from the haunting to the inspirational. Readers will understand why Young's legacy is tainted by associations with the early Great Basin community's polygamy and racism. However, they will also appreciate how Young's heroic will propelled him to hold a place comparable to Joseph Smith's in the hearts and minds of the Latter-day Saints. —Todd C. Ream

► THE TERRIBLE SPEED OF MERCY

A Spiritual Biography of Flannery O'Connor

JONATHAN ROGERS (THOMAS NELSON)

★★★★★ Sinners and freaks populate the

novels and short stories of Flannery O'Connor, making for disturbing reading. Her characters, drawn largely from the rural Georgia culture of her upbringing and sadly-abbreviated adulthood, do beastly things to one another—up to and including violent murder. Where's the "Christian" significance in all this? Biographer Jonathan Rogers, walking us chronologically through O'Connor's life and literary career, shows that rays of grace indeed pierce through the terrifying imagery. Confronted with scenes of scandalous evil from everyday life, we confront the scandalous, cruciform shape of gospel reality itself. —Matt Reynolds

► THE WHITE UMBRELLA

Walking with Survivors of Sex Trafficking

MARY FRANCES BOWLEY (MOODY)

★★★★★ Can the scourge of sex trafficking be erased from the earth? In our more sober, painfully honest moments, we're inclined to answer pessimistically. But while the full abolition of sexual slavery will surely have to await Christ's return, there are helpful, grace-giving steps we can take in the interim. For inspiration and practical advice, look to Mary Frances Bowley, founder of Atlanta-based Wellspring Living, which fights sex trafficking and provides care and protection to victims. In *The White*

Umbrella, Bowley gathers stories from those who have helped and been helped at Wellspring, offering an important resource for all who would join the battle. —Matt Reynolds

MUSIC

ASHIDA

► WATCHMAN

(INDEPENDENT)

★★★★★ Ashida (say it *uh-she-duh*) delivers a strong debut that straddles the pop and worship genres while mostly dodging the common pitfalls of both. *Watchman* is an acoustic pop album that flows with a worshipful awareness and prayerful lyrics. Big choruses on "Songs of a Broken Man" and "I Want to Run" echo like corporate sing-alongs. "Yours to Take" is a feel-good anthem, and "Arise" stands out as a mature love song. Grace, hope, and redemption are expressed in broad strokes. —Jeremy V. Jones

BILL FAY

► LIFE IS PEOPLE

(DEAD OCEANS)

★★★★★ English songwriter Bill Fay hadn't made a studio album in 40 years, but he never stopped writing. It shows. Now in his late 60s, Fay's voice is weathered but not brittle, and his backing band is so artfully arranged that the accompaniment never overwhelms his carefully chosen, God-focused words. Album opener "There Is a Valley" speaks of a hill near Jerusalem where wildflowers "could only silently look upon" the crucifixion. He does a beautiful, solo-piano version of Wilco's "Jesus, Etc.," and Jeff Tweedy (a longtime Fay apostle) guests on "This World," yearning with Fay for "something to set us free from this world." —Joel Oliphint

THE OLIVE TREE

► OUR DESERT WAYS

(INDEPENDENT)

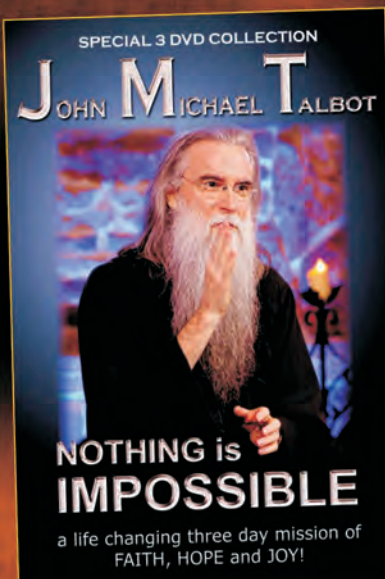
★★★★★ "Come join me out on the porch / Read me a psalm or two / I got the chords, if you got words, baby we can sing." So begins this gem from Memphis-bred brothers Ben and Scott Cunningham, a.k.a. the Olive Tree. They invite you to hang out on the porch and listen to their stories, as they describe it, of "revelation, romance, beauty, idols, motorcycles, feasts, famine, highways, friends, sin, pride, redemption, steel guitars, work, lack of work, water, faith, doubt, and faith." Their countrified, acoustic folk is reminiscent of Bill Mallonee—and surprise, they've done a few shows with the wily veteran. Here they sing "Lisa" with Mallonee accompanying on harmonica. —Mark Moring

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³⁵ Lord Jesus himself
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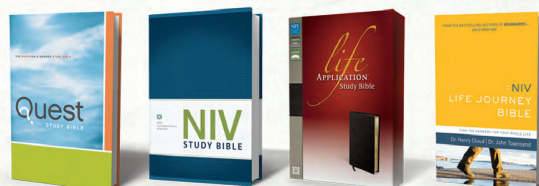
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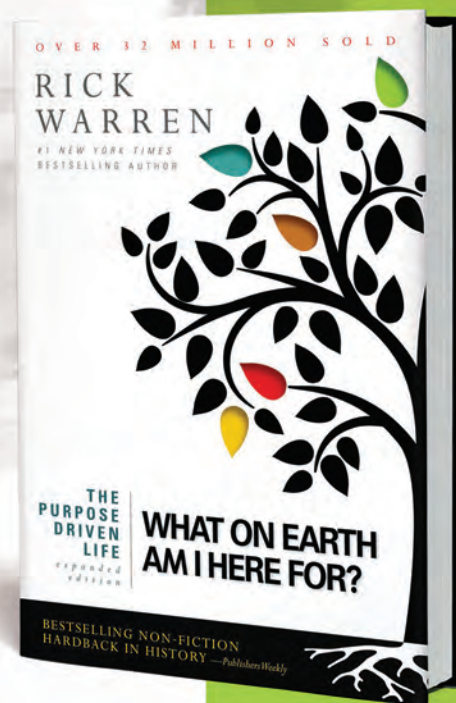
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BY MARK MORING



Embracing Hollywood

Why **Jonathan Bock** is looking for patrons.

Los Angeles native Jonathan Bock has visited Italy many times, and he's always floored by its wealth of great art—masterpieces at every turn, much of it connected to the church. Son of the late Fred Bock (one of America's best known church musicians), Bock first learned to appreciate art from his father, and because "My mom dragged me to every gallery and museum in Los Angeles and New York and Europe."

Now 42, Bock, founder and president of Grace Hill Media (a PR firm that helps Hollywood studios reach the faith market), wants more Christians involved in the arts—as creators,

appreciators, and, in his latest endeavor, supporters. Bock founded the nonprofit organization As1 to encourage the church to embrace its historical role as patrons of the arts—particularly movies and TV.

"In Italy, you see evidence everywhere that there was a time when the church partnered with the artistic community to create timeless, transcendent art," he says. "But today's relationship between the church and Hollywood is a long way from that. Not as far as we used to be, but we've got a ways to go. I feel like Christians need to understand what their role can be as patrons of the arts"—especially when Tinseltown makes movies that the church can embrace.

- **Hometown** Los Angeles
- **Church** Bel Air Presbyterian
- **Family** Kelly (wife); Riley, 10; Eliza, 7 (children)
- **Reading now** *One Big Thing: Discovering What You Were Born to Do*, by Phil Cooke; *You Lost Me. Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church . . . and Rethinking Faith*, by David Kinnaman
- **On your iPod** Norah Jones; Cory Chisel and the Wandering Sons
- **Favorite movie** *Lawrence of Arabia*
- **Favorite Bible verse** 1 Peter 4:1–2
- **Favorite website** Instapundit.com
- **Your hero** Dwight D. Eisenhower
- **What makes you laugh?** Daniel Tosh

question & answer

Define a modern-day "patron of the arts."

In the 16th century, it was a rich guy in tights with a coin purse. Today, you see signs in movie theaters: *Thank you for your patronage*. It's the customer, the ticket-buying audience. One ticket does not make a difference, but if we Christians are buying as one, we choose what becomes a hit. If we want our stories told well by the best artists, we should reward them with generous commissions.

Why should we support an artistic community that often seems opposed to our faith and values?

Hollywood doesn't care who they sell a ticket to, as long as it makes money. Once we understand that, we can be in a place where instead of waiting for culture to offend us, we can be participants in where culture leads.

What are projects to consider supporting?

The American Bible Challenge is the No. 1 show on Game Show Network. In March, we've got *The Bible*, a 10-hour miniseries on the History Channel. There are big-budget films in the works on Noah [starring Russell Crowe], Moses [directed by Steven Spielberg], and Mary, the mother of Jesus. Will we make these projects massive hits, or will we passively stand by and squander this extraordinary moment?

But what if these movies are garbage? Should we support them just because they are religiously themed?

We should support good art. There's nothing worse than a crappy movie. How "biblical" or "nonbiblical" is the content is trickier. When Michelangelo sculpted the *Pietà*, there was some scandal because he portrayed Mary as a 16-year-old girl holding a 33-year-old dead man. That's neither biblically nor historically accurate. But that sculpture is extraordinary, heartbreaking, and beautiful.

More: As1.org, GraceHillMedia.com

A QUICKVIEW

ON TODAY'S

BIBLE



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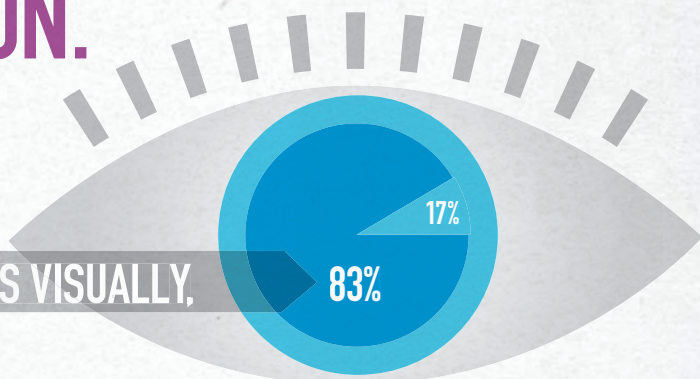
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