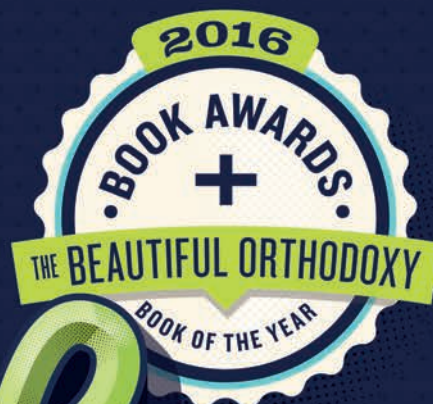


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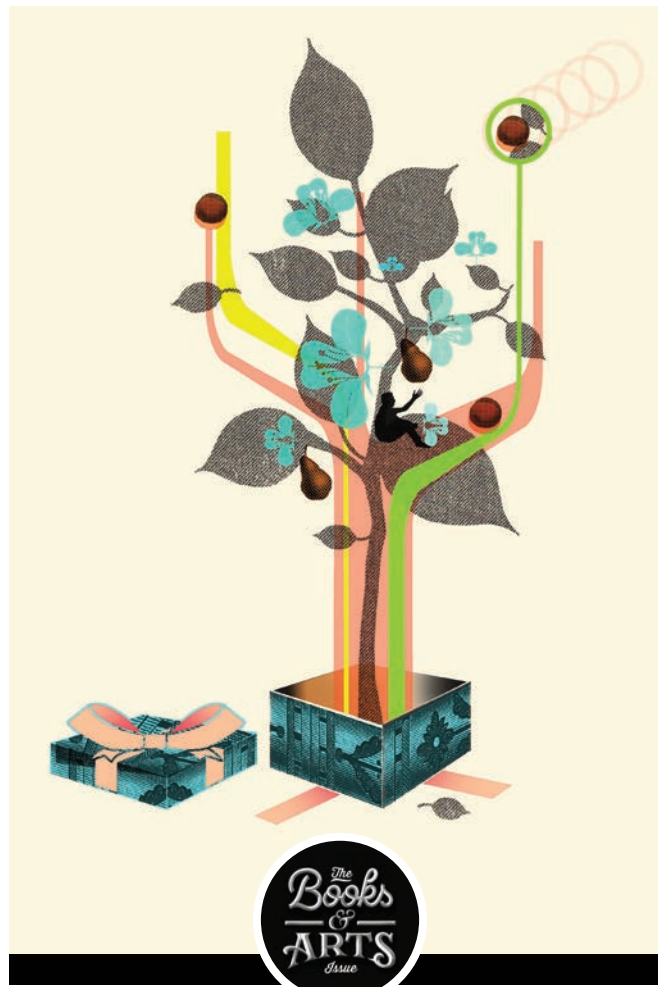
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**"Our hope is not based on our own abilities to act or to change the world."** p.67



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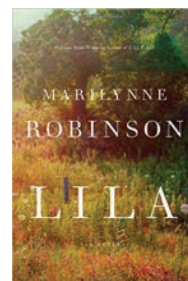
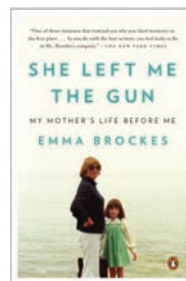
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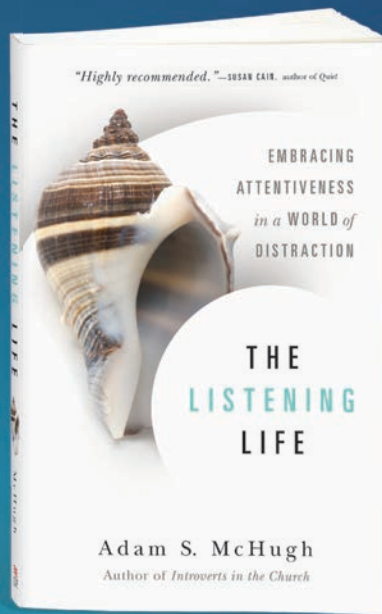
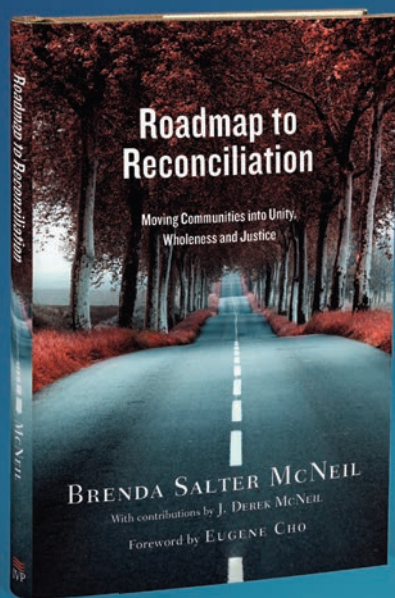
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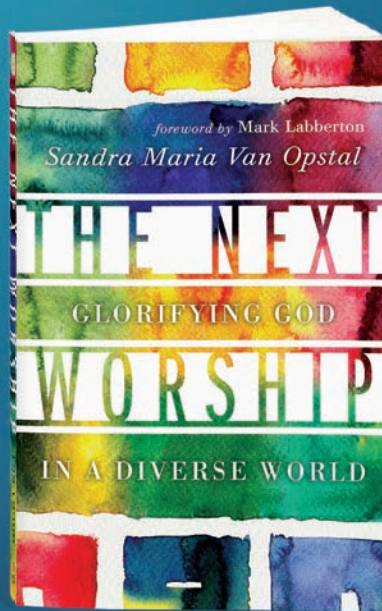
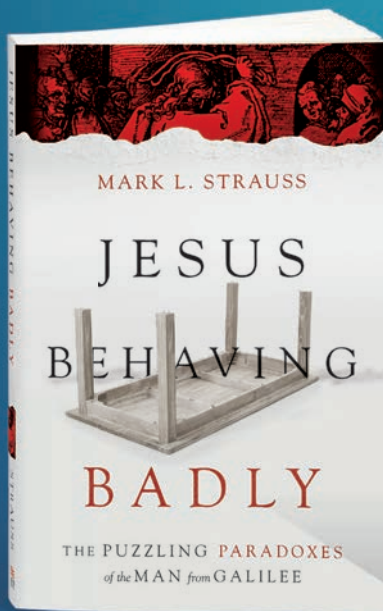
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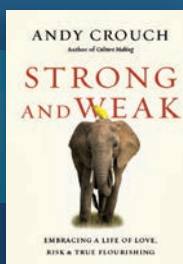
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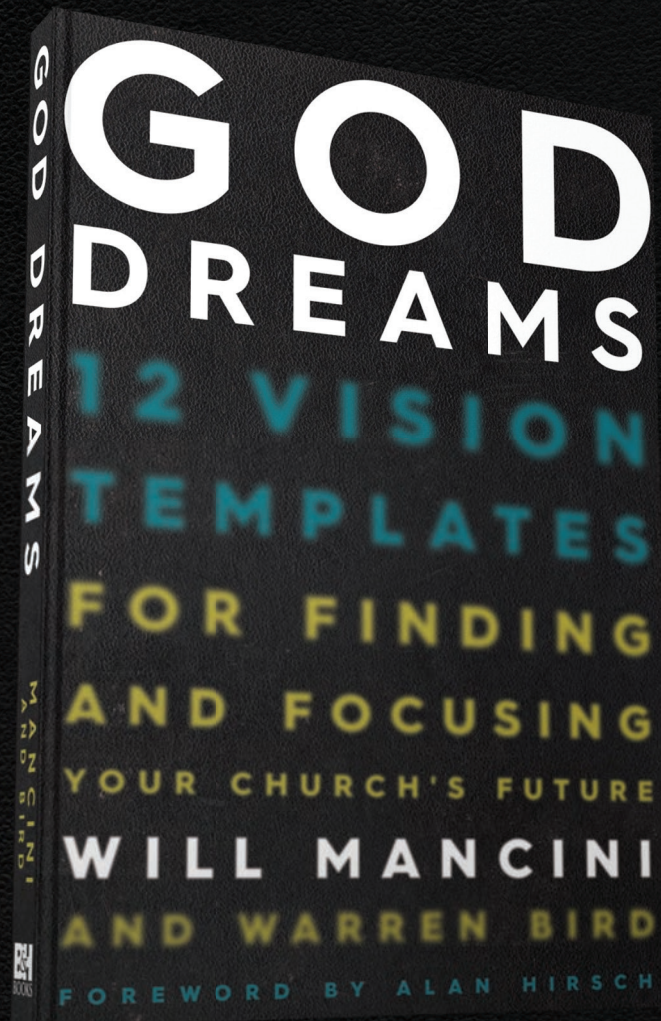


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# EDITOR'S NOTE

**H**ave you been to a Christian bookstore recently? What a cultural wasteland. Novels with paper-thin characters, absurd plots, and execrable writing. Pragmatic, paint-by-numbers books that promise success in relationships, business, and, of course, dieting. Cheap, sentimental gifts that nobody needs. And don't even get me started on the "lad magazines," with their "provocative" covers hidden behind flimsy pieces of cardboard.

Oh, wait, did I say "Christian bookstore"? I meant to say "airport bookstore."

If you think the Christian subculture is shallow, I suggest you pay a visit to mainstream culture. Turn on cable TV to a random channel, and you're likely to encounter dialogue that would curl an English major's toes. Choose the finest, Oscar-contending film at your local multiplex theater, and you'll sit through a dozen puerile trailers before the feature begins.

It's not Christian culture that is especially shallow. It's our Western, popular, mass-mediated culture. Evangelical Christians in the United States have a protean ability to pursue relevance, and our impulse to popularize has brought people to faith and sustained faith where it might have been lost. But even Christian popularizers recognize the problem. We each have our favorite Christian examples in film or music or art or porcelain figurines that make us embarrassed to be associated with the name.

But we also have living writers, musicians, visual artists, and filmmakers who love Jesus Christ and are making extraordinary works of art. Some are well known and celebrated, others obscure and neglected. Some of them, like the Danish artist Peter Brandes ("Dwelling in Light Accessible," page 40), are all too little known in the United States but are renowned elsewhere.

Then there is our cultural heritage. At a recent conference, former CT columnist N. D. Wilson pointed to two millennia of extraordinary art, created across several continents and many cultures, explicitly in the name of and for the worship of Christ. He then asked: Why shouldn't this count in our assessment of whether Christian faith leads to cultural excellence? Of course it does. And even in our secular age, an extraordinary proportion of our most-loved stories—The Lord of the Rings and Narnia, of course, but also Harry Potter, Divergent, even The Hunger Games—have been created by writers shaped by Christian faith.

So when it occurred to us that we could dedicate this issue of CT to books and the arts, we jumped at the chance. People of Christian faith are still creating and curating some beautiful and enduring work—and that is worth celebrating.



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**ANDY CROUCH** *Executive Editor*



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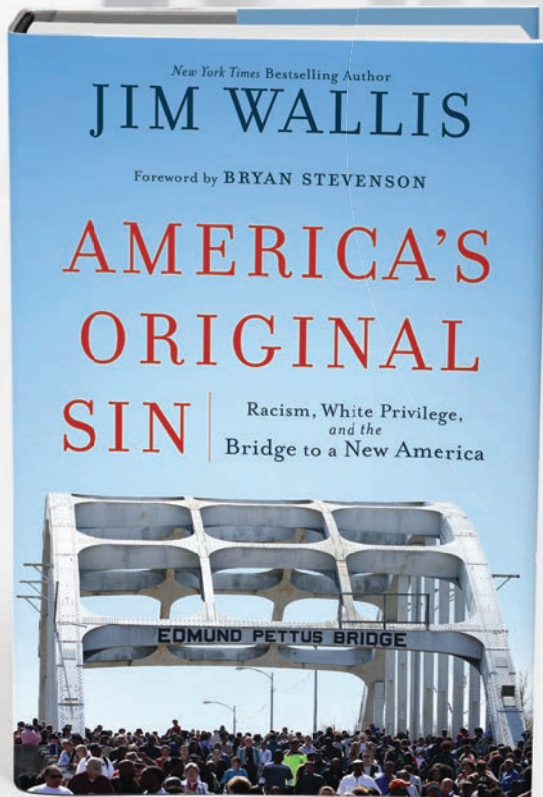


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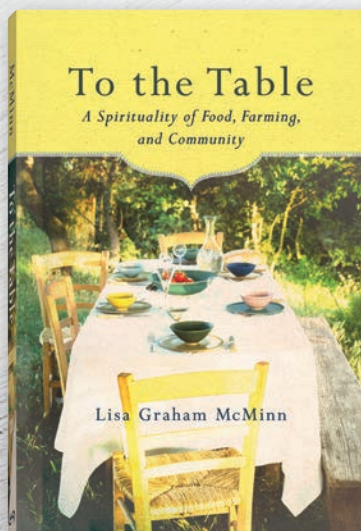
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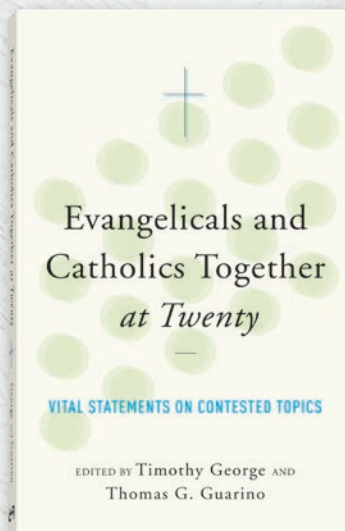
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# REPLY ALL

RESPONSES TO OUR NOVEMBER ISSUE

## ***The Power of Our Weakness* p. 40**

[Michael Gerson and Peter Wehner's] hopes for the future are commendable: working on social projects alongside those who support gay marriage, strengthening marriage, encouraging teenagers to abstain from sexual activity, and defending human dignity. But all of these must be Spirit-directed activities that originate in the gospel. Sexual ethics spring from believing that Jesus loves all unconditionally and is an advocate for every human being. Jesus died for all and is therefore the quintessential defender of human dignity. Gospel-motivated social engagement has the better hope of the gospel being passed on to following generations.

**JOHN TORGERSON** Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin



Gerson and Wehner mention the “Wilberforce Option,” but it’s a misrepresentation of this abolitionist movement. The abolitionists had zero tolerance for sin while implementing political change. The Wilberforce Option is not a social tolerance posture but a holy and restless striving to apply God’s will in society regardless of the decisions by governments and men in general. May the Lord raise up many Wilberforces in America, and may we be counted among them.

**CORNELIUS HEGEMAN** Miami, Florida

Gerson and Wehner too easily dismiss the importance of what we do sexually.... The sexual revolution is not just about the licentious freedom to follow our impulses among consenting adults. It is a radical revisioning of what a human being is, namely: a sophisticated beast that is radically autonomous, even self-creating, in a godless universe. Thus, we don’t receive or discover our moral framework. We simply will whatever morality we fancy. We will even ourselves, our identity. So, for example, children are not born boy or girl, but

rather at some time choose to identify as one or the other. There is no sovereign Creator God, only sovereignty over oneself and thus sexual autonomy.

The sexual dimension of the culture wars is not ultimately about “sins of the flesh” but about what it means to be human. If Christians don’t speak up on this matter, there is almost no one else who will. It is hard to speak in defense of people’s humanity when the very concept of “human” is in flux.

**D. C. INNES** in *WORLD* magazine, “Sex and the City of Man”

Gerson and Wehner’s article on the Wilberforce Option is a welcome invitation to rethink our evangelical reaction to our nation’s so-called “cultural shift.” However, we Christians need to go one step further and walk a mile in the shoes of our gay brothers and sisters, many of whom are our own sons and daughters, friends and neighbors.

They are men and women whom Christ loves and died for. A good number have grown up in the church and are hanging



*My fearful flesh says one thing about the refugees. My spirit ought to say another thing as a follower of Jesus.*

**@ANDYOETH**

“A Church Welcome for the Tired, the Poor” p. 33

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on to their faith in spite of ugly public rhetoric and continued rejection. For those who turn away from their faith, it is often we who must answer to Jesus for sending them away. For those who do not yet know Jesus, will they be drawn to him by the self-righteous who declare, "I'm a Christian, so I won't bake a cake for you"? Or might they be drawn to our Savior and his sacrificial love (as one blogger suggested) by the Christian who says, "I'll bake two cakes for you" in the same spirit that Jesus said, "If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles" (Matt. 5:41, NLT)?

**NETA JACKSON** Evanston, Illinois

## A Church Welcome for the Tired, the Poor p. 33

Thank you for this excellent article on how Christians can shine their lights for the gospel.

**@TRUDYPWHITLOCK**

Disappointed in comments here by @FranklinGraham4. Okay to send 1,000s of shoeboxes to Muslims but not welcome them?

**@NICHOLASAMOORE**

## Lead Like Jesus—Really p. 36

Christena Cleveland seems determined to cast Jesus in the image of a social activist. She assumes that the amount of power is fixed, so that leaders must give up power in order for followers to gain it. This contradicts the radical message Jesus brought. He gave us power and authority; he did not reduce his own. This he demonstrated not by his death but by his resurrection, which ushers us into new life.

A more powerful demonstration of servant leadership in the Christian community would be to practice forgiveness and love as a diverse community and let the natural outcome be a righteous "kingdom" come among us rather than seeking to adjust societal structures inherited from our prior "lost" condition.

**RICHARD OGBURN** Newark, Delaware

Cleveland's article extolling servant leadership rightly points out that we're living in a world in which all things are not equal, "especially in matters of race, class, and gender." Unfortunately, Cleveland

also raises issues that reveal some deeply held assumptions.

She implies that a pastor is inconsistent if he assumes a role of servant leader and then makes an executive decision. But it's one thing to deplore inequality in matters of race, class, and gender; it's another to imply that a pastor is behaving in a sub-Christian manner if he makes an executive decision.

**JOHN HARUTUNIAN**

Newtonville, Massachusetts



## When Islands of Meaning Sink Beneath Us p. 50

I'm overwhelmed reading Doug Groothuis's extremely well-written article in November's CT. He bared his heart and soul in a most penetrating manner. Doug has every right to lament and cry out in anguish. I can't imagine the physical and emotional deprivation he has endured.

**PHIL PARSHALL** Sebring, Florida

Ever since reading Groothuis's article, I have been haunted by it. I too have lived with a spouse who had Primary Progressive Aphasia and have had to say goodbye for ten years to pieces of this man I have loved. He was a well-educated pastor who was bright and articulate, so as he lost the ability to express himself, it was painful and difficult for both of us.

Through it all, I have found redemptive opportunities to come alongside others in similar pain. I have found great comfort in what Dallas Willard calls a "conversational relationship with God." I am able to say with the hymn writer, "It is well with my soul." This would be my prayer for Dr. Groothuis.

**CAROL WINDHAM** St. Paul, Minnesota

We all need a rich theology of suffering and lament to guide us when life crushes.

**@BRC2TIM215**



## A Peculiar Display p. 74

Very well-written reflection. That was indeed an amazing concert experience. And pivotal album. Nothing like it since.

**@BENJIGOODRICH**

I purchased *Jesus Freak* on a whim. I listened to it on repeat. I became a Christian shortly thereafter. #JesusSaves

**@DOUGHANKINS**

## CIRCULATION STATEMENT

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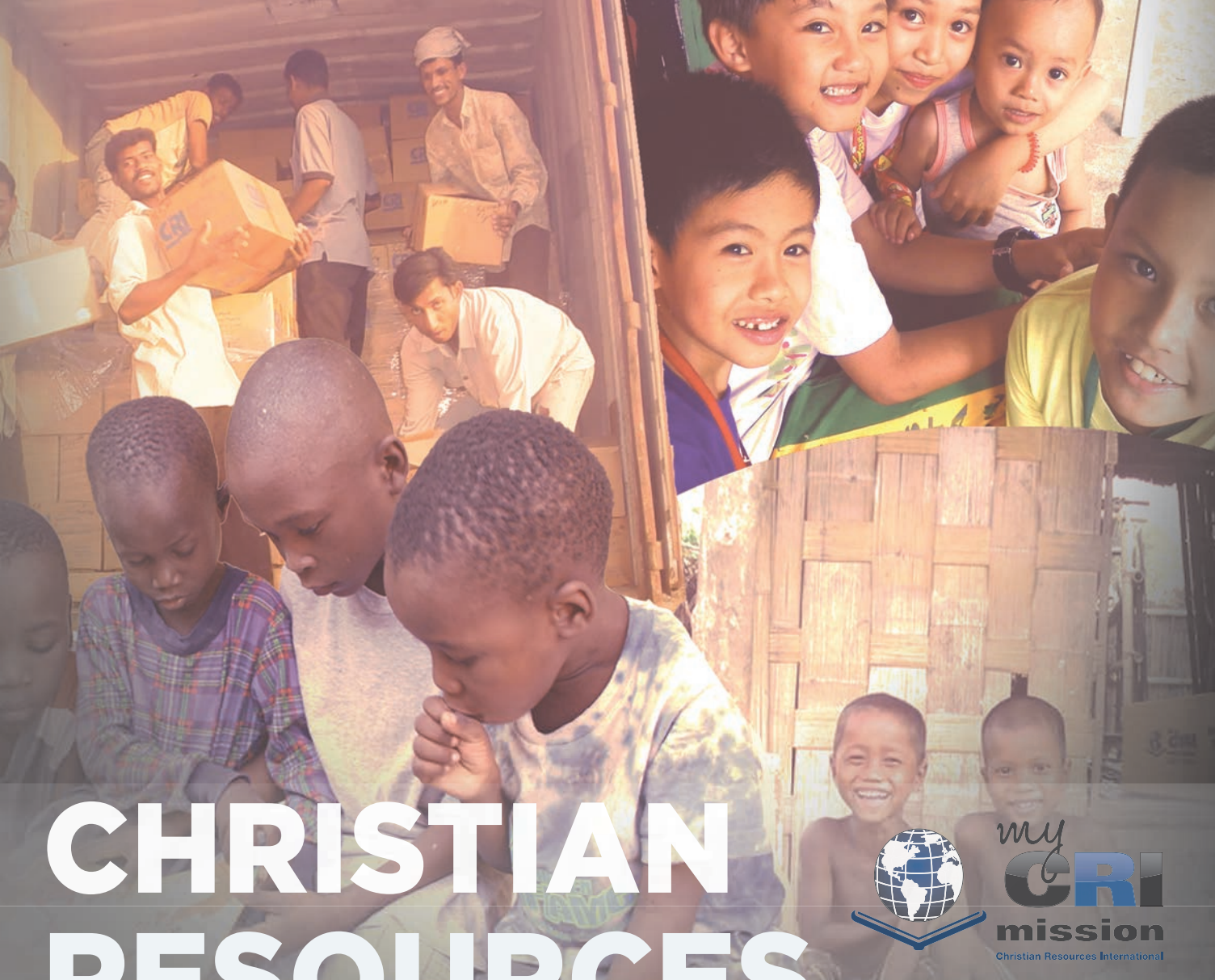
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## NEWS



WITNESS



## FORGIVER FETED

**INDIA:** In 1999, dozens of Hindu extremists attacked Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two sons in their sleep, burning them alive. Yet his widow, Gladys, forgave the attackers and continued the couple's ministry to lepers. In November, she received the prestigious Mother Teresa Memorial International Award for Social Justice. Previous winners include the Dalai Lama, Malala Yousafzai, and "Machine Gun Preacher" Sam Childers.

PHOTO BY STUART FREEDMAN

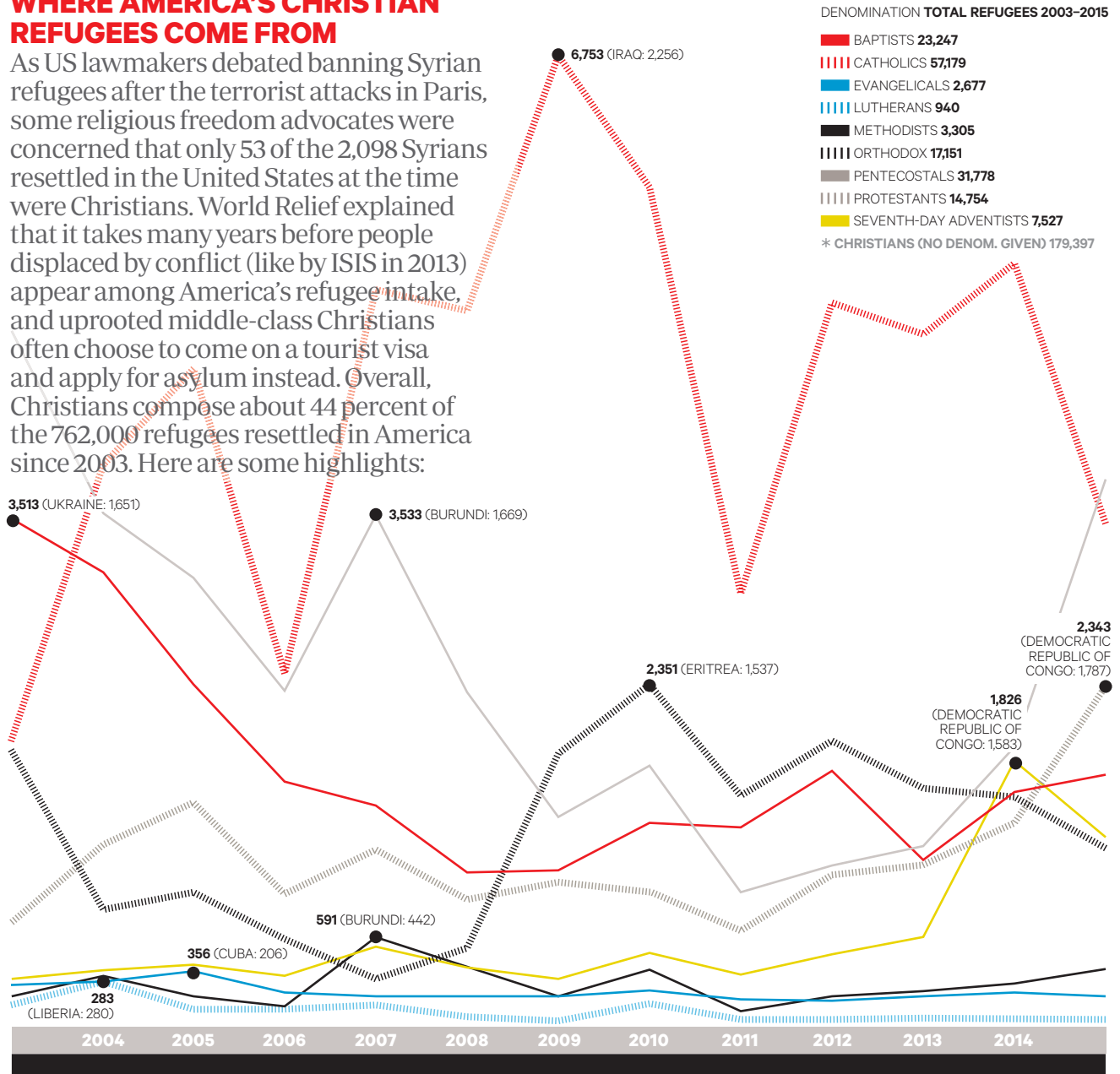






## WHERE AMERICA'S CHRISTIAN REFUGEES COME FROM

As US lawmakers debated banning Syrian refugees after the terrorist attacks in Paris, some religious freedom advocates were concerned that only 53 of the 2,098 Syrians resettled in the United States at the time were Christians. World Relief explained that it takes many years before people displaced by conflict (like by ISIS in 2013) appear among America's refugee intake, and uprooted middle-class Christians often choose to come on a tourist visa and apply for asylum instead. Overall, Christians compose about 44 percent of the 762,000 refugees resettled in America since 2003. Here are some highlights:



### Biggest apology for Christian persecution ever

In "an astounding admission," 145 leaders representing two billion Christians formally apologized for their denominations having abused each other in the past. Delegates from the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), the Pentecostal World Fellowship, the World Council of Churches, and the Vatican met to discuss the abuse of Christians under militant

Islam, but first acknowledged their own sins. While Catholic and Orthodox Christians have marginalized and denied civil rights to evangelicals, evangelicals have acted as if the historic churches knew little about the gospel and were in need of conversion, wrote WEA Global Ambassador Brian Stiller. The gathering, held in Albania, echoed apologies made by Pope Francis for Catholics' former persecution of Pentecostals and Waldensians.

### Saeed Abedini's wife halts her advocacy over alleged abuse

In two emails to supporters, the wife of imprisoned Iranian American pastor Saeed Abedini said their marriage has included "physical, emotional, psychological, and sexual abuse." Naghmeh Abedini, who has spent three years advocating for Saeed's release from an Iranian prison, said she "cannot live a lie anymore" and will "take a break from everything and

seek the Lord on how to move forward.” Attorneys for Saeed, who has been repeatedly beaten and blocked from medical treatment, said Naghmeh’s revelations don’t change the fact that Saeed is in a dangerous prison because of his faith. “Because of that, we were working to secure his release,” attorney Jay Sekulow said. “None of that has changed.”

## ‘Evangelical’ gets new definition

A two-year collaboration between the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and LifeWay Research has resulted in a new way to identify evangelicals in surveys. In what might be the first research-driven “creed,” the report identifies four key statements that define evangelical beliefs: “The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe”; “It is very important for me personally to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior”; “Jesus Christ’s death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin”; and “Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God’s free gift of eternal salvation.” Only those who strongly agree with each statement should be considered “evangelical by belief,” said the NAE. President Leith Anderson said the new method should help to consolidate evangelicals, often split in surveys by race or politics, and lead to more complete results about their views.

## Supreme Court takes pro-life cases

Seven lawsuits involving hospitals, colleges, and charities that object to providing contraception through their health-insurance plans have finally risen to the US Supreme Court, which has agreed to consider them all. The justices will consolidate the cases and narrow the question to whether the regulations of the Affordable Care Act violate the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. In the same session, the Court will decide whether two requirements in Texas—that abortion clinics meet standards for outpatient surgery

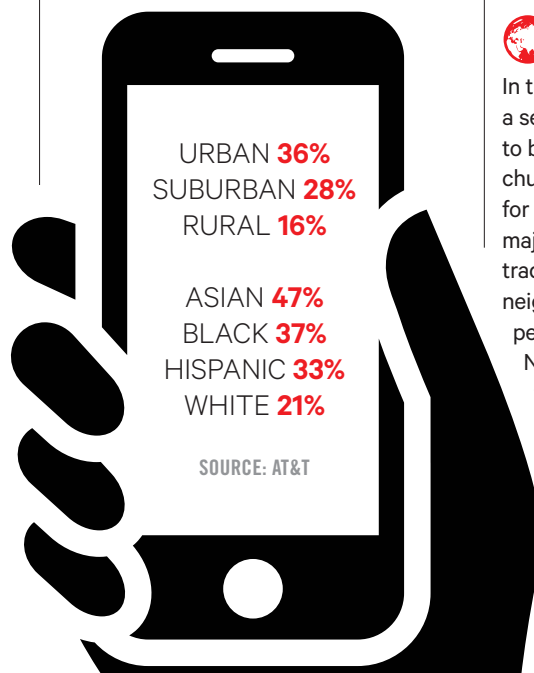
centers, and that abortion doctors have admitting privileges at nearby hospitals—place an “undue burden” on women. This is the first major abortion case to come before the court since its 2007 decision to uphold the partial-birth abortion ban.

## INDONESIA ‘Religious harmony’ law shutters 1,000 churches

A decade ago, Indonesia passed a law requiring religious minority groups to collect signatures from the local majority group before building their own houses of worship. The bill was touted by lawmakers as a long-term solution to religious conflicts in a country that is 87 percent Muslim and 10 percent Christian. But since then, more than 1,000 Christian churches have closed, and others were prevented

## CELL PHONES IN CHURCH

One-quarter of Americans who attend church at least monthly now use a mobile device to “connect with faith or inspiration” during the service. Half look up the Scriptures or songs, and one-third take notes. But one-quarter of Americans also admit to using cell phones for unrelated activities such as texting, posting on social media, watching a video, or playing a game. Here’s how many confess in each of the following groups:



from being built. Christian leaders have complained that even though they fulfilled the signature requirements, local officials still denied them permits. Potential breakthroughs: The Indonesian Supreme Court ruled in favor of a suburban church outside Jakarta in 2011, and a Muslim leader identified by Open Doors as the “key person behind the church closures” passed away in October.

## MYANMAR Christians not celebrating free elections just yet

Millions of Burmese celebrated the end of decades of military dictatorship after Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi’s party won Myanmar’s first free elections. But Christians were more cautious. As Partners Relief and Development founder Steve Gaumer told CT, “The big question is: Will Myanmar’s dictators really follow through on their promises of reform?” The military regime had long been at odds with ethnic minorities, who contain the majority of the Southeast Asian nation’s Christians. And the elections haven’t exactly split the country open: the military still controls a quarter of parliamentary seats, and its clashes with ethnic minorities have yet to abate. While the elections can be considered encouraging, Open Doors analyst Thomas Muller told World Watch Monitor, “It’s too early to draw conclusions about the full outcome.”

## NEPAL Faithful run out of fuel

In the weeks after Nepal declared itself a secular state (instead of returning to being a Hindu nation), Christian churches’ attendance plummeted—not for lack of faith but lack of fuel. India—a majority Hindu nation and Nepal’s top trading partner—cut off fuel from its neighbor, stopping the more than 300 petroleum tankers that once entered Nepal daily. The embargo curtailed travel for many Nepalis, including its Christian minorities. Church attendance has dropped as much as 50 percent in some places, AsiaNews reported. Nepal has turned to China for help.





## MISSIONS

# Made in China: The Next Mass Missionary Movement

Chinese Christians plan to send 20,000 missionaries by 2030.

**F**ive years ago, more than 200 Chinese Christian leaders were detained before they could board flights to the most diverse gathering of evangelicals ever. Among the 4,000 leaders gathered in South Africa's Cape Town for the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, their empty seats signified the Chinese church's challenges in engaging world missions.

But instead of tamping down the Chinese church's desire for missions, the Cape Town 2010 incident acted as a catalyst, bringing together the right leaders inside and outside China, ChinaSource president Brent Fulton says.

## TOP SENDERS OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES (2010)

United States	127,000
Brazil	34,000
France, Spain	21,000 each
South Korea, Italy	20,000 each
United Kingdom	15,000
Germany	14,000
India	10,000

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY

In 2011, 100 of those house church leaders made it to Seoul, South Korea, where the Lausanne Movement held a special conference for them. And this fall, about 850 Chinese leaders gathered for their own missions conference even closer to home. They announced from Hong Kong a long-discussed goal: to send 20,000 missionaries from China by the year 2030.

The number is enormous, especially for a country that has sent only a few hundred foreign missionaries so far. Of the world's top six sending countries, four hover around the 20,000 mark, according to the Center for the Study of Global Christianity (CSGC): France, Spain, Italy, and South Korea. Only the United States (127,000) and Brazil (34,000) send more. (CSGC counts Christians from all denominations. Other estimates vary.)

But nobody's ruling China out. "China always wins when it comes to numbers," said Fulton, who recently authored *China's Urban Christians*. "China has a huge church."

It's hard to pinpoint the number of Christians in China since there's no official count. The Pew Research Center estimated 67 million in 2010. CSGC, which includes growth from unofficial conversions, put the figure at 106 million in 2010, and predicts more than 330 million by 2050.

By those numbers, reaching 20,000 shouldn't be hard. The global average for Christians sending foreign missionaries is 175 per million, said CSGC's Todd Johnson.

If China has 100 million Christians, sending 17,500 would meet the average.

However, the Chinese church isn't aiming for averages but repayment: Chinese leaders estimate about 20,000 missionaries have served in China since the days of Robert Morrison and Hudson Taylor.

"The idea of the 20,000 was based on a gospel debt or missional debt," said 10/40 Window speaker and author Luis Bush, who addressed the Hong Kong conference. "They see themselves as an extremity of Acts 1:8."

When Paul was prohibited from going to Asia, the gospel turned westward to Europe and—eventually—to the Americas. When the gospel reached China, "the ends of the earth," it had nowhere to go but back to Jerusalem, Bush said.

"They see this as a closure, completing the circle of missionary work around the world," he said.

China's big goal is reminiscent of South Korea's pledge in the 1990s to raise 10,000 missionaries in 10 years. South Korean Christians met their goal in 2000 and raised it: they're now aiming for 100,000 missionaries by 2030.

Adding 20,000 Chinese missionaries "will definitely be a shift in the gravity of Christianity and its impact for the world from the West to the East," said David Ro, Lausanne's international deputy director for East Asia.

While the two countries are culturally similar, China doesn't have South Korea's sense of independence and



“China always  
wins when it  
comes to  
numbers.”

**BRENT FULTON, CHINASOURCE**

competitiveness, he said.

“They have more understanding of being a victim,” Ro said of Chinese Christians. “They have a little less of that ‘I’m going to conquer the world’ that Korea and the West have.”

That’s because China is one of the first major missions movements coming out of a repressive environment, he said. While arrests have slowed over the past 30 years, one provincial government still spent the past two years tearing hundreds of crosses off of church buildings (estimates range from 400 to 1,200). China ranks No. 29 on Open Doors’ list of places where it’s hardest to be a Christian.

China’s government also presents practical problems. One is that missions is solely the work of the unregulated house church movement, since the official Three-Self Patriotic Movement churches are not allowed to evangelize beyond their church walls.

Another is that missionary-sending agencies are illegal, so China’s 20-some parachurch missions support agencies are doing business as consulting companies and the like, Fulton said. That throws much of the organizational burden onto individual churches.

“[Chinese church leaders] are banking on enough believers in enough places to

organize themselves,” he said. “There is a bit of healthy peer influence among the various churches and networks in China. Nobody wants to be left behind.”

The possibility of government interference doesn’t discourage Chinese pastor Abraham Cui, who directed the Hong Kong conference.

“We are determined to prepare ourselves to confront different circumstances,” he said. “We believe firmly that ‘he changes times and seasons; he deposes kings and sets them up.’ As long as we walk in God’s will, he will pave the path and open doors for us.”

China’s church has unique strengths for evangelism, especially in the Middle East, said Zhiqiu Xu, director of Columbia International University’s Chinese program. To begin with, China doesn’t engender the same antagonism there that Western countries do.

In addition, the Chinese, like Middle Easterners, are emerging from a post-colonial, developing-world economy. “We

have a better foundation to communicate with each other,” Xu said.

And Chinese living in Tibet or near the borders of countries such as Tajikistan may share ethnicity, language, or religion with those in the mission field. These areas inside China are good training grounds for missionaries intent on going over the border, he said.

The geopolitical time is also ripe. China’s expansion westward through the “One Belt One Road” campaign aims to build infrastructure and trade routes—including a high-speed railway—to connect China with the rest of Asia and Europe. This expansion provides a natural avenue for Christian missionaries, much as the early church used the Roman roads, Xu said.

Even their own persecution has helped, teaching Chinese Christians how to set up discreet house churches and navigate the gray area, Fulton said.

Still, the campaign this time needs to be better organized than it was in the past, he said. Chinese missionaries working cross-culturally now number only in the hundreds, and most quit after two years.

“Zealous churches would send people out, but once they got there, there was no support from back home,” Fulton said. “Hopefully we can move beyond that.”

The Chinese church is a bit like a teenager—awkward but energetic, Xu said. “It may not have the details planned, but at least it has the vitality to tell the world, ‘We want to do something.’”

**Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra**





# Refugees on the Roma Road

In Europe, Christian 'gypsies' best understand those fleeing Syria and Iraq.

**M**onths before he encountered the refugees, Aleksandar Subotin had a dream.

The 31-year-old Roma pastor saw a large group of people walking through a train station. He had never seen them before, but he knew he was there to help them. He remembered this dream when he first brought 500 packages of food to a refugee processing camp in Kanjiza, Serbia, last fall.

"Then I started to pray for God to open

doors so we could work with them," said Subotin, who leads two Roma churches and 15 home groups in northwest Serbia.

Like many Christian Roma along Eastern Europe's "refugee highway," which stretches from Greece to Croatia, Subotin feels for the families fleeing Syria, Iraq, and other troubled nations.

His empathy stems from belonging to a group stigmatized for generations in Europe as "gypsies." Today, Europe has about 11 million Roma, a collection

of related ethnic groups that compose one of the world's largest people groups without its own nation state, as well as the seat of a massive Christian revival [see "God Among the Roma," May 2013].

More so than most European Christians, Roma believers—most of whom are Pentecostals—understand displacement and poverty.

Accounts of Roma expulsion and persecution date back to the 16th century. More recently, tens of thousands of Roma

were displaced during wars in the former Yugoslavia and Kosovo in the 1990s. Afterward, many Roma were excluded from receiving relief packages and denied state passports; lack of documentation made resettlement particularly complicated. Today, most Roma communities in Eastern Europe have higher rates of unemployment, illiteracy, and poverty than their non-Roma neighbors.

Consequently, Roma Christians also understand the appeal of the West. Like the current refugees, many Roma aspire to travel to the “promised land” of Germany, as well as other destinations in Western Europe. They seek temporary work, social benefits, or political asylum (although Roma pastors discourage their flocks from the latter two).

Because of this history, Roma “look at this situation as something that could happen to them,” said Sokrat Apostolovski, a pastor in Macedonia. He has seen 11 families from his Roma congregation emigrate to Germany.

“Over the years, the Roma were refugees many times, which changed their worldview,” said Radko Kratsov, a Roma leader for Youth With A Mission (YWAM)

in Bulgaria, which cut its illegal refugee flow in half after building a fence on its border with Turkey last year. While Kratsov claims that a victim mentality too frequently shapes the Roma identity, increasingly he and others believe that “God created us to be a blessing to the nations.”

And despite the cultural stereotypes that linger in Eastern Europe—that Roma are parasites, dishonest, or helplessly poor—the current refugee crisis has offered an opportunity for the poor to serve the powerless.

“The Roma pray often for the refugees. And those who served the refugees felt very blessed, as it was the first time for

them to serve instead of seeking to receive,” said John Papadopoulos, pastor of a Roma church outside Thessaloniki, Greece’s second-largest city. “We believe this new attitude is a landmark, and a new age for the Roma.”

Because of his people’s poverty in Serbia, Subotin wasn’t sure how his congregation would react to his dream. But their response was unanimous: “Go, bring help there. We are not jealous. They need help more than us, because we have food, water, and shelter.”

Subotin partnered with Help Eastern Europe, a Dutch Reformed NGO that focuses on the Roma. The group sent clothing, money, and other volunteers, enabling

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AND POVERTY.

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Subotin and his Roma churches to serve about 10,000 refugees this past fall.

Most of Subotin's congregants who offered to help were widows. "They told me something was stirring in their hearts, and that the Lord takes care of them as widows," he said. "So they want to say, 'Thank you, Lord, that we can do something for you.'"

However, it still can be hard to translate empathy into action.

"The Roma in Macedonia want to help in the various activities for the refugees," said Apostolovski. "But they themselves do not have basic financial resources. And so far, no one [in the West] has expressed

the wish to send help through the Roma church in Macedonia."

Thus, in the absence of resources, prayer becomes a major vehicle for Roma missions.

In eastern Croatia, Roma co-pastors Biljana and Đeno Nikolic prayed for the chance to serve the thousands of refugees passing through Serbia and Hungary. Within days of the Hungarian border closing, diverting the refugees to Croatia, they connected with Samaritan's Purse and Doctors Without Borders. Now, they work six days a week in a refugee camp in the Croatian city of Slavonski Brod. On Sundays, they share each week's experiences with their congregation, which marvels over the stories and fervently prays.

Helping refugees is only one strand in the emerging tapestry of Roma mission in Europe. The trend is fueled in part by visionary Roma leadership in places like Serbia, where a church movement plants churches and trains young leaders. Other organizations—such as the Gypsy Smith School in Bucharest, Romania, and the Gypsy and Traveller International Evangelical Fellowship—focus on training and equipping the Roma

to serve their own people.

Another catalyst is Great Commission Center International, a Chinese missions organization whose leader Thomas Wang felt a "gospel debt" to the Roma [see "Made in China," p. 20]. In 2014, it hosted a conference in Budapest for more than 100 Roma leaders and 30 Western missionaries.

Out of this emerged Roma Networks. Led by three Roma and three non-Roma, the group seeks to "network, connect, and research for the sake of transformation and reconciliation in Roma communities throughout Europe." A second Europe-wide conference is planned for 2016.

One of the network's six leaders, Miki Kamberovic, acknowledges there is much work to be done. "There is a lack of unity, and it is difficult to find the key country leaders who can mobilize the churches to work toward the same goal," said the 35-year-old Roma pastor in Jagodina, Serbia. "But I hope God will use this network to reach many Roma in Europe so that we can create an atmosphere for revival—not just for Roma, but also for all the nations in Europe."

Melody J. Wachsmuth in Osijek, Croatia

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# VIEWS



WHERE WE STAND

## LOVE DOESN'T STOP AT TWO

Why China's two-child  
policy is barely better  
than its one-child policy.

PHOTO BY CUIYAN LIU / STOCKSY







**FOR MORE THAN THREE DECADES**, China has enforced draconian restrictions on family size. Now, after a sudden shift announced in late October, China will enforce slightly less draconian restrictions. The country's notorious one-child policy has become a two-child policy.

It's a modest retreat from the oppressive status quo, stopping far short of the full dismantling that opposition groups rightly demand. Even so, there's an understandable urge to celebrate. All Girls Allowed founder Chai Ling rejoiced that "the Lord has done a great and mighty thing," likening the new reform to God's miraculous parting of the Red Sea.

Indeed, if any one principle sustains pro-life morale amid serial disappointments, it's that incremental progress beats

## The family, more than the state can ever imagine, understands the magnificent, multiplying power of love.

erases "the fact that the government is setting a limit on children, and enforcing this limit coercively."

A two-child limit may soften the instinctive outrage that made its predecessor such a global scandal. Who doesn't agree that capping families at one child is awfully heavy-handed? Most people who want children want more than one. Talk about stopping at two, though, and a great many heads nod. And if a regime decreeing that standard of "reasonableness" doesn't exactly scream "beacon of liberty," it might not scream

The family is formed and sustained by love, and love doesn't stand still. It overflows.

Love's bounteousness is woven into the fabric of the universe. God—as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—gives and receives love in a realm of eternal satisfaction. God doesn't need anyone's love and doesn't need to love anyone else. Yet God shares his perfect love, pouring it out freely, abundantly, sacrificially on the people he has created. Even in our sinful rebellion, God adopts us into his family through the atoning blood of Jesus. And that family knows no limits. As believers, we're called to make disciples of all nations, proclaiming God's offer of reconciliation through Christ. We await that glorious day when "a great multitude . . . from every nation" will gather around his throne in worship (Rev. 7:9–12).

"Be fruitful and multiply" is not a summons to competitive or unchecked breeding. Here on earth, most families reach a point at which joyful multiplication becomes practically difficult if not impossible. Advanced age, declining health, pinched income, cramped living space, sheer exhaustion—these and a thousand other factors naturally limit family size. But the state's ironfisted edict should never outweigh the family's prayerful decision. Why? Because the family, more than the state can ever imagine, understands the magnificent, multiplying power of love.

Having another child doesn't leave less love for the siblings, as though love were a pie carved into ever-smaller slices. By some deep mystery, ordinary families possess a touch of the inexhaustible love that promises Abraham "descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore" (Gen. 22:17).

Tell us, again, why China has any business interfering with that? **CT**

**MATT REYNOLDS** is associate editor, books, of *Christianity Today*.



no progress. Relaxing China's one-child policy means fewer forced abortions and sterilizations. Fewer little girls targeted in the womb or left to die as infants so that couples can preserve the possibility of male offspring. Praise God for every flicker of mercy in this dark world.

But let's keep the champagne corked for now. As a number of observers have remarked, economic self-interest is the name of the game. The Communist leadership sees demographic collapse on the horizon unless a graying population receives an infusion of youth.

Moreover, the machinery of surveillance and punishment remains securely in place, triggered now by the third pregnancy instead of the second. As Reggie Littlejohn of Women's Rights Without Frontiers explains, nothing about doubling the number of permissible births

"totalitarian nightmare" either.

But it should. China could unveil a ten-child policy, and it wouldn't dull our protest one iota. Haggling over the specifics—holding out hope for a "reasonable" balance between China's economic ambitions, its environmental footprint, and the reproductive freedom of its citizens—misses the point entirely. Wide or narrow, or somewhere in between, all governmental restrictions on family size are inherently tyrannical.

Tyranny can, on the surface, appear benign. It can wrap itself in high ideals. But look closely, and you'll always find some attempt at monkeying around with the basic architecture of reality.

With China's one- and two-child policies, this takes the form of brazenly denying something fundamental about the family: its very essence is joyful multiplication.



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# WESTMONT



**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.



# Backwards Prayers

What I learned about our praying instincts on a shaky flight to New Zealand.

**M**ost of us pray the Lord's Prayer backwards.

Eleven years ago, my wife and I were on an Air New Zealand flight that felt like it was falling out of the sky. Approaching the Queenstown airport in mid-winter—with mountain ranges on both sides and a huge lake straight ahead—we were caught in a giant wind tunnel. The plane was shuddering and sporadically dropping 50 feet at a time. The cabin filled with shrieking and praying. Many people were crying out to a God in whom they did not believe. Just as there are no atheists in foxholes, there certainly aren't many on buffeted flights.

Thirty minutes later, after having landed safely, the group of strangers waited at baggage claim, looking awkwardly at each other. No doubt, many of them felt silly.

The content of those prayers fascinated me. I suspect it reflects the way many of us intuitively pray. The most common petition I heard was some variant of "deliver us from evil": "Help!" "Save us!" and "Oh, God, please don't let me die!" Crises prompt cries for deliverance, with the immediate need for safety drowning out all other concerns. Whenever I listen to baptism testimonies at my church, I am struck by how many people called out to God for the first time in a moment of personal danger.

The other prayer I heard, though more infrequently, was "forgive us our sins" in some form or another: "I'm sorry" and "God, please forgive me." People want to be at peace with God when they die. So after crying out for rescue, they

apologized as they prepared to meet their Maker. (By far the most demanding line of the Lord's Prayer—"As we forgive those who sin against us"—was not heard over the din.)

After these sorts of petitions, most of us pray, "Please." This is probably the most frequent type of prayer we utter. "God, please give me this job." "Fix my marriage." "Keep my children safe." "Provide for my family." Or, more traditionally, "Give us today our daily bread." Life comes first, then forgiveness, and then physical provision. It's like a prayer form of Maslow's hierarchy of needs for what humans need to thrive (first physiological needs must be met, then safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization). We attend to our self-preservation, even in prayer.

But as we get to know God and grow in prayer, our horizons widen: We begin to pray for things that may not directly affect us, and we do so in a more sustained way. We start to pray for justice, peace, healing for others, overseas missions, church growth, and the salvation of those we love. We may develop prayer lists, meet in groups, or use set prayers to guide us as we bring our families,

communities, leaders, and nations before God. In doing so, we essentially pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Left to our own devices, we pray the Lord's Prayer backwards. Without being taught, we say help, then sorry, then please do X for me, and then please do Y for others. And then we begin to appreciate more fully the One to whom we are praying—not just as the One who dispenses safety, redemption, and material goods, but for his own sake. "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name" (Matt. 6:9). Or, "Our Dad without limits, make your name great. I want people to see you as holy. I want to acknowledge you as Father." In many ways, the height of Christian experience, Paul explains, is the joy from within as the Spirit cries out, "Abba! Father!" (Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 4:4-6).

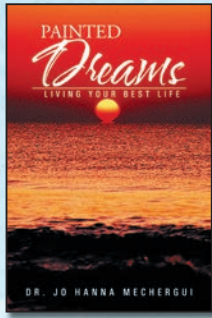
Yet Jesus taught us to pray it forwards. The topsy-turvy order of the Lord's Prayer is one reason it is so remarkable. Jesus' disciples knew the Scriptures, so they probably already knew how to ask for rescue, forgiveness, necessities, and God's action in the world. What they didn't know, and what Jesus wanted to make sure they never forgot, is that prayer is not intended to move from action to relationship. Instead, it is intended to move from relationship to action.

"This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father . . .'" Forget your formulas and your intercessory cards for a moment, and begin praying with one of the most basic words in a child's vocabulary. You are God's child, and he is your Father. Start there, and the rest will flow accordingly.

CT

**Prayer is not intended to move from action to relationship, but from relationship to action.**

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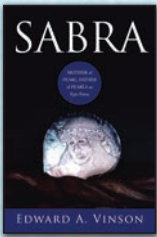
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Through poetry Michael Godwin takes readers on *A Journey Home*, traversing the valleys of his life, showing how they helped him keep the faith. With this sojourn he shares the encouragement given to him by the Lord, enriching readers' lives.



## SABRA

*Mother of Pearl, Father of Pearls  
an Epic Poem*

Edward A. Vinson

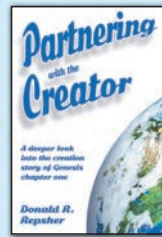
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*Sabra* is a professionally well-reviewed prophetic/poetic rendition of the Book of Mark. Similar works by Rev. Vinson include a 2-volume *Meditations On The Psalms - At Sea & In Port*; and soon to be published, *Meditations On Isaiah*.



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*A Deeper Look into the Creation Story of  
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Donald Repsher

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Delving deep into the Genesis story, this book provides a fresh approach that highlights the Creator's initiative inviting human beings into a life-changing partnership relevant for 21st century needs. For both study groups and school students through senior citizens.



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*A Commentary*

George L. Miller

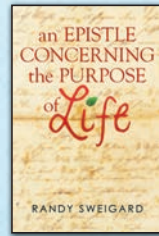
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## An Epistle Concerning the Purpose of Life

Randy Sweigard

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Among the revelations contained here are the true identity of Dark Matter, the reason we can still hear the Big Bang nearly fourteen billion years after it occurred. The most important question to be answered is, why are we here?

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**Christena Cleveland**  
is associate professor  
of the practice of  
reconciliation at Duke  
University's Divinity  
School, where she also  
directs the Center for  
Reconciliation.



## The Bias in Our Votes

Far more than faith shapes our politics.

I have fond memories of fall 2008. Having recently earned my PhD, I had just begun my academic career at Westmont College in Southern California. Since it was a presidential election year, I decided to focus my social psychology course on the psychology of political attitudes: how they are formed, how they are maintained, and how they can predict voting behavior. Much like the Westmont faculty, about half of the students in my class were self-described liberals, and about half were self-described conservatives. This ideological diversity made for lively discussions.

At the start of the semester, the whole class—myself included—believed that our particular political viewpoint was the most faithful to Christianity.

“Sure, politics don’t replace faith,” one student admitted. “But, come on, you have to admit that [my party’s] values best reflect the values of Jesus.” He wasn’t the only one. Many of my students insisted that their political attitudes were informed by an untainted reading of Scripture and unsusceptible to *bias*—that is, social factors that influence our attitudes beyond our awareness. Social psychologists call this the “bias blind spot.” We can easily point out other people’s biases, but we have a hard time seeing our own.

I wanted to agree with my students; it’s natural for Christians to insist that only our “Jesus bias” informs our political attitudes. To admit that perhaps some other bias has polluted our worldview not only undermines the legitimacy of our Christian worldview; it also challenges the integrity of the faith that we

closely associate with our worldview.

But over the semester, as we read numerous research articles, we began to see that all of our political attitudes are shaped by many factors, not just faith. Consider these recent findings on social factors that shape our politics:

**(1) Personality.** Well-known research from moral psychologist Jonathan Haidt shows that personality traits and even brain composition significantly shape the way we see the world and thus our political attitudes. People who need order, value authority and respect, and would rather have stability than new experiences gravitate to political conservatism. People who are fine with ambiguity, value equality, and would rather have new experiences than stability gravitate to political liberalism. Christianity, of course, attracts both types of personalities.

**(2) Racial background.** Race significantly shapes how we perceive the world, our faith, and politics. A recent study found that white Protestants, especially white evangelical Protestants, are much more likely to be conservatives than individuals with no religious

affiliation. However, black Protestants tend to adopt more politically liberal stances relative to white Protestants and individuals with no religious affiliation. Remarkably, even among people with relatively similar religious views, race powerfully influences political attitudes.

**(3) Experiences.** A semester abroad, a Bible study group, or challenging life transitions have the power to alter our worldview, including our political views. For example, traumatic experiences often lead us to adopt more conservative attitudes. A study among high-exposure survivors of the September 11 attacks found that Democrats, Independents, and Republicans alike were more likely to adopt conservative ideology, which generally values stability and safety in the midst of social change, as well as strong national defense. Other research shows that parenthood leads mothers to adopt more liberal attitudes on social welfare, while it leads fathers to adopt more conservative attitudes on social welfare.

As we begin another election year, what are we Christians called to do? All of this research calls for us to humbly examine what forces shape our views, keeping in mind that our bias blind spot likely prevents us from recognizing our biases. *Humbly* is the operative word here, because the people who have the clearest view on our biases are our sisters and brothers in Christ who hold divergent political views. We must look to them to show us our biases, and we must listen. In a time when political views threaten to further divide the body of Christ, each part of the body needs the others to see the full truth (1 Cor. 12:12–26). **CT**

**The people who have the clearest view on our biases are our sisters and brothers in Christ who hold divergent political views.**

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# THE

*Biblical scholar John Barclay explains*

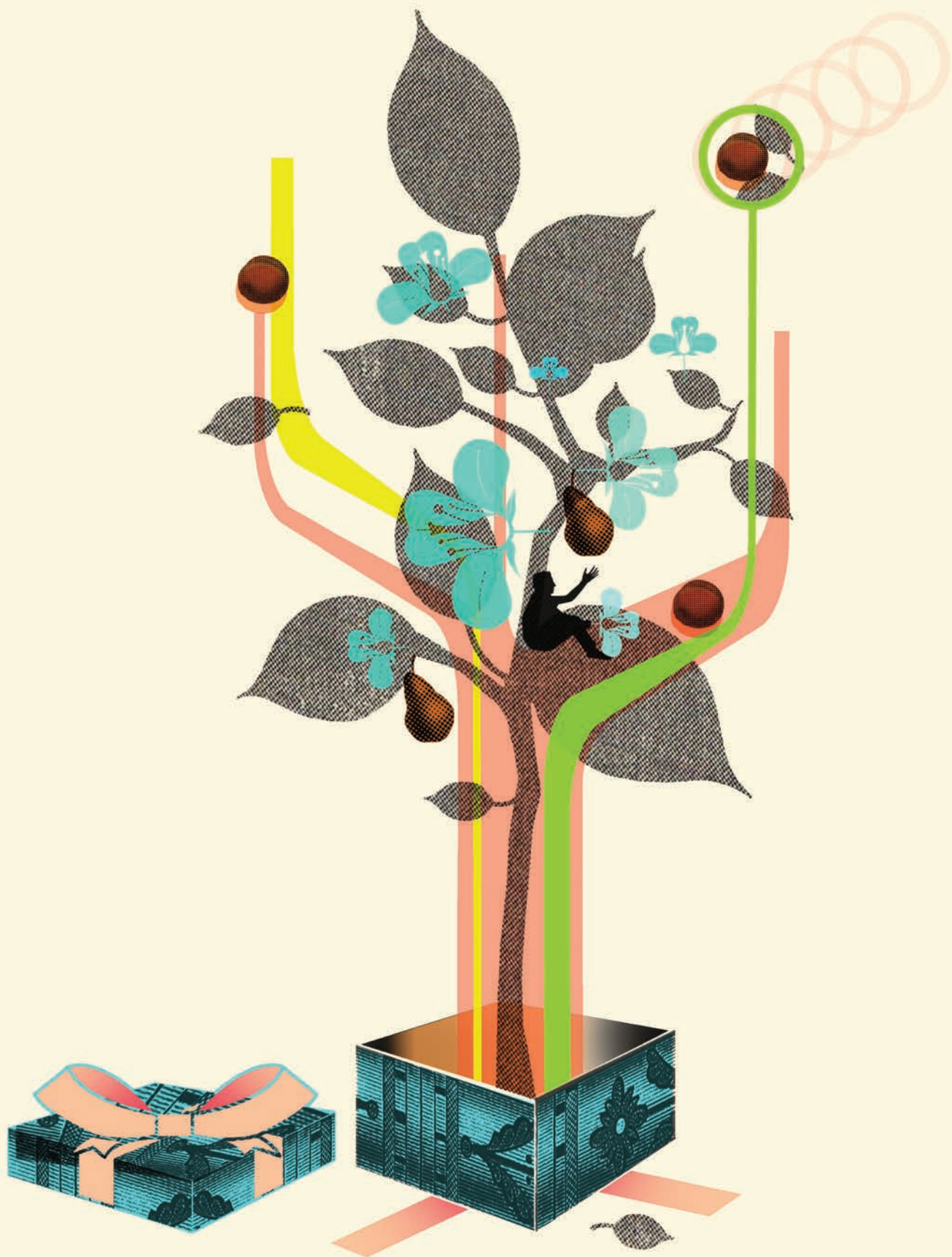
# SCANDALOUS

*why Paul shocked his religious peers—and reminds*


# GIFT OF GRACE

*us how radical the gospel really is.*

INTERVIEW BY WESLEY HILL







John M. G. Barclay, Lightfoot Professor of Divinity at Durham University, UK, is recognized by his peers as one of today's most influential New Testament scholars. Barclay began his academic career focusing on Paul's letter to the Galatians.

Since then, he has published widely on Second Temple Jewish texts and social history. His book *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora* is widely regarded as the definitive treatment of the topic. In the past few years, Barclay has turned his attention back to Paul, most recently with his monumental 2015 book, *Paul and the Gift* (Eerdmans).

For nearly four decades, scholarship on Paul has operated on the assumption that what makes Paul unique is *not* his view of grace. In fact, many scholars believe he had nothing new to contribute on the topic. Since the advent of the "New Perspective on Paul" in the late 1970s—which shifted attention away from "justification by faith" as the center of Paul's theology to the social, ethical dimensions of his missionary efforts—many interpreters of Paul have neglected the topic of grace. Barclay's new book opposes this scholarly trend, and proposes that Paul's radicalism lies precisely in his view of God's grace—and

of its potential to transform both individuals and communities.

Barclay recently had a series of conversations with Wesley Hill, assistant professor of biblical studies at Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pennsylvania, about his new book.

YOU ARGUE THAT PAUL'S VIEW OF GRACE IS BIZARRE AND UNSETTLING, EVEN "DANGEROUS." WHY WAS PAUL'S VIEW OF GRACE SO RADICAL?

Paul did not have a special word for "grace," so he used the common language of "gift" [*charis* in Greek, sometimes translated as "grace"]. Gifts in his day—and in most cultures throughout history—were given to people who, in one way or another, were worthy recipients. People gave gifts in order to create a relationship, most often with people like themselves.

We do this today. We give money to causes that represent our values. Or we

give prizes to people we deem worthy recipients.

Paul talks about Christ as the gift of God, the grace of God. What is striking about this is that this gift is given without regard to the worth of the people who receive it. God doesn't give discriminately to seemingly fitting recipients. He gives without regard to their social, gender, or ethnic worth. Nothing about them makes them worthy of this gift.

To deny any match between God's gifts and the worth of recipients was, in Paul's day, a theologically dangerous idea. It made God seem arbitrary and unfair. It meant that grace was unpredictable and that the world might become disordered.

And this view of grace breaks all sorts of social norms and expectations. The gift of Christ is larger than it should be. It is undeserved forgiveness.

Think of someone who sits with a homeless man on the street and listens to him, or the pope taking time from his official engagements to visit prisoners, or those who give up "good jobs" in order to spend their lives with people with severe learning difficulties. These are all "gifts" that seem inappropriate or risky by cultural standards. When he talks about the grace of God in Christ, that is the kind of gift Paul is talking about.

SO WHAT WAS DISTINCTIVE ABOUT PAUL'S MESSAGE WAS NOT GRACE PER SE, BUT HOW HE TALKED ABOUT IT?

Yes, Paul was not the only Jew of his day who talked about God's grace. We need to shy away from caricatures of [first-century] Judaism as a religion of works-righteousness or legalism that knew nothing about divine grace. Language of God's mercy and grace was everywhere, but it was not everywhere the same. People understood God's goodness, generosity, and mercy differently. Compared with his fellow Jews who also talked about divine grace, Paul emphasized grace given without regard to worth. This is the root of Paul's radical social policy.

Paul's theology of grace is not just about an individual's self-understanding and status before God. It's also about communities that crossed ethnic, social, and cultural boundaries. This is what made Paul so controversial in his day. His

mission to the Gentiles involved telling them that they didn't have to fit within the cultural boundaries of the Jewish tradition. In his letter to the Galatians, for instance, he strongly criticizes other Jewish Christians who say you have to fit in the Jewish cultural box in order to be Christian. Paul says no—God has not paid regard to that cultural box.

YOU WRITE THAT WHAT BENDS PAUL'S THEOLOGY IN THIS DIRECTION IS CHRIST. WHAT IS IT ABOUT CHRIST THAT REQUIRES PAUL TO RADICALIZE THE CONCEPT OF GRACE AND THUS DISTINGUISHES HIM FROM FELLOW JEWS?

At the core of Paul's theology is not some general notion about God, but a discovery of the gift of God in Christ. And this gift, given in the death and resurrection of Christ, works against all the categories according to which we expect God to act.

God gives Christ, who confounds our notions of wealth, wisdom, and power. And then God brings life out of death, in Christ's resurrection. According to Paul, everything about our former systems of value is destroyed. Paul discovered that God's act in Christ transforms the conditions of reality.

IS IT FAIR TO SAY THAT PAUL'S VIEW OF GRACE AROSE, IN PART, FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCE? Yes, experience is an integral part of Paul's theology. Before his conversion, Paul was absolutely committed to a

certain set of norms and values. He was persecuting the churches of God. Then he encountered the truth about Christ. And this experience subverted everything he thought about right and wrong. He thought he was 100 percent right and found he was 100 percent wrong. Christ's grace reached him despite his being completely wrong.

And he finds the same [phenomenon] in his mission to the Gentiles. These people have the wrong ancestry, the wrong ideas about God, and the wrong practices. Yet God gives his Spirit to them. By Jewish standards, they had no worth at all. But God's grace overlooked their lack of worth.

SOME ASPECTS OF WHAT YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT SEEM TO ALIGN WITH WHAT HAS BEEN CALLED THE "NEW PERSPECTIVE ON PAUL." YET OTHER ELEMENTS SEEM TO RESONATE WITH THE TRADITIONAL PROTESTANT VIEW. HOW DOES YOUR WORK FIT WITHIN THE DEBATE BETWEEN THE NEW PERSPECTIVE AND THE TRADITIONAL PERSPECTIVE? It is unfortunate how polarized the discussion has become. Ever since the 1970s, the New Perspective has set itself against Reformation readings of Paul. It has criticized Luther especially for fundamentally misreading Paul. But what I see in Reformers like Luther and Calvin is a brilliant rediscovery of Paul's theology of grace. Of course, they had to re-contextualize Paul's theology in

**GOD DOESN'T GIVE DISCRIMINATELY TO SEEMINGLY FITTING RECIPIENTS. HE GIVES WITHOUT ANY REGARD TO THEIR SOCIAL, GENDER, OR ETHNIC WORTH.**



order for it to take maximum effect, so they directed it against the notion that we can make ourselves favorable to God by doing good works.

The New Perspective has tried to rediscover the original historical context in which Paul himself was ministering. And this context is completely different from the 16th century.

I'm also trying to unearth the root of Paul's theology. The New Perspective has said that the theme of grace wasn't at the core of Paul's theology. The New Perspective also believes that Paul's theology was formed in his historical context, in and for his mission among non-Jews. As a result, the New Perspective has focused more on the social dimensions of Paul's thought, and has sidelined grace. But grace really was at the center of his theology.

When you understand Paul's view of grace, then you see how it informs his social practice. So while I disagree with the New Perspective in its sidelining grace within Paul's thought, I agree with its emphasis that Paul was fundamentally concerned with creating new communities that crossed ethnic and social boundaries.

SO IN MOVING AWAY FROM CARICATURES OF FIRST-CENTURY JUDAISM, WE NEED TO BE CAREFUL NOT TO DIMINISH PAUL'S RADICAL STANCE.

Yes. The New Perspective rightly insists that Judaism was not simply a religion of works-righteousness and legalism. Scholars like E. P. Sanders and N. T. Wright have insisted that Judaism was a religion of grace. But what do we mean by *grace*? There are many different understandings of it. What is distinctive about Paul is his emphasis that grace is not just a gift given generously or in advance, but a gift given precisely without considering [the recipient's] prior quality or worth.

VARIOUS PROTESTANT GROUPS CONTRAST THEMSELVES WITH OTHERS BASED ON THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF GRACE. DO SOME PROTESTANT TRADITIONS INTERPRET PAUL BETTER THAN OTHERS?

A good theological interpretation, in my

view, never just repeats the biblical text. Rather, it gets to the heart of the text and makes it real in a new context. So what unites Protestants is our understanding that Paul speaks of grace as an unmerited gift. That was the genius in Luther's rediscovery of Paul, I think, and has obviously influenced the whole Protestant tradition. But Luther was incredibly anxious about any notion of circularity—that we give back to God so that God can give further again to us. Luther was anxious about any language of obligation or obedience if it implied trying to win favor with God.

**WHILE THERE IS NO PRIOR WORTH FOR RECEIVING THE GIFT OF GRACE, GOD EXPECTS SOMETHING IN RETURN. PAUL EXPECTS THOSE WHO RECEIVE THE SPIRIT TO BE TRANSFORMED BY THE SPIRIT AND TO WALK IN THE SPIRIT.**

As a result, some Protestants believe it's inappropriate for God to expect something in return, because it would somehow work against grace. They believe a gift should be given without any expectation of return. However, that can lead to notions of cheap grace—that God gives to us and doesn't care about what we do. On the other hand, the Calvinist and, in different ways, the Methodist-Wesleyan traditions have rightly understood that the gift of God in Christ is based on conditions, in a sense. While there is no prior worth for receiving the gift, God indeed expects something in return. Paul expects those who receive the Spirit to be transformed by the Spirit and to walk in the Spirit. As he puts it, we are under grace, which can legitimately lead to obedience, even obligation.

WHAT HAVE THESE INTERPRETERS MISSED OR DOWNPLAYED IN REGARDS TO PAUL?

Paul talked about grace in a missionary context. In that setting, God's gift in Christ pays no attention to human worth, and that meant that Paul's churches could break free of the destructive norms of aggressive competition, status hierarchy, and ethnic division that governed their social context in the Greco-Roman world. But once Christianity became more widespread, this missionary theology became focused inward and turned against attempts to achieve Christian merit.



## Anticipated Books of 2016

*CT asked publishers which theology and biblical studies books they were most excited to publish this year. Here are the entries.*

### MODERN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

CHRISTOPHER BEN SIMPSON  
(T&T CLARK, FEBRUARY)

By putting the story of modern Christian theology against the backdrop of the history of modernity itself, Simpson examines the ways in which theology became modern, while showing how theology contributed to the rise of modernity.

SO THE MESSAGE OF GRACE BECAME LESS ABOUT CONVERTING PEOPLE AND MORE OF A POINT OF DISPUTE WITHIN THE CHURCH ITSELF?  
Yes. Paul's theology of grace has become directed at the internal motives and self-understanding of people who are already Christians. But in its original context, Paul's theology of grace was more socially radical. That is what I think needs to be activated again today.

COULD RETHINKING PAUL'S UNDERSTANDING OF GRACE HELP PROTESTANTS ACHIEVE MORE UNITY THAN THEY HAVE HAD?  
We can at least begin to understand each other better. We all use the word *grace*. And many of us think we all mean the same thing by it. But as we discuss it, we find that we actually disagree about certain aspects of it, and we tend to think we believe in grace more than the other person does. In reality, we simply hold different understandings of what grace means.  
In the book, I spell out six ways grace has been understood. We can at least understand why we use the same language yet disagree about the concept.

AT THE END OF YOUR BOOK, YOU SUGGEST THAT PAUL'S

VIEW OF GRACE SHOULD CONSTANTLY QUESTION THE NORMS BY WHICH WE EVALUATE OURSELVES AND OTHERS. WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR CHURCHES TODAY?  
First, it means there are no limits to the reach of God's grace. Both Paul and Jesus stood alongside people who were not at all respectable. In doing so, they took big social risks. God's grace operates beyond our norms of what is civil, proper, or fair. And it challenges our hidden prejudices. Why do we distrust immigrants, stigmatize the poor, or disdain certain socioeconomic groups? Why are we tempted to think that people who do not have a spouse or a job, or who do not have a physique matching cultural ideals, have somehow failed? Whose values are we applying?

Paul learned that God's gifts did not follow the values he had always assumed were right. The gospel has its own value system, which may not match our inherited values as much as we think.  
What we take for granted as having worth—our place in a hierarchy, our class, our wealth, our education, you name it—does not count for anything when we are encountered by Christ. In Paul's day, the main forms of hierarchy were built around gender, ethnicity, and legal status. Men were considered

more important than women, Jews were considered more valuable than non-Jews, and a free person was considered more valuable than a slave. Paul says that in God's eyes, none of these social boundaries matter. "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female" (Gal. 3:28).  
What I find so profound is the capacity of grace to dissolve our inherent and inherited systems—what we might call social capital. What counts before God is not what we pride ourselves on—or what we doubt ourselves on. What counts is simply that we are loved in Christ. This is massively liberating, not only to us as individuals but also to communities, because it gives them the capacity to reform and to be countercultural.  
That's why some of the most exciting churches today are not necessarily the big ones, but rather the small, multi-cultural, urban churches where you discover that different ethnicities and languages don't count before God. Our education, our age, our job, the kind of music we listen to, the books we read—these do not ultimately define us. What defines us is who we are in Christ. We all are on the same level together and are therefore able to form countercultural relationships despite our differences. And that opens up the possibility for hugely creative Christian communities. **CT**

**NONE LIKE HIM:  
10 WAYS GOD IS  
DIFFERENT FROM US  
(AND WHY THAT'S A  
GOOD THING)**

**JEN WILKIN**  
(CROSSWAY, APRIL)  
Wilkin highlights the joy of seeing our limited selves in relation to a limitless God—and how realizing this frees us from striving to be more than we were created to be, which is the root of human sin and rebellion.

**THE CHURCH: A  
THEOLOGICAL AND  
HISTORICAL ACCOUNT**

**GERALD BRAY**  
(BAKER ACADEMIC, APRIL)  
Bray discusses the four classic marks of the church—its oneness, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. He then surveys the ecumenical climate today and suggests ways that these marks should manifest in our present global context.

**A THEOLOGY  
IN OUTLINE**

**ROBERT JENSON**  
(OXFORD, APRIL)  
Jenson frames all of Christian theology as a response to the question, "Son of man, can these bones live?" (Ezek. 37:3). He considers how the story that God lives with his people continues, and whether Christian faith has become a valley of dry bones.

**DELIVERED FROM THE  
ELEMENTS OF THE  
WORLD: ATONEMENT,  
JUSTIFICATION,  
MISSION**

**PETER J. LEITHART**  
(IVP ACADEMIC, MAY)  
Leithart explores how the death and resurrection of a Jewish rabbi in the first century is the decisive event in history, and discusses the cultural and social implications of the Atonement.

**REVIVING OLD  
SCRATCH: DEMONS  
AND THE DEVIL FOR  
DOUBTERS AND THE  
DISENCHANTED**

**RICHARD BECK**  
(FORTRESS, MAY)  
In a time when many people doubt the Devil exists, Beck provides a biblical and bold vision of spiritual warfare in which Christians resist the Devil by joining God's campaign to interrupt the world with love.

**AN ANOMALOUS JEW:  
PAUL AMONG JEWS,  
GREEKS, AND ROMANS**

**MICHAEL BIRD**  
(EERDMANS, OCTOBER)  
By exploring Paul's Jewishness in relation to other Jews—including his fellow Jewish Christians—and to the Roman Empire, Bird claims that Paul was a strange figure who held both common and controversial Jewish beliefs.



# DWELLING

*New college chapel windows*

# IN LIGHT

*by Peter Brandes showcase the*

# ACCESSIBLE

*dynamics of Christ's glory.*

BY LISA ANN COCKREL



In the “yellow” windowpane in Cornerstone University’s new chapel, Jesus is on the cross, but he is also a sower. “He had already begun to fertilize the earth with his words and deeds,” explains Brandes.



“Blue, yellow, and red—those are the letters,” says celebrated Danish painter and sculptor Peter Brandes. “They’re like alpha and beta in the Bible: they are the beginning of everything. I could go on and make any language with those colors.”

Color is the language Brandes speaks fluently in his most recent project, his third in the United States: four large contemporary stained glass windows for the newly constructed Christ Chapel at Cornerstone University, an evangelical college in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

For Christ Chapel’s westerly window, Brandes employed 250 sheets of hand-blown glass in 48 different shades of blue to explore the idea of baptism and rebirth. In the east, red represents the resurrection morning. To the north, yellow brings joy into the crucifixion scene, foretelling resurrection. To the south,

a trio of complementary colors—green, violet, and orange—pays homage to the relationship between blessing and sacrifice in the Old Testament. Each window is made of about 1,000 pieces of glass.

The \$14 million building is the first dedicated worship space in the nondenominational school’s 75-year history. It is a dramatic change of venue from the gym where chapel services were previously held, thanks in large part to Brandes’s windows. “As far as I know, there are no other Christian colleges taking on this type of scale and intentionality in designing a chapel

site,” says Makoto Fujimura, artist and director of Fuller Theological Seminary’s Brehm Center. “Cornerstone’s effort is quite unique.”

“This is a highly intentional step for us,” says Cornerstone president Joseph Stowell. “Bringing significant artistic statements to campus is an important part of our vision to create an environment that reflects Christ, his work on our behalf, and his glory in a variety of dynamics.” Stowell says initial plans for the chapel called for plain glass windows. But conversations with philanthropist and Cornerstone alumna Roberta Ahmanson helped to



The north window, here being prepared by Brandes, measures 26.3 x 18.1 feet.





recast the vision. After touring the campus and reviewing the initial plan, she recalls thinking, *We can do better.*

Ahmanson, an advocate for contemporary art, points to Creation as proof that God has a rich visual vocabulary. “Look at space, the face of a baby, or the indefinable glory of a flower. . . . We deny God when we deny the power of beauty and fail to include that language in our spaces of worship,” she says.

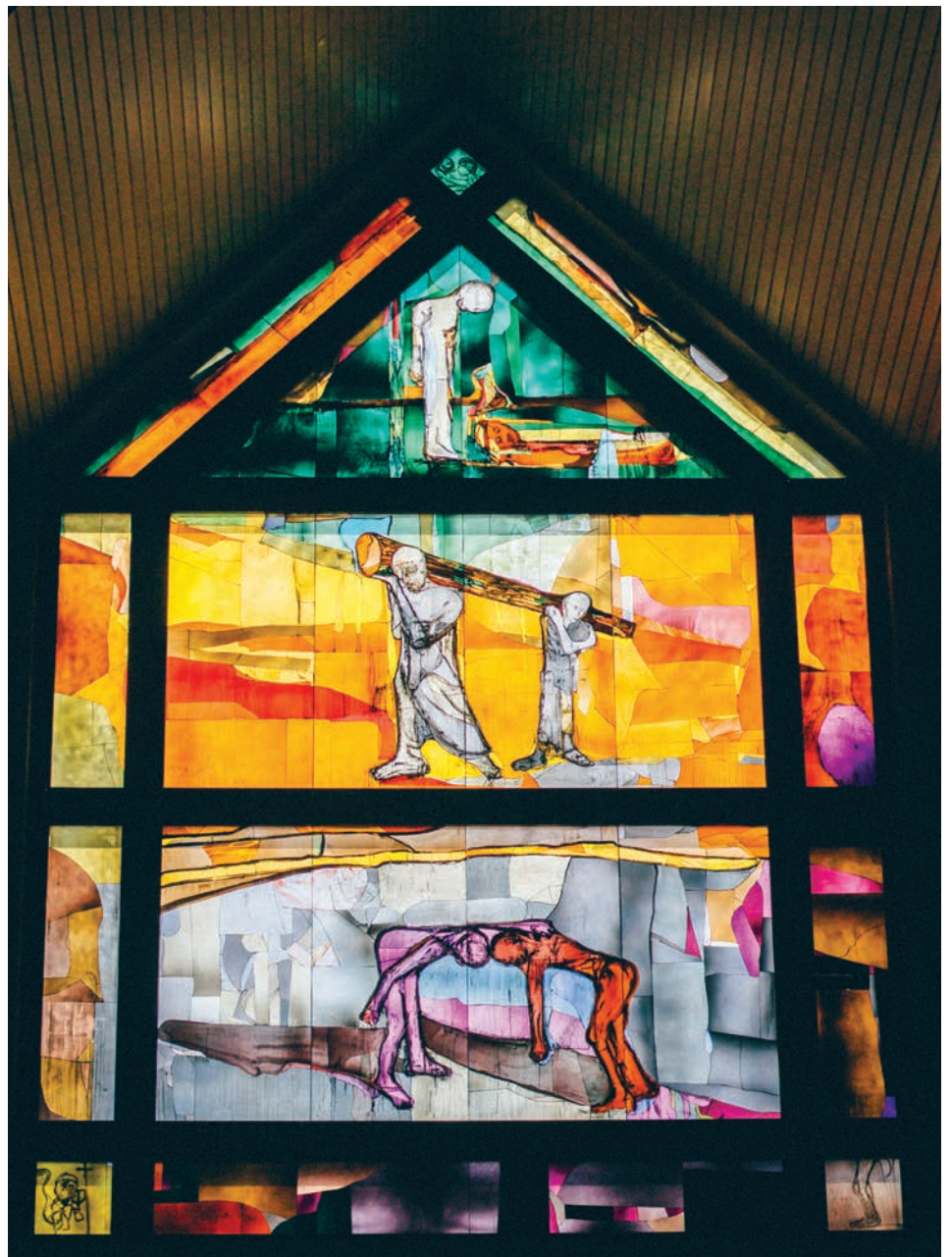
A friend and patron of Brandes, Ahmanson suggested that Cornerstone commission the artist to create windows for Christ Chapel. After both parties agreed that Christ should be the central figure in the windows, Brandes was given full creative control of the project.

“[At first], I had some thoughts about concepts that pictured Jesus’ interaction with his disciples,” says Stowell. “But in the end we wanted Peter to depict concepts that he was passionate about. Throttling an artist is usually not productive.”

A favorite artist of Queen Margrethe II of Denmark, Brandes has a number of pieces

The glass used for all of the windowpanes was blown by hand in France at a factory that is 300 years old.





**THERE ARE NO OTHER CHRISTIAN COLLEGES TAKING ON THIS TYPE  
OF SCALE AND INTENTIONALITY IN DESIGNING A CHAPEL SITE.”**

**MAKOTO FUJIMURA** ARTIST AND DIRECTOR OF FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY'S BREHM CENTER





Left, an early etching of the “blue” windowpane shows Jesus being baptized. Above, the artist assembles the “red” windowpane using approximately 1,800 pieces of glass.





in Roskilde Cathedral, the main burial site for the Danish monarchy since the 15th century. But his style is anything but mired in the past. “Very often churches in the United States repeat [art forms and themes that have] been done before, because they want to be sure that what they show is in the right line,” he says. “But this has nothing to do with contemporary life. . . . The text of the Bible is so strong, there is more than enough in it to make new

[artistic] interpretations for centuries and centuries to come.”

Brandes’s windows serve as a kind of training ground for the imagination. “This contemplative path to grow our imagination is critical for worship,” says Fujimura, “as we cannot worship without the use of our imaginations.”

Ahmanson hopes anyone who walks into Christ Chapel will experience “the overwhelming wonder of the color and

light,” and that their own visual awareness will deepen. She believes the church must regain its role as the home of the best of contemporary art. “We now live in a visual age, an emotion-driven age. The church can have no voice if it abandons visual language, one of God’s loudest, most powerful languages.” **CT**

**LISA ANN COCKREL** is director of the Festival of Faith & Writing at Calvin College.



# THE 2016 BOOK AWARDS

## WINNER

## APOLOGETICS / EVANGELISM

## AWARD OF MERIT



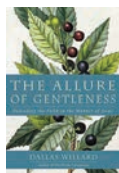
### FOOL'S TALK

*Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion*

OS GUINNESS (INTERVARSITY PRESS)

"Unlike many apologetics books, *Fool's Talk* is not a series of quick-fix answers to questions most folks are no longer

asking or one-size-fits-all 'McTheories' (Guinness's term) for any situation. Rather, Guinness draws upon a lifetime of diverse experience to explore and invite us into the art of 'creative persuasion.' " —Joshua Ryan Butler, pastor, author of *The Skeletons in God's Closet*



### THE ALLURE OF GENTLENESS

*Defending the Faith in the Manner of Jesus*

DALLAS WILLARD (HARPERONE)

"Of all the apologetics books published in the past year, *The Allure of Gentleness* is what I would most want my graduate students to read, digest, and deeply assimilate. It wonderfully distills the thinking of the late Christian philosopher and has the texture of Pascal's *Pensées* in its wisdom and presentation." —Craig Hazen, professor of apologetics, Biola University

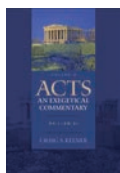
Friends who know my book-besotted line of work sometimes ask whether I actually read, cover-to-cover, all the volumes that come streaming into my office. I have to suppress a snicker, because that's a bit like asking whether Alex Trebek knows all the answers on *Jeopardy!*

Still, I devoured every word of the four finalists for CT's first-ever Beautiful Orthodoxy book award (page 52). What, you might wonder, is that high-sounding coinage supposed to mean? Think of everything that makes public discourse today a nails-on-chalkboard nightmare: the screaming matches, the outrage, the self-righteous peacocking. You might call "Beautiful Orthodoxy" our shorthand for the opposite of that—for theological, political, and cultural expression that unites truthfulness and loveliness. The way the gospel does.

Plenty of people speak the truth about God and his world, but their manner is abrasive. Others use warm, artful language in the service of half-truths and falsehoods. At CT, we believe in the possibility of truth without ugliness, of beauty without moral and theological squishiness.

That's one reason we are pumped about these yearly book awards, when we recognize Christian writers for painstaking research and trenchant analysis, for dazzling prose and arresting imagery. What a testimony to the power of beauty and orthodoxy uniting in a delicious feast. *Bon appétit.* —Matt Reynolds, associate editor, books

## WINNER BIBLICAL STUDIES AWARD OF MERIT

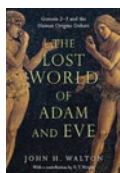


### ACTS

*An Exegetical Commentary, Vol. 1-4*

**CRAIG S. KEENER** (BAKER ACADEMIC)

"Keener is a scholar with gifts that come along once every century. Words like *encyclopedic*, *magisterial*, and *epic* come to mind when you examine 4,000 carefully argued pages on every aspect of the Book of Acts. Keener has a grasp of the ancient world like few scholars anywhere, but he also has a heart for the church and its mission." —Gary Burge, professor of New Testament, Wheaton College



### THE LOST WORLD OF ADAM AND EVE

*Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate*

**JOHN H. WALTON** (IVP ACADEMIC)

"Questions of human origins and the historical Adam are of intense interest, especially in light of the Human Genome Project. Reading the Creation account through ancient Israelite eyes, Walton provides an intriguing alternative for those who see contemporary science as antithetical to traditional understandings of Genesis." —Mark Strauss, professor of New Testament, Bethel Seminary

## WINNER THE CHURCH / PASTORAL LEADERSHIP AWARD OF MERIT



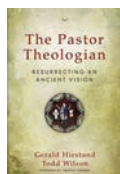
### THE IMPERFECT PASTOR

*Discovering Joy in Our Limitations through a Daily Apprenticeship with Jesus*

**ZACK ESWINE** (CROSSWAY)

"Gritty, liberating, godly, and honest. Drawing from Scripture, theology, and close observation of life,

Eswine describes the life of ministry in a way that unshackles the minister from impossible demands—and the dread, depression, and burnout that accompany them. It reminds us of a glad irony: God chooses to do imperfect ministry through imperfect persons rather than personally doing it perfectly." —Cornelius Plantinga Jr., senior research fellow at Calvin Institute of Christian Worship



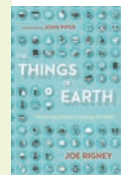
### THE PASTOR THEOLOGIAN

*Resurrecting an Ancient Vision*

**GERALD HIESTAND AND TODD WILSON** (ZONDERVAN)

"In our age, pastoral ministry is haunted by the specter of technique—the pressure to get things done. Hiestand and Wilson offer a different vision, one that attends not only to what is done, but also to the particular theology that drives our actions. Drawing upon a rich body of historical research, the authors suggest that pastoral ministry and the work of theology should not be mutually exclusive." —C. Christopher Smith, co-author of *Slow Church*, editor of *The Englewood Review of Books*

## CHRISTIAN LIVING / DISCIPLESHIP



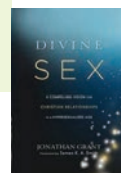
### WINNER (TIE)

#### THE THINGS OF EARTH

*Treasuring God by Enjoying His Gifts*

**JOE RIGNEY** (CROSSWAY)

"Too often, we treat delight in the beauties of nature and culture as distractions from the divine, or else consider our spiritual lives cordoned off from the rest of life—our leisure, food, clothes, relationships. Rigney invites us to enter into a more spiritually mature understanding of God's good gifts" —Rachel Marie Stone, author of *Eat with Joy*



### WINNER (TIE)

#### DIVINE SEX

*A Compelling Vision for Christian Relationships in a Hypersexualized Age*

**JONATHAN GRANT** (BRAZOS)

"The church's response to the seemingly limitless trajectory of hypersexualization has been puny, negative, and ineffective. Even the books written to 'celebrate sex' often reduce it to the same terms as our culture. *Divine Sex* widens the frame with an incisive analysis of our present state and provides a theological map toward living fully redeemed lives in fully redeemed bodies." —Leslie Leyland Fields, writer, author of *Forgiving Our Fathers and Mothers*



# WINNER CULTURE & THE ARTS AWARD OF MERIT



**SCIENCE FICTION THEOLOGY**  
*Beauty and the Transformation of the Sublime*

ALAN P. R. GREGORY

(BAYLOR UNIVERSITY PRESS)

"Our culture is awash in science fiction. From post-apocalyptic young-adult blockbusters to hard sci-fi novels, the genre's star has never burned more brightly. *Science Fiction Theology* demonstrates a masterful understanding of what makes it all tick. The dialogue between science fiction and Christianity, it turns out, is very lively, even when trafficking in distortions. A fresh, rigorous contribution on a topic that very much warrants it." —David Zahl, director of Mockingbird Ministries

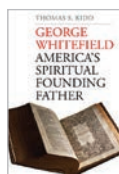


**YET ONE MORE SPRING**  
*A Critical Study of Joy Davidman*

DON W. KING (EERDMANS)

"This literary biography is a fascinating portrait of a woman who deserves to be seen as more than a famous man's wife. King traces Davidman's emotional, political, and spiritual evolution by closely examining her uneven but always interesting literary output. Though Lewis (naturally) has cameos, Davidman is the star: a strong woman and passionate writer whose love sonnets, especially, warrant closer examination." —Brett McCracken, author of *Hipster Christianity* and *Gray Matters*

# WINNER HISTORY / BIOGRAPHY AWARD OF MERIT



**WINNER**  
**GEORGE WHITEFIELD**  
*America's Spiritual Founding Father*  
THOMAS S. KIDD (YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS)

"Kidd offers a judicious assessment of a man who was at once a great evangelist, a tireless self-promoter, a deeply pious believer, and an advocate of slavery. The text is so clear and lively that the reader hardly notices the scholarly labor beneath the surface." —Elesha Coffman, professor of church history, University of Dubuque Theological Seminary



**AWARD OF MERIT**  
**JOY**  
*Poet, Seeker, and the Woman Who Captivated C. S. Lewis*  
ABIGAIL SANTAMARIA (HOUGHTON MIFFLIN HARCOURT)

"The narrative is crisp, and the subject matter is original and captivating. Santamaria examines Joy Davidman through a lens simultaneously critical and tender. Rather than presenting Lewis and his wife as saints, she depicts them as God's sinful patients. Out of the many books published on Lewis, his contemporaries, and his writings in recent years, this one most thoroughly grabbed my attention." —John G. Turner, professor of religious studies, George Mason University

## THE 2016 BOOK AWARDS BY THE NUMBERS

529  
BOOKS

entered  
by

61 PUBLISHERS

read  
by

59 JUDGES

12 CATEGORIES : 13 WINNERS : 12 AWARDS OF MERIT : 1 BOOK OF THE YEAR

### WINNER



**DEATH COMES FOR THE DECONSTRUCTIONIST**  
DANIEL TAYLOR (SLANT)

"This novel doesn't fit into a single genre, and that's what I love—it's one part mystery, one part religious and academic commentary. I was constantly guessing where the plot was headed, and I appreciated the experimental way the story unfolded. As I read, I found myself comparing the main character, Jon Mote, to Hazel Motes of Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*. Like Hazel, Jon is both haunted and intrigued by his Christian upbringing. Both are seeking redemption, but on very different paths. The author took risks, and I applaud his boldness." —Michael Morris, author of *Man in the Blue Moon*

### FICTION



**STILL LIFE**  
CHRISTA PARRISH (THOMAS NELSON)

"Parrish explores the complicated world of Ada, a young woman recently rescued from a fundamentalist cult. Ada is trying to build a life in the outside world when her world is rocked a second time by the sudden death of her new husband in a plane crash. She eventually meets Katherine, the woman who gave up her seat to Ada's husband. Katherine is trying to piece together her own broken marriage. The characters are complex and well-drawn, and their search for community and connection in the midst of mourning keeps the plot unfolding at a brisk yet natural pace." —Hannah Notess, poet and author, managing editor of *Seattle Pacific University's Response magazine*

### AWARD OF MERIT

## MISSIONS / THE GLOBAL CHURCH



### WINNER

#### CHRISTIAN. MUSLIM. FRIEND.

*Twelve Paths to Real Relationship*

DAVID W. SHENK (HERALD PRESS)

"Without giving formulas or reducing Muslims to a single type, Shenk draws on his vast experience in many parts of the world to provide an encouraging way forward for anyone seeking to share the hope of the gospel with their Muslim neighbors." —*Brian Howell, professor of anthropology, Wheaton College*



### AWARD OF MERIT

#### FROM DEPENDENCE TO DIGNITY

*How to Alleviate Poverty Through Church-Centered Microfinance*

BRIAN FIKKERT AND RUSSELL MASK (ZONDERVAN)

"Confronted with global poverty, the North American church can fall prey to a pair of mistaken approaches: retreating from a seemingly impossible task, or responding with impulsive but misapplied generosity. This book offers a way forward that can serve to build long-term solutions." —*Paul Borthwick, professor of missions, Gordon College*

## POLITICS & PUBLIC LIFE



### WINNER

#### ONWARD

*Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel*

RUSSELL MOORE (B&H)

"Conservative Christianity is at a pivotal moment. After decades of tremendous political power buttressed in a society that agreed with most of its convictions, that power is slipping, or at least shifting. Moore's hopeful response is not bitter or frantic, but measured and confident. He explores how we can be a 'prophetic minority,' calling for human dignity, religious liberty, and stable families with 'convictional kindness.' I only wish we had this book 20 years ago." —*O. Alan Noble, editor in chief of Christ and Pop Culture*



### AWARD OF MERIT

#### FREE TO SERVE

*Protecting the Religious Freedom of Faith-Based Organizations*

STEPHEN V. MONSMA AND STANLEY

W. CARLSON-THIES (BRAZOS)

"Religious liberty is on a collision course with prevailing moral and legal sensibilities, posing immediate dangers to Christian institutions. Monsma and Carlson-Thies address the problem with well-calibrated expertise. Religious liberty desperately needs defending as a matter of public policy, and *Free to Serve* shows how it's done." —*Hunter Baker, university fellow, Union University*

## SPIRITUAL FORMATION



### WINNER

#### WEARING GOD

*Clothing, Laughter, Fire, and Other Overlooked Ways of Meeting God*

LAUREN WINNER (HARPERONE)

"*Wearing God* is a provocative, smart, and well-written book, drawn from a deep well of astute biblical reflection and a host of ancillary sources. It enriches our theological imagination by calling our attention to neglected images of God in the Scripture: God as clothing and fire, God as the woman who labors and the one who laughs. Winner concedes the limits of human language, which can only 'gesture' at the reality of God, who is not always as we expect to find him." —*Jen Pollock Michel, author of Teach Us to Want (CT's 2015 Book of the Year)*



### AWARD OF MERIT

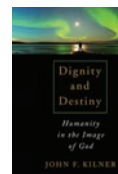
#### COMING CLEAN

*A Story of Faith*

SETH HAINES (ZONDERVAN)

"*Coming Clean* is the powerful story of a man whose son was diagnosed with a chronic illness. Instead of turning to God for solace, Haines turned to alcohol to numb the pain—and turned his anger at God. Yet, in coming clean from alcohol abuse, Haines also comes clean about doubts and fears—and their roots in some malformed spiritual experiences among well-meaning believers. Haines's humility and honesty are disarming." —*Nathan Finn, dean of the School of Theology and Missions, Union University*

## THEOLOGY / ETHICS



### WINNER

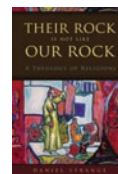
#### DIGNITY AND DESTINY

*Humanity in the Image of God*

JOHN F. KILNER

(EERDMANS)

"Kilner handles the doctrine of *imago Dei* in a way that has been badly needed. Carefully holding the doctrine to its foundations in Scripture, he painstakingly documents a host of unwarranted extrapolations that theologians and preachers have let themselves construct. What's left after his thorough work of demolition? Plenty. The way has been cleared for the doctrine of the image of God to help guide our thinking about human nature." —*Fred Sanders, professor, Torrey Honors Institute of Biola University*



### AWARD OF MERIT

#### THEIR ROCK IS NOT LIKE OUR ROCK

*A Theology of Religions*

DANIEL STRANGE (ZONDERVAN)

"Strange has produced a courageous and robust treatment on how evangelicals should relate to other religions. He stirs readers to think theologically about world faiths, with a view toward reclaiming the field of 'religious studies' and finding ways to wisely and lovingly share the Good News with those who live in darkness." —*Michael Bird, lecturer in theology, Ridley College (Australia)*



## HER.MENEUTICS



**WINNER**  
**MALESTROM**  
*Manhood  
Swept into the  
Currents of a  
Changing World*

CAROLYN CUSTIS JAMES (ZONDERVAN)

"For all the progress we've made in valuing women, in our society and our churches, a portion of the population still suffers silently: men. Whether they are falling victim to unrealistic stereotypes of masculinity, suffering from a 'father wound,' or feeling marginalized by the riptides of culture, men need the loving guidance and support of God's people. Without a doubt, *Malestrom* will encourage a healthy, biblical view of manhood in men and women alike." —*Jamie A. Hughes, managing editor of In Touch Magazine*



**AWARD OF  
MERIT**  
**SEARCHING  
FOR SUNDAY**  
*Loving,  
Leaving,*

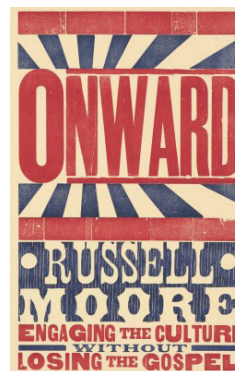
*and Finding the Church*

RACHEL HELD EVANS  
(THOMAS NELSON)

"*Searching for Sunday* is both an ode to the broken church and an invitation to all who are broken (that is, everyone) to come on in. Evans manages a graceful balance, noting the way churches can hurt, while speaking hope about the way churches can heal. She walks readers through stories centered on the sacraments while weaving in her own story of big spiritual questions, confusion, loss, and great hopes for Christian community." —*Rachel Pieh Jones, blogger, development worker in Northeast Africa*

# THE BOOK OF THE YEAR

**THE 2015 RELEASE THAT  
BEST CAPTURES OUR  
PURSUIT OF BEAUTIFUL  
ORTHODOXY.**



**ONWARD**  
*Engaging the  
Culture without Losing  
the Gospel*  
RUSSELL MOORE (B&H)

"Moore takes on the 'almost-gospel,' a form of cultural Christianity that has existed comfortably in America since its inception. With the cultural winds now changing, however, he commends Christians toward *strangeness*, toward living in joyful distinction from mainstream society. *Onward* pointedly challenges Christians to embrace the full gospel as pilgrims in a secularizing society." —*Chris Horst, vice president of development at HOPE International, co-author of Mission Drift*

"Vigorously engaged and engaging, *Onward* explores what it means for believers to be both courageously orthodox and prophetically beautiful in our witness for Christ. When we are, says Moore, we rise to see 'even our most passionate critics not as an argument to be vaporized but as a neighbor to be evangelized.' This is meaty, challenging, exciting stuff—a perfect fit for our culturally divisive times." —*Patricia Raybon, co-author of Undivided: A Muslim Daughter, a Christian Mother, Their Path to Peace*

"Moore provides a primer on how our commitments to Christ and his kingdom (as opposed to our political, social, and cultural agendas) should shape not only how we live our lives, but also what our lives should say to a watching, listening world. Combining the beauty of what he calls the 'true gospel' with a biblical orthodoxy that will inescapably mark Christians as 'strange,' Moore holds forth on the charged issues defining the 21st century. His colorful style will occasionally take readers aback—but ultimately keep them pressing on to a satisfying end." —*Harold Smith, president and CEO of Christianity Today*

### OTHER NOMINEES

#### REJOICING IN CHRIST

MICHAEL REEVES (IVP ACADEMIC)

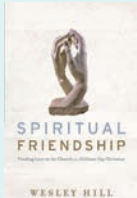
### BLIND SPOTS

*Becoming a Courageous, Compassionate,  
and Commissioned Church*

COLLIN HANSEN (CROSSWAY)

# PREACHINESS NEVER CHANGED ANYBODY'S MIND

AN EXCERPT FROM ONWARD.



## AWARD OF MERIT SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP

*Finding Love in the  
Church as a Celibate,  
Gay Christian*

WESLEY HILL (BRAZOS)

“Hill tackles not only the currently pressing topic of what hope Christianity has to offer those experiencing themselves as gay or lesbian, but also the deeper topic of friendship in an expressive-individualist age—something that’s relevant to everyone, regardless of sexual orientation. The book makes an acute diagnosis of our atomized lives in a world that imagines sex as the only source of real intimacy, and marriage as the only setting for real commitment. It retrieves elements of the historic church tradition relating to friendship and commitment. And all this is presented in sensitive, evocative language, with a reverence for literature, language, and art that makes it a delight to read. Hill’s account has a raw, even wrenching, honesty that’s essential to authentic Christian testimony in our broken world.” —*Andy Crouch, executive editor, Christianity Today magazine*

“In this well-versed yet vulnerable book, Hill urges readers to reconsider the centrality of friendship—not only for the flourishing of celibate gay Christians such as himself, but also for the flourishing of the church, which bears witness to bonds that are thicker than blood, even thicker than marital vows. In a time of individualization and loneliness, we need reminders like this that we belong to each other and for each other.” —*Katelyn Beaty, managing editor, Christianity Today magazine*

Once I clicked off a television program I normally love, because it just became too preachy. This episode was about preventing sexually transmitted diseases. A cartoonish, stereotypical Religious Right activist insisting on abstinence education frustrated the task of educating persons about proper condom use. The storyline enabled a series of coarse jokes, sprinkled with ongoing messages that abstinence doesn’t work and hurts people, and that government officials need the courage to fight the ideologues.

I, of course, am a conservative evangelical Christian who believes, with the historic Christian church, that chastity until marriage is God’s design and is necessary for human flourishing. I also think many efforts at sex education—those built merely around disease and pregnancy prevention rather than human dignity—have hurt people and diminished civil society. I’m not afraid of hearing other viewpoints. I turned off the television not because I was outraged, but because I was bored. This program was presenting a viewpoint with the kind of smug assurance of rightness that simply caricatured the views I hold.

I’m not worried about televised comedies. I was provoked, though, to think about how often we, as the Body of Christ, do the same thing. We can caricature our detractors’ positions in the grossest terms, in order to help reassure us that our opponents are particularly stupid or wicked, and we can get “Amens” from our side. But that’s preachiness, not preaching, and there’s a difference.

Jesus’ preaching took clear stands, with sharp edges. But Jesus never turned the sword of the Spirit into a security blanket for the already convinced. With the Samaritan woman at the well, for example, it would have been easy for Jesus simply to tell his disciples how Samaritans are sexually licentious because they reject the authority of the Bible. He could have ridiculed her self-delusion about her many failed marriages and her current cohabitation. Instead, he spoke to her, not about her. He uncovered how (even) she had to acknowledge the barrenness of the spiritual water she’d been lapping up.

Jesus, in continuity with the prophets and the apostles, didn’t shy away from moral confrontation. But he refused to leave it at the kind of superficiality we all crave. The disciples weren’t allowed to congratulate themselves for being free from adultery or murder, because his preaching drove the Law deeper into their consciences, exposing the kinds of internal adultery and murder it is much harder to identify. The apostle Paul, likewise, demonstrated the moral degeneracy of the Gentile nations (Rom. 1:18–2:26), but he didn’t allow the Jewish believers to step back and applaud him for his “calling sin ‘sin.’”

Many of the ideologies and practices we must confront are indeed deadly. But we aren’t preaching to those in bondage to such dangers if we simply repeat slogans. We must ask why such things are appealing, and why arguments for them can seem plausible. Our opponents, after all, are not cartoon super-villains in a lair somewhere, conspiratorially plotting the downfall of the good and the true. They believe themselves to be following the right way.

When unbelievers hear a canned, caricatured picture of their views, they recognize what I recognized in that television show. Preachy propaganda doesn’t arrest the conscience. We, as ambassadors of Christ, are dealing with the aroma of life and stench of death (2 Cor. 2:15–16). We must appeal to the depths of accused consciences that already know God but shrink back from him in fear.

Convictional kindness means loving people enough to tell them the truth, and to tell ourselves the truth about them. Those who oppose us aren’t (necessarily) stupid. They’re not any more hell-deserving than we are, apart from the grace of God in Christ. Preachiness never changed anybody’s mind. Preaching, on the other hand, can change everything.

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Excerpted from *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel* by Russell Moore.

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# THE YEAR WE

*2015 was the year we fixated on 'identity.' But some*

# SEARCHED FOR

*TV shows and films indicate that we are headed toward*


# OURSELVES

*a better, truer view of the self.*

BY ALISSA WILKINSON







ast spring, after seven seasons of women, work, two wives, and a lot of whiskey, Don Draper reached the end of his journey to define himself. And a record 3.3 million Americans settled in to watch how it would end.

The broad appeal of *Mad Men* was surprising, given that the show's protagonist—an affluent, straight, white male working on 1960s Madison Avenue—epitomized everything that social media pundits critiqued in 2015. From Oscar speeches to countless thinkpieces, from *Jane the Virgin* to *Orange Is the New Black*, the entertainment buzzword was *diversity*. The discussion about an industry still dominated by straight, white, male creators and characters often got heated, paralleling tensions over race and gender in American culture. Comedy-sketch shows like *Inside Amy Schumer* and *Key & Peele* satirized debates, suggesting pundits and politicians were missing the point, while the rest of us posted the clips online *en masse*.

Yet if we are trying to read pop culture circa 2015, Don Draper is actually a near-perfect decoder ring. His story embodies two current and contradictory obsessions: one, we celebrate each person

and suggest all people have equal value; two, we elevate geniuses—individuals who possess abilities that far exceed what any of us can imagine—to godlike status. In 2015, we championed diversity while also worshiping super-competent protagonists, from superheroes to cops with uncanny powers to people who are simply extremely good at what they do.

But a few popular releases portray a healthier view of both diversity and genius, with Don Draper as our guide.

**B**orn Dick Whitman, Don was raised in a whorehouse, a secret that profoundly shapes his life trajectory. He tried to shed his shameful identity following the Korean War, when he swapped dog tags with a dead foxhole companion. *Mad Men* slowly doled out the backstory, revealing exactly

how Don became an award-winning creative director at a scrappy advertising agency—a business built on constructing an image in order to sell something to the public. Not surprisingly, Don was the best in the business.

All along, *Mad Men* was a show about not just characters but a whole country becoming self-aware: a nation made up of many unique individuals, all of whom wanted the freedom to be themselves. In the 1960s, the things that defined most people's lives—race, class, gender, sexual orientation—went from being inescapable borders to hotly contested markers of social recognition. The key was to figure out who you were, be proud of it, then fight for others to accept you as equal.

Back in Don's day, the idea of a television show about a black hip-hop mogul with a gay son (*Empire*, the most highly rated drama on TV today) or a young, pregnant Latina virgin (the CW's *Jane the Virgin*) was inconceivable. *Fresh Off the Boat* is the first primetime show in more than 20 years to center on an Asian American family. And *Blackish*, about a suburban African American family, is one of the most-watched shows on television, alongside *Modern Family*, which includes a gay couple, and the female-led shows *The Good Wife*, *Scandal*, and *Madam Secretary*.

Nearly every critic agreed that the entertainment world has a long way to go before it will be "diverse." But such an array would startle any time-traveling *Mad Men* character. And the viewership statistics indicate that people enjoy watching people on screen who are like themselves. We are pleased when our on-screen avatars are viewed and beloved by others. We feel validated by proxy.

The cultural importance of finding your "authentic self," having others validate it, and fully living into it arguably started in Don Draper's day and is now reaching its peak. Critic Wesley Morris, writing in *The New York Times*, called 2015 "the year we were obsessed with



Three evil geniuses, from top to bottom: Don Draper in *Mad Men*, Walter White in *Breaking Bad*, Frank Underwood in *House of Cards*.

identity" and said we were a nation "in the midst of a great cultural identity migration." Today, our culture talks about "identifying" with our race, gender, or sexual orientation. In church circles, Christians talk about "identifying" as evangelical or feminist or politically conservative. We assume that our process of self-identification begins at birth and continues over the course of our lives.

We usually talk about this pursuit as a process of finding our authentic selves—the "real" selves we were born into. We take tests to determine our authentic personality type, vocational strengths, and even spiritual gifts. Disney

movies and Pinterest boards proclaim that we should never allow someone else to tell us who to be. "And above all: To thine own self be true," Polonius's exhortation in *Hamlet*, is both a favorite tattoo and the de facto motto of the 21st century. (We forget that Polonius is a blowhard.)

The Netflix comedy *The Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* was all about the challenges of defining the self. Kimmy (Ellie Kemper) is freed from an underground bunker after 15 years of captivity. She decides not to return to her hometown in Indiana with her fellow "mole women." Instead she starts over in New York City. Her new roommate, Titus Andromedon (Tituss Burgess), is a former prom king who left his conventional hometown, came out, and is now a struggling actor. Kimmy gets a job working for socialite Jacqueline Voorhees (Jane Krakowski), who, it turns out, is hiding a secret, too: she is actually Native American but is posing as white. Even Jacqueline's bratty teenage stepdaughter, Xanthippe, has something to hide from her popular friends: she's an overachiever. All the characters struggle to let their "real" selves emerge, or sometimes to *hide* that real self so as to fit into their chosen niche.

Certainly Christians believe that God sees and knows each person and that our specific gifts and abilities can find their place in the body of Christ. Christians also believe in respect for all people, since we are made in God's image and imbued with dignity. But we commonly assume, alongside mainstream culture, that the process of knowing our true selves is an individual one, something we necessarily undertake on our own.

In reality, though, we don't *first* find ourselves, *then* participate in relationships. Instead, we were made to know our true selves *in* relationships. Catholic philosopher Charles Taylor puts it this way: "No one acquires the languages needed for self-definition on their own.



We are introduced to them through exchanges with others who matter to us.”

Don Draper might have found peace with his true identity (though the show’s final sequence suggests he turns it back around as marketing material). But his breakthrough happens when he’s in a therapy session, and a stranger across the room unwittingly voices Don’s darkest anxieties:

I had a dream I was on a shelf on the refrigerator. Someone closes the door and the light goes off. And I know everybody’s out there eating. And then they open the door and you see them smiling and they’re happy to see you, but maybe they don’t look right at you. Maybe they don’t pick you. Then the door closes again. The light goes off.

This stranger has just voiced Don’s greatest fear—that everyone around him will experience a full life while he grows lonelier and more alone. Then Don crosses the room, his normally detached demeanor undone. He envelops the man in a hug, tears streaming down his cheeks. Soon afterward he calls Peggy, his confessor and closest friend, in tears. His personal moment of peace comes after their conversation. Even Don Draper can’t find himself without reaching out to those who matter to him.

Last year, movies and television shows asked another question, one they have been asking for a long time but now ask with greater force. As several critics noted in 2015, our obsession with “genius” is greater now than ever before. Nearly every TV show about crime fighting, for instance, needs some gimmick to make it into a production, whether the fighters are superheroes, serial killers,



Scenes from (top to bottom): *Empire*, *The Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*, and *Orange Is the New Black*.

or detectives.

So we have to wonder: What if your authentic self isn’t just different from everyone else but also *better* than everyone else? Do geniuses—people with uncanny talents we normal people can barely imagine—need others in order to understand themselves?

For a while now, the answer has been no. Flick on the TV or saunter down to the multiplex, and you’ll encounter a genius getting special treatment even when he or she behaves badly. There’s *The Blacklist*’s Red Reddington, an unbeatable criminal mastermind with a heart of gold. Or Olivia Pope,

the crack political operative of *Scandal*. Procedurals serve up mind-reading cops and can’t-lose undercover agents. Marvel gives us characters with special powers that render them invincible, or at least more powerful than mortals. At the movies this fall, we got another portrayal of Steve Jobs, the founder and longtime CEO of Apple, whose gifts led to both immense profit and personal isolation.

The way we portray geniuses is aggressively individualistic: they stand alone, as hyped-up versions of what we all want to achieve. Geniuses own their unique identities, never apologizing for how they’re different. They don’t care if anyone validates them; the results speak for themselves. From these mythic portrayals of geniuses, we often absorb the idea that becoming our best selves means breaking away from others. To be a truly realized individual, we must march to the radically different beat of our own drum.

Draper, like a number of other TV antiheroes (Walter White of *Breaking Bad*, Frank Underwood of *House of Cards*), is a classic genius. He’s the skeleton key his advertising firm uses to unlock big clients and big bucks. No matter how foul his attitude or how drunk he is, Don is untouchable. Even when his life is in shambles, at work he’s on top.

But as the show explored Don’s personal side, that genius construction got dismantled until it lay in shards. Don’s relationships with his family, friends, colleagues, and romantic interests slowly peeled away. *Mad Men* explores, but also eventually repudiates, the myth of the lone genius. By the finale, nobody is alone. Even geniuses need others in order to live well.

Other stories of 2015 (mind-reading cops notwithstanding) began to challenge the lone genius trope. For instance, *The Martian* features a brilliant protagonist who’s literally the only person on the planet. But as the story goes on, we

TOP PHOTO © FOX / MIDDLE AND BOTTOM PHOTOS © NETFLIX

realize that it's actually a movie about how people achieve great things only by working in concert. Lone genius is limited and sometimes pointless.

Genius also isn't morally neutral. Last spring, critics were abuzz about *The Jinx*, an HBO miniseries that asked whether, how, and why eccentric real-estate heir Robert Durst murdered his first wife and at least two other people. If he had done it—and gotten away with it—then that would make him a genius, wouldn't it? Serial killers push the limits of our appreciation of genius, partly because they are inherently those who have disconnected themselves from those around them, willing to define themselves based only on their own rules. They are radically true to themselves. Evil geniuses are the nadir of the lone genius.

By contrast, it seems, we are coming to terms with the idea that true genius requires humility, principles, hard work, and, above all, other people to keep us on the right path. One great example came in the Steven Spielberg film *Bridge of Spies*, in which Tom Hanks plays attorney James Donovan. He's not a superstar attorney. His specialty is corporate law, and his only superpower seems to be decent negotiation skills. But as the film develops, he becomes, if anything, a more virtuous man, dedicated to saving others and willing to forgo praise as long as he does right by a friend.

Pop culture seems to be bumping up against the trouble with lone geniuses: unhooked from those who matter, we fall prey to self-defined moral horizons. Who's to say that my "authentic self" isn't mean, abusive, even deadly? If identity really is formed by interactions with those around me, then I need relationships to develop morally and personally. Even *Steve Jobs* gets there, with Jobs's late realization that he might have been doing good business, but was going about the business of living all wrong.

All of this dovetails with a bedrock Christian truth: God designed church to be the place where our most important identity formation occurs,

among other people. We become more like Christ as we participate in the life of the church and form relationships there. But too often we think we must have our spiritual house in order before we can fully participate. Or, by contrast, we see the church as a place of performance, instead of a place where we are developed into more fully authentic—that is, more Christlike—humans.

abusive or egomaniacal leaders. It should also lead us to greater humility about our culture-making endeavors within the church: for instance, we might seek greater input from those around us before we embark on a life change, or we might choose to remain in a difficult church situation in order to be forged in its fires. We might seek out criticism instead of brushing it away. We might

**CHRISTIANS COMMONLY ASSUME,  
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Further, our Christian subculture is marked by church hopping. We stay put as long as it suits us, until we are offended or decide we're not being "fed." So, wanting to quietly validate our own identities, we tend to silo ourselves into churches where everyone looks like us, talks like us, likes the same movies, and won't embarrass us in public. But what if we took a cue from popular culture's push for diversity and realized that surrounding ourselves with our duplicates only makes us more self-centered?

The repudiation of the lone genius is a special challenge to evangelicals, whose culture is marked by the faulty assumptions inherent in the worship of the lone genius. In church, this takes the form of celebrity pastor worship, which can lead to inflated egos or, worse,

develop a love for those who challenge us both within the church and outside it, understanding that we are placed in this culture, at this time, to be the body of Christ for our world.

Don Draper had to get to the end of his rope in order to find some kind of satisfaction and be willing to pass it on to others. Pop culture is following his path, turning away from an individualistic take on authenticity toward real relationships and humble brilliance. Do we dare to learn from the inadvertent prophets? Can we do the same? **CT**

**ALISSA WILKINSON** is CT's chief film critic and an assistant professor of English and humanities at The King's College. She is the co-author of the forthcoming book *How to Survive the Apocalypse* (Eerdmans).



BY KNUT M. HEIM

LETTERING BY JILL DE HAAN

**KNUT M. HEIM** is tutor in Old Testament at Trinity College Bristol (UK) and, starting this summer, will be professor of Old Testament at Denver Seminary.



# Psalm 23 in the Age of the Wolf

Many people today find the famous psalm troubling. But we need it now more than ever.

**P**

SALM 23 OFFERS HOPE and encouragement like no other poem. Countless Jews and Christians have found in this short psalm solace in the face of life's greatest challenges, including death. Two verses in particular (4 and 6) have given the psalm such power:

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil... and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (KJV, used throughout)

**EVEN** **THOUGH** *through*  
**I WALK**  
*the* **DARKEST** *Valley,*  
*I WILL* *fear* **NO EVIL.**

**FOR YOU ARE WITH ME;**

**YOUR** **ROD** *&* **YOUR** *staff,*  
*They comfort me.*

**PSALM 23:4**



But some modern readers find its language foreign and patronizing.

Most readers today tend to think of sheep as dumb farm animals that are easily manipulated. Suggesting that we are like docile creatures that follow a leader en masse touts mindless religiosity. Our culture teaches us to be independent and self-sufficient. To compare humans to sheep is offensive.

Consider Pink Floyd's sarcastic rendition of Psalm 23—"Sheep," from the 1976 album *Animals*, which drew from George Orwell's novella, *Animal Farm*. The opening lines evoke the pastoral scene from Psalm 23, but with sinister overtones ("Only dimly aware of a certain unease in the air," "Things are not what they seem") and faint religious allusions ("I've looked over Jordan").

The next section highlights the pliability of humans who behave like sheep ("pretending the danger's not real, meek and obedient you follow the leader"). The third stanza opens with the words of Psalm 23, but they are sung in a threatening, menacing tone to contrast the soothing message of the psalm:

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall  
not want  
He makes me down to lie  
Through pastures green he leadeth  
me the silent waters by.  
With bright knives he releaseth  
my soul.  
He maketh me to hang on hooks  
in high places.  
He converteth me to lamb cutlets . . .

The "psalm" goes on to unmask the shepherd as a self-serving capitalist whose apparent care for the sheep is nothing but exploitative: the sheep are destined for slaughter.

Even some Bible scholars balk at the poem's language. David Clines, professor of biblical studies at the University of Sheffield, said,

We all know that in reality shepherds do not keep sheep for the sake of the sheep, as acts of altruism; they keep sheep for wool and for milk, indeed, but ultimately and usually for slaughter. . . . At the end of the poem, the sheep arrives at the "house of the Lord," the temple. Here the aspect of death lies just beneath the

surface; for everyone knows that there is only one reason why sheep go to the temple.

Clines believes the psalm propagates passive acceptance of injustice, oppression, and exploitation. People with such suspicions see organized religion either as the oppressor or as complicit with the oppressors.

In light of such contemporary objections, we need to look at the psalm once again to grasp why it's not about compliance to brutal injustice but about trust in a good God.

## THE PROBLEM OF RUMINATING SHEEP

**F**irst, we must remember that it is a poem written in a context and time very different from ours. Readers, therefore, need not just a good understanding of poetic imagery and imagination, but also of sheep and the ancient Near East. It is also important to try to understand, as best as possible, the original wording of the poem.

Many modern translations, such as the New International Version and the New Revised Standard Version, replace the King James Version's "valley of the shadow of death" with "darkest valley." The reason is technical and complex, says Bible scholar Adrian Curtis. He believes "the element 'death' may not refer to human mortality, but [to] a superlative idea, such as 'deathly shadow,' i.e., extreme or even total darkness." Thus, the reference is not to death but to danger, he says. Further,

Just as the sheep can rely on the shepherd for guidance through the most dangerous terrain, so the psalmist expresses confidence that he need fear no harm because God is with him. He is protected by the shepherd's staff and crook (v. 4c); the former is probably to be thought of primarily as a weapon, e.g., for warding off wild beasts, the latter as a means of support.

To be sure, the shepherd does indeed

defend the sheep from danger. But the Hebrew tradition favors "shadow of death." So does the Septuagint, which is rendered in the English translation as "in the midst of the shadow of death."

Understanding the behavior of sheep and the geography and topography of ancient Israelite landscapes only reinforces this word choice.

Sheep are ruminants—vegetarian animals with a special digestive system. First, they cut with their teeth the grass they feed on and then swallow it whole. The food is then predigested in the stomach and eventually regurgitated. The sheep then lie down and keep the regurgitated food, "cud," in their mouths and chew on it at length—a process called "chewing the cud."

Chewing the cud is a demanding task, and ruminants typically lie down and lapse into a semiconscious state. At this stage, they are particularly vulnerable to predators. This is why ruminants wander to and fro between "feeding grounds"—the green pastures of verse 2—and "resting grounds." The feeding grounds are where predators expect them to be. So ruminants tend to eat hurriedly before withdrawing again to various hideaways.

The sheep of Psalm 23 has to move from its relatively safe resting grounds to new feeding grounds. Frequently, however, the terrain allows only a limited number of passages between feeding and resting grounds, forming so-called "forced passageways." Often sheep are forced to travel through steep, narrow valleys strewn with large boulders that cast deep shadows right next to where the sheep have to pass. Predators know this, too. So they lie in ambush in the shadows of those boulders, which thereby—quite literally—become shadows of death.

For the psalmist, the sheep calls to mind his own vulnerability, and the shepherd calls to mind God preserving his life (vv. 5–6). The poem also allows readers to apply the shepherd image to all the dangers they face—even death—and to live with confidence in God's unfailing, protective love.

Spanish Bible scholar Luis Alonso Schökel reminds us, "What has been written with imagination must be read with imagination." Imaginative interpretation engages both our intellect

and our emotions, helping us to see our own lives in fresh ways through poetry. Metaphor shapes our thinking and how we behave because it helps us understand the complex and difficult aspects of life with the aspects of life that are familiar to us.

## THE SHEPHERD-HOST JESUS

**A**s profound as the shepherd-sheep metaphor is, something peculiar happens in the final two verses of Psalm 23: the imagery shifts to that of host and guest. Life is complex, so the imagery of sheep and shepherd alone cannot cover all the eventualities of life. Thus, the psalmist blends two metaphors to illustrate how God interacts with us.

Note the similarity between God as

surround us on every side. But God, who is both shepherd and host, is always with us. He watches over us, protects us, provides for us, and gives us hope in the midst of the most horrendous circumstances—even in death, which can be so cruel and violent.

This Shepherd-Host has come to us, of course, in Jesus Christ. Jesus applied the imagery of Psalm 23 to himself and has assured us that he is “the Good Shepherd.” He walks with his sheep through valleys of death. And he ultimately laid down his life for his sheep so that they might be once and for all delivered from death (John 10:11).

Christ as Shepherd-Host is beautifully explored and expressed in Kanye West’s 2004 song “Jesus Walks.” The lyrics contain the words “I walk through the valley of the shadow where death is,” clearly alluding to our psalm. The refrain “Jesus walks with me” evokes a different kind of interaction between Jesus—who takes the place of the

But most of all, we at war wit ourselves  
(Jesus walks)

God show me the way because the  
Devil’s trying to break me down  
(Jesus walks with me)

Two millennia after Jesus was born, he walks not just with me and you, but also with the untold masses of innocent victims of violence and injustice. They may not know that Jesus is with them, of course, which is one reason we are called to tell them this good news.

## HOPE FOR THE HERE AND NOW

**S**cholars have increasingly recognized that the Hebrew original of the final verse does not read “and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever,” as the King James Version has rendered it. Rather, the original says, “I shall return to the house of the Lord for many days to come” (my translation).

The psalm, in its original language, does not directly promise eternal life for believers. This may seem like a loss for us, but plenty other texts in Scripture promise such a blessing. Verse 6 assures the beleaguered pilgrim that divine goodness and faithfulness will remain with him throughout his life. This sheep-guest-human knows with absolute certainty that he is not alone in this world, even when all the odds are stacked against him and when he is so vulnerable that he cannot help himself.

This psalm gives us hope for the here and now, hope for life before death, in whatever dark night of the soul or body we may experience. We live in a time when many Christians around the world are violently persecuted, when unhinged terrorism seems to spread like wildfire, and when many people suffer the consequences of unrestrained greed and human consumption. A famous Latin proverb says, *Homo lupus homini* (“Man is wolf to man”). Yet our predators, human or otherwise, cannot ultimately overcome us. God, in Christ, walks through the valley with us, and he leads us to the house of the Lord, our feeding ground for hope.

CT

Both the poet and his readers knew that they themselves were vulnerable creatures living in a hostile environment.

shepherd letting the sheep “lie down in green pastures” (v. 2)—not hiding away in the secret resting grounds, but chewing the cud in plain sight of its predators—and God as host, spreading a banquet for the poet “in the presence of mine enemies” (v. 5). There are indeed “forced passageways” in our own lives. Danger, sickness, heartache, and violence

shepherd in the song—and the people in need depicted in the music video. We don’t need to accept all the implicit theology of the video to see that he is evoking this psalm and the hope it offers, especially in lines like this one:

Yo, we at war  
We at war with terrorism, racism



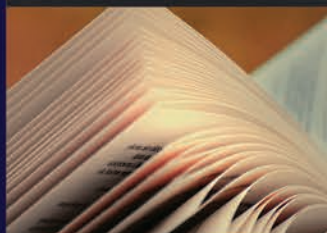
# WHAT MOVES YOU?

...

*“Peterson too has the heart of a musician, his intellectual rigor and humility saving him from the vicissitudes that have the rest of us banging tambourines as he lays out a feast on the altar.”*

—from the foreword by **BONO**  
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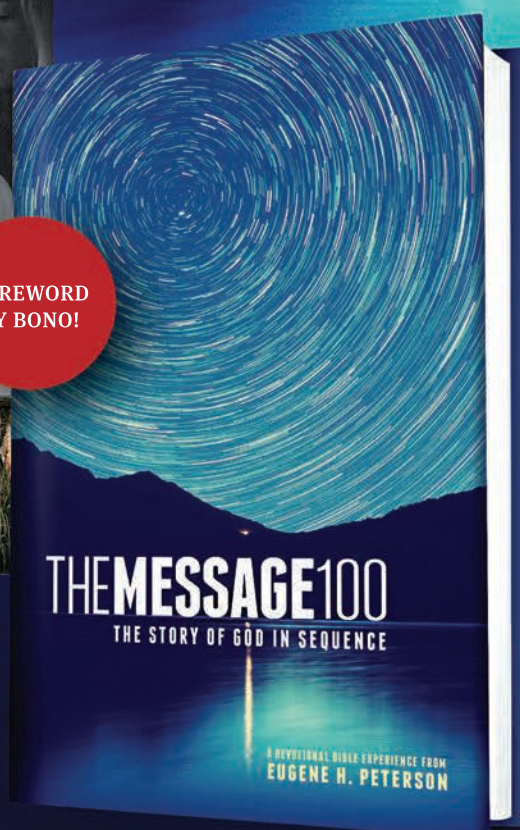


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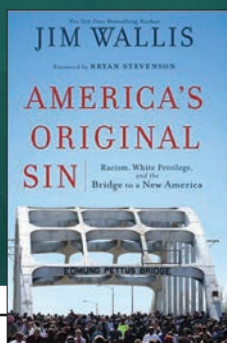


## BLACK AND WHITE IN THE RED, WHITE, AND BLUE

Three reasons to read Jim Wallis's take on race in America. And three reasons to read it with caution.  
By Joshua Ryan Butler



ILLUSTRATION BY BENEDETTO CRISTOFANI







**D**ue to cities like Ferguson and Baltimore, activist movements like #BlackLivesMatter and #ICantBreathe, and tragedies like last year's massacre of nine black Christians by a white supremacist in a South Carolina church, conversations about race are once again in the national spotlight.

As a pastor whose church has moved to broaden its ethnic diversity, and as a Hispanic man whose heart breaks over systemic injustice, I'm pleased to see so much attention devoted to healing some of our country's deepest wounds. Thus, I was excited to learn that Jim Wallis, the founding editor of *Sojourners* magazine, has weighed in with *America's Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America* (Brazos) ★★★☆☆.

For many reasons, the book offers a welcome contribution. First, it's an excellent resource for getting "up to speed" on contemporary race relations in the United States. Wallis provides a solid overview of troubling social realities like mass incarceration, the "school-to-prison" pipeline, racialized policing, immigration, and America's shifting demographic makeup.

Second, it highlights systemic injustice, connecting the dots between historical legacies and present-day realities. There are powerful, indicting statistics on dysfunctions in our criminal justice system, public schools, immigration policies, and other influential spheres. Wallis rightly wants us to see such injustices not as mere "political problems" but as rooted in sin—implying the need for deeper repentance and change.

Third, Wallis walks the talk. He has been on the front lines for decades, listening to and pleading on behalf of minority voices, living in rough neighborhoods, and working for grassroots change. Whatever you think of his progressive political leanings, you can't help being moved by the flesh-and-blood encounters that have shaped his perspective.

That said, I also have three significant concerns. First, for a book so heavily indebted to the concept of "original sin,"

God doesn't figure prominently in either Wallis's analysis of the problem or his proposed solution. It's one thing to employ "original sin" chiefly as a rhetorical device, as a provocative way of saying, in effect, "Racism is an important sin in American history that has massive implications for today." But Wallis seems to see it as the *foundational* sin.

Original sin involves wanting to rule the earth without God. At bottom, it's a form of rebellion. Of course, that rebellion has poisoned not only our relationship with God but also our relationships with each other—and racism is among its bitterest fruits. But Wallis invokes "original sin" primarily with the horizontal dimension in mind, giving minimal attention to the God-ward dimension.

This highlights a broader problem: Wallis makes constant use of terms like "conversion," "belief," and "repentance," but with a social emphasis that flattens out their theological shape. So for white people, Wallis says, believing black experiences will lead first to a conversion of perspective, followed by repentance manifested in commitment to political change. While I sympathize with the sentiment, it's not specifically *Christian* just because it retains recognizably Christian language.

I imagine Wallis wants to expand these biblical words by showing how they apply to urgent, real-world injustices. I fear, however, that he ends up shrinking words that, contemplated in their biblical wholeness, emphatically do oppose racism—but always within the larger, God-centered biblical drama of sin and redemption. Wallis recognizes in passing that racism is a sin against both neighbor and God, and he treats the cultural construct of "whiteness" as

a form of idolatry. But the horizontal is given such primacy that God seems like an afterthought, with rich biblical language shrunk down like a wool sweater run through the dryer once too often.

A second concern is that, in Wallis's telling, the nation seems to displace the church as the dynamic center of God's redemptive activity. The book implicitly treats America—rather than the body of Christ in union with its Lord—as God's blessed community and the prime witness to the diversity of his kingdom.

God's people can, of course, contribute to a nation's common good through community organizing and activism. But one wonders about the role of essentials like preaching the Word and taking Communion in Wallis's vision of the church. Perhaps they're just assumed. But except for a chapter on the prophetic potential of multiethnic congregations, the church's legitimacy seems to pivot not on its identity as the body of Christ but on its external contributions to American progress. In a telling moment, Wallis points to Baltimore, offering the nonviolent presence of churches on the streets as a prime example of how the church can *be* the church (rather than as the fruit of its underlying allegiance to Christ).

Finally, Wallis tends to approach biblical themes in a way that displaces the centrality of Jesus. For example, two of his major themes are that all are children of God, and that Matthew 25 ("whatever you did for one of the least of these . . .") commands us to care for the needy. All fine and good, as far as it goes. God is indeed the "father" of Adam, and thus implicitly the father of all (Gen. 5:1-2; Acts 17:26). And Matthew 25 has long spurred believers to exercise hospitality and charity toward people who are otherwise forgotten.

But one wonders whether Wallis can account for New Testament themes like adoption—that we *become* children of God through faith (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5-6). And don't forget that the subject of Jesus' words in Matthew 25 is "the least of *these brothers and sisters of mine*" (v. 40, emphasis added). The stress is on his followers. There are certainly implications for embracing "the least of these" on a broader, universal scope, but in a way that goes *through* rather than *around* the particularity of God's people.

In a revealing moment, Wallis cites

**Wallis provides a solid overview of troubling social realities like mass incarceration, the 'school-to-prison' pipeline, racialized policing, immigration, and America's shifting demographic makeup.**

Jesus' statement that "the truth will set you free" (John 8:32) as a way "to become better Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, people of other faiths, or people of conscience with no religion—all better because of the truth." But what does "truth" mean here? Is it the God-directed, Christ-centered, Spirit-saturated truth that the gospel reveals? Or has "truth" been lifted from its biblical moorings and re-envisioned as an abstract force guiding our secular campaigns for justice? Jesus comes off looking more like a cheerleader on the sidelines than the head of a new humanity, reconciling us to God and to one another.

#### 'WHERE DO I START?'

To sum up my ambivalence about this book, an analogy may prove helpful. I don't often listen to contemporary Christian music, because it tends to sound like an imitation of mainstream music with some Christian jargon thrown in. By and large, I'd rather just listen to the superior original product.

*America's Original Sin* can feel like the literary equivalent of "Christian music." It offers a fine overview of racism and white privilege in America, but its distinctly "Christian" contributions are more superficial than one might hope. I'd encourage readers to turn instead to mainstream accounts—preferably from minority authors—that pack a bigger punch, go deeper in particular areas, and are currently shaping our national conversation. Good examples include Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*, Ta-Nehisi Coates's *Between the World and Me*, and Joy DeGruy's *Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome*. These are the works that Christian minorities in my city recommend when people ask, "Where do I start?"

I'm grateful for Wallis's tireless on-the-ground efforts to awaken consciences and agitate for change. His faith-driven activism is nothing short of inspiring. But I found myself longing for a more robust theological vision. A message is truly prophetic only when God is at its center.

CT

**JOSHUA RYAN BUTLER** is pastor of local and global outreach at Imago Dei Community in Portland, Oregon. He is the author most recently of *The Skeletons in God's Closet* (Thomas Nelson).

# Hope in a World of Rape for Profit

An excerpt from *The Justice Calling*.

**M**ala was trafficked into one of the most brutal brothels that International Justice Mission [which I, Bethany, help lead] had ever encountered. The lead trafficker was powerful, wealthy, and deeply connected to a wide network of other traffickers in the underground world of rape for profit. He stopped at nothing to keep the girls in his brothel under his power. Some of his victims witnessed him murdering another girl simply to give a warning, lest they resist his will. If ever there was a human being I would be tempted to believe is unreachable by the grace of God, it would be this man.

Like all of the new girls, Mala was raped by the trafficker as her initiation into what she would be required to endure every day. The trafficker made his power clear to each of the girls in his brothel; one of the girls recalled him bragging, "I can even rape a girl and get away with it; that is how much power I have. I will never be put in jail." Indeed, he believed he was invincible.

Mala and the other girls worked around the clock, raped by 10 to 20 men each day. If they tried to refuse a customer, they were tortured. When Mala attempted (and failed) to run away, she was viciously beaten. After a few months in the brothel, Mala became pregnant, but her trafficker beat her even then, using a metal pipe and kicking her stomach. Mala lost her baby.

What hope could we possibly hold on to for Mala? Where do we even begin to look for hope in the face of what she suffers? In the face of the millions of lives her own suffering mirrors? And what hope could we possibly hold for Mala's trafficker?

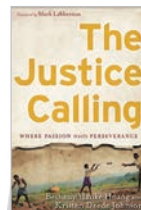
The closer we get to suffering, the more the idea of hope can begin to appear as nothing more than just

that—an idea, fleeting and nebulous, like a vapor that appears for a moment and then evaporates. But the author of Hebrews claims that hope is tangible, that hope is an anchor for our souls (Heb. 6:19). Hope is not a fleeting idea; we can "hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess" (Heb. 10:23). Paul writes that hope is certain: "Since we have such a hope, we are *very bold*" (2 Cor. 3:12, emphasis added). Peter proclaims that through Christ we have been birthed into a "living hope" (1 Pet. 1:3). We can hope with certainty and boldness "for he who promised is faithful" (Heb. 10:23).

Our hope is not based on our own abilities to act or to change the world. Our hope is entirely grounded in the reality that God has always cared about justice, has always called us to join him in seeking justice. God promises that he will fully usher in his kingdom of justice and righteousness. Because of what God has done, is doing, and will do in and through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, we can enter a fallen world of suffering and heartache rooted in a persevering hope.

This is not a cheap hope; our hope is often as broken, bloodstained, and costly as Christ's body hanging on the tree at Golgotha. This is not a trite hope; in the midst of our hope we still need to acknowledge and lament the places in

this world where we fall short of God's kingdom vision. It is a hope rooted in the power of the light of Jesus Christ to finally and fully overcome all the darkness of the world in his perfect timing.



**The Justice Calling: Where Passion Meets Perseverance**  
Bethany Hanke Hoang and Kristen Deede Johnson  
(Brazos Press)

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# Does Your Church's Worship Need a Multicultural Makeover?

Why local congregations should embrace the music and prayers of other church traditions. [Interview by Richard Clark](#)

**W**hat's the best way to foster unity across cultures in our churches? According to Sandra Maria Van Opstal, an experienced worship leader and trainer, the way we worship together sets the table for Christians to relate across ethnic and cultural boundaries. In *The Next Worship: Glorifying God in a Diverse World* (InterVarsity Press), Van Opstal (MDiv, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) explores how worship traditions from different cultures can further the connection between local congregations and believers worldwide. Richard Clark, managing editor of *Leadership Journal*, spoke with Van Opstal about enlarging the cultural and stylistic boundaries of worship.

## How did you develop a passion for multicultural worship?

As a child, I attended a Catholic parish with my mom, my grandmother, and eventually my whole family. Then, when I was a teenager, my father moved us to a Baptist church. And when I went away to college, I ended up at an urban, African American church.

Looking back, I can see how each experience gave me a different foundation. My time in the Catholic Church gave me an appreciation for liturgy. In the Baptist church, I learned about making a personal decision for Jesus. And in the African American church, I was exposed to charismatic worship. In each case, I picked up a different sense of who God is and of the many ways we can worship him.

## When did you first experience a conflict over worship styles?

Growing up in the 1980s, I can remember a generational conflict. The younger people were listening to more contemporary music. We wanted to bring some of that into the church, but the older folks wanted to continue singing out of the hymnal.

The lesson I took away is that people have strong preferences based on what they consider to be normal or good. It's hard to see something different as just *different* rather than better or worse. It can't just be that we favor a different style of instrumentation or a different worship environment. One of us has to be right, and the other has to be wrong.

In general, though, whether the conflict is generational or cultural, we have to be careful about the way we talk about change. Often, either out of immaturity or frustration, we give an impression of: "What we're doing isn't good. What we're doing doesn't work." And that sets the tone. Instead, we should focus on: "What we have here is beautiful and valuable. But it's not everything. So how do we create space for more?" We're not erasing the old. We're developing something new, which includes both what has been and what could be.

## What steps should churches take to transition to

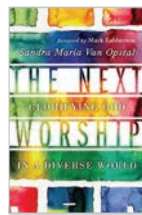
## multicultural worship?

First, you need to understand your own worship culture. If you're going to create something new, you need to know where you currently stand. Every community has favorite songs or passages that express some essential message or theme. In African American churches, for instance, Psalm 139 is important because of the emphasis on being fearfully and wonderfully made (v. 14). The more you learn about African American history, the more you understand why there's a continual need to draw from this passage.

Second, you need to know why you're considering change. For what purpose should your worship be more diverse? Because you've merged with another church? Because your neighborhood is changing, and you want to show neighbors that they are welcome? Because you want to show solidarity with Syrian refugees or other branches of the global

church? Whatever the reason, it's important to cultivate a sense of mutuality. We want to communicate not only that we stand with you, but also that we need you, that we're not complete without you.

From there, you want to find a mentor—ideally a local pastor. I used to bring in worship leaders from other churches to train my leaders and worship teams. Otherwise, books, CDs, and

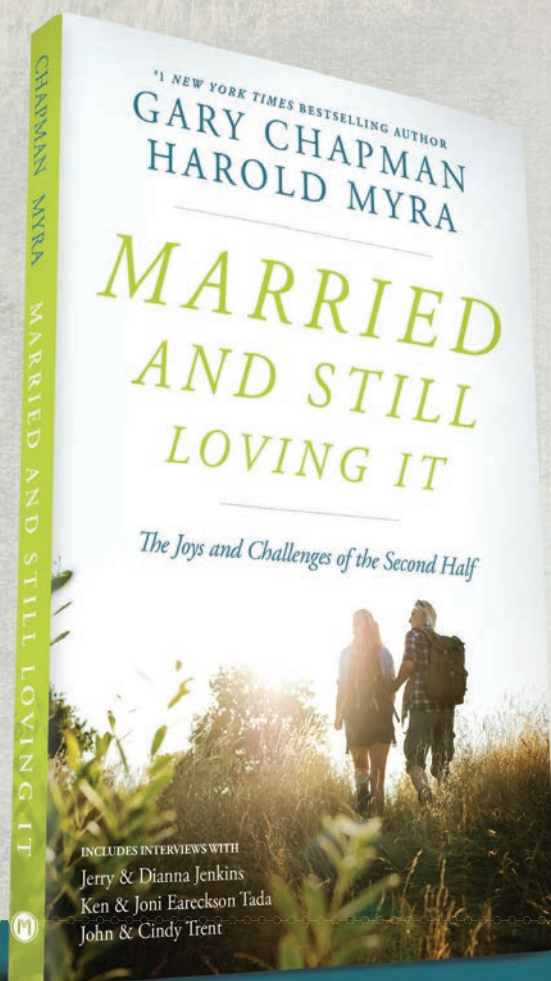


**The Next Worship: Glorifying God in a Diverse World**  
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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 68

YouTube videos can assist with specifics.

Make sure that the leaders and stakeholders of the church are on board. Unless they are involved in the process and invested in the vision, conflict could result.



**Let's say you're addressing a mainly white church in a mainly white community. Why should that church pursue multicultural worship?**

More and more, there will be very few pockets of the country where we can say, "There's no one like me around." But whatever the racial or ethnic makeup of your church, multicultural worship is critical to the church's discipleship. Worship leaders have a pastoral responsibility to help open the eyes of our congregations to the diversity that exists within God's family. There's a responsibility, yes, but it's also a blessing and a benefit. It's a way to acknowledge that we don't have everything we need in our own community, and that we're blessed by those who are different.

Hearing, for instance, the prayers, music, and testimonies of Egyptian Christians—who are a persecuted minority—connects you to them. It may even prepare you to experience persecution in your own context.

Multicultural worship makes us reflect on the experiences of our brothers and sisters. You may belong to a majority-white church. There may be no African Americans in your community. But if you begin worshiping with African American spirituals, you're forced to ask, "Why are they singing those words?" "Why are they repeating themselves so often?" We step into someone else's story through worship, and we seek God from a different vantage point. We take on their burdens of suffering, their joy, and their understanding of who God is.

**How can churches do this with sensitivity and respect?**

There's a difference between appreciation and appropriation. Appropriation is consuming someone else's product. It's about singing a particular song because it's "fun" or because it "spices up" our worship. It's like telling

Latino people, "I really like your tacos and salsa dancing, but I don't want to care about your immigration story or your current reality."

Appreciation is about connection—ideally through relationship, but at least through stepping into someone else's story. It's about saying, "I have

Christian brothers and sisters living within a different reality, and while I may not know all the history or the politics, I know they're made in God's image, and I want to understand things from their perspective."

**Why do you rely on the Lord's Table as a guiding metaphor for diverse worship?**

The Lord's Table is an image of unity. It's where we all come together to remember the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It's a place of intimacy. Those who come to the table are coming from different backgrounds and cultures, as was the case in the early church. Sharing a meal with someone is such an intimate thing. It's an ideal image for meeting together across cultures. We're at the table together, not just noticing each other or passing each other by.

**At least to some degree, all worship is cultural. German hymns came out of a German cultural expression. The prayers of the early church came out of the experience of persecution. There is no form of worship that isn't rooted in a particular point in time.**

**What attitudes or habits prevent well-meaning Christians from fully embracing multicultural worship?**

There's an awkwardness at the beginning. It's like learning a new language, and we feel weird. But the biggest issue is fear—from the congregation, the fear of trying something new or not being good at it. I was once hired to speak at a women's conference where the organizers tried to persuade me not to talk about diverse worship the way I usually would. They said, "You work with young women in college, and they're open to new experiences and ready for a challenge. But our women are over 50, and they come from white suburban backgrounds."

And from the perspective of a worship leader, there's a fear that the people will reject it. Giving someone a gift puts you in a vulnerable position, because you're not sure how warmly it will be received.

But overall, people are more open than we give them credit for. It's not so much that they're unwilling; it's that the process of guiding them can be unhelpful. We spring things on people, or we don't explain them well. People are more open, but they need to be pastored through the experience.

**Some would say that worship should be grounded in the Bible, not in any particular culture. How would you respond? And are there any nonnegotiable elements that need to be present, no matter the culture?**

At least to some degree, all worship is cultural. German hymns came out of a German cultural expression. The prayers of the early church came out of the experience of persecution. There is no form of worship that isn't rooted in a particular point in time. And there's nothing wrong with that.

That said, there are common elements that every cultural expression of worship should have. The late theologian Robert Webber, in his book *Worship Old and New*, points to four features: an invitation to worship, a preaching of the Word, a celebration of the Lord's Table, and a benediction or "sending" of some kind.

Worship should be God-centered. It should help us understand more about who God is, whatever the differences in content, form, and style. Of course we'll have disputes. But worship should always be focused on God.

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# MINISTRY FOR THE LONG HAUL

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No one starts out in ministry planning to fail . . . and yet pastor turnover is incredibly high. What can future pastors do to prepare for success, and how can churches help them thrive? A two-year study set out to answer these questions, and identified the key components of ministers and ministries that last.

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# WHAT IT TAKES TO THRIVE IN MINISTRY

by Kara Miller

**SEMINARY  
RESEARCHERS  
IDENTIFIED  
FIVE KEY  
AREAS WHERE  
PASTORS SHOULD  
PURSUE GROWTH  
TO ESTABLISH  
HEALTHY  
MINISTRIES.**

**W**hen you see pastors leading the service and greeting the congregation on Sunday morning, you see only a tiny snapshot of what their jobs entail. If you were to write up the actual duties of the average church pastor, it would not make an attractive job posting by most standards. “WANTED: Person to teach, preach, and disciple others by offering amazing insights every week. Master’s degree required, doctorate preferred. Will actually spend majority of time managing a business operated by volunteers, setting up systems, managing conflicts and politics of competing priorities, and creating and defending budgets. Volunteers will simultaneously be friends, congregants, counseling clients, critics, and the bosses who decide your career path and compensation. You’ll work on the day others are renewed and be expected to work the other days ‘normal’ people are in the office.”

Yet each year thousands of people

choose to attend seminary to become church pastors. And when they actually get started in ministry, many are shocked and surprised by what working in the church demands of them and their families. Bob Burns, dean of lifelong learning at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, as well as a pastor and a researcher in vocational ministry, points to a typical day on the job as an example of what contributes to this disconnect. “A pastor could have lunch with a businessperson who’s dealing with an ethical issue, then spend the afternoon working on sermon preparation, which is interrupted by three phone calls requiring pastoral care. The pastor then goes from there to the hospital, counseling a family with someone in crisis or even dying, and spends the evening at a church board meeting defending the way the budget is being spent.”

Pastors average more work hours per week than other managers and professionals, according to Jackson Carroll,

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professor emeritus at Duke Divinity School in Durham, North Carolina, and a long-term clergy researcher. Most pastors will admit, when asked about their personal and professional lives, that serving God in a church often also means loneliness, lack of opportunities for ongoing professional and personal development, and external and internal pressure to overlook one's own health in the service of others. The stresses of the job will cause many to choose (or be forced) to step away from church ministry altogether.

Alarmed at statistics on pastoral burnout and forced exits, the Lilly Endowment invested \$84 million in the early 2000s into research projects on pastors. Donald Guthrie, at the time a dean at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, enlisted fellow seminary faculty members Burns and Tasha Chapman to develop the Pastors Summit project. In addition to the Lilly data, the group had concerns about pastors' sustainability from a basic health perspective. "The research on the lack of physical and emotional health in our pas-

tors was rather shocking to us . . . how many pastors were on sick leave due to stress related illnesses, and how many pastors were obese, or had heart-related illnesses, compared to the general population," says Chapman.

The Pastors Summit focused not on preventing burnout but on identifying the positive practices required to stay in the pastorate. Participants were selected using criteria including strong ministry expertise evidenced by fruitfulness and overall emotional health in ministry. The Summit included 73 pastors, representing 26 states, who met in small cohorts three times per year for two years, along with their spouses and occasional outside experts such as psychologists. Each Summit meeting was recorded and transcribed, resulting in 12,000 pages of material to be analyzed, which eventually became the book *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving* (IVP Praxis, 2013). The researchers found that five common themes emerged, areas in which pastors and future pastors should pursue growth to establish their ministries for the long haul: spiritual formation, self-care, emotional

and cultural intelligence, marriage and family, and leadership and management.

A participant in the Pastors Summit summed up the challenge to pastors:

Most people in our church have a life that is like a stool with three legs. They've got their spiritual life, their professional life, and their family life. If one of these legs wobbles, they've got two others they can lean on. For us, those three things can merge into one leg. You're sitting on a one-legged stool, and it takes a lot more concentration and energy. It's a lot more exhausting.

The one-legged stool analogy highlights how a pastor's spiritual life, family life, and identity as a human being in a professional role can all blur together. "That is unusual in most other professions and very hard on pastors as people," says Chapman. "And that's the big challenge. They think vocational ministry in general is going to be one way . . . having long quiet times, preaching and leading Bible studies . . .

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and the complexity and demandingness of it, the loneliness and the amount of expectations, are surprising.”

And they don’t always learn that in seminary. “Pre-professional ministry training usually focuses on knowing the right content and on developing skills to accomplish ministry tasks,” says Guthrie. “As important as these are, they are usually not the reasons that people leave ministry. Rather, ministry-killing issues are matters of life skills, behavior patterns, and character.” Chapman speaks to groups around the world on this topic, and she consistently hears three reasons why people leave church ministry: conflict, lack of resources, or flagrant sin (usually sexual in nature). She says attention to the five themes can not only help pastors avoid a ministry-ending crisis, but actually help them be healthier human beings as they serve in a complex and difficult job.

### SPIRITUAL FORMATION

If pastors are going to stay in ministry for the long haul, they first need to be maturing as Christians, both personally and interpersonally. It may be surprising to realize that many pastors struggle to realize that many pastors struggle in their personal walks with Christ. As one pastor at the Summit said, “Look, I may be a pastor, but I’m an inch deep. My life is filled with incessant activity and little prayer. ‘Contemplation’ is foreign in my vocabulary and nonexistent in my life.”

Pastors also told researchers that they struggle with worship because they are distracted during services at their

in the area, even if they just stayed for the music portion. Others found it helpful to take the bulletin home as a guide for private worship during the week.

A pattern of neglecting spiritual formation is often established in seminary. “The pastor who doesn’t read the Bible devotionally was the seminarian who didn’t ever read the Bible devotionally,” says Guthrie. He challenges seminarians and those who aspire to seminary to not wait until they finish the educational process to form good habits. The time demands will not get easier when one moves into ministry, especially with the consumeristic approach many people bring to churches today. “The demands and expectations of well-meaning, good-hearted church folk are kind of outrageous,” he says.

So how can congregations help? One way is to encourage or require pastors to take adequate days off. Participants in the Pastors Summit discussed planning for the equivalent of one Sabbath day and one day off for running errands. Participants were creative in how this worked, with one taking a half-day Sabbath from noon to four on Saturday, and another half-day on Sunday afternoon, and then taking Monday as his day off work.

The research also found that pastors—and seminarians, for that matter—need to schedule time for intentional reflection as a part of their spiritual formation and overall leadership. “Pastoral ministry tends to move from one thing to another, with very little opportunity for structured or unstructured reflection on

what I’ve done, where I’ve been, where I’m going,” says Burns. This concept of reflection appeared as a necessary element in all five themes that emerged from the research.

The issue that surprised Guthrie most in the Summit was how isolated all the pastors were. Participants were thriving ministers, yet many had few people

with whom to share their lives. The authors suggest that this happens because pastors are always wisely calculating, consciously or unconsciously, whether

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own church. Several participants found that they could refresh themselves by finishing sermon prep on Saturday morning so they could to attend a Saturday night worship service at a large church



Three hands are shown in different poses against a solid red background. The top hand is a fist, representing 'Rock'. The middle hand is flat with fingers spread, representing 'Paper'. The bottom hand has the index and middle fingers extended, representing 'Scissors'.

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people in the congregation can be trusted with a pastor's deeper concerns. The answer is often no. A pastor's wife in a cohort said, "I love the small group I'm involved in at my church. But I'm not about to go to the group and tell them, 'My husband's sick and tired of this church and wants to leave.'" She wasn't the only one who shared feelings like that. She was the norm, says Guthrie.

The Summit participants examined in depth the lack of deep friendships and accountability relationships that would help with continued spiritual growth. Unable to find those within the church walls, many pastors confide only in their spouse. "The spouse is a nuclear waste dumping site for all the really hard processing and conversation," says Chapman. "We encourage pastors to consider how to break that isolation and find other talking partners who understand their world. That requires peer groups, probably others in vocational ministry and most likely outside their church context or denominational ministry context," she says. Out of 77 Summit participants, only 3 reported "confidants" within their church or from among church ministry co-workers. "My short answer for seminarians about how to thrive in ministry is to build a team," says Guthrie. "Submit yourself to your team, receive from your team, and contribute to your team . . . and don't wait for a sign to appear or until you're in a crisis."

## SELF-CARE

The second theme that emerged from the Pastors Summit was self-care: prioritizing physical and emotional health. Burns and Chapman were troubled to learn that 33 percent of pastors in one denomination in a European country they visited were off work for stress-related health issues. "We think we can separate the spiritual aspect of our lives from the rest of our lives . . . that's bad theology, this idea that somehow I can always stay up late because I'm doing spiritual work, that somehow my body's going to put up with that," says Chapman.

In Acts 20:24, Paul said, "I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me." Self-care for pastors is about living in a way that prevents burnout and allows them

to actually finish the race. Churches might consider the radical idea of providing gym memberships or discounts for pastors, similar to many secular companies that recognize how better physical health increases the productivity and longevity of employees. One Summit pastor said, "Over the last six months, I began running again. I found that when I am upset after a meeting or mad over offhanded criticism, and then I run, those feelings just seem to melt away." Another idea to help churches help pastors that emerged from the Summit: limit the number of nights a pastor can be in meetings at church.

The emphasis on self-care needs to start in seminary. "Seminarians should not shoot to get As," says Chapman. "There's probably a lack of basic self-care if they are trying to get As in all their courses." Seminarians who wish to

be thriving pastors have a co-curricular responsibility to figure out what it means to be healthy in marriage, family, and self: "To have hobbies, to have interests outside of what I'm doing here," adds Burns. "To learn how to develop those so I'm healthier when I get out into the ministry with the demands that are being placed upon me."

Guthrie says that their book has received some criticism that promoting self-care in seminary encourages mediocre preparation. To this he responds, "We would say that some people actually do need to work on their course work, and learn the discipline of having something to say when they have the opportunity to say it. What we're saying about being healthy should not be used as a shield to cover being unprepared."

## EMOTIONAL AND CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE

The third theme to emerge from the Pastors Summit was the importance of cultivating emotional and cultural intel-

ligence. Emotional intelligence is the ability to proactively manage one's emotions and to appropriately discern and respond to the emotions of others. The authors were surprised to also identify a complementary theme of cultural intelligence: pastors need to recognize and adapt to cultural challenges and the cultural context in the background of their own lives and of others in their churches. One Summit pastor said, "When I was in seminary, I was taught how to preach and how to exegete the Scriptures. I wasn't taught how to exegete people. . . . I didn't know that pastoring is dealing with people and

***"The research on the lack of physical and emotional health in our pastors was rather shocking to us . . . how many pastors were on sick leave due to stress-related illnesses, and how many pastors were obese, or had heart-related illnesses, compared to the general population."*** -Tasha Chapman

their messiness."

Pastors in the Summit reported being out of touch with their own emotions and unaware of how those emotions are displayed in non-verbal cues. Summit participants found it very helpful to spend time examining how their family of origin forged and shaped the way they relate to other people. They also noted that daily prayer, worship, and journaling may help pastors develop greater emotional intelligence. The Summit found that cultural intelligence also helps pastors recognize their tendency to think that their own background and approach is the only right one.

A particular challenge for pastors is workaholicism. "They get tired of volunteers saying 'no' to their requests, so they'll take way too much on themselves," says Burns. "A wise pastor once said to me, 'I need to be willing to let things be done about 70 percent as well as I could do them myself and to be happy with that.'" Future pastors should also recognize that the job requires



them to “wisely disappoint people.” In the Gospels, one can read how Jesus often disappointed people by not meeting societal expectations or handling ministry in the way they expected.

A Summit pastor shared, “The stress of ministry has pushed me and my marriage away from the practices of emotional honesty, reflection, and dialogue. I am also very prone to blame my failures on my schedule, my wife, and my parishioners. I definitely can feel the difference when we take time to cultivate our marriage, when I participate at home, when I say ‘no’ to things that are not a priority, and when I contemplate and pray.”

## MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

To sustain the stresses that come with church ministry, pastors also need to focus on marriage and family; that is, spiritual and relational health in relationships with their spouse, children, and extended family. Initially, the Pastors Summit was going to focus one session

could be the person who is critiquing you on your annual review or setting your salary.”

The stressors unique to a pastor’s marriage and family are especially shocking for younger seminarians and younger pastors, says Chapman. “They come out of a culture that says ‘I can do my thing vocationally, and my spouse can do their thing vocationally.’ But the pastorate is going to involve your entire family, including your children, in ways you can’t predict.” A Summit participant recounted how, after a tense board meeting, an elder went home and vented to his wife, calling the pastor “an idiot,” with their son in earshot. The next day, the elder’s son got into a fistfight with the pastor’s son at school after telling him his dad was “an idiot.” Both were suspended.

Before they even begin their ministry, future pastors should consider identifying boundaries to protect the emotional health and safety of their family. Summit participants described developing a

continuum of “need to know” in relationships that is unique for each pastor’s family and spouse. Meeting with other experienced pastoral couples, or even a professional counselor, may be helpful to establish these

***“The spouse is a nuclear waste dumping site for all the really hard processing and conversation. We encourage pastors to consider how to break that isolation and find other talking partners who understand their world.”*** -Tasha Chapman

around topics related to marriage and family, but it quickly became clear that spouses are integrally involved in pastors’ ministries. One pastor shared at the Summit, “When my heart is broken, or when I’m angry, I don’t go to the elders. I don’t go to other pastors. I go to my real pastor, who is my spouse.”

Pastors’ spouses also struggle to find confidants in their own church. They have many friends, but not people they can speak to with no filter. “Those people are rarely found in the church where you are serving because of dual relationships, a technical term in the counseling profession,” says Burns. “The pastoral life is constantly full of dual relationships, where the person you are counseling about the condition of his or her marriage one moment, in the next moment

boundaries. The Summit participants noted a particular need to assure pastors’ children that ministry challenges are not their fault, and that God can provide for the problems their parents are facing.

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The fifth and final theme to emerge from the Pastors Summit was leadership and management: pastors must accept that ministry in a church requires them to lead and manage, even if they don’t feel gifted for the work. “People go to seminary thinking that they will be preaching, teaching, training, and discipling. And all the studies show that at least half of the time, pastors are involved in leadership and management responsibilities, such as leading meet-

ings, planning agendas, putting together budgets, program development, or developing and working with volunteers,” says Burns.

The Summit research found that all participating pastors struggled with expectations of success. Burns says that pastors often need to accept that they may not pastor a large church and may instead serve in a smaller congregation. And they need wisdom to wisely disappoint the expectations of their congregants. In the book *Leadership on the Line* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2002), authors Martin Linsky and Ronald A. Heifetz wrote that “exercising leadership might be understood as disappointing people at a rate they can absorb.” Pastors need to manage expectations of time and attention, friendship, and the pressure to produce star-caliber sermons each week like the “celebrity” pastors people listen to on podcasts or television.

In *Resilient Ministry*, the authors note, “Jesus might as well have also said, ‘Where two or three are gathered together, there are politics.’ Ministry often requires negotiating between people with competing interests and different levels of authority. The book contains a lengthy discussion of power structures in the church, but one key takeaway is the suggestion that pastors develop “relationship capital.” New pastors can be intentional about building relationships with key groups in the congregation to have “capital” that they can spend when they must make unpopular decisions.

Future pastors will also benefit from work on developing listening skills, speaking the truth, and handling conflict. In the Bible, conflict is often used by God as a catalyst for growth. Successful Summit pastors saw conflict as part of their ministry and not an intrusion upon it.

Part of this management skill set is an understanding of how to handle emotions, both their own and those of others. “We practically say, ‘Welcome to seminary. We’re broken people, the counseling office is right there.’ What I mean is that we want them to experience counseling, and the process of working on their own brokenness and their own emotional health as seminarians, before they go out into ministry,” says Chapman. In the years since the Pastors Summit, Chapman said, she’s been intentional

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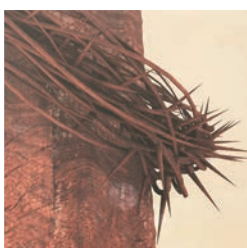
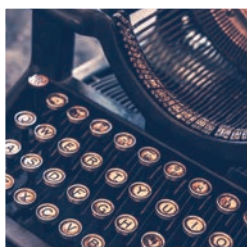
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about increasing the family of origin work completed by seminarians.

People considering ministry can keep these themes in mind as they examine potential seminaries and graduate institutions. Burns identified a helpful question to ask in the search: "Is this a school that is going to treat me as a brain on a stick, or is this a place where they're going to look at me as a whole person and think about helping my formation as a whole person and not just an intellectual or a theologian?" Careful consideration of co-curricular development offered during one's training can help many avoid burnout and stay in ministry for the long haul.

Quotes from *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving* are used with the authors' permission.

Kara Miller is a freelance marketing communications writer in the Chicago area who has a new appreciation for her pastors' jobs. You can follow her on Twitter @kara\_chicago.

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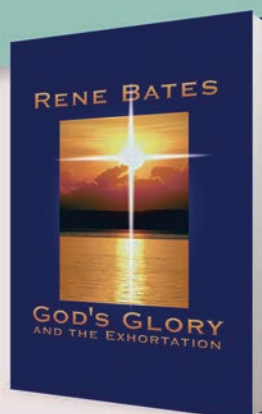
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Holy Spirit (the robin). And of course, C. S. Lewis's Aslan leapt into my mind and heart. For years, these spiritual mothers and fathers had been teaching me about the Bible. I just didn't realize it.

During winter quarter of my junior year, I decided to study in Vienna, Austria. But while the other students in the program got acquainted during our travel time, I kept to myself. They had so much in common: they were white and born in America; I was a dark-skinned immigrant from India. Trying to forget my "otherness," I pulled out a book: *Mere Christianity*, given by a friend from my dorm. I had accepted it eagerly only because Lewis was a trusted name. My dorm buddy had also given me a New Testament. I'd brought it along, not wanting to be rude, but I doubted I'd venture again into the "American Holy Book."

Vienna's friendliness soon drew me out of my shell. A postal worker came from behind the counter to re-tie my scarf. Bakers stuffed free cookies into my bag. Classmates ignored my nonverbal cues and kept inviting me to concerts, museums, and films. Mornings were full of classes in art history, German, and music, but in the afternoons I would squeeze in a few lonely rambles. When the snowfall grew heavy, I ducked into cathedrals. Stained glass glowed in soft patterns of mustard, saffron, indigo, and coral. Arches and vaults soared so high I could hardly see where they intersected. Always, the twisted, half-naked figure on the cross at the front shone as if he were sweating.

Most of the art that caught my eye, whether in cathedrals or museums, seemed to be about Jesus. Almost every conversation, in English or in my broken German, came to circle around his teaching, and most of the books I was reading either disputed or supported his claims. Meanwhile, in *Mere Christianity*, my old friend Clive was making a compelling case for faith.

During midwinter break, a few students invited me to join them in Russia, and I agreed. Maybe I would regain some perspective in the famously atheistic country. The Russian tour led us through prisons, cemeteries, and churches with histories of massacres and torture, where ancient icons displayed the Crucifixion. I felt overwhelmed by evil. How could

God—if God existed—leave humanity alone to endure so much?

One afternoon, we headed to the Hermitage, the world-renowned museum in St. Petersburg. The regular English-speaking guide was ill, so a higher-up museum official was assigned to take us from room to room. Again, many of the paintings depicted Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. I stood at the edge of the group, questions racing through my mind.

As our group was about to leave, the museum official pulled me aside. "What are you thinking about so deeply?" he asked in a low voice.

I was surprised into telling the truth. "A loving God. Human suffering. How can both exist?"

"You are at an intersection of choice," he said. "Either you decide that Jesus is the Son of God, or you turn your back on him forever. You must choose."

I felt a shiver that had nothing to do with the icy Russian winter. Was there nowhere to go without confronting the man on the cross?

#### BLOOD LIKE HIS

When we returned to Vienna, I decided to go to the original source of his story: the New Testament. Soon, I was encountering a Jew with olive-colored skin, black hair, and dark eyes. This Middle Eastern man healed foreign women; he knew what it was to feel lonely and rejected. Oddly, his life and words seemed familiar, as if I had read these Gospels before. When Jesus said, "Let the children come to me," I started to realize that most of my beloved stories had illuminated the life of this man.

Or was he a man? In the Gospels, he was enraging religious and political leaders by claiming a divine identity.

They killed him.

He let them.

**I hadn't anticipated the mystery of baptism—I went into the water spiritually blind and emerged with a new power to see.**

I was stunned.

If he was telling the truth, then this was God submitting to the four enemies of humanity—pain, grief, evil, and death—in order to destroy them all. The Cross, then, was where a loving God and the suffering of humanity could finally be reconciled.

One snowy evening in Vienna, I made my decision. I would follow Jesus as God—but would keep it to myself. I would quietly try to do what he did and said. He could be my guru. I wrote to my friend to thank him for the New Testament and shared my decision to follow Jesus.

When I returned to California, the news had leaked. The InterVarsity Christian Fellowship students invited me to join other new Christians who would be baptized in a fountain on campus. At first it seemed an unnecessary public display, but my guru had done it, so I said yes.

I hadn't anticipated the mystery of baptism—I went into the water spiritually blind and emerged with a new power to see. I wanted to tell everyone about the reconciliation of the cross. Like the robin who led Mary into the secret garden, the Holy Spirit led me into the Bible with fresh eyes. Even Genesis now sparkled with the love of Jesus.

Bit by bit, I also fell in love with the church, and ended up married to a Presbyterian pastor—like L. M. Montgomery (*Anne of Green Gables*) and Katherine Paterson (*Bridge to Terabithia*). Now I, too, write stories for young people, although the vocation has changed dramatically since the days when my spiritual parents were writing. My own fictional niche is to represent and champion the marginalized child.

In the American church, I still sometimes feel like an outsider. But I have worshiped with Christians of many cultures and identities, and know from the Bible that the global church belongs to one person: Jesus of Nazareth, my Jewish guru, the author of faith, the defender of the outcast, the healer of the brokenhearted. All blood is the same color: red, like his, spilling lavishly from the cross at the perfect intersection of human suffering and divine love. **CT**

**MITALI PERKINS** writes novels for young readers, including *Rickshaw Girl* (one of New York Public Library's 100 best children's books in 100 years). Her newest is *Tiger Boy*.



# TESTIMONY



## When God Writes Your Life Story

As an author, I appreciate his knack for unexpected plot twists.

By Mitali Perkins

**I** was raised in a Hindu home, where Dad taught his children that God was a divine spirit of love. Dad's job as an engineer took us from port to port, so that by the time I was 11, we had lived in India, England, Ghana, Cameroon, Mexico, and the United States. No matter where we were posted, Dad led us in a daily practice of gratitude to God.

I believed in this good God until high school, when a friend was killed in a car accident involving a drunk driver. Clayton's death opened my adolescent eyes to a world of suffering. What kind of God would allow this and then, according to Hinduism, reincarnate us into a painful world? I grieved for my friend and put my questions—and God—aside for the rest of high school.

College, however, engaged me in different philosophies and world religions. The first assignment in my humanities course was to read the Book of Genesis. I was eager to read the Christian Holy Book for the first time, especially because the

few Christians living in my dorm seemed caring and smart.

But the Bible reading left me scratching my head: naked people, fruit trees, a serpent, and a God who spoke, strolled in a garden, and seemed as passionate as the humans he created? Did my friends *really* believe this stuff? The campus bookstore offered partial refunds for 10 days. I returned the Bible, certain I'd never open it again.

What I didn't realize is that I'd been preparing to read it for years. No matter where our family lived, Dad made sure I had access to public libraries. In retrospect, most of the fiction I loved was penned by authors who were deeply informed by Christianity. Louisa May Alcott wove John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* into *Little Women*. Johanna Spyri's *Heidi* described God's forgiveness through the Parable of the Prodigal Son. In *The Secret Garden*, Frances Hodgson Burnett perhaps subconsciously provided a metaphorical glimpse of the Trinity—Father (Susan Sowerby), Son (Dickon), and

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