



CHRISTIANITY TODAY

SEPTEMBER 2015

THE POWER OF  
PRO-LIFE WOMEN *p. 25*

REAL DEATH  
WITH DIGNITY *p. 40*

WE ALL NEED  
SEXUAL HEALING *p. 71*

# MOORE ON THE MARGINS



SOUTHERN BAPTIST STATESMAN RUSSELL MOORE  
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OF CULTURAL POWER. IN FACT, HE SAYS, IT MIGHT  
BE THE BEST THING TO HAPPEN TO THEM.







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**"Our efforts at purity—pledges, rings, annual sex talks—are like fighting tanks with pea-shooters."** p.71



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Katelyn's bobblehead has made her the Dwight Schrute of CT magazine.



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Sarah Pulliam Bailey unwinds from her job at *The Washington Post* by playing board games. She and her husband own 60.

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## CHRISTIANITY TODAY

(ISSN 0009-5753) is published monthly (bimonthly January/February and July/August), by Christianity Today, 465 Gundersen Drive, Carol Stream, IL 60188. Periodicals postage paid at Carol Stream, IL, and at additional mailing offices. ©2015 Christianity Today

## POSTMASTER

Send address changes to Christianity Today, P.O. Box 37060, Boone, IA 50037-0060; 800.999.1704. Canada Publication Mail Agreement #: 040029733.

Registration #: 126028836RT0001. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: WWM Inc., 2835 Kew Drive, Windsor, Ontario N8T 3B7. Printed in USA. Subscription Rates: Regular subscription price: one year \$29.95. Outside US add \$13.00 postage prepaid US currency. \$4.95 per copy.

## MANUSCRIPT POLICY

Unsolicited manuscripts and poetry are not accepted. A query letter must be sent first, describing a proposed manuscript. Any unsolicited manuscript will not be returned.

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Cory Whitehead spent his summer picnicking along the Fox River in his beloved town, Aurora.

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 Advertising in *Christianity Today* does not imply editorial endorsement.

## AUSTRALIAN AGENT

MediaCom, 14 Eton Road, Keswick 5061, South Australia

## INDEXES

*Christianity Today* is indexed in Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature; Christian Periodical Index; Religion Index One: Periodicals, Religious and Theological Abstracts; Book Review Index; and Academic Abstracts and Magazine Article Summaries. Occasionally we share subscriber information with select organizations. If you wish to remove your name from direct mail, email, or telephone lists, call 800.999.1704 or send email to ctctuserv@christianitytoday.com. Please specify the types of promotions you do not wish to receive.

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# EDITOR'S NOTE

**L**uke tried to prepare us for it: “Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams” (Acts 2:17). Yet in the time since he wrote these words, somehow we Christians came to distrust much prophecy. Whether because of the excesses of the charismatic movement, or the Left Behind franchise, or the overly political aims of mainline Protestants, today when someone claims to be speaking “prophetically,” we ask: Whose visions? Which dreams?

We are wise to check any claim to prophecy against Scripture and church teaching. But I wonder if our mistrust has led us to reject prophetic words we desperately need to hear. (It wouldn't be the first time God's people did so.) In his book *The Prophetic Imagination*, Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann reminds us what prophets are for:

The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us. . . . Prophetic ministry seeks to penetrate despair so that new futures can be believed in and embraced by us.

In other words, prophets speak a word of judgment and of hope, reminding us of the future promised to us. A future in which pain and death itself are vanquished, for “God himself will be with them and be their God” (Rev. 21:3). Prophets don't conjure new realities; rather, they call us back to Reality himself.

This issue of CT features several people we believe may offer prophetic words for today's church. Russell Moore leads the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, the public-policy arm of the 15.7-million-member Southern Baptist Convention. As such, his prophetic platform is quite large, extending to the Vatican and the White House. There, he has spoken truth to power on immigration, marriage, freedom of conscience, and, most recently, structural racism. Whether he can lead US evangelicals as a “prophetic minority” without being co-opted by party allegiances is a central question animating Sarah Pulliam Bailey's in-depth profile (p. 30).

Likewise, one reason we asked Duke scholar Christena Cleveland to be our newest print columnist (p. 27) is because she speaks words of judgment and of hope on racial reconciliation. She and Reformed pastor Thabiti Anyabwile (p. 48) together attest to the enduring witness of the black church. And Kim Kuo, wife of the late White House leader David Kuo, offers a prophetic word of warning about assisted suicide (p. 40).

“It is the vocation of the prophet to keep alive the ministry of imagination,” says Brueggemann. We hope this issue of CT helps you to imagine, and to hope for, the future that awaits the people of God.

**CT**



## WHAT WE MEAN BY PROPHECY

We all need a word of judgment—and of hope.

**KATELYN BEATY** *Managing Editor, Magazine*



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# REPLY ALL

RESPONSES TO OUR JUNE ISSUE



## WAR TORN p. 32

As a combat veteran and retired Army chaplain, I've observed that vets who remain in the military after deployment do better than those who leave the military and return to a public that does not understand or appreciate their experience. Those who stay in the military are surrounded by fellow soldiers who "get it." That said, more needs to be done to address PTSD and suicide in the military. And chaplains should be allowed to freely offer spiritual resources for treating combat stress.

**Robert Leroe** US Army Retired

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** In part to help the public better understand veterans' experience, over the 4th of July CT hosted a Twitter chat with veterans and other military experts on what the church can do to better care for vets. Here are some suggestions.

Listening to a military family and their story is the most powerful thing civilian can do.

**Matthew Weathers** @chaplain2it

Send regular care packages to ones from

our church. Doing something for them is a way we let them know we pray.

**Dead Reckoning** @DReckoningTV

More than discounts, "thank you" means a lot.

**Corie Weathers, LPC** @CorieLpc

Seminaries need to actively recruit vet faculty. Few tenure level pros can relate to #combat

**Logan M. Isaac** @iamLoganMI

I am not sure that this space will allow

room for the anger, grief, and disillusionment I felt when I was first shown CT's latest cover image and title, "War-Torn."

When I left the Navy and became a conflict journalist, one of my first assignments was in Kabul. On the first day of my embed with a British Army regiment, I was snapping away on my camera—when, to my surprise, all the soldiers on patrol turned their backs to me. They had made the mistake before of trusting journalists to tell their story, only to be villainized and made out to be war criminals. What was written about them simply wasn't true.

CT has committed a similar error.

Veterans from Duke Divinity School and I were approached by CT for a story that would talk about healing, moving forward, and finding a place in God's kingdom. It is true that the copy does include these elements.

But CT's headline and cover treatment casts veterans as helpless victims. It freeze frames veterans at the very point we hurt the most. It does not recognize the hard work, the rehabilitation, and the often solitary, invisible road that we have traveled to get to a place of healing. Many of us have, through the help of those like Dr. Kinghorn and the practice of our faith, taken one painful step at a time to get where we are today.

To CT's readers, if you want to know what veterans' faith journeys look like, there is not one simplified generic story of pain. Our lives are as complex and rich as anyone else's. We have worked incredibly hard to move on, to live into the lives that God has carved out for us.

The image and title "War Torn" is not a complete story, nor an honest one. It does not respect the real people who have sacrificed so much for their country.

To all veterans who continue to struggle with questions of God, faith, and the church—know that we carry on praying for you.

**Rob Densmore**  
Durham, North Carolina

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## NEWS: THE BIBLE IN TWO MONTHS p. 18

O, we of little faith who doubted the legend of the Septuagint! Looks like, if “The Bible in Two Months” is correct, the 70 drafters of the Septuagint may have just gone from impossible overachievers to pikers.

**Rosa Lee Richards**

Adjunct in Hebrew, Trinity School for Ministry  
Ambridge, Pennsylvania

As a Spanish linguist and language professor, I find it remarkable that Wycliffe Associates claims to accurately translate the Bible in just two months by splitting up portions of the project to different translators. Imagine if we took Spanish professors and divided up portions of *El Cid* for translation. Styles would be inconsistent, vocabulary choices would reflect the speakers’ dialects and idiolects, and the translation would be a mess. Yet that is precisely what Wycliffe is doing for literature with far more importance.

Why take time to understand the context, get to know the people, and render an accurate, effective, natural-sounding, and cohesive translation when speed is what attracts dollars?

Come to think of it, Google Translate might produce similar, less expensive, and even faster results.

**Karol Hardin, PhD**

Associate Professor of Spanish, Baylor University  
Waco, Texas

## SPIRITED LIFE: BROTHERS, WE ARE NOT MANAGERS p. 30

Andrew Wilson’s column on elders makes me stop to think. I’ve been increasingly troubled by those desiring to be recognized using the title “lead elder.” Where does that title come from? When did churches begin using that title for a “first among equals”?

I understand the function of a lead guy on a team of elders. But I do struggle with the persistent desire of some to be publicly recognized as the “main guy.” It would seem to be a departure from the biblical norm of plural male eldership by forming a hierarchical “system” and giving weight to an individual where it’s not due.

**Liam Clark**

We aren’t the Firm, but a Family, and also a Flock. So we need Fathers first, managers second.

**Peter DeWit** @PeterDeWit\_

## HER.MENEUTICS: THE ALLURE OF LIVING WITH LESS p. 27

I like the approach this article takes. I am grateful for what God has put in my life. A lot of my stuff reminds me of people who no longer live on earth. Parents, grandparents, etc. I enjoy hospitality and pampering and making my guests feel special. Bottom line: Joy is in Jesus and not things. Materialism and minimalism can both become idols.

**Carol Reid**

## RE-WORD: TRUSTING THE GREAT DIRECTOR p. 50

I was excited to see “Trusting the Great Director” in the June issue, because I had just read the Book of Esther a few days earlier, and because I have been studying the topic of prayer since November. I was disappointed that Esther’s request for prayer was ignored in this article.

Kandiah says, “. . . nowhere in the story does anyone mention God. Not once. No one refers to the Scriptures, and no one explicitly prays.” But after Mordecai suggests that perhaps Esther was elevated to the palace for just such a time as this, Esther asks for prayer. In 2:15 she says

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to Mordecai, "Go and gather together all the Jews of Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will do the same." She is seeking God, and through the united fast of all the people of God, and even her servants who may not even know this God, they show their seriousness in fasting and prayer.

**Paul D. Washburn**  
Kansas City, Missouri

This is such a phenomenal read for anyone struggling through the "silence" of God.

**Rachelle Call** [@call\\_rachelle](#)

#### REVIEWS: HOW DANTE CAN SAVE YOUR LIFE p. 67

Gift of the year to me: Ralph C. Wood's stunningly generous *Christianity Today* review of my Dante book.

**Rod Dreher** [@roddreher](#)

When a friend reviews another friend: Baylor University's Ralph Wood on @roddreher's latest book on Dante.

**Francis Beckwith** [@fbeckwith](#)

## @ NET GAIN *Responses to our blogs and online articles.*

Forty-five years of marriage for my wife and me, all of it in various forms of ministry. I am sure that our sons, like the author, would say that we were not perfect, but we were faithful. And could I use this little space to highlight my wife's part in this journey? When I asked her to marry me, she replied with these words from Ruth: "Whither thou goest, I will go. Whither thou lodgest, I will lodge. Thy people will be my people; thy God will be my God."

Out of context, yes, but she has lived it. Small, hot, rooms; church splits; Africa; Southeast Asia—she has loved me every day of our journey.

**Mike Constantine**

Her.meneutics: "Pastor Exposed as Faithful to Wife of 17 Years," by Megan Hill

How can anyone defend Planned Parenthood by calling the method by which this video was obtained "sin"? Here in Canada, we recently had people putting up a fuss about the grisly images in fliers depicting abortion that were delivered to homes. What mixed-up, upside-down morals. Be upset at the abortions, not the fliers. Be upset at Planned Parenthood, not the covert video. This is not a left-wing, right-wing issue. It's about combating an egregious moral evil.

**Mike Gibbons**

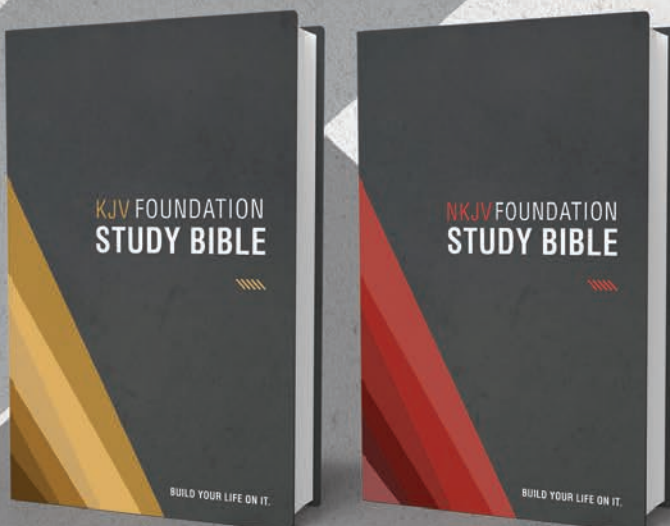
The Exchange: "Planned Parenthood, Selling Body Parts, and Appropriate Outrage," by Ed Stetzer

I am from a Muslim family. Yet I am converted to a Christ-follower. We shouldn't hate Muslims because they hate us. We should show them the love of Christ. It is the teaching of Christ. To love people even [when] they hate us. To pray for them who persecute us.

**Daniel Godson**

"Franklin Graham's Call to End Muslim Immigration Could Backfire," by Timothy C. Morgan

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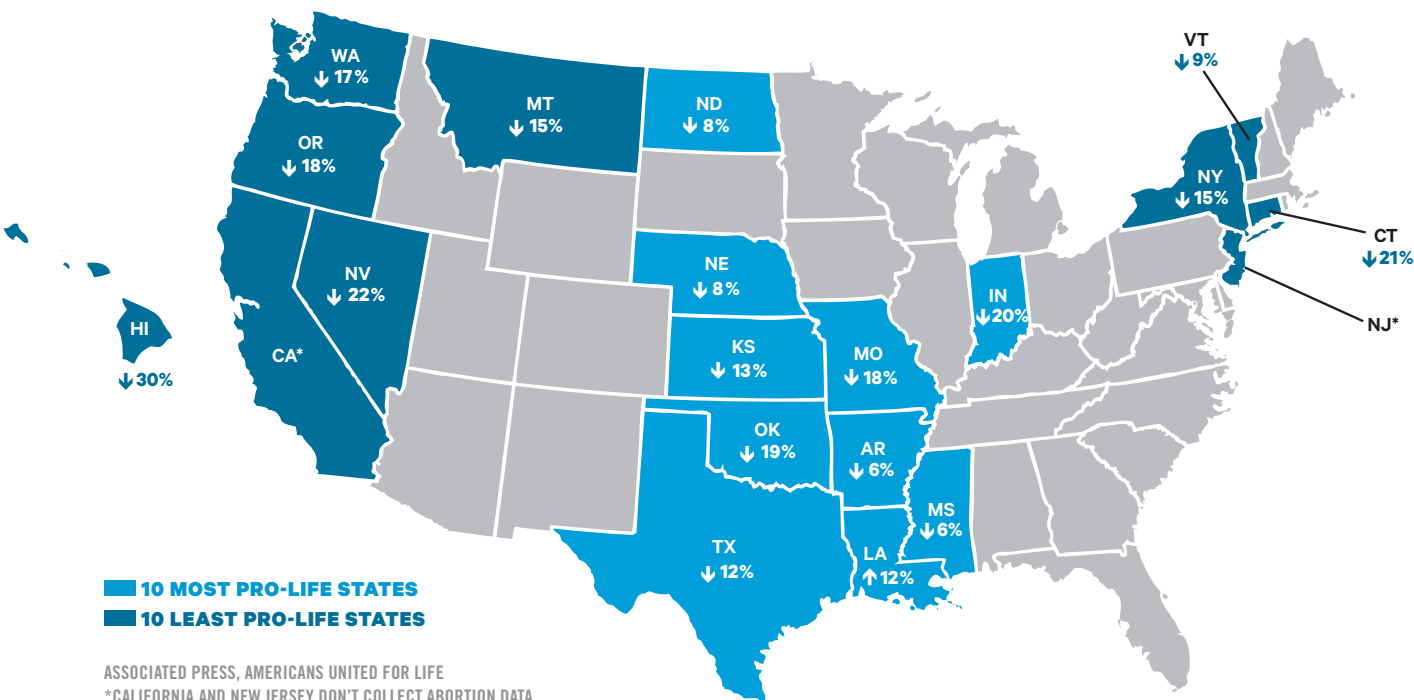


## CLEAN WATER'S NO. 2 PROBLEM

The goal of doubling the global poor's access to clean water has been met five years early, according to the World Health Organization. That's due in part to Christian charities that have dug wells with gusto. Now those groups are addressing the aftermath, which requires a different kind of hole in the ground: latrines. About 2.4 billion people worldwide still lack access to proper sanitation. WASH programs (water, sanitation, and hygiene) from groups such as World Vision and Tearfund hope to provide universal access to safe sanitation by 2030.







### ↑ ABORTION ABOVE THE LAW (IN A GOOD WAY)

Abortions in America, at near-record lows, have declined almost equally in both the most pro-life and pro-choice states. Does that mean state-level restrictions—230 laws have passed since 2011—are irrelevant? Not quite, said Americans United for Life (AUL): State debates generate public awareness, leading to fewer abortions. (Abortions did increase in pro-life Louisiana, but due to out-of-state patients after new laws in Mississippi and Texas closed clinics.) AUL cited the popularity of ultrasounds for the nationwide decline of 12 percent since 2010. Other factors: the rising popularity of the morning-after pill, and higher teen abstinence rates.



PAKISTAN

### Execution of Christian mother stayed

The death sentence of Asia Bibi, one of the world's most persecuted Christians, was halted in July after Pakistan's Supreme Court agreed to review her conviction for blasphemy. The 50-year-old mother of five has spent five years on death row for allegedly denigrating the Prophet Muhammad during an argument with a Muslim colleague over

a cup of water. Her lawyer argued that lower courts wrongly overlooked the five-day delay between the incident and the police report filed by a local imam, who wasn't present at the argument. In 2002, the Supreme Court reversed the blasphemy conviction of another Christian over a reporting delay of just a few hours. Top judges have asked Pakistani lawmakers to amend the controversial blasphemy law to make convictions more difficult to achieve.

### CCCU weighs fate of Mennonite schools

Two words may change the status of two members of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). After the US Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage, Goshen College and Eastern Mennonite University (EMU) banned discrimination on the basis of "sexual orientation" when hiring faculty and staff. The schools consulted their denomination, the Mennonite Church USA, which recently affirmed that homosexual behavior is a sin but gave churches the green light to conduct same-sex weddings. The CCCU, which has been "particularly focused on safeguarding the rights of institutions who hold to an orthodox understanding of marriage," said it will use a "deliberate and consultative process" with the presidents of its 118 US schools to decide whether Goshen and EMU can remain members.



NIGERIA

### Megachurch dodges conviction for deadly collapse

Despite a coroner's recommendation, Nigerian authorities will not prosecute a popular megachurch for "criminal

negligence” nearly a year after its six-story guest house collapsed and killed more than 100 visitors. The Synagogue Church of All Nations, led by controversial pastor T. B. Joshua, lacked the necessary permits for the building, the coroner decided. The church’s lawyers blasted the findings as biased and blamed the disaster on “sabotage.” South African leaders have pushed for prosecution, as a majority of those killed were tourists from their country. The tragedy was South Africa’s largest loss of life since 1994.



**MEXICO**

### Indigenous converts suffer ‘slow’ persecution

Religious freedom watchdogs and US officials are pressuring the Mexican government to better protect indigenous former Catholics who have become evangelicals. Earlier this year, the State Department questioned Mexican leaders about reports of “widespread discrimination, violence, and displacement” among indigenous communities in Chiapas and other southern states. While Mexico’s constitution guarantees freedom of religion, this right often conflicts with a law granting local autonomy in parts of the country with large indigenous populations. Converts report being denied access to public schools or having their water supply cut off by local officials. “A slow wave of religious persecution has been sweeping across Mexico,” said

## Freedom Fault Line

After same-sex marriage became legal nationwide, an Associated Press–GfK poll found that when individual rights collide:

**56%**

of all Americans favor the government protecting  
**RELIGIOUS LIBERTY**



**39%**

of all Americans favor the government protecting  
**GAY RIGHTS**

International Christian Concern. “The culture of corruption and lack of accountability . . . needs to end.”



**NEPAL**

### Hindu nation might ban evangelism

The long-awaited draft of Nepal’s new constitution, delayed by devastating earthquakes this spring, has proved disappointing to Christians. The mountainous nation’s interim constitution designates the former Hindu kingdom as secular and protects religious liberty, but the new draft is more ambiguous. The document, which has been in the works for nearly 10 years, upholds the freedom of religion in one clause but contradicts it in another; it states that any act to “convert another person from one religion to another” or to “undermine or jeopardize the religion of each other” is illegal. The draft also removes the country’s secular designation. Nepal’s Christians (about 3% of its 28 million people) are protesting the changes.

### Gordon College lays off tenured profs

A smaller-than-expected incoming freshman class prompted Gordon College to lay off seven professors, four of them tenured. Gordon, which is 50 students short of the 525 it expected for the 2015–2016 school year, said uncertainty over its accreditation may be partly to blame. Gordon’s prohibition of homosexual activities caused its accreditation agency to announce a review last year; the college was declared to be “in good standing” in April. Gordon, with about 600 employees, is dependent on tuition to meet its operating budget of about \$60 million, spokesman Rick Sweeney said.

The school said it will also freeze raises and retirement funding, and will consider changes to its health insurance plan.



**ITALY**

### Pope apologizes to the ‘first evangelicals’

Pope Francis apologized this summer to “the oldest evangelical church” for the Roman Catholic Church’s persecution of it during the Middle Ages. The Waldensians, a Bible-focused movement founded in 12th-century Italy by Peter Waldo, who preached radical poverty, were excommunicated and massacred. Thousands immigrated to Germany, where they became Lutherans, and to the United States, where they became Presbyterians. The apology came as Francis’ approval rating among US Protestants tumbled from 73 percent in 2014 to 52 percent in 2015, according to Gallup.



**PHILIPPINES**

### Chris Brown detained by influential church

A Filipino Christian sect barred a popular hip-hop star from leaving the country for three days after accusing him of fraud. Iglesia ni Cristo filed a complaint against Chris Brown after the singer did not show up for a New Year’s Eve concert at an arena owned by the denomination. Brown and his promoter were paid more than \$1 million for the show and never issued a refund, the complaint alleged. About two million Filipinos belong to the church, which has built a reputation as an influential political player due to its bloc voting. Meanwhile, Iglesia ni Cristo faces its own charges: The Filipino government recently investigated allegations that the church improperly used funds and kidnapped ministers critical of it.

*“You will see crosses everywhere in Zhejiang.”*

Seminary professor **Chen Kaihua**, on Chinese Protestants and Catholics partnering on “safe and legal nonviolent disobedience” over their government’s removal of hundreds of church crosses. **WEIBO**







## Discipleship

# My Small Group Looks Like Me

Why some multiethnic churches don't mandate diversity at gatherings.

**O**n any given Sunday at New Life Fellowship, worshipers from more than 75 ethnic backgrounds gather at the church's three services in Queens, New York City. But during the week, an increasing number of them go to small groups intentionally split along ethnic lines.

Congregations like New Life face a challenge when it comes to small groups: the things that make small groups thrive—like common interests, backgrounds, and culture—often work against the church's goal of building multiethnic community.

Some church leaders believe homogeneous small groups actually attract

diversity. At New Life, ethnic fellowships function as a “great entry point into a multiethnic church,” said small group pastor Phil Varghese, the son of Indian immigrants.

“It's a cultural shock for newcomers to see so many people groups gathering,” he said. “We're building Spanish-language and Filipino, South Asian, and Indonesian ethnic fellowships.”

Such groups can make new immigrants feel at home. Knowing that they can find weekday fellowship in their own language, many “first-generation parents will sacrifice not hearing a Spanish-language message [on Sunday morning] because their kids are loving what they are getting at our church,” said Jorge Molina, an El Salvador native who pastors small groups at Christ Fellowship Church Miami.

Instead of small groups, his church uses weekly volunteering as the place where its 3,000 members can interact with people from other ethnic backgrounds.

Other church leaders are skeptical of monocultural small groups. If members don't build friendship across ethnic lines outside of Sunday morning, they argue, the church's diversity is superficial at best.

At Bethel Cincinnati, a congregation roughly half black and

half white, small groups are integrated and not based on geography. As such, they are the primary place where members engage each other on potentially contentious issues.

“If we can't have honest conversations about race within our small group, what hope do we have of being a voice of healing for our nation and for the world?” said lead pastor Brian Taylor.

To create the environment for these conversations, however, churches must value diversity even if it is inconvenient, said Mark DeYmaz, president of the Mosaix Global Network.

Because so many American cities and suburbs remain racially divided, churches may be “unwittingly promoting segregation” in their small groups by basing them on location, he said.

“The fact is, regardless of anyone's intention, if churches simply adopt geographic small groups, it is easy for minorities to have the perception that this is just another way for white people to stay comfortable,” he said. The emphasis on proximity also “feeds the attitude of comfort and convenience—the very things that keep us segregated.”

Leaders don't require diverse small groups at Peoples Church in Cincinnati, but they do run experiments. For its biannual six-week small groups, the church assigns each ethnicity represented in the church a different color pen.

“We use Skittles as our analogy,” said Oneya Okuwobi, who co-authored *The Multi-ethnic Christian Life Primer* with DeYmaz and directs cross-cultural education at the church. This helps people identify a group that needs more diversity, she said. “If your group sheet doesn't look like a bag of Skittles, then you should sign up on a different sheet.”

Ultimately, multiethnic churches—no matter what approach they take to small groups—are after more than just demographic diversity.

Otherwise they could end up with a group of diverse strangers sitting in a room together on Sunday rather than a congregation that shares life together, says Aaron Cho, the small group pastor at Quest Church in Seattle and the son of Korean immigrants.

“That's not really what we are after,” he said. “What does it look like to be reconciled? What does it look like to strive to have deeper relationships and connections with others?” **Morgan Lee**





Jim Burgess, pastor of Fellowship of the Emirates, leads an Easter baptism service near Dubai's Burj Al Arab hotel.

#### Church Growth

# Why Christianity Is Surging in the Heart of Islam

Medical missions and market dynamics lead to millions of believers in the Arabian Peninsula.

**S**am Espada led friends in a chorus of "Happy Birthday" for his sombrero-wearing brother at a Mexican restaurant. After dinner, they saw the latest Hollywood blockbuster.

The five-story mall could have been anywhere in America, except that every storefront sign was in Arabic as well as English. The group was in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

"This place is like Disneyland," said Espada, a Christian from New Jersey. "But I don't feel fully free. You can definitely tell you are living in a Muslim country."

Espada, an architect, is one of the millions of foreign workers transforming the former desert oasis into a global center for business and travel. The UAE's Dubai is the fifth-fastest-growing city in the world; its population is now more than 80 percent migrant.

The great majority of migrant workers in the region come from India and Southeast Asia, sometimes suffering exploitation in labor camps to send a collective \$100 billion back home. As an American, Espada is unusual.

But as a Christian, he is not. Today the Pew Research Center numbers Christians in the Arabian Peninsula at 2.3 million—more Christians than nearly 100 countries can claim. The Gulf Christian Fellowship, an umbrella group, estimates 3.5 million.

These migrants bring the UAE's Christian population to 13 percent, according to Pew. Among other Gulf states, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar are each about 14 percent Christian, while Oman is about 6 percent. Even Saudi Arabia, home to Islam's holiest cities (Mecca and Medina), is 4 percent Christian when migrants are counted.

Together, they represent the largest

Christian community in the Middle East outside of Egypt. But their experiences vary considerably.

In Bahrain and Kuwait, Muslims can enter church compounds. In Qatar, guards allow only foreigners. Saudi Arabia's Grand Mufti (the nation's highest official of religious law) has called for all churches in the peninsula to be destroyed.

Surprising to many observers is how many of these churches there are.

"We don't really face persecution; we face misunderstanding," said Bill Schwartz, formerly with YWAM, now the Qatar-based priest responsible for the Anglican Church's work in the Arabian Gulf. "But we are building churches in every country except Saudi Arabia, and have good relationships with all governments."

At least 17 Gulf cities provide land for more than 40 church buildings. Through





them, the Bible Society in the Gulf legally distributed 41,000 Bibles, 10,000 New Testaments, and 115,000 pieces of Christian literature in 2013. “It shows the Christian community is here to stay,” said general secretary Hrayr Jebejian.

“People in the West measure religious freedom exclusively by the freedom of Muslims to convert,” said Schwartz, but he believes this view is too narrow. He grants that restrictions exist, and believes Islam at best “tolerates” non-Muslims. But the general freedom that Christians have to worship in much of the Arabian Peninsula issues from the Muslim faith and should be appreciated, he said.

Thanks also to global capitalism, that freedom is not going away.

In 2007, Schwartz’s church construction project in Doha, the capital of Qatar, missed a deadline to break ground. When he requested an extension, every official involved reassured him: “We won’t take this land back. There is too much invested in our public image.”

It is an image local Christian leaders are eager to promote. “Emiratis are not extremists. They are tolerant and want to live in the world in peace,” said Jim Burgess, pastor of Fellowship of the Emirates, whose 2,500-strong congregation meets in the luxurious Gloria Hotel in Dubai. “We want the government to know we appreciate this and want their attitude spread in the Arab world.”

His church participates in Easter services publicly on the beach. Last year, 39 expatriates were baptized in Gulf waters. And during this year’s celebration of the end of Ramadan, the ruling sheikh received Burgess and other local Christian leaders ahead of hundreds of prominent Emiratis jockeying in line for position.

“This was a message for those gathered,” Burgess said. “We believe God is answering prayer. We really need to get the message out that there are opportunities here that haven’t existed for 1,400 years.”

A quarter of Burgess’s fellowship identifies as non-Christian. Sixty percent had not attended church in years. Many are

surprised by the opportunities to share their faith, even with Muslims, if done within a strong relationship.

“I never had more opportunities to preach the gospel end-to-end than I had here,” said Wael Qahoush, a Palestinian-American banking executive and deacon at Evangelical Community Church of Abu Dhabi (ECC). “I was apprehensive, always trying to hide my identity, and everyone wanted to ask me about Christianity.”

Like other churches worshipping in theaters or private residences, Burgess’s fellowship operates in legal limbo. But that Gulf churches exist at all stems from relationships, not economics or law.



In 1960, before the oil boom that propelled the region to immense wealth, missionaries with TEAM (The Evangelical Alliance Mission) were invited by tribal sheikhs to start a hospital in what is now the UAE after TEAM’s medical work in Kuwait and Bahrain attracted their attention. Half of local children and 35 percent of mothers were dying during childbirth.

In gratitude, the sheikhs allowed Oasis Hospital to operate a church. Today the Gospel of Luke and a copy of the *Jesus* film are available in patient rooms. Many royal family members were born in the hospital. In 2012, one paid for the national theater to host apologist Ravi Zacharias.

“God has shown this country the

blessing of religious freedom, because of the kindness shown back then,” said Carol Rubish, a TEAM nurse.

But full religious freedom has not been extended to most Gulf citizens. The UAE barely made Open Door’s latest list of the 50 nations where it is hardest to be a Christian—but it still ranks at No. 49. Qatar is No. 18, and Saudi Arabia is No. 12. The US State Department notes restrictions in all Gulf nations, but officially designates only Saudi Arabia as a “country of particular concern.”

Rather than complain and lobby for international advocacy, Christians work quietly within both social and market constraints. “God is in control of Qatar and the Gulf,” said Schwartz. “And we will work with him here.”

Andrew Thompson, head of St. Andrew’s Church in Abu Dhabi, has forged strong links with local officials. The greater challenge is sharing his facility with other

churches. On a weekly basis, the Anglican compound hosts 10,000 worshippers in 45 congregations, representing 17 languages. Space is scarce, and this occasionally results in bad behavior from Christian leaders seeking optimal meeting times.

But on behalf of his international migrant community, much of which is illiterate, Thompson has partnered with the Ministry of Labor and New York University–Abu Dhabi to translate labor laws for a mobile audio app. “Some say there should be a prophetic voice,” he said. “We want to be prophetic hands.”

Strong relations with the UAE’s royal family have also led to their endorsement of Thompson’s book, *Jesus of Arabia*, translating the mes-

sage of the gospel into the culture of the peninsula. Complete with an appendix tackling Islamic perceptions of Christianity, it is a bestseller in the UAE.

“We rub shoulders with people from all over the world, so it is a dynamic place for kingdom impact,” said ECC pastor Cameron Arneson, who led the UAE’s Council of Evangelical Churches for nearly 25 years.

The council’s current leader, John Fulmar, agrees. “The confluence of peoples and cultures provides great evangelism opportunities,” said the pastor of United Christian Church of Dubai. “What I want is to have people move here and live openly as Christians living among the nations.”

**Jayson Casper in the United Arab Emirates**

# Sins of Our Fathers

Should denominations apologize for acts they didn't commit?

**I**nstead of apologizing imperfectly for racism this year, the second-largest Presbyterian denomination in America will wait to repent more perfectly.

The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) voted 684–46 during this year's general assembly to defer action on a resolution that apologizes for “involvement in and complicity with racial injustice” during the civil rights era.

Supporters called the resolution an essential step toward reconciliation in a time of growing diversity; the 350,000-member denomination is now only 80 percent white. But some pastors questioned the need, since the PCA didn't exist until nine years after the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

Reformed Theological Seminary chancellor Ligon Duncan III, who introduced the resolution alongside church historian Sean M. Lucas, said it grew out of his friendship with African American pastors.

“When you become friends with a person who has experienced oppression, and you begin to love that person,” said Duncan, “you begin to care about the things that have hurt their heart.”

While the PCA didn't exist during the civil rights era, many of its churches did, said Alex Shipman, a leader of the denomination's newly formed African American Presbyterian Fellowship. Some of those churches barred blacks from membership, or stood silently by as Southerners fought to maintain Jim Crow segregation, he said.

“I've heard folks say that because that was not their sin, they didn't want to deal with it,” he said. “But we believe in covenant theology. There are examples in the Old Testament that we confess the sins of our fathers.”

One example is Daniel 9, where the prophet pleads for mercy in sackcloth and ashes for the former sins of Israel, said PCA pastor Lane Keister. “On the flip side, you have Ezekiel 18, which makes it clear that each person is only condemned

for his own sin.”

After nine hours of debate, the PCA's Overtures Committee, which makes recommendations to the General Assembly, voted 80–0 to punt the resolution to next year.

Its reasons: to give time to perfect the language, to allow specific suggestions for repentance, and to give churches time to study the PCA's complicity, in order to produce a more “heartfelt and accurate” repentance.

But when the recommendation hit the assembly floor that night, many were surprised. “There was a sense of, ‘Why would you want to drag your feet on repenting?’” said Duncan.

“If the desire is to present a perfect resolution, we'll never have one,” said PCA pastor Leon Brown. Delaying repentance “does not work in our churches, in our marriages, and in other relationships.”

But corporate repentance takes more time than individual repentance, Keister said. “You can't get an entire denomination to fully repent on a dime.”

Another argument for waiting is that it keeps the focus on the issue for an entire year, said Wy Plummer, who coordinates the PCA's African American ministries. After past actions on race, including a 2002 confession of “complacency” and “complicity” with slavery, the denomination “went back to sleep,” he said. If the civil rights resolution had passed, “we would have gone to sleep again.”

Shipman agreed, and stressed that unless a vision is articulated and recommendations for action are added, the PCA is likely to find itself apologizing again in the future.

“I don't want to be in a denomination that's always confessing to past sins,” he said. “We have to catch a vision so we don't have to do another one 20 years from now.”

After voting to wait by a 15-to-1 margin, nearly a quarter of those present signed a protest that recognized “our church's covenantal and generational involvement in and complicity with racial injustice inside and outside of our churches during the civil rights period.”

Jemar Tisby, president of the multidenominational Reformed African American Network, called the moment “significant and historic.” “It makes it easier to commend the PCA to other minorities when we can point to these actions and the momentum and say, ‘Listen, the past is sometimes painful to recall, but the present is very bright.’” **Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra**

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# VIEWS



WHERE WE STAND

## THE POWER OF PRO-LIFE WOMEN

It's time to harness 'feminine authority' to protect the unborn.







**THE VIDEOS ARE HARD TO REFUTE**, and much harder to stomach. Conversations recorded and released by the Center for Medical Progress have dealt a hefty blow to Planned Parenthood's public image. While the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* seems a distant legal mirage, the videos have powerfully reminded us what abortion is: it is always the death of an unborn person, whose body parts can be crushed and extracted and exchanged for money.

Planned Parenthood has responded tepidly, apologizing for the "tone" used by its medical director. The activists behind the videos have slated several more for release. As the videos continue to stir public debate, we can expect to hear a common refrain: If you care about women, you will

## 'One of the big reasons I'm in this movement is that I'm offended by the idea that abortion is foundational to women's power.'

CHARMAINE YOEST, *president, Americans United for Life*

United for Life, and Carol Tobias, president of National Right to Life, are shaping pro-life federal and state legislation. Lila Rose and Abby Johnson are younger activists exposing the brutalities of the abortion industry. Together, they show that you can understand women's experience from the inside out, and still believe that women deserve better than abortion. As Yoest told CT, "One big reason I'm in

way, including unintended pregnancy," she says. Indeed, millennials are more likely to identify as pro-life than previous generations. And one of the biggest pro-life groups comprises college students; under Kristan Hawkins's leadership, Students for Life of America has tripled in size since 2006 to 900 campus groups.

When it comes to advancing a pro-life ethic, Christians have many resources at our disposal. We can appeal to moral reasoning, that unborn persons have a fundamental right to live. We can appeal to spiritual authority, that every major religion views abortion as killing of the innocent. We can point to astounding research that shows unborn babies are, physically speaking, tiny humans. But in a postmodern culture in which personal experience is given much authority, women can make a powerful contribution to the pro-life movement.

Abortion is not a "women's issue"; rather, it is a human issue that affects women uniquely. Congressman Henry Hyde, drafter of the Hyde Amendment (which restricts certain federal funds from being used to perform abortions), understood this well. In debates with pro-choice Democrats in the 1990s, he was accused of speaking on something he knew nothing about. So he turned to Marjorie Dannenfelser, now president of the Susan B. Anthony List, and said, "We've got to have women doing this." Hyde supported the pro-life nonprofit in its early years.

"When men speak, people can hear the intellectual argument," said Dannenfelser, "but they want to hear if there is female support for the position." As the 2016 election approaches, may more people hear that support loud and clear. **CT**

**KATELYN BEATY** is print managing editor of *Christianity Today* magazine.



support their right to choose an abortion. You are either for women's well-being and empowerment, or you are pro-life.

This is a false dichotomy—one that women in particular need to dismantle.

The dichotomy is reinforced by lobbyists, media, and tone-deaf politicians alike. In 2012, pro-choice advocates warned of a "war on women," arguing that male politicians can't create policies that involve women's bodies. Meanwhile, Todd Akin's "legitimate rape" comment and Richard Mourdock's statement that rape is God's plan reinforced that, if there wasn't a war, there was serious lack of compassion toward women. Throughout 2016, Planned Parenthood will assuredly argue that Hillary Clinton—whom they awarded for her "unwavering support of women's health and rights"—"gets" women like other candidates can't.

But on the level of hearts and minds, politicians don't have the last word. Charmaine Yoest, president of Americans

this movement is that I'm offended by the idea that abortion is foundational to women's power."

These and other leaders remind us that to be pro-women is to be pro-life. The first US feminists knew this instinctively. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and others understood that partners and doctors often coerce women into abortions; that abortion can compound women's shame over an unplanned pregnancy; and that it often entails a grief as deep and scarring as a child's death outside the body. When pro-choice advocates ignore these realities, they fail women and undermine their well-being.

"The abortion movement essentially tells women that they are weak, that they cannot handle an unintended pregnancy," Abby Johnson told CT. A former Planned Parenthood director, Johnson believes young women are ready for a new women's movement: one that says "women are strong enough to face whatever comes our



## A Necessary Refuge

I learned at age five that most US churches are unsafe for black people.

I was five years old when a white church leader called me the n-word.

Hoping to expand our cultural horizons, my parents had enrolled my siblings and me in a Vacation Bible School at a predominantly white church in our San Francisco suburb. Midway through the week, my brother and I became so engrossed in our game of tetherball that we failed to hear the teacher calling us to return to the classroom. Exasperated, she yelled at the top of her lungs, "Get in here, niggers!"

I had never heard the word before. But as the only non-white kids in the VBS program, my siblings and I instinctively knew that it referred to our blackness. I lowered my head and ran back to the classroom, feeling unwanted and unsafe.

This was the first of many times that the white church has dishonored the image of God in me as a black person, resulting in feeling unwanted and unsafe within white church walls. It was also the memory that immediately came to mind on June 17, when a white gunman entered Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Charleston, South Carolina, and killed nine congregants, including senior pastor Clementa Pinckney.

Because of this early experience, I have long believed that white churches are not safe spaces for black people. Over the course of my lifetime, I have been treated like a mascot, encountered astounding cross-cultural incompetence, faced unambiguous prejudice, and been silenced. That's why the attack on Emanuel was so disturbing: it communicated that black people are not safe even in our own churches. The trauma is exacerbated by the fact that the black church was created to be a haven for black people.

The historic black church was

established to protect black people from the anti-black racism that's part of the DNA of the white American church. Dating back to the days of slavery, white ministers preached oppression and racial hierarchy to their black congregants by focusing on Paul's epistles and avoiding the teachings of Jesus. As theologian and pastor Howard Thurman noted, "It was dangerous to let the slave understand that the life and teachings of Jesus meant freedom for the captive and release for those held in economic, social, and political bondage." The white-led church was a headquarters for black subjugation, birthing a legacy of racial inequality that has long shaped white Christianity.

"The AME denomination was founded as a protest against racism," said Yolanda Pierce, Princeton Theological Seminary's Elmer G. Homrighausen Associate Professor of African American Religion and Literature and director of its Center for Black Church Studies. Speaking recently of the AME Church, she said, "The black church itself was birthed as a sanctuary from white violence." In this way, the black church formed its own enduring legacy, one that actively sought to protect and liberate black people from discrimination.

These dueling legacies have continued.

**The attack on Emanuel was so disturbing because it communicated that black people are not safe anywhere.**

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Following typical journalism guidelines, CT does not publish racial slurs unless they are in a quote and there is a compelling reason to include them. In the following column, both exceptions are at play.

While many black churches were leading abolitionist and anti-lynching efforts in the 19th century, and the civil rights movement in the 20th century, white churches overwhelmingly maintained the status quo of racial inequality and

actively resisted change. Today, in the midst of the Black Lives Matter movement, which is galvanizing change far beyond the United States, the most recent Public Religious Research Institute data show that white evangelical Protestants are the only major religious group in which a majority doesn't see the need for such a movement. Indeed, more than six in ten white evangelicals say that police officers treat blacks and whites equally. And close to six in ten say the recent police killings of black Americans are isolated incidents that are not indicative of an anti-black society.

How can churches filled with people who refuse to acknowledge that racism is still a problem possibly honor the image of God in the black people who darken their sanctuary doors?

Until that acknowledgement and honoring happen, the black church will be a necessary place of refuge and resistance—a place where black Christians like me can encounter a God and community that labor for equality and seek to restore the racial identities that have been cursed both inside and outside the broader church.

In the wake of the terrorist attack on Emanuel AME, I hope the white church will choose to reject its legacy and stand with its black brothers and sisters. But no matter what, the black church will remain a beacon and a refuge for the black people of God.

**CT**



**Andrew Wilson** is an elder at Kings Church in Eastbourne, England, and author most recently of *The Life You Never Expected*. Follow him on Twitter @AJWTheology.



# Did Jesus Get the Bible Wrong?

How to understand his historical ‘discrepancy’ in Mark 2.

**A**ll of us are tempted on occasion to approach biblical tensions—texts that seem to contradict each other—in flippant or offhand ways. At one end of the spectrum are skeptics who reduce tensions to textual incoherence and human invention. On the other are those with more evangelical commitments, who desperately trawl books and websites to harmonize mismatching texts. Once they find one, they sigh and move on as if the tension has nothing to teach us. The “problem” has been “resolved.”

But if we want to take Scripture seriously, we must ask *why* tensions exist in the first place. Why did the Holy Spirit—who inspired Scripture—cause these discrepant texts to be written? What do they reveal? And what might we lose if we “resolve” the problem? We are, after all, listening for the voice of God, not solving a puzzle.

Some examples are more obvious than others. The paradox of divine sovereignty and human responsibility is not meant to be resolved but rather retained. Scripture indicates that both God and we work in our salvation. Is God three or one? Yes. Should we or should we not answer a fool according to his folly? Yes (Prov. 26:4–5). We recognize these tensions, yet accept them as foundational to Christian faith.

Yet when it comes to historical discrepancies in the biblical text, we enter problem-solving mode. When we find that Jesus has two different genealogies, or that the wedding feast parable has two different endings, we forget that we are listening to a divinely orchestrated symphony. Instead of discerning the different parts of the various musicians, we try to

force them to play the same note.

One of my favorite discrepancies is Jesus’ “mistake” in Mark 2. In this passage, the Pharisees criticize Jesus for letting his disciples pluck grain on the Sabbath. In response, Jesus explains that he and his friends are doing what David and his men did when they ate the holy bread in the time of Abiathar the high priest (Mark 2:25–26). The problem is, 1 Samuel 21 tells us that Ahimelech, not his son Abiathar, was the high priest at the time that David and his men ate the holy bread. Either Jesus made a mistake or Mark did. In either case, evangelicals get nervous.

Scholar Bart Ehrman said that when he discovered this discrepancy in seminary, it kick-started his departure from Christianity. Progressive UK pastor Steve Chalke made it his opening salvo in a debate with me about the truthfulness of the Bible. Countless Christians, on the other hand, upon seeing the problem, have rushed to their study Bibles or other resources where they discover, in relief, that the Greek phrase *epi Abiathar* could mean “in the passage about Abiathar” rather than “in the time of Abiathar.” “That must be it,” they exclaim. “Problem solved. On to Mark 3.”

Yet there is far more going on in Mark

2. Jesus’ argument is not that he has found an obscure guy in the Old Testament who once ate bread on a Saturday. His point is that David, Israel’s true king-in-waiting, and his consecrated friends were allowed the holy bread that day. Jesus is interpreting his actions through the story of Israel’s greatest king. He is saying, in that cryptic way he often does, “I am David. These guys are my men. So they can eat what they want.”

So Jesus is David, the true king of Israel, and the disciples are his allies. But they aren’t the only characters in the story. Herod is Saul, the current king who has drifted from God and now wants to kill the pretender to the throne. John the Baptist is Samuel, the fiery prophet who prepares the way for the new king and confronts the old one. Judas is Doeg the Edomite, the betrayer. And Abiathar? He is Eli’s great-great-grandson, the last surviving member of the old priestly line, whose eventual removal from the priesthood would prove true God’s word through Samuel (1 Kings 2:27).

All of this means that Jesus mentions Abiathar rather than Ahimelech for good reason. He is saying, “I am David, these are my men, and the current priests are Abiathar. They are in charge now, but in just a few years their priesthood will end, just like Abiathar’s. And my kingdom will be established, just like David’s.”

I think that’s wonderful. The Holy Spirit didn’t put discrepancies in Scripture to provide fuel for skeptics, employment for commentators, or annoyance for evangelical Christians. He did it to make us think, search, meditate, read, learn—and be ever filled with awe.

CT

**If we want to take Scripture seriously, we must ask *why* tensions exist in the first place.**



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# MOORE ON THE MARGINS



RUSSELL MOORE, PUBLIC-POLICY LEADER FOR THE LARGEST PROTESTANT DENOMINATION IN AMERICA, ISN'T TOO WORRIED ABOUT CHRISTIANS' LOSS OF POWER. IN FACT, IT MIGHT JUST BE THE BEST THING TO HAPPEN TO THEM.



LIVING IN THE IDYLIC SUBURBS of Nashville, Tennessee, Russell Moore didn't expect to see female bodybuilders tanning naked across the street on a hot June day.

So the eighth president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC), the public-policy arm of the Southern Baptist Convention, took to one of his pulpits: Twitter. "These people told me we ought to keep all the neighbor kids inside while they are naked out here. Y'all have never seen me this mad," tweeted Moore, a father to five boys.

Moore chuckled recounting the story while holding his youngest during family dinner. The day after his neighbors agreed not to tan naked in their front yard, Moore tweeted, "So far today we still have our First Amendment religious freedom and everyone in my neighborhood has their clothes on outside. #winning"

Compared with today's myriad court battles in which Christian individuals and organizations worry that their religious freedoms will soon vanish, tanned bodybuilders seem like a minor threat. But the encounter epitomizes the way Moore is practicing patient pluralism—and helping a denomination of about 16 million do the same—in a time when Christianity seems to many as odd as the notion of female bodybuilders was a century ago.

"When identifying as a Christian, there's an oddness and strangeness to the claim in some places," Moore, 44, told *Christianity Today*. "But the conception of Christianity as a strange thing is a good thing for the gospel because it lines up with what the gospel is.

"Christians are becoming aware that there's a large portion of society who would be relieved if all the evangelicals were raptured."

While Moore's youngest son ran around the house after dinner, his shorts came off. As Maria Moore got up to retrieve the toddler, Russell pointed across the street. "They're going to say, 'Get your own house in order before you fix mine.'"



## BACK TO BAPTIST ROOTS

In the two years since Moore, the former dean of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS), took to leading the ERLC, Southern Baptists have watched many of their beliefs—including, most notably, their beliefs about religious freedom—challenged in courts and by rapidly changing public opinion.

But even before the Supreme Court struck down all state bans against same-sex marriage this June, claims of being a "Moral Majority rang hollow for US Christians," Moore said in his ERLC inaugural address in 2013. For his part, he embraces the cultural margins.

"We are a prophetic minority who must speak into a world that is . . . exactly what Jesus promised us the world must be," he said.



**BOBBLEHEADS OF BILLY GRAHAM, THOMAS JEFFERSON, HANK WILLIAMS, AND CHARLES H. SPURGEON TOGETHER SYMBOLIZE MOORE'S VISION OF MIXING THEOLOGY, RELIGIOUS LIBERTY, EVANGELISM, AND CULTURE TO GUIDE SOUTHERN BAPTIST POLICY.**

In this way, Moore's leadership recalls "the days when Baptists were not at the center of culture but were outsiders, calling the culture into account for its failing," says Barry Hankins, coauthor of *Baptists in America* with fellow Baylor University historian Thomas Kidd. "That resonates with a certain part of Baptist history, but it's also quite different from the 20th century, a more triumphal approach, a more insider approach."

In 1920, Southern Baptist statesman George W. Truett gave his most famous speech, "Baptists and Religious Liberty," from the steps of the US Capitol to an estimated 10,000–15,000 attendees. He taught that Baptists and Americans had a shared goal: "Democracy is the

goal toward which all feet are traveling, whether in state or in church."

By contrast, Moore spoke not at the Capitol but at Capitol Hill Baptist Church, led by senior pastor Mark Dever. There, Moore warned a modest audience of about 400 against pursuing a Christian America.

"[F]or too long we have assumed that the church is a means to an end to save America," he said. "America is important. But the end goal of the gospel is not a

Christian America. The end goal of the gospel is redeemed from every tribe and tongue and nation and language. . . . We belong to another kingdom."

"Moore has an important message: How do you live when you're in exile?" says Fox News commentator Kirsten Powers. "Let's stop the pity party and instead say, 'We're in exile, and this is not the first time God's people have been in exile.'"

Alongside their Anabaptist cousins, Southern Baptists have traditionally seen themselves as on the margins of mainstream culture. Baptist teaching promotes the separation of church and state, warning that the





church must maintain a healthy distance from political affairs in order to speak prophetically to political and social issues.

Alongside Puritan Roger Williams—arguably the first proponent of church-state separation in America—Southern Baptists also take cues from Isaac Backus and John Leland, 18th- and 19th-century preachers who stood against tax-supported churches in Massachusetts and Virginia. The men's legacies loom large: The ERLC's office in Washington, D.C., is named after Leland, and a portrait of Backus hangs just inside Moore's Nashville office.

"One of the things we lost in training in Baptist life is the teaching of why religious liberty is central and important in the Baptist tradition, which I see as Baptists' contribution to the larger world," Moore said. "We have to be arguing for religious liberty for everyone." This means, for example, that Moore has publicly praised court rulings that protect the freedom of Muslims to practice their religion.

After the Supreme Court ruled in 2014 that Hobby Lobby wouldn't have to cover certain forms of employees' contraception due to the for-profit owners' religious claims, Moore tweeted, "This is as close as it gets to a Southern Baptist dancing for joy. . . . The Court reaffirmed a fundamental guarantee for religious liberty for all people."

## SUIT-AND-TIE GUY

Appearing ever ready to testify on Capitol Hill, Moore sported a red tie and ERLC-branded cufflinks the summer day I visited his Nashville office. There, Moore leads 25 employees and manages a budget of \$3 million. The bobbleheads on his bookshelves include theologian C. H. Spurgeon, former president Thomas Jefferson, evangelist Billy Graham, and musician Hank Williams. Together they symbolize Moore's vision of mixing theology, religious liberty, evangelism, and culture to guide SBC public policy.

Moore says the main difference between him and his predecessor—Richard Land, who led the ERLC for 25 years, when the Religious Right enjoyed significant influence in Washington—is that he sees himself first as a preacher-evangelist, and only second as a public policy advocate.

Land left the ERLC post in 2012. Before he stepped down, he came under fire for allegations of plagiarism in his radio broadcasts, and for remarks related to the shooting death of Trayvon Martin. At 69, Land today heads the nondenominational Southern Evangelical Seminary near Charlotte, North Carolina. He still positions himself as an evangelical spokesman, sending out statements in press releases after national events as he did as president of ERLC. (Land, who agreed to an interview at the 2014 SBC convention in Baltimore,

# 'CHRISTIANS ARE BECOMING A LARGE PORTION OF SOCIETY' RELIEVED IF ALL THE EVANGELICALS

later declined through a spokesman to speak with CT.)

Land was credited alongside other conservative religious leaders for helping to ensure George W. Bush's second presidential term in 2004. In 2002, Land had sent a letter to Bush, signed by other Christian leaders, that offered moral justification for a preemptive military strike against Iraq. Toward the end of his ERLC tenure, Land became more intertwined with specific political candidates, endorsing Mitt Romney in 2012.

Moore, by comparison, has yet to align himself with a major candidate for the 2016 election and is careful about which Washington groups he partners with. And while Land had a booming radio presence, Moore finds a captive audience on social media.

"Many people assume the tone change is because I'm associated with a younger wing of evangelicalism," Moore said. "I think it's more because I grew up in an older, blue-collar revivalist church that ended every service with an invitation hymn."

Moore was raised by a Catholic mother and a Baptist father in a working-class neighborhood in Biloxi, Mississippi, a



# ING AWARE THAT THERE'S OCIETY WHO WOULD BE GELICALS WERE RAPTURED.'

longtime hub for commercial fishing. He studied at the University of Southern Mississippi, New Orleans Baptist Seminary, and SBTS, where he earned a PhD in systematic theology. In the early 1990s, before seminary, Moore was an aide to US Congressman Gene Taylor, a Catholic pro-life Democrat from Mississippi. (Since then Moore has switched to the Republican Party.)

"I started my young adulthood working with the greatest public servant I've ever known," Moore wrote in 2006. Taylor's ability to transcend partisan politics arguably inspired Moore to do the same.

So has his family's experience adopting two boys from Russia before he and Maria went on to have three biological sons. Moore's adoption advocacy, notably in the book *Adopted for Life* (and a 2010 CT cover story), has given him a broadly evangelical platform that combines theological, cultural, and political engagement.

"I associate him closely with the adoption issue, which is not immediately political but creates a very personal, compassionate image," said Molly Worthen, a historian at the University of North

Carolina-Chapel Hill. "Before adopting, it wasn't that I was anti-immigrant or anti-orphan, but I didn't care about those issues the same way," Moore said. "Orphan care moved me into a place that I had intellectually but didn't have viscerally."

"The orphan care movement carries with it all of the possibilities and pitfalls of evangelical social action. In order for it to be effective, it has to work on the local church level... and it means the church taking on the risk of welcoming people who have the possibility of hurting them."

"Moore understands that even beneath the issues, there's a person," said Saddleback Church pastor Rick Warren after speaking on an ERLC panel at the 2014 SBC convention. "There are the theological issues and the social and political implications, but there's also a person behind every ethical and moral decision."

Moore admits he has not always seen the people behind contentious issues. In 2000, as a research assistant to SBTS president Albert Mohler Jr., he attended a gathering of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, mostly comprising moderate Baptists who withdrew from the SBC in the 1980s. Moore wrote a series of critical stories for Baptist Press, and Cooperative Baptists called his reporting unethical and inaccurate. Moore said what he wrote was true, but his attitude toward the Cooperative Baptists was wrong.

"I became pugnacious. I almost delighted in catching these people in their errors," Moore told CT. "It showed me a side of myself that I find forbidden in Scripture: 'The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome' [2 Tim. 2:24]."

At least one leader compares Moore's tone to that of Jorge Mario Bergoglio, who became Pope Francis three months before Moore became head of ERLC. Both men "have been misunderstood as though they are compromising the Christian witness on hot-button issues," said Robert George, the Catholic legal scholar at Princeton University. "They're simply proclaiming the historic Christian doctrine on sin and mercy toward the sinner. They're saying, 'Let me give you the rest of the story, which is mercy.'"

Moore got into hot water last year for criticizing Christian radio shows for lacking that mercy.

"I listened on the way back up here from my hometown to some Christian talk radio this week, against my doctor's orders," Moore said at the ERLC's 2014 Leadership Summit, in a talk titled "Walking the Line: The Gospel and Moral Purity." "Honestly, if all that I knew of Christianity was what I heard on Christian talk radio, I'd hate it, too. There are some people who believe that fidelity to the gospel simply means speaking, 'You kids get off my lawn.'"

Syndicated radio host Janet Mefferd called on Moore to apologize, saying his remarks were "over the top." She defended hosts' approach to discussing homosexuality.





Moore suggested that some commentators had been too focused on sexual immorality. "We have not been called simply to condemn," Moore said. "We have been called to reconcile."

## BIG-TENT CALVINIST

But make no mistake: Moore is as traditional in his theology as Mohler, who led SBTS and the larger Southern Baptist world into a conservative resurgence that it enjoys to this day.

When Mohler assumed the SBTS presidency in 1993, he required new faculty to affirm the inerrancy of Scripture and oppose women's ordination. Moore rose quickly through Southern's ranks, joining the faculty in 2001 and becoming dean in 2004.

"Moore and I see eye to eye on almost all issues of significance besides the great raging debate of opera vs. country," Mohler told CT. "He's very much on the wrong side."

Moore describes himself as a four-point Calvinist (he's not on board with Limited Atonement), but a "big-tent" one who will work alongside Arminians. Today he downplays the differences between the SBC's Calvinists and non-Calvinists.

"I said I was a conscientious objector in the debates," Moore said. "Some of the perceptions are overblown, and many of them are differences between theologically oriented people and practically oriented people."

Still, Moore must be understood in the context of Southern's Reformed sensibilities, said Bill Leonard, a church historian at Wake Forest University. "Total depravity and a response to the principalities of this world are closely related in his theology," said Leonard, who taught at SBTS during its moderate days in the 1970s. "One of the responsibilities of government is to hold at bay the totally depraved multitude."

Greg Wills, dean of SBTS's school of theology, told CT, "Russell thinks it's important not to talk about the evils of gambling, but [that] these are issues in which individual human beings are suffering depravation so they are vulnerable to the enticements of state lotteries. He addresses materialism, structural social issues, while insisting on the traditional position on gambling."

Moore does not hesitate to critique theology he sees as aberrant or harmful.

"The pro-life aspect of the Religious Right saved the evangelical movement in this country," Moore said. "It alerted evangelicals that theological liberalism doesn't just kill churches. It kills people, too."

Still, he believes the Religious Right was too optimistic about political power. He openly criticized a 2010 rally that media personality Glenn Beck, who is Mormon, held with Christian Right leaders, including Land.

"Beck is not preaching the gospel," Moore told CT, recalling his outrage at the time. "But it seemed like it because he was preaching on values. In order to make ourselves a moral majority, we have deemphasized the gospel and replaced it with a vague sense of values."

Anchored by Jerry Falwell Sr.'s Moral Majority, many Christian Right groups drove agendas opposing abortion and the Equal Rights Amendment and supporting prayer in school and tuition tax credits for private religious schools. With the diminished influence of many conservative Christian institutions in Washington, today leaders like Moore are less

# 'YOU AND I JUST PASSED THE WALL OF SBC PRESIDENTS. IF IN 10 YEARS FRED LUTER IS THE ONLY PERSON OF COLOR ON THAT WALL, THAT WILL NOT BE PROGRESS.'

inclined to claim a "majority" label. And though he has not publicly criticized other leaders in Washington, such as Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council, the two have not collaborated in the way Land and Perkins did.

"I don't have that relationship with Russell that I had with Richard," Perkins, who repeatedly declined CT's interview requests through a spokesman, told *National Journal*. "I don't know Russell that well. I think he's still trying to find his way."

Moore's path has led him away from the Family Research Council's mode of political engagement (which CT editorialized against as "caustic" in 2012). Moore's challenge is whether he can carve out middle space between the separatism of a "prophetic minority" and the guidance on key issues that many evangelicals will be looking for during an election year.

"There is reason to wonder where evangelicalism will go after taking leave of the Religious Right, whether into suspended political animation or into the sort of political activism that avoids the points of greatest tension with the ambient culture," Moore wrote for *First Things* in 2013. The problem for many evangelicals, says Moore, is not that the Religious Right was too conservative. It's that the Religious Right, in seeking political power or to reclaim America, sacrificed gospel distinctiveness.

"Today the center of American evangelicalism is, theologically speaking, to the right of the old Religious Right," wrote Moore. Evangelicals work on orphan

# MOORE ON TWITTER

SOME OF HIS MOST POPULAR TWEETS

care, creation care, human trafficking, racial reconciliation, prison reform, and economic inequality, as well as abortion, economic freedom, and marriage, “with decidedly conservative motivations and strategies—and theologies,” he wrote.

Which is why Moore may be a fitting figurehead for evangelical public policy leading up to November 2016, during which, absent an evangelical pope, media will look to him to speak for the movement. He appears regularly on television and radio as an evangelical spokesman. As an invited guest of the White House and Congress, he shifts between prophetic dissent and hearty support, depending on the issue.

Moore has been invited to meet with President Obama five times, each on the issue of immigration, an issue the SBC has made a priority. But he also publicly disagrees with the President on abortion and same-sex marriage. An avid Wendell Berry fan, Moore advocates for creation care, though he has warned of environmentalists “sounding the alarm on global warming.” He believes the death penalty is sometimes warranted.

Moore has served as board chair of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, an organization that promotes complementarianism, believing that men and women serve different roles in the church and home. When gender informs the public discourse on abortion or contraception, Moore regularly highlights work by evangelical women. His closest advisers, however, are men, including an executive staff weighted with SBTS graduates. When it launched in 2014, the ERLC’s research institute included 3 women on a staff of 70.

Moore hosts regular conference calls with SBC pastors, updating them on issues and offering guidance on public-policy questions. Always armed with a beverage before fielding questions, he says he recently switched from his usual diet soda to unsweetened iced tea. “Isn’t that such a Yankee thing to do?” he lamented. On one call, a pastor asked him how to criticize the President in a way that is Christian.

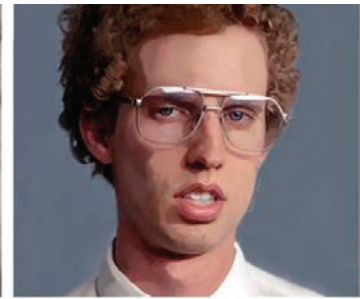
“Make sure you are publicly praying for the President and honoring him in situations where you’re not criticizing him,” Moore said. “Some of the ways I’ve heard people pray for the President have been things like, ‘Lord, we pray you turn his wicked heart.’”



Russell Moore @drmoore

7/18/14

I told @albertmohler tonight that I finally figured out why we worked so well together at @sbts: ★ 508 🔄 217



Russell Moore @drmoore

6/26/15

On the wrong side of history? We started on the wrong side of history—a Roman Empire and a cross. Rome’s dead and Jesus is fine. ★ 1,136 🔄 1,084



Russell Moore @drmoore

6/21/15

Charleston was where America split apart in 1861. Maybe it’s where America comes together in 2015. ★ 1,011 🔄 836



Russell Moore @drmoore

7/14/15

Dear @facebook, what is “abusive” about protesting Planned Parenthood’s human trafficking? ★ 672 🔄 1,152



Russell Moore @drmoore

6/19/15

Charleston families sharing gospel with the killer. Flesh and blood cannot do this. This is Spirit and life. ★ 897 🔄 686



Russell Moore @drmoore

2/15/15

When the Book of Revelation speaks of those beheaded by evildoers, it speaks of the martyrs not as victims but as “overcomers.” ★ 543 🔄 610



Russell Moore @drmoore

6/30/14

#HobbyLobby wins. This is a great day for religious liberty. Government is not lord of the conscience. ★ 381 🔄 645



Russell Moore @drmoore

12/3/14

A state that can choke a man to death, on video, for selling cigarettes is NOT Rom. 13 justice. ★ 460 🔄 738



Russell Moore @drmoore

4/19/14

Most hilarious line in all Bible is Matt 27:65, Pilate on the tomb of Jesus: “Go, make it as secure as you can.”

Good luck with that. ★ 489 🔄 798





**MOORE SPOKE AT A POLITICO BREAKFAST ON SAME-SEX MARRIAGE THIS JULY, AND TO ERLC LEADERS ON RACE THIS SPRING; HE AND MARIA HAVE 5 BOYS, THE OLDEST 2 OF WHOM WERE ADOPTED FROM RUSSIA.**

Instead, Moore told pastors, they can suggest disappointment without passive-aggressive prayers. “Signal that you really do want the President to succeed but you’re disappointed with what he’s doing,” he said.

## TAKE DOWN THAT FLAG

As the United States rapidly grows more diverse, Moore said that the SBC still has much work to do on race. The ERLC’s summit this spring featured several plenary talks from African American leaders on why racial reconciliation remains a core gospel issue.

Next to the bobbleheads in Moore’s office is a photo of black sanitation workers protesting labor conditions in 1968 Memphis. Citing years of poor treatment, unfair wages, and discrimination, some 1,300 sanitation workers walked off the job in protest. “It reminds me of human dignity,” Moore told me, pointing to the photo.

The SBC originally formed in 1845 in a split from the American Baptist Convention over whether Baptists who owned slaves could also serve as missionaries. Many SBC leaders were either silent on or actively opposed the civil rights movement through the 1970s, and many congregations segregated blacks. Today about 20 percent of the 50,000 Southern Baptist congregations are predominantly nonwhite.

Moore noted the SBC’s historical ties to slavery in his 2013 inaugural address. “We must be those who recognize as we speak to the outside world, and especially those of us who are a part of this great denomination, a denomination that is summed up in its very name—the fact that we were founded, at least partly, to justify man stealing, and kidnapping, and slavery, and lynching,” Moore said.

Both Moore and predecessor Land nod in appreciation to Foy Valentine—a moderate who led the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission (now the ERLC) from 1960 to 1987—on his civil rights work. While many Southern Baptist preachers attempted to remain neutral on race, Valentine urged engagement.

When Land took over the agency in 1987, he led the SBC’s Racial Reconciliation Resolution of 1995 after convening eight black and eight white SBC pastors and scholars. The committee’s resolution apologized for “the role that slavery played in the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention,” SBC opposition to civil rights, and the exclusion of blacks from SBC churches.

But race remains a tricky issue for a denomination in which nonwhite pastors fill far fewer leadership positions. The SBC elected its first black president, Fred Luter, in 2012. As he cycled out of office last year, the SBC replaced him with Ronnie Floyd, a white pastor.

“You and I just passed the wall of SBC presidents,” Moore said, referring to the portraits of all-but-one white men. “If in 10 years Fred Luter is the only person of color on that wall, that will not be progress.”

Moore tried to make progress this summer by calling for the Confederate flag to be removed from atop the South Carolina Capitol. For a leader whose home state’s flag features a Confederate battle flag in the upper-left corner, the statement was remarkable.

“The cross and the Confederate flag cannot co-exist without one setting the other on fire,” he wrote two days after nine black churchgoers were fatally shot at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston. “White Christians, let’s listen to our African American brothers and sisters. Let’s care not just about our own history, but also about our shared history with them.”

Moore’s conviction solidified after Hurricane Katrina, when a national

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ERLC

# ‘TOTAL DEPRAVITY AND PRINCIPALITIES OF THIS RELATED IN MOO

BILL LEONARD



guardsman gave him a Mississippi flag from the wreckage of Biloxi, Moore's hometown. Moore tacked the flag on a pegboard in his basement study.

But on a day when Moore was preparing to host African American friends, he noticed the Confederate cross in the corner of the flag—and couldn't imagine trying to explain why he had the flag hanging in his home. As Moore unpinned the flag from the wall, it fell apart in his hands. The memory came roaring back after Charleston, when he decided it was time to speak publicly. Observers said it enabled political leaders to eventually pull the flag down.

"How can you address education inequities and economic inequities when we have the basic problem of imagery that divides us?" said Burns Strider, a Southern Baptist from Mississippi and a faith adviser to Democratic presidential frontrunner Hillary Clinton. "Russell's speaking out as a conservative had an immediate ripple effect."

## STRANGERS AND EXILES

As Moore and I waited for dinner, Moore's dachshund trotted over to the feet of his master, who rolled his eyes. The dog was a hasty promise Moore made when he told his boys they would be moving to Nashville and two of them began to cry.

The dog's name? Waylon, after country musician Waylon Jennings.

"Country music and hip-hop are the only two popular music forms in America that have a more holistic view of a person and deal with sin," Moore said. "Both of those forms of music at their best tend to be more honest."

Moore may be uniquely equipped to speak the cultural language of two generations at once. As a member of Generation X, Moore appears ready to calm a boomer generation anxious about millennial Christians, who are generally more left-leaning politically than their parents and less likely to join a church. He occasionally meets with hip-hop artists like Lecrae, though he retains deep affinity for his Mississippi church that sang Fanny Crosby revivalist songs.

"My grandmother is in the slow process of dying," he said. "I realized I could sing to her hymns that she and I would both know and it would be meaningful. I'm not sure that would be the case for my kids. I get older Southern Baptists and I get what they see being lost."

"On the other hand, I'm encouraged that we have a millennial generation defined theologically instead of politically."

"Keep Christianity strange" is the central message of Moore's new book, *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel* (Broadman & Holman). "The temptation is to do with America what the prosperity gospel does for the individual," Moore told CT. "If you do these things, you'll have blessings and wealth."

As he navigates the waters between Southern pulpits and Washington corridors, Moore is trying to thread the needle of leading Christians to shape public policy without being co-opted by political leaders.

Moore is the rare person in politics who tends to leave you more hopeful after you meet, said Joshua DuBois, who ran the faith-based office under President Obama. "He is resetting the boundaries of appropriate dialogue in the public square. He's trying to wake up evangelicals to the world around them."

Moore may be preparing evangelicals to be in the minority, but he has also been teaching that Christians must remain culturally engaged or risk losing their religious liberty.

"We are strangers and exiles, on our best days, but we are not orphans and wanderers," he writes. "Our strangeness is only hopeful if it is freakishly clinging to the strange, strange mission of Christ crucified and risen."

As US Christians feel more and more like exiles, Moore seems more than ready to lead them into the wilderness.

**CT**

**SARAH PULLIAM BAILEY**, CT editor at large, is a religion reporter for *The Washington Post*, where she runs the Acts of Faith section.

# A RESPONSE TO THE WORLD ARE CLOSELY RE'S THEOLOGY'

**CHURCH HISTORIAN**

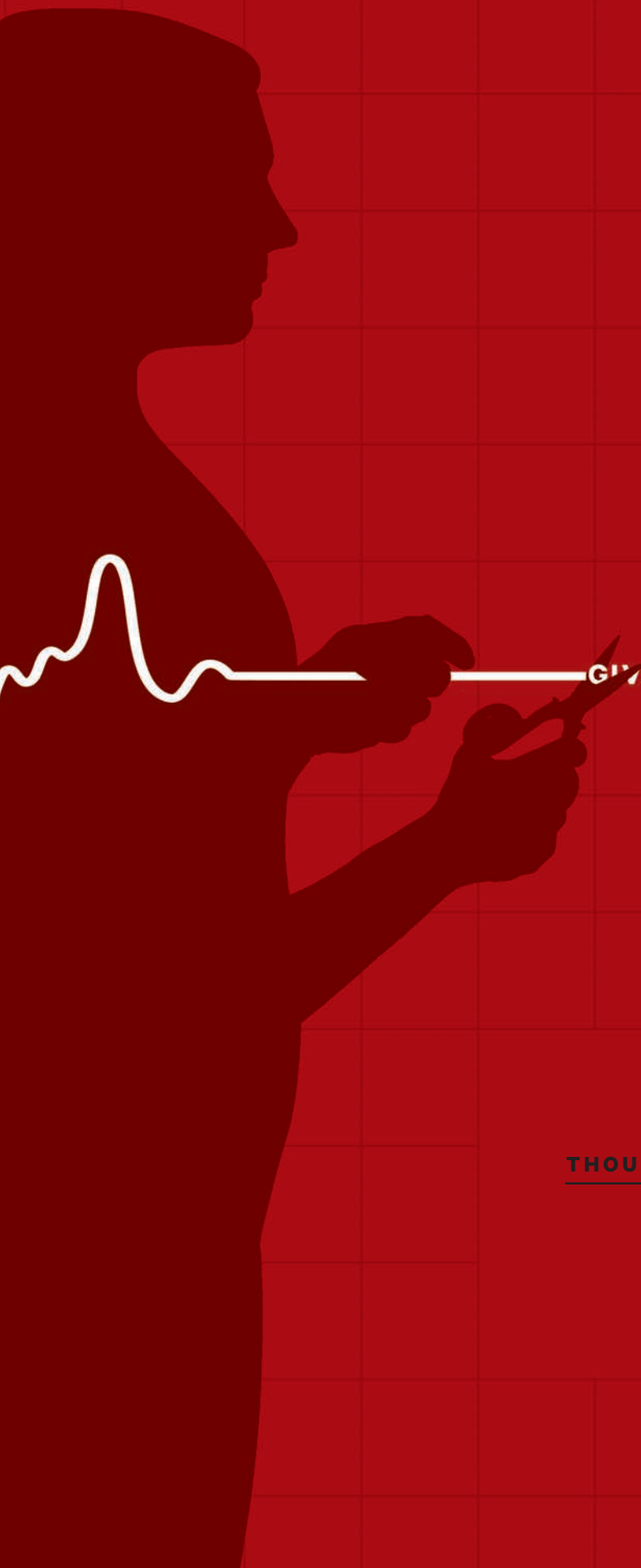


**ASSISTED-SUICIDE ADVOCATES**

**SAY THAT CHOOSING WHEN WE DIE**

**IS A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT.**





**GIVING OUR FINAL DAYS TO GOD**

**MY LATE HUSBAND**

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**THOUGHT OTHERWISE.**

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**BY KIM KUO**

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# IF YOU ARE WONDERING WHAT THE NEXT SOCIAL DEBATE IN THE UNITED STATES WILL BE, NPR HOST DIANE REHM SPELLED IT OUT RECENTLY IN A PUBLIC CAMPAIGN:

## ASSISTED SUICIDE.

Those like Rehm who believe terminally ill patients should be to able to end their lives with help from physicians typically avoid the words *suicide* and *mercy killing*. The bald truth of those words would not win support for the movement. Still, Rehm declared that Jack Kevorkian, who went to jail for killing terminally ill patients, “was before his time” and that “the country wasn’t ready.”

But it’s apparently ready now. The agenda is set. Death will not be defeated.

Assisted suicide—defined as a physician providing a patient the means to take his or her own life, usually through medicine—is now legal in five states, with several more currently considering end-of-life legislation. California resident Brittany Maynard’s 2014 crusade to take lethal drugs rather than face terminal brain cancer sparked 20 newspapers in 11 states to endorse “death with dignity.” Inspired by Maynard, one woman diagnosed with cancer is suing California for the “right to die.” She is not alone: Some studies identify a “suicide contagion” after media coverage of events such as Maynard’s death. One pro-life nonprofit found that, during the media attention before Maynard’s November 2014 death, the number of lethal prescriptions written in Oregon was 39 percent higher than the state’s monthly average.

To paraphrase Dickens, terminal illness is that “vague, uncertain horror” that threatens us all. Most of us have friends or loved ones who have faced cancer head-on. While our compassion for those who fight incurable disease is steady, we are unhinged by the terminal aspect of illness.

Yet certainly people of faith have unique questions to ask about terminal illness. Namely, are we willing to surrender to our Creator the specifics of how and when we die? How much do we actually trust him with our final days?

Our society is quickly becoming comfortable with the

notion of death on demand rather than life in all its complexity. About 7 out of 10 Americans self-identify as Christian. And, according to a 2015 Gallup poll, 69 percent of Americans say doctors should be legally allowed to end a patient’s life if the patient wants it. That means that at least 40 percent of self-identified Christians believe people should be allowed to control the circumstances of their deaths. Much like arguments that have fueled the abortion and gay-marriage movements, we have accepted that each individual has full, unfettered rights to their own bodies, their own lives and loves, and, now, to their own deaths.

## EVERY DAY MATTERS

As Christians we cannot expect our nation’s laws to fully align with our beliefs. But in the church, we have many teachings that oppose the “right to die” rationale. Two of the clearest come from 1 Corinthians:

Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are

that temple. (3:16–17)

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (6:19–20)

For me this is not a theoretical issue. My husband, David Kuo—perhaps best known to CT readers as former deputy director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives—fought cancer with dignity and courage. He endured 10 years of chemotherapy, radiation, alternative therapies, and clinical trials. He was plagued by mental, physical, and emotional damage. Yet he never stopped fighting. To survive, we had to immerse ourselves in Scripture passages like these, to reassure our hearts that God had a plan in the midst of our suffering. We never stopped believing that God could heal David—and if not, that God would use him fully for as many days as he had.

Three separate times, starting in 2003, David was given anywhere from 6 to 12 months to live. That is the same diagnosis Maynard received. But we soon learned that people—even doctors—are ill-equipped to play God in determining the end of life. Upon her diagnosis, Maynard set a date for when she

## ARE WE WILLING TO SURRENDER TO OUR CREATOR THE SPECIFICS OF HOW AND

would take hers. After the same diagnosis, David went on to live 10 years. During that time, we had two beautiful children, while David wrote a book, struggled, fought, and touched many lives. No one below the throne of God can predict how the journey of life will go, and we shouldn't pretend to.

Like Maynard, David had severe seizures. Over time he lost the ability to walk, then to write. His personality changed markedly due to the vicious side effects of surgeries, radiation, and medications. He developed a great deal of anxiety, depression, and rage. His playful outlook was darkened. And the end was brutal. Every function of his body slowly collapsed.

Still, every day of David's life mattered. Even in semi-lucid deterioration, David challenged his ICU doctor to read *Mere Christianity*. His conversations with his neuro-oncologist resulted in her later starting a ministry to homeless cancer patients. David's last days healed divides between political enemies and deep wounds among friends and family. Especially in suffering, we can dive below the shallow waters and touch another's heart and soul.

Steve Jobs, who died of pancreatic cancer in 2011, shared this wisdom at a commencement speech at Stanford University: "No one wants to die. Even people who want to go to heaven don't want to die to get there. And yet death is the destination we all share. No one has ever escaped it. And that is as it should be, because death is very likely the single best invention of life. It is life's change agent."

David and I saw this truth play out among scores of friends and family who entered battle with us. For a decade, the looming prospect of death was our "change agent," the trial

and spirit. But rather than creating widespread policy based solely on empathy, consider where the widespread legalization of assisted suicide will lead. For assisted suicide to become policy, someone has to decide who can choose to die. Should children be included? The mentally ill? Is the cost of keeping someone alive a factor in determining whether they should die? In Oregon, where assisted suicide is legal, until recently the state health plan did not cover many expensive medical procedures, including cancer treatments for patients with a low expected survival rate. But it does cover lethal drugs, which are a cheaper alternative to extended care.

In countries where assisted suicide has been made legal, euthanasia—different from assisted suicide in that a doctor *directly* acts (such as via lethal injection) to end a patient's life—has expanded unpredictably. The number of "mercy killings" in Belgium rose 27 percent in 2014, to five killings per day on average. Belgium also allows terminally ill children of any age to request to be euthanized. While euthanasia is technically illegal in the Netherlands, the government mostly looks the other way. It has mobile euthanasia units for people who want to die at home, as well as an initiative to expand the laws to include people older than 70 who simply are tired of life. When Britain was considering assisted-suicide legislation, Dutch ethicist Theo Boer reportedly told the House of Lords, "Don't do it, Britain. . . . Some slopes are truly slippery."

This strikes at a central question in the broader US debate over assisted suicide: What if we get it wrong? A basic tenet of our justice system is Blackstone's formulation: It is better that 10 (later expanded to 100) guilty persons go free than that one innocent suffer. The foundation of our "presumption of innocence," it establishes

## WHEN WE DIE? HOW MUCH DO WE ACTUALLY TRUST HIM WITH OUR FINAL DAYS?

that tested our faith, reset our priorities, and forced us into deeper communion with God and our community.

We had many moments when we thought we couldn't take any more. But the hard truth is that our experience transformed our hearts and radically challenged many others. If our lives are truly about glorifying God, then our *only* option is to glorify him where we are.

### A BITTER ASSIGNMENT

For people of faith, it's a bitter assignment. And any policy discussion in the public square is clouded by the emotion we share: sympathy for people facing terminal illnesses. We don't want them to suffer. We want to help. But as Pope Francis observes, assisted suicide gives us a "false sense of compassion." Choosing suicide at any point is the same sin Adam and Eve committed in the garden: the pride of wanting to *be* God, not simply to serve him. True compassion is surrounding a terminal patient with love, support, and palliative care. In many countries, end-of-life suffering is minimized thanks to readily available hospice care.

It is not easy; death is an unnatural ripping apart of body

that government and courts must lean heavily on the side of innocence. The principle

is an extension of Abraham's plea to God in Genesis 18, that he not destroy Sodom if a single righteous man could be found there.

The stakes for defending innocents in "mercy killing" cases could not be higher. If we overextend the law, we would not simply be wasting tax dollars or natural resources. We would be killing people. Countries where euthanasia is legal have a dismal track record. One study found that 32 percent of assisted deaths in Belgium were done without the patient's consent. In Switzerland, a healthy woman paid \$20,000 for an assisted suicide because she was unhappy about "losing her looks." Her family found out afterward, when they received her ashes and death certificate. A severely depressed woman in Belgium was euthanized without including her family in the decision, even though her doctor offered treatment. Should a broad policy endorsing suicide be implemented, will we have safeguards against this kind of "suicide creep"?

### A TRULY BRAVE DEATH

This January, ESPN anchor Stuart Scott died of appendiceal cancer. Scott faced death with enough winsomeness to



KIM AND DAVID KUO IN KIAWAH ISLAND, SOUTH CAROLINA, 2012



persuade anyone to keep fighting for life: “You beat cancer by how you live, why you live, and the manner in

was roundly praised by the media, chosen as one of CNN’s “11 Extraordinary People of 2014” and crowned a “hero”

which you live. So live. Live. Fight like hell, and when you get too tired to fight, [lie] down and rest and let someone else fight for you.”

That is exactly how Lauren Hill lived out her final days. Like Maynard, Hill publicly battled a rare form of inoperable brain cancer. She was a college freshman basketball player at Mount St. Joseph University in Cincinnati, Ohio. She endured severe migraines, stomach ailments, and other debilitating side effects. Adopting the mantra “Never give up,” she rallied her teammates, fans, and social media followers to fund research for a cure. Despite doctors’ predictions, she lived to see Christmas 2014. Days later, she announced that the campaign had raised more than \$1.5 million to fund research.

At what point do we no longer believe God has a plan for each moment of each person’s life? At what point do we sanction ending it all to avoid suffering?

If we are swept along with cultural tides, we will be swayed into believing that assisted suicide is compassionate. Maynard

**IF WE ARE SWEEPED ALONG WITH  
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TERMINAL DISEASES.**

by *People* magazine. All this for choosing to commit suicide rather than face brain cancer, which she rightly called “... a terrible, terrible way to die.”

That is the wrong message to send the millions fighting with great dignity against terminal diseases. It’s like telling the depressed stranger on the ledge to go ahead and jump. Rather, we should share Hill’s resolve to never give up, to always

trust, hope, and persevere, as this is the way of love (1 Cor. 13:7).

On behalf of people who are facing terminal illness, severe depression, or any acute suffering: Act with true compassion. Get involved in their lives. Be present in their suffering. Pray for their healing. Let the reality of death change your life. And rest assured that defending life is not merciless or judgmental—and that to endorse assisted suicide is simply to give up hope.

**KIM KUO** is a writer and communications consultant based in North Carolina.

**CT**

PHOTO COURTESY OF KIM KUO



IN OUR ATTEMPTS  
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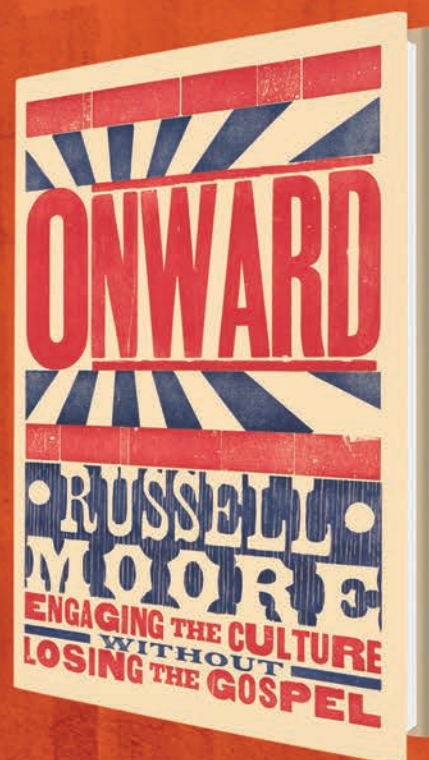
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# TOUGH LOVE FOR THE BLACK CHURCH

THABITI ANYABWILE, THE REFORMED PASTOR

OUTSIDE WASHINGTON, D.C.,

OFFERS CELEBRATION, CRITIQUE,

AND HOPE FOR REVIVAL.

INTERVIEW BY JOHN C. RICHARDS JR.

CH

PHOTO BY DANIEL BEDELL PHOTOGRAPHY



# THE BLACK CHURCH HAS LONG STOOD AS A PILLAR IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY IN THE UNITED STATES.

For centuries, it has served as the theological, political, and social center of black life in America. But there are growing concerns from within about its present health and future prospects. As debates rage about an enduring legacy of racism in the United States and Christians' response, Thabiti Anyabwile, who pastors a church in a black community outside Washington, D.C., has written a heartfelt plea for spiritual renewal in *Reviving the Black Church: A Call to Reclaim a Sacred Institution* (B&H Books). John C. Richards Jr., founding editor of *Urban Faith* magazine and author of *The Tenacity of Hope*, spoke with Anyabwile about why he celebrates—and critiques—the institution that has nurtured him over so many years.

## WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO WRITE ABOUT THE BLACK CHURCH?

I want to see all churches become as healthy and vigorous as possible—especially African American churches. The Lord has given me something of Paul's longing for his "kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:3, ESV). I want to see African Americans brought into God's kingdom in as great a number as possible. For that to happen, the churches that serve African American communities have to be alive.

There's a pitched battle for the soul of the black church, and the visions for

her future are not compatible. As far as I'm concerned, the only sure way to revival is making the Word of God the very heartbeat of the church. If the Word is central to all we think and do, revival becomes more likely. But if we use substitutes for God's Word—however well intended—our churches will continue to lean toward sickness and death.

## SOME SAY THE BLACK CHURCH IS DEAD OR DYING, WHILE OTHERS THINK IT IS ALIVE AND WELL. WHAT EXPLAINS THESE CONTRADICTORY PERSPECTIVES?

Some people measure the health of the black church by political standards, while others use theological standards. Eddie Glaude Jr., a Princeton professor who has proclaimed the death of the black church, pointed to the loss of the church's prophetic voice in advocating for social and political causes. But some of those responding to him, who see vitality in the black church, focus on its gathered worship. Depending on where people sit politically or theologically, they tend to bring forward different measures of vitality or health. At that point, you're not even having the same conversation. You're talking about what the black church is, politically and theologically, before you even get to whether it's dead or alive.

## SOME BLACK CHURCHES HAVE A REVERENCE FOR SCRIPTURE BUT DON'T KNOW IT VERY WELL. HOW CAN WE IN THE BLACK CHURCH OVERCOME BIBLICAL ILLITERACY?

The solution to biblical illiteracy is to put the Bible at the center of the church's life and help those people understand its teachings. As a preacher steadily plods

through Scripture, opening up text after text in the sweep of redemptive history, then hopefully people will say, “Oh, I didn’t know that.” If you’re able to accomplish that, then you have not only taught them something, you have also rooted them in the Scripture in a deeper way.

#### YOU CRITIQUE ASPECTS OF MODERN GOSPEL MUSIC. WHAT’S GONE WRONG?

The musical creativity of the black church is unparalleled. Its ability to engage the whole person through music is unrivaled. Even today, it’s hard to find many R&B stars who haven’t been shaped, touched, or informed in some way by the musical traditions of the black church.

But even though there’s much to commend and preserve in gospel music, there are things that need more consideration. The biggest area that needs work is the singing of the Word. Colossians 3 speaks about us teaching and instructing one another as we sing. It notes that Christ dwells in us richly as we sing to one another (3:16). I worry that, in our theology of music and singing, we don’t think enough about the fact that we’re supposed to be teaching one another in our congregational singing.

A lot of traditional gospel music is very good—even if it isn’t theologically sophisticated. It’s just rich and solid, and it has a deeply biblical view of the Christian life. In the black church, we sing about scriptural themes. We sing about our suffering with joy and hope. We sing about the coming of the Lord. We sing about the blood of Jesus. We take older hymns from outside our own tradition and put them in our own key and style. That’s rich.

If you look at some of the contemporary gospel music that’s been released in the past 20 years, you see a similar creativity, but the content isn’t scriptural. We need to make sure that we’re singing the Bible. There’s a lot of work to do to de-emphasize entertainment and emphasize edification.

HISTORICALLY, BLACKS HAVE BEEN EXCLUDED FROM FORMAL THEOLOGICAL TRAINING, AND MANY BLACK PASTORS WERE SELF-TRAINED. NOW, WITH HIGHER SEMINARY ATTENDANCE, WE OFTEN SEE A DISCONNECT BETWEEN A PASTOR’S TRAINING



If you, as an aspiring black pastor, attend a predominantly white evangelical seminary, you risk ending up distanced from the black evangelical context you came out of. There are pros and cons to that.

#### AND CERTAIN FEATURES OF BLACK-CHURCH LIFE. HOW CAN WE NARROW THAT GAP?

The problem comes out of the African American church tradition. Most of our pastors were in some kind of apprenticeship in preparation for the ministry. They would sit under another pastor or have a “spiritual father” who would pour himself into them.

More than ever, we need to marry seminary training with training in the local church. We need to make sure that seminary education has deep roots in the church’s life so that head, heart, and hands are being shaped. Seminary is great for impacting the head, but it isn’t always great at inflaming the heart or teaching what to do with the hands.

If you, as an aspiring black pastor, attend a predominantly white evangelical seminary, you risk ending up distanced from the black evangelical

context you came out of. There are pros and cons to that. It’s incredibly helpful to experience things you wouldn’t otherwise experience. The downside is that it’s easy to become very critical of the black church, because you learn things you hadn’t learned in the black church. You can stop appreciating things that ought to be appreciated.

And sometimes you lose the cultural rhythm. Some of that is beneficial. Some black pastors learn a different sermon style in seminary that makes their preaching clearer and more Word-centered. But if you’re unable to communicate with a congregation, all that training can go to waste.

I encourage black churches not to simply outsource ministry training to white seminaries. Many churches have assumed that sending a kid off to seminary would prepare him for ministry. But think about how the gospel spread in New Testament times: None of the apostles went to seminary. They all were discipled. They followed Jesus and learned at his feet. Those apostles taught others. It has been the Lord’s plan that preparation for ministry happen heart-to-heart, as older, seasoned pastors pass on not only the “pattern of sound words” (2 Tim. 1:13), but also a way of life that conforms to those sound words. The black church has to get back to that.

#### YOU DEVOTE A SIGNIFICANT PORTION OF THE BOOK TO BIBLICAL MANHOOD. WHY?

Because the broader culture is losing its mind regarding gender and identity. Turn on the news, and almost every day you’ll see a view of manhood and womanhood that is incompatible with the Bible.

The church, and increasingly the African American church, is buying into the broader culture’s understanding of these things. In many corners of the black church, when you talk about biblical manhood and womanhood, people treat you like you’re a dinosaur from the 1950s trying to do the *Leave It to Beaver* thing. They regard you as oppressive to women and to people with same-sex attractions. If we understand our callings as Christian men and women—and what we’re called to form in Christian families and marriages—then we will make great strides in solving the many social problems we face within the African American community.



Prior to being in ministry, I spent my life working on social policy and addressing community-based problems. In the social sciences, you almost never get a research consensus. But there is one thing in social science literature that seems incontrovertible: Children do better in every measure when they are raised by their married, biological parents. A good, healthy marriage between a man and a woman who have children together—what we call the traditional, nuclear family—is still the best social-welfare program. It is still the best way to improve the well-being of children, family, and communities.

If there is any institution that's going to strengthen black families in a way that leads to real flourishing from God's perspective, it's going to be the local church. I argue for manhood in the book, not in any way to diminish the importance of biblical womanhood. But it does seem to me, for better or worse, that so much of the well-being of families and communities hinges on the cultivation of godly, responsible men. That, it seems to me, is where Satan has decided to wage his battle most fiercely.



TOP: An overflow crowd attends funeral services for the girls killed in the bombing at 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, 1963. BOTTOM: People line up to attend the wake of Clementa Pinckney, one of the nine killed at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston.

FOR A LONG TIME, THE BLACK CHURCH HAS HAD TO COPE WITH VIOLENT MANIFESTATIONS OF RACIAL PREJUDICE. DURING THE CIVIL RIGHTS ERA, WHITE SUPREMACISTS BOMBED A BAPTIST CHURCH IN BIRMINGHAM, KILLING FOUR INNOCENT CHILDREN. THIS SUMMER, WE WITNESSED THE RACIALLY MOTIVATED MURDER OF NINE CHURCHGOERS IN CHARLESTON. WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO OVERCOME RACIAL PREJUDICE AND PREVENT THESE KINDS OF TRAGEDIES?

The black church exists because of racism. We must be clear about that fact. The beginning of the independent denominational black churches is generally traced to a prayer meeting in Philadelphia, where Absalom Jones, Richard Allen, and a faithful company of black Christians were forcibly removed by white leaders from a recently segregated space in the church. This, after those same African Americans helped finance the building of the new facility. White Christian prejudice gave rise to the black church. Its

TOP • AP BOTTOM • DAVID GOLDMAN / AP

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continuance is an indictment against white Christians failing to repent of these sins and prove their repentance by their deeds.

Nothing short of deep contrition and repentance will begin to repair the breach. Part of that repentance must include renouncing the very categories of “race” and “whiteness,” so that we can finally embrace our common descent from Adam and Eve and our common identity in Christ. There’s a schizophrenia in the church that sometimes has us thinking of ourselves in primarily “racial” terms, and at other times in simple Christian terms. That two-ness leaves room for racism and interrupts our unity.

Steps are being taken to heal the divide. Recent confessions and seasons of prayer at the Presbyterian Church in America’s General Assembly and in the Southern Baptist Convention are hopeful signs. If white churches found a distinctively Christian and prophetic voice for addressing racism, then racists would have fewer places to hide. Progress has been made over the past 50 years. But we must remain vigilant.

#### WHAT IS YOUR HOPE FOR THE BLACK CHURCH?

A lot of folks ask if there even *should* be a black church, or if it’s dying or fading away. After all, we see a greater emphasis today on doing multiethnic ministry. Megachurches have chipped away at black church membership. Mainline black denominations are losing members. And there’s lots of anxiety about whether or not millennials are leaving the church.

Still, there are historical and theological reasons for believing the black church will stick around—and that it *should* stick around. Historically, the black church will continue because we are not done with racism in the larger church. So at least for now, the church has to retain its separate character for the gospel to move forward. And we need not apologize for that.

There are also theological and missiological reasons. The Lord will gather a people from every tribe, language, and nation. That includes African Americans. As far as I can see, there aren’t many ethnic churches saying, “Hey, let’s go reach our African American neighbors.” So for the gospel to go forward, particularly in the

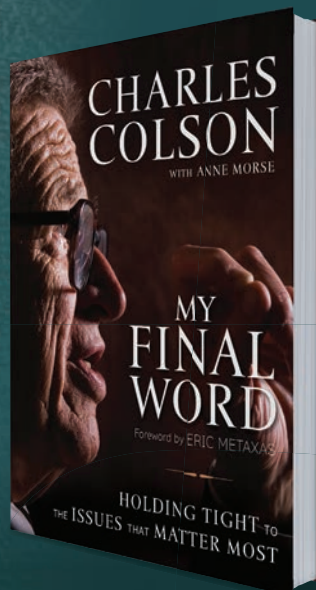
hard urban neighborhoods, African Americans are going to have to take the lead.

My hope for the black church is that she gets healthier—more zealous for the gospel and the Word of God. I hope she learns the habit of healthy self-critique, and to practice it publicly, without shame. One thing that stymies the black church is this aversion to talking about our weaknesses publicly. Outside communities have often exploited our self-criticism to hammer us rather than to help us, so I understand the aversion. But the inability to reflect critically on the black church is weakening our community. I’m hopeful that we will be able to have those conversations as brothers and sisters, to disagree charitably, and to place our emphasis on the essential things. And there, I see progress.

In a word, I’m hopeful for *revival*. I’m hopeful the Lord will pour out his Spirit on the black church, renew her again, add to her number, strengthen her, make her beautiful in holiness, and make her compelling in a dark world. We have every reason to believe that our God, who rose from the dead, can raise her up to newness of life. **CT**

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BY J. I. PACKER

LETTERING BY JILL DE HAAN

J. I. PACKER is Board of Governor's Professor of Theology at Regent College and author of more than 40 books, including his bestseller *Knowing God*.



# The Joy of Ecclesiastes

How a wizened sage tamed my youthful cynicism.

**C**HRISTIANS LIKE TO QUIZ EACH OTHER about their favorite book in the Bible. Finding out how people experience Scripture—especially those who write books about the Bible—is a natural interest to us. When asked which Bible book is my favorite, I say Ecclesiastes. Should people raise their eyebrows and ask why, I give them two reasons.

First, it is a special pleasure to read an author with whom one resonates. That is how the writer, who called himself Qohelet—Hebrew for “Gatherer,” a title that in Greek became Ecclesiastes, the “Assembly-man”—strikes me. I see him as a reflective senior citizen, a public teacher of wisdom, something of a stylist and wordsmith. As his official testimonial or third-person testimony (it might be either) in 12:10 shows, this man took his instructional task very seriously and labored to communicate memorably. Whether he was the Solomon of history or someone impersonating him—not to deceive but to make points in the most effective way—we do not know. All I am sure of is that each point has maximum strength if it comes from the real Solomon at the end of his life.



To the person  
who pleases him.

God gives wisdom  
knowledge, and happiness

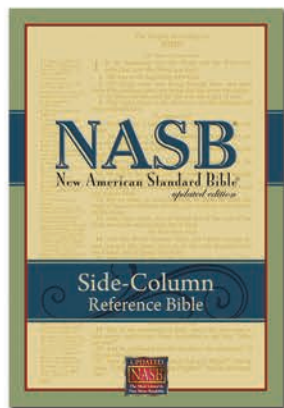
but to the sinner  
he gives the task of gathering and  
storing up wealth  
to hand it over to the one  
who pleases God.

This too is meaningless,  
a chasing after the wind.  
Ecclesiastes 2:26





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Whoever he was, Qohelet was a realist about the many ways in which this world gives us a rough ride. But while temperamentally inclined to pessimism and cynicism, I think, he was kept from falling into either of those craters of despair by a strong theology of joy.

How far this matches the way people see me, I do not know, but this is how I want to see myself—and why I warm to Ecclesiastes as a kindred spirit. (One main difference, of course, is that his thinking

Also, I was barred from sports and team games by reason of a hole in my head—literally, just over the brain—that I had acquired in a road accident at age 7. For years I had to cover the hole, where there was no bone, by wearing an aluminum plate, secured to my head by elastic. I could never get my body to learn to swim or dance.

Being an isolated oddity in these ways was painful to me, as it would be to any teen. So I developed a self-protective

Pride led me to stand up for Christian truth in school debates, but with no interest in God or a willingness to submit to him.

is all done within the framework of Old Testament revelation.)

Second, looking back to my late-teens conversion, I see myself as having received from Ecclesiastes wisdom that I needed badly. When Jesus Christ laid hold of me, I was already well on my way to becoming a cynic. But by God's grace, I was tamed thoroughly, and I see Ecclesiastes—the man and his book—as having done much of that taming.

Cynics are people who have grown skeptical about the goodness of life, and who look down on claims to sincerity, morality, and value. They dismiss such claims as hollow and criticize programs for making improvements. Feeling disillusioned, discouraged, and hurt by their experience of life, their pained pride forbids them to think that others might be wiser and doing better than they themselves have done. On the contrary, they see themselves as brave realists and everyone else as self-deceived. Mixed-up teens slip easily into cynicism, and that is what I was doing.

I was reared in a stable home and did well at school, but, being an introvert, I was always shy and awkward in company.

sarcasm, settled for low expectations from life, and grew bitter. Pride led me to stand up for Christian truth in school debates, but with no interest in God or a willingness to submit to him. However, becoming a real as distinct from a nominal Christian brought change, and Ecclesiastes in particular showed me things about life that I had not seen before.

## LEARNING TO LIVE

**W**aiting for me in the pages of Ecclesiastes was a view of reality very different from my junior-level cynicism.

Ecclesiastes is one of the Old Testament's five wisdom books. It has been said that the Psalms teach us how to worship; Proverbs, how to behave; Job, how to suffer; Song of Solomon, how to love; and Ecclesiastes, how to live. How? With realism and reverence, with humility and restraint, coolly and contentedly, in wisdom and in joy.

People who may not have read beyond

chapter 3 might think of Ecclesiastes as voicing nothing more than bafflement and gloom at the way everything is. But 2:26 already goes beyond this: “to the one who pleases him God has given . . . joy” (ESV, used throughout). In Ecclesiastes, joy is as central a theme, and as big and graciously bestowed a blessing, as it is in, say, Philippians.

Ecclesiastes is a flowing meditation on the business of living. It has two halves. Each is a string of separate units juxtaposed without connectives in a loose-looking way, which yet links them logically and theologically by subject matter. And binding everything together are three recurring imperatives:

Revere God: *fear* in Ecclesiastes, as in Proverbs, means “trust, obey, and honor,” not “be terrified” (3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 8:12–13; 12:13). Recognize good things in life as gifts from God and receive them accordingly, with enjoyment (2:24–26; 5:18–19; 8:15; 9:7–9). Remember that God judges our deeds (3:17; 5:6; 7:29; 8:13; 11:9; 12:14).

There are two further unifying features. The first is the bookend sentence, “Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher. . . . All is vanity”—the opening words in 1:2 and the closing words in 12:8. *Vanity* literally means “vapor” and “fog,” and appears more than two dozen times to convey emptiness, pointlessness, worthlessness, and loss of one’s way. “Striving after wind”—that is, trying to catch hold of it—is an image of parallel meaning (1:14, 17; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4; 6:9). Both metaphors point to fruitless effort, of which the world is full, says the writer.

The second unifying feature is the phrase “under the sun.” It specifies the standpoint and pinpoints the perspective of no less than 29 verdicts on how things appear when assessed in this-worldly terms, without reference to God.

The first half of Ecclesiastes, chapters 1–6, is in effect a downhill slide “under the sun” into what we may call the darkness of vanity. The natural order, wisdom in itself, uninhibited self-indulgence, sheer hard work, money-making, public service, the judicial system, and pretentious religiosity—are all canvassed to find what meaning, purpose, and personal fulfillment they yield. The reason for enquiring is given: Deep down in every human heart, God has put “eternity” (3:11)—a desire to know, as God knows, how everything fits in with everything else to produce lasting value, glory, and

satisfaction. But the inquiry fails: It leaves behind only the frustration of having gotten nowhere. The implication? This is not the way to proceed.

The second half, chapters 7–12, is somewhat discursive—we might even say meandering. It labors to show that despite everything, the pursuit and practice of modest, quiet, industrious wisdom is abundantly worthwhile and cannot be embarked on too early in life. After comparing old age to a house falling to pieces (12:1–7), the writer works up to a solemn conclusion:

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

That last phrase is elusive; duty may be its focus, or the phrase could be carrying the thought “the completeness of the human person,” which the Good News Bible has neatly rendered:

Fear God and keep his commands, because this is all that man was created for. God is going to judge everything we do. (12:13–14)

How then should we finally formulate the theology of joy that runs through and undergirds the entire book? Christian rejoicing in Christ and in salvation, as the New Testament depicts, goes further. But in celebrating joy as God’s kindly gift, and in recognizing the potential for joy of everyday activities and relationships, Ecclesiastes lays the right foundation.

There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God. (2:24)

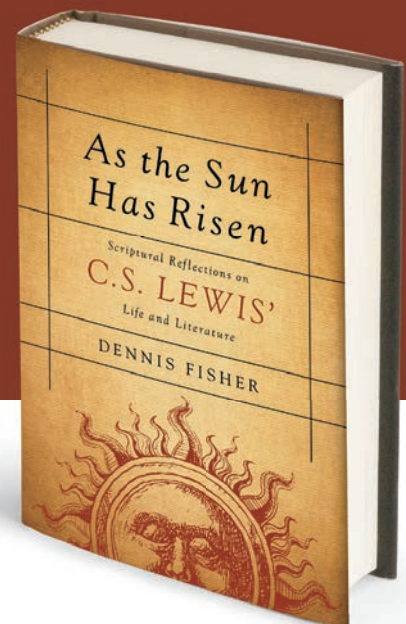
I commend joy. (8:15)

Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun. (9:9)

Being too proud to enjoy the enjoyable is a very ugly shortcoming, and one that calls for immediate correction. Let it be acknowledged that, as I had to learn long ago, discovering how under God ordinary things can bring joy is the cure for cynicism.

CT

# REFLECT DEEPLY



*“I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”*

C. S. Lewis

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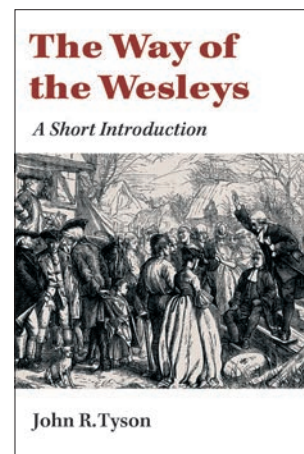
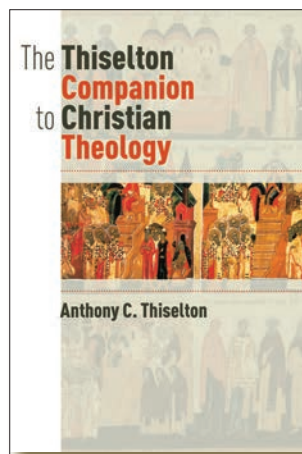
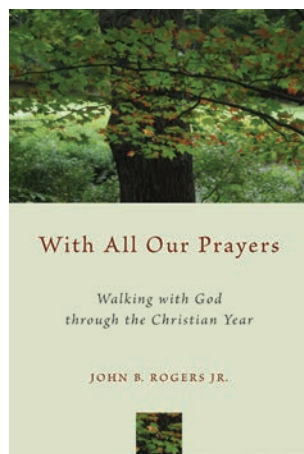
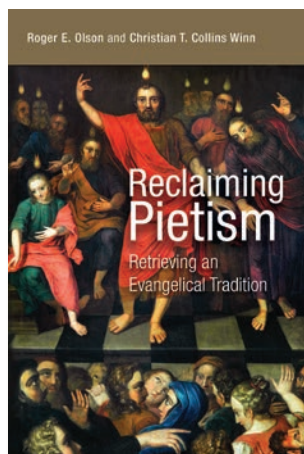
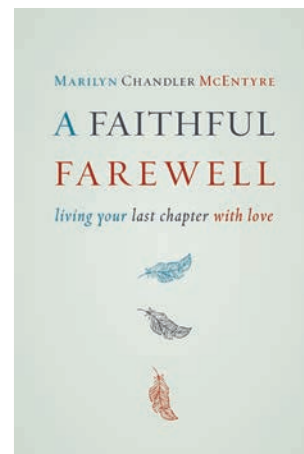
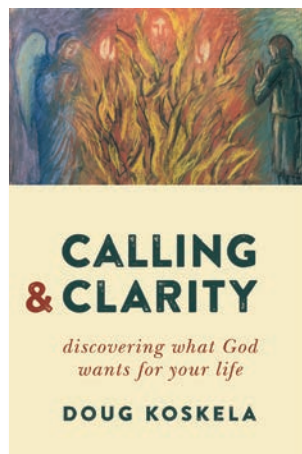
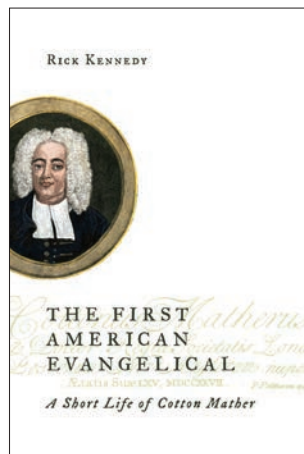
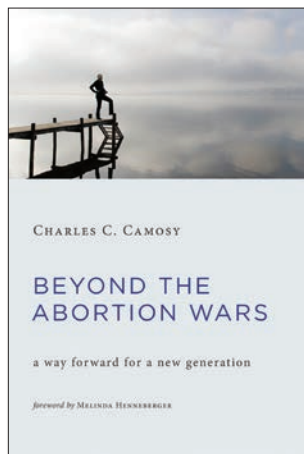


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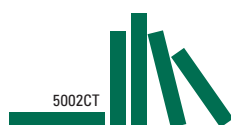
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FOLLOW

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# CALLER

WHAT WE  
FORGOT ABOUT  
VOCATION.

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BY  
RYAN J.  
PEMBERTON



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S THE OLDEST OF THREE CHILDREN IN A SINGLE-PARENT FAMILY, I REMEMBER WE STRUGGLED TO COVER THE RENT MOST MONTHS AND STILL HAVE ENOUGH FOR GROCERIES. WE MOVED SO OFTEN THAT, BY THE TIME I REACHED MIDDLE SCHOOL, I NO LONGER BOTHERED TO PUT AWAY THE MOVING BOXES IN MY CLOSET. AS A TEENAGER I CRAVED STABILITY. SO IT SURPRISED EVEN ME WHEN, A FEW YEARS AFTER COLLEGE, I WILLINGLY LEFT A STABLE CAREER WITH A CARDBOARD BOX IN MY HANDS AND TEARS IN MY EYES.

At age 25, I was enjoying the kind of security I had longed for. I had married my high-school sweetheart and was the youngest account manager at a marketing firm where I helped clients to tell their stories. Yet I sensed a pull down a different path. *Instead of telling my clients' stories, I thought, maybe God wants me to tell his story—the story of his in-breaking kingdom.*

After much prayer and many conversations, my wife and I liquidated our retirement accounts, left our jobs, and moved 6,000 miles to England so I could study theology at Oxford University. I saw this education as a way to enrich my writing, to help others see the world through the lens of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Yet even as I was confident that God had called me in this direction, part of me wondered

what it even meant to be called.

Having spent the past few years writing about calling, I have realized I'm not alone.

## LET YOUR LIFE SPEAK

My quest to understand calling began when I was an anxious college freshman. Reading Parker J. Palmer's classic *Let Your Life Speak*, I was struck by his description of vocation: "something I can't not do, for reasons I'm unable to explain to anyone else and don't fully understand myself but that are nonetheless compelling." For Palmer, vocation is deeply connected to identity: God's purpose *for* one's life is found in God's design *of* one's life. "Our deepest calling," he explains, "is to grow into our own authentic selfhood . . . the seed of true self that was planted when I was born."

It soon became clear to me that writing is that which I cannot *not* do. Shortly after Jen and I married, I began slipping out of bed well after midnight so I could record thoughts on my laptop. I would leave work at the marketing firm late so I could scratch down reflections I had throughout the day. Even before I began to question God's call on my life, I wondered about this urge to write.

Palmer encourages Christians to examine our lives' particularities to find out what we were created for. This may very well be different from who you want to be or what you want to do. And this introspective work is not to be done in isolation. It is performed best within a community of faithful Christians who know you and are actively seeking God's will. In community is where God's call is most clearly discerned.

# CALLING ALWAYS ASSUMES A CALLER. AND FOR CHRISTIANS, THAT CALLER IS THE LIVING GOD.

The Holy Spirit often speaks to us through others. Proverbs underscores the importance of surrounding ourselves with many counselors (Prov. 15:22). The story of Samuel in the temple suggests we need older, godly men and women to help us hear God's word to us (1 Sam. 3:1–9). Notice that after Christ's ascension into heaven, the disciples waited *together* to receive direction from the Holy Spirit (Acts 2).

Jen and I were leading a young marrieds group at our church with another, older couple as we considered moving to England. At that point, it was clear to us that writing was that which I could not *not* do. But I still wasn't sure that was what *God* was calling me to do. The couple, Doug and Carol, knew us and our dilemma, so we invited them into the discernment process. "If you don't go after this now," Doug told me, "you're going to spend the rest of your life wondering, *What if?*" That outward sign confirmed an inward prompting.

Twelve years after I read Palmer, a professor introduced me to Frederick Buechner. In poignant reflections on his vocational journey, the Presbyterian pastor and memoirist offers insights on vocation as elegant as they are wise. Jen and I had recently returned from England to continue my studies, and I was hoping to publish my first book. After receiving several rejection letters, I grew anxious, wondering whether the writing life was really what God had for me or merely arose from my own ambition. During that vocation crisis, Buechner offered a timely voice.

Buechner defines *vocation*—from the Latin word *vocare*, meaning "to call"—as "the work a person is called to by God." In other words, calling always assumes a caller. And for Christians, that Caller is the living God.

While Palmer highlights the inward search—"let your life speak"—Buechner connects vocation to outward needs,

encouraging us to attend to the people and communities around us. "The place God calls you to," writes Buechner, "is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

For me, that outward look came in the form of the final text message my sister-in-law sent me before her unexpected death at age 19. Hayley had struggled with drugs and alcohol, and she hadn't attended church regularly for some time. Yet she was reading my writing and sharing it with her roommates. "You're going to impact a lot of people's lives," Hayley told me in that final text. "You have mine."

Together, Palmer and Buechner encouraged me to pay attention to moments in my life when I felt most alive, and to discern what those moments say about what I have to offer. Buechner, in particular, taught me not to overlook the ways in which the "deep hungers" of this age can bring out my God-given gifts.

As our culture rarely helps us to reflect on anything beyond the most immediate demands for our attention, most of us would do well to reflect on what the particular qualities of our lives say about what we were made to do. But calling cannot be discovered by only looking at ourselves. We need a voice from the outside to guide us.

## THE HIDDEN CHRIST WHO CALLS

"*Nein!*" is how theologian Karl Barth responded to Emil Brunner's notion that the created world, as God's handiwork, reveals God's will. In a prominent exchange, Brunner acknowledged that sin has blemished creation's original image. But he maintained that God's will remains apparent in the world as a "remnant," accessible to human minds apart from Scripture or revelation in Jesus Christ.

Barth believed Brunner had conflated human reason with divine revelation. He insisted that any approach to discerning God that does not begin and end with Scripture or Christ must be rejected.

Barth's counterpoint has important

implications for how we define calling. For example, when we look only to the needs of the world and our own dreams and desires, we risk placing a divine stamp of approval on our own will. We can easily mistake our dreams, talents, and ambitions as God's will for our lives when they may be no more than our own will.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Barth's contemporary and interlocutor, encouraged Christians seeking God's will to turn to the living Christ, rather than risk baptizing their own ambitions. "It is the hidden Christ who calls," wrote Bonhoeffer. "The call as such is ambiguous. What counts is not the call but the one who calls."

For Bonhoeffer, the way to hear Jesus' call is to listen to the Word preached and to receive Communion. We must listen for the voice of the One who calls in the context of the church. Godly community helps defend against confusing our ambitions with God's will. In discerning the latter, we must be careful not to simply baptize the former. We must always be willing to give back to God even what we believe to be his call on our life.

Does this mean that we should disregard our deepest passions and our world's greatest hungers when seeking to glorify God in our decisions? The answer is both yes and no.

Palmer and Buechner rightly encourage us to take inventory of our talents and passions so that we can steward them well. But we'd be mistaken to think that all we need is careful self-examination, the right personality assessment, or a Venn diagram to determine *how* God will use such gifts. When it comes to knowing how our talents and passions will manifest in God's call on our life, there is no one-to-one relationship between such gifts and God's will.

## A STORY-SHAPED CALLING

So how do we discern God's will without conflating it with our own dreams and ambitions? One way is to think about calling in terms of story. This means asking: "If the risen Christ calls me to follow him, and if calling is conceived primarily in terms of that call, what shape should my life take?"

This story-form approach is a more





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dynamic understanding of what it means to be called. For one, it does not mean we ignore our passions, talents, or life experiences. Those are all part of the story, but they no longer present a static blueprint or life plan. They are elements of the story and, therefore, should never *direct* the story. Which means our response to Christ's call is always determined in the daily moments of our lives, usually by asking, "How do my gifts, and the needs around me, inform how I will respond to Christ's call?" Calling, therefore, is less like a plan and more like a posture. In other words, it is discipleship. And discipleship is always embodied in community, among other believers.

This way of thinking about calling has been helpful in some of my deepest valleys.

I'll never forget sitting with Jen and our infant daughter in a dim, musty North Carolina social services office. I had just received a wave of publishers' rejection letters. A social worker explained in a monotone voice that our family qualified for food stamps.

Yet in that moment of need and insecurity, I experienced a peace that can only be described as surpassing all understanding. I was given confidence that we were exactly where God wanted us. Instead of wiping away tears, I kissed my wife on her forehead and smiled at our apple-cheeked daughter.

Somewhere in my pursuit of what I believed to be God's call, I had lost sight of the One who calls. By viewing my passion for writing as a static revelation of "my calling," I neglected the needs right in front of me—such as my wife's. It wasn't until we returned to the States, and were seated in the reality from which I had spent most of my life running, that I realized what it means to be called.

Calling wasn't so much about writing or theology per se. Rather, it was about daily offering up all that I am—my passions, experiences, talents—as I faithfully embody these gifts in a community that witnesses to Christ's "follow me." It was only when I loosened my grip on what I believed to be God's static, specific call on my life that I was free to once again follow the One who called in the first place.

**CT**

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**RYAN J. PEMBERTON** is author of *Called: My Journey to C. S. Lewis's House and Back Again* (Leafwood Publishers).



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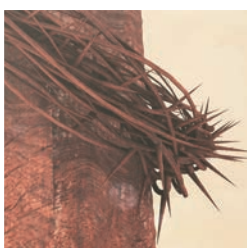
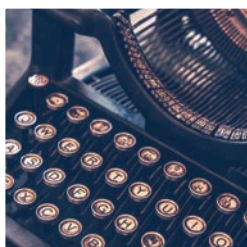
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# REVIEWS



## WE ALL NEED SEXUAL HEALING

Even followers of Jesus fall prey to our culture's assumptions about sex. By Andrew Wilson







**W**hen it comes to sexuality, there's an ever-growing gulf between the way Christians think and the way secular people think. Biblical and cultural perspectives clash, not just on who gets to have sex and when, but on what sex is for, what it means, what it essentially is. Clearly, that poses challenges for the tasks of apologetics and evangelism. But it also frustrates efforts at Christian discipline and formation.

Simply by living in the modern West, followers of Jesus cannot help imbibing the assumptions, practices, and stories of a culture centered on the pursuit and fulfillment of individual desires. As a result, our efforts at purity and restraint—pledges, rings, annual sex talks, True Love Waits campaigns—are like fighting tanks with peashooters. We need a more comprehensive and compelling vision of sex.

So argues Jonathan Grant, an Anglican pastor in New Zealand, in his book *Divine Sex: A Compelling Vision for Christian Relationships in a Hypersexualized Age* (Brazos) ★★★★★. His basic point is that instructions, exhortations, and doctrines are vitally important but go only so far. Instead, we need to thoroughly reimagine our popular narrative of sexual liberation, with all its implied commitments, desires, and practices.

In Part I, Grant explains why the modern world sees sex the way it does: as an expression of the self, an act of freedom, a consumer choice, and a fundamentally natural (rather than transcendent) activity. Then, in Part II, he offers his response: “a new course for Christian formation,” requiring a new way of thinking about the future, human desires, our shared story, and everyday practices.

#### HOW WE GOT HERE

*Divine Sex* is heavily indebted to the language and approach of the philosopher Charles Taylor. Like *A Secular Age*—Taylor’s landmark narrative of modern secularism—this book is full of references to “secular liturgies,” “thick practices,” “enchantment,” and “social imaginaries,”

reflecting Taylor’s refrain that habits deeply shape our imagination. (James K. A. Smith, whose *How (Not) to Be Secular* distills Taylor’s work for ordinary readers, writes the foreword.)

Grant is at his best when providing a genealogy of modern sexuality, explaining how we got here and why it matters. On account of several social, philosophical, scientific, and cultural changes, he writes, sex has been “separated from the social contexts that had traditionally given it its essential meaning. Sex has been redefined as a separate, autonomous entity in its own right, an independent commodity that can be reclassified under any category.”

This has occurred in five phases, he argues: the separation of sex from procreation (through contraception), then from marriage (with the rise of cohabitation), then from partnership (as sex becomes temporary and recreational), then from another person (through the explosion of online pornography), and finally from our own bodies (through questioning the very categories of “male” and “female”). In making sex so easy and individualistic, we have cheapened it and thereby emptied it of its power. We tried to make it simpler, and we ended up making it smaller.

Grant has read widely, engaging contemporary thinking about sex wherever it may be found. The book fuses insights from anthropologists, philosophers, sociologists, biblical scholars, ethicists, and neuroscientists. We learn, for instance, why the differences between the infatuation stage and the commitment stage of a relationship are so stark that they show up in brain scans. We see data marshaled to show that marrying later, after frequent cohabitation, actually leads to less satisfying marriages. We see the historical roots of “selfism” in sexual relationships, as even some pastors

come to assume that marriages are private, not public. Though this avalanche of ideas, disciplines, and frameworks could prove exhausting, the stimulus it provides—chiefly in confirming how the Christian vision of sexuality is borne out by research in numerous fields—more than compensates.

At the same time, *Divine Sex* is peppered with vignettes putting a human face on the headier stuff. Some are tales of the rich and famous: John Mayer’s remark that he sometimes sees 300 naked women before getting up in the morning, or Naomi Wolf’s story about a young man asking her, blankly, “Mystery? I don’t know what you’re talking about. Sex has no mystery.” Others, however, come from the pastoral frontlines. Grant writes with a mixture of concern and hope, bringing humanity and warmth to a book that could have suffocated beneath citations, statistics, and occasional jargon.

#### STICKY PRACTICALITIES

*Divine Sex* expertly diagnoses the problem of our “modern sexual imaginary.” But how can we transform it into something better? Although Grant offers helpful insights and prescriptions, in the end they seem slightly inadequate. To be sure, we need to hear God’s kingdom continually proclaimed. We need our hearts to delight in God. We need life-on-life discipleship throughout the church. We need character-shaping and vision-forming habits built into our weekly worship. Yet despite hailing these steps as “a new course for Christian formation,” Grant is essentially listing the very things healthy churches have done for centuries.

Of course, this may well be a virtue. Yet the structure and language of the book lead the reader to expect something fresh, rather than age-old practices packaged in Tayloresque terminology. (A good example is Chapter 10, which urges discipleship by mentors, pastors, and parents, but does so in the language of “narrative formation” and “storied communities.”) Further, the chapters in Part II struggle to show how these basic components of Christian formation can be developed and enhanced amid the mundane practicalities of modern life.

It is not clear whether Grant thinks we are missing something, and if so, what that something is. It may be that he is simply calling for churches to do

**Our efforts at purity and restraint—pledges, rings, annual sex talks—can seem like fighting tanks with peashooters. We need something more comprehensive.**

these things more consistently and intentionally—“keep calm and carry on,” as we English would say. If he is, I agree. In presenting all this as new, however, he creates expectations that can’t quite be fulfilled.

Despite these quibbles, *Divine Sex* is a fine book. In fact, its most significant contribution to the solution is likely its

excellent framing of the problem. By providing such a thoughtful, well-rounded, and compelling account of our society’s view of sex, Grant provides the resources we need to challenge, deconstruct, and ultimately subvert it. After all, if our vision of sexuality gives rise to a parade of horrors—a hypersexualized culture, sexual dissatisfaction, rampant porn

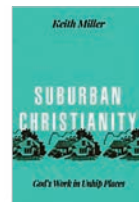
use, unhappier marriages, and young men who deny, with a straight face, that sex has any mystery—then why would we keep it? **CT**

**ANDREW WILSON** is a CT columnist, an elder at Kings Church in Eastbourne, England, and a PhD candidate in New Testament Studies at King’s College, London.

# Mockin’ the Suburbs

Why city-loving Christians are wrong to sneer. *By Caryn Rivadeneira*

**Suburban Christianity:  
God’s Work in Unhip  
Places**  
Keith Miller  
(Moody)



**I thought any sheepishness** I ever felt about living in a leafy suburb a dozen miles west of Chicago had long evaporated. But as I walked through the doors of Vic’s Drum Shop—located to those dozen-plus miles east of us—I realized my suburban insecurity was, in fact, alive and well.

There’s no way to *not* feel like a full-fledged dork while walking around an oozing-cool Chicago drum shop with your newly teenage son. And when our drummer salesman asked where we were from, I paused before answering. I longed to mention that I was a writer, an *artist*—that, yes, I drive a minivan, but I *fight authority* and hold some *troubling opinions* on politics and religion.

Instead, my mind ran back to Keith Miller’s *Suburban Christianity: God’s Work in Unhip Places* (Moody) ★★☆☆, a suburban-born Columbia Law School graduate’s defense of suburban life against its urban detractors. Though Miller protests too much, I concede his basic point. Suburban living is not cool. Not in drum shops, and increasingly not among church folks.

Miller writes primarily to millennial Christians who struggle with their suburban identity, who bristle when peers (or certain influential pastors) living in urban centers claim that The City is where God’s work is being done and where Christian influence is most

needed. Miller raises six critiques—that the suburbs lack influence, diversity, sacrifice, authenticity, community, and beauty—and spends a chapter responding to each.

Since these critiques *are* outlandish, debunking them is fitting. In each chapter, Miller raises valid claims. He reminds readers of the ways suburbanites influence culture, especially in raising families, and that the desire to own affordable homes with spacious yards cuts across racial and socioeconomic divides. And he asks, reasonably enough, whether “inauthenticity” might be a *good* thing at times: Might the disposition “to conform to a certain set of morals actually help strengthen” a community?

But I can’t help questioning whether Miller actually understands the suburbs. His idea of a suburb—and hence, a suburban Christian—doesn’t match what I see. And if it doesn’t ring true for a lifelong resident of Chicago’s suburbs, I wonder for whom it will.

Although Miller broadens his definitions of *suburb* and *city* in an appendix, he generally trafficks in the same caricatures of suburbia as its critics. Miller’s suburbs contain pre-fab houses and cul-de-sacs. They are full of children but devoid of prodigals. (The father in the Prodigal Son story lives in a suburb, according to Miller.) His portrayal of a faithful suburban family struck me as

saccharine and superficial.

Miller creates a world in which suburbia is persecuted by everyone from Hollywood executives to city-loving pastors. In doing so, he ends up bashing city-living as much as urban partisans bash suburb-living.

For example, Miller argues that Hollywood casts suburbia in a bad light. Using *Mad Men* as one example, Miller writes, “[It] is the system of bourgeois values and hypocrisy of the suburban lifestyle that are the supposed cause of [lead character Don] Draper’s agony.” But those familiar with the AMC series know that Draper—who was orphaned, abused, and war-torn—was in agony long before reaching the suburbs.

Taking this suburban-persecution theme to absurd lengths, Miller contends that Jesus would have hung out with us suburbanites because, as the “uncool,” we are the new “outcasts,” the new “least of these.”

Wherever you are, you can be sure that God is at work. Cities are great. Suburbs are great. So are lonely islands and mountain shacks. Live where you want. Live as you are called. But do visit drum shops. It doesn’t matter where you live: They make dorks of us all. **CT**

**CARYN RIVADENEIRA** is a regular Hermeneutics contributor and the author of *Broke: What Financial Desperation Revealed about God’s Abundance* (InterVarsity Press).





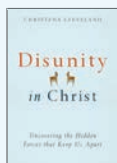
D. L. Mayfield has spent the past three years living among Minneapolis's poor and immigrant communities as part of the missionary order InnerCHANGE. Here, Mayfield—also the author of CT's 2014 cover story "Why I Gave Up Alcohol"—recommends

### 5 BOOKS FOR BECOMING A BETTER NEIGHBOR.



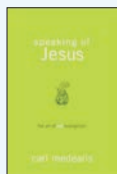
#### **The Voice of Witness series**

Being a good neighbor starts and ends with listening—especially to voices we tend to ignore. The Voice of Witness series, created by a nonprofit of the same name, contains oral histories collected to “amplify unheard voices”—among them refugees, residents of low-income high-rises in Chicago, Palestinians, and female prison inmates. The power of first-person narratives is astonishing, and oral histories are at the forefront of cultivating compassion.



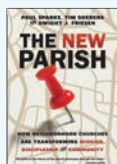
#### **Disunity in Christ** *Christena Cleveland*

Cleveland is a smart, funny social scientist who speaks to the church's fundamental problems with listening. Pointing out how segregated we have become (ethnically, to be sure, but also theologically and culturally), she remarks on how puzzling it is that people committed to unity have such a hard time actually *uniting*. A key, for Cleveland, is acknowledging that bias feels good, and actively trying to overcome it. She also tackles our cultural idolatry of individualism and points out that, whether in churches or neighborhoods, homogeneity is never harmless. (See also Cleveland's debut CT column on page 27.)



#### **Speaking of Jesus** *Carl Medearis*

Too often, evangelism feels like an exercise in guilt, fear, and trying to convince others to join our “team.” Instead of “selling” others on Christianity, Medearis asks us to simply point to Jesus—who he was, what he did—and watch people be transformed. This book was truly liberating. It made me want to soak in the Gospels, then go out and share what I was learning with my neighbors—a witness to the Good News in my life, without all the pressure that can come with witnessing.



#### **The New Parish** *Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens, and Dwight J. Friesen*

We are accustomed, as the authors here argue, to “living above place”: leading individualized lives within a fragmented, globalized economy. Real gospel transformation has to start in our neighborhoods, as people root themselves—their spirits, emotions, and bodies—in a particular place. *The New Parish* shows how believers can come together, both within the church and beyond, for the good of their communities. If you aren't jazzed about what God is doing in your neighborhood after reading this book, it might be time to move.



#### **More-with-Less Cookbook**

Shane Claiborne famously called *More-with-Less* a “cookbook for life.” The recipes, culled from Mennonites around the world, are framed by global poverty and our call, as Christians, to celebrate and nurture one another. This book changed how I shop, eat, and grapple with food insecurity in my own neighborhood and around the world. It challenges us to live joyfully within or even beneath our means. What if we ate with all our neighbors in mind? It might be a sweeter world indeed.





# Christian, Meet Confucius

What Jesus' disciples can learn from the ancient Chinese philosopher.

Interview by Derek Rishmawy

**E**vangelicals are sometimes suspicious of Eastern philosophy, viewing it as a major worldview competitor to Christianity. Gregg Ten Elshof, professor of philosophy at Biola University, wants to push back against this mentality, at least when it comes to the most prominent Chinese philosopher in history. In *Confucius for Christians: What an Ancient Chinese Worldview Can Teach Us about Life in Christ* (Eerdmans), Ten Elshof examines how the Confucian tradition can shed new light on Christian theology and moral teachings. Derek Rishmawy, who pastors students and young adults in California, spoke with Ten Elshof about the book.

## What kind of belief system is Confucianism? And why should Christians pay attention?

It's a matter of some serious, academic controversy whether Confucianism is a religion, like Islam, or more of a philosophy, like Stoicism or Aristotelianism. Religion or not, it's one of the great wisdom traditions on life's big questions. It studies the road to flourishing in personal, interpersonal, and political contexts, and how to locate yourself in the world. Since it's been deeply formative for much of human history, it warrants careful attention.

## What distinguishes Confucius from Aristotle?

The similarities outstrip the differences. They were both interested in the formation of good people, but both opposed a codified list for right behavior. From the good person, good behavior will come naturally. Confucius, though, is clearer on the distinction between moral goodness and a "well-styled" life. Aristotle discusses various moral

virtues, but Confucius envisions a life that attractively and fully expresses human capabilities, including moral virtues.

## You highlight Confucian insights that can sharpen Christian faithfulness. Which one is most urgently relevant for Christians in the modern West?

In a word, it's *relationality*. The contemporary West has this standard conception of the person as an autonomous unit, a thing unto himself: We believe ourselves to be free-standing individuals who can choose to enter into relationships to make our lives better.

That is foreign to the Confucian way of thinking. Confucianism highlights the significance of relationships for understanding who we are, our place in the world, what we ought to do, and what the good life looks like. If there's one place where the Confucian tradition can helpfully correct the contemporary Western mindset, it is here.

## How can this emphasis on relationships affect the life of the church?

We often think of the church as a loose collection of autonomous individuals who are there to help each other grow in Christ or do the Christian life better. But we don't equate belonging to the church with belonging to a *family*, at least as someone in ancient Near Eastern culture would have understood the family bond. People in that culture wouldn't have been able to understand themselves, or their place in the world, apart from their families.

We're grateful for our families, and we wouldn't be

here without them, but we can imagine living apart from them. Indeed, we very often choose to do so. The way we in the West think about family shows up in the way we think about the church. When Jesus (and Paul) call the church to be a family, though, it's a call to something like the more relationally integrated, Confucian conception of family. You get a much different picture.

The Confucian emphasis on relationality can also help us better understand the dynamic of shame in Scripture. We think primarily in terms of guilt, which is almost inherently individualistic: I can't be guilty for something you have done. But the category of shame is relational. If we are relationally connected, I can suffer shame for something you have done. Shame is helpful for understanding the social dimensions of the Fall.

## Is there something particular about Jesus that reading Confucius has helped you better understand?

I've gained a more nuanced view of Jesus' teachings: his command, for instance, to love our enemies. Before reading Confucius, I thought more or less that loving your enemies is about treating them

exactly as you would a friend. Confucius helped me see that even though we should love our enemies, pray for them, and seek their flourishing, treating them identically to friends would be unwise in some circumstances. You might need to protect yourself from enemies, or create some distance, all the while continuing to love and pray for them. I read that injunction (and others) from Jesus with greater nuance and less rigidity than before. **CT**



**Confucius for Christians: What an Ancient Chinese Worldview Can Teach Us about Life in Christ**  
Gregg A. Ten Elshof  
(Eerdmans)





# Missionaries Uncensored

How failure and frustration found a way  
into stories from the field.

By Amy Peterson



**T**he book cover shows a white woman wearing a straw hat holding a brown baby, a golden light glowing behind her. The slender children's biography still has the price tag: 25 years ago, I paid \$3.95 at the Shepherd's Shoppe in San Antonio. From the stories inside, I learned about Amy Carmichael's mission to India during the first half of the 20th century. I was hooked on missionary stories from childhood onward. They conjured a life of Nancy Drew-style escapades done in the name of Jesus.

After graduating from college, in search of heroic adventures for Christ, I moved to Southeast Asia to "teach English." Needless to say, I quickly learned that a small-town English teacher's life is not all high adventure. And when my story *did* turn in that direction—with conversions, arrests, persecution, and rumors of CIA involvement—there was none of the romance the stories I read growing up had promised. Instead, the whole ordeal felt heart-wrenching.

In reflecting on my missionary experience over the past decade, I have returned to those little books that first wooed me overseas. But I've also started following the burgeoning online writings of current missionaries. It's increasingly clear that, because of cultural and technological developments, we are witnessing a retreat from longstanding conventions of the missionary genre. Many changes are afoot, and many of them are for the better.

## A FRONTIER SAINT

Western Christians have long been fascinated by the missionary biography, beginning with *The Life of David Brainerd*, published by Jonathan Edwards in 1749. Brainerd spent three years trying to evangelize Native American tribes in the 1740s. When a bout of consumption sidelined him from missions work, Brainerd lived with the Edwards family.

After his death, Edwards edited Brainerd's diaries into a tale of a sickly,

orphaned missionary who persevered against physical, spiritual, and emotional hardships. This book became one of Edwards's most popular, remaining to this day his most frequently reprinted work. Brainerd became a folk hero: Stories circulated of a frontier saint subsisting on bear meat and Indian cornmeal, encountering poisonous snakes that refused to attack, and kneeling so long in prayer that he couldn't stand to walk.

*The Life of David Brainerd* inspired the first generation of US evangelical missionaries. It also defined the genre and furnished the rhetoric for writing about their experiences. In the 1800s, a growing body of memoirs—from missionaries such as Samuel J. Mills, Levi Parsons, Pliny Fisk, Gordon Hall, Harriet Wadsworth Winslow, and Adoniram and Ann Judson—followed its pattern. Many of these memoirs mentioned *The Life* directly.

Even in private writings, missionaries measured their experiences alongside





Brainerd's. Fisk, for example, seriously ill in Egypt in 1823, consoled himself by writing in his journal, "What must not Brainerd have suffered, when sick among the Indians?" Some even wrote for eventual readers, as though expecting their diaries to land next to Brainerd's on readers' bookshelves.

These memoirs painted the missionary life in idealized hues. Part of the heroic language came from editors: Many narratives were compiled by a widowed spouse and published posthumously. Editors' introductions framed them as examples of holy lives and calls to take up the missionary cause.

For at least 150 years, the kind of inspirational prose popularized in *The Life of David Brainerd* remained standard both in biographical and autobiographical works. Elements of this style persist in some of their modern offspring: Katie Davis's *Kisses from Katie*, Elisabeth Elliot's biography of Amy Carmichael, *A Chance to Die*, and the many missionary biographies written for children.

## TWENTIETH-CENTURY CHANGES

In the 20th century, the way missionaries talked about their experiences began to change. Due to advances in medicine, technology, and culture, missionaries were living longer and editing their own works. Some memoirists, free from the oversight of mission boards, permitted

themselves greater honesty about their missions.

Isobel Kuhn spent more than 20 years with China Inland Mission, and wrote 10 autobiographical works in the 1950s, near the end of her life. She speaks forthrightly about her agnosticism, pride, bitterness, and marital conflict. As Ruth A. Tucker points out in *Guardians of the Great Commission*, even if "such marital strife is routine for missionaries, it is rarely attested to." Kuhn's books include accounts of converts who struggled to maintain their newfound faith or even renounced it completely. While such experiences are common on the mission field, they aren't always mentioned in prayer letters sent back home.

Elisabeth Elliot, probably the best-known missionary writer of the 20th century, who passed away this June, sometimes wrote candidly about the complexities of cross-cultural work. Books focusing on her martyred husband, Jim, tend to follow long-established patterns of the genre—valorizing the missionary and emphasizing trust in God over doubt. But accounts of her own life are different. *These Strange Ashes* (1975) covers her first year in missions, spent in language study with an Ecuadorian tribe. She's frank about loneliness, doubts, and struggles with self-discipline. After the death of her friend Maruja, she writes that she "could not escape the thought that it was God who had failed." Later, when her language informant dies, she starts questioning her own calling.

Elliot's darker take comes through most clearly in *No Graven Image* (1966), a novel about a young woman spending her first year of missionary work doing translation among the Quechua

Indians in the mountains of Ecuador. (This sounds familiar.) Humorous, engaging, and often brilliantly satirical, the book critiques much of the missions rhetoric of the mid-20th century, and it doesn't end on a clearly positive note. Many missionary leaders sought to keep it out of bookstores; some vendors flatly refused to sell it. Nor was the book well-received by missionaries in Ecuador. By and large, no-holds-barred accounts (like those written by Elliot and Kuhn) never enjoyed the popularity of more uplifting narratives.

There is a place for inspirational and even idealized missionary stories in stirring up passion for God's glory and justice among the nations. But there are dangers in glamorizing missionary heroes, particularly an overweening confidence in what missionary work can accomplish. Rachel Stone, who spent time with a Presbyterian mission agency in Malawi, has warned against promising, for example, to change a child's whole life for \$2 a day. "When your feet hit the ground and you see that, in fact, your money has lined the pockets of middlemen and women . . . cynicism and even despair may follow," she wrote recently.

Instead, Stone asks, what if we told stories of well-meaning aid and development projects that nevertheless failed? That "might be the best way to build hopeful skepticism—and the best antidote to a well-intentioned, but quite possibly wrongheaded, triumphalism."

## BLOGGING THE TRUTH

We now have a generation of Christians hungry to tell authentic tales that face up squarely to frustration and failure. Witness books like *Runaway*



Elisabeth Elliot in Ecuador



Jonathan Hollingsworth in Cameroon

ELLIOT (PAGES 76, 78) • THE ARCHIVES OF THE BILLY GRAHAM CENTER, WHEATON, ILLINOIS (COLLECTION 278). HOLLINGSWORTH (PAGES 76, 78) • COURTESY OF AMY AND JONATHAN HOLLINGSWORTH

# If missionaries are treated like super-Christians, they can grow arrogant. If they fall short of expectations, they might become depressed.

*Radical*, the 2015 memoir of a “failed” missionary from mother-and-son duo Amy and Jonathan Hollingsworth. But the changing rhetoric is due in large part to the advent of social media and Internet communication. In unedited and unmediated forms, missionaries can tell their stories directly to a wider audience than ever before.

At the website A Life Overseas, more than 20 missionaries and expats regularly write about their cross-cultural lives in ways that poke holes in missionary folklore. In one post, Rachel Pieh Jones doubts the insistence of Hudson Taylor and David Livingstone that they never made sacrifices. All missionaries make sacrifices, she argues. For her, sometimes that feels like “not being sure you will get through the day.”

In another post, Danielle Wheeler describes how living in a small home in a polluted city of 22 million left her and her husband feeling like their “souls were withering” and their relationships with God were dying. At another collective, Velvet Ashes, many women write openly about their difficulties. “The cost is so very real,” writes Patty Stallings. Jessica Hoover shares about missionaries’ need for mental-health counseling. Commenters chime in with stories about postpartum depression overseas and the ways that institutions sometimes protect their systems more than their people.

Some missionaries openly regard the established in-field rhetoric as dangerous. Jonathan Trotter, a missionary with Team Expansion in Southeast Asia, challenges “The Idolatry of Missions” in a post viewed nearly 25,000 times. Idealizing missionaries as the church’s “special forces” and “cream of the crop” is actually harmful, Trotter writes. If they come to

believe they are super-Christians, they can grow arrogant. Or, if they fall short of high expectations, they might become discouraged or depressed. Meanwhile, Trotter says, we are prone to miss the glory of faith-filled older people and believers with “regular jobs” sitting in the pews. Unmediated blogs can bring the freedom of grace for missionaries and senders alike.

Marilyn Gardner, a nurse who spent 10 years in Egypt and Pakistan, praises the level of accountability the Internet brings to missionary storytelling. Gone are the days when missionaries could spiritualize a relationship for a prayer letter. Now, she says, they have to be honest, or people will find out. In the same way, the public nature of missionary lives encourages treating people as people, not as items on a conversion checklist. If the people you’re writing home about are also Facebook friends, there’s no room for self-glorifying embellishment.

Sometimes the Internet helps to expose scams. In *Miracle on Voodoo Mountain* (2015), Megan Boudreaux writes about visiting the Son of God Orphanage in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, while working to establish her own nonprofit in the city’s suburbs. After multiple visits, she realized the orphanage was trafficking children. “Pastor Joe” collected money from US churches that sent short-term teams, but didn’t provide food, clothing, or basic medical care for the children. Boudreaux organized a sting operation that gathered evidence of his offering to sell children. Using the power of social media, Christians petitioned CNN to expose Pastor Joe. CNN’s subsequent investigation helped pressure the Haitian government to shut down the orphanage.

## REAL STRUGGLES AND JOYS

Despite these changes, missionaries still feel pressure to communicate in a certain way—one that leads churches and individuals to continue their financial support. Jamie Wright, who runs the popular blog *Jamie the Very Worst Missionary*, blames this dynamic on sending churches. She writes that missionaries can “feel roped in to this wordplay because the church insists on overly spiritualized reports from missionaries whose work they don’t entirely understand.” Afraid of financial instability, missionaries downplay their struggles or just how mundane a lot of their work is.

We need to hear stories about the real struggles and joys of missions work. These kinds of stories have the power to improve our missiology; unless we are honest about the challenges missionaries face, we won’t find realistic solutions. But if we are forthright about what the job requires, we’ll stand a better chance of attracting the right people and preparing them adequately for long-term service, rather than sending them home early, disillusioned and depressed.

As Amy Carmichael wrote in *Things as They Are: Mission Work in Southern India* (1903), a book criticized at the time for its negative portrayals of missions,

It is more important that you should know about the reverses than about the successes of the war. We shall have all eternity to celebrate the victories, but we have only the few hours before sunset in which to win them. We are not winning them as we should, because the fact of the reverses is so little realized, and the needed reinforcements are not forthcoming, as they would be if the position were thoroughly understood. . . . So we have tried to tell you the truth—the uninteresting, unromantic truth.

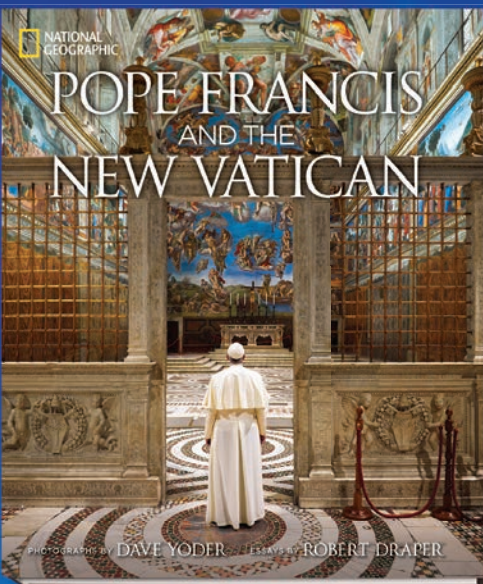
That passage wasn’t in the biography I read as a child. But even at the turn of the century, Carmichael knew something had to change in the way we talked about missions. Now we have a chance to realize her vision. **CT**

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**AMY PETERSON** teaches ESL and works for the Honors Program at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana. She taught ESL for two years in Southeast Asia.



## THIS POPE BRINGS HOPE



The “people’s Pope” electrifies the world with his message of mercy and humility, energizing not only Catholics but people of every faith.

National Geographic goes behind-the-scenes of the new papacy with exclusive access. Award-winning photographer David Yoder captures intimate moments in never-before-seen photographs. Essays by journalist Robert Draper insightfully cover Pope Francis’s personal story and the heart of his ministry. This glorious celebration of the new pontiff marks his first visit to the U.S. and is a lasting keepsake of a truly historic event.

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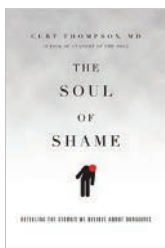


# New & Noteworthy

Compiled by Matt Reynolds

“In our deliverance from shame, we are not simply liberated to be nicer, happier people; rather, we are redeemed to live into multiple roles of calling—from parenting to teaching to engineering—with joyful creativity.”

~ from *The Soul of Shame* by Curt Thompson, MD

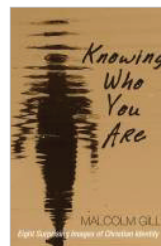


## THE SOUL OF SHAME

**Retelling the Stories We Believe about Ourselves**

**CURT THOMPSON, MD** (INTERVARSITY PRESS)

Where does our shame originate? And how can we loosen its oppressive hold on our lives? Thompson, a psychiatrist and founder of the organization Being Known, looks to Scripture and the field of interpersonal neurobiology for insights. “Shame,” he proposes, “is not just a consequence of something our first parents did in the Garden of Eden. It is the emotional weapon that evil uses to (1) corrupt our relationships with God and each other, and (2) disintegrate any and all gifts of vocational vision and creativity,” including “any area of endeavor that promotes goodness, beauty, and joy in and for the lives of others.” *The Soul of Shame* gets inside how this process happens—and how it can be reversed.

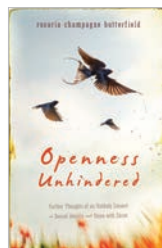


## KNOWING WHO YOU ARE

**Eight Surprising Images of Christian Identity**

**MALCOLM GILL** (WIPF & STOCK)

“One of the ways the Bible helps us think about the Christian life is by providing a series of images from everyday life that reveals truth about our identity,” writes Gill, a minister and lecturer at Australia’s Sydney Missionary and Bible College. “Jesus, along with the New Testament authors, regularly used familiar metaphors in their teaching to illustrate what it meant to be a disciple of Christ.” *Knowing Who You Are* begins with reflecting on what it means to embrace the label “Christian” before exploring eight metaphors for disciples: pilgrim, citizen, combatant, farmer, steward, soldier, laborer, and sheep.



## OPENNESS UNHINDERED

**Further Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert on Sexual Identity and Union with Christ**

**ROSARIA BUTTERFIELD** (CROWN & COVENANT)

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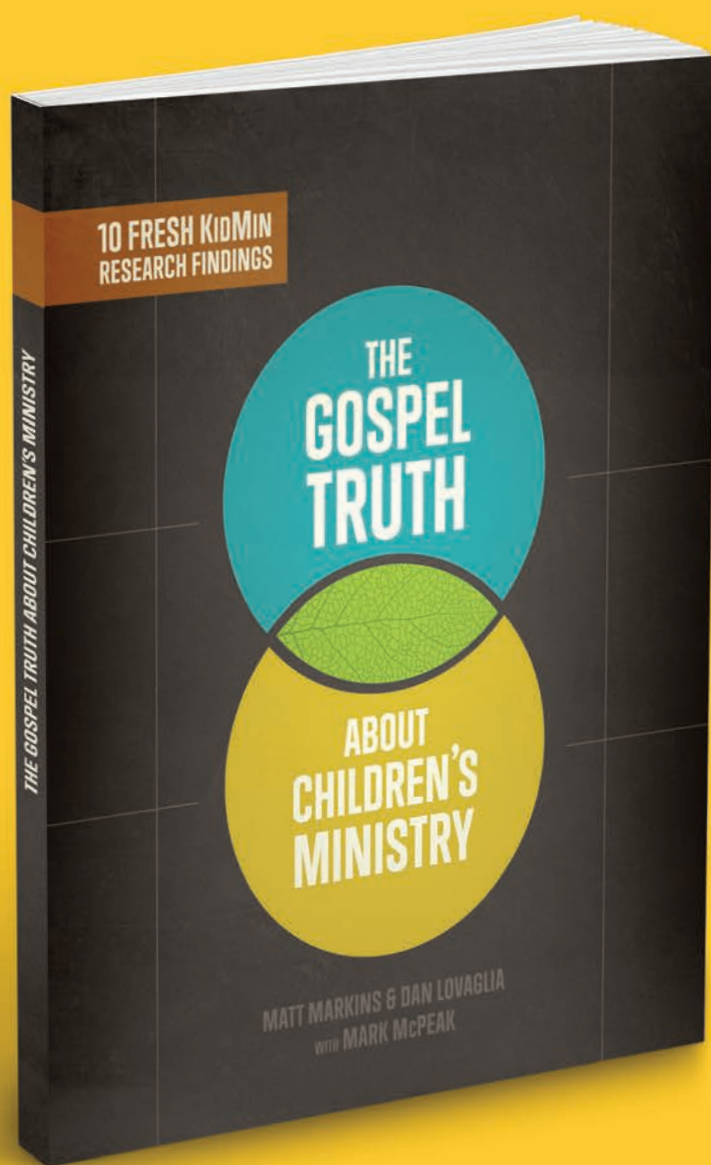
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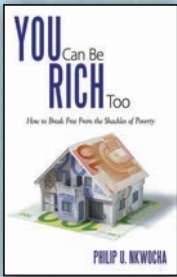
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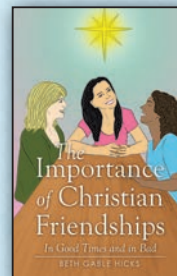


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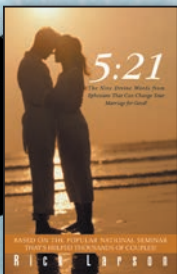


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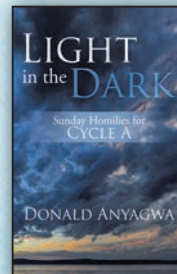


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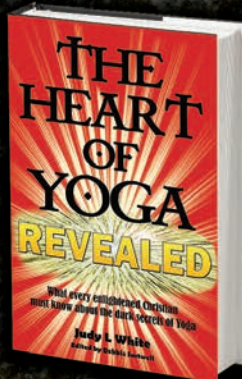
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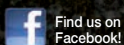
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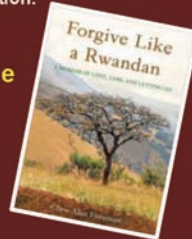
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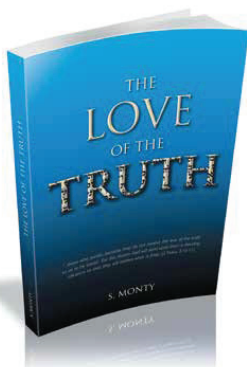
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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 88

germinating within me. Seeing my inventive mother baking cakes to make ends meet diverted my attention from God to money. I was fed tales of my grandfather's rise to riches. He had built an entire office block in Nairobi, and was brazen enough to buy a large house opposite the British High Commission. I wanted to be just as audacious and successful. With this in mind, I dabbled in selling alcohol in school under the radar. Though my business was short-lived, I had my first taste of making money, and it tasted good.

In 1986, my parents scraped together their hard-earned savings and sent my sister and me back to the UK to continue our studies, returning themselves some months later. Though I had arrived with a strong African accent, I quickly discovered the power of generosity to earn me friends. I put to use the money I earned as a part-time cleaner to buy rounds of beer and share cigarettes. Money was a real-life magnet. As I played the generosity card, I began to appreciate the power of money to gain control.

This fascination increased after my parents separated. Money worries had ripped a hole in their marriage, completely breaking their will and energy to hold things together. Deeply upset, I was adamant this would never happen to me.

I chose to study English at university, going on to teach English briefly before becoming a drama teacher. But then came a realization: I wanted success and recognition, and I wanted money! So I turned my hand to writing. Within months, my debut play, *BBA and Proud* (about a group of mixed-up British-born Asian kids caught in the East-West dichotomy), won an Edinburgh Festival Fringe first prize and went on national tour. Then came a contract to write with my wife the Emmy-nominated children's television series *My Life as a Popat*. One would think winning a BAFTA (British Academy of Film and Television Arts) award or being flown to New York for the Emmys would have brought great excitement. In reality it left me numb.

Then the break I was craving suddenly arrived. I had taken a gamble on buying my first property in a scabby part of South London. As house prices rose and the street became more desirable, I

sold it for more than double the purchase price. Having caught the property bug, I quickly invested my profits into buying apartments to rent.

My eye was caught by the idea of investing in "off-plan": buying a property while it was still on the architect's drawing board, then, thanks to rising property prices, selling it at a profit before it had even been built. Before I knew it, I had a queue of investors wanting a slice of the property pie. I was an overnight sensation. One moment I was dabbling in a few properties, the next I was buying whole blocks of apartments across the UK.

The more media recognition my company received, the greater the risks I took. I was on a treadmill moving at a reckless pace. I had become addicted to risk-taking; growing success failed to bring me the satisfaction I craved. My wife bore the brunt of my addiction. I was spending more time away from home, eating out at expensive restaurants, spending thousands on entertaining clients, and ultimately cheating on my wife. I had become a bad husband.

#### UNLIKELY TO LIVE

The credit crunch of 2008 was quick and brutal. With some 900 apartments coming up for imminent completion, I suddenly found myself in the firing line, facing a queue of creditors demanding their money. Any value in my business disappeared overnight as the property developers stripped the company of its cash. The next two years were the hardest of my life as our family adjusted to the dramatic change in our finances.

That same year, my 2-year-old son became critically ill. Ishaan was a sickly child and had been hospitalized many times with severe breathing difficulties. Now, with the nebulizer failing, he was rushed into resuscitation. Within minutes

the ER teemed with doctors and nurses fighting for his life. His airways shut, and he was intubated to keep him alive. He was later transferred to a hospital in London.

Over the next four days, my wife and I wept uncontrollably. An American couple whom we had recently befriended began praying for Ishaan. They even got their families' churches in the United States to pray for him. On the fourth day in the hospital, the doctor stated that it was unlikely that my son would open his eyes anytime soon. We were distraught.

But as the consultant continued doing her ward round on that fourth day, Ishaan suddenly sat bolt upright in bed. The only explanation was that we had witnessed a miracle.

After all the elation and joy, I vividly recall turning to my wife and committing to attend our friends' church to thank them for their prayer support. A few weeks later we did just that. Yet how was I to know that I would feel the urge to go back again? And how was I to know that one Sunday a few weeks later, I would feel stirred to walk to the front and give my life to Jesus, the One who gave his life for me?

For months I sat at the foot of the cross in the church, weeping. How could he save a wretched sinner like me? I couldn't get my head around the immensity of God's grace. After I gave my life to Christ, my wife didn't recognize me; she felt like she was married to a new man. I found myself saying sorry, becoming gentler and caring for others, laying aside the pursuit of money in order to serve God. I remain involved in real estate, but on a smaller scale. Part of my week is spent working for the Evangelical Alliance-UK, where I lead the South Asian Forum team to equip the church to reach South Asians of other faiths.

In those early days I often sensed God saying that he had heard the prayers of our Christian friends and had saved my son, but that *his Son* he had not rescued and instead had allowed to pass through death. His Son died so that I—indeed all who will believe—may have life. **CT**

**Our son's airways shut, and he was intubated to keep him alive. Over the next four days, my wife and I wept uncontrollably.**

**MANOJ RAITHATHA** leads the South Asian Forum team at the UK Evangelical Alliance. His autobiography, *Filthy Rich*, is distributed in the United States through Kregel.



## TESTIMONY



# From Rags to Real Riches

After years of making my own luck, my life was interrupted by the power of prayer.

By Manoj Raithatha

**E**veryone loves a good rags-to-riches story, and mine is unusual—the humble teacher who becomes a property tycoon by buying up blocks of apartments across England.

At the pinnacle of my real-estate career, the customers were lining up, credit was easy, and I was becoming filthy rich. It was everything I was supposed to ever want.

Like good Indians, my parents raised me and my sister as Hindus. Our family regularly visited the Hare Krishna temple, and for a time a corner of my bedroom was made into a small temple where my father placed Hindu gods and worshiped them. But the economic downturn of the early 1980s had left my father out of work. In 1981, our household uprooted from London to start a new life in Kenya, where my father had been offered a steady job. When we arrived in Nairobi, my parents enrolled my sister and me into a Christian primary school.

With small classes and an emphasis on perseverance, Cavina School was no place for the shy. Before long I found

myself engaging in school life as well as becoming fascinated with Christianity. I was intrigued by the teaching that God took upon himself the judgment of our sin by dying on a cross. So moved was I by this message that I regularly argued with my father that there had to be something in this Jesus character. I could see it in the way my headmaster talked about him, like they were the closest of friends.

While my fascination with the Christian faith continued throughout my primary schooling, I never made a commitment to Jesus. On my final day at Cavina, I was given a biography of the great evangelist George Whitefield. But it would be more than 25 years before I would read it.

## CATCHING THE MONEY BUG

In truth, my father had to do little to curb my interest in Christianity; it waned of its own accord once I reached secondary school. With financial pressures growing at home, a small seed of enterprise began

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