

# Christianity Today

JUNE 2013

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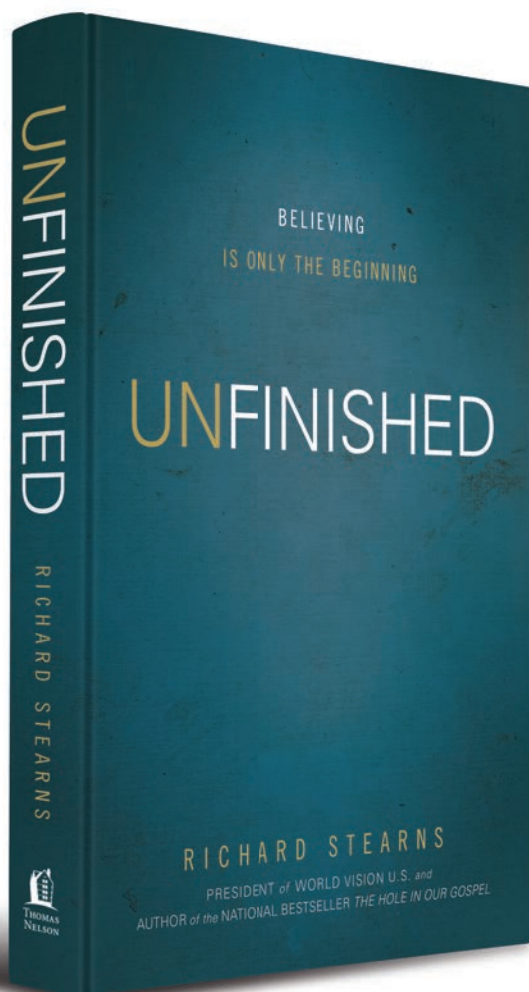
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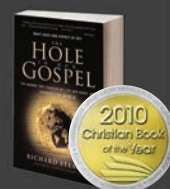


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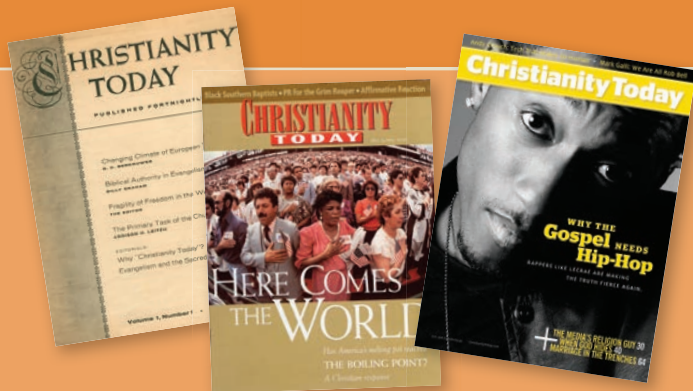
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## Join Our Story

In my editorial in this issue (page 61), I talk about the gift of institutions—structures larger than celebrity or ephemeral fads that can pass on gifts and blessing from one generation to the next.

In fact, you can usefully define an institution as a cultural pattern that survives at least three generations—which is one reason the people of God are named the people of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

By this measure, CT is an institution, founded 57 years ago by Billy Graham and now led by a team that includes folks young enough to be his grandchildren and even great-grandchildren. Like any healthy institution, CT has changed dramatically over the years, but also it has preserved something unique and valuable—most of all a set of convictions about the hope of the gospel and a commitment to serious, smart journalism that tells the truth and proclaims the name of the One who is Truth.

Healthy institutions are essential to a healthy movement. Part of what keeps CT healthy is our not-for-profit status. We answer not to private owners or to a celebrity leader but to a thoughtful, engaged board of directors who are stewards of our mission. And we are able to think long-term and invest in projects that have lasting value because we have partners who give toward that end.

There are two good ways for you to be part of what we are doing. One is to be our customer. The second is to be our financial partner, to actually invest some of your personal giving in strengthening our work for the long run. Your gifts enable us to “institutionalize” in the best sense: to hand on something good to the next generation. Whichever you choose, thank you for being part of this multigenerational story—not just the story of our parents’ parents and their faithfulness, but of the hope we have to pass on a vital legacy to our children’s children.

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Andy Crouch  
Executive Editor

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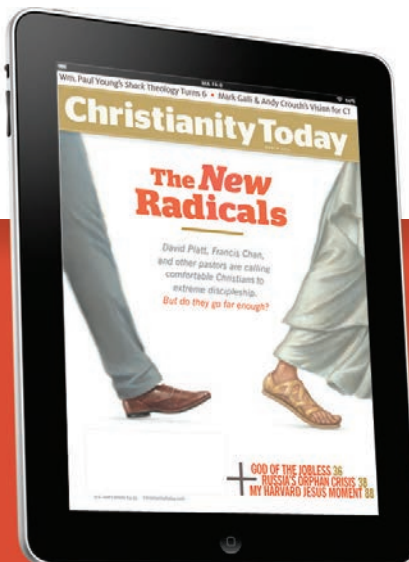
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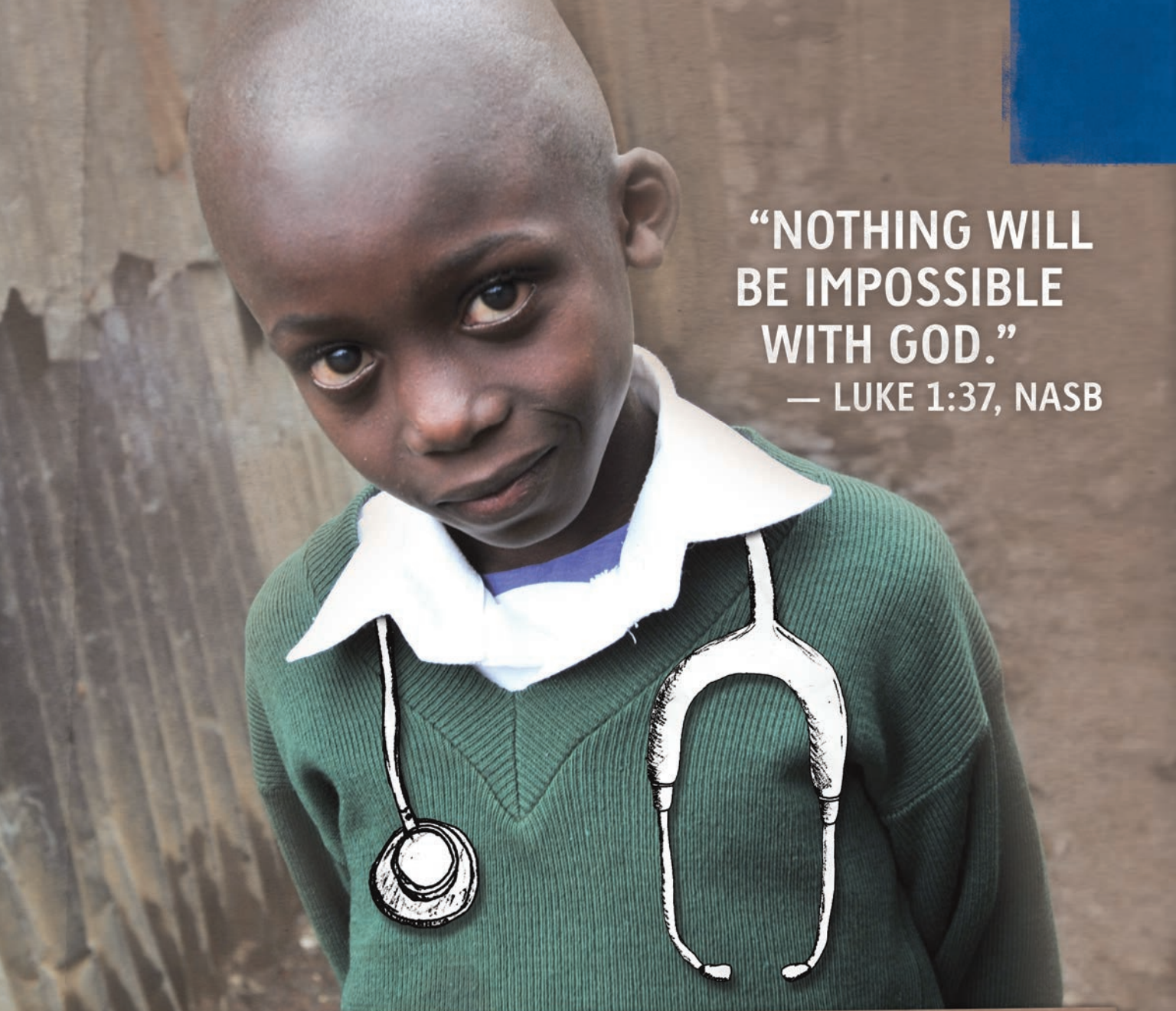


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A young boy with a shaved head and a green sweater with a white collar. A white stethoscope is drawn over his sweater. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a textured, brownish wall.

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When it comes from nonprofit media directors and rock-band frontmen, good news can be hard to stomach. We at *Christianity Today* receive constant waves of marketing—e-mail ad blasts, book publicity campaigns, interview requests—touting new methods among goodhearted fellow believers to “eradicate extreme poverty” or “end global sex trafficking.” And then we read the morning news and realize the world still needs saving.

But every so often, we get good news that makes us smile—no small accomplishment among a band of jaded journalists. One such tidbit came this winter from Bruce Wydick, whose credentials gave him a wide hearing: An economist at the University of San Francisco, Wydick has consulted for the World Bank, taught at Harvard and Princeton, and cofounded a development nonprofit in the Mayan highlands of Guatemala. (Oh, he’s also writing a novel about fair-trade coffee. Slacker.) He came to CT with astounding news about the effects of child sponsorship in six majority-world countries—effects that were verified time and again and were published this spring in the *Journal of Political Economy*. “I stared at the charts on my screen to make sure I was seeing correctly,” writes Wydick about the results in his cover story (page 20). It turned out he was.

Since at least the 1938 founding of the Christian Children’s Fund (see page 29), child sponsorship has been something of a darling of Christian charity models. And even amid a recession, it’s growing: From 2007–2011, evangelical giving to sponsorship groups increased 74 percent, making child sponsorship the fourth-largest segment of our philanthropy. No doubt Wydick’s research will inspire more giving.

But there’s a profound truth to child sponsorship that transcends metrics. Several colleagues and I have sponsored children, and part of what compels us is the connection that forms between two people separated by geography, language, and even religion. One colleague and his wife have sponsored a Ugandan boy for eight years. “Sometimes you wonder if they or the volunteer has written the letter. But it doesn’t bother us. We know it’s for the greater good.”

And then there’s hope, that immeasurable yet vital factor in the equation of any human life. His studies, Wydick told me, “made me realize the importance of hope”:

What is powerful to me is how Jesus gives many of these sponsored children hope by caring for them through the local staff and sponsors. Sponsors are usually people they will never meet in person, but it is a powerful idea to a child that across some ocean, far away out there, someone cares for them. Perhaps in this way, God’s love for them is made more concrete.

May it be so.

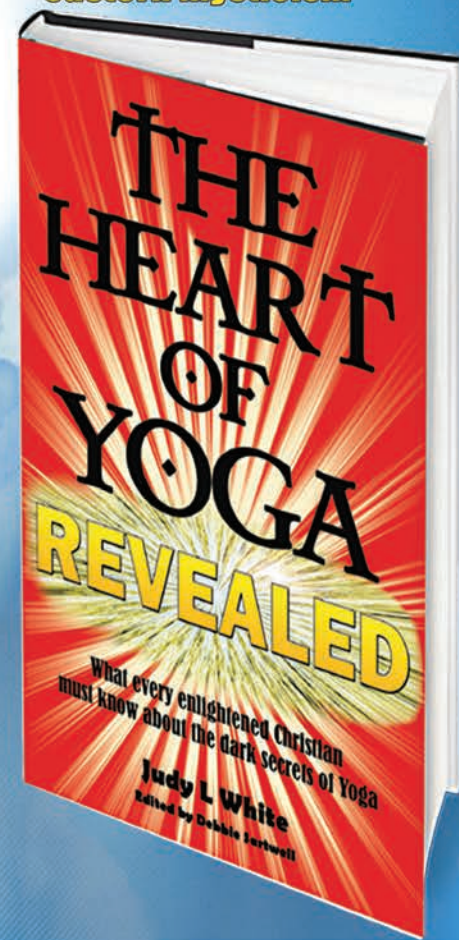


**Next issue:** Christopher J. H. Wright shows us how to love Leviticus (and all those other confusing Old Testament books); Ted Olsen hacks his way into the Bible; and Amy Simpson remembers growing up with a mom with schizophrenia.

◆ Who created yoga's sign language and what do the postures communicate?

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# BRIEFING

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## SPOTLIGHT: A Flood of Arks

➤ Even when John C. Whitcomb and Henry M. Morris's *The Genesis Flood* was a bestseller in the 1960s, and various would-be Indiana Joneses in the '80s and '90s were claiming to have found the remnants of Noah's ark, there were no significant efforts to build a 300-cubit replica of the biblical vessel. In recent years, however, a global flotilla has launched (or hopes to). Perhaps to blame is the 2007 comedy flop *Evan Almighty*, which used a full-sized replica in filming (though much of it was plastic). If *Evan* had an effect, watch out for next year's *Noah*, starring Russell Crowe.



ARK VAN NOACH



**ARK ENCOUNTER** Williamstown, Ky.: Answers in Genesis (AIG) hopes to build a \$73 million theme park with a full-scale ark and a zoo. Later stages would feature Babel and recreate a sinful antediluvian city. Despite heavy media attention, funding is slow, and revenues from AIG's nearby Creation Museum have declined.



**GOD'S ARK OF SAFETY** Frostburg, Md.: In 1974, Church of the Brethren pastor Richard Greene had a series of visions, suggesting he recreate Noah's ark next to I-68. He's been working on the project ever since. It's debt free, but so far it's also just a steel frame of the first third.



**ARK VAN NOACH** Dordrecht, Netherlands: In December, construction company owner Johan Huibers became the first to build a full-sized ark model that actually floats. (He built a half-size version in 2004.) The \$1.3 million project weighs 3,000 tons. Huibers had wanted to take it to the London Olympics, but couldn't meet coding regulations.



**NOAH'S ARK PARK AND RESORT** Ma Wan Island, Hong Kong: Open since May 2009, this theme park includes not only the first full-sized replica of Noah's ark, but also gardens, a solar telescope, and evangelistic displays. The downside: Its Christian benefactors (the third-wealthiest people in Hong Kong) are on trial on bribery and corruption charges.



**BURNHAM ROAD MINISTRIES** Florenceville, New Brunswick: Pastor Paul Smith also says he received a vision telling him to build an ark. He got further than Greene, but his 1993 building is only a two-thirds replica—and probably not seaworthy.



**NOAH'S ARK PARK / MESSIAHVILLE** Broomfield, Colo.: Baptist pastor Tommy Moore announced plans to create the world's first full-sized ark replica in 2001. He tells CT he's still actively fundraising for it.



**THE ARK, CORNERSTONE CHURCH** San Antonio: The new children's building at the John Hagee-founded church doesn't evoke Noah from the outside. But inside it's a \$5 million, two-story, Disney-style attraction, complete with animatronic animals.



**UNNAMED PROJECT** Yerevan, Armenia: Why would you have an ark without Mt. Ararat? That's the thinking behind a new government-backed plan for the capital city to eventually host an ark theme park in view of the famous mountain in nearby Turkey.



## GLEANINGS

*Important developments in the church and the world.*

### ③ Warren suicide sparks advocacy

Few knew that Rick Warren's youngest son, Matthew, had a lifelong struggle with mental illness until the 27-year-old committed suicide in April. The tragedy prompted a national discussion, and evangelical leaders—including Rebekah Lyons, Ann Voskamp, Sheila Walsh, and Frank Page—talked personally about their or their loved ones' battles with depression and suicide. Meanwhile, the Warrens launched a public fund in Matthew's honor to combat mental illness.

### ④ WEA weighs in on 'Son of God' debate

Bible translations that avoid the phrase "Son of God" have proven successful among Muslims. They also prompted the three-million-member Assemblies of God to threaten a boycott of Wycliffe Bible Translators unless it ended the practice. (The Presbyterian Church in America did the same.) Wycliffe asked the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) to referee the debate. In April, a panel of experts released 10 recommendations on how to translate familial terms for the Trinity. It said translators should choose "the most suitable words in light of the semantics of the target language." For example, use "qualifying words" such as "heavenly Father" for God and "eternal Son" for Jesus.

### ⑤ Sudan says no more new churches

**SUDAN** Citing stagnant attendance and abandoned buildings, the Sudanese government will no longer issue licenses to Christian churches. "The existing ones can accommodate worshippers," said an official. Churches in

Khartoum and other northern cities have seen attendance drop as many worshippers have migrated south (not all by choice) since 2011. But Christian Solidarity Worldwide says freedom to worship in Sudan is under attack, reporting 55 anti-Christian incidents in February alone.

### ④ School vouchers win big

The Indiana Supreme Court unanimously ruled that the state's school voucher program—the most expansive in the nation—is constitutional. The program provides public assistance for low-income children to attend private institutions; however, opponents label it "a backhanded method of funding religious activity," because nearly all of its taxpayer dollars have been directed toward religious schools. The court approved the vouchers because state funds "directly benefit lower-income families" rather than the schools themselves.

### ⑤ Funeral attacked at top Coptic church

**EGYPT** A riot during an April funeral at Cairo's most prominent church, St. Mark's Cathedral, re-ignited sectarian tensions in Egypt. The deadly weekend—which killed 6 and injured more than 90—marked the worst violence against Christians since the election of President Mohamed Morsi in 2012. Meanwhile, the Associated Press reported a "wave of kidnappings" by Islamists in Minya, the Egyptian province with the densest population of Christians.

### ⑥ Fighting human trafficking with fashion

The next fashion trend could be marked by a very different kind of label. The

President's Advisory Council on Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships released its first "call to action," a 36-page report on how to combat human trafficking. Recommendations include a global fund (similar to the successful PEPFAR) to fight trafficking, as well as a proposed labeling system that would identify consumer goods not produced using slave labor.

### ⑦ Terrorists pledge to defend Christians



**NIGERIA** Christians targeted by Boko Haram Islamists have gained an unexpected defender: another Nigerian militant group. The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), known for its violence in the oil-rich Niger Delta, pledged that attacks against mosques and Muslims "in defense of Christianity" would begin May 31 unless Boko Haram leaders promised a "cessation of hostilities." Meanwhile, Jubilee Campaign released a report claiming that 70 percent of Christians killed for their faith worldwide in 2012 were in Nigeria.

### ⑧ Oklahoma bans religious laws—again

In April, the Oklahoma State Senate approved a bill that bans courts from applying any foreign or religious laws—and supporters hope the bill is constitutional. Oklahoma's first and groundbreaking attempt to bar such laws failed in 2010 because it unfairly targeted Islam's Shari'ah law. Since then, however, five other states have approved bans on religious laws, and 32 states have introduced similar bills. The most successful bills use language that applies to all religions.

### ⑨ Should Christian teachers get unemployment?

Many Christian teachers in Arizona could become ineligible for unemployment benefits if a new bill becomes law. The state's

#### GO FIGURE Secularism

**57%**

Americans who have not read the Bible in the past week.

**33%**

Americans who have not attended a Christian church in the past year.

**27%**

Americans who have never made a commitment to Jesus.

Barna Group





## QUOTATION MARKS

**“Jesus is my Lord and Savior. It’s how I identify myself as a Christian.”**

**Deandre Poole**, the Florida Atlantic University professor who asked communications students to “stomp on Jesus” (as critics labeled the class exercise). Public outcry forced the school to place him on leave for his own safety.

*Inside Higher Ed*

**“I don’t like to think in terms of culture wars.”**

**Russell Moore**, incoming president of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC), describing the role of religion in American politics to C-SPAN host Libby Casey.

*C-SPAN*

**“My goal is . . . to produce an ever increasing number of graduates who will be the green berets and paratroopers of God’s army.”**

**Richard Land**, announcing his new role as president of Southern Evangelical Seminary. He retires from the ERLC in June.

*Southern Evangelical Seminary*

**“He finished well.”**

**Jack Graham**, pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church, on the death of Pat Summerville, the famed NFL broadcaster who became a Christian late in life after a bout with alcoholism.

*Baptist Press*

**“Whitworth’s Reformed, evangelical, and ecumenical identities are inherently more stable and potentially less ambiguous.”**

**Whitworth University**, on ending its exclusive partnership with the Presbyterian Church (USA) after 123 years.

*Whitworth University*

11

Department of Economic Security decided last year that religious schools and child-care centers that claim education tax breaks could not exempt themselves from paying taxes for their teachers and daycare workers. The reason? Despite the schools’ religious nature, religion is not their primary mission. However, Arizona House Bill 2645 would allow religious organizations to claim both the educational tax break and a religious exemption. This in turn would bar dismissed teachers from receiving unemployment. The bill’s supporters say it returns things to the status quo.

### 10 Equal rights for vegans and Christians

**UNITED KINGDOM** Vegans and environmentalists should receive the same special treatment in British workplaces as Christians.

So say new guidelines from Great Britain’s Equality and Human Rights Commission. It states that a protected belief “should be serious, genuinely and sincerely held” and recommends that employers allow workers to discuss and demonstrate those beliefs. The recommendation followed several rulings by the European Court of Human Rights where 3 of 4 Christians lost their appeals for free religious expression at work.

### 11 Christians fear cult ban

**SRI LANKA** An attempt to prevent the spread of cults in Sri Lanka could impact the ministries of evangelical churches in the island nation. A proposed law that would “take action against anyone distorting the original teachings” of Christianity (as well as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam) might sound helpful, given evangelical concern for orthodoxy. But Barnabas Aid said authorities would likely label evangelical churches, which are unrecognized by Sri Lanka, as cults.

### 12 Sweden sends Christians back to Iran

**SWEDEN** Sweden may be one of the most secular countries in Europe, but it offers a safer haven for immigrant converts to Christianity than their home countries in the Middle East. However, the Scandinavian nation has begun denying religious refugee status to Iranian Christians, threatening to extradite them. Applicants complain that immigration judges don’t understand the risks converts face back home in Iran, but officials say the applicants are not always able to show evidence of conversion, which disqualifies them.

### 13 Church sues police over rock music

A Michigan church has been granted the right to sue police over investigations into its loud music. The Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that Faith Baptist Church in Waterford Township had a “reasonable fear” that one police officer’s threats of prosecution would have a chilling effect on the church’s “speech, free exercise of religion, and freedom of association.” The unlikely First Amendment–related case arose back in 2008, when police investigated complaints of loud, contemporary music at the church during its Wednesday night youth service.

### 14 Special-needs orphans gain celebrity allies

Two Christian music and football giants are partnering off their respective fields. Steven Curtis Chapman’s orphan-care ministry, Show Hope, announced in April that it will partner with the Tim Tebow Foundation (TTF) to assist families who desire to adopt special-needs children but require additional financial assistance. The initial grants provided by TTF will sponsor 10 to 14 families this year, awarding \$7,000 to \$10,000 per family.

#### GO FIGURE Doctrine

**26%**

Protestant churchgoers who say people can obtain eternal life through religions other than Christianity.

**58%**

Protestant churchgoers who say Christianity is the only path to eternal life.

*LifeWay Research*



FAMILY

# Marriage Help Comes to Capitols

How experts are trying to shape divorce policies in fresh ways. By Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra

**L**awmakers in three states are assessing the latest legal tactics to strengthen American marriages.

In North Carolina, the proposed Healthy Marriage Act would require divorcing couples to attend communication counseling and, if applicable, a class on how divorce affects children. The waiting time before a divorce could be finalized would be doubled (to two years), and couples would no longer be required to live separately during the interim.

In Texas and Georgia, lawmakers are considering similar bills that would apply only to parents of children under 18. The bills would extend waiting periods to 6 months and 11 months, respectively.

The bills are the latest attempts to reverse troubling marriage numbers, where no current strategy is a clear winner. While the divorce rate

has dropped over the past decade (from 4 per 1,000 people in 2000 to 3.6 in 2011), marriage rates are dropping as well (from 8.2 in 2000 to 6.8 in 2011).

The bills take a different tack than Louisiana's pioneering "covenant marriages," where couples waive their rights to a no-fault divorce and have to seek counseling before getting one. Only 2 in 100 couples opt for a covenant marriage, but do stay together more often than those in traditional marriages, said W. Brad Wilcox, director of the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia (UVA). "It was having that sense of commitment, and the expectation that if they did divorce, it would be more difficult."

But the counseling requirement proved dicey, since not all counselors are pro-marriage, said Mike McManus, president of Marriage



**Nuptial Numbers:** While the divorce rate has dropped over the past decade (from 4 per 1,000 people in 2000 to 3.6 in 2011), marriage rates are dropping as well (from 8.2 in 2000 to 6.8 in 2011).

Savers. "What [a study] found was quite disturbing," he said, citing *Covenant Marriage* by UVA sociology professor Steven Nock. "Those who sought professional help actually increased their odds of divorce."

Instead, McManus recommends mentoring by experienced married couples. He founded Marriage Savers in 1996 to train churches to pair mature couples with those whose marriages are new or struggling.

He claims success: An estimated 10,000 churches have signed his "community marriage policies," which employ five different interventions. In addition to pairing couples with mentors, pastors promise not to marry couples without premarital counseling and to create support groups for stepfamilies.

Participating cities have seen their divorce rates drop up to 17 percent, he claims.

But now McManus is turning his attention to public policy. "We've had 10,000 or so churches involved in our work, but this is a country of 350,000 churches," he said. "We need to go after laws [that] have just encouraged excessive numbers of divorces, and try to change them."

One idea is requiring mutual consent for couples with children to divorce, which McManus advocates in his 2008 book, *How To Cut America's Divorce Rate in Half*.

But while policies reach more people more quickly, there is no evidence that they make much difference, said Ron Haskins, codirector of the Brookings Center on Children and Families. The Bush administration offered a marriage-education initiative with mixed results, he said.

"There is good evidence that for middle-class families, marriage education makes a big difference," said Haskins, who served as senior adviser for welfare policy during the Bush administration. "But that doesn't mean it will work for low-income and minority families."

He said the Bush-era programs designed to educate low-income

## GO FIGURE Conversion

**85%**

Muslim converts who cited "the love of Christians" as a major factor that drew them to Christianity.

**60%**

Those who said this was the "exclusive factor."

**30%**

Those who cited "disappointment with Islam" as a major factor.

**25%**

Those who cited "dreams and visions" as a major factor.

*Biblical Missiology*

ISTOCK



couples were often wasted when couples failed to show up.

"The idea [of] 'build it and they will come' didn't work," said Haskins. "Whatever we do, trying to get the men and women—especially the guys—to come is going to be a great challenge. If they don't come, you can't expect effects."

High divorce rates are troubling, he said, but the main problem is that marriage rates are too low. "More and more people are convinced we need to do something about it. [But] we really have not had much experience with public programs intended to increase marriage rates."

Some argue that the tax code penalizes marriage, but the child tax credit and earned income credit both address this, said Haskins. "We might try looking at marriage penalties in our social programs."

Wilcox said eliminating the welfare marriage penalty—where couples currently on welfare become ineligible once they marry because their now-combined income exceeds federal limits—would help. So would extending a tax credit per child and entitlement taxes like Social Security and Medicare.

Another "important ingredient," he said, is "a strong religious culture that preaches and teaches and offers support to people who are learning the ropes, or who are struggling within their marriages."

There is no magic answer, said Haskins. "We need an experimental attitude. We don't know what works." ✚

## MUSIC

# Rap Battles

## Christian hip-hop enters 'critical phase.'

By Owen Strachan

**J**ust five years ago, uttering the phrase "Christian hip-hop" in the average evangelical church would have met with blank stares. All this has changed as artists

such as Lecrae and Flame have exploded in popularity—winning awards, selling out shows, and racking up millions of downloads [see *Christianity Today*, May 2013, page 22]. Young believers have responded enthusiastically to the movement's blend of doxology and pedagogy.

But Christian hip-hop is showing signs of entering a new phase. Call it the "critical phase," one in which artists broaden their program to address cultural issues in evangelism or the public square.

In April, Sho Baraka, a rapper and elder at Blueprint Church in Atlanta, released a song entitled "Jim Crow" that uses strong language—including the controversial word *nigga*.

The song drew a heated response and engaged Christian leaders.

"It's being used in the same way that it was used in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," noted Ken Jones, senior pastor of Glendale Missionary Baptist Church and a relative of Propaganda, a spoken-word poet. "Part of the baggage that [the term] will carry is that people are expecting a Sunday school lesson, and they're not necessarily going to get it."

Daniel White Hodge, author of *Heaven Has a Ghetto: The Missiological Gospel and Theology of Tupac Amaru Shakur*, approves of language that reaches "the general human experience."

"People aren't interested in coming to some crusade, saying a little prayer, and then thinking that their lives are going to be okay," he said. "Christian art tries to answer ultimate questions."

Rapper Trip Lee said he probably would not use the word, but noted that hip-hop is about provocation.

"It's a bold, in-your-face art form," he said. "It lends itself to movements—often rebellion against God and morality, but it can be used as a counter-rebellious force in society."

But Thabiti Anyabwile, senior pastor of First Baptist Church of Grand Cayman, said Christian

## PASSAGES



**Died**  
**George Beverly Shea**  
Longtime singer at Billy Graham's crusades. He was 104.



**Died**  
**Edith Schaeffer**  
Cofounder of L'Abri Fellowship with husband Francis Schaeffer. She was 98.



**Died**  
**Brennan Manning**  
Author of *The Ragamuffin Gospel* whose reflections on grace captivated evangelicals. He was 78.

**Editor's Note:**  
Full tributes to Shea, Schaeffer, and Manning can be found at [blog.ChristianityToday.com/ctliveblog](http://blog.ChristianityToday.com/ctliveblog)

rappers should note the call for pure speech in Ephesians 4:29. While this verse applies primarily to speech inside the church, its principles also "ought to go outside the church with hip-hop," he said. "That's part of what is going to make it an effective witness."

"Jim Crow" is not the only recent rap song to ignite controversy. Shai Linne's recently released "False Teachers" states that advocates of the prosperity gospel are "heretics Christianizing the American dream." Linne calls out a number of prominent pastors by name—including Joyce Meyer, Joel Osteen, Paul Crouch, T. D. Jakes, and Paula White.

White's son, Brad, publicly responded to Linne, calling the song "pure cannibalization without biblical reference" and arguing that the rapper had maligned his mother's genuine faith in Christ. Linne defended the song in an open letter. "Paula White lists 'financial abundance' as one of the promises of the Atonement," he wrote. "This is false. It is also a slap in the face to the millions of godly saints . . . who do not live in 'financial abundance' like many of us live here in America."

Observers wondered whether Linne should have named false teachers publicly. But theologian Bruce Ware cites passages such as 2 Timothy 2:16–18.

"Warning against false teaching is a mandate," he said. "False teaching comes through false teachers, so you have to warn your people about certain people whose teachings will lead you astray."

"Jim Crow" and "False Teachers" raise different issues, but reflect evangelical rappers' growing desire to speak to sociological and theological issues as their influence in the church grows.

"You can deal with tough subjects," said Anyabwile. "But you need to do so in a way that meets [that] litmus test." ✚

[ continued on 14 ]

CHURCH AND STATE

# Strange Bedfellows

Why Christian groups oppose America's antiprostitution stance.

By Melissa Steffan

**W**omen who visit crisis pregnancy clinics want options. But they usually don't want to talk about abortion or the morning-after pill—and Heartbeat International intends to keep it that way.

That's why the pro-life group, which represents more than 1,300 pregnancy help centers, is urging the United States Supreme Court to overturn a federal pledge against prostitution. The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty and the Christian Legal Society are doing the same.

Their position may seem counter-intuitive, since all three organizations oppose prostitution. But the case boils down to whether or not the government can require groups to adopt its views before it gives them funds.

At issue: a Bush-era program to

fight HIV/AIDS requires grant winners to "explicitly [oppose] prostitution and sex trafficking."

Evangelical interest in the case is largely unrelated to prostitution per se, said Stanley Carlson-Thies, president of the Institutional Religious Freedom Alliance. "A government policy that can require private groups to commit to its ideological orthodoxy will increasingly marginalize faith-based services."

Some fear that the antiprostitution policy could inspire the government to attach loyalty oaths to other federal benefits. It could require an organization like Heartbeat to tell clients about abortion, or a religious nonprofit to affirm the government's views on gay marriage or contraception, to retain tax-exempt status. Many believe such oaths violate the First Amendment and its promise of freedom of speech.

Walter Weber, senior litigation counsel with the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), counters that the right to freedom of association outweighs the right to free speech in this particular case. He says the government is not showing unconstitutional bias, but using bias the way any employer would: to see if potential partners will be a good fit.

DISCUSSION STARTER  
Family

Celebrity couple Jim Bob and Michelle Duggar recently announced that they would consider adopting to add to their family of 19 children (plus a handful of grandchildren). Michelle told *People* magazine that she and her husband have "an open heart" toward the idea.

But even the ACLJ believes the government's power to attach conditions to funds should be limited to groups who apply for funds on their own, said Weber. "We don't want [courts] to say the government can do whatever it wants."

He said the situation would be different if faith-based groups were being forced to agree with the government in order to receive widely available public benefits. Similarly, the ACLJ would not support loyalty oaths that were unrelated to the purpose of a program. One hypothetical example is requiring churches to support the Affordable Care Act before receiving federal tax breaks.

Discriminating against faith-based groups in that way would be "impermissible," Weber said. He hopes the Supreme Court's ruling will draw a line between the two types of discrimination—the helpful kind and the coercive kind.

Yet Ellen Foell, legal counsel for Heartbeat International, says she wants the antiprostitution policy struck down. Although the policy does not affect pregnancy centers directly, she said, "The U.S. Constitution does not allow the government to determine . . . what [groups] shall say, and how it should be said." ➤

## UNDER DISCUSSION Topics in the current debate.

compiled by Ruth Moon

# Can a Christian family ever be too big?

YES

"Overpopulation, overuse of resources, human-induced climate change, and pollution should be considered, as should one's physical and emotional health and ability to provide for a family. The decision should be made to promote 'justice and righteousness.'"

**RAY VAN LEEUWEN**  
professor of biblical studies, Eastern University

"Yes, but family size should depend on each family's gifts and strengths. We have to work out—in our own faith walk—how many kids can we bring into our home and our family and still have them serve the Lord based on our individual capacity."

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

"If the Duggars adopted, viewers might understand adoption in new ways and other orphans might find families. There's a global orphan crisis, so this matters. However, because of that family's homogeneous and public nature, I'd be concerned for the child."

**JENNIFER GRANT**  
author, *Love You More: The Divine Surprise of Adopting My Daughter*

"Often, a historical argument is used for large families—casting back to our Puritan forebears. The Puritans did have an average of seven children; but only an average of three survived infancy and childhood. We should acknowledge that child mortality was a factor then in a way that it is not today."

**MEGAN EVANS HILL**  
author

"Family life is a calling, like the priesthood or the religious life. Christian men and women should be guided by trying to discern God's will. If they are doing that, then I really don't think their families can be either too big or too small."

**JONATHAN V. LAST**  
author, *What to Expect When No One's Expecting*

"Every life is a precious gift from God. Any family that adopts is demonstrating God's heart for orphans, especially when modeling good stewardship in the household. Any family that lives simply can more fully attend to the work God places on their hearts."

**MITCH HESCOX**  
president, Evangelical Environmental Network

NO





**Face Time:** Jason Garver meets with pastor Corey Magstadt at a Twin Cities coffeehouse. The effective jobless rate for millennials is 16.2 percent.

OUTREACH

# The Forgotten Millennials

More noncollege-bound young adults seek direction, and more ministries are poised to help. By Catherine Newhouse

**J**ason Garver reached a crisis on a summer day at age 18, when he came to the end of his peanut-butter-and-cracker food supply in a house on the brink of foreclosure.

His hopes for a steady job had just crumbled. Nearly every company where he had applied for work had recently

called to turn him down. Garver thought: *Why does God hate me so much?*

He texted that question to his former pastor. Except that Garver wasn't sure if there was a God. If there was, he thought, maybe he had written off the high-school dropout as a "bad kid" for abusing drugs and alcohol. His father had moved out of state for work, leaving Garver to survive on

occasional grocery deliveries from friends.

"It was the hopelessness of not having any food, not getting a job, not seeing people," Garver said. "I wasn't in school. I didn't have friends coming to see me ever, and I couldn't go out to do anything. I was so hungry I didn't want to do anything."

After receiving the text, Garver's pastor, Corey Magstadt, asked to meet with him.



**Give Them Shelter:** At the Launch Pad, homeless young adults are provided affordable housing. A new federal program, *Youth Count*, will count homeless millennials in nine major cities this year.

Magstadt told Garver that he didn't have all the answers. But he did help Garver get back on his feet and invited him to the new Launch Ministry for young adults near Chaska, southwest of Minneapolis—St. Paul, Minnesota.

Garver, now 22, belongs to the so-called millennial generation (born from 1980 to 2000), a group numbering 80 million that surveys show is beyond the reach of many traditional churches. According to a recent Pew Forum survey, millennials are the least religiously affiliated Americans of any living generation.

Young adults who go from high school to a four-year university or military service have specialized ministries tailored to them. But few ministries exist to address the distinct needs and spiritual concerns of millennials who drop out of high school, go straight into the workforce, or attend a community college.

"There's a cultural expectation of what a college student is," said Magstadt,

Launch Ministry's executive director. "But if you're that age and not going to college, you fit into a different box, and the church doesn't know what to do with you."

Launch is one of the few ministries in the country serving 18- to 25-year-olds who aren't pursuing four-year degrees. Without Launch, Garver says, he might easily have fallen into a deeper financial and spiritual rut.

When Garver needed short-term housing, Magstadt invited him into his home, and when he needed a car to get to work, Magstadt gave Garver his old one. He also encouraged Garver to turn to Scripture amid his spiritual struggles.

Garver has since obtained his GED and nursing assistant license, with his eyes set on a bachelor's degree in physics.

And he doesn't think God hates him anymore. "Now I can say, being a Christian—that's how God helps," Garver said. "It's not a big glowing hand coming from the sky. It's people like Corey."

#### **TREND REVERSAL: GOING IT ALONE**

As the author of the 2009 book, *Souls in Transition*, Notre Dame sociologist Christian Smith has studied the religious lives

of the millennial generation and their halting transition into adulthood. His research has found that millennials who don't go to college tend to be even less religious than their peers—a trend reversal since the 1990s.

"It used to be that college corroded religious faith. That has changed," said Smith. "Something about just graduating high school or not graduating high school and just working seems to be associated with less believing and less church involvement."

Smith said there are a few possible reasons for the trend. First, social class is a correlating factor—Americans who have bachelor's degrees and therefore are in the middle class are more likely to attend church. Second, working young adults tend to be more socially isolated and less connected to any type of community institution, including the church. Third, religious organizations typically overlook groups of college-age adults who aren't at four-year institutions.

"If you're trying to set up a ministry for young people, colleges make the most sense," Smith said. "They're accessible. Students are away from home and are most susceptible to being changed by a message. Ministries view college-bound people as more attractive because they'll be more influential in society as they get older."

But the noncollege-bound are a sizable group to overlook. Of the nearly 4 million U.S. high-school graduates in 2011, about 68 percent had enrolled in college by that October, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Of those college-enrolled students, only about 60 percent were at four-year institutions. In an economic downturn, many millennials have opted to attend more affordable two-year colleges, which are less likely to have robust on-campus Christian outreach.

Meanwhile, working millennials are more vulnerable to poverty and unemployment, Smith said, meaning they face some of the hardest obstacles transitioning to adulthood.

Realizing this, Magstadt started Launch Ministry. As the senior pastor of the River Church in Chaska, he saw that many youth-group graduates had disappeared from the church's regular worship. After



stepping down as senior pastor, he soon discovered just how serious some of their problems were.

About 20 young adults showed up to the first Launch Bible study in February 2009. As they went around introducing themselves, Magstadt saw many were dealing with crises: the first person had lost his mom the night before, the second person had just found out she was pregnant, and the third person was her boyfriend, who was addicted to meth.

"We quickly realized we were in over our heads," Magstadt said. Although he had envisioned the Bible study to be like a youth group for young adults, the need for a supportive community was more urgent.

#### AN ENVIRONMENT TO GROW

Launch started developing practical programs to meet young adults' basic needs, such as one-on-one mentoring and life skills classes, which teach career skills such as building a résumé, applying for a job, and taking the GED.

The mentoring program pairs about 20 young adults with volunteers from local churches. The mentors help young adults set and achieve their goals in both spiritual and practical areas of life. It's this personalized attention that results in change, Magstadt said.

"Young adults are crying out for someone to pour into their life, especially those who don't have much parental support," Magstadt said. "They need guidance that is much more direct and personal."

Most recently, Launch opened a transitional house called the Launch Pad, where eight young men stay for a monthly rent of \$150, and they hope to start a house for young women. After committing himself to the Christian faith, Garver is now helping to manage the Launch Pad.

Magstadt said creating the Launch Pad was necessary because young adult homelessness was on the rise in their area.

"All their basic needs were taking up so much of their time that they couldn't focus on other things, like school and developing their spiritual life," Magstadt said. Recent national surveys show that 2 million people ages 18 to 24 had experienced homelessness during the previous 12 months.

Even while they don't have ministries

that specifically target noncollege 18- to 25-year-olds, some churches have successfully reached millennials. In the past few years, Sunrise Community Church in Austin, Texas, has seen millennials gravitate toward their ministry, and now pastor Mark Hilbelink estimates that half the congregation is under the age of 40. Hilbelink came to Sunrise in May 2009 at the age of 26, succeeding a 65-year-old pastor.

Hilbelink describes Sunrise as half blue-collar and half white-collar, with a young adult population that faces struggles like out-of-wedlock children, alcoholism, and drug abuse. He said such issues require a brutally honest church atmosphere, where young adults can own up to their failures rather than hiding them from the public eye.

"We want you to lay out your dirty laundry and then we'll walk with you through it and deal with it, rather than forcing you into the closet with it," Hilbelink said.

Sunrise emphasizes the importance of missional small groups to create that intimate atmosphere; in fact, said Hilbelink, if you have to choose, skip church and go to small group. Chad Valls, 28, had never been to a small group before Sunrise. But when he joined one he found himself opening up about his fear that he wouldn't be there for his 5- and 7-year-old daughters, fathered out of wedlock—just as his father wasn't there for him.

Valls said he told his small group everything before going to his pastor, but he eventually saw that it was okay to tell Hilbelink too. "It's hard to talk to a pastor, because you think he's this guy who's right with God," he said. "Is he going to judge me if I tell him about this? But after I went to a small group, I realized it wasn't that bad."

#### COMING INTO THEIR OWN

Sometimes young adults take it upon themselves to reach out to their peers. That's the case with the Mission, a new community-college ministry to 75,000 students in the Lone Star College System.

The Mission isn't affiliated with any church or religious organization. It started in September 2011 when a few Lone Star students in Montgomery County in southeast Texas decided to create a Christian club. Prior to the Mission, there had only

been a small Bible study group active on the Montgomery campus.

Many on-campus ministries tend to focus on four-year schools, where students live in the dorms and are gathered in a central location. At community colleges, students commute and are less accessible.

The response to the Mission was overwhelming. Natalia Gaggero, a 22-year-old Lone Star student who helped start the ministry, said more than 80 people showed up for the first meeting, and they had 120 members in the first month. Since then, the Mission has expanded to two other Lone Star campuses. Members are constantly praying for Lone Star students; 48 people pray for a half hour every day, covering the full 24 hours.

"We're very oriented toward prayer and intercession, crying out to God for our campus, for the Lord to break the walls of apathetic reactions to him," Gaggero said.

Other millennials have risen to leadership within existing ministries. Sunrise has several young worship leaders, including 22-year-old Ashley Rico, who sings and plays the keyboard.

When Sunrise asked her to join the worship team, Rico was hesitant. Between raising her 2-year-old son (now 4) and working, she had a lot on her plate. She also wasn't sure if she was ready for the spiritual responsibility of leading worship and representing the church.

"I had to make a decision when they asked me to lead worship, if I was going to be 100 percent in my faith," Rico said. "I knew I wasn't going to get up on stage if I wasn't."

After much prayer, Rico decided to go for it. Soon after, she started reading the Bible more and looking up the biblical origins of worship songs. At first, Rico was nervous about speaking in front of the congregation, but the previous worship leader reminded her that as long as her heart was set on worshipping God, everything would be okay.

"Every time I do practice or a worship service, I'm reassured and know that's where I'm supposed to be," Rico said. "I feel like a better person, not because of what I'm doing, but because I'm part of something." ☪

**Catherine Newhouse** (soon to be Catherine Knarr) is the editor for Faith Driven Business, a new online network of Christian entrepreneurs.



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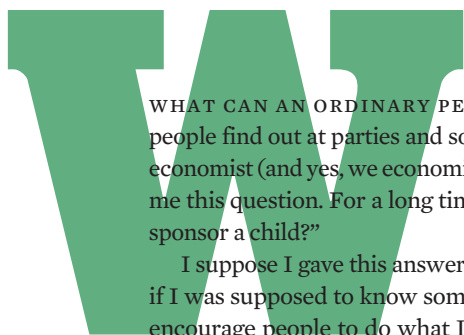
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**Want to  
Change  
the World?  
Sponsor  
a Child**

By Bruce Wydick







WHAT CAN AN ORDINARY PERSON like me do to help the poor?” When people find out at parties and social gatherings that I am a development economist (and yes, we economists do attend such events), they often ask me this question. For a long time my response was the same: “Perhaps sponsor a child?”

I suppose I gave this answer because I myself sponsored a child, and if I was supposed to know something about helping the poor, I should encourage people to do what I was doing. After all, child sponsorship makes sense: By focusing on youth instead of adults, it aims to nip poverty in the bud, providing children in the developing world access to education, health services, and, in some programs, spiritual guidance. But over time my autopilot response started to annoy me. The truth was that I hadn’t the slightest clue about the effect child-sponsorship programs had on children.

Dissatisfaction with my pat answer began to inform conversations with my graduate students. “Have you considered researching the impact of child sponsorship?” I would ask. One student was interested, and she followed the topic long enough to find out that no one had ever investigated the topic, despite 9 million children sponsored worldwide, and the more than \$5 billion per year channeled into sponsorship programs from ordinary people wanting to help. But we were having trouble finding a sponsorship organization willing to work with us. What if the research discovered that sponsorship didn’t work? This was the risk that some organization out there had to take.

A couple years later, another graduate student, Joanna Chu, became interested in the topic, in part because she was sponsoring a child with Compassion International. Chu put out some feelers with Compassion’s research director, Joel Vanderhart, who decided to risk what no other child-sponsorship organization was willing to risk at that point: to allow its program to be scrutinized. We were able to carry out the study with one major condition: Compassion would remain anonymous. They would be referred to as “a leading child-sponsorship organization” in any academic publication.

In the course of talking with Vanderhart, we stumbled upon a vein of gold for any development economist: He casually mentioned that



Compassion had used an arbitrary age-eligibility rule when they underwent a major worldwide expansion during the 1980s. When one of Compassion's programs entered a new village, typically only children who were 12 and younger were eligible for sponsorship.

With that, our strategy for identifying the causal impacts of the program became clear. We would obtain early enrollment lists from different village projects introduced during the 1980s, and track down the families of those who were first sponsored in these projects. Then we would obtain information on the life outcomes of these formerly sponsored children—now adults—and compare them to their adult siblings who had been slightly too old to be sponsored when the program arrived in their village. In this way we would be able to control for genetics, family environment, and a host of other factors that the siblings held in common. The only difference that could affect adult life outcomes across the sample would be the fact that Providence had allowed some of these siblings and not others to be age-eligible for child sponsorship.

## THE RESULTS

Chu found a partner for her research project: Laine Rutledge, now a doctoral student in economics at the University of Washington. The two graduate students spent the summer of 2008 in Uganda, where they obtained data on 809 individuals, including 188 who were sponsored as children. The students had a number of adventures in the field, including a run-in with a wild dog that took a bite out of Rutledge's leg. A couple of months after they returned, Chu and Rutledge stopped by to share the results. A nervous excitement quickly filled my small office.

We loaded the data onto my computer from Rutledge's flash drive,



**Personal Touch:** Chidchai, 14, examines his sponsor's picture in his home on the outskirts of Bangkok. He says his favorite part of the Compassion program at his church is singing.

and I rattled off some code to replicate their estimations. I was looking at the results of Compassion's impact on educational outcomes in Uganda—I stared at the statistics on my screen to make sure I was seeing correctly.

"This is . . . amazing," was all I could mumble. We tried slicing the data different ways, but each showed significant educational improvements. You could beat this data senseless, and it was incapable of showing anything other than extremely large and statistically significant impacts on educational outcomes for sponsored children.

A few months later, I presented the Uganda findings in the weekly development economics

seminar at UC–Berkeley. The Berkeley seminar was familiar turf, but not a place to suffer fools gladly. We received a number of constructive comments, but the consensus was that the underlying methodology was sound. What was obvious was that the study needed external validity. Uganda was one country. Compassion was one organization. We would try to expand the study to multiple organizations and countries.

Vanderhart flew out to San Francisco to talk about expanding the study. This was our first in-person meeting. Vanderhart is a big, conservative man with a lumberjack beard who instantly reminded me of Merlin Olsen from *Little House on the Prairie* reruns I watch with my kids. I wondered how he felt about trusting a bunch of San Francisco academics with the public credibility of his organization. We strategized about expanding the study to include other major child-sponsorship organizations. But those organizations weren't interested. So with Compassion remaining as the only organization amenable to the project, we drew up a plan to carry out the study in six countries: Uganda, Guatemala, the Philippines, India, Kenya, and Bolivia—two countries on each of the three continents that make up the developing world. They represented Compassion's work worldwide.

But to expand the project, we needed grant money. Based on the preliminary results in Uganda, we were able to obtain USAID funding through BASIS, a development economics research network based at the University of California at Davis. Rutledge coordinated the fieldwork in the remaining five countries. By

August 2010, we had obtained data on 10,144 individuals over an array of variables: primary, secondary, and tertiary education; type and quality of adult employment; community leadership; church leadership; assets owned as adults; and a number of other variables that would measure that slippery word that economists love, *development*.

We presented the results at a



## ***The puzzle pieces are beginning to fall into place: the patient nurturing of self-worth, self-expectations, dreams, and aspirations may be a critical part of helping children escape poverty.***

number of universities and research institutions: Stanford, the World Bank, UC–Davis, Georgia Tech, the University of Southern California, the University of Washington, and Cornell, among others. I had asked Paul Glewwe, an expert on the economics of schooling and children’s issues in developing countries, to join the project. I had met Glewwe, a professor at the University of Minnesota and former economist at the World Bank, through the Association of Christian Economists. I knew he would bring additional expertise in program analysis and econometrics (a bunch of statistics for testing economic hypotheses) to the larger research project.

The results in our other five countries confirm the positive impact of Compassion’s child-sponsorship program in Uganda. In all six countries, we find that sponsorship results in better educational outcomes for children. Overall, sponsorship makes children 27 to 40 percent more likely to complete secondary school, and 50 to 80 percent more likely to complete a university education. Child sponsorship also appears to be the great equalizer in education: In areas where outcomes are worse, such as sub-Saharan Africa, impacts are bigger. In countries where existing outcomes aren’t as bad, like in India and the Philippines, impacts are significant but smaller. In countries where existing outcomes are higher among boys, the impact on girls is larger; in countries where the existing educational outcomes are higher for girls, the impact on boys is larger. We even find some evidence for spillover effects on the unsponsored younger siblings of sponsored children.

To put it simply, the educational impacts of sponsorship are large—roughly equal to the substantial effects of the Rosenwald Schools program that from 1913–31 educated blacks in the Jim Crow South. They are roughly double those of *Oportunidades*, the celebrated conditional-cash-transfer program that gives cash to mothers in Mexico for keeping their children in school. It’s so successful it has been replicated in dozens of developing countries around the world with financial incentives from the World Bank.

Compassion’s results extend beyond school attendance. We found that child sponsorship means that when the child grows up, he is 14–18 percent more likely to obtain a salaried job, and 35 percent more likely to obtain a white-collar job. Many of the Compassion-sponsored children become teachers as adults instead of remaining jobless or working in menial agricultural labor. We found some evidence that they are more likely to grow up to be both community leaders and church leaders.

The academic paper containing the full methodology and results of our study appears in the current issue of the *Journal of Political Economy*. The *JPE*, edited by the department of

economics at the University of Chicago, is comparable to, say, *The New England Journal of Medicine* for medical researchers, accepting only a small fraction of submitted papers whose results are often pertinent to the general population.

Compassion inquired politely: Do you think we could remove the anonymity clause?

### **THE HOPE HYPOTHESIS**

Compassion asked me to visit Colorado Springs to present the results of our research. I had an appointment with Wess Stafford, then president of Compassion, a man I had always respected from a distance but now had a chance to meet. His secretary ushered me into his office, where a large wooden skipper’s wheel was mounted on the rear wall. It was a big ship to pilot: Compassion sponsors nearly 1.3 million children in 26 countries.

Stafford greeted me with a warm handshake and ushered me into a comfortable chair in front of his desk.

“Your program works,” I said.

“I know,” he smiled.

“But I am analyzing this data as a dispassionate scientist, not as an advocate of Compassion like yourself,” I replied. “We’re not just finding positive correlations, but substantial *causal* effects from the program—in every country—especially Africa. I’m wondering what is happening here. You’re a former academic. I think there is something deeper going on in the program that would interest the greater development community. I need some leads.”

“Try hope,” he said.

I raised my eyebrows. “Hope?”

Hope is a fuzzy concept for economists. I squinted my eyes. He explained:

For my dissertation, I asked a bunch of kids what they wanted to be when they grew up. Some were Compassion kids, some were unsponsored. There was a little bit of a difference between the



two groups. But then I asked them later what they realistically expected to be when they grew up. Here, there was a big difference between the sponsored kids and the other kids. You see, poverty causes children to have very low self-esteem, low aspirations. The big difference that sponsorship makes is that it expands children's views about their own possibilities. Many of these children don't think they are capable of much. We help them realize that they are each given special gifts from God to benefit their communities, and we try to help them develop aspirations for their future.

#### PORTRAITS OF CHANGE

Stafford's story brought to mind another one I had heard in the field from Compassion workers in Kenya. A pilot from Kenya Airways had visited a number of Compassion projects to talk about his job. The children were fascinated to meet someone who flew the planes they saw zooming across the sky. They had never met such an amazing and interesting person, and after his visit, most of them wanted to be pilots.

Whatever it was, something that Compassion was doing was working, and we wanted to explore the mysterious black box of poverty and child psychology. To test the hope hypothesis, we carried out a follow-up study on currently sponsored children. Did sponsored children have higher aspirations than nonsponsored children who were just like them in other ways? If there were no statistical differences in aspirations between sponsored and nonsponsored children, we could rule out the hope hypothesis and explore something else.

We carried out three studies—in Bolivia, Kenya, and Indonesia—

## Finding the Silver Lining

**B**oth Compassion-sponsored and nonsponsored children in Jakarta were asked to draw a self-portrait set in the rain in order to assess their psychological health. The drawing on the left was done by an unsponsored 5-year-old boy and shows several indicators of poor emotional development: using a single color is a potential sign of low self-esteem and feelings of hopelessness; the body language and facial expression signify unhappiness. The boy was ranked in the 17th percentile in the psychometric happiness index. Additionally, it indicates a low view of self-efficacy (only 23rd percentile) as the boy is not sheltered from the rain.

The drawing on the right was created by a sponsored 13-year-old girl. The use of multiple colors and bright colors correlates with a sense of hope and optimism. Her answers to the survey questions and drawing characteristics ranked her in the 70th percentile in the happiness index. She is smiling and holding an umbrella, which is associated with a higher degree of self-efficacy (94th percentile)—the rain is bouncing off the top of the umbrella, making her safe and secure underneath. Note the sun peeking out from behind the rain clouds.

children and nonsponsored children.

In Indonesia, my graduate students carried out a unique experiment with 540 children living in the slums in Jakarta (see above). Of these 540 children, 288 were sponsored and the rest were either siblings of sponsored children, children on the waitlist to be spon-

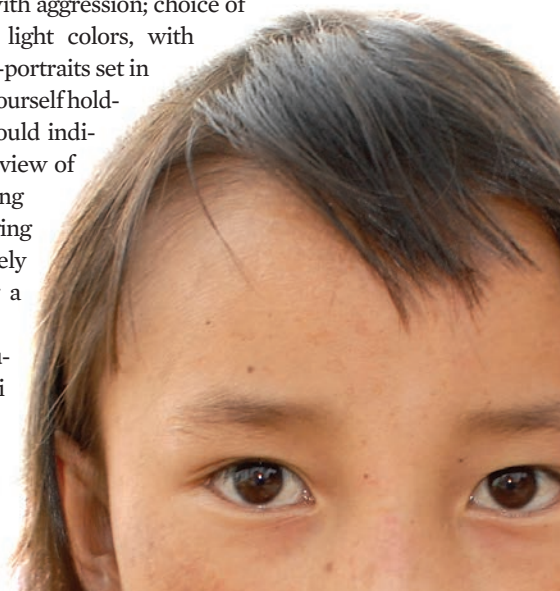
***Child sponsorship appears to get under the hood of human beings to instill aspirations, character formation, and spiritual direction. In short, it trains people to be givers instead of receivers.***

with 1,382 children. The sample included sponsored children, their unsponsored siblings, and other unsponsored children from the same communities. In each of the studies, we found that sponsored children consistently had significantly higher expectations for their own schooling than unsponsored children, even when controlling for family and other factors. They also generally had higher expectations for adult employment. (Years later, a disproportionate number of Kenyan kids still wanted to be pilots.) Many of these findings came close to mirroring the adult differences we measured between formerly sponsored

sponsored, or siblings of children on the waitlist. We sat each child at a desk with a blank piece of paper and a fresh box of 24 colored pencils. We asked each to "draw a picture of yourself in the rain."

Child psychologists have demonstrated that self-portrait drawings reveal a cornucopia of information about the psychological health of children. Different facets of children's drawings have been empirically correlated with various emotional disorders: missing facial features correlate with shyness; a tiny figure, with insecurity; big teeth and monster figures, with aggression; choice of dark colors over light colors, with depression. In self-portraits set in the rain, drawing yourself holding an umbrella could indicate an enhanced view of self-efficacy—dealing with a challenging situation proactively rather than being a victim of it.

One of my graduate students, Teddi Aufer, spent dozens of hours coding







these drawings with 1s and 0s to account for 20 different features for each drawing. What the self-portraits revealed was remarkable. Compassion children were 12 percentage points more likely to choose light colors to draw pictures of themselves than nonsponsored children. They were 13 percentage points less likely to draw themselves as a tiny figure, 6 percentage points less likely to draw themselves as a monster, and 9 percentage points more likely to draw themselves holding an umbrella. Overall, when we combined these characteristics into aggregated psychometric indices, controlling for other factors, we found that Compassion children's drawings displayed significantly lower levels of hopelessness, higher levels of optimism and self-efficacy, and higher levels of overall happiness.

We can't yet establish a clear causal link between the increased levels of hopefulness and aspirations among sponsored children and their improved adult lives. But the puzzle pieces are beginning to fall into place: the patient nurturing of self-worth, self-expectations, dreams, and aspirations may be a critical part of helping children escape poverty. It is a holistic approach that secular antipoverty initiatives have largely downplayed, but an approach that Christian development groups have championed for decades.

### CREATING GIVERS

The traditional approach to development work has been to provide things for people. If people lack education, we build them schools.

If they are unhealthy, we build them hospitals and provide doctors, or we drill a freshwater well. If their small businesses are stagnant, we provide microcredit so they can borrow. While each of these interventions can be helpful in the right context, mere provision fails to address the root of poverty: the behaviors, social systems, and mindset that are created by poverty. The key to ending poverty resides in the capacity of human beings—and their view of their own capacity—to facilitate positive change.

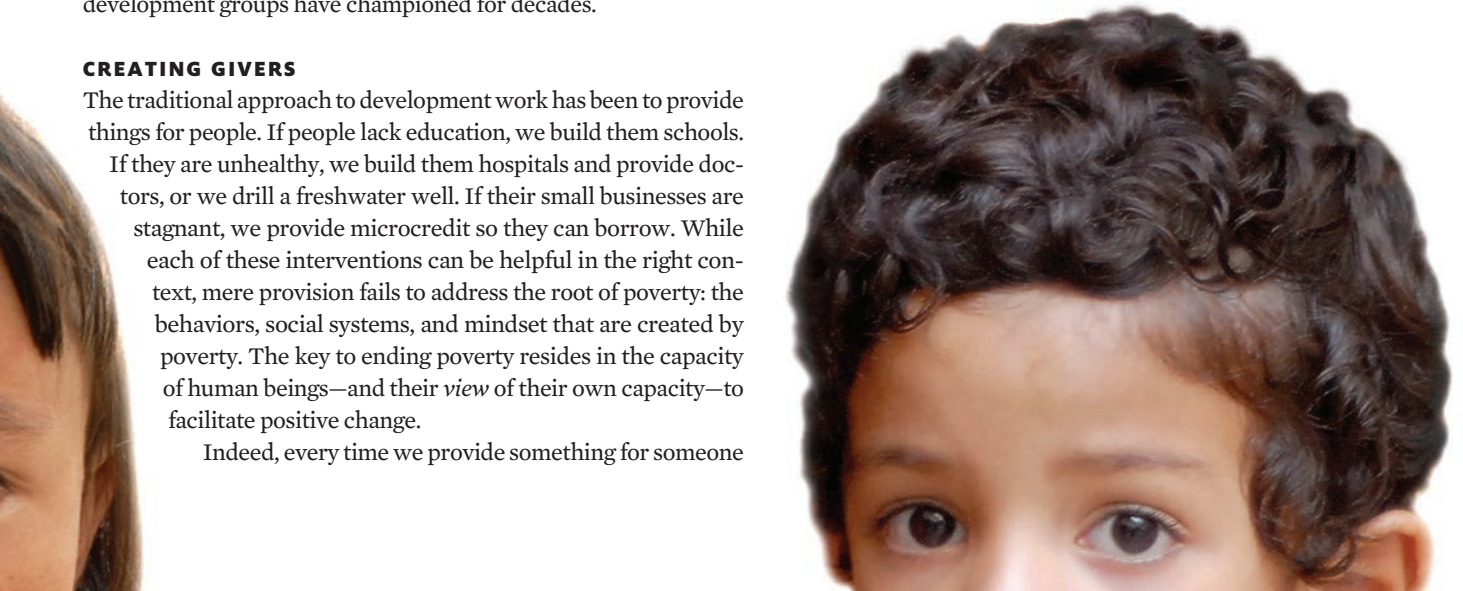
Indeed, every time we provide something for someone

else in need, we send a subtle message to them that we believe they are incapable of providing for themselves. While some interventions are necessary, especially in the area of health, they come at a cost of reinforcing an inferiority complex among the poor. Good development organizations understand this.

Along with providing some basic resources that allow children to progress farther in school, the child-development approach advocated by Compassion appears to get under the hood of human beings to instill aspirations, character formation, and spiritual direction. In short, it trains people to be givers instead of receivers.

When someone asks me what an ordinary person can do to help the poor in developing countries, I tell them about our research. The most common response is, "That's good to know. I always wondered if all that was a scam." At this point we can confidently state that it is not. 

**Bruce Wydick** is professor of economics and international studies at the University of San Francisco. His novel about coffee growers in Guatemala is forthcoming from Thomas Nelson.



# A Better World for Kids

Economist **Charles Kenny** offers a contrarian take on global poverty.

Interview by Timothy C. Morgan

GENERATIONS OF NEWS MEDIA have branded the academic discipline of economics “the dismal science” for its gloomy forecasts.

But Charles Kenny, a senior fellow at the Institute for Global Development, calls himself “an optimistic economist” and has reported compelling evidence that the global economic glass is at least half-full. His contrarian 2011 book, *Getting Better: Why Global Development Is Succeeding—And How We Can Improve the World Even More* (Basic Books), takes an evidence-based approach to the study of global poverty.

Each year, billions of dollars in aid are spent to achieve the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals. Three of the eight goals directly connect to the welfare of children: eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, and reducing child-mortality rates by two-thirds.

UN member states adopted the goals in 2000 and set a deadline of 2015, now 18 months away. Kenny said that while not all those goals will be achieved by then, the progress has been significant. He recently spoke with *Christianity Today* senior editor of global journalism Timothy C. Morgan about his findings.

**Your book describes a historic decline in global poverty. But hasn’t the worldwide economic recession bumped poverty rates back up?**

If I were writing the book today, I would be more positive. What has become clear is that the African continent, sub-Saharan Africa in particular, is having one of its best decades ever. Some of the fastest-growing countries in the world have been in Africa, and these countries over the past decade have doubled their gross domestic product. It’s really an impressive performance.

We have seen quite dramatic poverty reduction as a result. If you look at Africa in the 1990s, the proportion of Africans living on \$1.25 a day went up. But since 2000, it’s been tumbling back down the other way. There’s good news about income pretty much everywhere over the past decade.

You would have expected in 2008–2009 to see a dramatic reversal in progress in poverty and income. There was a slowdown. They didn’t drop as far as the West has, and they bounced back faster. Not even the biggest economic crisis since the Great Depression

reversed the progress.

If you look at child mortality, Africa has had a spectacular decade. In a four- or five-year period, for example, Senegal reduced child mortality by two-fifths. It’s a big drop. We’ve halved the number of African children who are going to die before their fifth birthday. The progress has been historically unprecedented. Africa is leading the charge over the past decade in reducing child mortality. It’s a wonderful story.

**Some experts still look at the glass as half empty. For example, Somalia and Burundi don’t seem to be getting better at all. What’s your response?**

There is immense unnecessary suffering worldwide. I don’t want to say the glass is full. It’s a long way from full.

There is misery of every form in places like the Congo [DRC]. I don’t want to sound ridiculously positive in the face of such misery.

Yet even in the Congo, from the survey evidence, child mortality is dropping. It’s dropping from hideous highs, but it is dropping. There are small signs of progress—green shoots if you will.

The people in the Congo and in other war-torn regions are changing behaviors that are improving lives, especially of their kids. Even in the Congo, vaccination rates are up, and more parents are telling their kids to wash their hands after they go to the bathroom.

That is reducing avoidable mortality. Even in extremely miserable places, there are green shoots.







**So new research confirms a critical role for parents?**

One study looked at simple community-level interventions. The idea that newborn kids are unclean was prevalent in one community. Newborns weren't cleaned for the first 24 hours, which increased neonatal mortality dramatically.

Parents were encouraged to use safer birthing practices, and they were able to quite dramatically reduce rates of child mortality.

We should be worried about paternalism. But in this particular case, I think we shouldn't be as concerned. These techniques are clearly working to save kids, and that's something that everybody wants. There are approaches that involve nudges—encouragement to

**Sugar, Salt, Water:** Economist Charles Kenny says people are surprised to learn that more than 1 million young children per year could be saved by treating severe diarrhea with oral rehydration therapy—a simple mixture of sugar, salt, and water, costing less than 50 cents per treatment.

behave in the right way, not making people behave in a different way.

A nice example is vaccines. Setting up a vaccine camp is quite complicated. If you get only a third of parents turning up to get their kids vaccinated, it's not as effective. So the MIT Poverty Action Lab gave parents a bag of lentils if they got their kids vaccinated. Now lentils are not that expensive, but that little incentive dramatically increased the number of parents who turned up.

**Who should get the lion's share of the credit for reducing poverty?**

People. At the bottom of all this are parents making different decisions. It's all very well building a school, but if parents don't want their kids to go to that school, it's really hard to make them.

What is driving up enrollment rates? Parents making the active decision to send their kids to school. What is driving up increased vaccination rates? Parents making the decision to get their kids vaccinated.

***I don't want to sound ridiculously positive in the face of such misery.  
Yet even in the Congo, child mortality is dropping.  
There are small signs of progress—green shoots if you will.***

After people, there's a lot of credit to go around. I'm happy to give quite a lot to NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] and civil society, to governments, and to the United Nations. The halving of child mortality rates over 25 years is a big enough story that there is a lot of credit to go around.

**Is the faith sector being particularly effective in improving the lives of children?**

There's a bunch of basic child-health interventions in particular, but also education interventions, where what you want is universal coverage. You want every kid getting access.

The best way to do it long term certainly involves the government, but not necessarily the government doing all of it. Universal delivery of a service has to involve the government.

Having said that, if you look at some of the most exciting advances in how we provide services sustainably and more efficiently, they're coming out of faith-based organizations and other NGOs. Once you set up a government program, government is wedded to it. They have political capital attached to it.

If you want innovation and change, you want outsiders. Many kids in India spend seven years in school and learn nothing. But Acer India [an educational assessment nonprofit] is running some of the most exciting experiments on how we improve test scores. Can you bring in contract teachers? Can you reduce class sizes? Can you use computers? They're throwing changes at the problem and very carefully measuring what happens.

Outside groups are not wedded to the current system for all sorts of reasons. We see it all the time in child health. Who is it that comes up with the way to increase the number of people to turn up to vaccine camps? Faith-based organizations, NGOs.

We talked about the importance of parents acting differently. I would probably put child sponsorship in this category. I'm glad to hear it makes a difference, [but] on an individual basis in a cost-effectiveness measure, it's probably quite expensive for the changes you're making.

**You're making an 8- to 10-year commitment when you sponsor a child.**

It's a lot of money, compared with how much is being spent on that kid locally. There could be spillover effects, if other parents who have one kid being sponsored see the impact on that kid, and then look into finding the money to do it for their other kids.

Faith-based organizations and NGOs have a reputation for not being in it for themselves. They're more likely to change norms than are the government and local agencies.

**A norm change in a village would be believing that girls can go to school.**

Right. Or that it's okay to have skin contact with your kid in the first

24 hours after birth. It is quite likely that NGOs and faith-based organizations coming in working on those things will have greater credibility than would a contractor or the local government. If faith-based organizations can find places where they can leverage the impact of their money, where by spending money on a few people, they can create change over time that spreads to the rest—that's a powerful role.

**Do you have any concerns about the basic child-sponsorship model?**

Some of these programs don't work as well as others. That has to do with careful monitoring and making sure that the kids get the benefits rather than somebody else. That applies to any development program.

The individual connection, especially if the kid is writing to you, means you might have some independent way of verifying whether your money is actually doing good.

I'm also concerned about the cost effectiveness. But along with that concern comes a kind of reality check, which is that these

people might not be giving money at all if they did not have an individual connection with somebody.

If my choice is between a terribly effective program with no funding and a slightly less effective program with funding, I'll take the second.

We have to be realistic. It's a painful debate. We have to do the painful moral calculus, when we can, of cost effectiveness in health. We also have to be cognizant of the fact that the pot of money changes depending on how much people want there to be a pot of money in the first place.

I'm quite willing to believe that there are more effective programs to improve outcomes for kids in the developing world than even the more effective child-sponsorship programs. But I'd still rather have the less effective program with money, thank you very much.

**You stress the essential need for individual initiative. Are you laying down the gauntlet for individuals to take responsibility?**

Yes, one problem I have with the current dominant marketing strategy for many NGOs and even some faith-based organizations is that they say, "It's all miserable in Africa."

That gives people a moral out. If it's all miserable in Africa, and it's always been all miserable in Africa despite all of what we've done today to try and help, that means your money will be wasted if you spend it there. So you don't.

You may have a theoretical moral duty to help those who are in considerably worse straits than yourself. But if you cannot actually help them, you can spend the money on a new iPad.

I think the world is getting better. Partially it is connected with the support of NGOs, faith-based groups, governments, taxpayer dollars at work—all of that. It means that actually—yeah, sorry—we have a moral responsibility.



GARY GNIDOVIC



# Sponsoring a Movement

Former sponsored children  
like **Moses Pulei** pay it forward in their hometowns.

By Ken Walker

**M**OSSES PULEI KNOWS the benefits of child sponsorship up close and personal.

The oldest of four sons, Pulei grew up in a mud hut 40 miles from Namanga, a town along the Tanzania-Kenya border. Life in his village was so laid-back, he can only guess his age—his passport lists it as 44.

His boyhood goals were simple: get circumcised, become a Maasai warrior, then spend his life raising cows, goats, and sheep, just like his father and uncles before him. His youngest brother did just that, refusing to enroll in school.

"I wouldn't be where I am today if I hadn't been sponsored," says Pulei. "It meant a complete change in how I lived."

Sponsors (alongside partner World Vision) provided him a school uniform and books, and their support ensured health exams and the certainty of year-round nourishment, even during East African famines. World Vision also planted trees in his community to address the chronic problem of deforestation.

Kenya's government provides its citizens with a free primary education, albeit in partnership with churches, particularly in rural areas. However, neither party provided the books and other supplies that made it possible for Moses and two of his brothers to attend school.

And although only two Pulei children had sponsors, the whole family benefited from the resources and gifts that came with sponsorship. Staff taught his father how to raise healthier livestock and earn more money for those he took to market.

"My dad had a flock of sheep that he called his 'World Vision sheep,' because he got them as a result of a Christmas gift," Pulei says.

Sponsorship played a crucial role in Pulei's spiritual life as well. As a senior in high school, he accepted Christ at a Christian camp, a decision he made two years after his grandfather died. Pulei connected with the promise from Matthew 5:4, that those who mourn will find comfort.

## LONG-TERM FAITHFULNESS

Stories like Pulei's are, thankfully, heard time and again at church events and in marketing campaigns. But child sponsorship itself is a relatively new idea in the history of Christian compassion.

The origins are complex, but one definitive moment came in 1938, when J. Calvitt Clarke, a Presbyterian pastor, created the Christian Children's Fund (now ChildFund International), a sponsorship program to aid children impoverished after the second China-Japan war.

Soon, other organizations followed in ChildFund's footsteps: Save the Children began sponsoring individual children in 1940;

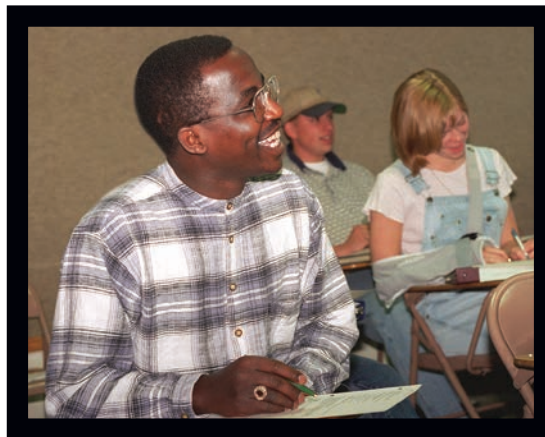
World Vision, in 1950; Compassion International, in 1952; and Food for the Hungry, in 1978. Today more than 5 million children are sponsored by World Vision and Compassion alone, and more than 900 Christian and secular American charities now offer some form of child sponsorship.

Roland Hoksbergen, professor of economics and international development at Calvin College, says, "People in North America respond to this fundraising tool better than to any other. It connects donors with real people." Missiologists cite several reasons for why child sponsorship, which typically requires a monthly donation of \$30–50, has resonated so strongly with donors.

First, sponsorship usually means a personal relationship, if only through

photos and letters, says Susan Greener, professor of intercultural studies at Wheaton College in Illinois.

It's also received a significant bump from the contemporary Christian music industry since the 1970s. "As the recording and concert industries grew, organizations recruited musicians to promote child sponsorships in their products and in concert venues," Greener says. "They built a strong volunteer base of child sponsors to man tables at Christian events and in their churches." Artists would talk



**On Campus:** Pulei studied theology at Whitworth University and now teaches Bible there when his schedule permits.



passionately about visiting their sponsored child and how the lives of children were improved due to intervention programs. At concerts, photos of children available for sponsorship were handed out.

Multnomah University professor Greg Burch served 11 years as a missionary in Venezuela and Costa Rica and believes short-term mission trips fuel the sponsorship model. He says directly exposing relatively wealthy Americans to chronic poverty can change hearts and minds.

“Going to Bogota, Colombia, for the first time and witnessing the extreme poverty kids were living in motivated me to organize a sponsorship program and eventually move to Latin America to serve the very kids I had seen on the streets,” Burch says. “Even today young people are getting excited [about sponsorship] because of short-term mission trips.”

Bryant Myers, professor at Fuller Seminary’s School of Intercultural Studies, says an invitation to help children is effective in recruiting sponsors and retaining many of them for 10 years or more. “Because sponsors are so faithful, programming can last much longer than is possible from any other funding source,” Myers says. “This enables sponsorship-funded organizations to work on long-term development programming.”

**Keeping Tradition Alive:** Most of the Maasai reject modern technology and live in rural areas in Kenya and Tanzania, tending livestock.

## GIVING BACK

In many nations, the cutoff age for being sponsored is 18 (though a few countries have extended the age to 22). But what happens after that? Child-sponsorship groups are not prepared to track all sponsored children into adulthood. But leaders say their programs are designed to encourage young adults toward productive careers and a lifetime of helping others.

After graduating from high school in 1986, Pulei spent seven years working for the Kenyan government and Young Life. But mentor Fred Foy Strang, a Presbyterian Church (USA) missionary, encouraged Pulei to pursue higher education. Strang and his wife mentored Pulei and several other emerging leaders in the 1980s. That continued after the Strangs returned to America to pastor a church.

In 1993, the Strangs encouraged Pulei to study in the United States, and he enrolled at Whitworth University, a Presbyterian school in Washington State. Pulei went on to study at Fuller Theological Seminary, earning a divinity degree and a PhD in theology and culture. After marrying a woman he met in California, Pulei accepted an offer from Whitworth to teach theology.

But in 2010, World Vision offered Pulei a job in East Africa. Prayer, childhood memories, and a promise to give back to his people persuaded Pulei to accept the offer to become World Vision’s regional university research partnership coordinator in Tanzania, near his



# **'We have pictures of children we sponsor on the refrigerator. We want them to get the same opportunities that I experienced.'**

~ Moses Pulei, East African theologian

childhood home in Kenya.

The relocation put Pulei in a strategic position to work with his mentor on a new theological education extension center at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro.

Strang left the mission field in 1990, but he still visits Africa every year. He is thrilled to work more closely with his protégé, saying, "I'm proud that Moses chose to go back."

As partnership coordinator, Pulei now works with a wide range of universities that conduct the same kind of research as economist Bruce Wydick (see "Want to Change the World? Sponsor a Child," page 20). Besides validating the efficacy of sponsorship, they hope to learn ways of better implementing their mission—which includes helping nearly 765,000 needy children in East Africa alone.

"It didn't hit me until I came back that I'm on the other end," Pulei says. "I feel fulfilled. We have pictures of children we sponsor [in India and Mexico] on the refrigerator. We want them to get the same opportunities that I experienced."

## **LEARNING AFTER SCANDAL**

Despite such testimonials, for years critics have faulted child sponsorship for being too expensive, subject to fraud, designed around the needs of sponsors, and creating harmful dependence and jealousy.

In 1998, the *Chicago Tribune* published a hard-hitting two-year investigation of child sponsorships, reporting that two dozen deceased children were on the sponsorship rolls at Save the Children.

The report prompted the firing of an employee in Mali and new accountability measures across many ministries. The ongoing communications between sponsorship groups, sponsors, and children helps ensure that the process of distributing funds is more transparent, says Fuller professor Myers.

"There are anomalies here and there, but all the larger sponsorship agencies have internal auditors that work pretty hard to find breakdowns," says Myers.

One issue critics raise is the ethics of helping one child in a poor family and leaving others unattended. Myers thinks agencies can address that by assuring sponsors that their funds are invested in education, health care, and clean water, which help all local children.

Calvin's Hoksbergen observed another shortcoming a few years ago. Several Christians working in Ghana with an international agency told him of the time-consuming nature of acting as liaisons between sponsors and children. On occasion, visiting sponsors would shower their sponsored children with expensive gifts, causing jealousy in the community.

To circumvent such situations, some organizations connect more than one sponsor with a child who "represents" the community. But this raises the issue of deception. Though some organizations still

do this to minimize problems, Hoksbergen says, "They run the risk of alienating donors if they don't have their own child."

Multnomah's Burch is also concerned about automatic payment plans, which he said can turn well-heeled Americans into "slacktivists" disengaged from the emotional and relational cost of sponsorship.

## **MORE THAN ONE MODEL**

Child sponsorship is not based on a single model of raising support or providing services, experts say. Compassion International and others allow sponsorship aid to go directly to a single sponsored individual child.

Other programs use the community model. For example, World Vision pools resources to help groups of sponsored children through selective programs.

In addition, many child sponsorship organizations participate in or operate other child-focused programs, including vaccination, public health, clean water, parent education, nutrition, and housing. Food for the Hungry (FFH) supports more than 120,000 children in 16 countries, but it only has 58,000 sponsors. The organization emphasizes community solutions to poverty issues, says Tom Davis, FFH chief program officer. "We want to see the whole thing

changed. We feel that's what God had in mind with change—not just change for one child."

One key to FFH's approach is the peer-to-peer education model, in which volunteer health educators are trained to promote better health practices among mothers in their neighborhoods. The model,

which was designed by World Relief in 1995 and furthered in recent years through FFH, has been shown to be effective in two recent independent studies.

The most recent study—whose results were published in the March issue of *Global Health*—covered a five-year period that concluded in 2010. Using sponsor funds and a grant from USAID, FFH developed a nutrition program in Mozambique for children under 2 that saved an estimated 6,800 lives and decreased malnutrition by 38 percent. A second effort that involves children up to age 18 seeks also to improve agriculture and education and lower the risk of disease.

Wheaton's Greener says a well-run sponsorship program educates supporters about global poverty and promotes resilience. "Children are growing, and their developmental needs are immediate. It is better to act imperfectly than to wait for the perfect model."

Ken Walker is a writer and journalist in West Virginia.



**Welcomed Home:** Maasai villagers greet Pulei on a return visit to his home near Mount Kilimanjaro.







# A Terrifying Grace

Why God's omniscience  
is good news for us.

By Mark Galli

**M**Y WIFE, BARBARA, AND I have been married for more than 30 years, and yet some corners of our inner lives remain dark to one another. We know a lot about each other—a lot. But we're still learning how to reveal secrets. It's still scary after all these years.

When we take a step back from marriage and think of other relationships, it becomes clear how much we hide from each other. Most of the time, we try to make a good impression: on the boss, the coworker, the neighbor, the stranger we hold the door for at the bank. We share various and sundry intimacies with friends, lovers, parents, children, and priests or pastors—but we do not tell everything to anyone. We hold back.

We hold back in wisdom. It's probably not a good idea to tell coworkers of the opposite sex about your temptations to lust. It's not wise for parents to tell their young children how they sometimes wish they hadn't had children.

But we also hold back in fear. What would he think if I told him how hateful I feel? Would she still speak to me if I admitted my addiction to pornography? Could I still work in the church if they knew how many doubts I have?

*Would I be accepted if I told all?* That's the question. We long to be accepted, to be in the company of someone who will not blink regardless of what we say. But long ago we came to believe that this isn't possible. At some point we have all chosen to share a vulnerable secret, only to later endure humiliation or shame. So now we live with a low-grade fear that somebody is going to find out something about us we do not wish to reveal. It's a fear that nags us for life.



Bringing God into the picture does not seem to help at first. But bring him in we must, because a key attribute of God is his omniscience (lit. “all knowledge”)—that he knows everything, in particular everything about us. Jesus makes this clear time and again when he says things like, “Your Father knows what you need” (Matt. 6:8). He admitted that while his own knowledge was temporarily limited—for example, he does not know the “day or hour” of his own return—the Father does know (Mark 13:32). Jesus always frames God’s complete knowledge as a point of comfort, but if we’re honest with ourselves, we see that we aren’t always comforted.

For example, we’re rightly told over and over that God accepts us just as we are. But truth be told, we’re skeptical. If there is anyone whom we’re really anxious to make a good impression on, it’s God.

Sure, we confess things to God that we confess to no one else. But many of our confessions are attempts to manage the relationship so that we are acceptable to God: I admit my greed or selfishness in a moment of contrition. I’m sincere, but I’m also looking for absolution, forgiveness, and acceptance. If I do my part, God will do his part, and all will be well.

I know I’m managing the relationship with God because while I’m willing to bring some areas of my life before him, I find it difficult to speak with him about other areas. Like an alcoholic in denial, I struggle to admit my various addictions. I’m hiding the truth *from myself*, and in that sense, I’m hiding it from God. Many times when circumstances or the loving rebuke of a friend force me to acknowledge some dark area of my life, I have to admit that I was aware of it for some time, like being aware of the low speaker hum while you’re listening to a speech. You do not hear that hum if someone is chattering into the microphone, but when the person stops talking and you just listen, the hum is there.

We say it’s wonderful that God knows everything about us and yet still accepts us, but we have to admit we don’t believe it. If we believed God accepted us, we wouldn’t be hiding secrets from ourselves, and from him.

The psalmist does not fall for a cheap piety. Neither does he pretend he can hide something from God. He’s an honest theologian. He knows that God knows him completely, and that while this knowledge is comforting

in some ways, it is also frightening.

O Lord, you have searched me and known me!  
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from afar.  
You search out my path and my lying down  
and are acquainted with all my ways.  
Even before a word is on my tongue,  
behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.  
You hem me in, behind and before . . .  
(Ps. 139:1–5, ESV)

God’s knowledge does not always feel freeing, as we might suppose, but sometimes makes the psalmist feel trapped. He realizes that he has no choice but to live with this reality. He will have to allow God to shed light on the dark corners of the soul where secrets of shame, guilt, and doubt huddle in fear. He will have to admit how much he tries to manage his image even before God, how proud he is of his faith, and how selfish even his most contrite moments are. If he really lets God reveal the truth about himself to himself, he will have to stand before God naked, ashamed, with every dark secret laid out—with nothing to cling to in order to justify his existence.

It is no wonder that the attribute of God’s omniscience has fallen on hard times.

### THE DILEMMA

When we ponder God’s complete knowledge, we tend to wax eloquent about things philosophical. And we ask large questions: *If God knows everything that is going to happen, does that negate humans’ free will? If we are truly free to make decisions, doesn’t that imply that God doesn’t know what we are going to do? And so on.*

Indeed, there are deep theological issues involved in omniscience that are worth exploring. But in the spiritual life, often our intellectual doubts only mask an unwillingness to humbly submit to an ultimately mysterious yet clear truth.

Current theological discussions of omniscience have made one thing clear: We can no longer hold to an omniscience that arises from Greek philosophical thought—a rigid, impersonal, and deterministic knowledge that sabotages free will. Any talk of

omniscience has to be grounded in biblical revelation. And biblical revelation is concerned first and foremost with God’s relationship with us.

There is no one verse or passage that spells out this doctrine in an orderly way. That’s because the writers of the Bible simply assume the omniscience of God. It is one way of affirming to the people of Israel that their God is utterly superior to the gods of the adjacent nations. As Isaiah put it:

Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel  
and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts:  
“I am the first and I am the last;  
besides me there is no god.  
Who is like me? Let him proclaim it.  
Let him declare and set it before me,  
since I appointed an ancient people.  
Let them declare what is to come,  
and what will happen.  
Fear not, nor be afraid;  
have I not told you from of old and  
declared it? (Isa. 44:6–8, ESV)

Even more to the point, the biblical writers relate God’s omniscience to the depths of the human soul. God knows the secrets of our hearts (Ps. 44:21), that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick” (Jer. 17:9, ESV). They teach that God’s knowledge is a form of judgment. As Job’s friend Elihu put it:

For his eyes are on the ways of a man,  
and he sees all his steps.  
There is no gloom or deep darkness  
where evildoers may hide themselves.  
For God has no need to consider a man further,  
that he should go before God in judgment. (Job 34:21–23, ESV)

No wonder the psalmist felt hemmed in by God’s knowledge. The holy God knows the worst about us, and it is difficult to imagine that we will survive his scrutiny unscathed by mortal judgment.

Theologian Paul Tillich put it like this in his sermon “The Escape from God”:

Our entire inner life, our thoughts and desires, our feelings and imaginations, are known to God. . . . The hu-



man resistance against such relentless observation can scarcely be broken. Every psychiatrist and confessor is familiar with the tremendous force of resistance in each personality against even trifling self-revelations. Nobody wants to be known, even when he realizes that his health and salvation depend upon such a knowledge. We do not even wish to be known by ourselves. We try to hide the depths of our souls from our own eyes. We refuse to be our own witness. How then can we stand the mirror in which nothing can be hidden?

That's the psalmist's dilemma, and ours.

#### A CAVERN OF MERCY

The very thing that makes us feel trapped—God's omniscience—is the very thing that reveals the depth of God's grace. If we can muster the courage to allow God's omniscience to judge us, we will see that before and after the righteous judgment, there has been the omniscience of grace. Let me give an example of an early experience of this.

The autumn after my 13th birthday, my mother and brother and I began attending a fundamentalist church where the pastor gave a weekly altar call, if not for conversion, then for recommitment. He was a master at his craft, and every week when he began warming up to the altar call, I felt guilty. Week after week, this part of the service became increasingly oppressive. As December rolled around, I decided that I didn't want to celebrate Christmas with this guilt hanging over me. So the Sunday before Christmas, when the pastor asked for a show of hands of those wished to give their lives to Jesus, my hand shot up.

That was usually the end of it, but this week he asked those of us who had raised our hands to come forward to pray with an elder. This was more than I had bargained for, but I was determined to flush this guilt out of my system, so I went forward, and the elder and I went off into another room. He led me in some version of the sinner's prayer, and I wept uncontrollably, which we both took as a sign of my true repentance.

I went to church the following week with great expectations. But my joy was crushed

when the pastor gave the altar call and, once again, those feelings of guilt rose up. I felt as bad as ever.

As the months and years unfolded, I slowly understood what had happened. First, the pastor was adept at making people feel guilty, regardless of their moral state. Call it manipulation or prophetic insight into the



***The very thing that makes us feel trapped—God's omniscience—is the very thing that reveals the depth of God's grace.***

human condition—it was probably a combination. So the guilt I continued to experience was genuine in some respects and externally manufactured in other respects.

Second, I slowly recognized how self-centered my conversion had been. I formally "accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior," and I confessed my sins as a prelude to that. But in fact, what I really wanted was mostly to get rid of guilt. I wanted to stop feeling uncomfortable. And I was trying to use God to make that happen.

Third, I came to realize that God knew this about me when I walked forward on that December morning. He knew that

I had little intention of making Jesus my Lord at that moment; he knew that the lord of my life was very much still me, trying to shape it according to my understanding of happiness.

God in his foreknowledge knew that when he drew me into his family, I would lust and lie and gossip and slander and practice all manner of immorality through the years ahead. He knew the particular sins and the particular people I would sin against. He has known for some time the particular evil inclination that I recognized for the first time yesterday in worship. He knows this morning how I'm going to fail him before the morning is out.

Yet despite his complete knowledge of the darkness of my heart and the wickedness of my future, he accepted my initial sinner's prayer and has held me to that commitment. He has remained committed to me despite his full knowledge of my deeds, words, and motives, past, present, and future. As Paul put it, "If we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself" (2 Tim. 2:13, ESV).

Like exploring a dark cave with a small flashlight, we discover the contours of this grace slowly. Once in a while, we come upon a huge cavern of mercy, where the stalactites and stalagmites of grace overwhelm us with their beauty. We realize that this grace has been dripping into our lives for years, creating something beautiful when we only knew darkness.

We have the courage to explore this cave of our souls now, because we know that only in the darkness do we discover the beauty of God's grace. It is still unnerving, and requires faith-courage, but the more we discover the hidden grace, the more we have the courage to explore even more.

Omniscience, then, is not so much a theological attribute or a philosophical problem as much as a revelation of God's grace. It will indeed inspire fear when we first start reflecting on it. Just ask the psalmist. But the fear of the Lord is also the beginning of wisdom and grace. ✚

**Mark Galli** is editor of *Christianity Today*. This article was adapted from a chapter in his book *A Great and Terrible Love: A Spiritual Journey into the Attributes of God* (Baker Books).



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The Antifat Pastor: Steve Reynolds of Capital Baptist Church in Annandale, Virginia, has used Bible-based fitness to lead his congregation to lose 12,000 pounds since 2007.



[ CULTURAL TRENDS ]

# The Fitness-







SCOTT SUCHMAN

**I**T'S MONDAY NIGHT at New Hope Community Church in Flora, Indiana, and 40 churchgoers donning T-shirts and sweats are gathering in teams for their weekly weigh-in. There's no camera to capture their reactions when their numbers are announced, and no one will be booted out of the church. But make no mistake, this is a weight-loss competition. And Michelle Reed is in it to win.

"I've lost 16 pounds in a few weeks. It's a lot easier when you hear what God says about it," says Reed. In January 2013, the church started using *Losing to Live*, a 12-week program that includes a fitness assessment, group aerobics, and counseling created by "antifat pastor" Steve Reynolds. After losing 120 pounds himself in 2007—and then leading 250 members of Capital Baptist Church in northern Virginia to lose 12,000 pounds—Reynolds developed that curriculum followed by *Get Off the Couch: 6 Motivators to Help You Lose Weight and Start Living*. Like most weight-loss programs, Reynolds's promotes healthy eating and regular exercise. But then it adds one of the Ten Commandments: You shall have no other gods before me. "We've made food an idol," says Reynolds.

Twenty years ago, I did my part to resist that idol. I'd lace up my sneakers and run to church to work out in a Sunday school classroom, dancing awkwardly and sweating to Amy Grant. Our group, unofficially dubbed the "Not-So-Firm Believers," felt slightly subversive—dancing and sweating in church? We always made sure the doors were closed.

As it turns out, those of us in that Sunday school classroom were ahead of a curve that has found its way to some of the largest churches in America, including Saddleback. In 2011, pastor Rick Warren threw out a challenge: "Okay guys, I've only gained like three pounds a year, but I've been your pastor for 30 years. So I've got a lot of weight to lose. Does anybody want to join me?" He expected a few hundred to straggle to the first meeting. Twelve thousand showed up. Shortly after, 15,000 from 190 countries signed up online to follow a diet, exercise, and Bible study program named "The Daniel Plan," after the Old Testament prophet's refusal to eat the Babylonian king's rich food. Two years after it began, Saddleback congregants have lost more than 270,000 pounds. A major publisher is set to launch the Daniel Plan as a book-plus-media package in 2014.

Losing to Live and the Daniel Plan join a host of faith-based wellness programs launched within the past decade: Firm Believer, Bod4God, WholyFit, Body Temple Wellness, and Body Gospel, to name a few. Faith-based diet and nutrition books, all claiming to shrink believers' waistlines while expanding their faith, continue to make the bestseller lists. Local

# Driven Church

Across the country, congregations are whipping members into shape with highly marketed, faith-based health programs. What's right—and troubling—about the trend.

By Leslie Leyland Fields

churches are building gyms and beginning neighborhood health ministries. Brainerd Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee, opened an exercise facility in 2006 with 200 members. Now its church-run BX (Brainerd Crossroads) Center has grown to 54,000 square feet and 3,000 members.

The Christian wellness trend has unfolded amid national debates about health care, childhood obesity, government-banned large sugary drinks, and who or what is to blame in a country where about 1 of every 3 adults (35.7 percent) is clinically obese. By 2030 nearly 1 out of 2 are expected to be obese, according to a 2012 study in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. But it's not an entirely new interest for the body of Christ. The YMCA, founded in 1844, was dedicated to the development of the whole person, "body, mind, and spirit," and Christian diet books go back at least to Charlie Shedd's 1957 bestseller *Pray Your Weight Away*, which taught that "if our bodies really are to be temples of the Holy Spirit, we had best get them down to the size God intended."

Churches' interest in physical health, though, seems to have new energy. "I've seen more and more interest. In the last year alone we've had triple the number of churches contacting us about some kind of fitness ministry," says Brad Bloom, publisher of *Faith & Fitness Magazine* and a partner of ChurchFitness.com, which helps churches open fitness facilities. "Churches are realizing that fitness and lifestyle ministries are one of the most effective ways to strengthen members and reach their community." Rita Hancock, a Christian physician and author of *The Eden Diet*, says it makes sense to take a faith-based approach to wellness. "I think [people] have tried everything else but God, and out of desperation, why not try this since nothing else is working? It's working because faith is woven into our beings."

### THE HEAVY HOLY

Not to dampen enthusiasm, but in truth, another reason such programs are taking off is sheer need: On a national scale, we churchgoers weigh in as among the heaviest. A 2006 Purdue University study first broke the news that religious people tended to be heavier than nonreligious, with "fundamental Christians" weighing in as the heaviest of all religious groups. Lead researcher Ken Ferraro minced no words: "America is becoming



a nation of gluttony and obesity, and churches are a feeding ground for this problem."

An 18-year Northwestern University study released in 2011 found those who attended youth group as teenagers were 50 percent more likely to be obese by the time they were 50 than those who didn't. Pastors' health has likewise declined in the past

retreat recently, he realized that "75 percent of the men at the meeting were on medications. I see people who are literally digging their own grave with their teeth."

We do a lot of that "digging" at church, of course. On any given Sunday in all of the churches I have attended, I could reward myself for coming to Sunday school with a

***When we overemphasize the 'good' of good health, we may reel out a new measuring tape for godliness and spirituality: the strictness of your diet, the size of your jeans, the rigor of your workout, the amount of energy you possess.***

decade, so much so that a number of denominations have formed their own pastor health programs. In 2007, Duke Divinity School began the Duke Clergy Health Initiative, a \$12-million project aimed at improving the health of United Methodist clergy as well as the "broader health of the congregations and communities they serve." Last year the Lilly Foundation committed \$45 million to clergy health and renewal.

Grainger Browning knows the stats personally. A fellow pastor's sudden death of a heart attack 15 years ago "shook me to the core," says the pastor of Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal Church in Fort Washington, Maryland. He began to take his own health and his congregation's more seriously. But he wonders if he's making a difference: Leading a men's

sprinkled donut. Between services, I can pick up a latte and a muffin. On many potluck Sundays, the dessert table stretches way past the main-dish tables. My teenagers will nosh on pizza, potato chips, and brownies at youth group. What are we doing? We're having fun and fellowship, for sure, but shouldn't the gospel we hear preached every Sunday deliver good news for our bodies as well as our souls?

A resounding yes, says blogger and theologian Matthew Lee Anderson, in his 2011 release, *Earthen Vessels: Why Our Bodies Matter to Our Faith*. But for years, some say for centuries, we haven't known any good news about our bodies, other than the fact that we'll get new ones in heaven. Anderson calls it "something of a scandal" that contemporary Christians have not yet formed "a holistic





**Losers in Christ:** Last year Saddleback members celebrated losing 250,000 pounds as a church (including 50 from Rick Warren) since using the Daniel Plan.

theological understanding of the body.”

“We’ve been teaching very little about ‘body care,’ and when we do, it’s primarily negative: don’t get drunk, don’t smoke or take drugs, and don’t have sex outside of marriage,” Gary Thomas, author of *Every Body Matters: Strengthening Your Body to Strengthen Your Soul*, tells me. “Until recently, we’ve not known where to go from there.”

The “scandal” is lessening, not just among theologians but thanks to the church Zumba dancers, the Daniel Plan-ners, the Losing to Live participants, and the many thousands of believers involved in church-based health care—all of whom are helping Christians think more biblically about the body and fully living the faithful Christian life.

## BEYOND DUALISM

For all their diverse methodologies, the faith-based health manuals and routines share a simple, biblical belief: God made our bodies, so we should care for them. PraiseMoves cites 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 as its foundational verses: “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.” The Daniel Plan, whose motto is

“faith, friends, food, fitness,” includes a Bible study emphasizing that God asks us to manage our bodies—and that one day we’ll be held accountable for what we did with them. That message connected with Chiquita Seals of Saddleback, who lost 140 pounds in the churchwide initiative. “That was a big motivation. God gave me this body, and I feel like I really dropped the ball with it, not taking care of it,” she says.

Many in the faith and wellness movement cite the apostle Paul: “Whether you eat or drink, do all to the glory of God.” Though they offer differing strategies to accomplish this—everything from yoga-like exercise to power walking to boot-camp aerobics to low-fat, vegan, and/or low-carb diets to simple moderation—all teach that God can be glorified by what and how we eat. Hope Egan’s *Holy Cow! Does God Care About What We Eat?* cites Old Testament dietary laws to show that in fact he does. Hancock’s *The Eden Diet* instructs readers to eat as Jesus did, as “an act of worship and reverence.” Many say they find freedom in knowing God cares about their whole person, and are working to bring their daily habits under the lordship of Christ. An anonymous WholyFit participant writes, “Before I gave my life to Christ, exercising was only for me. This program allows me to redeem fitness and health for God’s glory.”

All this may hardly sound revolutionary, but outside the church, it challenges the

prevailing notion that our bodies belong to us alone—either as machines to be hacked and fueled, or as “plastic” to be reshaped, starved, pierced, and used for pleasure or vanity. And inside the church, it challenges the dualistic worldview that God cares only about “spiritual” matters. It was that dualism that led Thomas to leave his bestselling Sacred series to pen *Every Body Matters*.

Historically speaking, the church has not overlooked the body entirely, of course. It’s just tended to care more for the bodies of others than for our own. Jesus provided the model for his followers to care for the physical needs of others. Throughout the centuries the church has founded hospitals, cared for plague victims, and attended the dying. We understand all this as our spiritual service to God, the enacting of “loving our neighbor as ourselves.” But we’ve not recognized, until recently, that we ourselves are sick. Pastors also consistently choose the welfare of their flock over their own wellness. Gwen Wagstrom Halaas, a family physician and wife of a Lutheran minister, wrote *The Right Road: Life Choices for Clergy* in part to sound the alarm on clergy health. “They think that taking care of themselves is selfish, and that serving God means never saying no,” says Halaas. It’s not easy to change this mindset. One pastor told me that if his parishioners see him playing tennis, they ask him, “Why aren’t you out visiting and sharing the gospel?”

At the heart of these beliefs and practices—stewarding our God-made bodies and glorifying him in everything—is a growing understanding of the unity and integrity of the human self. It’s an essential stake in the wellness revival tent: that body, mind, and spirit are inextricable, and that true health and true spirituality will address all three. These efforts may help lead the church toward re-membering a dis-membered faith that separates our beliefs from what we do with our bodies.

But some of these efforts are clumsy at best and contradictory at worst. And here the workout music stops. The health movement is indeed contributing a lot to our understanding and practice of wellness. But the tent is often so lumpy and sprawling, with loose theological stakes, that its very integrity is at risk.

## BEYOND HEALTH AND WEALTH

First, what makes diet and exercise “Christian”? One author assures me in an interview that his weight-loss book is “completely

biblical,” because it includes a Bible verse on every page. For many of the exercise programs, the key is beginning and ending in prayer and moving to CCM rather than secular music. Prayfit, a book, DVD, and “online community” calling itself “the fastest growing faith-and-fitness brand on the market,” promises to provide “all the tools needed for increased faith and fitness.”

How is this accomplished? Literally—

participants memorize Scripture while working out. Prayer Walking organizes group praying-while-walking sessions. None of this is harmful or wrong, but do we really need prayer, Scripture memorization, and Christian music to sanctify exercise? Such programs raise the question of whether the church health movement is just baptizing broader health-and-fitness culture in Jesus-y marketing language.

Sadly, the loose stakes and flapping corners have let in more than the usual share of hucksters and cure-alls. One diet book claims that “every part of you will know and experience the optimal health we were all meant to have.” Gwen Shamblin’s *Weigh Down* program, all the rage in the late 1990s and still going today, promises “permanent weight loss and the solution to all addictions.” The best-selling *What Would Jesus Eat?* prescribes the diet that Christ apparently ate, but without considering that he ate whatever he was served, meaning he ate exactly what everyone else in first-century Israel ate. Another promises to “eliminate sickness” through eating “God’s way,” which means

**God does not require us to be healthy to accomplish his mission on earth. Exercise and healthy eating will not guarantee a more fruitful ministry.**

a return to the Old Testament dietary laws. Jordan S. Rubin, author of *The Maker’s Diet*, is one of several who have created their own line of food and supplements with extravagant health claims and prices. His Garden of Life products have repeatedly been censored or shut down by the Food and Drug Administration for unsubstantiated claims. All of these seem to suggest that God’s plan is full health for all and that a return to “biblical living” will end all ills.

“A lot of this is part of the health and wealth gospel,” says Peter Walters, professor of applied health science at Wheaton College in Illinois. “I feel like we’re doing a disservice to the kingdom by representing Christianity in that fashion.”

Margaret Mohrmann, a medical doctor and professor of pediatrics and education at the University of Virginia, is also concerned. “Good health is not to be an end in itself,” she cautions in *Medicine as Ministry: Reflections on Suffering, Ethics, and Hope*. “Health can never be anything other than a secondary good.”

Even when we aspire to better health to better serve God and others—a noble goal,



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to be sure—it's crucial to remember that God does not require us to be healthy to accomplish his mission on earth. Exercise and healthy eating will not guarantee a more fruitful ministry. Indeed, God chose not to heal Paul of his "thorn in the flesh," electing to use Paul's very weakness to display his own strength. Nor did Paul's many imprisonments impede his songs of worship or his injunctions to "rejoice, and again I say, rejoice!"

There are indeed sicknesses we bring upon ourselves by our own choices. We must take our self-inflicted sickness seriously. But others come to us unbidden, as the consequence of genetics, aging, viruses—all realities of a decaying world groaning under bondage. When we overemphasize the "good" of good health, we may stumble into the mindset of the Jews in Jesus' day who equated disability and disease with sin. Such a perspective can reel out a new measuring tape for godliness and spirituality: the strictness of your diet, the size of your jeans, the rigor of your workout, the amount of energy you possess.

True and complete health comes when we are restored to the Healer, whom we cannot know apart from our bodies. Even when we profess belief in Christ, it is not enough to "believe in our hearts that God raised him from the dead," we must also "confess with our lips." What does real health look like, then? The psalmist gives us a beautiful portrait in Psalm 103, where he enjoins us to "Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits." His benefits to us are vast and generous. This is the God who "forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's."

Health comes as the overflow of loving God and submitting every realm of our lives to him, including tending the God-made bodies he has given us as gifts—our neighbors' bodies and our own. The church has come a long way in this direction, says Walters, moving away from a negative, escapist theology. But there's yet a long way to go. "I don't think we have a complete theology of the body and health yet."

I believe that theology will continue to be worked out by theologians, pastors, Zumba dancers, prayer walkers, and people like James Tate of First Baptist Church in Glenarden, Maryland, who lost 200 pounds

through an eating and exercise program at his church. He no longer has to sit in the handicap seats in the sanctuary to accommodate a 415-pound frame. He teaches other men in his congregation about "taking care of our bodies" and helps them to develop a closer relationship with God.

Meanwhile, Michelle Reed would like her team to win the Losing to Win competition, but win or lose, she's gained something

incalculable. "It's been so eye-opening that God cares about our whole selves. I want to honor him now in all the choices I make." ☩

**Leslie Leyland Fields** is contributing editor and former columnist for *Christianity Today*. She has taught creative nonfiction in Seattle Pacific University's Master of Fine Arts program. Her memoir is titled *Surviving the Island of Grace: Life on the Wild Edge of America* (Epicenter Press).

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# Love the Lord with All Your Voice

Singing is a forgotten—but essential—spiritual discipline. By Steven R. Guthrie

**W**

E EAT because we are hungry; we sleep because we are tired. But there are many other things we do without a clear sense of why we do them. Each year I teach a course on theological aesthetics, and one of the questions I pose at the beginning of the semester is, “Why do human beings sing?”

Many answers are given: We sing to mark important occasions, to pass time while working, to simply enjoy ourselves. We could also give rationales based in history, sociology, psychology, or biology. But my students answer with a fair degree of unanimity. “We sing,” they say, “to express how we feel.”

In the fourth century, the church father Athanasius (293–376) articulated a different understanding of singing. It includes self-expression, but Athanasius believed singing is centrally a spiritual discipline—an important practice in Christian spiritual formation, and a means of growing in the life of faith.

In a letter to his friend Marcellinus, Athanasius enthusiastically commends the Book of Psalms and provides guidance for reading the Psalms devotionally. Of course, Athanasius recognized that each portion of Scripture is valuable and makes its own contribution to the life of faith. The Book of Psalms, however, has a unique place

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in Christian devotions, something that was true in Athanasius' time and remained so across centuries of monastic practice and worship. Athanasius suggests that the Psalms are so spiritually significant precisely because they are not simply read or spoken but sung. But why is *singing* valuable?

### THE ART OF IMITATION

For most of my students, singing is a means of expression—a way of drawing out what is in us (the *ex* in *expression*). Athanasius very nearly inverts their reasoning: The first and most important outcome of singing the Psalms is *impression*. In singing, the truth of the Psalms is drawn *into* the depths of one's being rather than *out* of the depths of one's being.

Athanasius explains that “in the other books [of Scripture], those who read . . . are relating the things that were written about those earlier people.” Imagine an ancient preacher reading to his church the story of Moses and the burning bush. As the story is read, there are two separate actors: Moses, and the preacher, who is reading about Moses. In this sort of reading, Athanasius says, “those who listen consider themselves to be other than those about whom the passage speaks.”

On the one hand is Moses, who is worshipping; on the other hand is the congregation, who is listening to the account of Moses worshipping. In contrast, Athanasius says, consider the Psalms: “He who takes up this book . . . recognizes [the words] *as being his own words*.”

And the one who hears is deeply moved, *as though he himself were speaking*, and is affected by the words of the songs, *as if they were his own songs*” (my emphasis).

For Athanasius, the first virtue of the Psalms is not that they allow me to express my emotions.

Rather, singing the Psalms makes it possible for me to express Moses' or David's

emotions as my own

(“as if they were his own songs”).

Singing is

first of all an act of imitating. I take another person's words, another person's declaration, on my own lips and into my own heart. For Athanasius, singing begins as *impression* rather than as *expression*.

### THE POSTURE OF OUR WORDS

We might ask again why we could not simply speak the words of Scripture as if they were our own. What is gained by singing them? Just this: In song, we learn not just the content of the spiritual life, but something of its posture, inflection, and emotional disposition.

When we sing, we learn not simply what to say but how and why to say it. What Athanasius recognizes (and what we might forget) is that inflection, rhythm, and tone of voice matter deeply. They are not aural decoration. For example, after someone offends us we might say, “It's not so much what he said, it's the way he said it.”

We all know, for instance, that there is a way of saying “thank you” that is simply enacting a social convention, such as when someone holds the door for us. There is yet another way of saying “thank you,” perhaps after receiving a beautiful gift, that means, “I love you.” And there is still another way of saying “thank you,” perhaps halfway through an annoying sales pitch, that effectively means, “Go away now.”

We do not just say words. We inhabit and enact them. What matters in the spiritual life is not only the words that are said but the “certain attitude . . . posture and expression” with which they are said. This is a deeply biblical insight. Both the Old Testament prophets and Jesus had condemning words for those who had learned the words by heart but had failed to learn the heart of the words. Song is valuable because it carries the words inside us (*impression*), and because it carries us to the inside of the words.

### ENTERING A BROAD SPACE

It is only after discussing *impression* and musical posture that Athanasius moves to the element of musical expression. Here he commends the Psalms: “It is fitting for the divine Scripture to praise God not in compressed speech alone, but also in the voice that is richly

***We have missed something vital if our vision of spiritual formation is altogether lacking in poetry and song.***

broadened.” In comparing the Psalms to the prose passages of Scripture, such as historical books and the law, Athanasius finds that in those books “things are said . . . in close sequence.” These descriptions are puzzling at first.

To understand Athanasius, we need to recall that reading was almost always something done aloud for the ancient reader. If we think in terms of audible speech and song, it becomes apparent that Athanasius has given us a reasonable description of the difference between the two forms of speech. In ordinary speech there is intonation and rhythm, but these are “in close sequence.” When “things are expressed more broadly”—when we draw out and sustain the tones and rhythms of our speech—we move



from prose, to poetry, to song.

In intoning words in this way, Athanasius says, “thus will it be preserved that men love God with their whole strength and power.” Words that are broadened allow space for the speaker to enter in. The singer enters in, not only by inhabiting the words as described earlier, but by filling and animating them with her own strength and passion. We are invited to pour our hearts into this broad space.

We might be tempted to begin with this part of Athanasius’ spiritual formation program. When we think of the role of music, we first think of self-expression. Indeed, in the spiritual life generally (and in music particularly), we may wish to begin by giving voice to our own concerns and passions. Of course, there is a place for immediate and spontaneous expression. But Athanasius commends a pattern of tuneful discipleship—one that begins with self-denial rather than self-expression. Before the self is expressed, it is to be formed through Scripture and worship.

This should not be surprising. Jesus marks out this path. At the start of the Christian life there is a surrender, a laying down of one’s self, a kind of death: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23, NRSV). Yet neither the gospel nor the Christian life ends at the Cross. After Good Friday there is Easter; after the grave there is resurrection. In the same way, it is after surrendering my own voice to the melody of another that—paradoxically—I find I can express myself truly: “For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it” (v. 24). Athanasius’ program of singing the Psalms does not begin with but culminates in self-expression—expression of our true selves. The Psalms are a rich and broad place where all the fullness of one’s heart and soul and strength can be given voice.

#### BECOMING A HARMONY

Athanasius suggests a final reason that God has paired these words of the Psalms with melody: God intends for melody to serve as “a symbol of the spiritual harmony in a soul.” Athanasius writes that while “the entire Holy Scripture is a teacher of virtues and of the truths of faith, [the Book of Psalms] possesses somehow *the perfect image for the souls’ course of life*” (my emphasis).

What is a “harmonious soul”? We might define harmony as a pleasing concord of disparate elements, a way of being in which difference gives rise to delight and fullness rather than to strife and frustration. Sadly, our inner life rarely reflects this consonance. We need the image of a well-ordered soul because in their present fallen state, our souls are confused and disordered. We are out of rhythm with God, out of tune with others, and troubled by jarring dissonances within ourselves. Musical harmony, however, may give us some intimation of a life that is composed. Music, Athanasius believes, is a sounding image of a soul that is no longer at odds with itself, nor at odds with the Holy Spirit. Melody models an inner life in which the many different elements and impulses of the person are drawn together in a pleasing chorus.

Athanasius goes even further. Not only is this singing of Psalms

an image of the well-ordered soul; it is also a means by which God brings about this order. As the Christian goes about “beautifully singing praises, he brings rhythm to his soul and leads it, so to speak, from disproportion to proportion.” This proportioned, harmonized self is not our normal state of being. Apart from Christ, the ordinary state of affairs is for the various members and impulses of our person to jostle for control, battling with one another (Rom. 7:22–23). But when one sings, body, reason, emotion, physical sense, and desire come alongside one another, each enlisted together in the praise of God. As we sing, we become a harmony.

This is not to suggest that music in itself has the power to make us holy. The spiritual discipline Athanasius describes involves singing the words of Scripture, and singing them in the presence of God and the company of God’s people. Athanasius’ point, however, is that specifically

by singing our praises, all the diverse elements of our humanity are drawn together, and then together lifted to God in worship.

#### JOYFUL MELODY

Athanasius portrays the Christian life as a sort of richly broadened harmony, ringing out in praise of God. This image of the spiritual life itself may be one of the most important ideas from his *Letter to Marcellinus*.

Years ago, when I was a youth pastor, I ran a summer Bible study series on the spiritual disciplines. I now cringe when I remember the name I gave the series: “Boot Camp.” The handouts and Bible study worksheets had military-looking stencils and borders with clip art of camouflage and—forgive me, I was young—barbed wire. What a set of images to surround our discussions of prayer and fasting and Bible study! And how far removed from Athanasius’ image of a soul that is “beautifully disposed.”

Of course, Christian growth and the spiritual life include hard work, discipline, and training. The apostle Paul himself used a military metaphor (2 Tim. 2:3–4). But we have missed something vital if our vision of spiritual formation is altogether lacking in poetry and song. Perhaps we simply recognize all too well the discordant inner impulses that Athanasius describes, but we haven’t yet learned the way of melody and rhythm. We haven’t yet learned how to allow grace and beauty to draw our fragmented souls into God’s presence. So instead, we urge one another on in sanctification through guilt and threat, through systems and record-keeping, and through heavy-handed admonitions and manipulative programs.

But when Athanasius (and with him, countless generations of monastics) thought of spiritual formation, they thought first of the ringing cadences and resonant harmonies of the Psalms. For this reason, when Athanasius commends the spiritual life to Marcellinus, he does so in terms of song. And when he describes the character of Christian growth and formation, he finds no better image than joyful melody. ✚

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**Steven R. Guthrie** is associate professor of theology at Belmont University in Nashville. He is the author of *Creator Spirit: The Holy Spirit and the Art of Becoming Human* (Baker Academic).

# HOW ONE CHURCH LEADER IN GEORGIA IS BREAKING THE LONG-STANDING DIVIDE BETWEEN PROTESTANTS AND ORTHODOX.

By William E. Yoder in Moscow

THERE IS A SOLEMN PROCESSION to the altar. The choir is chanting. A bishop in a long, black robe and a full, gray beard swings an incense burner back and forth. We bow. We cross ourselves. It's a typical Sunday service at the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia. "Yes. Baptist."

That is how Alexander Cuttino, an American pastor, recently described worship at the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia (EBCG), a denomination famous for its unusual method of contextualizing the gospel. The man behind those efforts: Malkhaz Songulashvili, archbishop of the EBCG.

For many citizens, being Georgian means being Orthodox; 82 percent of Georgia's 4.5 million citizens identify as Orthodox. Songulashvili, a Georgia native, says he could have created "a Baptist church for Baptists, or a Baptist church for Georgians." He chose the latter. Call it the seeker-sensitive approach in the former Soviet state.

Songulashvili claims a total community of 17,000, making the EBCG the largest Protestant denomination in Georgia. (Brian Wolf, a dissenting Georgia missionary with International Gospel Outreach, puts the number much lower, at about 2,000 adult members.) Yet its contextual model is powerful. "I know of no other Baptist union or convention in the world that has exegeted its context for ministry as brilliantly and powerfully as [the EBCG]," claims Baptist theologian John Sundquist.

Many Orthodox view Baptists as a Western-inspired and -funded fringe or underground movement, decrying them as sectarian heretics. Baptists, in turn, have regarded Orthodox as unconverted. Yet Songulashvili has "uncovered the treasures" of the Orthodox tradition, he says, and incorporates them into faith and practice. He intends to lead a denomination that's Baptist in theology while both Georgian and Orthodox in culture—and to break the long-standing impasse between evangelical Protestants and Orthodox throughout Eastern Europe.

Structurally, the EBCG calls itself an Episcopal Baptist church. It is headed by an archbishop and three bishops—one of whom is

female. Female ordination and liturgical dance both mark the EBCG's departure from Orthodoxy.

But the tradition of worshiping God with all five senses is one Orthodox gift that the EBCG receives "with gratitude," says Songulashvili. Consequently, the EBCG has founded a school for icon painting and uses incense in services. It has a monastic order and holds processions and pilgrimages.

Since the Georgian Orthodox Church withdrew from the World Council of Churches in 1997, the EBCG has been the largest denomination in Georgia active in the global ecumenical movement. Consequently, the relatively tiny EBCG has become known throughout Georgia. Konstantine Gabashvili, a chairman of Georgia's parliament, says, "We cannot think of any other church or confession that has been as active in the life of wider society."

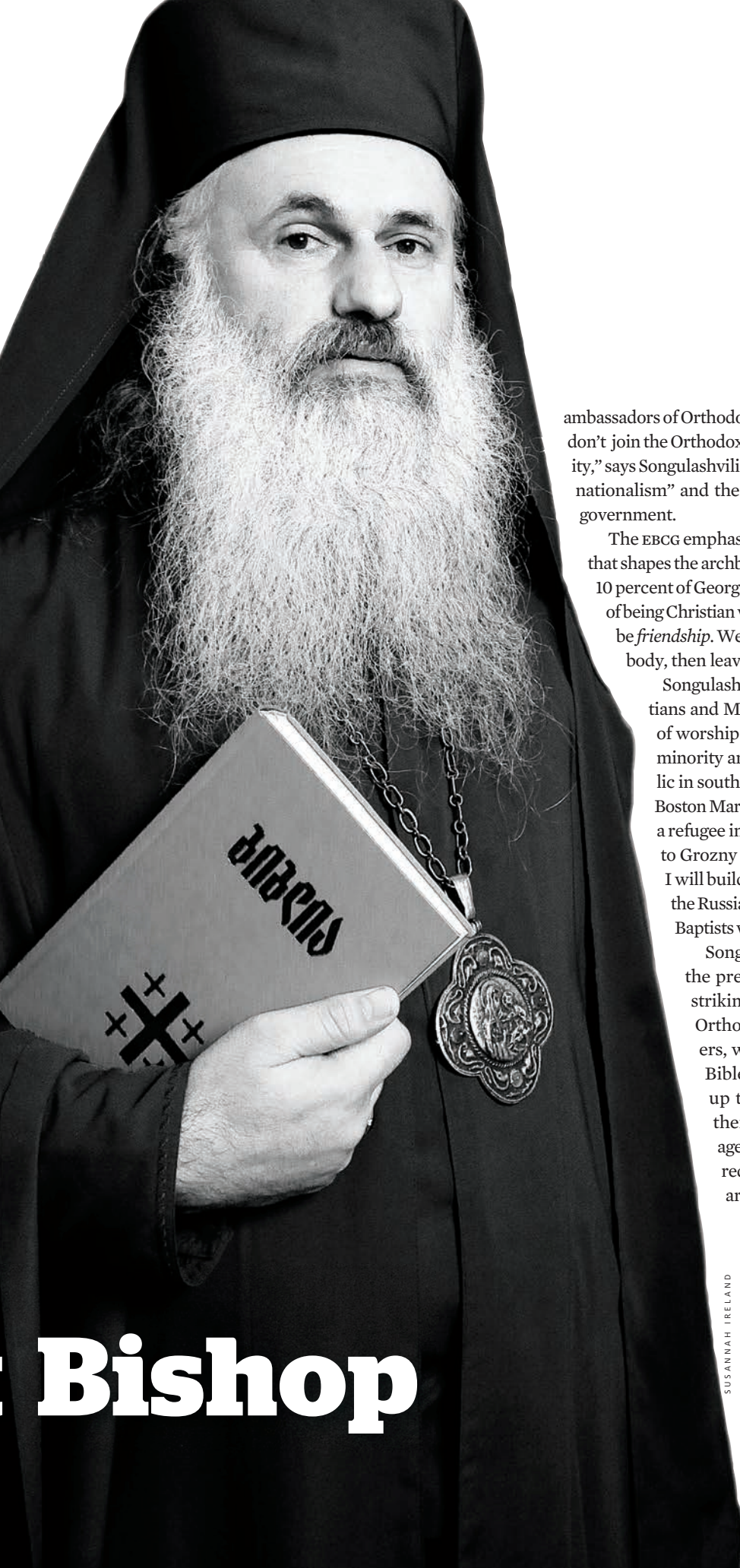
Songulashvili was ordained in 1994 and became an archbishop in 2006, and is himself a remarkable example of bridge-building. His 2008 wedding on top of Mount Didgori included 60 foreign guests from 14 countries. More than 600 Eastern Orthodox, Catholics, Anglicans, Armenian Apostolic, Jews, Muslims, atheists, and Baptists—including the general-secretary of the Baptist World Alliance—attended the ceremony and feast of music and dancing.

## PEACEMAKER

The EBCG's work has left Georgian Orthodox leaders both flattered and disappointed, says the archbishop. Flattered that Baptists have become

# The Unorthodox Baptist





ambassadors of Orthodox spirituality, but disappointed that the Baptists don't join the Orthodox fold. The relationship is one of "critical solidarity," says Songulashvili: "We criticize them for corruption and religious nationalism" and their insistence on preferential treatment by the government.

The EBCG emphasizes freedom of conscience, a core Baptist tenet that shapes the archbishop's mission to Muslims, who make up about 10 percent of Georgia's population. Christians, he says, are to "speak of being Christian without imposing anything. The key word should be *friendship*. We simply show our love and friendliness to everybody, then leave the rest to God."

Songulashvili says he dreams of a society in which Christians and Muslims help each other build their own places of worship. He has met with leaders of Georgia's Muslim minority and refugees from war-torn Chechnya, a republic in southern Russia (and where the brothers behind the Boston Marathon bombings were originally from). In return, a refugee imam from Chechnya promised, "When I return to Grozny [the capital of Chechnya], I will do two things: I will build a new mosque, because ours was destroyed by the Russians. I will also build a Baptist church, because the Baptists were the only people with us in our time of need."

Songulashvili's outreach to nationalists, hostile to the presence of non-Orthodox in Georgia, is just as striking. Consider the dramatic public trial of radical Orthodox priest Basil Mkalavishvili and his followers, who torched a building that contained 17,000 Bibles owned by Baptists. Songulashvili walked up to the defendants' cage and publicly forgave them. Asked by the defense about desired damages, Songulashvili demanded "nothing except the red wine, which we will drink together when they are set free." The Orthodox ex-priest responded

SUSANNAH IRELAND

# Bishop



in kind, sending icons and cake to the EBCG headquarters. After Mkalavishvili (now released) was sentenced to six years in prison, the archbishop wrote, "In the past we were praying that [he] be arrested. Now we are praying that he be released."

The Baptist Peace Fellowship, an international group based in North Carolina, is sponsoring Songulashvili on a trip to war-torn Aleppo, Syria, one of the many hotbeds of the Arab Spring. In April, a UN commissioner called the ensuing Syrian civil war the worst humanitarian disaster since the cold war. The fellowship believes the archbishop's peacemaking track record will bear fruit among Christian and Muslim leaders there.

"I have been friends with the local community in Aleppo since 2004," wrote the archbishop recently. "The humanitarian situation is worsening. In order to build capacity for a culture of peace, it is essential that we as Christians show tangible empathy with the suffering Muslims and Christians of Syria in their time of despair."



**Servant Shepherd:** This spring, hundreds of Georgians observed Holy Week at Peace Cathedral in Tbilisi, where the archbishop washed parishoners' feet.

## ANOTHER SPLIT

But not all is well among evangelicals in Georgia. The EBCG's worship and ties to Western evangelical and ecumenical groups have divided it from the Baptist unions of Belarus, Ukraine, Russia, and the Central Asian republics. Even Baptists in Georgia are split: The Evangelical Baptist Association of Georgia, a second Baptist union of 6 pastors, 30 churches, and some 800 adult members, became official last October. The Moscow-based Euro-Asian Federation of Unions of Evangelical Christians-Baptists rushed to make the dissident movement

a member—and is still estranged from the EBCG.

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF), based in the state of Georgia, has meanwhile publicly supported Songulashvili. Frank Broome, CBF coordinator for Georgia, has noted that the two denominations "share things in common: They are accustomed to being criticized by fellow Baptists for inclusion of women in ministerial leadership, and for working cooperatively with other Christian



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groups.” (The CBF split from the Southern Baptist Convention in 1991 over women’s ordination.)

Songulashvili publicly championed the pro-Western revolutions of Georgia, Ukraine, and Belarus, but Baptist leaders in Slavic Eastern Europe and Central Asia refuse to speak out on political issues. When Songulashvili arrived in Belarus in March 2006 without the blessing of the country’s Baptist leaders, he spent three days in jail, then was expelled from the country. The archbishop has pushed individual human rights and Western-style elections, and has distanced himself from the Russia-inspired socialist heritage and that power’s present-day interests. His thought mirrors the church and political divisions of Europe at large: Like the Georgian government, the EBCG broke with Russian-sponsored Eastern Europe and joined the West. As a result, his relations with the pro-Russian multitudes and with Protestant fundamentalists are fraught with tension.

On the other hand, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kievan Patriarchate gave the archbishop one of its highest awards in April 2011. The young Ukrainian church is at odds with the Russian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate, the world’s largest Orthodox denomination. Songulashvili has fought against the Russian yoke, appealing for national sovereignty and vehemently supporting the Georgian position in the war with Russia over South Ossetia and Abkhazia in August 2008. But it is not easy to find common ground with Russian evangelicals, who are often as Russian as the archbishop is Georgian. He concedes these are unresolved weaknesses.

“Our allegiance lies with Eastern spirituality and Eastern culture. It

may be true that we do not have as strong of formal political ties with Eastern European churches as we do with others,” he says. “This is not intentional. I want to believe the time will come when Georgian Baptists can witness together with the other Baptists of Eastern Europe. But this will not happen until the next generation arrives.”

That generation may be arriving soon. In 2010, an American pastor reported that on any given Sunday in Peace Cathedral, where Songulashvili serves, “the sanctuary [is] overflowing, with younger people crowding at the doorways to participate in the services.” A bearded, wine-drinking, highly educated Baptist hierarch in flowing robes and sandals is apparently more attractive to Georgian youth than a podium-pounding Eastern European preacher in an ill-fitting suit.

“Our church is growing slowly and steadily,” says Songulashvili. “But that growth expresses itself mainly in a deepening of faith and its influence on Georgian society. Our church has stopped being mad about numbers. We think concentration on numerical growth is a reflection of the Western capitalist system.”

Songulashvili has been mostly absent from Georgia over the past five years, pursuing doctoral studies at England’s Oxford Centre for Mission Studies. But he has completed his doctoral studies, and preached his final sermon in Oxford this March. Return to his homeland is imminent. Georgia would do well to brace itself for some surprises. +

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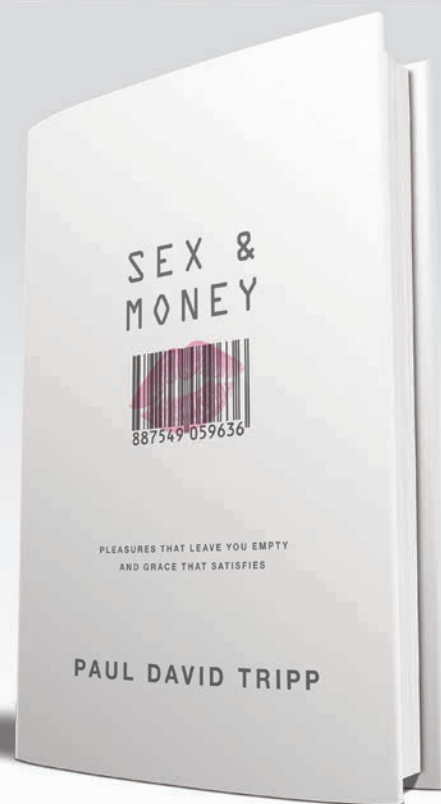
**William E. Yoder, PhD**, is a freelance church journalist based in Moscow. He is a volunteer consultant with the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists and the Russian Evangelical Alliance.

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# The Gospel in One Word

Why do we find ourselves so often





By Craig Bubeck

OD IS LOVE.”

Whenever any kind of apologetic or doctrinal debate turns toward love, don't many of us (the theologically “in” crowd) roll our eyes? For us older guard, what leaps to mind is the *L* word (*liberal*), or from the more recent decade the *P* word (*postmodern*), or the latest (and already fading) scapegoat, the *E* word (*emergent*). When love is appealed to, we often nod our heads impatiently and respond, “Yes, but . . .”

We are suspicious because love can be an excuse for mushy thinking and diluted theology—a ploy to minimize sin along with God's wrath and justice.

I know whereof I speak, because in this regard I've been among the greatest of sinners. My atheist friends would protest, “You Christians say God is love, but we

sinners are not feeling it from the likes of you.” At least these days I avoid tossing out the exhausted cliché, “Yes, God loves sinners, *but* he hates sin.”

But how else are we to respond, for instance, to a persistent mother of a prodigal daughter who once again corners the first church leader she can find after the worship service and, with pleading whispers, begs for a simple welcoming gesture: “Couldn't someone seek her out—just invite her to be a part of us? She won't listen to me.”

We have all seen the awkward hesitancy in the eyes of everyone standing nearby. We're all thinking the same thing: “Yes, God loves her daughter, but she wouldn't be a good example for the children; she might lead some of our own into sin.”

God loves her, but . . .

The qualification is just as evident in our theological discourse. For instance, many found it a hard and bitter irony that something titled *Love Wins* could create such a tightening of the church's collective gut rather than a rousing “Amen!” Given the supposed dichotomy between God's love and justice, which do we suppose most Christians would be inclined to qualify with a “but”? You just don't hear many folks saying, “God is just and righteous, but . . .”

But nothing—the dichotomy is false.

#### THE ROYAL LAW

As I've mulled over some familiar Scriptures, I have been drawn toward a rare certainty in their inescapably direct teaching: God himself is love by definition.

squirming at the announcement of God's love?

Everything he has been about and is about is uncompromising love.

### 1. God preemptively loved the world.

It's so familiar, we can easily miss the profound implications: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son" (John 3:16). From Adam and Eve to the present day, God has loved *all* of us wicked people. In the very context of an Adam-and-Eve-fallen world, God so loved us.

God has always loved the yet-sinners. "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!" (Rom. 5:8-9). Interesting, isn't it, how God's justice and wrath must be described in the context of his love? This brings us to something rather difficult.

**2. God's wrath is not an exception or counterpart to his love.** Rather, it is a consequence of it. From their beginning, the Scriptures are clear that we must weigh the significance of the Fall itself on the scale of God's love. The essence of Adam and Eve's original sin act is the very same state we are all born into: God's love distrusted, rejected, and unrequited.

The real concern for God's wrath should be far more about our being born into it, over and above anything we could have done to earn it. Out of this inherited original divorce come all of the inevitable, unlovely, unloving consequences popularly known to be sins. Furthermore, it is this very state of our existence in God's wrath that occasions his sacrificial love. It's why he himself, God the Son, breaches the chasm that is sin, making our returning his love even possible.

In John's first epistle, he makes this inescapably clear: "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (4:10, NASB). So in love, God preemptively provided propitiation. This atonement, this appeasement cannot merely be a Savior Son rescuing sinners from the hands of an angry God. Of all things in which God the Father, Son, and Spirit must be one, it is "that he loved us."

It's not so much a matter of appeasing an angry God as restoring within us the capacity to love. When we respond in faith, we return to him the love for which we were

***We love because God first loved us, not because he threatened or scared us into something we call faith.***

created. Tragically, those who choose to remain "in sin" are simply "without" in respect to God's love.

This is exactly why God's wrath cannot be about eliciting fear, as if salvation were about avoiding the frightening prospects of God's retribution or hate—as if Jesus actually came to save us from some monster God. John is clear on this: You don't legitimately love God or neighbors out of fear of wrath (1 John 4:18-20). We love because God first

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loved us, not because he threatened or scared us into something we call faith.

**3. God the Son said that the foundational, preeminent law of the entirety of Scripture is love.** James calls it the “royal law” (2:8). Unequivocally, the entirety of the Bible’s good news message is love (Matt. 22:34–40; see also Mark 12:28–34). In fact, as Paul echoes in his letter to the Galatians, the whole of Scripture can be summed up in that single word: “[T]hrough love serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (5:13–14, NASB).

It’s no less than the essence of Jesus’ good news. The gospel is all about God’s love, our inability to love (sin), and God’s sacrificial remedy (love incarnate). All we must do is believe in his means of redemptive love (Jesus Christ and his gospel story) and respond in kind.

#### **PUTTING AWAY CHILDISH THINGS**

One cannot discuss the preeminence of love

without citing 1 Corinthians 13. But it has struck me recently how rare it is that I hear verses 11 through 13 (especially “put away childish things,” NKJV) cited in the context that Paul intended. Love’s preeminence is actually what God inspired Paul to represent

### ***Everything that is truth comes down to love and is measured by it—everything!***

the mark of Christian maturity. Childish religion is about performance of good works, sin management, protectionism, and fear. The Christian who would be in right relationship with God will put away immature and inadequate motives, because from beginning to end, faith and hope are all about love.

The more I realize God’s love in thought and practice, the more I am transformed into his holiness, putting away childish rationalizations and hyperboles of justice, wrath, guilt, and fear. In our holy God’s economy, there is no counterpoint or equal to love. Everything that is truth comes down to love and is measured by it—everything! There is not a single

piece of Scripture or theology that should be understood without the context of God’s love.

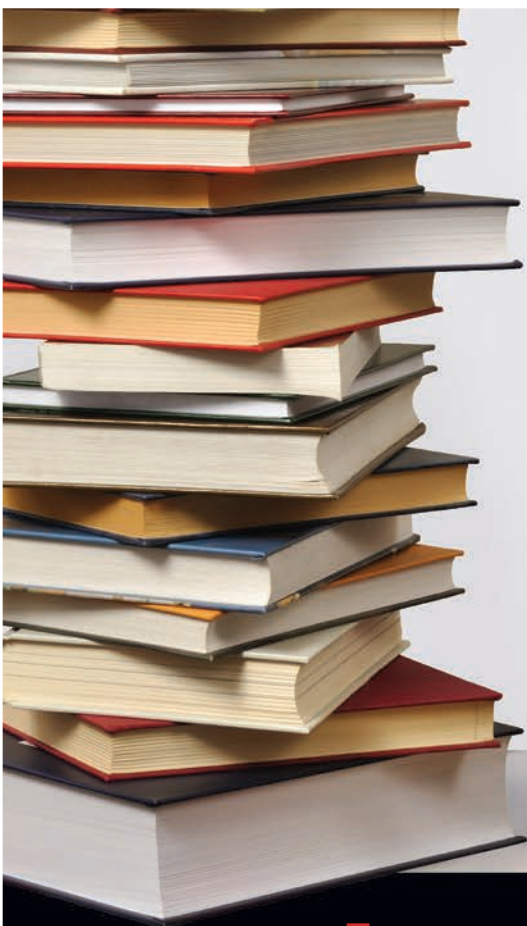
It should sadden us deeply that we Christians can be so prone to distrust love—to respond, “Well yes, love, but . . .”

If Christianity is not all about love, it is nothing but another impotent human religious construct, a loud and annoying cymbal. Because love is not rude, it cannot roll its eyes against the persistent pleas of a prodigal’s mother. Neither is it self-seeking, prioritizing the protection of those within from those without. And love keeps no record of wrongs, even of daughters who are unrepentantly living in God’s wrath.

For grown-up Christian thinking, there can be no alternative. There is no “but” to God’s love. ✚

**Craig Bubeck** is director of product development at Wesleyan Publishing House.

Go to [ChristianBibleStudies.com](http://ChristianBibleStudies.com) for “God Is Love: No Buts About It,” a Bible study based on this article.



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doctoral studies in missiology have given me an  
edge in leading this healthy, growing movement.  
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and do a doctorate - if not for Western  
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courses in Portland, I'm now doing my  
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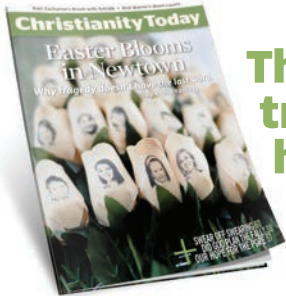
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OPINIONS AND PERSPECTIVES ON ISSUES FACING THE CHURCH

# Viewpoints



**Thank you, Philip Yancey, for bringing harsh truths to light in a way that gives hope to the hopeless and meaning for those who struggle.**

Mary Veilleux  
Berryville, Virginia

## Light in Dark Places

The April issue of *CT* was timely, encouraging, and sobering. Friends of ours are frail in the faith, facing the imminent death of their son from brain cancer. I shared with them Philip Yancey's article "National Tragedy and the Empty Tomb," then sent it to all the unbelievers who are in our circle of a growing faith community, including one of our sons. Thank you, Philip Yancey, for continuing your work of grace, bringing harsh truths to light in a way that gives hope to the hopeless and meaning for those who struggle.

MARY VEILLEUX  
Berryville, Virginia

## Already 'Reached'?

I read with interest *CT*'s recent interview with Rick Warren ["Rick Warren's Final Frontier," April]. Having recently visited Saddleback from New Zealand, where I serve as a missionary, I was surprised to see on Saddleback's map of the world numerous "unreached people groups" located in New Zealand. I have tried to clarify with them who these groups actually are. While I am committed to reaching unreached people groups, I feel we need to be clear on who and where

they are, and not make statistical claims that have no basis in fact. At the Lausanne Congress in 2010 in Cape Town, I had a similar experience when we were asked to commit to reaching these unreached people groups—of which we knew many were already "reached."

BEN CARSWELL  
Wellington, New Zealand

## Imperfect Beings

In "The Mystery of Original Sin" [April], Marguerite Shuster writes, "The reason we do evil remains as mysterious as the turning away of Adam and Eve." But according to the Bible, God made the first man with a lifeless spirit: "Thus also it is written, The first man Adam became a living soul; the last Adam a quickening spirit. But that which is spiritual [was] not first, but that which is natural, then that which is spiritual" (1 Cor. 15:45–46, Darby).

The first man was an unfinished, therefore imperfect being. God does not make mistakes. God creates man according to a progressive process. When Adam and Eve disobeyed, "the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked" (Gen. 3:7). The first man's disobedience was an eye-opener:



National Tragedy  
and the Empty Tomb  
Philip Yancey

### TOP 3

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

**14%**  
Investigator or  
Prosecutor?  
Bobby Ross Jr.

**9%**  
What the . . . ?  
Carolyn Arends

**9%**  
The Mystery of  
Original Sin  
Marguerite Shuster

### READERS' PICK

The most praised  
piece in April's *CT*

he saw his nakedness, that is, his incompleteness. According to God's will, man is brought to final perfection by Christ and in Christ. In God's plan, we become spiritually alive only through union with God in Christ through the birth of the Spirit.

PATRICK SCHAEER  
Geneva, Switzerland

## Enriching Our Insight

I appreciate "Knowing What the Bible Really Means" [April]. Languages are interpreted from our own human experience. New ideas on the interpretations of biblical words can enlighten us beyond our current understanding, mainly because they flow from ideas and experiences that we could never have on our own. Incorporating the insights from other languages enriches our own insights.

All of this, however, rides on our dependence on the Holy Spirit leading us into "all truth." He is the only final and accurate teacher. When we combine a workman-like approach to the biblical languages and a sincere desire for the truth, he will provide the view needed for God's purposes.

KERMIT P. SOILEAU  
E-mail

As a teacher of Greek, I agree that multiple Bible translations can enrich our reading of Scripture. Even a scholar can

### COMMENTS? QUESTIONS?

CT'S EDITORS WOULD LOVE TO HEAR THEM.

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learn from various translations. But in my experience, knowing only a little Greek is more harmful than knowing only English. When a pastor says, "The Greek word really means . . .," he usually has no idea what he is talking about. It's better to read the text in context than to look at an individual Greek word—unless you have a lot of experience reading Greek literature in general (beyond the biblical), have a decent introduction to linguistics, and are very careful in your statements. If one does take care, though, there is no substitute for the original.

**EDWARD KOTYNSKI**  
E-mail

## A Better Grasp

Thanks for the insightful article "Conversion Confusion" [April]. Too often I hear sound-bite caricatures of religious persecution or governmental favoritism around the world. Jayson Casper's article helped me understand the social and political complexities that go along with religious membership and conversion in Egyptian society. I need more of this type of nuanced discussion in order to have a better grasp on the critical issues as the gospel takes root around the globe.

**DREW THOMPSON**  
Brunswick, Georgia

## Cussing Clarity

I always enjoy Carolyn Arends's columns, and her musings in "What the . . .?" [April, "Wrestling with Angels"] are superb. Growing up in the church, the teaching I'd received on harsh language was long on "Don't!" and inordinately

short on the "Why not?" I found Arends's point refreshing—that language is essentially a social contract, and that as such when we "linguistically reduce something or someone to the level of biological functions (and their resultant products)" we are showing contempt.

The master stroke, however, was connecting this topic with John Stackhouse's observation that the primary vocation of the follower of Jesus is to cultivate shalom. How can we do that if our default responses flow from the cesspool of contempt?

**BOB HAY**  
Assistant Director of Recruitment, SIM USA  
Fort Mill, South Carolina

## Born in the USA

"Orphans in Limbo" [March] broke my heart for both the children in Russia and the American families waiting to adopt them. But I couldn't help wondering if the idea of adopting from the United States popped into any readers' minds. My husband and I are thankful for our two biological sons, but we are also adopting a daughter from the U.S. foster system.

There are so many children and teenagers in the United States who will grow out of the foster system with few or no connections. In our city alone, 7 out of 10 members of our homeless population were once foster kids. If we are truly pro-life, let's follow through with providing homes for our orphans—not just in word but in deed.

**ANDREA MANN**  
Houston, Texas

compiled by Elissa Cooper

## WORTH REPEATING

Things overheard at CT online.



**WORD CHOICE**  
Do you use different translations of the Bible?

**33%**

Yes, in church and personal use.

**29%**

Yes, in devotional and study use.

**18%**

Yes, to compare different translations.

**11%**

Sometimes, if I'm curious about different meanings.

**5%**

Sometimes, but I'm not deliberate about using different translations.

**4%**

No, I like to stay with one translation.

Total votes: 414

(Online polls do not represent a scientific sample.)

**"While we cling to God I feel that he is stripping away all my rosy ideals and saying, 'I alone am enough for you.'"**

**Kaili Eveans**, sympathizing with Rick and Kay Warren in the loss of her own son to suicide.

CT Liveblog: "Rick Warren's Son Dies from Suicide," by Timothy C. Morgan

**"His approach is not all that new—he just has a different emphasis."**

**Anamaria Scaperlanda Biddick**, comparing the newly elected Pope Francis to his predecessors, Benedict XVI and John Paul II, and admiring his humble approach in reaching the poor.

Speaking Out: "Pope Francis' Emerging Revolution," by Kenneth Tanner

**"Asking if I've thought about suicide today is like asking if I put on clothing."**

**Michael Wright**, discussing how bipolar disorder has affected his walk as a Christian.

Speaking Out: "When Suicide Strikes in the Body of Christ," by Al Hsu

**"I think he is guilty of having money, not worshiping money."**

**Rick**, saying he's hesitant to name "false" teachers, such as Joel Osteen, in public, as Christian rapper Shai Linne does on his new album.

CT Liveblog: "Reformed Rapper Calls Out 12 Popular Pastors as 'False Teachers,'" by Melissa Steffan

**"Just think of his wonderful voice joining the never-ending chorus of praise in heaven!"**

**Judy**, remembering George Beverly Shea.

CT Liveblog: "Died: George Beverly Shea, Longtime Singer at Billy Graham Crusades," by Jeremy Weber

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# Planting Deep Roots

When you get serious about cultural change, you get serious about institutions.



We live in an age deeply suspicious of institutions. Pastor and performance artist Rob Bell spoke for many of his peers when he asked pastors at Duke Divinity School in 2010, “Do you ever feel like you signed up for a revolution [when you went into ministry], but ended up running a corporation?” Less than a year later, Bell left his pastoral role for a new, less institutionally constrained, calling in Los Angeles.

Implied in Bell’s question is a deep frustration with the institutional church and with institutional leadership. But an institution does not have to be a calcified bureaucracy, slowing sucking the soul out of its inmates. Part of why we are cynical about institutions is because we have a limited view of what institutions are and how they work.

The modern bureaucratic organization is relatively new. Historically, institutions are much more varied and valuable things. In the broadest sense, an institution is a cultural pattern of rules and roles, artifacts, and arenas for human creativity and action that passes from one generation to the next.

For cultural change to grow and persist, it has to be institutionalized, meaning it must become part of the fabric of human life through a set of learnable and repeatable patterns. It must be transmitted beyond its founding generation to generations yet unborn. There is a reason that the people of God in the Hebrew Bible are so often named as the children of “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” Like divine intervention in history, true cultural change takes generations to be fully absorbed and expressed.

Indeed, the best institutions extend *shalom*—that rich Hebrew word I paraphrase as “comprehensive flourishing”—through

both space and time. Take one of my favorite institutions: the game of baseball. It is a set of cultural patterns that has lasted for several generations now, played at a professional level on several continents. A great game of baseball is mentally, physically, and emotionally taxing and fulfilling in the way that all deeply human endeavors are. It embodies the playfulness and competitiveness that reflects our God-given creativity and ambition for excellence. It is an institution, larger than any individual player.

At their best, institutions make room for diversity. One difference between a baseball game and a simple game of catch in the back-

yard is the range of positions available in the fully “institutionalized” form. Catcher and pitcher, right field and left field, first base and third base—for all their similarities, each of these positions rewards a slightly different set of abilities. The result is the abundance and variety God intends for the world.

Some of the longest-lasting institutions in the West, and for that matter within evangelicalism, are our universities. A university employs and serves people with a vast array of talents—not just the faculty in disciplines from archaeology to zoology, but also staff with talents for mentoring and shaping campus life, administrators with strategic and business skills, and students who form clubs, residential communities, and musical and sports teams.

Any celebration of institutions requires a substantial “to be sure” paragraph. To be sure, some institutions succumb to institutionalism, existing only to preserve themselves

rather than to continue to venture and risk their assets in the service of comprehensive flourishing. To be sure, institutions perpetuate and pass on sin and injustice. Some, such as slavery, must be altogether abolished. And if the biblical language of principalities and powers is taken seriously, it seems that human institutions can become demonic, opposed to the purposes of God.

And yet the alternatives to institutions aren’t very appealing. Movements that fail to institutionalize are like seeds that spring up quickly, but fail to become rooted. Nothing springs up more quickly than celebrity, the short-lived, fleeting impact of particular

personalities. This has afflicted American Christians more than most groups, with baleful consequences for our maintaining a distinctive and transforming presence in culture. In his boringly titled but brilliant book, *On Thinking Institutionally*, political scientist Hugh Heclo points out that baseball at its best could produce players like Cal Ripken, servants of the game who were part of something bigger than themselves. But at its worst, it produced players like Barry Bonds, celebrities for whom the game was just a stage for their outsized egos.

We need more Cals and fewer Barrys in American life, and also in the American church. But we also need more institutions worthy of the loyalty of a Cal, and institutions able to resist the egotism of a Barry. Building them is neither the anarchy that young radicals dream of, nor the boring bureaucracy that cynics fear. Rather, it is the joyful and difficult task of leadership. Jesus promised that those who build on hearing and doing his Word will build enduring structures. Let’s build something that will last. ✚



**We are cynical about institutions because we have a limited view of what institutions are and how they work.**

BY **Andy Crouch** EXECUTIVE EDITOR

*Biblical  
Bonding*

## Is interfaith marriage always wrong, given that the Bible teaches us not to be ‘unequally yoked’?

### NOT ALWAYS WRONG

**Mark Regnerus** is a sociologist at the University of Texas–Austin and coauthor of *Premarital Sex in America: How Young Americans Meet, Mate, and Think about Marrying*.

No, interfaith marriage is not always wrong. But yes, avoiding being “unequally yoked” is an excellent biblical principle. The question itself requires more excavation.

Paul advised the Christians at Corinth to avoid entering significant relationships, such as marriage, with unbelievers. There you have it: Don’t marry an unbeliever—that is, someone who doesn’t share the basics of Christian doctrine and practice. As those who have been there can attest, raising the next generation of Christians is simply tougher when one parent is dragging his heels or openly balking. It can be done. I’ve seen praiseworthy spouses watch their mates come around to faith. But that’s a rare outcome.

Genuine interfaith marriage is a challenge I don’t recommend. But as marriage has shifted in purpose over time, many Christians have added layers of meaning onto Paul’s wise command. “Unequally yoked” has evolved into a graded criterion for an optimal mate rather than a simple test for an acceptable one. This is a problem.

Why? Spiritual maturity is not equally distributed among men and women in the peak marrying years. Quality survey data reveal only two serious, churchgoing evangelical men for every three comparable women. Thus, one out of every three evangelical women is not in a position to marry a man who’s her “spiritual equal,” let alone “head.”

This elevated standard now translates—for women, at least—into something like this: “Find that uncommon man who is your spiritual equal or leader, not to mention kind, virtuous, industrious, employed, and, if possible, handsome, and then figure out how to make him want to marry you.” A tall order it is. As a result of the increasing “failure to launch,” evangelicals find themselves saying lots of nice things about the benefits of singleness (which certainly do exist), but seem unwilling to move their boundary stones for marriage. Except that they have moved them, away from acceptability and toward ideals. It’s not a surprising move, since marriage is far more voluntary and economically unnecessary for women (and men) today than it was as recently as 50 years ago.

The pressure we put on marriage to be fabulously great is at an all-time high. Marriage is slowly becoming something that only an elite will attain on a natural timetable connected to their height of fertility. Marriage is a good thing—a school for sinners and a source

of grace—and I don’t wish for Christians to miss out on it except by their own active choice or vocational call.

Finally, what exactly is meant by *interfaith*? My family and I swam the Tiber a couple years ago, and we’re no less Christian than we were before. I will, of course, prefer that my children marry fellow Catholics, but the distance between some traditions is farther than between others.

What I don’t recommend is a marriage to an unbelieving spouse, to one who professes an altogether different religion, or to an obstructionist who systematically places barriers in the way of your Christian development. The Pauline “unequally yoked” standard is a good and biblical one for Christians. Adding layers of meaning to it? Not so much.

### DON’T ASK FOR TROUBLE

**Naomi Schaefer Riley**, a former editor at *The Wall Street Journal*, is author of *’Til Faith Do Us Part: How Interfaith Marriage Is Transforming America*.

David Slagle, the pastor of a small evangelical church in Atlanta, told me the story of a woman in her late 20s. The woman had befriended a man living in her apartment complex.

Slagle and his wife inquired whether the two were dating. “No. We’re just hanging out,” they were told.





The man was an ardent atheist, so the young woman announced, "I'm not going to date him. He's just a good friend. I could never date someone who didn't value what I value ultimately." A few months later, she announced that they were dating, but she would not get engaged to him "unless he becomes a Christian." A few months after that, Slagle says, she "did an about-face on that one too."

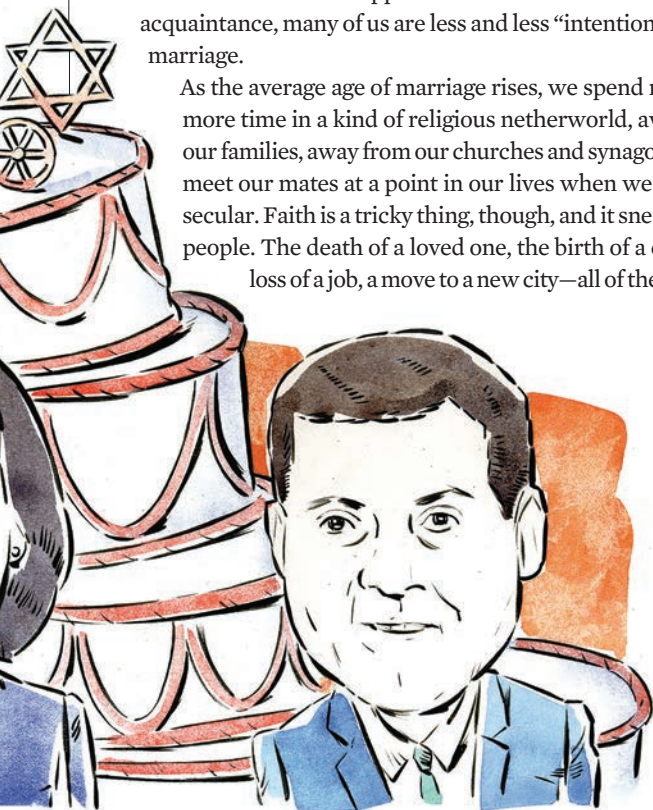
The story is hardly uncommon. According to a survey I commissioned in 2010 of 2,500 married Americans, about 42 percent of marriages today are between people from two different faith traditions. This is an all-time high. While this has resulted in unprecedented tolerance and assimilation in American society, it has also created problems for religious communities and for marriages. Partners in interfaith marriages are generally less satisfied with their relationships than those in same-faith marriages.

When I looked at the religious tradition of respondents, I found that the biggest gap in marital satisfaction was for evangelicals married to nonevangelicals. About 30 percent of evangelical Christians are married to someone of another faith. Roughly one third of all evangelicals' marriages end in divorce, and that climbs to nearly half for marriages between evangelicals and nonevangelicals.

What is it about being "unequally yoked" that produces these consequences? It is not that interfaith couples spend some significant part of their lives arguing about doctrine.

In my survey, interfaith couples did not report disagreeing about religion very often. Rather, the practices and rituals are more likely to affect our day-to-day lives and therefore our marriages. Religion informs how we spend our time, how we spend our money, where we decide to live, and how we raise our children. Disagreements over such issues can lead to unhappiness and divorce. But like Slagle's acquaintance, many of us are less and less "intentional" about marriage.

As the average age of marriage rises, we spend more and more time in a kind of religious netherworld, away from our families, away from our churches and synagogues. We meet our mates at a point in our lives when we are most secular. Faith is a tricky thing, though, and it sneaks up on people. The death of a loved one, the birth of a child, the loss of a job, a move to a new city—all of these things



can give people a desire to return to the faith of their childhood. Some people will pursue that desire, occasionally to the detriment of their marriage. Others will suppress that desire for the sake of their marriage and thwart their own spiritual journey.

## YES—FOR THE UNWED

**Russell Moore** is president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

I recently read an interview with a Christian woman who had lived many years in a lesbian relationship before her conversion.

Accepting a Christian sexual ethic, she left her partner. She mentioned that, quite often, she would find herself asking the homeschooling mothers in her new church home, "I gave up my girlfriend for this. What have you given up?" Her question is a good one.

There were probably many in that congregation who gave up certain long-term relationships because they believed that believers should marry only other believers. If you asked a randomly chosen Christian why a believer should marry only another believer, he or she would most likely repeat Scripture: "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers" (2 Cor. 6:14, ESV). But the unique application of this passage to marriage is what is helpful, because of the unique ways that marriage binds two people together.

The intimacy in a marriage is more than a contract. In a mysterious sense, the two become one—not only physically but spiritually as well. The apostles also affirm the marriage bond when they maintain a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever is still a marriage. That's why Paul and Peter command believers to stay with their unbelieving spouses. This hardly commends initiating such marriages in the first place. Indeed, the word of the church, through the apostles, to these situations is itself a demonstration of why a Christian-unbeliever marriage is an "unequal yoke." In the New Testament, the marriages of God's people are the business of the new covenant assembly.

Marriage is not a merely social or biological construct, but an icon of the union between Christ and the church. Both husband and wife are held accountable to the community for the marriage itself.

But in a marriage of a believer to an unbeliever, the church has authority and discipling capacity over only one party. Without the indwelling Holy Spirit and the reign of Christ through his Word, only one party is able to live out explicitly the picture of the gospel embedded in the marriage.

A marriage of a follower of Christ to an unbeliever impedes the intimacy of a union that, from the beginning, was intended to be about a common mission under the rule of a common King (Gen. 1:27–28).

We live in the world as it is, and we love our unbelieving neighbors. Christians are going to be drawn toward some of those unbelievers and wish to join themselves to them in marriage. That's where the church should graciously speak the hard word that marriage isn't just about romance, but also about gospel and mission. Some will hear this and go away angry or saddened. But some will hear in these hard words the voice they heard at the very beginning of their call to Christ: "Take up your cross and follow me."



# Consolation Prize

A simple principle for discerning God's will.

**Y**ears ago, I toured as an opening act for Rich Mullins. There was something about Rich's music that stirred up people's deepest longings. I loved overhearing conversations at the autograph table; they often turned serious and urgent.

More than once, a fan asked Rich how to discern the will of God. Rich would listen and then offer an unexpected perspective.

"I don't think finding God's plan for you has to be complicated," he'd begin. "God's will is that you love him with all your heart and soul and mind, and also that you love your neighbor as yourself. Get busy with that, and then, if God wants you to do something unusual, he'll take care of it. Say, for example, he wants you to go to Egypt." Rich would pause for a moment before flashing his trademark grin. "If that's the case, he'll provide 11 jealous brothers, and they'll sell you into slavery."

I'm not sure whether this satisfied Rich's fans, but I suspect his advice has stayed with them in the way it's haunted me. When I find myself wrestling with life decisions, I think of Rich's Egypt Principle. It makes me laugh, and then it asks me to get down to the serious business of determining which of my options allow me to best love God and other people. Such an approach usually rules out certain possibilities, while affirming (and even creating) several others.

Sometimes, once I've narrowed down my alternatives in light of the Great Commandment, the determinative "jealous brothers" do show up. A scholarship comes through at one school and not another. A job offer is escalated or rescinded. Other times, however, I'm left standing at the junction of several seemingly reasonable pathways, miserable with uncertainty. If only Rich were around to dispatch further wisdom!



Recently, in a college music department faculty meeting, the topic of discerning God's will came up. We were discussing the decisions our students face, which often include whether to pursue a music career or enter church ministry. One teacher mentioned that he asks students to attend to their experiences of consolation and desolation. They should give special consideration to the directions that most consistently produce consolation, he said, while the avenues that create desolation should be approached cautiously.

I was skeptical. If some of our students are led into music careers, desolation (rejection, obstacles, long drives in decrepit vans) will be normative. (I imagine the desolation level in church ministry is similar.) Often, the most worthwhile undertakings are the most difficult. Christians, as people of the Cross, should understand this best. Wouldn't a paradigm of consolation and desolation lead to avoiding anything challenging or unpleasant?

While I teach at one college, I'm a graduate student at another. There, only a few weeks later, I re-encountered the consolation/desolation paradigm in some coursework on Ignatian spirituality. I began to realize that I had misunderstood these terms. Consolation is understood not as happy feelings (although they can be its byproduct), but rather as that which opens us up to God and others—and quickens our pulse for the things of the kingdom. Even difficult circumstances can lead to consolation if we

sense God in them. Desolation, too, is more nuanced than I imagined. It has to do with that which distracts us from our awareness of God's presence and turns us in on ourselves (whether our immediate experience of the diversion is positive or negative).

Ignatian spiritual direction reminds us that diligent attention to the movements of consolation and desolation in our own souls can help clarify which options lie within God's will. In moments of crisis, we can base our decisions both upon how we have sensed him moving, and also upon the God-given inclinations we've discovered within ourselves.

I'm not certain whether Rich Mullins was familiar with Ignatian spirituality. But I know he paid attention to the things that opened him up to God—and the things God seemed to have wired him to love—and ran headlong toward them. That's how he ended up traveling with a ragamuffin band of friends, singing songs that made people hungry to find God's will. It's also how he wound up, toward the end of his short but ferociously lived life, on a Navajo reservation, teaching music to kids.

Maybe that's why Rich could claim that loving God and others takes care of most of our discernment questions. After all, the psalmist assures us that if we delight ourselves in the Lord, he will give us the desires of our heart (Ps. 37:4). God can be trusted to teach our hearts what to desire, and to lead us—by jealous brothers, burning bushes, or quiet inclinations—to the places where our own unique giftings meet the movements of his kingdom. There we find consolation . . . and joy.

**Consolation is understood not as happy feelings, but that which opens us up to God and others. Even difficult circumstances can lead to consolation if we sense God in them.**





# Our Francis, Too

Why we can enthusiastically join arms with the Catholic leader.

**P**apa Francesco! In the damp darkness of St. Peter's Square, the crowds chanted his name when Jorge Mario Bergoglio, the archbishop of Buenos Aires, was named the new pope. Seldom has a religious leader been embraced so warmly across the Christian world, including by many evangelicals. Seldom has hope risen so high so quickly. And the hopes have risen for good reason.

Since the Reformation, many of the names chosen by popes—Pius, Clement, Leo, Urban, even Benedict—sound quaint to non-Catholic ears. But the humble Francis of Assisi is a saint for everyone. Francis challenged the church of his day—not by conforming to the standards of the world but by returning to the pattern of Jesus, the one who did not seek status but humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on the cross (Phil. 2:5–11).

Early on, in a radical act of dis-possession, Francis broke decisively with his former life as a soldier and playboy. He stripped off his clothes in the bishop's palace, saying, "I will no longer be called the son of Pietro Bernardone. From now on I shall say simply, 'Our Father, who art in heaven.'"

We see already an intimation of Saint Francis in Pope Francis. There is his simple apparel: black street shoes instead of the calf-skin red of his predecessors, simple white cassock minus gold-embroidered accessories. In addition, a pope who lives in a modest guesthouse (versus the spacious papal apartment), worships on Maundy Thursday with young prisoners, and who embraces HIV/AIDS patients in a hospice follows in the steps of *il poverello*, "the poor one," as Saint Francis was called.

Since the *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision of 1973, Catholics and evangelicals in the United States have worked side by side

to advocate for the sanctity of life. The pro-life community will have a strong ally in the new pope. He has referred to abortion as the "death penalty" for the unborn. In 2005, he admonished his fellow believers in Argentina to "defend the unborn against abortion even if they persecute you, calumniate you, set traps for you, take you to court, or kill you. No child should be deprived of the right to be born, the right to be fed, the right to go



to school." Likewise, Francis of Assisi was known for his passion for spreading the Good News, once making a trip deep into North Africa to declare Christ to a sultan. One of the great challenges of Pope Francis will be to energize Catholic leaders for the New Evangelization—to study the Scriptures, renew the disciplines of the faith, and boldly proclaim the love of Christ. As important as interfaith dialogue may be, real evangelization requires something more: unambiguous witness for Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, the one and only Savior.

The sex abuse scandals, by no means limited to the Catholic church, have besmirched Christian witness in the 21st century. Both outside and inside the church's walls, there is much that makes us wince and turn away. But reform and renewal can come only as we face squarely the evil within us and around us and seek the repentance that comes only as a gift. I believe that Pope Francis, a Jesuit, would agree with the first of Martin Luther's 95 Theses: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' he willed for the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."

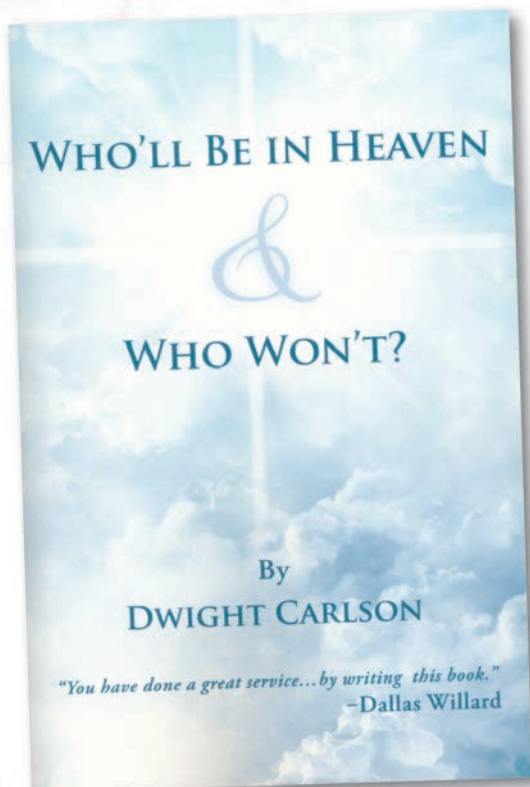
Francis succeeds two men of genius in his papal role. John Paul II was the *liberator* who stared down communism by the force of his courage and prayers. Benedict XVI was the eminent *teacher* of the Catholic church in recent history. Francis appears now as the *pastor*, a shepherd who knows and loves his sheep and wants to lead them in love and humility. The new Franciscan moment is the season of the shepherd. Catholics and evangelicals are the two

largest faith communities in the body of Christ. Without forgetting the deep differences that divide us, now as never before we are called to stand and work together for the cause of Christ in a broken world. We can make a start by praying with Saint Francis:

Most High, Glorious God, bring light to the darkness of my heart. Give me right faith, certain hope, and perfect charity, insight and wisdom, so I can always observe your holy and true command. Amen. ✚

**Without forgetting the deep differences that divide us, now as never before we are called to stand and work together for the cause of Christ in a broken world.**

# WHO'LL BE IN HEAVEN & WHO WON'T?



## Did you ever wonder:

- Is it possible for a person who has never heard the gospel to be saved?
- Can a Muslim who worships in a mosque be a follower of Jesus?
- Will everyone in hell receive the same punishment — is that fair?

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**“Dwight Carlson has courageously tackled some of the toughest questions about heaven/hell and who will and will not be saved... Don't read the book unless you are willing to think, have previously unquestioned presuppositions challenged and to consider that perhaps when the veil of mystery is lifted you discover a God more demanding in his righteousness and more mercifully generous in the scope of his salvation than you have previously considered.”**

— Dr. John A. Huffman, prominent Evangelical figure,  
chairman of Christianity Today Board

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Dr. Dwight Carlson is the author of bestselling *Overcoming Hurts and Anger* and *Why Do Christians Shoot Their Wounded?*



BOOKS, MUSIC, AND THE ARTS

# CT Review



*Tilt-A-Whirl* focused on a way of seeing, *Death by Living* focuses on “a way of living, a way of receiving life.”

“I am a man attempting to paint another picture of the same wonderful world, but I have turned my easel around,” writes Wilson. “I’ve taken my best shot at the sunrise. Now for the sunset.”

## LITTLE CHRISTS

The thesis of *Death by Living* is that Christians should live fully in every moment, with the horizon of mortality always in view. Live hard. Enjoy every moment. Get blisters. And on your deathbed, receive death as the grace it was intended to be—as the merciful experience of *completion*, the knowledge that a good race has been run and a good fight fought. For Wilson, “living is the same thing as dying,” and “living well is the same thing as dying for others.”

*Death by Living*, while very much a “how shall we then live?” guidebook, isn’t a collection of feel-good tips for “your best life now!” Wilson begins with the assumption that suffering, struggle, and death are not hiccups in the human story, but central to who we are. Each person is born “for the fight, to be forged and molded—under torch and hammer and chisel—into a sharper, finer, stronger image of God.”

At times Wilson’s prose sounds reminiscent of John Eldredge’s *Wild at Heart*, with its emphasis on living hard and embracing adventure. But ultimately, the book is less a brief for recovering rugged religion than a

reflection on human finitude in a world where time seems always to be tugging us to and fro, and where the best moments are frustratingly fleeting.

We shouldn’t “resent [these] moments simply because they cannot be frozen,” but instead learn to praise God simply for continuing to give them so excessively.



## You Only Die Once

N. D. Wilson paints a portrait of living joyfully underneath the horizon of mortality. By Brett McCracken

**Y**OLO (“you only live once”) is the acronym *du jour*. You may have come across it on Twitter (#yolo), in a Drake song, or tattooed on actor Zac Efron’s hand. Lampooned as often as it is championed, the trendy motto conjures up a familiar, hedonistic sensibility of living for the moment, consequences be damned.

N. D. Wilson’s ***Death by Living: Life Is Meant to Be Spent*** (Thomas Nelson) ★★★★★ isn’t exactly an apologetic for YOLO, but it is cut from similar cloth. Technology, globalism, and social media give our contemporary world an especially palpable sense of ephemerality. YOLO, aided by a mortality-denying consumer culture, translates this

into narcissistic YouTube tomfoolery, “sexting,” and Snapchat (the new no-paper-trail social media fad). But Wilson wants us to lead lives that lean into time and run toward death, after the model of Christ. Death is not a shadow to be feared or an abstraction to put out of our minds. Rather, it is a part of God’s creational good, a beautiful reminder of the brevity of breath and the urgency of life.

Like Wilson’s well-received *Notes from the Tilt-A-Whirl* (2009), *Death by Living* is a hybrid of memoir, apologetics, theology, philosophy, and lyrical prose, at once irreverent and worshipful, comical and elegiac. But where

“Sunset after sunset makes it hard to remember and hold just one. Smell after smell. Laugh after laugh.” So what can you do? “Enjoy life now. And now. And now. Before the nows are gone. See the gifts. Savor the food, knowing that you will have to swallow.”

Given that “our heartbeats cannot be hoarded,” Wilson—in a most un-YOLO fashion—exhorts us to spend our moments mostly on others. He resolves to be “giving my fingers, my back, my mind, my words, my breaths, to my wife and my children and my neighbors,” rather than grasping after “the vapor and the vanity for myself.”

In other words, we should be little Christs, exhibiting the gospel in our own “death-by-living” stories. Wilson sets forth a beautiful vision for why our teensy little lives matter in the grand scheme of God’s economy. We are each a unique testimony to his resurrection work.

From the compost of our efforts, God brings glory. . . . By His grace, we are the water made wine. We are the dust made flesh made dust made flesh again. We are the whores made brides

**‘Enjoy life now. And now. And now. Before the nows are gone. See the gifts. Savor the food, knowing that you will have to swallow.’ ~ N. D. Wilson**

and the thieves made saints and the killers made apostles. We are the dead made living. We are His cross.

Not only is this true, it’s also all so dang lyrical. Wilson can string words together like few writers of his generation. *Death by Living*, like *Tilt-a-Whirl*, skillfully employs an abundance of rich, concrete language to convey the mystery and majesty of God. Whether he’s describing a childhood experience of discovering motes of dust hanging in the air, the adventures of his family road-tripping across Europe, or his grandfather’s war stories, Wilson’s knack for finding a universe of meaning in the smaller particles of life is on glorious display.

Fragmentary, nonlinear, and vignette-driven, *Death by Living* is a messy montage of sensuous sights, sounds, smells, prayers,

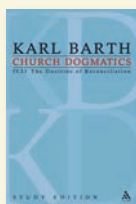
eulogies, inner monologues, jokes, and even script-style dialogue. Some may call it repetitive, grandiloquent, or unoriginal. But its unpolished, loosely woven texture reflects the way the world is: beautiful *because* of its blemishes and wild untidiness. Wilson’s style reinforces his point that the infinite dramas unfolding across the universe at any given moment all point in one direction and share one big theme—that death gives way to life, and dying is the only way to live.

#### THE GREATEST STORYTELLER OF ALL

Much is made these days of the importance of “story.” As Wilson and many others have noted, our lives are stories. But occasionally, we become overly enamored with communicating our “stories” in meticulously edited fashion (especially in our “broadcast yourself” age of blogging, vlogging, tweeting, and

## MY TOP 5 BOOKS ON EVANGELISM

By Paul Louis Metzger, author of *Connecting Christ* (Thomas Nelson)



### CHURCH DOGMATICS, VOL. IV, 3.1

*The Doctrine of Reconciliation*

KARL BARTH  
(T&T CLARK)

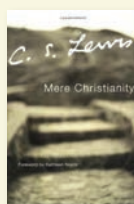
Barth’s work has helped me become more attentive to gospel bridges beyond the church’s walls: Jesus—the light of life—penetrates all domains. Moreover, the dissolution of Christendom (e.g., Christian America) makes possible a genuine gospel encounter with those who don’t know Christ.



### LETTERS AND PAPERS FROM PRISON

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER  
(TOUCHSTONE)

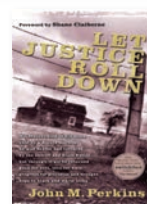
Bonhoeffer’s reflections from prison opened my eyes to see more clearly that the gospel is not chained, even when we face severe obstacles. God’s power will be displayed in the vulnerable witness of Christ and his community, even in an increasingly secular age.



### MERE CHRISTIANITY

C. S. LEWIS  
(MACMILLAN)

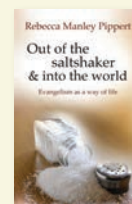
Lewis’s well-reasoned, no-nonsense, accessible account of the essential Christian faith helps readers come to terms with the fact that the gospel is not about sweet, pietistic niceties. It is about a divine subject who addresses us as the ultimate life-changing reality.



### LET JUSTICE ROLL DOWN

JOHN M. PERKINS  
(REGAL)

Perkins’s autobiography provides a compelling account of the gospel’s power to change people’s hearts, lives, and communities. His holistic expression of the gospel is an incredible aid in offering the Good News to a broken, fragmented world.



### OUT OF THE SALT SHAKER & INTO THE WORLD

*Evangelism as a Way of Life*

REBECCA MANLEY PIPPERT  
(INTERVARSITY PRESS)

Pippert’s book is a very practical and useful guide on how to be an effective witness. She assists readers in becoming more natural in their evangelism, more confident in the gospel, and more dependent on God.



Instagramming). So it is refreshing when a writer, without fetishizing individual stories, can showcase their beauty and illuminate their place within an infinitely bigger tale.

“Yes, your life is a story,” writes Wilson, “but you are carpet-dwelling, dust-mite teensy on the scale of this stage, and numbered in the multitude of His cast.” And yet the upshot isn’t to diminish humanity’s magnificence, but to amplify God’s:

Your world is tiny, yes. But God gets tinier. Not one dust-mite falls through the carpet fibers and into the pad apart from your Father. He’s big enough that small doesn’t matter. Dust-mite drama doesn’t use up His attention, taking it away from something deemed by mentally incontinent college professors to be more worthy of His attention. When one is infinite, one can enjoy two black holes arm-wrestling over a galactic snack, and an uncoordinated junior high quarterback struggling to escape an overweight junior high defensive end. Infinite goes all the way up and all the way down.

From the tiniest of trivialities to the most expansive of philosophical questions, Wilson infuses every page of *Death by Living* with an eloquent and organic mood of worship. It’s a book that entertains, informs, provokes, and moves, but all toward the end of bringing glory to the Greatest Storyteller of all. It confronts us with our own wrinkly and decaying destiny even as it vigorously shakes our shoulders, slams on our helmet, and hustles us back onto the field while there’s time left on the clock. There is work still to do and ground yet to cover. Sunrises and sunsets to behold. Families to make. Kindness, love, and forgiveness to be given.

We may only die once, but we can choose to die daily to ourselves and, in that, to truly live. For as the old prayer goes, it is in giving that we receive, in pardoning that we are pardoned, and in dying that we are born to eternal life. ✚

**Brett McCracken** is the author of *Hipster Christianity: When Church and Cool Collide* and the forthcoming *Gray Matters: Navigating the Space Between Legalism & Liberty* (Baker Books).

# Sidelineing Stigma

Amy Simpson challenges the church to step up its ministry to the mentally ill. By Michael Mangis

**T**he shocking recent suicide of pastor Rick Warren’s 27-year-old son, Matthew, launched thought-provoking discussion about the difficulties of coping with mental illness in the church. In the midst of his grief, Warren spoke honestly and vulnerably about the stigma and judgmental attitudes that kept his son’s depression in the shadows for far too long.

Amy Simpson confronts these attitudes in ***Troubled Minds: Mental Illness and the Church’s Mission*** (InterVarsity Press) ★★★★★, an excellent introduction to the realities of mental illness. Simpson challenges the church to step up its ministry to this vulnerable population.

The book includes a look at Scripture, Simpson’s survey of 500 churches, and sensitive accounts of many Christians struggling with mental illness themselves or alongside a family member. She argues that although the topic of mental illness is now discussed openly in the broader culture, the church often remains stuck in the dark ages. Many still hold a neo-Gnostic theology, believing depression and other mental illness are caused by unrepentant sin.

Simpson poignantly describes her mother’s severe and chronic mental illness. She weaves her stories with those of others. Many people were eager to be heard, and were grateful that someone in the church is finally paying attention.

*Troubled Minds* offers a thorough and well-researched overview of the realities of mental illness. But Simpson does not resort to professional jargon. The book’s real strength lies in Simpson’s empathy for those she interviewed, and the compassionate retelling of their stories. Readers will be far better prepared to care for those in their midst who struggle with mental illness. Finally, the book offers hope, both for those who are suffering and for church leaders awakened by Simpson’s prophetic

call for change.

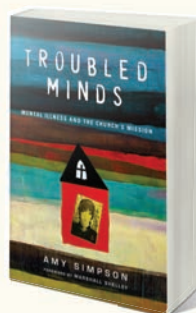
Simpson clearly demonstrates that mental illness occurs on a continuum, from more common and treatable forms to severe, chronic, and disabling kinds. She tries to demolish the myth that mental illness means people are “crazy.” But her frequent use of stories of people with severe mental illness does not always help to dispel that unfortunate myth. The book could have been strengthened by more stories of those who valiantly continue to function in their daily lives and jobs while suffering silently and unnoticed.

Nevertheless, *Troubled Minds* should prove to be an excellent resource for pastors and lay leaders who minister to the mentally ill. Likewise, it will encourage and inform anyone in the church who wants to be more mindful of and sensitive to those suffering from what are known, colloquially, as the “no casserole” illnesses (because no one thinks to visit or bring a meal).

And perhaps most important, it reassures those struggling with their own or a family member’s mental illness that they are not alone, and that there is hope for healing and comfort within the body of Christ. ✚

**Michael Mangis** is professor of psychology at Wheaton College and a practicing clinical psychologist with Heartland Counseling in Elburn, Illinois. He is the author of *Signature Sins: Taming Our Wayward Hearts* (InterVarsity Press).

**Editor’s Note:** In the July/August issue of *Christianity Today*, Amy Simpson gives a personal account of growing up with a mother who suffered from schizophrenia. Simpson has also spoken about her book in an interview at CT online (“Loving the 26 Percent”).



# Watch What You Think

from **POPCULTURED:**

**THINKING CHRISTIANLY ABOUT STYLE, MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT**

**STEVE TURNER** (INTERVARSITY PRESS, 256 PAGES)

**T**he secular world rarely considers the effect of popular culture on our thoughts. The only time it shows concern [is] . . . when someone becomes a racist through being exposed to racist literature, or a killer mimics a scene from a violent film. The Bible presents the different idea that what we think is judged alongside what we do. It's possible to keep the law and yet have an immoral mind. . . .

Often people will defend unsavory entertainment because they say it hasn't led them to do anything bad, but this doesn't take into account the content of their minds. We can remain meek and mild yet have a brain swirling with the most poisonous images. When Jimmy Carter was running for U.S. president in 1976, he gave an interview to *Playboy* in which he was asked whether he had committed adultery. In his answer he said that he had committed adultery many times in his heart. The secular media scoffed at this because it hardly seemed like a moral infringement, but Carter was of course picking up on a Bible truth that it's possible to commit sins in the privacy of our heads; sins known only to God. . . .

Christians sometimes expose themselves to dangerous stuff just to show how resilient they are. It's the spiritual equivalent of tightening your six-pack and challenging someone to deliver a swift punch: "See! It didn't hurt." But we can't always tell at the time how things will affect us in the long term. Images we saw decades ago can rise to the surface of our consciousness without us being aware of where they came from. The biblical proverb asks, "Can a man scoop fire into his lap / without his clothes being burned? / Can a man walk on hot coals / without his feet being scorched?" (Prov. 6:27–28) . . .

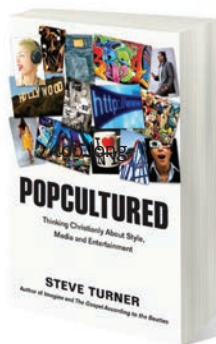
This suggests that we can't be careless about our consumption of popular culture. We have to respect its capability to shape our opinions and decorate our minds, and need to work at being transformed in order not to be overwhelmed. . . . We can't expect the culture that is trying to fashion us to reveal the secrets of how it is fashioning us. The world will tell us nothing untoward is happening to us. We are being overanxious. We are being too intense. We are victims of Christian paranoia. . . .

[But] dealing with popular culture demands more effort of a Christian because his or her nonbelieving counterpart . . . is not concerned about giving an account of his or her thoughts and words to God. . . .

The Christian doesn't have the option of being passively educated by culture. Writing to the Romans Paul says, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you'll be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Rom. 12:2).



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## QUINTESSENCE

DAVID WALTON (TOR BOOKS)



So you've come to the place where the mere sight of yet another well-meaning "science-and-religion" book makes you sick. What to do? Easy. Pick up a copy of David Walton's new novel. Warning: This is sci-fi,

hence not respectable in the eyes of many of your peers. But this brazenly witty exercise in alternate history—a tale of alchemy, sea monsters, religious conflict, and high adventure—reimagines the age of exploration not only to entertain (as it does, magnificently) but also to provoke reflection about how we know what we think we know.

## COUNTEE CULLEN: SELECTED POEMS

EDITED BY MAJOR JACKSON (LIBRARY OF AMERICA)



Countee Cullen (1903–1946) was adopted early in his teens by the pastor of one of the largest churches in Harlem, and his early success made him, for a time, a leading figure in the Harlem Renaissance. But he fell

out of fashion—not black enough, some said; old-fashioned in his diction and versification, others sniffed—and died in his early 40s. Now that we're well into another century, why not investigate for yourself? This collection is a good place to start, along with the excellent biography of Cullen by Charles Molesworth, *And Bid Him Sing*.

## THE ENCHANTED WANDERER

*And Other Stories*

NIKOLAI LESKOV (ALFRED A. KNOPF)

TRANSLATED BY R. PEVEAR AND L. VOLOKHONSKY



The husband-and-wife team of Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky has given us new translations of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, Gogol and Chekhov, Bulgakov and Pasternak. Now they have turned to Nikolai

Leskov (1831–1895), studied assiduously by scholars of Russian literature but not as familiar as he should be to general readers. This handsome volume includes 17 tales, among them (in addition to the title piece) "The Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk" and "Lefty," Leskov's best-known stories, as well as some that will be fresh even to those acquainted with his work.



# Translation Truth

Dave Brunn shows why no version of the Bible achieves strict, word-for-word accuracy—even versions that promise it. Interview by Lindsay Olesberg

**F**or 20 years, missionary and translator Dave Brunn labored to provide the Lamogai people of Papua New Guinea with Scripture in their own language. Meanwhile, a debate broke out among Western Christians about the merits of translating the Bible into different versions of English: Are “dynamic equivalent” translations (which aim to reproduce the basic meaning of original biblical texts) as faithful as “literal” (word-for-word) ones? In **One Bible, Many Versions: Are All Translations Created Equal?** (IVP Academic), Brunn, dean of academics for New Tribes Mission’s USA Missionary Training Center, explains the choices faced by Bible translators. He exposes the limits of English-language conventions in understanding the translation process. Lindsay Olesberg, Scripture engagement director for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship and author of *The Bible Study Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide to an Essential Practice* (InterVarsity Press), spoke with Brunn about the judgment calls that translators inevitably face, no matter which translation theories they espouse.

## Why do English-speaking evangelicals face so much tension around this issue?

Part of the tension is due to a limited, incomplete view of translation. I don’t question anyone’s motives. They are all driven by a desire to protect the faithfulness and accuracy of God’s Word.

But it is a little bit dangerous to raise discussion of Bible translation to the level of doctrine. Obviously, there are key doctrines, such as the Virgin Birth and the deity of Christ, that we must protect very carefully. But the Bible does not give instructions on how to translate a message from one language into another.

## How has your experience in Papua New Guinea shaped how you see the current debates about English translations?

When I first went to Papua New Guinea, I was committed to translating God’s Word as faithfully and as accurately as possible. I thought I had a good idea of what that meant, but I quickly realized that I had oversimplified the actual task of Bible translation. I heard people articulate proposed standards for faithfulness and accuracy. But I found that many of those standards are based on English grammatical features that do not exist in Lamogai or many other languages. So, if those standards are really God’s universal standards, then Lamogai would automatically be disqualified from having a faithful and accurate translation.

A lot of people don’t realize that since English and Koine Greek are both Indo-European languages, the degree of accuracy that we have in our English New Testaments is largely due to the fact that the translators were working with languages that are part of the same family, albeit as distant cousins. Translation into English is not easy, but there are many more difficulties faced by those translating into unrelated languages—difficulties that those translating into English would never imagine.

## What most surprised you as you started comparing the original Hebrew or Greek with various English translations?

As I approached a passage to translate into Lamogai, I looked at the original, and then I would compare as many English versions as I could. I thought I understood what “literal” translations were in English. But I found that every literal version frequently breaks its own rules of literalness and word-for-word translation—and not

only when the grammar or other specific constraints force them to. Often it’s just a judgment call for the translators. It really surprised me to find out that the supposedly “literal” versions are often not literal in places where they could have been. There is also a surprising number of places where the intentionally nonliteral versions actually end up closer to a word-for-word rendering.

Different theories of translation often come down to little more than philosophical differences between translators. I’m trying to let the real evidence speak for itself. What have the translators of “literal” versions done in the actual practice of translation? I think, by implication, they are saying it is okay to go beyond some of their own guidelines.

## So calling their translations “literal” or “dynamic equivalent” is somewhat misleading in terms of what actually happens on the ground?

I don’t think anyone is intentionally trying to mislead. But when Bible scholars call a translation “word for word,” they know that cannot possibly mean that every word in the translation matches every word from the original. The term “word for word” is unfortunate. To the average English-speaking Bible reader, it implies a higher degree of correspondence with the original than is true of any English version.

## You call your book a “plea for realism.” Why does the translation debate need that sort of perspective?

A lot of books and articles have been written about Bible translation. The vast majority of them tend to be theoretical, academic, or philosophical. Authors will often articulate their philosophy of translation and then use a few carefully selected examples to support their position. I have tried to take a broader look at the evidence in all of the versions, especially in the more avowedly literal translations. I find that the discussion within the theoretical realm doesn’t do a good job describing what the translators have done in actual practice. I would prefer to let the real evidence speak for itself. Everything that people will criticize in another version, I can show them many places where their version does exactly the same thing. So it doesn’t make a lot of sense to put down other versions.



# A Fractured and Beautiful Faith

How songwriter Audrey Assad transcended 'positive and encouraging' to create music for the church. By Patrick Stafford

**A**udrey Assad was in her early 20s when her parents told her they were considering divorce. An hour later she was at a sound check for a church worship service. Be happy, she was told. Smile!

"They wanted us to be bright-eyed. To smile and be perky," she says. "I just wanted to throw the microphone down and shout the f word."

That reaction forms the pillar of Assad's career as a Christian musician. The ever-present need to be "positive," she contends, is a distraction. Her music is made in direct—often conscious—opposition to that expectation.

Assad has had one of the more successful debuts in Christian music in the past few years. Her piano-based, introspective music has sold 100,000 albums on two records from Sparrow and won her the iTunes Christian Breakthrough Album award in 2010, along with several Dove nominations. She appears as a named artist on Chris Tomlin's Christmas record.

Apparently you can still succeed in the genre of contemporary Christian music (CCM) even if you dissent from its ethos: reassuring, upbeat, and "safe for the whole family." Those sentiments weren't enough when Assad's parents divorced and they weren't enough when her husband was diagnosed with cancer six months after their wedding.

"I don't think the words *positive* and *encouraging* have ever historically been adequate to describe Christian life," she says. "Yet these are the words being thrown around now as the two main characteristics of music made by Christian people."

Assad's music, echoing the thoughtful, melodic arrangements of Sara Groves and Brooke Fraser (who shares a producer with Assad), is intensely personal, seasoned with

deft musical and literary references. Her lyrics can be stark, like these from "Show Me," the final track of her debut album: "Bind up these broken bones / mercy bend and bring me back to life / but not before you show me how to die." Pain, sorrow, and regret—a sense that the world is not as it should be—pulse beneath the beauty.

Just as honest offstage as on, Assad has forthrightly discussed her addiction to pornography as a teenager—including on Twitter. "There were specific people who told me I shouldn't talk about that, and I listened to them for a long time. But I felt I was doing a disservice if I didn't," she says. Her fans were listening, and they responded.

"It's been overwhelming how many people, especially young girls, have said the same thing. They had no idea that a woman could struggle with something like this."

Assad shows life as the broken pieces of a stained glass window—beautiful, but fractured all the same.

Yet Assad's acknowledgment of her flaws doesn't become an excuse to shun piety or virtue. If the first striking point about Assad's music is its clear-eyed honesty, the second is its religious source. Assad is a devout Catholic, having converted at age 19 after growing up in the Plymouth Brethren church, a conservative Protestant movement. The decision was a shock to family and friends.

Assad's music is not narrowly Catholic. Yet recently, when she posted a picture of the newly elected Pope Francis on Twitter, it received a hostile reaction from some erstwhile fans. "I'm continually surprised not just by the opposition but by the revulsion," she says. "It's an exception, not the rule . . . I'm

truly brokenhearted over it."

Assad's Catholicism isn't a CCM trend. She says songwriter Matt Maher forms the other half of their small club. But the resistance to her faith is a small reminder that CCM can be just as exclusive as the secular realm.

## FROM CCM TO CROWDFUNDING

"My songs are born from suffering," Assad says. "I try really hard not to shy away from those feelings or boil them down to a more acceptable reaction to life."

So Assad sings of hope in light of struggle. "What if the seasons help us realize / some things are only proven over time?" she asks in "Even the Winter," an exploration of marriage. Her own has certainly been filled with turmoil. Assad's husband, William, has recovered from his cancer, but its lingering effects are clear in Assad's sophomore effort, *Heart*. On a website dedicated to an EP that Assad and friends recorded to help pay for William's treatment, he describes the experience as one "marked by the unity of joy and suffering"—a succinct description of Assad's approach.

This unity is the deepest sign of the admirable maturity in Assad's music, whose lyrics are sprinkled with references to Simon and Garfunkel, Augustine, and Gerard Manley Hopkins. It's the kind of cultural depth that gives homeschooling—which Assad requested herself as a child—a good name, and it partakes in a long obedience in the same direction. "Faith is not a fire," she sings, implicitly critiquing anthems of naive passion, "as much as it's a glow."

When nuance like this is successful, we can all be grateful. But after 100,000 albums

**'My songs are born from suffering. I try not to boil them down to a more acceptable reaction to life.' ~Audrey Assad**





sold, Sparrow and Assad decided to part ways. Assad is unfailingly polite about the record label, and she is reticent to declare who left whom, but it seems that one wanted more success and the other wanted more freedom.

So as an independent musician, Assad has a new plan: to create albums of worship music to be used by the church. Without the backing of a major label, it's a risky move. Yet Assad's fan base has been supportive. When she asked them to help fund the worship project through the crowdfunding site Kickstarter, the pledges exceeded the campaign goal of \$40,000 after just three days. The final tally exceeded \$70,000.

The transition would have been a financial sacrifice two decades ago, when there was far more money in CCM pop than in worship music. But that relationship has been turned on its head with the rise of worship music megastars like Chris Tomlin and David Crowder. The audience for CCM is waning, and the audience for singable anthems that

can fill stadiums, and bring in recurring royalties from use week after week in thousands of church services, is burgeoning. Consciously or not, Assad could do worse than by aligning herself with this trend, even though she says her biggest fear is becoming a careerist worship leader.

"I don't know how to avoid it, but I know I don't want to go there," she says. "There is enough of a struggle when you're singing to remain focused on what you're actually doing, without adding millions of dollars." (The juxtaposition of worship music and "millions of dollars" is both unsettling and entirely realistic.)

But this is not how Assad sees the move. For her it is a lifeline to a more authentic relationship with her audience, and with God.

"I've encountered a lot of cynicism, even from [artists] who are the poster children for Christian pop. And I sensed myself moving in that direction . . . partially because I didn't love what I was doing any more."

It's a mark of the perils of CCM that an

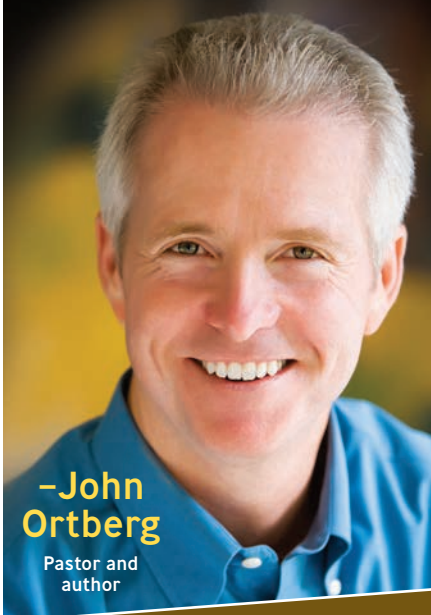
artist finds herself descending into cynicism after just two albums. And since the genre of worship music is not much more tolerant of nuance and introspection than Christian radio, one wonders how successful Assad will be. But the beauty of crowdfunding is that it may not matter. If fans are willing to part with their money to support Assad before hearing a single note, it may be possible to build the next phase of her career on making exactly the music she wants to make.

These backers form a "tribe," she says, a band of dedicated followers who understand who she is and what she stands for—and allow her to be the same person both on and offstage.

"I'd rather have a smaller number of followers and have them be clued in," she says, "than a million people who simply don't get it." 

**Patrick Stafford** is a professional journalist from Australia who writes about business and entertainment.

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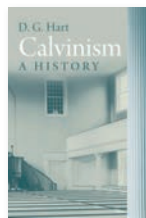
## New & Noteworthy

Compiled by Matt Reynolds

### ► CALVINISM

*A History*

D. G. HART (YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS)



D. G. Hart, a former director of Wheaton College's Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals, traces the history of Reformed Protestantism from its origins in 16th-century Europe through its expansion across the globe in

subsequent centuries. Hart demonstrates that Calvinistic beliefs have shaped public life in diverse political and social contexts.

### ► RESURRECTION YEAR

*Turning Broken Dreams into New Beginnings*

SHERIDAN VOYSEY (THOMAS NELSON)



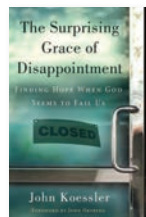
Unable, after 10 years of frustration, to conceive a child, Sheridan Voysey and his wife, Merryn, decided to embark on a journey across Europe. *Resurrection Year* recounts the couple's adventures abroad and the struggle

to reconcile with God amid the bitter disappointment of prolonged infertility.

### ► THE SURPRISING GRACE OF DISAPPOINTMENT

*Finding Hope When God Seems to Fail Us*

JOHN KOESSLER (MOODY PUBLISHERS)



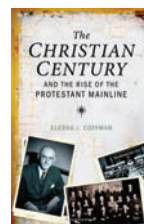
John Koessler, professor of pastoral studies at Moody Bible Institute, writes about the frustrations that result when Jesus, inevitably, fails to meet our expectations. But the problem, he assures us, is not

with Jesus, who does deliver everything we need—even though we're slow to realize it.

### ► THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY AND THE RISE OF THE PROTESTANT MAINLINE

ELESHA J. COFFMAN (OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS)

During the first half of the 20th century, when mainline Protestantism occupied a privileged place in American society, *The Christian Century* was among its leading journalistic voices, giving

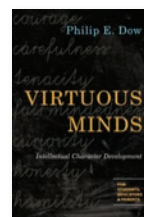


a platform to such eminences as Reinhold Niebuhr. Former *Christian History* editor Elesha Coffman's history of the Chicago magazine takes readers behind the scenes, introducing colorful editorial characters and exposing fractious internal disputes, while also evaluating its legacy in shaping American religion and culture.

### ► VIRTUOUS MINDS

*Intellectual Character Development*

PHILIP E. DOW (IVP ACADEMIC)



Education isn't just about the content of what we know, argues Philip Dow, but also about the cultivation of certain intellectual virtues. The experienced teacher and administrator shows how intellectual attributes like

courage, carefulness, tenacity, honesty, fair-mindedness, and humility enrich not only our studies but also our contributions in every realm of life.

### ► I AM A CHURCH MEMBER

*Discovering the Attitude That Makes the Difference*

THOM S. RAINER (B&H PUBLISHING GROUP)

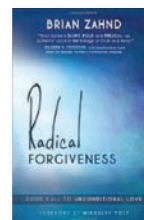


Thom Rainer, president and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources, has taken his viral blog post on church membership and expanded it into a small book in which he outlines six commitments that all members of the body of Christ should resolve to make.

### ► RADICAL FORGIVENESS

*God's Call to Unconditional Love*

BRIAN ZAHND (PASSIO)



Building on his work in *Unconditional? The Call of Jesus to Radical Forgiveness*, Brian Zahnd, who pastors a large nondenominational church in Missouri, tackles uncomfortable questions about how Christians should respond to the trespasses of others, up to and including the most horrific evils.



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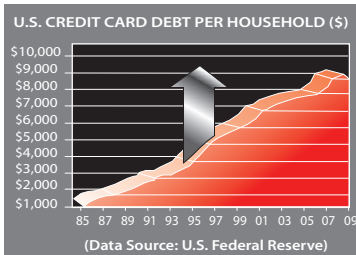
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Sometime after graduation I came up with a kind of answer, involving the symbolic image of drilling through ice on the surface of a lake. It was a vaguely Jungian/Freudian idea that said the goal of life and all religions was to drill through this ice, which represented the conscious mind, in order to touch the water beneath, which represented Jung's "collective unconscious"—a vague "God force" that somehow connected all of humanity. It was an Eastern and impersonal idea of God, making no particular moral claims on anyone. How one went about doing any of this was anybody's guess.

Graduation itself was like stepping off the top of the ladder I'd been climbing my whole life. Good grades got me to Yale and through Yale. I majored in English, edited the Yale humor magazine, worked in the dining hall, and sang in some musicals. At graduation I was Class Day speaker, preceding the main speaker—my future friend, talk-show host Dick Cavett—and I received several awards for my short fiction. What but success could lie ahead?

Instead I was launched into a step-less void, unable to climb toward what I thought I'd wanted to achieve, which was success and acclaim as a fiction writer. For the next few years I tried, mostly in vain, to write short fiction, and eventually sold some literary humor pieces to *The Atlantic*. I spent aimless and unproductive months at the elite writers' colonies of Yaddo and MacDowell in New York and New Hampshire, respectively. I lived in sublets in the Boston area and clung to a sad relationship. You might say that I floated and drifted, which inescapably and inevitably leads to that singularly humiliating cul-de-sac of moving back in with one's parents.

The parents of my friends saw that I was trying to find myself, but my own parents—who'd never had the privilege of a college experience and worked very hard to finance my own—preferred that I simply find a job. It was a seriously awful time. My relationship, now long-distance, was foundering, and I took the only job I could get, proofreading chemical manuals and other nonliterary arcana at Union Carbide's world headquarters. My cubicle was a quarter of a mile from the nearest window. (And the password is . . . *Gehenna*.)

But it was there, alone in the belly of a corporate whale, that I would finally

consider the question of God. In my misery I befriended a bright graphic designer who began to engage me on the issue of faith. Ed Tuttle was older, already married with kids, and one of those born-again Christians I had been trained to steer well clear of at Yale. I was perpetually wary, but in my pain and longing for relief I was desperate enough to keep the conversation going, for weeks and then months. To avoid real engagement or controversy, I cagily half-pretended to agree with him and his positions. But whenever he invited me to church, I demurred.

One day at lunch, Ed said, "Perhaps you don't really know God as well as you think, Eric." I was offended. *Who did he think he*

must be an alternative. Would that be God? I was also reading Thomas Merton's *The Seven Storey Mountain* and Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship*, though I cannot remember if I was reading these before or after the dream. Ah yes, *the dream*.

One night near my 25th birthday, I dreamt I was ice-fishing on Candlewood Lake in Danbury. I believe my childhood friend John Tomanio and his father were with me. I looked into the large hole we had cut into the ice and saw the snout of a fish poking out. (Of course ice-fishing is never this easy.) I reached down and picked it up by the gills and held it up. It was a large pickerel or perhaps even a pike. And in the dazzlingly bright sun-

## God was one-upping me in the language of my own symbol system.

*was, and how could anyone claim to know God?* Anyone with a brain knew that even if it were all true, we certainly couldn't *know* it, and would have to content ourselves with that, with agnosticism. But I wasn't content. Ed once told me to pray that God would reveal himself to me, but I thought praying to a God I wasn't sure was there didn't make sense. But in my confusion I sometimes did ask for some sort of sign.

In June of 1988, my uncle had a stroke and went into a coma. Ed said he and some friends were praying for him. I was astounded at the kindness of the gesture and at the idea that these people believed there was a God who heard prayers like this and could do something about it. A few days later, Ed asked if he could pray for my uncle *with* me. I quickly agreed and followed Ed into a ghastly fluorescent-lit conference room. I had never done anything like this, but it couldn't hurt. So I closed my eyes as Ed prayed aloud, and as he did, some transcendent shift seemed to take place. It was as though a window had been opened onto another realm and I'd felt the faintest touch of some heavenly breeze. When it was over, I opened my eyes. *What was that?*

Around this time a slight shift was taking place in my mind, too. I had picked up M. Scott Peck's *People of the Lie*, and this prominent Harvard psychologist's experiences with real evil got my attention. If real evil existed, there

light shining through the blue sky and off the white snow and ice onto the bronze-colored fish, it appeared positively golden. But then I realized that it didn't merely look golden, it actually *was* golden. It was a living golden fish, as though I were in a fairy tale.

And suddenly I understood that this golden fish was *IXTHYS*—Jesus Christ Son of God Our Savior—and that God was one-upping me in the language of my own symbol system. I had wanted to touch inert water, to touch the so-called "collective unconscious," but he had something more for me: this was his Son, a living Person, Jesus Christ. And I realized in the dream that he was real and had come from the other side and now I was holding him there in the bright sunlight and at long last my search was over. And I was flooded with joy.

When I went to work the next day, I told Ed about the dream. He asked what it meant, and I said what I never would have said before—and would have cringed to hear anyone else say. I said that I had accepted Jesus. And when I spoke those words, I was flooded with the same joy I had had inside the dream. And I've had that joy with me for the last 25 years. ☩

**Eric Metaxas** is the author most recently of *Seven Men: And the Secret of Their Greatness* and the *New York Times* bestseller *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Thomas Nelson).



# The Golden Fish

How God woke me up in a dream. By Eric Metaxas

**I**s it possible for one's life to change literally overnight? In 1988 I had a dream in which God spoke to me in what I have come to call "the secret vocabulary of my heart." The next morning, all was new and newness. Perhaps even *newness-ness*.

I had the dream around my 25th birthday, and if someone had investigated my life at that time to determine who I was, they'd likely have settled on three themes at the heart of my identity: first, that I am Greek; second, that I loved freshwater fishing; and third, that I was deeply committed to the life of the mind and the search for meaning.

My parents are European immigrants (my dad is from Greece, my mother from

Germany) who came to New York in the mid-1950s, met in an English class in Manhattan, and married. I came into the world in 1963 at Astoria General Hospital and attended a Greek Orthodox parochial school through fourth grade. In 1972, we moved to the relatively rural environs of Danbury, Connecticut, where I went to a public school and attended the Greek Orthodox church every Sunday.

Greeks in America prize their Greekness, and perhaps because I am only half-Greek, it was especially important for my dad to instill this in me. Once, when he saw the chrome fish on the back of a car, he was excited to explain that this was from the Greek word *IXTHYS*, meaning "fish," because the early

Christians used this word as an acronym—*Iesus Xristos THEos Ymon Sotir*, "Jesus Christ Son of God Our Savior." It was their secret symbol.

My only hobby besides watching television was freshwater fishing. I fly-fished, sometimes tying my own flies. I fished for bass, once in a tournament, and of course I ice-fished a few times too.

As an undergraduate at Yale I was exposed to the intellectual life, and I half-heartedly attempted to divine the meaning of life, with mixed results. My Christian faith was essentially nominal; I never took seriously the idea that our lives are meaningless, but neither did I settle on any particular alternative.

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