

Alister McGrath: My Resurrection Journey • Jonathan Aitken: Colson Transformed

Christianity Today

JUNE 2012

Forever Young

The Juvenilization of the American Church



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WHEN DAD'S IN PRISON 13
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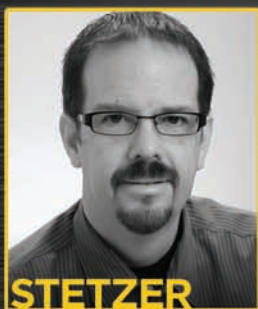
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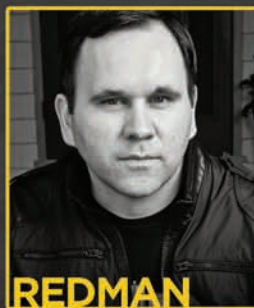
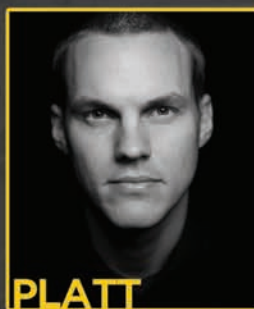
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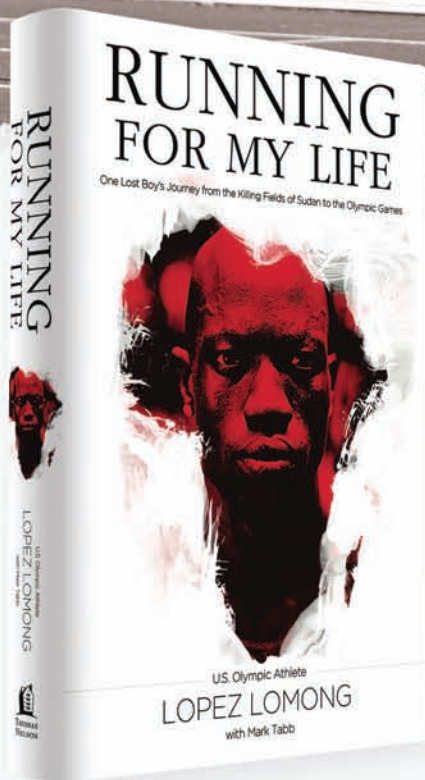
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One Lost Boy's Journey from the Killing Fields of Sudan

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RUNNING FOR MY LIFE is Lopez Lomong's harrowing story of loss, overcoming, triumph, and redemption. It is the once-in-a-lifetime story of a Sudanese lost boy who became an American citizen and Olympic athlete. His life is a powerful picture of the fact that we can overcome, that what seems out of reach is within our grasp if we'd believe and if we'd only try.

He was abducted. He was beaten. And he was forced to become a boy soldier in his war-torn homeland, Sudan. But he escaped in the night, ran three days, and he was taken into a refugee camp in Kenya. He never owned a pair of shoes. In his wildest dreams, Lopez Lomong couldn't even conceive that Nike would one day be his official sponsor, that he would graduate from college, and that he would represent his new home and bear the American flag in the Summer Olympics.

Be the one of the first 200 people to sign up and receive a free download of the book: www.NelsonFree.com/RunningformyLife

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The Mirror of Truth

Thirty years ago, I left pastoral ministry to become an editor. I oriented myself to my new calling by reading an essay by Wes Pippert, United Press International's veteran political reporter. Was there a theological dimension to the calling of a Christian journalist? Was connected a journalist's commitment to truth with Jesus' claim to be the Truth.

At *Christianity Today*, I've tried to make the way we handle little-t truth reflect the Truth himself, as "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." But even when it is spoken with grace, the truth can lead to tension. A community's health depends on having an accurate picture of itself, and Christians need journalists like those at CT to hold up the mirror of truth. After a good look in that mirror, we can celebrate the healthy things we see, as well as scrub off the metaphorical smudges and lose the figurative flab.

In preparing this issue, we thought a lot about Charles Colson (see pp. 52 and 59). Truth was central to his ministry—perhaps because he once made his mark by planting lies about political enemies. When he fostered dialogue with Roman Catholics, Colson made mutual submission to truth the cornerstone of cooperation. Interestingly, Evangelicals and Catholics Together spoke not only of believing the truth, but of obeying the truth as well.

CT regularly relies on readers like you to help us hold up the mirror—perhaps by creating buzz about a groundbreaking article or by giving gift subscriptions. Now I would like to encourage each of you to continue this needed support in a new way.

You can make your tax-deductible contribution—of any amount—by check or online. Make checks payable to *Christianity Today*, and put "CT Global Excellence Fund" on the memo line, or visit ChristianityToday.com/donate. Your gift will help us continue to speak the truth with fairness, compassion, and grace.

David Neff, Editor in Chief

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Our Youthful Romance

From junior-high camp gimmicks to sexperiments.



Back in my days as a youth pastor—this was the early 1970s—I was asked to speak at a Christian camp in Canada, and in the weeks leading up to my engagement, I grew a beard and left it as scruffy and untrimmed as I could. I arrived hours before I was to first speak and went around introducing myself to campers left and right. That evening, for my first talk, I shaved off my beard in front of God and everybody, and then talked about not judging others, especially based on their appearances.

Yes, I really did that. And I'm sorry to say that after three years at a prestigious theological seminary (and through no fault of Fuller's!), this was the best I could come up with to open a series of talks with junior-high kids. It was a silly gimmick to get the attention of juveniles.

Fast-forward to January 2012, when evangelical pastor Ed Young and his wife held a bed-in: They spent 24 hours in a bed on the roof of Young's church in Grapevine, Texas. He was trying to draw attention to his book and a sermon series called *Sexperiment: 7 Days to Lasting Intimacy with Your Spouse*. He thought a silly gimmick was just the thing to engage adults in his church and community.

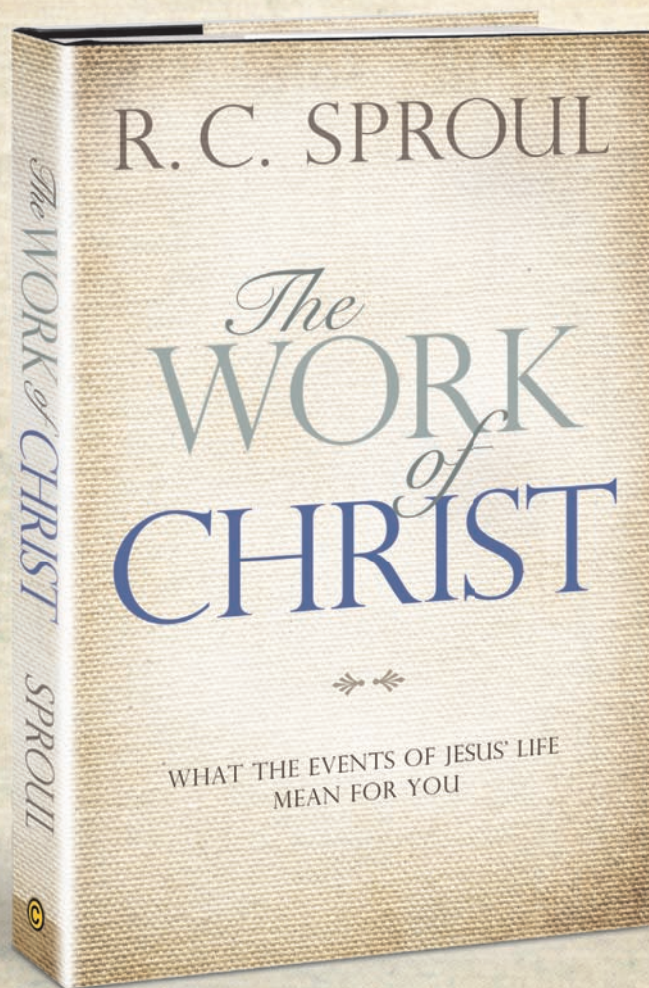
I'm not going to take credit for Pastor Young's stunt, nor for the juvenilization of our church and culture. I will say that there are not many evangelicals who have not been shaped—and helped to shape—the situation we find ourselves in today: a church culture that, because of our fascination with youth culture, has enjoyed numeric church growth—and has hindered spiritual maturity.

Last year, in an article in *The New York Times Book Review*, writer Mohamad Bazzi discussed a book about the cultural revolution afoot in some sectors of Islam. He wrote about developments in Islam that “appeal to the American romance with youth, technology, and agency.” Thomas Bergler, in his new book *The Juvenilization of American Christianity* (Eerdmans), teases out what the “romance with youth” has looked like in mainline, Catholic, African American, and especially evangelical churches. In our cover story (page 18), Bergler briefly (which is unfortunate, so get his book!) outlines how youth culture has shaped the American church—and what we need in order to grow up.

Such a bold and straightforward thesis is sure to be challenged—and is challenged in some ways by our three respondents, starting on page 26. But there is more than a grain of truth in Bergler's analysis, and thus it is well worth pondering. We look forward to listening in on the many conversations his thesis will stimulate.

Next month: We look at how Christians in Phoenix—both Anglo and Hispanic—are addressing immigration (the next installment of *This Is Our City*), the limits of incarnational ministry, outreach at the Burning Man festival, and the surge of Persian converts from Islam in Germany.

WHY DOES IT MATTER WHAT JESUS DID?



Dr. R. C. Sproul looks at the purpose behind Jesus' actions, addressing such life-changing topics as why Jesus' baptism is relevant for our salvation, why Jesus' ascension makes a difference in our lives today, and what we know and don't know about Christ's return. As you delve into the life of Christ, you will find renewed wonder at the Savior who loved you before time began.



Dr. R. C. Sproul is the founder and chairman of Ligonier Ministries and the author of more than seventy books. A beloved speaker around the world and a well-respected academic scholar, Dr. Sproul teaches on the radio program *Renewing Your Mind with Dr. R. C. Sproul*, which is broadcast in forty countries.

BRIEFING

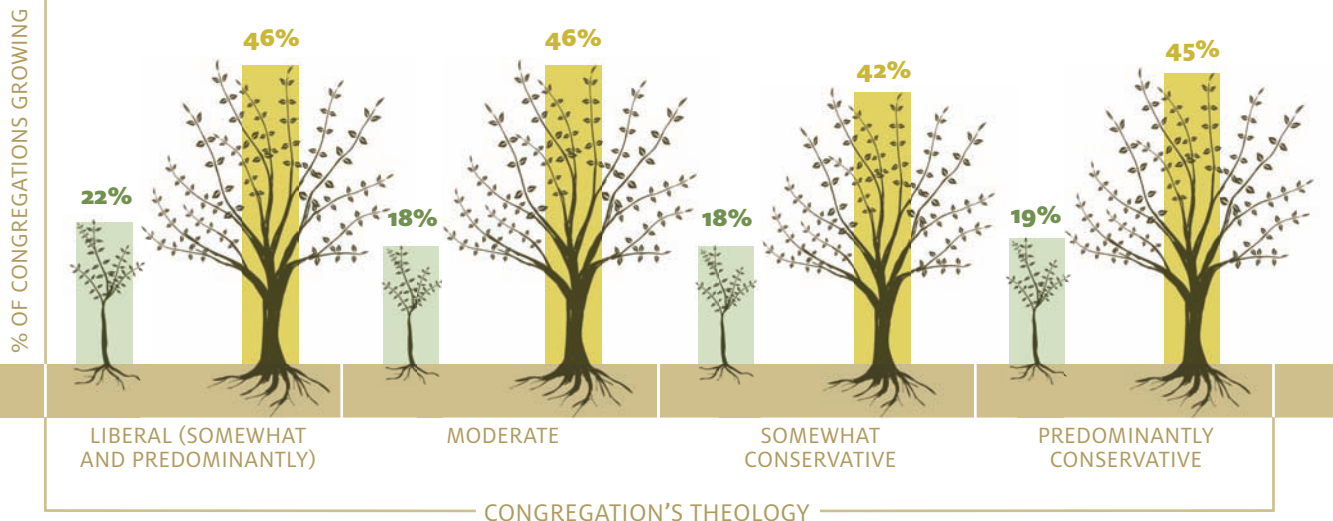
REPORTING & DISPATCHES
FROM THE CHURCH
WORLDWIDE

SPOTLIGHT: Mainline Conservatives' Dilemma

➔ Conventional wisdom says that conservative churches grow and liberal churches don't. But as a recent study from the Hartford Institute for Religion Research found, this isn't quite accurate. It's the *denomination's* theology that tends to matter, not the congregation's. Churches in evangelical denominations are more than twice as likely to grow as churches in mainline denominations, but within those denominations theological orientation doesn't have much effect. In other words, orthodoxy doesn't draw crowds on its own.

WHY DENOMINATION MATTERS MORE THAN CONGREGATION

MAINLINE
EVANGELICAL



“The quality of congregational life, the involvement of members and technology in evangelism and recruitment, and even being located in the South appear to be much more important to growth than your denominational family, theology, or strictness (which has long been thought to be a secret to growth).”

David Roozen, director, Hartford Institute for Religion Research



“One of the stronger correlates of growth was the extent to which the congregation ‘has a clear mission and purpose.’ Not surprisingly, churches in conservative and evangelical denominations are considerably more likely to [say they have one] than mainline congregations. . . . At least part of the explanation for mainline decline is lack of a clear motivating purpose.”

Kirk Hadaway, author of the “Facts on Growth: 2010” Hartford study



“I confess I am not surprised. I find mainline evangelical churches less politically active and more open to ecumenism, which fails to draw the constituency that the more conservative counterparts can draw. The behavior is very different, even if the doctrine is similar. Numerical growth may not be an indicator of renewal or discipleship.”

John Armstrong, ACT 3, leadership trainers involved in mainline renewal



1



2



4

GLEANINGS

Important developments in the church and the world.

1 Christians face forced exodus

SUDAN As war looms between Sudan and South Sudan, Christians of southern origin living in Sudan fear retribution from its Islamist government. At least half a million black southerners (the majority of whom are Christian) living in the Arab north are now considered foreigners, though some have registered for citizenship. Officials gave southerners until May to register or leave the country, but the government has also cut off flights and land routes to South Sudan. Tensions between the two countries have escalated over the control of oil fields along their disputed border.

2 Supreme Court declines college case

A California college can continue denying recognition to religious student groups. The Supreme Court declined to hear a challenge to San Diego State University's nondiscrimination policy, which prohibits student groups from restricting membership based on religion. Last August, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the policy was constitutional, though it added that the university's implementation might not have been.

3 Minister on hook for church taxes

Pay attention, pastors: If your church skirts its payroll taxes, you can be on the hook to pay what's overdue. A North Carolina federal court ruled that a minister who was given "the general powers and duties of supervision and management usually vested in the office of president of a corporation" by her church's bylaws, and had the authority to cosign loans, was a responsible party when her church

failed to pay its payroll taxes despite multiple warnings. As a result, the Internal Revenue Service can charge the minister for the total amount of taxes owed.

4 Faculty reportedly unhappy with oath

A contested survey suggests many faculty members at Shorter University are unhappy with the school's decision to adopt a mandatory lifestyle statement on sexual ethics, alcohol, and loyalty to Shorter and the Georgia Baptist Convention. Of the 61 faculty and staff who responded to an anonymous survey sent to 109 Shorter employees, 90 percent disagreed with the statement created after Donald Dowless became Shorter's 19th president in June 2011. Defenders of Dowless said the survey questions were biased and supporters of the statement were left out of the poll. The unofficial faculty committee that distributed the survey said it queried all full-time faculty.

5 Missionary wins 'rare' settlement

CHINA In what advocates call a "rare victory," police in the Tibetan capital of Lhasa agreed to compensate a missionary who sued after being criminally detained last fall. Song Kuanxin was arrested with 10 other members of his Chinese house church in Lhasa last October and held for a month "on suspicion of [being part of a] cult group." After his release, Song posted a detailed account of the incident on the Internet and filed a lawsuit. The Tibet Public Security Bureau offered to return all of Song's remaining confiscated items and agreed to pay 7,000 yuan (USD \$1,110) in an out-of-court settlement.

6 Assemblies of God cuts 47 jobs

Just a few months after reporting the opening of more than a church a day last year, the Assemblies of God announced a "strategic restructuring" that eliminated 47 positions at its national office. The restructuring includes a shift from offering print to digital resources; most of the cuts—which affect about 6 percent of the office workforce—were in the printing department.

7 Churches want fewer cash offerings

NIGERIA Offering plates brimming with cash are good news for churches—but no longer in Nigeria. As the Central Bank of Nigeria prepares to switch to a "cash-lite policy" to cut costs, churches are considering new ways to collect tithes and offerings. The policy places maximum limits on cash transactions for both private and corporate accounts; transactions that exceed the limit can face surcharges as high as 20 percent. No exception exists for religious groups. Some churches are considering buying Point of Sale machines for electronic tithes; others have asked members to tithe with checks. Nigeria struggles with power and mobile network failures, raising concerns about the viability of electronic banking.

8 Judge: Imprecatory prayers are legal

A Dallas judge ruled that imprecatory prayers are legal as long as no one is personally threatened or harmed. Mikey Weinstein, founder of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, filed a lawsuit against a former Navy chaplain for using "curse" prayers (such as Psalm 109) to incite violence against Weinstein and his family. District judge Martin Hoffman dismissed the suit, saying there was no evidence the prayers were connected to other threats and vandalism against Weinstein's family.

GO FIGURE Nonprofit

-16%
Drop in charities and foundations registered with the IRS in 2011 from 2010, mostly because 272,000 apparently inactive groups did not file new forms.

-7.7%
Drop in new applications for nonprofit status in 2011.

ECFA



11

9 Church schools will combat secularism

UNITED KINGDOM Amid challenges to public displays of faith, the Church of England says it will reform its role in education to reduce "religious illiteracy." Plans include establishing at least 200 Anglican schools, rebranding existing schools, and proposing ways secular schools can boost their religious education. The church has also suggested joining with other faiths to open multifaith schools. Currently, the Church of England runs a fifth of British state schools.

10 Baptism could send mother to jail

A baptism dispute may lead to jail time for a Tennessee mother. The state's appeals court ruled that Lauren Jarrell, a Presbyterian, must face a criminal contempt hearing for baptizing her children (ages 5 and 7) without notifying her ex-husband. Emmett Jarrell, a Methodist, wanted to baptize the children when they were old enough to understand its significance. A court had ordered the couple to jointly make decisions regarding the children's religious upbringing.

11 Christians sue for equal tax treatment

ISRAEL Christians are protesting tax exemptions that they claim are discriminatory. In March 2010, an amendment to municipal tax laws exempted synagogues—including classrooms, offices, and spaces used commercially—from property taxes; for other religious buildings, only prayer halls were exempted. Five groups led by the Jerusalem Institute of Justice have filed a lawsuit seeking to either extend the full exemption to all houses of worship or end the exemptions altogether. Legislation has since been proposed to extend the amendment to all religious buildings.



12

12 NYC drops ban of 'loaded' words

A proposed ban on 50 "loaded" words like *dinosaur*, *Halloween*, and *television* from student tests in New York City raised a kerfuffle across the nation. Though it would not be the first to avoid sensitive words on tests (Florida avoids *hurricane* and *wildfire*, for example), the inclusion of words like *divorce*, *birthday*, *Christmas*, and *religion* on the list raised accusations of political correctness gone awry. A week after the list became public, the city eliminated the ban.

13 College cancels merger

Trustees at Providence Christian College in California have withdrawn from merger discussions with Covenant College in Georgia. Both colleges signed a letter of intent to merge in March as Providence president J. Derek Halvorson prepares to become president of Covenant, his alma mater. But board chairman Pete Nanninga said Providence concluded "it simply wasn't the right time" due to accreditation challenges.

14 Religious travelers stopped at border

UZBEKISTAN Religious individuals entering or exiting Uzbekistan face travel bans and restrictions, according to religious freedom watchdog Forum 18. Travelers not part of officially recognized religious groups—including Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Hare Krishnas—have reportedly been blocked from entering or exiting the doubly landlocked Central Asian nation. Many travelers have reported having religious possessions confiscated at border crossings or fines levied against them. Citizens who wish to leave Uzbekistan—even Muslims who have passed state controls to make the pilgrimage to Mecca—must have an exit visa renewed every two years.

compiled by Ted Olsen

QUOTATION MARKS

"You're wrong and your God's wrong."

S. Ford Clements, Ontario Court of Justice judge, to pro-life activist Mary Wagner, who had violated her probation by entering an abortion clinic to protest. She promised to do it again. Clements sent her back to jail.

LifeSiteNews.com

"It doesn't help. That's for sure."

Fred Luter, likely to become the first African American president of the Southern Baptist Convention, on whether Richard Land's comments on Trayvon Martin hurt efforts to attract ethnic minorities. Land later apologized for accusing Democrats of exploiting the teen's death.

Associated Press

GO FIGURE Bible

Americans say their most significant frustration when it comes to reading the Bible is that they "never have enough time to read it" (32%). The No. 2 frustration?

Age 18–27:
"I don't feel excited about reading it." (27%)

Age 28–46:
"The language is difficult to relate to." (16%)

Age 47+
"I don't have any frustrations." (20% for 47–65, 27% for 66+)

American Bible Society's "The State of the Bible 2012"

"'A' maintains a singular connotation in this context."

The Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals, overturning a tax court decision that allowed clergy to claim more than one home as a parsonage allowance. Phil Driscoll's lawyers had argued that the relevant tax code for "a home" includes "homes."

The Wall Street Journal

"We are deeply saddened by these events. Our hearts are broken."

The Voice of the Martyrs, on news that its executive director, Tom White, apparently committed suicide to avoid a police investigation into allegations that he sexually molested a 10-year-old girl. VOM said no one at the ministry knew of the allegations.

The Voice of the Martyrs

"It's sad that some feel they must resort to vandalism to be heard, but it doesn't change our message . . ."

Tim Smith, pastor of Mars Hill Church Portland, after its century-old stained glass windows were broken, apparently by a gay-rights group.

Facebook



EDUCATION NIGERIA

Fury Over Fees

Church-run schools no longer offer mission prices. By Sunday Oguntola in Lagos

More Nigerian states are returning public schools seized from churches decades ago, refueling debate over the high tuition charged by mission schools.

Mission schools, which since the 1800s offered free or low-cost education to the majority of Nigeria's youth, were nationalized after the West African nation's civil war ended in 1970 in an attempt to defuse tribalism. In 2001, Lagos became the first state to return hundreds of seized mission schools to churches in hopes of seeing quality of education improve. The states of Imo, Ogun, and Plateau—home of conflict-ridden Jos—followed suit.

Recently, the southern state of Anambra returned 1,040 primary schools to their original church owners, while neighboring Delta handed over 40 schools with more to come. Four other southern states have expressed interest in doing the same.

The majority of government teachers, however, have refused employment in the returned schools,

protesting that church operators are too strict and profit-oriented.

Their concerns echo a heated debate among Christians over the fees charged by today's mission schools. Tuition at church-run primary schools ranges from 15,000 to 50,000 naira (\$100–\$350) per term. The minimum wage in Nigeria is 18,000 naira (\$120) per month.

Many church families complain they cannot afford to enroll their children. "These schools are not for the poor; they are too elitist," said Bola Akin-John, president of International Church Growth Ministries. "Even members who donated toward their establishments cannot send their children there."

"They should have told us they are running profit-oriented schools from the outset," said Alex Adegbeye, general overseer of The Stone Church in Ibadan, "instead of using the word *mission* to raise money, get public support, and turn around to become unaffordable."

Church operators counter that quality education does not come

Pricey Pupils: Nigerian states have returned thousands of seized mission schools back to churches, but the schools' once-free education is no more.

cheaply anywhere in the world.

"People keep referring to the mission schools of [past] days, but they forget some people were paying for the free education from abroad," said Jerry Akinsola, director of Christian education for the Nigerian Baptist Convention. "If we will continue to offer quality education and remain at the cutting edge, then somebody must pay."

The convention, which operates Bowen University in Osun state among 15 other schools, offers rebates of up to 50 percent to financially committed church members. Nearby Joseph Ayo Babalola University, run by the Christ Apostolic Church, recently announced a 15 percent discount for member families.

Fees charged by mission schools are moderate compared to the quality they offer, said Paul Omaji, vice chancellor of Salem University, sponsored by Foundation Faith Church International. Mission schools also offer flexible payments and scholarships to orphans, which conveys their Christian values, he said.

"If education is expensive," he said, "then people should try ignorance."

Most mission schools are better equipped than public schools, and students outperform their public counterparts on tests.

However, the question remains whether churches can administratively handle the return of so many schools so quickly. Riots shut down an Anglican university in Oyo for weeks last February after a student died because of poor facilities at the school's health center.

Adun Akinyemiju, Nigeria director for the Association of Christian Schools International, knows that operating a school is not cheap. However, she urges mission school owners to increase tuition subsidies in order to transform more lives.

"Christian schools are raising disciples for Christ," she said. "That is something eternal that no amount of money can buy."

GO FIGURE

Jesus

3%

Americans who associate the words *pain* or *suffering* with Jesus.

15%

Koreans who associate these words with Jesus.

10%

Americans who associate the word *crucified* with Jesus.

30%

Koreans who associate the word *crucified* with Jesus.

Society for Personality and Social Psychology

PUBLISHING

'Buyer' Beware?

Controversy brews over labels on Christian novels. By Ken Walker

Atlanta novelist Creston Mapes is thrilled that a recent weekend of free Kindle downloads gained him legions of new followers. That despite some negative reviews of his book, *Nobody*.

"I've always wanted my books to be seen by thousands, and now they finally are," said Mapes, who gave away nearly 60,000 eBooks after his 2007 paperback generated only modest sales.

And those negative reviews? Many had to do with readers' failure to click on links that revealed the Christian identity of Mapes's protagonist. Wrote one: "I have nothing against religion, but there is a place for it, which is not in a good fiction novel."

Before the giveaway, Colorado literary agent Rachelle Gardner warned in a blog that if Christian authors fail to mention their books' faith-based content, they are in danger of receiving nasty reviews. "The star ratings on [sites such as] Amazon and Goodreads do influence how people look at the book," she said.

An underground controversy over the practice has raged the past two years, since Christian publishers discovered free eBooks could increase author awareness, said Gardner.

Mark Kuyper, president of the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association, says it's hypocritical to complain that a book has a Christian worldview. After all, he says, Christians who pick up a general market novel don't receive any warnings of potentially objectionable worldviews.

"In the marketplace, the reader is not always going to be aware of or happy with your content," he said.

Many critics of James Rubart's

2010 *Rooms*—given away on Amazon and BarnesandNoble.com—failed to notice clear references to its faith elements. "It surprised me how many people must have downloaded the book without bothering to read the description," said Rubart. "I understand it was free, but wouldn't they at least want an idea of what they were getting?"

However, dealing with heated reader reactions is part of life for modern-day authors, said Jennifer Butenschoen, director of digital content for Harvest House Publishers.

"The ability to offer comments and feedback in a nonpersonal, anonymous environment leaves folks feeling free to speak their mind when they wouldn't otherwise," she said.

Lynn Garrett, senior religion editor for *Publishers Weekly*, thinks clarity is wise for Christian writers, especially those new to online publishing. "Authors don't necessarily have to label it 'Christian,' but they should include some mention of 'faith' in the description," she said.

Mapes remains undeterred. "I would do it again in a heartbeat," he said. "It was not our intent to fool anybody, but if it did—hey, it was free." ☪

POLITICS

Pro-Life Dems Dwindle

Redistricting, retirements may halve group—again.

By Tobin Grant

Democrats with conservative positions on social issues such as abortion continue to disappear from Congress. Half as many pro-life Democrats sit in Congress today than two years ago, and—thanks to redistricting and retirements—in six months the number may be cut in half again.

In the 2010 election, pro-life groups targeted pro-life Democrats who supported President Obama's health-care law. Even some

PASSAGES



Died
Thomas Kinkadee
Christian artist known as the "Painter of Light," on April 6 at his California home. He was 57.



Named
David N. Hempton
As Harvard Divinity School's newest dean. He has been professor of Evangelical Theological Studies at the school since 2007.



Escaped
Chen Guangcheng
Prominent opponent of China's one-child policy. The blind legal activist, under house arrest since 2010, hopes to relocate his family to the United States.

Democrats who opposed the law faced opposition by conservatives who saw the midterm election as a golden opportunity to put a more conservative Republican in office. The result: The number of pro-life Democrats shrank by half.

This time around, Democrats are less vulnerable on the abortion issue, but many face new districts with lines redrawn after the latest census.

In Pennsylvania, a reduction in the number of House seats resulted in two Democrats with pro-life records facing off in April. Jason Altmire (PA-4) lost to Mark Critz (PA-12) in a rare incumbent-versus-incumbent primary.

Heath Shuler (NC-11) barely held his seat in 2010; this year he faced an even more difficult race after district lines in North Carolina were redrawn, so he decided to retire. Mike McIntyre (NC-7) is staying in his race, but many analysts consider it a toss-up.

"As the Democratic and Republican parties have taken opposite sides on abortion, so have Democrats and Republicans in the public," said John Sides, a political scientist at George Washington University. "People's views on abortion are increasingly aligned with their party's."

Other pro-life Democrats are retiring rather than seeking reelection. Jerry Costello (IL-12), Joe Donnelly (IN-2), Mike Ross (AK-4), and Dan Boren (OK-2) each will retire at the end of this term. The number of pro-life senators will shrink further this fall when Sen. Ben Nelson (D-Neb.) retires since the state is expected to elect a Republican.

Only a few pro-life Democrats are shoo-ins for reelection: Daniel Lipinski (IL-3) and Collin Peterson (MN-7). Henry Cueller (TX-28), recently criticized for his work with Texas Republicans, should also return. Tim Holden (PA-17) and Nick Rahall (WV-3) may face some competition.

"Holding a pro-life stance is toxic in a Democratic primary in most

[continued on 12]

Briefing [from 11]

parts of the country,” said Matthew Wilson, a professor of political science at Southern Methodist University. “It can be pretty tempting just to give up.”

POLITICS LIBERIA

Founding Faith

Believers debate ‘Christian nation.’ By George Stewart in Monrovia

A controversial clergy-led campaign to officially return Liberia to its Christian heritage has sparked debate in the West African nation.

Liberia was founded under the “blessings of the Christian religion” by freed American slaves in 1847, but became a secular state following a 1980 military coup and subsequent civil war. In April, an international tribunal convicted former president Charles Taylor, once supported by Pat Robertson, of crimes against humanity.

Today a group of pastors called the Liberia Restoration to Christian Heritage Committee has stirred up popular momentum to add

Christianity back to the constitution—similar to Zambia, a “Christian nation” since 1996.

The Liberian Council of Churches has remained tight-lipped about its opinion, but vice president W. Nah Dixon, archbishop of Don Stewart Pentecostal Church, has appealed to pastors to stop collecting signatures. He worries that imposing a state religion could refuel civil conflict in a nation with a sizable Muslim minority (12 percent). Catholic, Baptist, and Lutheran leaders have echoed his concerns.

Another umbrella group of pastors, the Fellowship of Full Gospel Ministers (FGM), has divided over the issue. One camp dismisses the Christian heritage campaigners as a small group seeking publicity; the other sympathizes but says well-established organizations—such as the FGM—should have been the ones to champion the cause.

The campaigners argue for a state religion based on Liberia’s present—Christians make up 85 percent of its 3.8 million people—and its past. The country’s Declaration of Independence was signed in Monrovia’s Old Providence Baptist Church, preserved today as a national shrine. Campaigners label the 1986 decision

DISCUSSION STARTER

Denominations

A Presbyterian Church (USA) commission has voted 15–5 to allow non-geographic presbyteries. The move, which would allow churches to choose their own groupings for “missional purposes,” follows defections over the denomination’s vote to ordain noncelibate gays and lesbians. The recommendation needs approval at the General Assembly this June.

to separate church and state as a devilish act responsible for disrupting national peace over the past two decades.

Crafters of the current secular constitution argue that it derives from the American model of religious freedom. Yet the pastor who initiated the campaign, Jomah Woiwor of Kingdom Harvest Church, counters, “A state religion doesn’t suggest religious intolerance as being portrayed by our opposition.”

The Liberian constitution requires only 10,000 signatures from qualified voters for the national legislature to consider a petition; the campaign aspires to gather one million signatures to demonstrate popular demand.

Repeal of Liberia’s secular status would require a two-thirds majority vote by the legislature and the president’s endorsement. The chances of this coming to pass remain unpredictable, though Lutheran bishop Sumoward E. Harris told ENI he is confident the campaign “will not materialize.”

Time will tell. Despite stiff resistance from critics, campaigners have reportedly gathered more than 150,000 signatures—with two-thirds of the nation’s political subdivisions still left to canvas.

UNDER DISCUSSION Topics in the current debate.

compiled by Ruth Moon

Should denominations be organized geographically?

YES

“Geographical proximity allows for more spiritual, emotional, pastoral support. When you cannot coexist spiritually with another church in the same denomination, functionally you probably have two denominations and it might be better simply to separate.”

CARL TRUEMAN
professor, Westminster Theological Seminary

“If a theological conviction runs deep enough, why wouldn’t you walk away from a denomination that disagrees? If it’s just preference, then you’re thinking like a person with options: ‘I’ll go to the church that reflects me rather than the Bible.’ That seems more consumeristic than gospel-driven.”

GREG PETERS
professor, Biola University

“I respect those whose conscience calls for separation in order that denominations can survive. But I wonder what it does to our souls when we increasingly use our rights and freedoms to disassociate. According to Jesus in John 17, the disunity of the body dilutes our witness.”

BOB THOMPSON
past chair, Association for Church Renewal

“Ideally, churches of one denomination would share so much theological commonality that it would be quite natural for them to group themselves geographically. With the theological diversity and tension in many denominations today, that’s just no longer possible.”

R. ALBERT MOHLER JR.
president, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Of all the ways of organizing the church, geographical proximity is not the best. It worked fine when we were all on the same page in regard to fundamental beliefs. That homogeneity seems to be passing. Affinity groupings may be the wave of the future.”

WILL WILLIMON
bishop, North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church

“As theological diversity broadens among many denominations, theological affinity trumps geographic proximity as a catalyst for vision and ministry. Structures need to conform to this reality. Geographical organization belongs to a bygone era. We need to let it go.”

PAUL DETTERMAN
executive director, Presbyterians for Renewal

NO



Quantity and Quality: Research shows that at-risk children benefit the most when adults—such as Bernard Jones, here tutoring mentee Kendall Jackson in New Orleans—spend generous amounts of time with them.

EDUCATION

When Dad Is in Prison

Mentoring programs for children of prisoners let faith flourish after federal cutback.

By G. Jeffrey MacDonald in New Orleans



With seven children at home and a husband in jail, Tameyka Powell admits she needs help keeping her kids on track. Two years ago, her young son Kendall Jackson behaved so poorly in his New Orleans school that he was suspended several times a month.

Now Kendall, 7, is doing much better. He's on the honor roll and winning praise for following directions. Powell credits the mentoring her son receives through New Hope Missionary Baptist Church, where she says men teach boys right from wrong.

"He wants to please God," says Powell, chatting in a pew at New Hope after a worship service. "Even when I'm watching TV, [Kendall] says, 'Oh Mama, God's not

pleased with that.' This church has been a very good foundation for him."

For years, federally supported mentoring for America's 2 million children who have a parent in prison has banned mentors from initiating talk about God due to guidelines enforcing church-state separation. Between 2003 and September 2011, Mentoring Children of Prisoners (MCP), a \$49 million federal program, matched more than 100,000 children with adults. Mentors could discuss matters of faith only if and when mentees raised the subject.

MCP funding ended last September. Yet rather than wither without federal dollars, the movement to mentor children of the incarcerated shows new signs of vitality and religiosity. Churches such as

New Hope, which joined the movement without seeking federal funds, are growing robustly religious mentoring programs. Mentors trained under MCP are embracing new freedom to talk about their Christian faith with their mentees.

"There's an extra level of excitement for a mentor when the door is opened to faith conversations" with a mentee, says Jeff Dorn, former director of the Assemblies of God's MCP-funded program in Springfield, Missouri. "Having mentors know up front that [sharing faith] can be part of the program adds incentive for them to volunteer and assists with longevity."

MCP was a Bush administration faith-based initiative that paid to recruit and train volunteer mentors, who typically came



Group Meeting: Jacob Crowe and Anna Watson take part in an Isaiah 43 session. Most mentees with a parent in prison are under age 10.

FOCUS ON VIRTUES

With the federal government out of the picture, religious groups are now working through a patchwork of regional and denominational efforts. Projects vary, but faith is notably a key element where it wasn't before.

New dynamics are on display in New Orleans, where an epidemic of youth violence fuels the nation's highest murder rate. (In 2011, the city of 344,000 saw 199 murders.) In September, Mayor Mitch Landrieu launched the sobering Save Our Sons initiative, in which mentoring would be a pillar. As with MCP, churches would recruit volunteer mentors,

but now mentors would be free to help kids know God as the cornerstone of their lives.

"Churches are huge players" in the Save Our Sons mentoring initiative, says Tyrone Walker, special assistant to Mayor Landrieu. "The Bible talks a lot about sowing and reaping. New Orleans is, we think, a fertile ground uniquely positioned for good seed to be sown into the lives of young people through mentorship. The mayor wants to encourage that."

New Orleans churches are mobilizing anew to reach at-risk kids, many of whom have an incarcerated parent. New Hope's program started with 15 neighborhood kids in late 2010. It now draws 75 kids on Saturday mornings for Bible-based lessons in abstinence and other virtue-centered habits. A second, midweek session is expected to launch this year.

In a separate initiative, the Archdiocese of New Orleans is currently piloting Isaiah 43, a new mentoring program that will soon be offered across the archdiocese. It's part of the "New Battle of New Orleans," as framed by Archbishop Gregory Michael Aymond. The vision is to confront a scourge of social problems by strengthening families, mentoring kids, and coaching parents—all by bringing robust Christian principles to bear.

Faith was in the air one February night

'There's an extra level of excitement for a mentor when the door is opened to faith conversations.'

~ Jeff Dorn, Assemblies of God

from churches. Many felt inspired to work with kids living in chronic poverty with little stable adult influence in their lives.

At Big Brothers, Big Sisters of the Triangle in Raleigh, North Carolina, some 90 percent of MCP-supported mentors are Christians who see mentoring as mission. Chief executive Kim Breeden said many mentors continue despite the funding cut. "We have children who go to church and to Bible study with their [mentors]," Breeden says. "The parents are very supportive of that."

However, not everyone is cheering a surge of faith in mentoring. While religion can be a "shared interest" that facilitates bonding, it can also introduce harmful dynamics if not managed carefully, says Jean Rhodes, director of the Center for Evidence-based Mentoring at the University of Massachusetts-Boston.

"There's the possibility of proselytizing and crossing ethical boundaries,"

says Rhodes, who helped launch MCP. "Let's say you're getting into [mentoring] because you're religious. Then you find out the kid isn't, so you try to convert him. We don't want that."

"The best mentors

aren't overly didactic or overly proselytizing. So the mentors who take a faith perspective can't be too heavy-handed about it."

But others insist that exposure to religious faith benefits children. Some programs formerly supported by MCP now prefer mentors with faith convictions. Cornerstone Children in Marrero, Louisiana, offers mentoring for children who ride Catholic Charities buses to visit their parents at Angola and other state prisons.

"Any person can [do mentoring] if they have genuine compassion for children, but a spiritual person is the best candidate," says Leo Jackson Jr., assistant program director for Cornerstone Builders, a Catholic Charities division that oversees Cornerstone Children. "Once you're born again, the fruits of the Spirit—love, patience, concern—are what you become. Those traits are more easily translated into mentoring when you are those things, rather than when you're trying to manufacture those things."

as an Isaiah 43 pilot session kicked off at Holy Family Parish in Franklinton, north of New Orleans. Peter Hammett wore a collar as he greeted kids whom a middle-school guidance counselor had identified as being at-risk. He led them in prayer before the fried chicken dinner.

After some ice-breakers, every child

Assemblies of God, received MCP funding.

When Karnes learned MCP would be ending, he saw an opportunity. He broached the topic of God and got a warm reception. Karnes tells CT that “Al said, ‘I didn’t want to bring up faith because I was afraid you’d think I was crazy.’” Now Karnes and Al do regular devotions along

‘It may be that the best thing that’s ever happened for the movement is for the feds to get out of the business.’

~ Byron Johnson, Baylor University

was matched with a volunteer mentor, all of whom came from either Holy Family or a local United Methodist church. In a get-to-know-your-mentor activity, 13-year-old Jacob Crowe asked Ron Brumfield, a retired city attorney and a devout Methodist, about his goals as a mentor.

“My goal is to make you as good a person as I can,” Brumfield told Jacob, whose father was incarcerated. “You can depend on me.”

NOT JUST THE BIBLE BELT

Faith-infused mentoring is gaining traction elsewhere. The 2.5 million-member Progressive National Baptist Convention has developed a new, Bible-based kit for mentoring at-risk children because “Scripture is the driving force to make us do what we’re supposed to be doing,” says Dee Dee Coleman, co-chair of the Progressive National Baptist Commission on Social Justice and Prison Ministry. The program, which has trained 125 mentor trainers, is being piloted in Detroit, Michigan, and Richmond, Virginia.

In some cases, volunteers trained under MCP feel they’re at last able to fulfill their mission as mentors. That’s been true for Jack Karnes, a Springfield, Missouri, sales rep who mentors 16-year-old Al Henson, whose father is incarcerated. Al raised questions about religious faith in several text messages last year, but the teenager never followed up in person. Karnes, a self-described “hardcore believer,” wanted to talk faith but didn’t dare bring up the topic. His program, Shapes Mentoring from the

with lifting weights and playing basketball.

“That’s what we’re instructed to do,” Karnes says, referring to the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19. “We’re supposed to be disciples and make disciples.”

MENTOR SHORTAGE

Not all religious mentors are exercising their newfound freedom to evangelize, however. Some still make a point to keep religion out of the relationship. Georgette Santilli of West Warwick, Rhode Island, became Catholic in adulthood and is raising her birth children in the faith. But she doesn’t discuss faith with Kenzie Seebeck, her sixth-grade mentee, whose mother has been in and out of prison.

Santilli keeps the focus on other areas: relationships, school, Kenzie’s aspirations to be a chef (and an FBI agent). Their bonding happens largely around shared experiences, not religious beliefs. “I truly believe that no matter what religion you are, it all comes down to the same morals,” Santilli says. “It’s about doing the right thing and living your life the right way.”

Santilli knows firsthand what a rough childhood can entail. Her parents were alcoholics, she said. Beatings were common in her home, as were visits from the police. She wants Kenzie to learn that by staying hopeful and playing fair, she too can overcome challenges.

With Santilli’s encouragement, Kenzie is having some success. She’s gone from being a C and D student last year to a mostly B student now. She looks up to Santilli, who has a happy family life and

a steady job. Santilli competed this year in the Mrs. Rhode Island beauty pageant, which Kenzie thought was “so cool,” even though some of Santilli’s coworkers scoffed at her “quest for the crown.”

“It’s just cool that you do what you want to do,” Kenzie told Santilli in a shopping mall one December afternoon as they painted pottery as Christmas gifts. “You don’t let people bother you.”

For other pairs, though, faith has become the glue that holds them together. In Pittsburgh, IT professional Michael Pace and his 12-year-old mentee, Keyshawn Corlew, like to play and watch sports together. Whether at a city park or a college stadium, they never miss a chance to discuss God’s call on their lives.

Sharing faith “is the most important part of my relationship with Keyshawn,” said Pace, who got matched with Keyshawn through Amachi Pittsburgh, a faith-based nonprofit and former MCP grantee. “I always try to mention Christ and make sure [Keyshawn] knows that whatever you’re doing, you should keep him in the back of your mind.”

With new funds unlikely to come anytime soon from federal or state governments, the future of mentoring depends on support from the religious and corporate sectors. Much hinges on whether volunteers can be motivated to become mentors and stick with it.

Experts say the shortage of mentors remains the biggest challenge. To that end, some expect that a less restrictive environment for faith expressions might help reinvigorate the movement.

“It may be that the best thing that’s ever happened for the movement is for the feds to get out of the business,” says Byron Johnson, a Baylor University criminologist and author of *More God, Less Crime*. “I think it could open up some doors that have not been open before.”

G. Jeffrey MacDonald is a journalist and author of *Thieves in the Temple: The Christian Church and the Selling of the American Soul* (Basic Books, 2010). This assignment was supported by the 2011 Knight Grants for Reporting on Religion and American Public Life. The Knight Program in Media and Religion is based at the University of Southern California.



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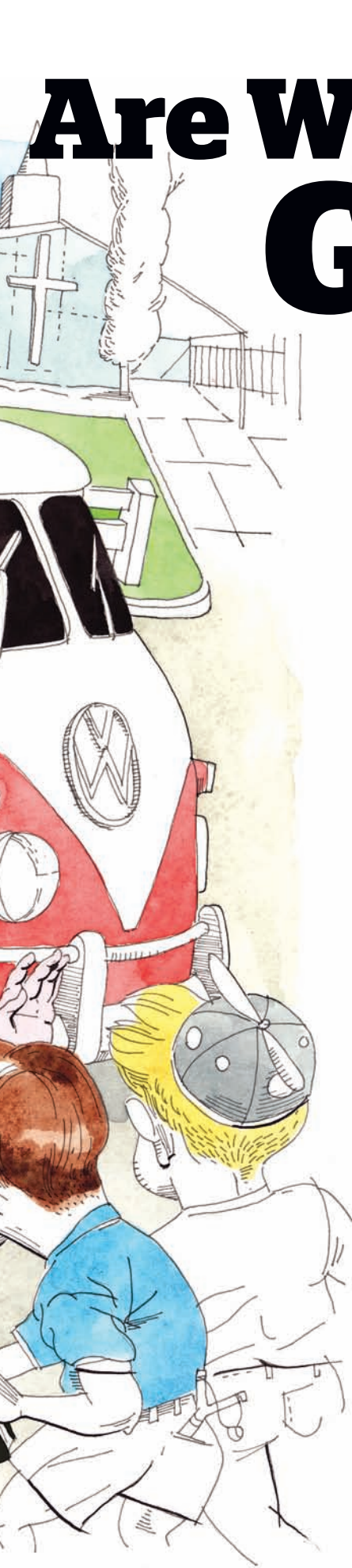
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When





Are We Going to Grow Up?

The juvenilization of American Christianity.

By Thomas E. Bergler

THE HOUSE LIGHTS GO DOWN. Spinning, multicolored lights sweep the auditorium. A rock band launches into a rousing opening song. “Ignore everyone else, this time is just about you and Jesus,” proclaims the lead singer. The music changes to a slow dance tune, and the people sing about falling in love with Jesus. A guitarist sporting skinny jeans and a soul patch closes the worship set with a prayer, beginning, “Hey God . . .” The spotlight then falls on the speaker, who tells entertaining stories, cracks a few jokes, and assures everyone that “God is not mad at you. He loves you unconditionally.”

After worship, some members of the church sign up for the next mission trip, while others decide to join a small group where they can receive support on their faith journey. If you ask the people here why they go to church or what they value about their faith, they’ll say something like, “Having faith helps me deal with my problems.”

Fifty or sixty years ago, these now-commonplace elements of American church life were regularly found in youth groups but rarely in worship services and adult activities. What happened? Beginning in the 1930s and ’40s, Christian teenagers and youth leaders staged a quiet revolution in American church life that led to what can properly be called the *juvenilization* of American Christianity. Juvenilization is the process by which the religious beliefs, practices, and developmental characteristics of adolescents become accepted as appropriate for adults. It began with the praiseworthy goal of adapting the faith to appeal to the young, which in fact revitalized American Christianity. But it has sometimes ended with both youth and adults embracing immature versions of the faith. In any case, white evangelicals led the way.

SAVING THE WORLD

Juvenilization happened when no one was looking. In the first stage, Christian youth leaders created youth-friendly versions of the faith in a desperate attempt to save the world. Some hoped to reform their churches by influencing the next generation. Others expected any questionable innovations to stay comfortably quarantined in youth rallies and church basements. Both groups were less concerned about long-term consequences than about immediate appeals to youth.

In the second stage, a new American adulthood emerged that looked a lot like the old adolescence. Fewer and fewer people outgrew the adolescent Christian spiritualities they had learned in youth groups; instead, churches began to cater to them.

Between 1930 and 1950, Americans got blasted by the Great Depression, World War II, and the cold war. Youth pastors, politicians, and parents all wondered if America and its “way of life” would survive. In the public mind, young people held

PAUL KISSELEV

the key to national survival. After all, millions of young people were unemployed, and Hitler and Stalin were riding to power on the backs of easily manipulated youth. Torrey Johnson, the first president of Youth for Christ (YFC), spoke for many when he said, “If we have another lost generation . . . America is sunk.” In a world of impending doom, who could argue against doing whatever it took to Christianize and mobilize the young saviors of the world?

The 1940s also saw the birth of the “teenager.” Unlike the more diverse youth of previous eras, teenagers all went to high school and participated in a national youth culture increasingly dominated by the same music, movies, products, and cultural beliefs. Although it may seem that the teenagers of the 21st century bear little resemblance to those of the 1950s, crucial similarities remain in the structure of adolescent life and its relationship to the church. And one of the most important traits

Meanwhile, African American churches had not developed much expertise in creating youth-friendly environments that could sustain teenage loyalty in the face of the upheavals of the 1960s and ’70s.

Pre-Vatican II Roman Catholics grew up in what journalist Garry Wills later described as “a ghetto, undeniably. But not a bad ghetto to grow up in.” Their families, neighborhoods, schools, and youth clubs were all saturated with Catholic identity markers. Drilled in memorization of the Baltimore Catechism, they knew the facts of their faith better than subsequent generations. But when they voiced tough theological questions, they often felt rebuffed. And they struggled under intense adult pressure toward sexual purity without being provided a fully satisfying rationale.

What seemed at the time like an unassailable, effective approach to youth socialization turned out to be quite fragile.

One mid-1940s teenage girl said, ‘We just want to live our own lives. We’re not in a hurry to grow up and get all serious and morbid like older people.’ Of course, girls who just want to have fun make poor saviors of the world.

is the aversion to growing up.

When asked to sum up what was most important to her and her friends, one mid-1940s teenage girl said, “We just want to live our own lives. We’re not in a hurry to grow up and get all serious and morbid like older people.” Of course, girls who just want to have fun make poor saviors of the world. But except for a few Roman Catholic youth and their leaders whose voices were largely ignored, Christians turned a blind eye to early warning signs that youth culture frivolity might swamp Christian activism.

FAILED ATTEMPTS

Each branch of American Christianity responded differently to the growing pressure to juvenilize. Mainline Protestants, such as those who ran the Methodist Youth Department, assumed that young people were natural political activists. They successfully mobilized an influential minority of young people to fight for racial integration and other progressive political causes.

But their attempts to adapt to youth culture proved clumsy. In 1959, a national convocation that tried to use Beat culture and existentialism to shake up the supposedly apathetic teenagers of the “silent generation” backfired and led to the resignation of the conference organizer. More often, youth committees and “rhythmic games,” the Methodist answer to dancing, competed poorly against other youth culture entertainments.

African American Baptists taught young people to speak, act, and dress like adults and to use their Christian maturity to shame segregationists. This strategy succeeded beyond everyone’s wildest dreams in the sit-in movement of the early 1960s. But in the pressure cooker of the movement, the religious fervor that initially motivated many young activists turned into a zeal for destroying anything that seemed to get in their way, including the very black churches that had nurtured their activism.

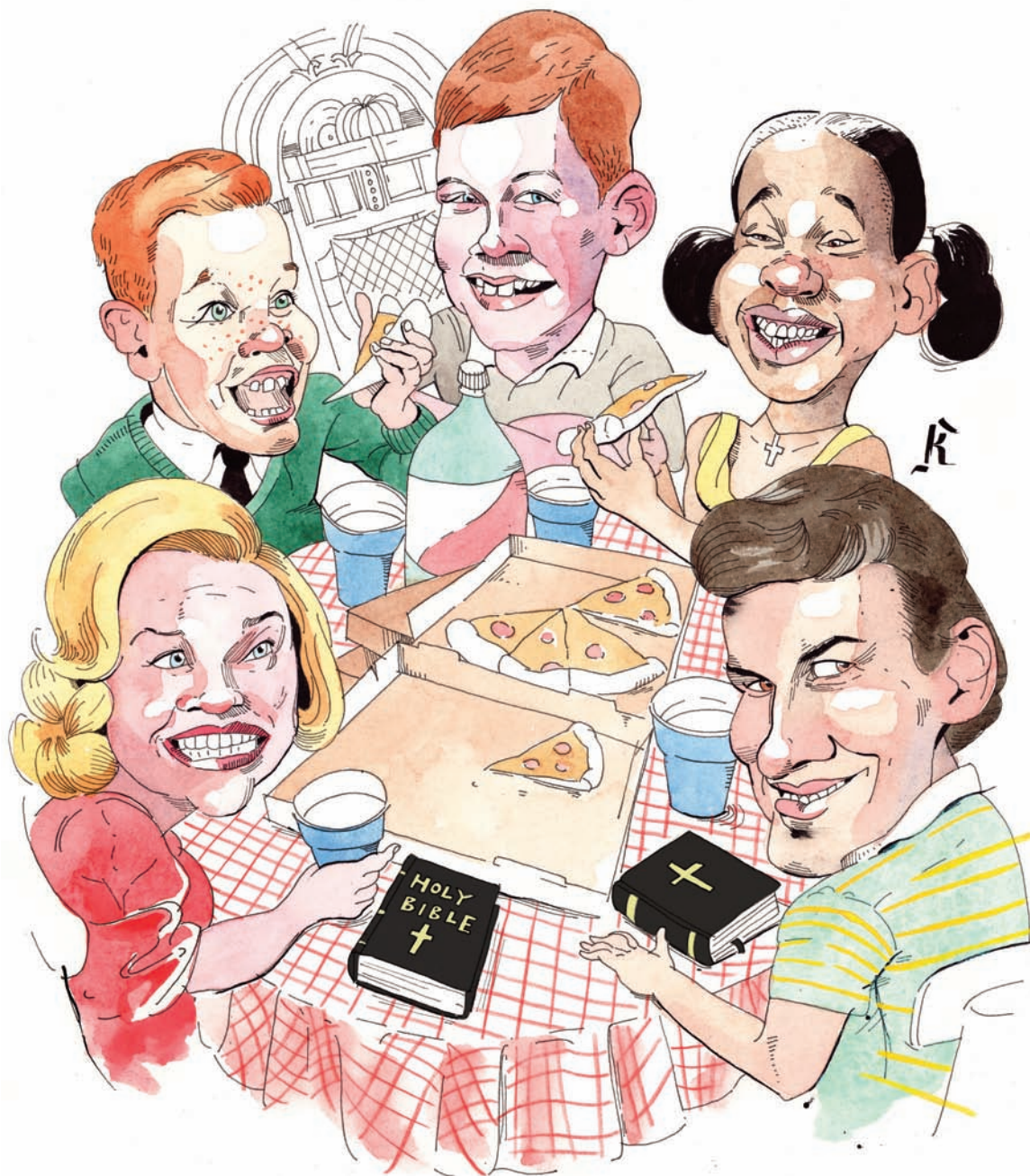
When the institutions of the Catholic ghetto began to shake and Americans simultaneously decided that religion should be an optional, personalized activity, Roman Catholics were unable to adapt. They had not learned how to create the emotionally satisfying, entertaining youth environments that would be needed to sustain religious interest among the young in post-1960s America.

EVANGELICAL SUCCESS

In contrast to other Christian youth leaders who ignored, suppressed, or adapted clumsily to youth culture, white evangelicals—like those who founded Young Life and YFC—embraced it. They created a youth-friendly version of old-time religion that they justified in part by insisting they had no intention of tampering with what happened in church. With a dream of beating “the world” at its own game, they started weekly Saturday night youth rallies held in auditoriums and featuring live radio broadcasts, upbeat music that mimicked the crooner and big-band styles of the day, brief testimonies by recent converts, and short, fervent sermons tied to current events. Stadium events like the May 1945 Victory Rally in Chicago drew thousands to spectacles of patriotism and piety and won respect even in the secular press.

Since the fate of the world depended upon winning as many youthful converts as quickly as possible, preachers at YFC rallies didn’t worry about ways they might be subtly altering the gospel message. Billy Graham, who got his start as an evangelist on the YFC rally circuit, claimed that “the young people around the world today who are having the best time are the young people who know Jesus Christ.” Jim Rayburn, founder of Young Life, agreed: Accepting Christ as Savior did not mean giving up pleasure and wearing a long face. As he put it, “It’s a sin to bore a kid.”

At the same time, the new breed of evangelical youth leaders



stressed that following Christ included absolute obedience to his commandments and separation from “the world.” This seemingly contradictory combination of fun and moral strictness actually worked quite well at capturing teenage loyalty in a competitive religious and entertainment marketplace. Mainline Protestant youth leaders often complained that YFC rallies were stealing young people away from more worthy, social gospel-oriented youth programs.

In addition to rallies that borrowed heavily from teen entertainment, evangelical youth leaders established Christian clubs that fit neatly into the emerging social world of the public high school. The goal was for teenagers to “stand up for Jesus” as pure witnesses in the pagan stronghold of the public schools. As YFC national club director Jack Hamilton told teenagers, “You know, gang, they can take the Bible as a book out of school, but you can put it back in by the life you live!”

Bible club members carried their Bibles to school and wore distinctive pins, sweaters, and jackets—group identifiers that

closely resembled those of other high school clubs, cliques, and gangs. They had their own yearbooks and substituted a senior banquet for the senior prom. Although they did not drink, dance, or go to movies, YFC Bible clubbers of the 1950s appropriated many elements of white, middle-class youth culture with full approval of their adult mentors.

One local chapter even developed a Christian hot-rod club called the Boltin’ Bishops. The combination of adherence to old standards of right and wrong and the drive for evangelistic success allowed this Christian youth culture to develop relatively unhindered. And since adults assumed that young people would eventually grow out of these pop-culture forms of Christianity, few worried about long-term effects on the church.

A YOUTH THEOLOGY OF THE BODY

But how could Christian youth and their leaders tell the difference between worldly compromise and beating the world at its own game? Because they had few clearly articulated theological

criteria for deciding which adaptations to youth culture were morally acceptable, YFC leaders instinctively turned to the purity of youthful bodies as the key distinguishing mark that separated cultural victory from worldly contamination. This unconscious focus on bodily purity was humorously illustrated at a 1953 rally in Lansing, Michigan.

Early in the meeting, the rally was interrupted by Bible club member Norm Hinton, who staggered down the aisle holding his stomach and feigning illness. Four young men in the audience jumped up to help, carrying Hinton to a cot on the platform. Local YFC director Billy Walker immediately prescribed an operation. Lacking proper anesthetics, Walker removed one of Hinton's shoes and placed it over the patient's nose and mouth. Using a knife and saw as make-believe instruments, the "doctor" extracted dice, cards, cigarettes, tickets to the movies and a dance, comic books, and an empty bottle of whiskey. He replaced these with a picture of Jesus, a Bible, Christian tracts, a Christian novel, tickets to the Bible club and roller-skating party, and a copy of *Youth for Christ* magazine. After the successful operation, the patient got up "really alive, and gave a terrific testimony!" This skit provided a pantomime of the working theology of culture operative in YFC and other evangelical youth movements of the day.

The ultimate way for a teenage girl to prove her bodily purity and confirm her powerful Christian witness seemed to be to get elected prom queen and then refuse to dance. The editors of *Youth for Christ* magazine eagerly reported several instances in which this happened during the 1950s. Such stories confirmed that Christians could be popular, have fun, and save the world at the same time, but only if they preserved their pure "witness." This youthful spirituality held a powerful appeal because it reassured teenagers that their renunciation of youth-culture pleasures was contributing directly to the all-important Christian mission of saving souls. In contrast, Roman Catholic teenagers heard just as many urgent messages about sexual purity, but did not catch a vision for how their personal abstinence could save the world. As a result, the enforced sexual morality of the Catholic ghetto did not fare as well in post-1960s America as did the voluntary, mission-inspired evangelical version.

It also helped that adults provided white evangelical teenagers with replacements for most of the youth-culture pleasures they renounced. In those rare cases where no equivalent could be found, they simply redefined life with Jesus to be just like whatever teenagers had to give up, only better.

One anonymous YFC teenager wrote of her disillusionment with Elvis Presley: "The fact of the matter is, I've found something else that has given me more of a thrill than a hundred Presleys ever could! It's a new friendship with the most wonderful Person I've ever met, a Man who has given me happiness and thrills and something worth

living for."

Evangelical teenagers were coming to describe the Christian life as falling in love with Jesus and experiencing the "thrills" and "happiness" of a romantic relationship with him. Perhaps because they believed so strongly in a personal relationship with Jesus as the center of Christianity, they didn't question what might be lost when that relationship was equated with an erotic, emotional attraction to a teen idol.

ALL ADOLESCENTS NOW

Despite its obvious weaknesses, this juvenilized Christianity proved highly adaptive to cultural changes. It fared equally well in the buttoned-down 1950s and the psychedelic 1960s. Long before the 1960s counterculture alerted everyone in America to the "Generation Gap," white evangelicals were already highly skilled at adapting their message and methods to young people. The pioneers of YFC and Young Life paved the way for evangelicals to accept long hair, Christian rock, small groups, or any other cultural adaptations that might be needed to capture the attention of later generations. Some of the growth of conservative churches over the subsequent decades would come from this expertise in recruiting and retaining young people.

The final step in the process was the transformation of American adulthood itself. Older cultural conceptions of adulthood encouraged responsibility, self-denial, and service to others. In the first half of the 20th century, most people clearly entered adulthood in their teens or early 20s by virtue of getting married, getting a job, and having children. More recently, the passage to adulthood has been delayed and rendered more subjective for most middle-class Americans.

In what sociologist James Côté calls the new "psychological adulthood," the individual's "needs and wants" expand and his or her "obligations and attachments" contract. The seven



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deadly sins have been redefined: “pride has become self esteem . . . lust has become sexuality . . . envy is now channeled into initiative and incentive . . . sloth has become leisure.”

Of course, many adults still value virtue and deplore vice. But they also increasingly view life as an unending journey of self-development. And the contemporary landscape through which they journey has many paths that can end in self-centeredness or even narcissism.

In short, at least some traits that should be included in Christian maturity have been decoupled from adulthood in post-1960s America, and this change has encouraged juvenilization. Indeed, it is likely that the juvenilization of American Christianity and the emergence of the new immature adulthood have mutually reinforced one another. We’re all adolescents now.

JUVENILIZATION TRIUMPHANT

Because of juvenilization, American Christianity is doing much better than it should be. Despite numerous cultural, legal, and

an informal, entertaining, fast-paced worship experience set to upbeat music. Everything done in these churches to reach “unchurched” people was already being done in the YFC rallies of the 1950s. And this parallel is not coincidental.

How many evangelical pastors have started their careers as youth pastors over the past 40 years? To take one highly influential example, Bill Hybels first experimented with his seeker-friendly model and church market research while serving as a youth pastor in the 1970s. The white evangelical churches that are growing the fastest in America are the ones that look most like the successful youth ministries of the 1950s and ’60s.

Even the emerging church movement, which among other things is a reaction against this white, middle-class, suburban version of Christianity, is itself a product of juvenilization. Concerns that evangelical churches were alienating postmodern young people pushed many emerging church pioneers to explore new ways to be the church. Tony Jones argues that the egalitarianism and relational ministry practiced in evangelical

Because of juvenilization, American Christianity is doing much better than it should be. Youth ministries have contributed to this surprising outcome by making the Christian life more emotionally satisfying.

institutional changes that should have led to religious decline, American churches remain about as full as they were 50 years ago, and most Americans continue to believe in a God who bears considerable resemblance to the Christian God. Why?

In 1924, after a thorough study of Muncie, Indiana, sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd concluded that even there in the heartland, Christianity had begun an inevitable decline. A key indicator was that young people seemed less religious than their parents. In 1978, the Lynds’ *Middletown* surveys were repeated, revealing that the predicted decline in religion had never materialized. Both youth and adults had more positive views of the church and Christianity in 1978 than their predecessors did in 1924. The top reason people gave for going to church had changed from “habit” to “enjoyment.”

Youth ministries and juvenilization contributed to this surprising outcome by making the Christian life more emotionally satisfying. Passion was in, duty was out. This kind of individualized, emotional connection to God sustained religious interest in a changing society in which custom, tradition, and social pressure would no longer motivate people to care about faith or attend church.

Not surprisingly, in the process of adapting to the new immature adulthood, churches started looking a lot like youth groups. Contemporary churches appeal to thousands of Americans by providing

youth groups shaped the emerging church movement.

Although white evangelicals have been the most aggressive juvenilizers, other branches of American Christianity are not far behind. Some of the most fervent young Catholics are combining traditionalist faith and youth culture styles. In her book *The New Faithful: Why Young Adults Are Embracing Christian Orthodoxy*, Colleen Carroll Campbell writes of these young Catholics:

They sing evangelical songs. They tell their conversion stories and facilitate the conversion of others. They stress the importance of a “personal relationship with Christ.” They wear T-shirts with messages like “Eucharistic Adoration: Do It 24/7” and “Top 10 Reasons to Be Catholic.”

When asked what they get out of their rock band–energized youth liturgies, Catholic teenagers report that they like the “intense experience” that serves as a “stress reliever” and they “love the music.” Some African American church leaders are experimenting with hip-hop worship in order to reach young people who are alienated from traditional black churches. The history of white evangelical youth movements suggests that over time these innovations will filter into adult church life. And that is not all bad. “That’s the way we’ve always done it” is not a compelling theological argument.

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

Still, churches new to juvenilization would do well to consider its unintended consequences. Juvenilization tends to create a self-centered, emotionally driven, and intellectually empty faith. In their landmark National Study of Youth and Religion,



Christian Smith and his team of researchers found that the majority of American teenagers, even those who are highly involved in church activities, are inarticulate about religious matters. They seldom used words like *faith*, *salvation*, *sin*, or even *Jesus* to describe their beliefs. Instead, they return again and again to the language of personal fulfillment to describe why God and Christianity are important to them. The phrase “feel happy” appeared over 2,000 times in 267 interviews.

Smith and his research team labeled this pattern of religious beliefs Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. Teenagers learn these beliefs from the adults in their lives. It is the American cultural religion. Teenagers are “moralistic” in that they believe that God wants us to be good, and that the main purpose of religion is to help people be good. But since it is possible to be good without being religious, religion is an optional tool that can be chosen by those who find it helpful. American Christianity is “therapeutic”

of leaving many individuals mired in spiritual immaturity.

TAMING JUVENILIZATION

As the line between adolescence and adulthood continues to blur, eliminating youth ministries would only weaken religious formation of youth without doing much to counter spiritual immaturity among adults. And instead of naively thinking we can eliminate juvenilization, we should instead work to tame it by helping local congregations build an intergenerational way of life that fosters spiritual maturity.

Pastors and youth leaders can begin by teaching what the Bible says about spiritual maturity, with a special emphasis on those elements that are neglected by juvenilized Christians. Church leaders also need to ask hard questions about the music they sing, the curriculum materials they use, and the ways they structure activities.

Today many Americans of all ages not only accept a Christianized version of adolescent narcissism, they often celebrate it as authentic spirituality. God, faith, and the church all exist to help me with my problems.

in that we believe that God and religion are valuable because they help us feel better about our problems. Finally, American teenagers show their “deism” in that they believe in a God who remains in the background of their lives—always watching over them, ready to help them, but not at the center of their lives.

Given the history of youth ministry and juvenilization, this pattern of religious beliefs should come as no surprise. As early as the 1950s, youth ministry was low on content and high on emotional fulfillment. The best youth ministries did provide individualized spiritual formation and even intense discipleship. But even otherwise exemplary youth ministries could unintentionally send the message that the church or even God exists to help me on my journey of self-development. Most youth ministries since the 1960s have followed the club model pioneered by Young Life and YFC. Songs, games, skits, and other youth-culture entertainments are followed by talks or discussions that feature simple truths packaged with humor, stories, and personal testimonies. As they listen to years of simplified messages that emphasize an emotional relationship with Jesus over intellectual content, teenagers learn that a well-articulated belief system is unimportant and might even become an obstacle to authentic faith. This feel-good faith works because it appeals to teenage desires for fun and belonging. It casts a wide net by dumbing down Christianity to the lowest common denominator of adolescent cognitive development and religious motivation.

Today many Americans of all ages not only accept a Christianized version of adolescent narcissism, they often celebrate it as authentic spirituality. God, faith, and the church all exist to help me with my problems. Religious institutions are bad; only my personal relationship with Jesus matters. If we believe that a mature faith involves more than good feelings, vague beliefs, and living however we want, we must conclude that juvenilization has revitalized American Christianity at the cost

We need to ditch the false belief that cultural forms are neutral. Every enculturation of Christianity highlights some elements of the faith and obscures others. We must be vigilant and creatively compensate for what gets lost in translation when we use the language of youth culture. For example, if we sing songs that highlight the emotional consolations of the faith, what can we do to help young people also embrace the sufferings that come with following Jesus?

I believe one key is to renew our commitment to the church as an intergenerational family, in which each person has a unique role in helping the others toward our shared goal of maturity in Christ (Titus 2:1–15; Eph. 5:21–6:4; Col. 3:18–4:1; 1 John 2:12–14). Adults need children and adolescents to draw out their committed love and provide concrete opportunities to care for others. Adolescents help adults reconnect with the passion of a life devoted to Christ, what he called the first love of the Christians at Ephesus (Rev. 2:4). Young people need adults in their lives who are modeling a vibrant spiritual maturity. One reason no one wants to grow up in America is that many adults don’t make their life stage look very attractive.

Teenagers can legitimately follow Christ in adolescent ways, including participating in age-appropriate youth ministries. But those ministries must also help youth catch a vision for growing up spiritually. Churches full of people who are building each other up toward spiritual maturity are not only the best antidote to the juvenilization of American Christianity, but also a powerful countercultural witness in a juvenilized society. ✚

Thomas E. Bergler is professor of ministry and missions at Huntington University, where he has taught youth ministry for 12 years. He is the author of *The Juvenilization of American Christianity* (Eerdmans, 2012), from which this article is adapted. He serves as senior associate editor for the *Journal of Youth Ministry*.

A NEW SEMINARY ANATOMY

A Church in need of revival calls for a different approach to ministry training

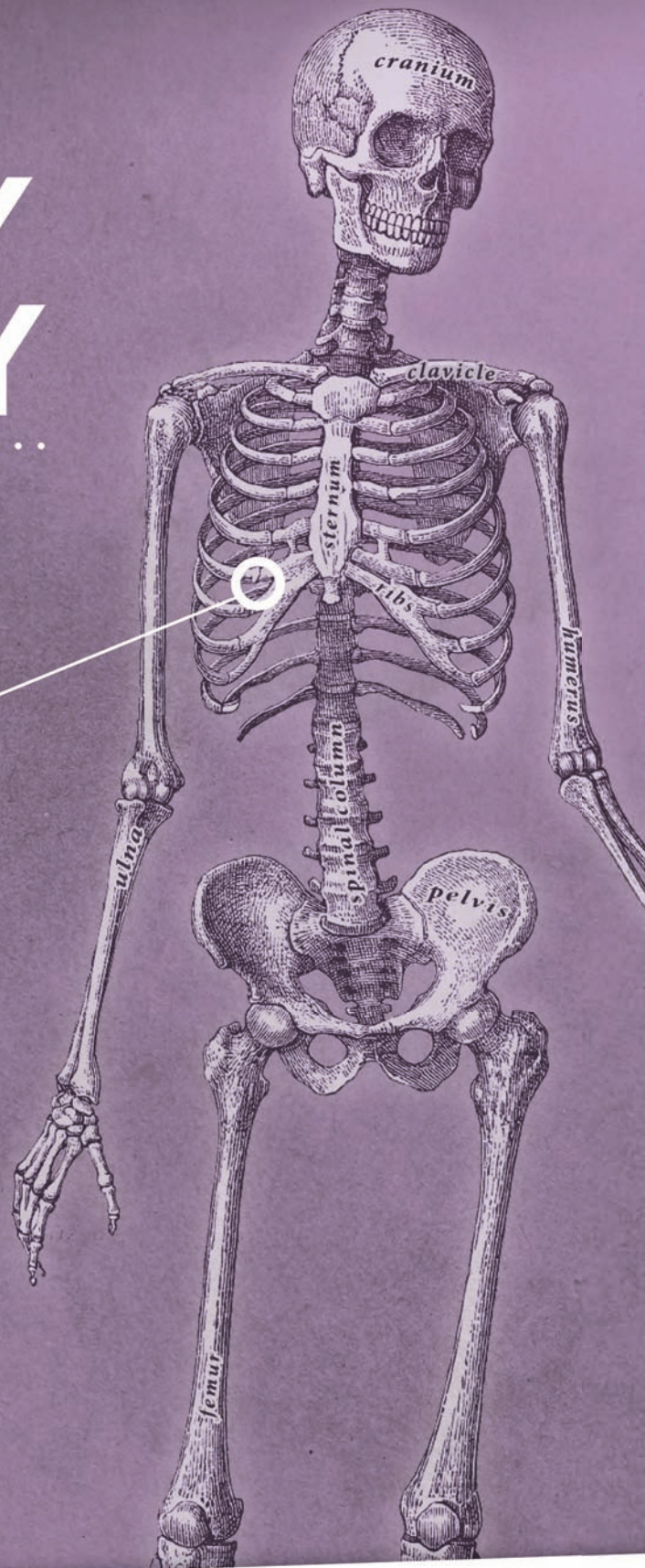
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A BODY, ACHIEVING HEALTH AND MOMENTUM THROUGH BALANCE

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Mostly Right!

A megachurch pastor, a researcher, and a cultural critic respond to Bergler's startling thesis.

Ponce de León on Steroids

What does Christian maturity look like in a youth-worshipping culture? By John Ortberg

IRAN ACROSS a generationally concerned quote while reading University of Connecticut sociologist Bradley Wright recently: "Our earth is degenerate in these latter days . . . children no longer obey their parents." It was chiseled on an Assyrian stone tablet around 2800 B.C. And it may well have been true. You don't see a lot of thriving Assyrian family ministries these days.

The "things are getting worse" narrative is a comet with a long tail in human history and has particular resonance with today's evangelical community. Thomas Bergler's thoughtful exploration of American youth ministry taps into that narrative with a wealth of information that will be new even for many of us who grew up in the evangelical world. And it will prompt many questions about a dilemma that has troubled the American church for a long while: What kind of people are we trying to reach, and what kind of people are we trying to produce, and is it possible to do both simultaneously?

Youth has always been worshiped in its own way. After all, Ponce de León didn't risk his life and fortune searching for the Fountain of Maturity. But what was once a quest has become an industry. Between Rogaine, Viagra, Botox, and Gingko, the fountain of youth has turned out to be pharmacological.

Bergler poses as his thesis that an inescapable tension struck the core of American Christianity during the 1930s and '40s: Should church leaders aggressively seek to adapt to youth culture and risk altering the faith, or should they avoid youth culture and risk losing the youth?

One of the difficulties in answering that question is the lack of a baseline. To truly measure the cost of adapting to youth culture, we would need to have a good gauge of the "maturity level" of people whom churches were turning out in the three or four decades before the '30s and the rise of youth culture. The emergence of adolescence as a prolonged developmental stage of life is clear; judging its impact on national character would



require some kind of assessment of prior national character.

The opening pages of Bergler's new book, *The Juvenilization of American Christianity*, are devoted to describing common features of contemporary churches: praise music featuring spiritually romanticized lyrics (I recently heard Tony Campolo say, "When I get to heaven, if they have an overhead projector, I'm out of there"); messages that focus more on spiritual life as a journey than on themes of guilt and repentance; an approach to missions that emphasizes personal experience; and a tendency to exalt young people as the spiritual gold standard of authenticity and passion.

Most of what follows is a detailed history of youth ministry from the 1930s to the '70s along four tracks: the evangelical world, mainline Methodism, the African American (particularly Baptist) church, and Catholicism. (In fact, the book is so historically focused that I would have loved to see more time spent reflecting on the contemporary state of the church; that will have to be the focus of another book.)

Evangelicalism in particular has featured an entrepreneurial spirit that allows it to navigate cultural change with both effectiveness and excess. I had heard before about the Youth for Christ (YFC) "Gospel Horse," which would stamp its hoof three times when asked how many members make up the Trinity. What I didn't know was that even some Unitarians like the Rev. G. Richard Kuch began to suggest they should copy the "vim and vigor" of YFC. (A Unitarian Gospel Horse should be easier to train, needing to stamp only once for the how-many-members-in-the-Godhead question.)

A friend who teaches philosophy at Notre Dame noted that while evangelicals tend to adapt to culture, Catholicism has tended to survive by creating its own culture to which its adherents must adapt, and mainliners have tried to muddle along without any clear cultural strategy once they cease to occupy a privileged seat in civil religion. When I was growing up, I was somewhat jealous that the Catholic kids got to have dances sponsored by the church. Bergler notes that YFC leader Torrey Johnson was sometimes called "the religious Frank Sinatra";



Bergler's book is both an indicator of need and a beginning of the kind of reflection that churches and church leaders hunger for. We also need our best thinkers to help us identify what true spiritual maturity *is* (much easier to define what it is *not*). Here, the "things are getting worse" narrative so common in evangelicalism can keep us from thinking clearly and rigorously about what kind of people we actually *used* to produce, and what kind of development we are heading toward now.

Because we increasingly live in a post-Christian culture, any church leader must seek to discover how to contextualize the gospel to our culture. And our culture is a youth-worshipping, Justin Bieberized, Twilight-Hunger Games-Kardashian culture.

the Catholic Church didn't have to create one, because they actually *had* Frank Sinatra. They only had to argue whether he was a good enough Catholic.

Bergler's landing place, that "juvenilization has kept American Christianity vibrant" but at a serious cost, is enough to give any church leader pause. In many ways, I think the discussion of juvenilization is more like the missiological discussion of contextualization than anything else. Because we increasingly live in a post-Christian culture, any church leader must seek to discover how to contextualize the gospel to our culture. And our culture is a youth-worshipping, Justin Bieberized, Twilight-Hunger Games-Kardashian culture.

It is easy to confuse maturity with churchiness.

Paul himself said he was in the "pains of childbirth" until Christ was formed in the Galatians, and he complained that the Corinthians were still infants (adolescence not yet being a developmental category available for ancient metaphor). In a sense, juvenilization has been the problem of the church from the beginning. We just happen to live in a moment when the greater culture has gotten caught up in it as well. ☩

John Ortberg is pastor of Menlo Park Presbyterian Church and author of the forthcoming *Who Is This Man?: The Unpredictable Impact of the Inescapable Jesus* (Zondervan).

The Rise of Digital Urban Tribes

How we under- and overestimate the power and shape of the next generation. By David Kinnaman

THE MOST popular games are those that rely on both strategy and luck. When we win, we like to credit our acumen. When we lose, it's easy to blame the unfortunate odds.

Many Christians seem to think discipling the next generation of Christ followers is a simple mix of skill and luck. It goes something like this: God gets the credit when the kids turn out all right, and our broken world gets the blame when things run amok. This logic may not be entirely wrong, but it oversimplifies on-the-ground realities.

Our team at Barna Group has spent the past five years researching the development of Christianity among youth and young adults—more than 5,000 interviews on this subject. We've examined the perceptions of teens and 20-somethings, and we've explored the attitudes of stakeholders, including pastors, youth workers, parents, and ministry professionals who work with the younger generation. My take on our research findings is that we underestimate three aspects of discipleship, and overvalue another, regarding the next generation.

First, we underestimate the profound impact of the social changes that are taking place with the current millennial generation, or “mosaics,” as we call them. Today's generation of youth and young adults is more conversant with technology, less likely to come from married families, and more financially indebted than any previous generation. Their levels of religious, ethnic, and sexual diversity far outpace those of preceding generations. And they are getting married much later in life than did the boomers. Robert Wuthnow's book *After the Boomers* shows just how much this current generation of young adults is “launching” later in life—taking longer to get through the major maturing events in life, like marriage, education, and parenthood.

Here's how we describe this trend: Most 20-somethings today are digitally connected, in urban tribes, and are unmarried. By comparison, the typical boomer completed most major life transitions before age 30. To put it more starkly: A majority of today's 20-somethings live in anything but conventional young families. And this is a particular problem for congregations, because most faith communities tend to “work best” with traditional family units.

The point is this: The rise of digital urban tribes of 20-somethings is having a profound, lasting impact on the spiritual trajectory of today's emerging generation and specifically the church.

Second, we underestimate how much young people are shaped by the massive power of the digital tools, consumer culture, and media of the broader American culture. Thomas



Bergler's work in *The Juvenilization of American Christianity* gives us a fabulous phrase for this: “the deadening effect of popular culture.” Of course, many Christians recognize and bemoan the impact of media and technology on young people. Many, however, miss how much the influence is increasing and how much *every* age group is feeling its effects. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, the typical teenager is using more than 10 hours of media *per day*, far more than previous generations. Is it any wonder when you mix and stir human nature, reality television, and social media that one-quarter of today's teenagers believe there is a “definite” or “probable” chance they will be famous or well-known by age 25? Call it the *American Idol* effect.

In addition, our research shows that typical parents are just as “addicted” to media and technology as are their teenagers, just in different ways. In an ironic and telling shift, the teenagers we interviewed complained that their parents' use of technology was inhibiting quality family time.

Third, we misunderstand the potency of youth culture's

gravitational pull. We don't influence youth culture as much as it influences us. Much of the Christian community, as Bergler adroitly points out, has been juvenilized. That is, in an attempt to keep up and stay relevant, churches have increasingly accommodated the passions and preferences of teenagers and young adults. Our fixation on all things young is changing the way we do Christianity. It's also shaping the workplace,

with the requisite z. If we think the primary problem facing young people is biblical illiteracy, for example, then what's required is longer teaching sermons.

Solution-making is generally good. It reflects our creative, dominion-taking nature. Yet, our efforts are often missing key ingredients or doomed to repeat past patterns. Too few of us stakeholders think deeply, culturally, and theologically about

Our research shows that today's parents are just as addicted to media and technology as are their teenagers, just in different ways.

advertising and marketing, fashion, and media, to name a few spheres of society.

So, what do we overvalue? I believe we misjudge the power of our own ideas about how to change the upcoming generation. Frankly, I was surprised at how deeply we hold our notions about what works and what doesn't—revealing this strange mix of our beliefs about luck and skill as though the fate of the next generation is a game of *Risk*. The hypotheses we nurture about youth and college ministry are important, of course, for they shape our actions and priorities. For instance, if we believe we do not face a fresh problem compared with the boomers, we lack any impulse to try anything new. If we imagine the problem is defined by x, we try to shift our effort

our work with the next generation—or how our fixation on all things “young” is changing the way we ourselves do Christianity.

Making sense of today's youth culture is not easy. Grasping the nuances and shaping influences of the upcoming generation's faith is equally difficult. At times I wonder whether we love our traditions more than our children. And, as I've come to learn, we often love our youth ministry theories more than we love the complexity of connecting with the digital tribes of today's youth and young adults. 

David Kinnaman is the president and majority owner of Barna Group. He is the author of *You Lost Me* (Baker) and coauthor of *unChristian* (Baker).

By Grace You Are Mature

We don't grow out of spiritual adolescence by trying to grow up.

By David Zahl

IT IS EASY TO FORGET that when Tommy “Crimson and Clover” James released his excellent record *Christian of the World* in 1971, there was no such thing as Christian rock. Pop stars didn't make dramatic confessions of faith, or when they did, they didn't write rock ‘n’ roll albums about them. Even Elvis had the good sense to make his gospel recordings reverent affairs steeped in Baptist quartet singing, not electric guitars. Rock was a young man's game, and the church belonged to the adults, who were understandably reticent about “the Devil's music.”

Fast-forward 40 years, and the tables have turned. Even in more liturgical churches, guitars are the rule rather than the exception, to say nothing of drums. American Christianity has been juvenilized, as Thomas Bergler makes painfully clear.

Indeed, it is difficult to argue with Bergler's basic diagnosis, especially without resorting to the adolescent forms that he decries. Christianity has been irrevocably cast in romantic terms over the past 50 years; in many corners of the church, “personal relationship” has become an unimpeachable phrase. The kneejerk anti-institutionalism of mainstream American evangelicalism is undeniable. The emphasis on (good) feelings

over theology; the obsession with sexual purity relative to other Christian virtues; the subtle and not-so-subtle appropriations of cultural norms, from the use of movie clips in sermons to the blatant commercialism of the “book table”—all these have strangely resulted in a deeper incubation from the wider culture than anyone could have imagined. Would any of us really deny this reality?

Of course, it is almost impossible to write about this juvenilization without sounding grumpy or at least as alarmist as the groups who, according to Bergler, kick-started the phenomenon in the 1950s. Indeed, his careful tracing of the historical antecedents is extremely helpful, especially for anyone involved in ministry. And he makes a laudable attempt to be generous about the invigorating and generally well-intentioned passion of our nation's youth ministers.

The question, as Bergler points out, is not whether the church has been juvenilized, but whether or not this transformation is good. I personally do not care about the packaging if the message is true. Bergler, like Marshall McLuhan before him, suggests the packaging is not neutral, that it always changes the message. And he is probably right. Are we then to assume that

the message that appeals to the young, whether it's one of political yes-we-can-ism or of personal spiritual and moral improvement, will stray, by default, from the gospel? I certainly hope not, but again, we'll have to see. Perhaps Bergler is occasionally hampered by generational baggage, such as when he conflates all of pop culture into one monolithic beast, falling into the same ditch that many other Christians fall into: acting as if they are not somehow a part of the culture themselves. Compartmentalization serves no one, whatever the century, especially when it is based on an inflated view of human nature.

In fact, narcissism is moot if what is being said about "us" has any validity. The gospel message is addressed to people, after all. I remember speaking with a pastor who was preaching the basic, adult gospel each and every week—the forgiveness of sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He remarked that, contrary to what one might think, the people in the congregation who gave him the most headaches were not the older, stodgier types, but rather the younger, ex-parachurchers. They were the ones consistently policing his every word (and each other), demanding something "more" than the Good News of Christ's finished work on the Cross. They wanted their marching orders, in other words, because they had an adolescent—and, ironically, *unbiblical*—view of themselves and their potential that, as Bergler says, "change is possible and desirable." They "pushed back" when he would talk about the tragic dimension of the human condition; they *didn't* want to hear about themselves, at least not as they actually were. The older people in the church, on the other hand, wanted a comforting word, one that took into account the storms and



PAUL KISSELEV

Bergler runs into trouble in his discussion of Christian maturity. When he laments the lack of adulthood in American Christianity, some might say that he simply trades one "moralistic therapeutic deism" for another, that his vision revolves around growth just as much as the adolescents he is describing. The Christian religion, after all, is not ultimately

The great irony of the gospel is that maturity, when it happens, flows from the absolution of one's abiding immaturity, not from the injunction to grow.

shipwrecks of life. Transformation simply does not have the same appeal to a 70-year-old as to a 30-year-old. Mercy does.

Perhaps that is the most troubling aspect of the phenomenon Bergler describes. For the sake of reaching young people, the church has compromised the severity of God's law, instead offering a superficial semi-Pelagian piety (which "relationship" language unfortunately tends to encourage) that young people can master, at least theoretically. This teaching not only leads to religious burnout and self-righteousness, it also blunts the assurance and freedom of God's grace. That is, "me and Jesus" is not a problem if the "me" is the sinner and "Jesus" the savior! But when it becomes a partnership, you not only lose those who have been around the block (and failed to live up to their side of the bargain), you also lose the *good* part of the Good News: that God has done for us what we could never do for ourselves.

about the Christian, either adolescent or mature—it is about the Christ. And the great irony of the gospel is that maturity, when it happens, flows from the absolution of one's abiding immaturity, not from the injunction to grow.

Bergler's vision of a mature Christian ("Mature disciples of Jesus center their lives on following Christ and partnering with him in his kingdom"), on the other hand, sounds like an alternate works righteousness, albeit with "emotional connection" replaced by old-fashioned religious obligation. So while his diagnosis is spot-on, it misses the freedom at the heart of the gospel.

Then again, to quote Tommy James, perhaps I'm just "draggin' the line."

David Zahl is the director of Mockingbird Ministries and editor in chief of the Mockingbird blog.

A red and black motorcycle is parked on a white surface. Next to it is a round, dark-colored grill with a metal grate, and a silver spatula with a black handle. The motorcycle's handlebars, mirrors, and fuel tank are visible. The grill is filled with dark, charred food.

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A Bridge Between Two Worlds

How the Resurrection infused my rational faith with a passionate hope.

By Alister McGrath

A YOUNG MAN WHO WISHES to remain a sound atheist cannot be too careful of his reading. There are traps everywhere.” What would have happened to me, I often wonder, if I had read those words of C. S. Lewis when I was 18 years old and been alerted to the danger of reading? At the time, I was a grumpy and frankly rather arrogant atheist. I was totally convinced that there was no God, and that anyone who thought there was needed to be locked up for her own good. I was majoring in the sciences at high school and had won a scholarship to study chemistry at Oxford University, beginning in October 1971. I had every reason to believe that studying the sciences further would confirm my rampant godlessness. While waiting to go up to Oxford, I decided to work my way through a pile of “improving books.” Needless





to say, none of them were religious.

Eventually, I came to a classic work of philosophy—Plato’s *Republic*. I couldn’t make sense of everything I read. But one image etched itself into my imagination. Plato asks us to imagine a group of men, trapped in a cave, knowing only a world of flickering shadows cast by a fire. Having experienced no other world, they assume that the shadows are the only reality. Yet the reader knows—and is meant to know—that there is another world beyond the cave, awaiting discovery.

As I read this passage, the hard-nosed rationalist within me smiled condescendingly. *Typical escapist superstition! What you see is what you get, and that’s the end of the matter.* Yet a still, small voice within me whispered words of doubt. *What if this world is only part of the story? What if this world is only a shadowland? What if there is something more wonderful beyond it?*

Had I read Lewis at that stage, I would have known that he once shared my dilemma as the imaginative deficiency of his youthful atheism began to dawn on him: “On the one side, a many-islanded sea of poetry and myth; on the other, a glib and shallow rationalism.” Yet even without Lewis, a seed of doubt had been planted within my dogmatic mindset. I could not have known this, but within a year, such doubts would overwhelm me and lead me to rediscover Christianity.

My own conversion was intellectual. I didn’t need a quick spiritual fix. Instead, I encountered a compelling and luminous vision of reality so powerful and attractive that it demanded a response. Christianity made more sense of the world I saw around me and experienced within me than anything else—my earlier atheism included. I discovered the sheer intellectual capaciousness of the Christian faith—its remarkable, God-given ability to offer us a lens through which we can see things, bringing everything into a sharper focus. It’s a light that illuminates the shadowlands. That’s why I’ve come to love Lewis’s great one-liner: “I believe in Christianity as I believe the sun has risen, not just because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.” Although my journey of faith started with reason, it did not end there. The novelist Evelyn Waugh once wrote of the “delicious process of exploring” that he experienced upon converting to Christianity in 1930. I know just what he meant. Everything is new and exciting. It’s all too much to take in at once. You have to keep coming back, going deeper each time around. That’s what I found with the Resurrection.

EMINENTLY REASONABLE

My first reflections on the resurrection of Christ were exactly what you’d expect from a recovering hyper-rationalist. My questions were all about historical factuality. Did Jesus really rise from the dead? What was the evidence for it? At that stage, my concern was really to reassure myself of the trustworthiness

of the New Testament. If the Resurrection didn’t happen, then the New Testament could not be trusted. If it did, the New Testament was to be trusted. Although I emerged from this period of questioning with my faith intact, I could not help feeling there was rather more to the resurrection of Christ than the validation of the authority of Scripture.

I now began to reflect on how the Resurrection helped me make sense of the identity of Christ. I cut my theological teeth on works like German theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg’s *Jesus: God and Man*, which offered a complex and intriguing defense of the Resurrection as a public event *and* argued its importance for understanding the true significance of Jesus Christ.

My early concern was to get straight what Christians believed, and why they believed it. How does the Resurrection fit into the web of Christian beliefs? How does it fit into the

overall scheme of the Christian faith? After several years of wrestling with these issues, I came down firmly on the side of Christian orthodoxy. I became, and remain, a dedicated and convinced defender of traditional Christian theology. Having persuaded myself of its merits, I was more than happy to try to persuade others as well. My early books

My own conversion was intellectual. I didn’t need a quick spiritual fix. Instead, I encountered a compelling and luminous vision of reality so powerful and attractive that it demanded a response.

had titles such as *Understanding Jesus* and *Understanding the Trinity*.

Today, I remain convinced that Christianity gives the best “big picture” of reality, one which makes sense of science, history, culture, and personal experience. This is one of its greatest strengths, and it helped me come to faith. Yet I came to realize that it has more strengths than I had initially appreciated. I was like someone holding a diamond up to the light, and realizing it had many facets—each scintillating brilliantly in the light—and rejoicing as I came to appreciate their individual beauty and relevance.

A deeper appreciation of the significance of the Resurrection slowly began to dawn. I had always understood that the significance of the Resurrection went beyond deepening our understandings of the identity of Christ and our own situation. Yet I found it difficult to express this in words, and could not quite grasp its traction on the deeper things of life.

DEEPER DIMENSIONS

My appreciation of the deeper dimensions of the gospel grew considerably as I worked as a curate—the Church of England’s term for an assistant pastor—in a parish in England’s East Midlands in the early 1980s, ministering to those who were suffering, dying, and bereaved. Ordinary people, often in the final stages of their life, explained to me how their faith in the Resurrection transformed their lives and brought new hope to their sufferings and losses. As I listened to them, I realized that they were ministering to me as much as I to them.

Those good faithful Christian people taught me that the Resurrection enabled believers to do more than think. It helped them to *cope* with the sorrows, ambiguity, and pain of life. They hadn't read Pannenberg. But they had immersed themselves in the New Testament and absorbed its fundamental message of hope. They knew that, even though they walked through the valley of the shadow of death, God was with them. So they kept walking through the wilderness of this world, knowing God was by their side. They knew that Christ's resurrection was the firm foundation for their hope that all who trusted in him would finally rise with him and be with him in the New Jerusalem. So they faced suffering with dignity and serenity, knowing that those who suffer with Christ will be glorified with him.

To put it simply: Ordinary Christian believers helped me realize that the Resurrection changes not just the way we think but also the way we live. Things that I had understood in a rather dry and detached way now became living realities. What I had once studied, I now inhabited. What I had once understood, I now embraced. My time in a parish helped me to realize that the gospel impacted every aspect of our existence—our reasoning, emotions, imaginations, and values. Looking back on those days, I can now see that they liberated me from an impoverished view of the Christian faith. There's nothing wrong with a faith that shapes the way we think—as long as we allow it to do its work of transforming every aspect of our lives. The healing balm of the gospel needs to salve the wounds of every faculty that we possess, so that they can all be transformed, enriched, and empowered through the grace of God.

Now many readers will feel—not without good reason—that this is all rather obvious. It is to me now. But it wasn't when I began my pilgrimage of faith over 40 years ago. It was something I had to discover, and learn the hard way. To use a phrase from Lewis, my imagination was baptized as I realized how much more there was to discover about the gospel.

And so I returned to the Resurrection. I was already reassured of its historical truth. I had figured out its enormous implications for a right understanding of the identity of Jesus of Nazareth. But now I was ready for more—to engage with the Resurrection at a level and with an enthusiasm I had not known before. So what did I encounter?

Space permits only one reflection: It brought a new dimension to my understanding of worship. The resurrection of Christ creates a bridge between two worlds—the everyday world in which we exist and a better and brighter world of the Christian hope. Sharing in Christ's resurrection means sharing in the hope that we shall one day inhabit the New Jerusalem, and anticipating being part of its worship and adoration. Though our entry into the courtyards of heaven lies in the future, we can anticipate it now. Worship on earth is a foretaste of the worship of heaven.

**Ordinary Christian
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THE FRAGRANCE OF HEAVEN

I came across an illustration years ago that helped me visualize this (see pages 32–33). In his 1888 work *The Atmosphere*, the French astronomer Camille Flammarion (1842–1925) reproduced an illustration that he declared to be a medieval woodcut. (This is now thought to be Flammarion's own invention, by the way.) It shows a man on the threshold of the everyday world, peering beyond it into a deeper and more complex reality.

That's how I see the Resurrection. By his death and resurrection, Christ has built a bridge and opened a door to the New Jerusalem. Not only do we, as citizens of heaven, have a God-given and Christ-based right of entry and abode there; we can anticipate our arrival in its courtyards, allowing the worship of heaven to inspire and excite us right now. The fragrance of heaven wafts into the everyday world. By God's grace, those

things we enjoy and love now become signs and pledges of something greater to come. Jonathan Edwards put this rather well in his great sermon of September 1733, "The Christian Pilgrim":

To go to heaven fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, children, or the company of earthly friends, are but shadows. But the enjoyment of God is the substance.

These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun.
These are but streams, but God is the fountain. These are but drops, but God is the ocean.

The resurrection of Christ is the guarantor that these hopes of heaven are not the pathetic delusions of wistful human hearts. No. These are realities that are secured, disclosed, and illuminated through the gospel declaration of the resurrection of Christ as the firstfruits, with believers to follow in God's own good time. No wonder the New Testament exults in the Resurrection hope!

When Paul speaks of the "unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8, NIV 1984), he is not forbidding us to explore but rather *encouraging* us to do so, in the knowledge that there will always be more to discover about Christ, the focus and center of our faith. Paul is right: Knowing Christ is better than anything the world can offer, even though that knowledge is limited by our finitude and sin. But one day, we shall know Christ as he really is, and be with him in his kingdom. Christ's incarnation evokes our wonder that God once came to us; his resurrection consolidates our hope that one day we shall return home, rejoicing, to that same God. ☩

Alister McGrath is professor of theology at King's College London, and president of the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics. His next book is a new biography of C. S. Lewis, to be published by Tynedale in March 2013.

[MEDIA]

The Social Network Gospel

How interconnectivity helps us better engage the Bible.

By Robert C. Crosby

IN THE 15TH CENTURY, Johannes Gutenberg and Martin Luther both wanted to get Scripture into the hands of the masses. Centuries later, in a new millennium with technologies far exceeding any they could have imagined, their vision has been fulfilled at a stunning pace.

Not only do billions around the world now have access to the Bible online, and not only are many of them actually *reading* it, they're also actively *engaging* with the Word of God—and with one another in far-flung virtual communities across the planet.

With these trends, the vocabulary of Bible dissemination is changing. For centuries, the buzzword was *distribution*, with a focus on

quantity delivered. The new buzzword is *engagement*. Lamar Vest, president and CEO of the American Bible Society (ABS), says we're witnessing "a revival of Bible engagement. For too long we have judged our effectiveness by the number of Bibles distributed. We are determined to no longer judge our effectiveness by tonnage but by impact."

Vest's comments came at a conference in Orlando, Florida, held late last year by the Forum of Bible Agencies and largely catalyzed by ABS and its new engagement initiative, Uncover the Word. The event drew representatives from over 125 organizations, including Willow Creek Association, Renovaré, the Salvation Army, Christianity Today, and Scripture Union, plus many denominations. Participants





SHEVAUN WILLIAMS

The New Engagers

Bobby Gruenewald | Founder, YouVersion

YouVersion (yv) is the fastest-growing Bible app for mobile devices in the world, with over 50 million users and gaining about 3 million per month. No wonder Bobby Gruenewald's official title at LifeChurch.tv is "Innovation Leader." And no wonder *Fast Company* named him one of its "100 Most Creative People in Business for 2011."

When he learned in early 2008 that Apple was planning an App Store, Gruenewald and his development team created an app simply called "Bible." It launched the day the App Store opened (July 11, 2008). Gruenewald was hoping for 80,000 users by the end of the year; they got 83,000 in *three days*. Today, yv (*YouVersion.com*) gives access to the Bible in 160 versions in 51 languages; Korean is the second largest language of use. Recently, the 1 millionth reading plan was completed online. A team of 14 full-time workers and 500 active volunteers support the site.

Gruenewald says he and his team were "the most unlikely people to do this. When we started, we didn't even know you had to license the various Bible translations to use them online." But today, "we hear story after story of people who are reading the Bible all the way through. They are using the Bible app to share the gospel with others. Pastors tell us it is helping their churches stay engaged with the Bible between Sundays."

He hopes soon to see "half a billion users and 1 billion minutes of use per day. There are more people alive now than at any point in history, and they are more connected than ever before. We believe that this could become the most Bible-engaged generation in history. I want to leverage technology to its fullest to advance the gospel."

were urged to "leave behind their logos and egos" and join a "movement" for Scripture engagement.

Presenters included Bobby Gruenewald, founder of YouVersion.com, with over 50 million users; Mark Brown, creator of the Bible page on Facebook, with over 8.5 million "friends"; Jim Mellado, president of Willow Creek Association; Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church; Chris Webb, president of Renovaré; and Sam Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference.

"The Bible has long stood as the centerpiece for the moral ethos in this country," Rodriguez said in his opening address. "We have lost that. This movement will reaffirm biblical orthodoxy among us. It will be a prophetic, truth-telling movement. We will reengage the culture with this story."

New research from ABS and the Barna Group—called *State of the Bible 2011*—was also presented. Results showed that 45 percent of Americans say God regularly speaks to them through the Bible, but 50 percent say the book is hard to understand. "Some see that 50 percent statistic as a problem," said Mark Forshaw, executive director of ABS's Global Scripture Impact, "but we are choosing to view it as an opportunity."

The study also showed that while 86 percent cite the Bible as "a sacred book," only 20 percent are engaging it in their personal lives. Joel Hunter, pastor of Northland Church in Orlando, cited a widespread "de-emphasis on the Bible. Unfortunately, we are biblically ignorant. We go to the Bible when we need something, but we are not married to it."

Are the marvels of modern technology—the information superhighway on steroids—changing that?

ISTOCK

Gone in 60 Seconds

Every minute at YouVersion:

20 new daily reading plans started	Bible versions switched 949 times
23 Bible passages shared on Facebook	1,175 audio streams started
Program installed on 69 new devices	Opened 2,747 times
78 Bible passages bookmarked	6,567 Bible chapters viewed
298 Bible passages highlighted	40,747 minutes of Bible engagement
368 reading plan parts completed	126,280 requests to yv servers



THE NEW ROMAN ROADS

The ancient Roman roads spanned more than 250,000 miles. The Romans started building these continent-connecting arteries in 500 B.C., enabling both their empire to grow and the gospel to advance rapidly.

Today's Roman roads are the Internet, the smartphone, the tablet, and social media, ready and waiting for innumerable journeys of faith and witness. While the ancient roads connected hundreds of towns and cities, the new ones connect millions of homes and individuals. *New York Times* columnist Tom Friedman recently wrote, "The world has gone from connected to hyperconnected."

There are an estimated 400 million smartphones (iPhones, Androids, Blackberries, and so on) across the globe. Brown estimates that number will rise to 1 billion within a few years, because "more and more people are doing everything on their smartphones." Last year, for the first time, sales of smartphones and tablets surpassed those of laptop and desktop computers. Daily time spent on apps now exceeds time spent online on laptops and desktops.

These new technologies bring unprecedented access and analytical tools. The question is no longer, "How many Bibles do you own?" but, "How accessible is the Bible to you in various formats?" My bookshelf may hold three copies, but my smartphone can hold 300 versions.

The way people read and respond to Scripture is going through an epochal transformation, in both form and function. Innovative communication media are creating unprecedented pathways for a new generation of Bible innovators—and even more traditional, "old-school" publishers and organizations are coming around.

Nearing its 200th anniversary, ABS is making an effort to shake off potential organizational aging and drift. (Even the word *society* reflects an earlier era.) Founded in 1816, ABS began with a twofold mission: to advance the Word of God, and to end slavery. The society's first president, Elias Boudinot, had served in the Continental Congress; Francis Scott Key was ABS's vice president from 1818 until his death in 1843.

It's a rich history at ABS, and now they're aiming to make more history through Uncover the Word. It's the type of work Paul described as a "supporting ligament" (Eph. 4:16)—connecting people with gifts to people with needs. They are especially focusing on

bringing churches, leaders, and innovators together to promote scriptural engagement through collaborative efforts. Yesterday's "societies" are becoming today's networks.

TRAVELING THE NEW HIGHWAYS

Because these new roads are ready for travel, a vast host of pilgrims will be needed. But what principles can we learn from the vanguards of online Bible engagement? Here are a few nuggets gleaned from conversations with some of today's most seasoned travelers:

Initiative. In the digital age, the most effective travelers are not the timid. Instead, a few lone souls and a few small nimble teams have tried their hands at Bible engagement

online and are proving most successful. More aggressive learn-as-you-go approaches are trumping calculated study-first strategies. Those who start simply, and simply start, rule the new roads.

Responsiveness. The pulse of online Bible engagement is rapid response and connections. While Brown's Facebook page may not have more users than other sites, it frequently draws more interactivity. That means that more people are typing, responding, liking, sharing, forwarding, and clicking on this page than any other. Remembering that there is a soul on the other end, and responding promptly, are vital to online engagement.

Frequency. In the app-development



The New Engagers

Mark Brown | Creator, the Bible page on Facebook

When Mark Brown wants to interact with his Facebook friends, he simply types a Scripture verse onto his page. Most of us might get a few responses within a day or so, but within 10 minutes, Brown's post will spark 10,000 responses from around the globe. His page, simply called "The Bible" ([Facebook.com/TheBibleUBS](https://www.facebook.com/TheBibleUBS)), launched three years ago with one verse: John 3:16.

It took 18 months to reach 1 million Facebook friends, but three years in, it's now at 8.6 million and consistently one of Facebook's top sites for reader interactivity. Users don't just drop by solely to read a verse; they're posting and responding to one another as well.

Brown, former CEO of the Bible Society of New Zealand, says his "Bible engagement strategy" is "to be where people are. You need to learn their language—the culture, the nuances, and the particularities. With all of that, you start to build a community. And then I try to get their attention by finding out what will capture them. I know what gets them talking."

Apparently he's tapped into a felt need. "They want prayer," Brown says. "They want answers to their life's problems. There are constant needs. We often see someone writing, 'That's exactly what I needed right now,' or 'I'm crying as I read this.' It's a joy every time I read about someone finding comfort or practical help for a challenge they are facing."

His biggest joy, though, comes each time a user "confesses Christ."

The page is now run primarily by the United Bible Society, with 22 volunteers helping. But Brown is still involved, and says he doesn't see any major challenges for the site's future.

"I just see opportunities," he says. "Lots of opportunities."



The New Engagers

Nelson Saba | Creator, The Glo Bible

What does a young technology bank executive who majored in airplane design do in his spare time? In Nelson Saba's case, stay up late at night and work on a computer-generated virtual tour of the ancient Jewish tabernacle. After finishing the project several years ago, Saba began designing an entire Bible that was technologically and visually immersive. The result is the Glo Bible (GloBible.com), which was voted the "Coolest Book App" by *USA Today* last fall after being named 2010's Bible of the Year by the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association.

Glo is an interactive Bible that illuminates the full text of Scripture through HD video, high-resolution images, zoomable maps, 360-degree virtual tours, and customizable reading plans.

"Millennials are fascinated by Glo because of the user experience," says Saba, CEO of Immersion Digital. "The old-fashioned study Bibles are not going to attract them because they don't feel connected with it. It has to be an interactive media format in snippets—short learning experiences. It has to be something that somehow connects with their life. Glo helps the reader experience what they are reading; they learn with both sides of their brain."

Gabe Lyons, author of *The Next Christians: The Good News About the End of Christian America*, says Glo's interactivity "is really leveraging technology today. It's on the cutting edge. You can click a video when studying Sodom and Gomorrah, for instance, and it pans the valley where it all took place. There are so many interactive elements."

Saba and Immersion Digital are currently collaborating with Hollywood producer Mark Burnett (*Survivor*, *Celebrity Apprentice*, *The Voice*) and his wife, Roma Downey, along with Zondervan Publishers, on a new app called Bible360. Burnett and Downey are producing a much anticipated new 10-hour docudrama on the Bible for the History Channel to be released in April 2013; much footage from the series will eventually make its way to Bible360.

"Digital media is so powerful," says Saba. "Interactive media is my canvas to communicate my fascination with the Bible."



THE SOCIAL NETWORK GOSPEL

world, conventional wisdom says, "Think big, start small, fail fast; learn rapidly." To try repeatedly is vital in engaging people with Scripture online. The digital environment welcomes raw attempts and quickly forgives trial-and-error efforts that are promptly corrected and adapted with improvements.

Saturation. The forwarding and referring capacities of digital Bible engagement means the potential for reaching people has little to do with a traveler's budget and more to do with vision. Things can quickly go viral. Effective travel on the new roads involves a constant awareness of reaching broadly—that a small impact on one soul has the potential of reaching thousands more in a short span of time.

STONES AND PHONES

The Bible conference in Orlando concluded in prayer with each participant holding a small stone in one hand and a smartphone in the other. Conference attendees were reminded that the Word of God first engraved upon stone tablets at Mount Sinai could now be communicated on the faces of a billion mobile phones and computer tablets.

Technology has changed the game. Printed Bibles have to be duplicated, bound, packaged, shipped, displayed, sold, taken somewhere, and then opened and read. Digital Bibles, however, begin as electronic bytes on a server and can become a thousand or a million copies on the faces of smartphones in mere seconds.

While the message of Scripture has not changed, the delivery of it has. Gruenewald says, "We understand that Bible translators might have given 30 years of their lives to what now takes us 30 seconds to download."

Luther regarded Gutenberg's invention as more than a new science, something truly glorious. He called the printing press "God's highest... act of grace, whereby the business of the gospel is driven forward." Luther had recognized a new "road." What might he have said about the iPad or the Android phone? And just how would Luther and his colleagues have harnessed and traveled these new roads for the kingdom? How will we? 

Robert C. Crosby is professor of practical theology at Southeastern University, a columnist at *Patheos.com*, and author of several books, including *More Than a Savior: When Jesus Calls You Friend* (Multnomah). His next book, *The Teaming Church: Ministry in the Age of Collaboration* (Abingdon Press), releases in October.

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[THE CT INTERVIEW]

The Reformers' POSTMODERN Moment



Interview by David Neff

LAST FALL, InterVarsity Press launched its new Reformation Commentary on Scripture (RCS) as a follow-up to the landmark Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. They selected historical theologian and Beeson Divinity School dean Timothy George to serve as general editor. *Christianity Today* editor in chief David Neff interviewed George, who also serves as a columnist and theological adviser to CT, about the Reformers' continuing relevance.

In your introductory volume to the RCS, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers*, you talk about the superiority of pre-critical exegesis. What really makes that better than how we interpret the Bible today?

Much good can be gleaned from a critical study of the Bible, but sometimes it comes with blinders. When we study the ancients, the Medievals, and the Reformers, it lifts off the blinders and puts us in touch with a wider community of discourse.

When we today think about reading the Bible contextually, we want to hear from different communities: from women, from different ethnic groups, from global voices. That gives us a wide range. Pre-critical exegesis brings in the wider community that we need chronologically in order to get a balanced understanding of Scripture.

Unlike post-critical exegesis, pre-critical exegesis is done in the context of and for the sake of the community of faith. It's churchly exegesis that puts us in touch with the life of prayer, the great doctrines of the faith, the catechetical tradition of the church, and the liturgy of the church, and it helps us to see Scripture as part of that whole.

There are obviously still people trying to do that, but the discourse that informs biblical studies at most modern academic conferences cares very little about this.

century, the two sides shared in common the written Word of God. They had different interpretive patterns. We shouldn't minimize that. But in that pre-critical world, what they shared, often as unspoken assumptions, was far greater than the issues that divided them. So in the Reformation Commentary on Scripture, we include Catholic authors from before the Council of Trent.

We have too much material for the RCS. So we had to draw the line. We're not getting into the exegetical controversies during and after the Council of Trent. But we do include the early Catholic reformers, many of whom were commentators on Scripture. People like Cajetan, for example, whom Luther opposed at Augsburg. After that encounter, the great Thomist theologian gave the rest of his life to writing biblical commentaries. Many of his commentaries even show a similar perspective on some of the doctrinal matters to what was promoted in Wittenberg, Strasburg, and Zurich. The lines aren't neat and tidy when you read the Reformation through the lens of Scripture commentaries. That's one of the benefits of this study for ecumenism.

In your book *The Theology of the Reformers*, you gave an almost equal treatment to the Anabaptist and spiritual reformers as you did to Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli. Does the new RCS offer a similar breadth?

That's our intention. We wish we had far more material to work from. The radical reformers were so busy being hunted down and killed that they didn't have much time to write commentaries. A few, however, like Hans Denck, did write commentaries. But we're going to other Anabaptist sources as well—court depositions, for example. You might think that's a strange place to find biblical exegesis, but in

Historical theologian **Timothy George** says Luther and Calvin show us how to read the Bible for the sake of the church.

The magisterial Reformers both taught the faith and preached it.

Exactly. There was a symbiotic relationship between what they preached and what they wrote in their commentaries. The Reformation was a preaching movement. They did what they did to advance the proclamation of the Word of God. Their commentaries on Scripture were not simply to be read for personal edification or even for the sake of knowledge. It was so the gospel of Christ would be proclaimed to all of God's people.

Some say the Reformation as a historical movement is not as relevant to us as it once was. You yourself have been deeply involved in Evangelicals and Catholics Together. Evangelical historian Mark Noll wrote *Is the Reformation Over?* Just what is over, and what is the unfinished business?

In endorsing Noll's book, I said that the Reformation is over only to the extent that it has succeeded. And it has succeeded in bringing change to both sides of that 16th-century divide. Back in the 16th

fact, many of the Anabaptists answered their inquisitors by means of scriptural exegesis.

You will see the Anabaptist influence especially in areas like the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount was really important to the Anabaptists. Our commentary on Matthew will have a lot more of their material than some of the other volumes.

Many postmodern evangelicals seem hostile to the Reformation. What do you think this commentary can do for them?

In *Reading Scripture with the Reformers*, I talk about the Reformers as "proto-postmoderns." There's a great deal about postmodernism that we orthodox, Bible-believing, gospel-honoring Christians have to question, such as relativism. But when we've given that its full due, we have to acknowledge that there's also a lot that we have to learn from the postmodern world—for example, the relational and correlative nature of knowledge. It's wrong to think of the Reformers as early Enlightenment figures. Calvin was not Descartes. They were very aware of the communitarian context in which knowledge,

exegesis, and comment are made. That's a very postmodern point made specifically by the Reformers.

Then there's the hermeneutics of the Cross—interpretation not just from a position of privilege and power but from the position of having no privilege or power. Luther's theology of the Cross anticipates certain postmodern themes. I would encourage our postmodern evangelicals to look at the Reformers and see if indeed they don't resonate with some of their own deepest concerns.

Has the recent emphasis of ancient-future evangelicals on the church fathers inadvertently undermined the importance of the 16th-century heritage?

There's a lot of continuity from the apostolic witness of the early church to the Medieval period and the Reformation. We can't leapfrog over the Reformation back to the ancient church, because if you ignore the 16th century, you'll lack a sense of the development of doctrine. The Reformation is a development of early patristic theology—Trinitarian, Christological dogma as it is applied to the question of the church and salvation. That's how the Reformers saw what they were doing. So I would beseech you and other advocates of the ancient-future way of thinking about the church to extend your definition of ancient to include the 16th century.

How much did the magisterial Reformers rely on the ancient fathers?

They were intentional about doing theology in continuity and conversation with the great heritage of Christian wisdom represented by the early church. Alongside their work in translating Scripture and editing critical editions of the Greek and Hebrew texts, they produced critical editions of the early church fathers and gave them a lot of time in their commentaries. The Reformers also published digests of patristic writings for students and pastors who could not afford the full critical editions in mammoth folio volumes.

The Reformers liked some fathers better than others, of course. Augustine above all, for the magisterial Reformers. I read somewhere that Calvin quoted Augustine more than 2,000 times in *The Institutes*. But he also quoted Chrysostom, Athanasius, and Jerome, the great linguist—even, you might be surprised, Origen. They were patristic scholars.

The Reformers had good intentions when they gave the Bible to the common people. But did it backfire?

Of course, it backfired. When you let the Bible loose, and you let common people—plowboys and milkmaids at their pail—begin to read and study Scripture, all hell does break loose. This was certainly true in the context of the English revolution of the 1640s.

There is a risk involved. 2 Timothy 2:9 says, “The word of God is not bound” (ESV). The unfettered character of Scripture makes it a loose canon. We can't control it. The Protestant Reformation illustrates this fact. We may no longer have an infallible Magisterium to tell us how to interpret Scripture, but in reality, neither do Catholics. Just look at the diversity of interpretation among Catholic scholars.

We have to be open for the Spirit to speak to the churches through the Word of God as he wills.

Luther has been both credited and blamed for inventing the individual conscience that led to extreme individualism, secularization, the breakdown of community, and some of the worst excesses of capitalism. How fair is this?

Luther has been both praised and damned for being the champion of individualism. The modern individual comes on stage. The shackles fall. Hegel saw Luther as the all-illuminating sun that rises at the end of the dark Middle Ages. On the other hand, you have a more traditional Catholic, negative view of Luther. You are now an individual. This is horrible. You no longer have the monolithic Magisterium. I think both views are wrong.

What Luther said at the Diet of Worms was, “My conscience is captive to the Word of God.” It wasn't a conscience that was unfettered from the Word of God, free and individual and sole and autonomous. Modern rugged individualism is a post-Enlightenment phenomenon, and in some ways a post-American Revolution phenomenon. The Reformers did not champion conscience over against the church or the written Word of God. Conscience was, in fact, activated in that context. They were reformers of the church, scraping the barnacles off the boat and letting it sail again.

Before the Reformation, a lot of forces were at work, breaking down that earlier unified culture. If you want to talk about schism, about paradigms being shattered, go back to 1054 and the great divide between the Eastern and Western churches. Then look at what happened in the later Middle Ages, the rise of the Mendicant orders where you no longer have stability as the highest ideal of the Christian life. That was the Benedictine way. Instead you have mobility into the world, into the marketplace, into the universities. You have the development of the *via moderna* in late Medieval theology. You had the Hussites and Lollards, radical developments going on even before Luther drew his first breath. It's a big mistake to think that Luther and the Reformers shattered a unified world.

It is, however, fair to ask how we got where we are. To answer that question, you have to go a long way before the Reformation, and you have to see the decisive break 200 years after the Reformation, when reason became autonomous.

There's been a tremendous revival of interest in John Calvin among some younger pastors and leaders. This has provoked some key scholars to take periodic swipes at Calvinists. Will this commentary serve to reduce that polarization?

We're working against isolating Calvin, Luther, and these great figures from the wider context in which they lived and wrote, which involves other voices—the Anglicans, the Anabaptists, the Zwinglians—and also the much wider context of the Christian family through the centuries. They are part of a conversation that extends back to the Scriptures, to the apostolic witness, to the early church. Putting it in that framework has a moderating effect. I hope that this commentary series will be a great encouragement to those who love Reformation theology, but that they will see this in a broader biblical and patristic framework. ☩

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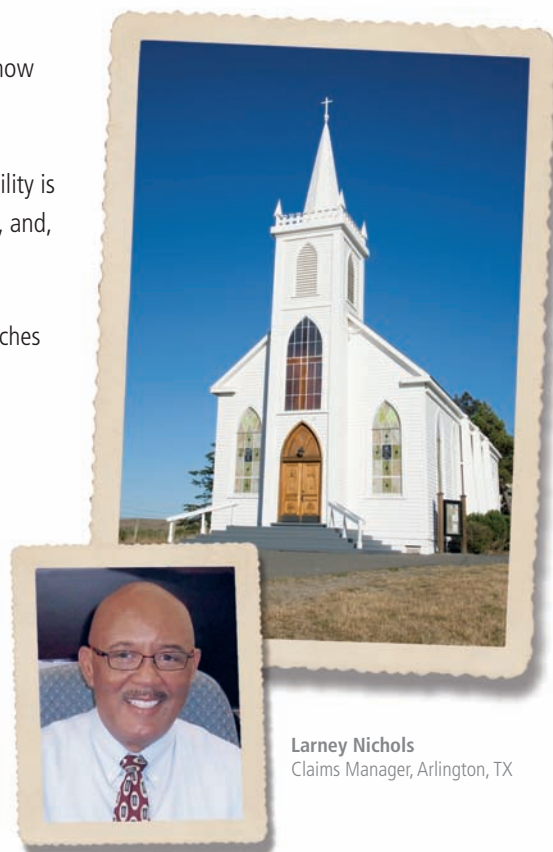
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The Fight for Egypt's Future

Coptic leaders, at the front lines of compassion, win new respect for the Christian community.

By Jeremy Weber in Cairo

TO SEE HOW EGYPT'S revolution has changed the lives of its 8 million Copts (Egyptian Christians), walk one block from its epicenter: Tahrir Square. Pass between the effigies hanging from street lamps, past the ramshackle tents of demonstrators, and turn right at the graffiti-covered concrete blocks barricading the newly elected parliament and loathed police headquarters.

Here sits the largest evangelical Arabic-speaking church in the world—6,000-member Kasr El Dobara (KDEC). The sturdy white sanctuary, lined with tall stained-glass windows depicting New Testament stories of Jesus, is half full on the Sunday evening before the first anniversary of military dictator Hosni Mubarak's February 11 downfall.

Attendance is low. Four days earlier, more than 70 soccer fans were massacred in the coastal city of Port Said. A short distance away, angry demonstrators clash with police.

Flanked by two Egyptian flags, head pastor Sameh Maurice preaches from 2 Peter. Just beyond the sanctuary's heavy oak front doors, volunteer doctors treat a wounded demonstrator on a metal cot. Church members used to share coffee and conversation in the open air of the tiled courtyard. Now KDEC runs a 24/7 field hospital for the wounded.

The service ends with the Lord's Prayer and instructions for members to exit through the church's back entrance—tear gas is in the air in front. A short time later, a wailing ambulance arrives, delivering six young men. One clutches his wrist; another reveals a back peppered with birdshot. Another will probably lose his eye.

VIOLENCE STRIKES HOME

The following night, the violence touches the church family. A KDEC teenager is shot near Tahrir. News spreads that someone kidnapped the daughter of a church member. Another member is found dead, murdered on his way home from the airport.

"Lord, let this be the pain of childbirth," prays Maurice. "Let the suffering bring life."

The graffiti covering downtown Cairo chronicles the elated optimism of the Egyptian revolution's early days. Spray-painted pairings of crosses and crescents abound. But today's headlines belie that peace and prosperity are near at hand.

A report by the Maspero Youth Union, a leading religious advocacy group, documents six violent attacks against Copts during the first year of the revolution, compared with fifteen during Mubarak's entire 30-year reign.

CORBIS



The front page of Egypt's only Coptic newspaper, *Watani*, regularly reports incidents of "collective punishment" in which Christian families in rural villages are ordered to leave town in order to preserve the peace after an individual Christian's transgression.

Are Christians fleeing Egypt? Some, yes. Nearly every church can name a family that has emigrated. Many more families desire to follow suit but cannot.

But the closer one looks, an irony emerges. Coptic leaders report that a significant number of Christians, especially in rural or poor communities, do fear the future. But many of the most ardently Christian—former Muslims who now follow Christ and have the most to lose under an Islamist government—are the most eager to stay. They hold to their love of country—and to their belief in God's promise in Isaiah 19: "Blessed be

Egypt my people."

One case study is a Muslim-background believer turned human-rights activist who fancies himself the Christian version of Che Guevara. Bleary-eyed from demonstrating in Tahrir until 2 A.M. the night before, he is realistic about the increasing risks facing converts as Islamists gain political power.

"We [converts] could be the first people to be killed," said the activist, who asked for anonymity. "We are the rust in Islam that is corroding the walls. We are the threat."

But rather than seeking the first opportunity to leave Egypt, he and others like him choose to stay and exert influence behind the scenes. "Doctors stay in medicine; politicians stay in politics; advocates stay in advocacy," he said. "The salt put in warehouses will just go stale. The salt needs to be in the food."

A host of new Christian movements have

Counting the Cost: In Cairo, Copts mourn the deaths of more than 25 Christians in the so-called Maspero Massacre last October. To date, no one has been charged in the killings.

sprung up since the revolution. Their strategies to not merely survive but thrive in the new Egypt are not clever political schemes, but rather foundational Christian principles: engaging society, growing the church, loving neighbors and enemies (often the same), and seeking church unity.

CHURCH BEYOND THE WALLS

Egypt's Muslim majority has historically known very little about Copts beyond media stereotypes. But many Coptic leaders say the revolution brought the Egyptian church outside of its walls—both literal and metaphorical.

As a result, Copts enjoy a newfound



publicity and respect among Egyptian media and institutions. Days before Mubarak resigned, 50 evangelical leaders issued a strong public statement supporting the revolution. “We were the only church to do this,” said Andrea Zaki, vice president of the Protestant Churches of Egypt. “This gave us [evangelicals] strong credibility with Islamists.”

Copts have also earned newfound respect at street level. Mina Daniel, an Orthodox youth killed during last October’s Maspero Massacre, has become an iconic figure among revolutionary youth. More than 25 Copts died in front of the state tv station as they pro-

If Christians would like to continue in this country, they can’t remain in the churches.’

~Andrea Zaki, Protestant Churches of Egypt

tested church burnings. Many who died were killed after military vehicles ran over them. “Mina Daniel” is chanted during street protests, and red flags bear his likeness. “I never thought I could love a Christian guy,” says a Salafi activist in a YouTube video. “[But] I learned that not only Muslims are ready to die for their country.”

KDEC evangelist Fawzi Khalil represented Coptic Christians in Tahrir Square the Friday after the “Day of Rage” that ignited the revolution on January 25, 2011. For one hour before the regular noon call to prayer, he led

a massive crowd of hundreds of thousands of Muslims in Christian songs and prayer. It was an extremely rare televised public display of Christian faith in Egypt.

“Fear shot through my body because . . . the government or someone might shoot me if they don’t like what I say,” said Khalil. “But I thought, *For such a time as this . . . the church has a chance to speak.*”

He used the public pulpit to spread peace and blessing. “I pressed the boundary little by little,” said Khalil. “First I mentioned God; then I mentioned Jesus.” He felt many biblical statements would resonate with the crowd. He focused on the promise in Isaiah 61 of freedom for the captives.

Khalil said KDEC now engages with Muslims every day. The church hosted a memorial service for martyrs of the revolution, and invited thousands of Salafis to enter the church to cleanse themselves before prayers in Tahrir.

The church’s field hospital is not only the revolution’s largest; it also serves as a powerful symbol of unity, with evangelical and Orthodox doctors working alongside Salafi and Muslim Brotherhood colleagues. “This changes [Muslims’] minds as to what a church is,” said Khalil. “They see that Christian people are good. We smile. We are human.”

“The revolution has pushed local churches outside their walls to engage society in a wider way,” said Zaki. Today,

Tending the Injured: At Kasr El Dobara, volunteer professionals treat pro-democracy demonstrators in February. During the 2011 revolution, 846 Egyptians were killed and 6,000 were injured.

a Heliopolis church works with families of the revolution’s martyrs. A Nasr City church hosts joint breakfasts and garage sales with a nearby mosque. A church in Nag Hammadi formed a coalition of Muslims and Christians to run for parliament. He says there are hundreds more examples.

“If Christians would like to continue in this country,” said Zaki, “they can’t remain in the churches.”

ERASING FEAR

Copts compose about 10 percent of the 80 million Egyptians crammed into just 5 percent of the desert nation’s land—the narrow arable stretch along the Nile River and its delta. Thus, growing the church through evangelism is not just a biblical mandate but also a survival strategy.

Yet the greatest obstacle to sharing the gospel with Muslims is not government restrictions on religious freedom, said Tharwat Wahba, missiology professor at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo. Instead, it is the heritage of fear created over 14 centuries under Islamic rule.

“The greatest obstacle [is] the wall of fear,” he said. “We need to break this wall.”

More religious freedom is not the first item on Wahba’s wish list. “We have yet to stretch ourselves to the [existing] limit,”

he said. When prisons opened after the revolution, thousands released were Salafis or Muslim Brotherhood members jailed because of their faith. “How many Christians were jailed because of evangelizing their faith? None. We didn’t use the freedom we had because of fear,” he said. “The pressure inside the church is more than the pressure outside the church.”

Wahba sees three strategies to meet the evangelism need in Egypt:

- Empower and encourage the nearly 100 rural churches unable to afford pastors because younger generations keep moving to Cairo or Alexandria in search of better opportunities. “The church is not dying—it is moving.”

- Plant churches among these urban transplants. Wahba knows of 150 groups that need help finding leaders, organizing legally, purchasing land, and building churches.

- Plant churches intentionally in areas where Christians are not but should be, such as the Red Sea coastline. “If we don’t start a church today, we will never have one.”

Today mass media—whether televangelist Father Zakaria Botrus or influential Christian satellite broadcasting—and dreams in the night produce far more converts than personal evangelism. Few are willing to risk the consequences, said Khalil. Others have trouble loving their Muslim neighbors after years of mistreatment.

“If we go one by one, we will evangelize Egypt in 80 million days,” said the KDEC evangelist. “If we focus on mass media and dreams, we have to rely on divine intervention.”

Today’s converts meet weekly in cell groups. KDEC gathered more than 60 such groups last Christmas. “We are able to do this today with hundreds,” said Khalil. “The question is, what are we going to do when we have thousands? That day is not far away. Revival is coming regardless of what is going to happen with the revolution.”

LOVE FIRST

In the interim, Copts live with the daily reality of their minority status. In Upper Egypt, south of Cairo, this situation exposes Copts to sectarian clashes.

One solution to these tensions may lie in the approach of Father Yu’annis, an Orthodox priest in the Upper Egypt village of Magh-
 agha. He said his family tree has produced priests for 27 generations. He has 33 years

under his own belt, with a beard and belly to match. Training and experience have led him to one strategy for peace: love of neighbor.

Yu’annis says his village of 200 Christian families living among 1,200 Muslim families enjoys harmony. “The Muslims where I’m from love us because we have loved them first,” he said. He visits them for holidays. He donates bags of cement when a mosque needs building. He even helped a Salafi sheik campaign for parliament this spring.

Yu’annis says he has successfully built or expanded 32 churches over his career. The secret: Don’t start by pursuing government permission or sufficient funds. Both are moot if neighbors are not on board. “Love the Muslims first and then they will stand with you in building the church,” he said. “Nothing else will work.”

One longstanding approach by Copts to demonstrate Christian love of neighbor has been providing social services such as education. The evangelical Synod of the Nile’s General Secretariat of Schools celebrated its 100th anniversary last year. Today, it operates 22 kindergartens through high schools nationwide, educating more than 30,000 Christian and Muslim students.

Many graduates now hold positions of influence in Egyptian academia, business, media, and government. “The attitude of our [Muslim graduates] toward Christians is totally different from many other Muslims,” said general secretary Mohsen Mounir Rizkalla. “They see Christians are not enemies.”

Cave-In: Last November, 50,000 Copts worshiped in an amphitheater at St. Samaan the Tanner, which began in 1974 as a children’s Bible study.

The synod has partnered with Zaki’s Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services to create a colorful children’s curriculum that teaches concepts such as equality, citizenship, peace building, and conflict resolution. The hope is such training will balance any rising fundamentalism in homes.

“Children are the future,” said Rizkalla. “We can’t change the parents’ minds, but we can change the kids’ minds.”

UNITY FROM THE BOTTOM UP

All Copts trace their heritage to the apostle Mark, founder of the first-century church in Alexandria. But for two centuries, the Orthodox—who number 90 percent of Copts—have dismissed Coptic Protestants as sheep stealers. (Most initial converts came from Orthodox families.) In turn, Protestants have dismissed the Orthodox as self-preservationists. But today, more Copts thirst for unity.

This ecumenical movement is driven not by clergy but by laypeople. “The Lord is using the people of the congregation more than the leaders,” said an Orthodox evangelist who requested anonymity. He talks eagerly about how interdenominational prayer meetings that laypeople initiated climaxed last November, when an estimated 50,000 Orthodox, Protestant, and Catholic Copts gathered at Cairo’s famous cave church, St. Samaan the Tanner. They prayed until sunrise.

The service, broadcast on Christian and secular TV channels, is believed to be the largest public gathering of Christians in Egypt’s history.

“Many churches criticize us, but we see it as a divine mandate,” said the evangelist.



"We denominations had moved away from each other. . . . We [should be] different fingers, but one body with the same lifeblood."

Even tragedies have furthered the desire for unity. An evangelical Copt who survived the Maspero massacre describes how fellow protesters next to him were crushed by military vehicles. The experience traumatized

'Revival is coming regardless of what is going to happen with the revolution.'

~ Fawzi Khalil, church evangelist

him. But he sees a silver lining. "Maspero minimized the distance between denominations, because who was targeted was not denominations but us as Christians," he said. "[And] if the country keeps going in an Islamist direction, this will unite us more than ever before."

There is another, less visible example of emerging Coptic unity in Manshiyet Nasr, Cairo's largest slum. It is located past the famous City of the Dead, where the poor

live in mausoleums, and below the Citadel fortress towering upon the sandstone cliffs on the city's eastern edge.

This maze of ramshackle brick and concrete canyons is home to the *zabbaleen*: descendents of Christian subsistence farmers who emigrated from Upper Egypt in the 1940s. For generations they have made their living recycling Cairo's trash.

Many *zabbaleen* are anxious about their future, explains Syada Griess, president of the Association for the Protection of the Environment (APE), launched by wealthy Orthodox Copts in 1984 to help the *zabbaleen*.

The Coptic business community is working through APE to teach the garbage collectors their rights, register them to vote, and get them to the polls.

Griess, wearing a red wool jacket and colorful scarf the day before Valentine's Day, estimates 80 percent of the 60,000 *zabbaleen* participated in the parliamentary elections. "I tell them don't be afraid," she said. "The

worst thing you can do is to stay silent."

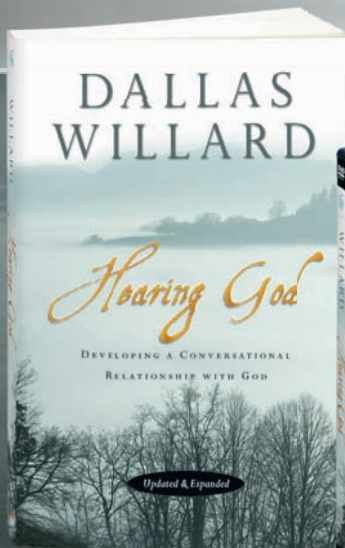
Copts helping empower other Copts is the foundation of the new models being tested as Christians seek to shape Egypt's future. Many models are youth-driven—a significant shift from the days when Copts relied on their church leaders, such as recently deceased Pope Shenouda, to mediate their needs and concerns with Mubarak's regime.

DIFFERENT APPROACHES

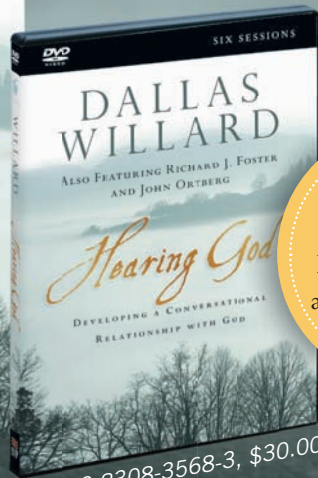
One charismatic leader of youth-oriented change is Father Philopater. Soft-spoken with a long, narrow beard and a slim frame under his black vestment, the busy priest gives an interview in his gray Hyundai sedan as he drives through rush-hour traffic from the backdrop of Giza's pyramids to the wealthy Nile island neighborhood of Zamalek.

Philopater was confirmed as an Orthodox priest 13 years ago. But he has temporarily put aside his duties at a 10,000-member congregation in Giza in order to advise the Maspero Youth Union. "My presence is only to correct for the past," he said. "We had taught [youth] to be quiet. Now we need to teach them to

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demand their rights.”

The union is one of the largest opposition movements advocating for the rights of Copts. Today it counts 100,000 members, mostly Christians ages 20 to 35, but also Muslim and secular youth.

Researchers estimate that 50 percent of Egyptians are under 25—a staggering 90 percent of whom are unemployed. Philopater advises these youth because he believes their voice is more important than the church hierarchy right now.

“The youth have taught us the lessons of age. Before we would accept [discrimination], but the youth have chosen to reject the suffering situation that we have,” he said. “I stand with them, because maybe they will find the solution to our problems.”

Another new model is Salafyo Costa, a group of primarily Salafis and Orthodox Copts attempting to build bridges from opposite ends of the religious spectrum. More than 110,000 Egyptians have joined their Facebook group and exchanged 70,000 posts and counting.

One Monday evening, the leaders met in a Zamalek cafe named No Big Deal—an apropos title given their goals. Mohammad Tolba, 33, is an observant Salafi. Bassem Victor, 35, is an observant Orthodox. They met in Tahrir Square and became friends because they have a common enemy: the military.

They share the view, common among youth, that Mubarak relied on religious conflict to maintain control. So they have been intentional to build bridges. Media images of Christians guarding Muslims during prayers in Tahrir Square, and Muslims then guarding praying Christians in turn, reflect this.

Interfaith efforts are often accused of watering down both sides in order to reach a lowest common denominator. Salafyo Costa is trying a different approach.

“We are very clear that we are not one,” said Tolba. “According to my beliefs, [Victor] is going to hell. And according to his beliefs, I am not going to heaven. We are different, and we have to learn to live together.”

Tolba and Victor would love for the other to share their faith, but feel that evangelism can be left to other venues. They focus on dispelling stereotypes through joint community development projects.

Salafyo Costa’s first event was a soccer match between Salafis and Orthodox, which mercifully ended in a 6–6 tie. The group has

distributed blankets to the poor and made comedic movies. Victor has spoken on the most prominent Salafi TV channel and addressed 1,200 Salafis at a religious conference. “There should be more Christians doing this,” he said. “We are trying to make a very small model of Egypt.”

The coming year will be critical for Copts. “The future of Egypt is not sitting in our chairs and feeling optimistic or pessimistic,”

said Zaki. “We need to work very hard.

“Fourteen hundred years ago, Christians were able to adapt [to Islamic rule] and continue in Egypt. We need to adapt to our new situation,” he said. “We want to move from a survival strategy to a victorious church that is free to remain, worship, and serve.”

Jeremy Weber is news editor at *Christianity Today*.

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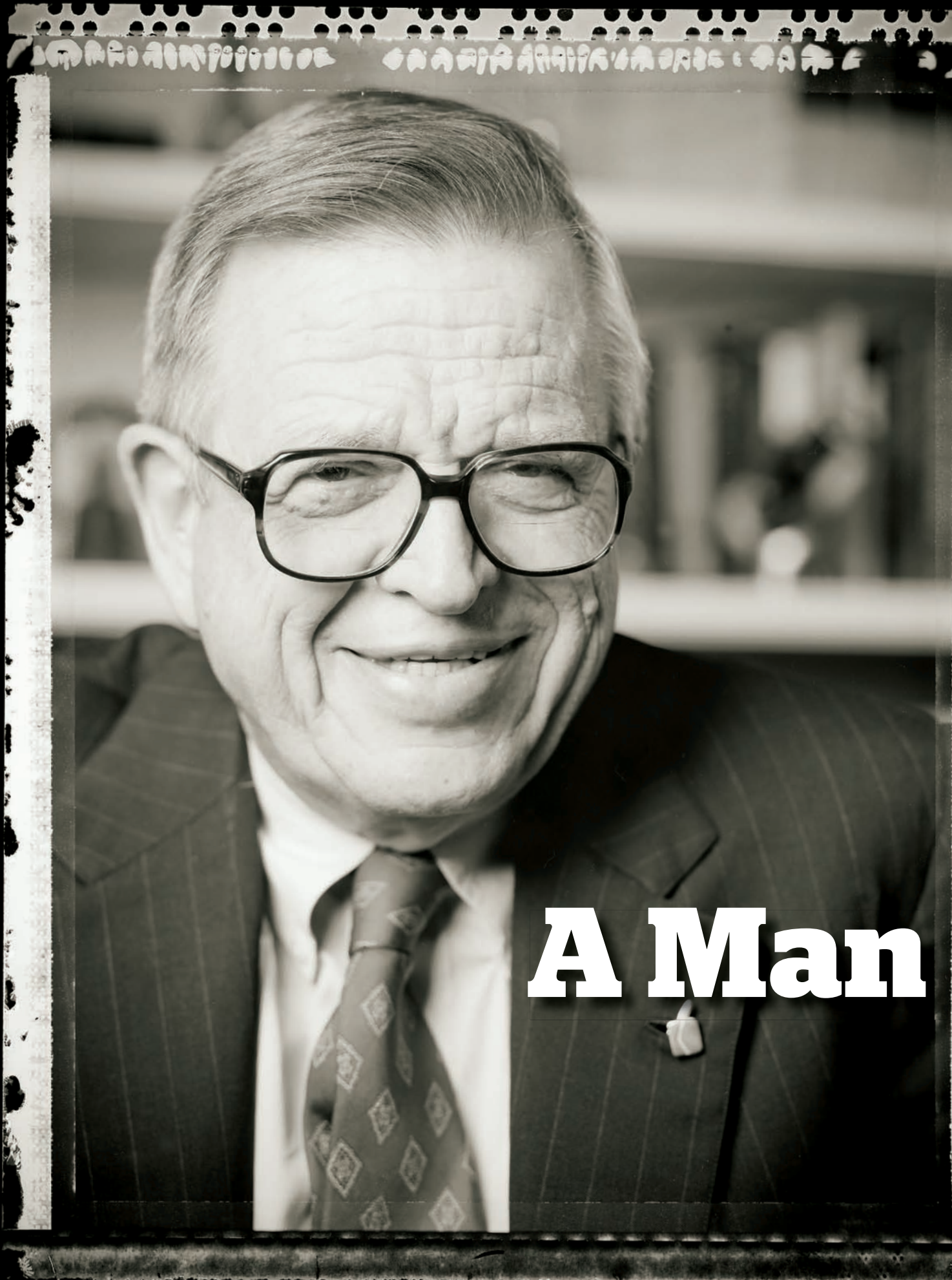


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A Man

How Charles Colson, Nixon's hatchet man, became a major figure in evangelicalism. By Jonathan Aitken

T

HE TRUMPETS WILL BE SOUNDING on the other side for Charles W. Colson—not only for what he achieved as a Christian leader but also for how much his character changed. His life story is one of the most outstanding and best-known modern

examples of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

Colson's early career in secular politics was successful, leading him to the White House as a senior presidential aide. But that ended in spectacular failure during Watergate. In those dark days, he was the most vilified figure in Washington after Richard Nixon. Some of the obloquy heaped upon Colson was undeserved: for example, it is a journalistic myth that he attempted to order the bombing of the Brookings Institute. But in the role he gleefully relished as "Nixon's hatchet man," he connived in many dirty tricks.

When the scandal broke, the press and the prosecutors had Colson in their sights. They knew he was a major contributor to the unsavory moral climate inside the White House. He first hit the headlines in 1972, when he wrote an internal memo with the line, "I would walk over my grandmother

conversation about faith during his political career ended with Colson telling his first Christian interlocutor, Fred Rhodes, "Oh, I think religion is fine, provided one has as little of it as possible."

A CONVERSION GREETED WITH CYNICISM

Colson's turning toward the search for spiritual meaning came soon after he had left the White House under a cloud and was attempting to rebuild his career as a lawyer. He called on Tom Phillips, the chief executive of Raytheon, who had recently come to the Lord at a Billy Graham rally. Colson was hoping to land some of Raytheon's legal business. Instead, Phillips talked with passion about his newfound faith and read aloud some passages from *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis.

Colson first thought his host's religious views were "pure Pollyanna." But the reading from the chapter on pride in Lewis's book ("The Great Sin") struck home. So did the prayer Phillips said at the end of the evening, asking Jesus Christ "to open Chuck's heart and show him the light and the way." Later that night, Colson broke down in tears at

Transformed

for Richard Nixon." That symbolized his end-justifies-the-means ruthlessness as a political operator. It was no surprise that he became a prime suspect for architecting Watergate.

As he was later to admit, Colson had no moral compass for the first 41 years of his life. In that period he occasionally described himself as "a nominal Episcopalian." This was a considerable stretch of the word *nominal*. He was so unchurched that he had no idea who the Good Samaritan or the Prodigal Son was. The only recorded example of a

the wheel of his car and offered a prayer of his own. As he climbed into bed, he told his wife, Patty, that he thought he'd had a conversion experience—but he did not know what the term meant.

At the instigation of Phillips, Colson was mentored by Doug Coe, an unorthodox but effective Washington pastor. Coe ran the National Prayer Breakfast and led the Fellowship, a ministry to influential movers and shakers. Few of them wanted anything to do with Colson. Nevertheless,

Coe twisted some arms and formed a prayer group to support the Watergate sinner. These prayerful brothers became Colson's lifeline of spiritual support (they included liberal Democratic senator Harold Hughes, the nine-term Republican congressman Al Quie from Minnesota, and a former Democratic congressman from Texas, Graham Purcell). Under Coe's leadership, their theology was fuzzy but their love was great. Although the word *Christian* was not allowed to be mentioned, the brothers lived out Jesus' commandment "Love thy neighbor" with exemplary commitment. Colson was a mixed-up soul in torment at the time, but his new brothers sustained him as he began his journey from self-centeredness and self-justification to Christ-centeredness and justification by faith.

Once it leaked out that Colson had become a man of prayer, cynicism erupted everywhere. The media's mockery was vicious and damaged whatever chances he might have had of evading the clutches of the prosecutors. So he was indicted—but on what charge? The evidence against him was slim. He apparently knew nothing about the Watergate break-in. Nor had he broken any easily identifiable criminal law, whatever might be said about his political amorality. The old Colson would have played every trick in the book to beat the rap. But a different Colson was emerging. In addition to his regular meetings with his prayer group, he was applying his first-class mind to reading Scripture, to studying Christian authors, and to taking his first stumbling steps in theology. His was learning and changing—although this process was neither quick nor easy.

Painful though it was, Colson's repentance was authentic. The most dramatic sign of this was that he became so convicted of sin that, against the advice of his own lawyer, he decided to plead guilty. To do this he had to find a unique section of the criminal code (18 USC Section 1503), under which he admitted "disseminating information whose probable consequences would be to influence, obstruct, and impede the conduct and outcome of the criminal prosecution of Daniel Ellsberg." Since Ellsberg, the leaker of the Pentagon papers, was never prosecuted, this plea was (to put it mildly) a legal oddity. But in the fevered atmosphere of Watergate, a judge accepted it and sentenced Colson to a one- to three-year prison term.

During the time he spent in jail, Colson had to learn many lessons in humility and penitence. Blows rained in on him. He failed to gain the presidential pardon that he had been expecting after the clemency granted to Nixon. He was disbarred from practicing law. His father died. His son was arrested for narcotics possession. But Colson gradually began surrendering to God's will. He immersed himself in Bible reading, started a prayer group with fellow prisoners, and completed the *Design for Discipleship* course published by the Navigators.

Yet his spiritual steps forward seemed to be accompanied by practical reverses. What he found particularly hard to bear was having his parole application denied after other Watergate prisoners, notably John Dean and Jeb Magruder, were freed. But Colson prayed on and was unexpectedly given parole in July 1975 after serving seven months of his sentence.

BORN-AGAIN CELEBRITY

He did not settle easily into the world of freedom. There were continuing struggles between the old and the new man in him. But God's plan gradually became clear. Colson came up with the idea of starting a discipleship program for prisoners furloughed out to a Christian retreat house. The head of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, Norman Carlson, listened to Colson's presentation of his scheme and gave it the go-ahead on an experimental basis. This was the genesis of what was to develop into the worldwide ministry of Prison Fellowship (PF).

While he was working out his vocation for discipling prisoners, Colson wrote a book that became a worldwide bestseller. This was *Born Again*. The phrase was little known outside evangelical circles in 1976. But Colson's title and his emotionally searing narrative about his journey and his conversion changed that. It also helped when an emerging candidate for the presidency, Jimmy Carter, described himself as a Christian who had been "born again." The whole world started to ask what these two words meant. Colson, via Nicodemus and John 3:1–8, provided an answer.

Born Again sold three million copies worldwide and catapulted Colson into the stratosphere of Christian celebrity. But by now he was sufficiently steeped in his faith to know that the label was a dangerous oxymoron,

contradicting the humility that should lie at the heart of godly witness. Colson was also blessed by spiritually wise friends who kept his feet on the ground. One of them, his young research aide Michael Cromartie, guided him toward eminent theologians who satisfied both his intellectual and spiritual hunger for the knowledge that would nourish the roots of his faith.

Such theologians initially included Nicholas Wolterstorff, R. C. Sproul, Carl Henry, Francis Schaeffer, and Richard Lovelace. Their importance in Colson's life was that they broadened his spiritual horizons. Narrow evangelicalism, he discovered, was not enough. He did his share of one-on-one ministry in the prisons, but he knew he must also participate in the public arena of action and debate. Inspired by the example of William Wilberforce, Colson came to believe that he must strive to understand and implement a comprehensive Christian worldview regarding life and society.

The quest for a Christian worldview shaped the direction of the fast-growing ministry of PF. With his formidable energy, Colson led it to extraordinary achievements. With no small assistance from trusted associates like Gordon Loux, Tom Pratt, Ron Nikkel, Mark Earley, and Michael Timmis, the ministry expanded globally into Prison Fellowship International, flourishing today in over 120 countries.

Within the United States, PF launched programs like Justice Fellowship (which pioneered the Restorative Justice movement); Angel Tree (which organizes 300,000 Christmas gifts a year to the children of prisoners); and the InnerChange Freedom Initiative (which has spawned at least 15 Christian-run prisons or prison units around the world; studies have indicated such facilities see significantly lower reoffending rates than secular penal institutions).

**Narrow
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Carl Henry, Francis
Schaeffer, and
Richard Lovelace
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spiritual horizons.**



These Colson initiatives completely changed the face of prison ministry. It used to be an unfashionable, underrated, and largely localized Christian activity with no national or international leadership. It is still too far down the pecking order of most churches' priorities. But Colson gave it a profile and a passion worthy of the exhortation in Hebrews 13:3: "Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison."

AN EVANGELICAL ELDER STATESMAN

Colson's own profile stretched into many areas above and beyond the prison walls. He continued to be a notable author, publishing over 20 books since *Born Again*. His most successful titles include *Loving God*, *How Now Shall We Live?*, and *Kingdoms in Conflict*. He has been a prolific broadcaster on his own weekly radio program *BreakPoint*. He was a columnist for *Christianity Today* from 1985 until his death. He has received numerous awards recognizing his achievements as a Christian leader and apologist, of which the most lucrative was the 1993 Templeton Prize for Religion. He donated the \$1 million award to charity.

Colson's legacy thus extends far beyond the community of prisoners, although prison ministry has been his primary calling. In his contribution to changing the church, he crossed many denominational boundaries. He started a bold initiative called Evangelicals and Catholics Together, which caused controversy but also achieved

theological understanding between the two wings of the faith. In recent years he had dedicated much of his time to the Centurion educational program. It raises up 100 church leaders each year through an intensive teaching course which he led.

Although Colson's achievements were remarkable, his example is more important. Back in Watergate times, his secular opponents loathed his spiritual journey and longed for him to stumble and fall. Almost four decades later, he confounded his critics and often won their admiration. This is because he walked his talk.

Colson's personal life was exemplary from the time he entered into a relationship with his Lord. He made considerable sacrifices in financial matters. He battled, successfully, against the petty vices of smoking and drinking and against various forms of the pride described in Lewis's "Great Sin" that tempted him toward the limelight of being too dominant and controlling in his ministry. But these struggles made his journey all the more authentic and effective.

BACK TO THE WHITE HOUSE

In the early years of the 21st century, Colson's journey took him back to the White House. He became something of a confidant of George W. Bush on issues relating to the rehabilitation and reemployment of prisoners. Their conversations resulted in some important executive and legislative initiatives in this field. But Colson's influence went further. On October 26, 2003, the lead story on the front page of *The New York Times* carried the headline "Evangelicals Sway White House on Human Rights

Issues Abroad." The first name mentioned in the article was Charles W. Colson. It was reported that he and others had persuaded the White House to take political initiatives toward ending the war in Sudan, halting sex trafficking, and preventing the global spread of HIV/AIDS.

Such achievements represented an ironic full circle in Colson's life story. As a young aide to the 37th President, Colson in the 1970s steered the White House toward activities that were the antithesis of Christian morality. By the early 2000s, the older Colson was having a considerable influence in a wholly Christian direction on several of the decisions and policies of the 43rd President.

These and other examples of Colson's legacy in politics, culture, the church, and Christian ministry have only been possible because amid the earthquake of Watergate, he heard the still small voice of God's call. He obeyed it and stayed faithful to it. As a result he has become a shining example of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit and the redemptive blessings of God's grace. As many of his fellow Christians have said about him, God changed Charles Colson and used him for good. ✚

Jonathan Aitken is the author of *Charles W. Colson: A Life Redeemed*. A reporter, writer, broadcaster, and campaigner for prison reform, Aitken spent 23 years as a member of British Parliament before pleading guilty to charges of perjury and serving a seven-month prison sentence. He is now a director of Prison Fellowship International and president of Christian Solidarity Worldwide.

Attention *Christianity Today* Readers:

We Want To Hear From You!

Dear Readers,

In an effort to provide you with the best possible magazine, we invite you to take a survey to let us know what you think of this issue and how we can make *Christianity Today* even better.

The survey is quick and easy to complete, but there are also opportunities to elaborate if you want. Your answers will be anonymous and used only in combination with other responses to form a complete picture of our readers.

To thank you for taking the survey, **you will receive a \$20 coupon for Bible study resources** from ChristianBibleStudies.com. The coupon code and instructions are included at the end of the survey

Two Easy Steps:

- 1) Read this June issue as you normally would
- 2) Go to **CTMagSurvey.com** and take the survey by June 18

Thank you. We're grateful for your valuable input.

A stylized, handwritten signature of David Neff in black ink.

David Neff
Editor in Chief, *Christianity Today*

CTMagSurvey.com



VIEWPOINTS

OPINIONS AND
PERSPECTIVES ON
ISSUES FACING
THE CHURCH



If not for parents, teachers, and pastors who believe in supporting their local public school, so many students would be utterly hopeless.

*Pia Hugo
E-mail*

Education Lifestyles

I've been a public high-school teacher in L.A. for 15 years ["School Choice of a Different Kind," April]. My three kids went to public school and are highly educated, loving God with all their hearts, souls, and minds. My administrators remain quite hostile to Christian activities on campus, but the other Christian teachers and I have found ways to work around them. If not for parents, teachers, and pastors who believe in supporting their local public school—who are like the Christians in this report—so many more students in my area would be utterly hopeless.

PIA HUGO
E-mail

The willingness of the couples in April's cover story to benefit a community by living and participating in it is inspiring. But before we conclude that their actions are models for a universal solution, several things should be considered. Principally, the choice that the couples made to send their children to a local school.

Children are to be nurtured, not sent into potentially harmful situations as deputy missionaries. Chimborazo School was being reformed by a dedicated

principal, and that school was open to cooperation with churches. But there are schools that are unreformed, or hostile to Christian influence, or anti-Christian in their agendas. In such cases a different course of action would surely be warranted.

TED HEWLETT
E-mail

Why We Serve

In "'Crucified under Pontius Pilate'" [April], it seems that only a partial solution is given to the theological and emotional problem that haunts me. The author used the word *abstract* several times. To me there is nothing abstract about the biblical line drawn repeatedly between the saved and the lost. "One way" and "no other name" are the words that motivated me to spend 43 years in Asia seeking to bring Muslims into the kingdom.

If I had read this article in my youth, I would have felt that the God who is good and just and loving did not need my help in evangelizing Muslims. But I was compelled to preach, and I'm so glad I did. In the final day, God will sort out the wrenching issues that confound

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

32%
'Crucified Under
Pontius Pilate'
Mark Galli

20%
When a
Daughter Dies
Ben Witherington

16%
Discipling
the Eyes
W. David O. Taylor

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



**Breaking Nigeria's
Fatal Deadlock**
Sunday Agang

and pain me. In the meantime, I am grateful that I understood my responsibility in co-partnering with God in my proclamation and in his grace.

PHIL PARSHALL
SIM
Sebring, Florida

Fully in Charge

I commend Ben Witherington for showing his heart and sharing his vulnerability with the death of his daughter, Christy ["When a Daughter Dies," April]. However, I must take issue with the portrait of a good and loving God who is as much at the mercy of the curse caused by sin and resultant heartaches as we are. I wholeheartedly agree that God is good and loving, but I insist that he is also absolutely sovereign. As someone has said, "God is either sovereign of all or he is not sovereign

at all." The latter leaves us at the mercy of confusion and chaos when we experience the ravages of sin and death. The former, however, gives us hope and help in the midst of our grief and heartache.

There is no biblical doctrine of partial sovereignty. I seldom understand what God is doing, nor do I always like it, but the problem is my myopic perspective and self-centeredness, not the plan and purpose of God.

BRUCE A. PICKELL
Alabaster, Alabama

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

E-MAIL: cteditor@christianitytoday.com **FAX:** 630.260.8428
ADDRESS CHANGES, SUBSCRIPTIONS: ctfulfill@christianitytoday.com

Worshipping Art

How can the article "Discipling the Eyes" [April] be reconciled with the first commandment? I grew up in a church that had a great deal of artwork in the form of pictures and statues. People often paid homage to those images by kneeling before them and kissing them. The artwork did not inspire holistic, Christ-like, and Spirit-filled Christians. In Europe, I saw cathedrals with great art on the outside and the inside, yet dead like a tomb. What Christianity needs is more of the Spirit and less of the art.

JAMIL QANDAH

Pastor,
Oak Lawn Arabic Church of the Nazarene
Chicago, Illinois

Give Peace a Chance

Thank you for publishing Sunday Agang's article "Breaking Nigeria's Fatal Deadlock" [April]. Most Christian reports coming out of areas with sectarian violence vilify the enemies (in this case, Muslims) and inform us Americans in a way that justifies the violent response by Christians. Sadly, Jesus' teaching to love our enemies has fallen on deaf ears worldwide. Though the events being reported out of Nigeria are absolute tragedies, it

was encouraging to read a Christian response that respected the *imago dei* of those on each side of the violence. Creative, active nonviolence will help break a vicious cycle of murder, and Agang's work in just peacemaking is a testament to that truth all of us need to see.

TYLER GLODJO

Jackson, Tennessee

Animals in Afterlife?

In an issue full of deeply thoughtful articles dealing with death, the process of truth discovery being destroyed by mistaken ideas of tolerance, and suffering in Africa, I flip the page and find two pages of nonsense in "Do Pets Go to Heaven?" [Village Green, April]. I love my Irish setter and enjoy her as the gift of God she is to me. But I also know that she's part of a creation that is perishing. To treat the question of eternal life for animals borders on offensive.

JERRY D. SCOTT

Washington, New Jersey

Corrections: In April's Passages, we misspelled the name of Bishop Robinson Cavalcanti. In "Discipling the Eyes," the city of Edmonton should have been located in Alberta.



ONLINE POLL

ADORNING THE CHURCH

Does your church have art in its sanctuary?

55%

Yes, and I appreciate it.

1%

Yes, but I don't care for it.

7%

Sometimes.

24%

No, but I wish we would.

13%

No, and I'm glad we don't.

Total votes: 231

(Online polls do not represent a scientific sample.)

compiled by Elissa Cooper

WORTH REPEATING

Things overheard at CT online.

"We have made marriage the be all and end all in relationships. It is not. It is one facet of the greater community."

Steve D., touting the importance of friendships—even those with the opposite sex—outside of marriage in order to build community.

Her.meneutics: "Cross-Gender Friendships: What's Appropriate for Married People?" by Sharon Hodde Miller

"Actions should decide who best fits your worldview and your vision of what kind of country and world you want to live in."

Heather, believing that a political leader's declaration of faith should not be the deciding factor when choosing whom to vote for in the upcoming presidential election.

CT Politics Blog: "Will Evangelicals Vote for a Mormon Candidate?" by Tobin Grant

"If they insist someone embraces the belief of their organization, why is it a violation of policy for Christian organizations to do the same?"

Kathi, on the seemingly contradictory stance that student organizations must allow those with opposing views to be considered for leadership positions. Faith-based groups at Vanderbilt have come under fire recently for their position.

CT Liveblog: "Student Coalition Opposes Vanderbilt's Nondiscrimination Policy," by Morgan Feddes

"Jesus did not come to normalize our sins and tell us how nice we look in Satan's chains."

Mike W., debating the purpose of having Scrooge portrayed as a homosexual in an upcoming adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*.

CT Entertainment Blog: "A Christmas Carol . . . for Gays?" by Mark Moring



ED KOEHLER

"We lift our hands, we lift our hearts, we shout loud praises to our King . . ."

United Against Nihilism

Chuck Colson's vision for Christian unity and full-orbed reform lives on.

In 1985, the year Charles Colson became a *Christianity Today* columnist, Gordon College professor Thomas Howard joined the Roman Catholic Church. *CT* devoted about seven pages to a special report on the conversion of this scion of an elite evangelical family. In 2012, it is hard to imagine the anguish that lay behind *CT*'s handwringing.

At *CT*, we are under no illusion that the doctrines of salvation and the church taught by the medieval Western church are good for the soul. We believe that the Protestant Reformers accomplished a great work for God in renewing those doctrines through close attention to the teaching of the apostles and the church fathers. However, you can credit Colson, who died on April 21, for a major part of evangelicals' reduced anxiety about relations with Roman Catholics.

Colson became a Christian—an evangelical Christian—as an adult. He did not acquire skepticism of all things Catholic with his mother's milk. Instead, when he learned his theology from key evangelical theologians, he paid particular attention to the words and deeds of the great Dutch theologian and politician Abraham Kuyper (died 1920). Kuyper carefully articulated the doctrinal and philosophical differences between Rome and his beloved Geneva. Yet he admired Romanism's vigor in countries where it became disestablished. Kuyper believed that in the fight against modernism, Protestant Christianity could be effective only if it partnered with Roman Catholics.

Colson, like Kuyper, was concerned about the effects of modernism and later postmodernism on contemporary culture. And like Kuyper, he believed that unless believers are equipped with the critical tools of worldview thinking, they are unlikely to make any headway in redeeming culture.

When Colson and Richard John Neuhaus formed Evangelicals and Catholics Together (*ECT*), their new Protestant-Catholic

initiative, the group focused its initial statement on the common mission of the church in the third millennium. That mission, their 1994 document said, involved contending together “against all that opposes Christ and his cause.” In “developed societies,” that included “widespread secularization” that had descended “into a moral, intellectual, and spiritual nihilism that denies not only the One who is the Truth but the very idea of truth itself.”

Within the framework of Kuyper's vision, this was an excellent summary of what Protestants and Catholics needed to address together. However, this and later *ECT*

statements inflamed residual separatism among evangelicals. Some of Colson's key friends shunned him, and Prison Fellowship lost \$1 million in donations over this controversial initiative. *Christianity Today* editor David Neff worked behind the scenes to set up conversations that would help heal broken relations. In 1999, Neff participated with theologians ranging from Erwin Lutzer and R. C. Sproul to J. I. Packer and Thomas Oden in drafting a biblical and distinctly Protestant formulation of the gospel that was a source of unity for those on both sides of the *ECT* imbroglio. For strategic reasons, Colson stayed away from the meeting that drafted “The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration,” but he signed the statement, which had its healing effect.

Catholics, evangelicals, and Eastern Orthodox have continued to work together to address social decay and the modern secularism that underlies it. Their efforts are ongoing, but the impact is smaller than we might hope. In the United States, teen pregnancy rates have fallen, and the willingness to

regulate abortion has grown. But the willingness to redefine marriage has also expanded, as have government threats to the liberty and independence of religious organizations.

Chuck Colson knew that we must aim our reform efforts at a long horizon. On this score, he took inspiration from the historical example of William Wilberforce, who for almost four decades pursued in the British

Parliament the abolition of the slave trade and then slavery itself. Colson's 1985 *CT* article celebrating Wilberforce's persistence was titled “Standing Tough Against All Odds.” Colson was under no illusion that we could mend American

society as the result of a single election or Supreme Court decision. He knew that he, like Wilberforce, was called to a long obedience in the same direction. That is why he titled one of his *CT* columns “The Sky Isn't Falling.” He perennially fought evangelical tendencies to play Chicken Little because they undermine efforts to reform society.

Like Wilberforce, Colson knew that he was called to *comprehensive* reform. Wilberforce fought not only the slave trade but also the poor working conditions of chimney sweeps and textile workers. He advocated education and prison reform and founded the world's first animal welfare organization. Likewise, Colson worked for justice reform and against prison rape. He advised the George W. Bush administration to fight against HIV/AIDS in Africa and to support human rights around the world. In all of these things, he built coalitions.

Unlike Wilberforce, Colson did not live to see his greatest aims achieved. But before he died, he saw his leadership exert tremendous force on American Christianity. ☩



Colson knew that we must aim our reform efforts at a long horizon.

*The Dilemma
of Resource
Stewardship*

Should churches abandon travel-intensive short-term missions in favor of local projects?

ABANDON PROJECTS

Brian M. Howell is associate professor of anthropology at Wheaton College and author of *Short-Term Mission: An Ethnography of Christian Travel Narrative and Experience* (IVP Academic, forthcoming).

Churches should not abandon travel, but we should abandon most travel-intensive “projects.”

It is good for American Christians to visit Christians in other places to witness what God is doing around the world. It is good for American Christians to visit missionaries, learning firsthand about their work and how to pray for them. The opportunity to learn from all our brothers and sisters living and working around the world is a gift many of us have received due to our relative wealth, access to technology, and leisure time. We should accept this blessing gratefully.

When it comes to projects, however, the good we do is often outweighed by the warped impressions left on both sides. For example, sending high-school students to do construction in front of poor, underemployed adults furthers the humiliation of the poor as they see wealthy North Americans casually doing jobs they would happily accept, while it reinforces the views of many American Christians that poor people cannot help themselves.

Our projects further promote views of poor people as lacking personal agency, as short-term mission teams often spend most of their time interacting with children conducting Vacation Bible School or teaching games. Teams often leave with the impression that the whole country is childlike, vulnerable, and in need of our care. When short-termers do interact with adults, it is often in unequal relationships—cooks, drivers, and other employees of the American missionaries—where true fellowship is difficult. Those ministries run by nationals who host short-term teams frequently adapt their ministry to meet the needs of visiting foreigners first and local residents second. These hosts are reluctant to ask too much of powerful guests or to confront their visitors’ views and risk losing material benefits.

Unequal social relationships and a skewed view of poor communities can affect service in the United States too. However, there is a reason why many churches have little problem getting 25 youths to sign up for a project in South Africa, while the trip to a nearby urban community goes unfilled. The dynamics of international

travel make it easier to imagine that we in the West have no responsibility for the problems “over there” beyond our occasional charity. We can feel good about our service without being confronted by our responsibility for the injustices we witness. In nearby urban centers, or a local apartment complex, we are more likely to be confronted with the reality that our lives are bound up with theirs, and we cannot so easily turn away from what is going on in front of us when it gets difficult or inconvenient.

We should not abandon international travel, nor should we be less generous with our resources. But if we would spend less time building walls, painting houses, or digging ditches, we could spend our time learning how the problems there are part of the problems here. These trips should serve to teach us how we are bound up together, in our economics, in our politics, and, most importantly, in Christ.

SET OBJECTIVES FIRST

David Livermore is president of the Cultural Intelligence Center and author of several books on cultural intelligence and global leadership, including *What Can I Do: Making a Global Difference Right Where You Are* (Zondervan, 2011).

If you’re primarily using a short-term trip to build awareness and engage people in mission, stay local. Research shows that you do not increase understanding about mission and culture more by going abroad than you do by serving nearby in a diverse neighborhood.



But if your travel is tied to a larger missions initiative with overseas partners, the trip might be worth thinking about.

One shortcoming in many discussions about short-term missions—sometimes mine included—is the tendency to talk about the trips as a uniform reality. With millions of North Americans traveling each year, it's unfair to make blanket statements about all of them.

But of all the trips I've observed and participated in over the years, the single most important thing that differentiates the "good" from the "bad" short-term missions is the leadership's objective.

If your church is planning a \$30,000 trip for 10 people to go to Kenya and paint a church building there, that reeks of poor stewardship. Stay home and help a single parent or local school with some painting. Send a \$1,000 check to Kenya, which will more than cover the painting by local labor.

But let's imagine that your \$30,000 trip to Kenya is designed to explore with Kenyan church leaders ways to jointly address an area of need. And imagine that what emerges from that discovery leads to you raising \$150,000 over the next two years to help address that need. Suddenly that travel-intensive trip seems worth it.

Of course, this isn't all about money. I know there are a lot of intangibles that can come from the "paint-the-building" trip. My point is that the leadership needs to define how the investment of the travel-intensive trip will play into the long-term vision, as well as benefit churches on both sides of the border. Let's get rid of our overspiritualized, "only God knows the results" rhetoric and be good stewards, thoughtfully examining the best use of our limited resources.

Even if you decide to pursue the travel-intensive trip, it's important that you are engaged in local projects as well. There's something wrong with blindly driving by the needs in our own neighborhoods on the way to a short-term missions trip meeting.

Despite the critiques I've raised throughout the years about short-term missions, I believe they can be very effective ways to get all of us more deeply involved in mission. At the same time, I have high respect for churches that have decided to abandon the travel-intensive, short-term missions trips in favor of local projects. You can still be engaged globally by supporting long-term missionaries, and by partnering with local churches in the regions you've been called to support.

Every individual and church needs to view the question of whether or not to participate in short-term missions with an "it depends" mindset. How has God called you to engage in mission, and what's the most effective, faithful way to do so? We can leave the results to God. But the decision in the first place is one we have to own and make carefully.



AMANDA DUFFY

BOTH HAVE PURPOSE

Robert J. Priest is professor of mission and anthropology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, blogs at *MissiologyMatters.com*, and is writing a book on short-term missions.

Mission trips and local projects are not competing alternatives. Each follows different temporal rhythms. Christians take advantage of brief slots of discretionary time—a few hours or a day—in the normal daily and weekly rhythms of work and school to volunteer for local projects.

By contrast, Christians utilize vacation blocks of time involving a week or two for dual-purpose mission trips: trips that both serve others and contribute to their own spiritual formation.

Like pilgrimages, retreats, and church camps, the mission trip functions as a sustained and communal time of spiritual formation away from the obligations, distractions, and routines of everyday life in home spaces. As early as Exodus 8:27, we find the ancient idea that a group of people should travel to get away from home for a time of intense spiritual formation, an idea that even Pharaoh was supposed to appreciate. Local projects do not sufficiently cut people off from everyday rhythms, distractions, and commitments of life to serve this function in quite the same way. Unlike campground meetings, retreats, and pilgrimages, the mission trip is "other-oriented," placing witness, service, human need, and relationship with "social others" at the center of spiritual formation.

Local projects and mission trips do not compete for the same blocks of discretionary time. Nor do they compete with each other for money already in church coffers. The travelers themselves cover much of the funding for adult mission trips. The issue is not whether a church should budget resources for a local project instead of a mission trip, but whether prosperous Christians will decide to expend their vacation time and travel money self-indulgently, perhaps at an all-inclusive resort, or to expend that time and money on behalf of others through a mission trip.

Even when mission-trip participants solicit support, they turn to friends, colleagues, relatives, and neighbors rather than church coffers. They activate or "cash in" on their social capital—their networks of mutual obligation and trust—on behalf of distant others who would otherwise not have access to the benefits of this social capital.

Because of residential segregation, American Christians are geographically distant from extremes of human poverty, violence, sex trafficking, famine, AIDS epidemics, and crises associated with earthquakes, hurricanes, and tsunamis. And yet American Christians control a disproportionate share of the world's resources.

In such a context, an exclusive focus on the local is neither helpful to the spiritual formation of Christians, nor an appropriate stewardship of what God has given. We already expend the vast majority of our time and money locally. The mission-trip phenomenon helps ensure that global concerns are also at the core of our spiritual formation. They help to establish global social ties among Christians on behalf of global Christian witness and service. And they help mobilize interest, concern, time, and resources on behalf of kingdom purposes in a wider world.



In on the Joke

Why we can't get the New Testament without the Old.



My kids finally saw *The Princess Bride*, a movie their dad and I have loved since our college days. There is something wonderful about watching your favorite people watch one of your favorite films. In this case, the added bonus was observing the light come into their eyes as they discovered the origin of several quirky things their parents routinely say. “Hey!” they shouted with a shock of recognition when Westley first said, “As you wish”—a line they’ve heard their father utter hundreds of times. Vizzini’s “Inconceivable!” produced a similar response. By the time we got to the ROUS (Rodents of Unusual Size), our kids were grinning with the particular delight of cracking a previously mystifying code. They were in on the joke, and they liked it.

Language is much more than grammar and syntax. It is layer upon layer of collective memory and shared meaning, so that simple phrases like, “Houston, we have a problem,” “*Et tu, Brute?*,” “Remember the Alamo,” or even “Yada, yada, yada” can carry worlds of meaning. You can’t master a dialect without also learning the culture in which it is embedded.

In my quest to learn the “Gospel Language,” I have often been oblivious to the shared experience assumed by the biblical writers. Jesus and his earliest followers were Jews; they held in their collective memory a particular story of a particular people, loaded with mutually understood points of reference. When I’ve read the New Testament only dimly aware of the symbolic world of the Old Testament, I’ve barely skimmed the surface of an ocean of meaning.

Certainly, I’ve grasped that Jesus’ choice of 12 disciples has something to do with Yahweh’s calling of the 12 tribes of Israel. But until recently, I remained oblivious to the way his baptism and desert temptation evoke the foundational story of the Israelite Exodus through Red Sea waters and into the

wilderness. I’ve been duly impressed with the Lord’s ability to command the stormy waters to be still (Matt. 8:26–27), but I’ve missed the Israelite shock at this man from Nazareth doing something that, according to the Hebrew Scriptures, *only Yahweh can do*. And although I’ve understood some of the significance of Jesus’ transfiguration right before the eyes of Peter, James, and John, I’ve forgotten that the Israelites had been waiting since the Exile for the Shekinah—the visible glory of the Lord—to return.

Maybe the most significant reference I’ve missed has to do with Jesus’ final words on the cross. That awful cry—*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*—has haunted my struggle to understand exactly what transpired (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34). Was Jesus, for a devastating moment, utterly alone and without hope? How that cry is processed has all sorts of implications for theology—not least for the way we conceive of the Atonement and of the relationality of God’s triunity. More personally, it shapes the way I perceive my own experiences of abandonment.

I’ve known, in a vague way, that with his cry Jesus was quoting the beginning of Psalm 22, a passage so familiar to his friends that to utter the first line would have been tantamount to reciting the entire thing. Psalm 22 is an anguished prayer of David, spoken as a godly sufferer awaiting deliverance. It’s the most frequently quoted Psalm in the New Testament. And its parallels to the Crucifixion are chilling:



A band of evil men has encircled me,
they have pierced my hands and my feet.

I can count all my bones;
people stare and gloat over me.
They divide my garments among them
And cast lots for my clothing.

(vv. 16b–18, NIV 1984)

The psalm is so shot through with suffering, it’s hard to imagine any more appropriate reference Jesus could have made. But it’s essential to know that the only thing in Psalm 22 that runs as deeply and vividly as the speaker’s pain is his unshakable hope:

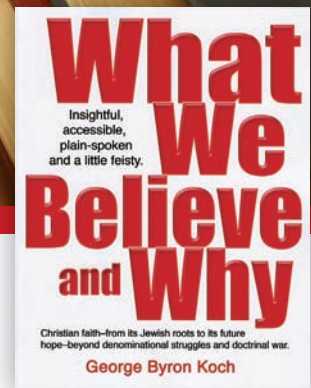
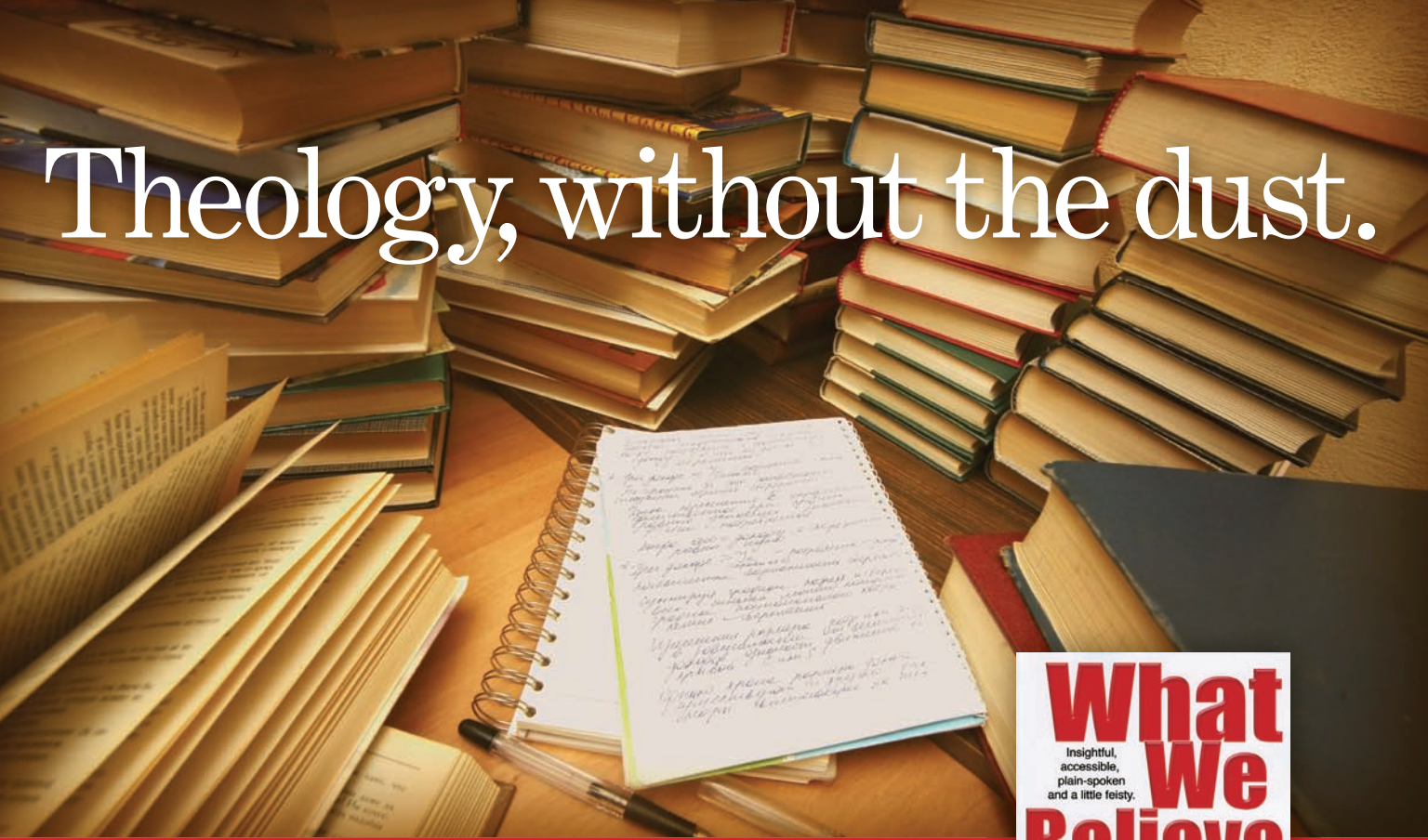
You who fear the Lord, praise him! . . .
For he has not despised or disdained
the suffering of the afflicted one;
he has not hidden his face from him
but has listened to his cry for help.
(vv. 23a, 24, NIV 1984)

Both Matthew and Mark note that some of the onlookers misunderstood Jesus’ cry, mishearing the Aramaic word for “my God”—*Eloi*—as *Elijah*. I wonder if, in including that detail, they aren’t cautioning us to pay attention to exactly what Jesus is saying.

The Cross is a mystery, and no human should expect to understand it fully. But if we want to be conversant in the language of the gospel, we need to be able to say at least this: At Calvary, Jesus felt the deepest level of anguish ever known, and yet he could still, in his Psalm 22 declaration, point to the presence, faithfulness, and anticipated deliverance of his Father—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the God of our salvation.

You can't master a dialect without also learning the culture in which it is embedded.

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—Dr. David R. Mains
Director, Mainstay Ministries





Churchless Jesus

A viral video is a symptom of our spiritual malaise, but not the cure.

Chuck Colson, who died on April 21, wrote *Christianity Today's* longest-running column. His colleague Timothy George will continue *Contra Mundum* in our September issue, the 27th anniversary of Colson's first column. Please see our editorial (p. 59) and biographer Jonathan Aitken's reflection (p. 52) on Colson's contribution to contemporary Christianity.

• • •

YOU MAY NOT be able to pick Jefferson Bethke out of a lineup, but your kids probably could. He is the creator and star of the YouTube video "Why I Hate Religion, But Love Jesus."

The video took the concept of "going viral" to an entirely new level: Just four days after it was uploaded in January, it had been viewed more than 10 million times, a number that has doubled since then.

It's easy to see why the video went viral. It's well done and clever, and Bethke's passion and sincerity are obvious. We understand why the video struck a chord. But it's a chord that's missing some important notes.

The video begins with the line, "What if I told you Jesus came to abolish religion?" Religion, Bethke tells us, is about appearances and respectability, not real transformation—a state of affairs he compares to spraying perfume on a casket. Jesus, we are told, is the "work of God," while religion is a "human invention."

There is something to be said for this critique, for religion without the gospel, ritual without conversion, is a spiritual dead end. In this sense, Jesus did not come to found a "religion." He came to establish the church.

The fastest-growing demographic in American religious life, the "nones," includes many young people who are drawn to a churchless Christianity. A better word for this group might be the "liminals," as the

recent book *American Grace* suggests. These folks, say authors Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, "seem to stand at the edge of some religious tradition, unsure whether to identify with that tradition or not."

This phenomenon is nothing new. In 1832, Ralph Waldo Emerson, the godfather of privatized religion in America, resigned from his church in Boston and moved to Concord, Massachusetts, to write essays on nature, reason, and self-reliance. Even



earlier, in the age of the Reformation, spiritualists such as Sebastian Franck taught that the true visible church had ceased to exist in the world. Thus they no longer baptized, or shared Communion, or preached the audible Word of God. Instead, they focused on the inner light. Every man's hat became his own church.

But the Protestant reformers took a different approach. They protested with vigor against corruption and abuse in the church, which they aimed to reform but not abandon. They advocated a strong ecclesiology in the service of the Word of God. Calvin went so far as to claim, with Cyprian in the early church, that "outside the church there is no salvation."

It is important also to note that the New Testament speaks of the church in two distinct ways: both universal and local. Hebrews 12:22 speaks of the church as "the

heavenly Jerusalem," the city of the living God, the joyful assembly of all the redeemed of all the ages. The church is an eschatological entity, the body of Christ extended through time and space.

But Hebrews also admonishes us to "not [give] up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but [encourage] one another" (10:25). The local church at Fourth and Main is where the gospel is preached, sinners are saved, prayers are offered, ministers ordained, the sacraments celebrated, and a cup of cold water given in Jesus' name.

Thus in the New Testament, the universal church and the local church are distinguishable but never divorced. The two are not two species of the same genus but, rather, two predicates of the same subject. As Gregory the Great put it, "The holy church has two lives: one in time and the other in eternity." In both instances, it's the same church.

Of course, few churches live up to Christ's vision for his bride. Why should we expect otherwise? After all, we don't. Yes, the local church is usually buffeted by struggles, beset by detractors, peopled by sinners, and in countless other ways, just plain annoying. It's also the only church we have.

It is difficult not to suspect that at root, many liminals want the benefits of tradition and community without having to subordinate their desires to a larger whole.

That's a very American impulse but not a Christian one. Just ask Jefferson Bethke. After his video went viral, the talented young Bethke received a lot of criticism—and counsel—from other believers. Reflecting on his work, Bethke clarified his message. "Saying you love Jesus but hate the Church, is like a fiancé saying he loves his future bride, but hates her kids," he said.

We couldn't have said it better. We only wish it had been made clear from the start.✚



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CT REVIEW

BOOKS, MOVIES,
MUSIC, AND
THE ARTS

Grace Amid Genocide

How Cambodia's Killing Fields became an extraordinary ex-Communist's mission field. By Tim Stafford

For much of its history, the Western church has been instructed by the lives of missionaries. Often risking their health, always forced by circumstances to innovate, missionaries set the pattern for adventurous faith on the frontier. Their biographies are not only inspiring; they, like the Book of Acts, also expand our vision beyond the predictable and comfortable precincts of home.

Today, Western missionaries may be less likely to tell such frontier tales, while a new set of role models—majority world

Christians—has emerged. This new generation is highly visible at international conferences, doing for the global church what missionaries have long done for the Western church. Cambodian evangelist Barnabas Mam, author of **Church Behind the Wire: A Story of Faith in the Killing Fields** (Moody) ★★★★★, makes a compelling example.

Raised as a Buddhist (as an adolescent he lived and worked in his uncle's Phnom Penh temple), Mam became a Communist in the turbulent early 1970s. His mentor sent

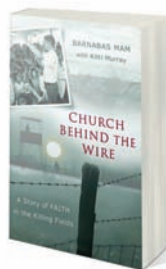
him to spy on an evangelistic meeting led by World Vision president Stan Mooneyham. (Communists saw Christians as patently American, Mam writes, and thus as enemies of Cambodian nationalism.)

The spy, however, was caught by Mooneyham's preaching and led to Christ. It was joy and new life from the first day. Mam joined a church and spent three years absorbing his new faith.

Then, in 1975, Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge came to power. Phnom Penh was evacuated, ostensibly because American armed forces were about to bomb it. The Khmer Rouge left the cities vacant, attempting to eliminate all vestiges of modern life. Buddhist monks were slaughtered. So was anyone attached to the old regime, along with anybody educated. Merely wearing glasses or speaking a second language was grounds for execution. Professing Christ was a death sentence.

Mam describes the chaos he experienced in those years as he wandered from place to place and, while a prisoner, faced nightly interrogations. Many were executed; starvation was an unrelenting enemy. Millions of Cambodians lost their lives in the Killing Fields, but by the grace of God Mam survived. When the Vietnamese army liberated his country in 1979, he was able to find his wife, his mother, and two daughters. His father and all his siblings had been killed. His wife, whom he had married unofficially early in the chaos of Pol Pot's regime, soon left him.

Returning to Phnom Penh, Mam found only a handful of surviving Christians. Pro-Vietnamese authorities still forbade Christian gatherings, so churches met in secret. Mam became active in writing and performing indigenous worship music, a great shift from the Westernized music that had dominated the tiny Cambodian church. He remarried and had another daughter. In 1985 he was warned that he would shortly be arrested. Escaping the city, he



hid his identity and eventually found his way over the border to Thailand. There, reunited with his wife and three daughters, he would spend eight years with half a million other Cambodians in refugee camps.

They were, he says, more like prisons than camps. Multiple armed factions fought against the Vietnamese occupiers and against each other. These conflicts penetrated the refugee camps, each one dominated by a different group.

During these years, Mam's church learned how to reach out to other traumatized, needy Cambodians. Training a new generation of pastors, they established churches in every sector of Camp II, where Mam lived.

In 1993, with peace finally established, Mam and his family went back to Phnom Penh. Stronger from their time in exile, his church has gone on to plant 400 churches throughout the country. Christianity remains a small minority religion in Cambodia—3 percent of the population, according to Operation World—but it is growing fast.

SUFFERING AND JOY

Mam's story is complicated, with many different phases, personalities, and locations. For some reason, he has chosen to tell it in

Mam's story wisely balances grace and suffering, thus serving as an antidote both to prosperity teaching and to overglorified suffering.

a jumble, jumping forward and back in time instead of sticking to his chronology.

The drama of the story suffers, but our encounter with a thoughtful and mature Christian leader does not. Mam experienced miraculous deliverance multiple times. Yet the suffering and death of his friends, family members, and fellow Christians weigh heavily on him. Repeatedly, Mam makes a point of balancing suffering and joy.

"God brought his best gifts to bear in the worst situations," Mam writes. "Yes, I suffered. Yet I shouted praise in my heart. Yes, I was confused and disheartened by what I saw. Yet I heard the voice of the Holy Spirit leading me too many times to count. Yes, I was afraid. Yet I learned to trust my Lord. Yes, so much was taken away. Yet so much was given.

"Yet' is the geographical fixed point for the follower of Christ. It acknowledges the darkness while simultaneously turning our

attention to the light. It shifts all glory away from suffering and to the God who meets us in that suffering."

Mam's story wisely balances grace and suffering, thus serving as an antidote both to prosperity teaching and to overglorified suffering. The "already-not yet" tension of God's kingdom is clearly visible in the gritty, uplifting realism of his account.

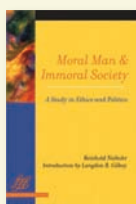
EMBRACING THE DESPISED

Mam's story played out against a background of division: Buddhist against Catholic against Protestant against Communist. Armed factions fought for preeminence. Nationalism and ethnic prejudice projected fears and hatred. And these differences were sharpened by horrible events, impossible to forget and hard to forgive. Compared to this, American polarization is a Sunday school picnic.

Not only did Mam learn to love his enemies in this context, he also learned the value

MY TOP 5 BOOKS ON PATRIOTISM

By David Gushee, director of the Center for Theology and Public Life at Mercer University



MORAL MAN AND IMMORAL SOCIETY

A Study in Ethics and Politics

REINHOLD NIEBUHR

(WESTMINSTER JOHN KNOX PRESS)

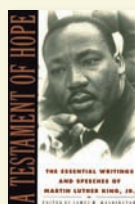
Niebuhr's always-timely insight is that patriotism is commendable in taking us beyond a fixation on self-interest, but dangerous in that it easily becomes little more than a collective egoism that is problematic precisely because it is so often considered virtuous.



ETHICS

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER
(TOUCHSTONE)

Bonhoeffer bore witness to a patriotism of engaged resistance. Rather than exile himself from Nazi Germany or comply with the regime, he instead returned from New York in 1939 with a clear intention to resist his own government—in the name of both Christ and a better, truer German identity.



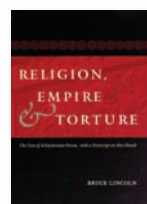
A TESTAMENT OF HOPE

The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.

EDITED BY JAMES M.

WASHINGTON (HARPERONE)

In his "I Have a Dream" speech and other writings, Martin Luther King Jr. taught generations of readers an exalted form of patriotic dissent, in which current policies are challenged by both biblical norms and our nation's highest principles.



RELIGION, EMPIRE AND TORTURE

The Case of Achaemenian Persia, with a Postscript on Abu Ghraib

BRUCE LINCOLN (UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS)

In his ingenious and disturbing book, Lincoln explores the rationales for torture offered by leaders of ancient Persia. He warns of the use and abuse of patriotism in states of imperial reach and power such as our own.



JESUS FOR PRESIDENT

Politics for Ordinary Radicals

SHANE CLAIBORNE AND CHRIS HAW (ZONDERVAN)

Claiborne and Haw offer an uncompromising posture in which national loyalty is utterly alien to a person whose Lord is Jesus Christ. I prefer the critical patriotism of a Bonhoeffer or King, but such patriotism has no prayer without the witness of books like this.

of embracing the despised—for example, a group with leprosy who settled near his family in the refugee camp. Mam notes that in the camps they learned the same lessons that came from the first Lausanne Congress: “The church, as it became more global, also became more holistic.”

“Our neighbors were diametrically different from us, if not our traditional enemies, as many were. We were charged by Jesus to love our neighbors: the lepers, the Vietnamese, the Muslims, and the Buddhists; the depressed and the hungry; and, to use a term that fit all of us, the war-torn. Our neighbors needed the gospel, to be sure. But they also needed just about everything else . . . The radical love of our Savior, expressed in as many ways as possible, was the only way to tear down the walls between us.”

One small example of generosity was their use of music. Mam and his daughters composed and recorded haunting Cambodian hymns. Initially they experienced considerable opposition within the church, which considered non-Western music unholy. As the years went by, however, the value of indigenous music became increasingly clear. It enabled an exiled people to connect with its identity through worship. It broke down barriers with other Cambodians, who regarded Christianity as a foreign religion. Mam recorded traditional music and gave it away to revive the spirits of refugees. He helped Catholics develop their own worship music. He offered his choir for events like Human Rights Day, celebrated by all the refugees in their camps.

Mam has lived an extraordinary life, leading a church through a time of great suffering. Yet he does not seem impressed by his deeds. He knows that others, just as gifted and just as dedicated, died. Mam learned to follow God during times of confusion, fear, and depression. He often lacked answers—perhaps there were no answers—but God led him through. It is in the very lack of comprehensive solutions—in the humility and balance, along with compelling trust in God—that Mam may have most to offer us. Such maturity is rare, and always has been. ✚

Tim Stafford, CT senior writer, is the author of the upcoming *Miracles: A Journalist Looks at Modern Day Experiences of God's Power* (Bethany House).

Holy Ground

Ignoring the ethics of food production and land use is not an option for Christians. By Jake Meador

In *Pollution and the Death of Man*, coauthor Francis Schaeffer describes a visit to a charming bohemian commune located across a ravine from an ugly Christian school. The stark contrast in settings confirmed for Schaeffer the bohemians' critique that the neighboring Christians obviously cared nothing for the physical creation: “When I stood on the Christian ground and looked at the Bohemian people's place, it was beautiful. . . . Then I stood on the pagan ground and looked at the Christian community and saw ugliness. . . . Here you have a Christianity that is failing to take into account man's responsibility and proper relationship to nature.”

Given that backdrop, one should welcome the recent publication by evangelicals of many fine books examining the relationship between Christian faith and God's creation, such as Lisa Graham McMinn and Megan Anna Neff's *Walking Gently on the Earth: Making Faithful Choices About Food, Energy, Shelter and More* and Craig G. Bartholomew's *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today*. The latest arrival is **Making Peace with the Land: God's Call to Reconcile with Creation** (InterVarsity) ★★★★★, coauthored by Fred Bahnson and Norman Wirzba.

Where the previous books set their sights on broader themes of place and practical questions of energy use, architecture, transportation, and the like, Bahnson and Wirzba's book focuses on a topic both men obviously know quite well: gardening and agriculture. The final three chapters offer an especially useful treatment of the subject, with Wirzba (a Duke Divinity School theology professor) focusing on the theology of eating, and Bahnson (a gardener, writer, and Duke Divinity graduate) looking at questions of sustainable agriculture, the agrarian arts, and the life of the church. In an especially helpful practical suggestion, Bahnson argues that the church needs to find ways to integrate the agrarian arts into its day-to-day routines.

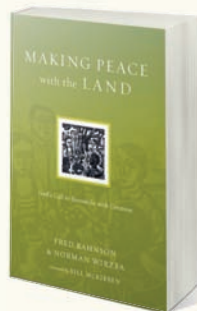
“What,” he asks, “if our homes and churches went from being primarily sites of consumption to places of production, as the scholar and priest Ivan Illich suggested? What if we planted church-supported community gardens, permaculture parishes . . . and apostolic farms that fed entire neighborhoods? What if seminaries trained every future pastor in the agrarian arts, ecological literacy and post-carbon living? What if church lawns stopped being dumping grounds for pesticides and petro-fertilizers and started growing zucchini and heirloom tomatoes for the local homeless shelter? . . . What if we created infrastructures of holiness, where God's kingdom of shalom could flourish on earth as in heaven?”

The book best succeeds in calling the church to think of environmental concerns as less a pet issue of an eccentric enclave than an unavoidable question for all Christians to carefully consider. “Christian environmentalism,” observes Wirzba, “is fundamentally about learning to see the world as God's creation and as a gift of love. How we think about creation has huge implications for our thinking about every theological category.” Unlike mere intellectual hobbies, questions of environmentalism cannot be avoided. We all have to eat. We all have to live on land of some kind. Adopting the consumerist logic of the prevailing Western culture isn't an option for the Christian.

In Genesis, God entrusts the care of his good creation to humanity, commanding us to rule it as his vice-regents—which means careful stewardship, not consumeristic exploitation. Determining the difference between the

two is sometimes difficult. But with the guidance of prayer, Scripture, and books like *Making Peace with the Land*, we might find the search for wisdom less difficult than we first thought. ✚

Jake Meador blogs at Notes from a Small Place.



LEARNING FROM MY FATHER

Lessons on Life and Faith

DAVID LAWATHER JOHNSON

(EERDMANS, 159 PAGES)

Both my parents lived relatively long and healthy lives. Each of them died a difficult death. In my father's case, because his cancer was discovered so late, the outcome was certain long before the discovery was made. Beyond any real chance of survival, my father's clear course of treatment (which, fortunately, he was a full participant in choosing) was hospice care, watching and waiting for the end, trying to stay as comfortable and unharried as possible. . . . I knew what to do at the hospice. Showing up and standing by were the principal activities required of me.

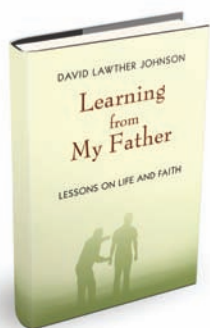
My mother's challenges were longer-lasting, and more complex. Suffering for many years from a bad heart and slowly progressing congestive heart failure, she eventually ended up in intensive care, battling minute by minute to find enough oxygen to draw her next breath. She was fully conscious, right up until the very end, and fiercely resistant to either decline or death. Her treatment required much of her family, involving a series of moves to various levels of care in the hospital. . . . I never knew what to do at the hospital. Every day when I visited my mother, it seemed there was some new, painful choice to make. . . .

In my experience, Christians often come in either the "hospital" or "hospice" visitor variety. Some have a desire mainly to find a belief, to settle into it, and then to hold on to it. The fact that, once inside this shelter, nothing should be at stake beyond—and because of—the "certainty" of salvation is the greatest source of comfort. . . . Faith is overwhelmingly therapeutic, a continuous healing process whose principal demand is showing up for care and standing firm. . . .

For others, Christianity comes in a far messier form. Though they frequently question whether they live up to the title, these are indeed "Christians" holding strong elements of belief. But such belief is usually commingled with doubt, and often exhibits a demonstrable lack of intellectual consistency or systematic thinking. . . . Faith involves not clarity but activity, giving rise to a constant barrage of assorted efforts, including Bible studies, small group sessions, and Sunday morning services. These are restless practitioners, constantly working on what they believe. . . .

As much as I envy the certainty of hospice Christians, I am definitely a Christian of the hospital variety. I come by this honestly. My father [a Presbyterian pastor] also approached his faith as a necessarily tumultuous affair, pointing out that tumult was inevitable because relationships are always difficult to understand, define, and manage, and faith involves nothing less than a direct, ongoing relationship with a truly personal authority—Jesus Christ.

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FREE WILL

SAM HARRIS (FREE PRESS)



I think I am exercising free will as I write this mini-review (free only within constraints, to be sure—especially space constraints—but meaningfully so). Ditto you in reading it (or skipping it). But Sam

Harris—or I should say, "Sam Harris," meaning the conjunction of causes that made him write the book—knows better. And who knows? Maybe you (or "you") and I (that is, "I," not the superficial consciousness ensorcelled by the illusion of free will but rather the forces actually steering me) will wake up one morning and find that we agree. Or maybe not.

THE LION BIBLE IN ITS TIME

LOIS ROCK, ILLUSTRATED BY STEVE NOON (LION)



Many books attempt to introduce the biblical world to children with a mix of text and colorful illustrations. Plenty are mediocre. This one's a keeper. The glory of it comes in the plentiful

two-page illustrations, spreads that are at once panoramic and loaded with detail. From "Abraham: A Nomad in Canaan" and "The Tabernacle in the Wilderness" to "Jerusalem in the Time of Pilate," they invite exploration. I can't wait to sit down with this book and our grandkids.

CRAZY DANGEROUS

ANDREW KLAVAN (THOMAS NELSON)



When I was a kid, some well-meaning grown-up would give me what would nowadays be called a Young Adult book, written from a Christian perspective and intended to be inspirational. Almost

always, such books were awful. How things have changed. Andrew Klavan, like a number of leading suspense novelists, has started writing for kids as well. Last year, I recommended his Homelander series. Now he has a new book, with a pastor's kid as the protagonist. Like many good YA novels (see the work of Peter Abrahams, Donna Freitas, N. D. Wilson, and Marly Youmans, for example), it can also be read with pleasure by adults.

Childlike Faith

What developmental science tells us about children's religious beliefs. Interview by Holly Catterton Allen



Children, argues Justin L. Barrett, are born receptive to the idea that there is a god. In **Born Believers:**

The Science of Children's Religious

Belief (Free Press), Barrett, a psychology professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, builds upon previous research on cognitive development to show that children naturally intuit design—and a Designer—when exposed to the natural world. Holly Catterton Allen, professor of Christian ministries at John Brown University, spoke with Barrett about the scientific evidence testifying to children's religious beliefs.

Why do you suggest children are “born believers”?

I'm using that term in a folk sense, the way we might say that Michael Jordan was a born basketball player, or Mozart was a born musician. I don't mean that Mozart came out of the womb playing the clavichord, but that given very minimal cultural and environmental input, he was going to take to it like ducks to water. Virtually all humans are essentially born believers—they have a natural receptivity to religious belief.

I'm contributing a new line of research that affirms [Swiss developmental psychologist Jean] Piaget's insight that children see design and purpose and meaning, but challenges his idea that they see *human* design or purpose. Piaget posited that young children believe that humans made the mountains or the sun. He thought they believed that God is just a human being involved in this creative process with other humans. But new research is showing that by the age of 4, children say that humans make some things, such as chairs and tables, but *not* mountains and trees. Even preschoolers know that humans are not the answer to the “who

made the world?” question. Someone else is needed.

What scientific evidence do you see?

We are not starting with unformed blobs that can be shaped into anything we like. Research from developmental psychology suggests children learn some things more easily and are attracted to some ideas more than others. There are certain kinds of ideas that children can learn more easily and rapidly than others, and internalize more deeply, such as believing in gods.

Children have a natural disposition to see the natural world as having purpose. Research has shown that children have a strong inclination to see design in the world around them, but they are left wondering who did it. They also know design doesn't arise through random chance or mechanistic processes. In fact, children (and adults) automatically look for a person behind purpose or design. By five months old, infants already make the distinction between things that are acted *upon* and those things that *do* the acting, that is, intentional *agents* (like people). And preschoolers' default assumption is that these agents are super-knowing, are super-perceiving, and are not going to die. If a child is exposed to the idea of a god that is immortal, super-knowing, super-perceiving, the child doesn't have to do a lot of work to learn that idea; it fits the child's intuitions.

How do you respond to arguments that say that what you are describing is normal childish belief in magical creatures, such as Santa?

There are all kinds of childish beliefs, such as the idea that other people have minds, that there is a real world out there, that the laws of nature are stable, that my mother loves me. All these ideas are

rooted in children's early developing intuitions. If that is someone's claim, I accept it; religious belief is in awfully good company.

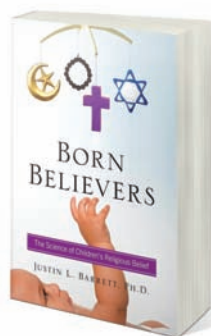
There are interesting similarities to Santa Claus. He is an agent, with special powers to account for certain kinds of peculiar events in the world. But Santa falls terribly short in other domains. He matters only a few weeks of the year at best. He doesn't fill the conceptual gap about why the natural world is the way it is. There are limitations as to what Santa knows and doesn't know, what Santa perceives and doesn't perceive. At the core, the reason children believe in Santa is that Santa is propped up through ruse and deception. If that's all religions had going for them, they would die out pretty quickly.

What suggestions do you have for parents who wish to encourage their children's religious development?

I would encourage parents and Sunday school teachers not to sell children short by assuming that just because a concept seems difficult for adults, it must be difficult for children. We know this is not true for music or language learning. Why would it be for religion? An opportunity could be missed if we don't teach about God's attributes until children are 8 or 9 years old.

Also, children need to see parents and other members of their religious community acting like they believe. Their belief should be a natural, organic part of existence, rather than something special or set apart in terms of space—for example, only in church, or set apart in terms of the way we talk. Who says, “I believe there is oxygen”? The existence of oxygen is part of our ordinary understanding of our world, and our conversation never presumes otherwise. If parents are convinced God exists, they should simply talk that way. Otherwise, children will begin to perceive that belief is strange or suspect.

Most important, we should focus on God's relational character. As born believers, children may perceive that God is super-powerful, super-knowing, immortal, and morally interested. Other questions are critical: *Is God distant and aloof? Or is God involved and loving?* There is a difference between believing that there is a god and having a relationship with God. This relational aspect requires cultivation beyond the default intuition that God exists.



¡Viva Cristo Rey!

For Greater Glory shows Mexico's fight for religious rights. By Steven D. Greydanus

The 1920s Cristero Rebellion, or the Cristiada, during the latter part of the Mexican Revolution, was one of the largest insurgencies in Western history, but few people in the United States have heard of it. The closest familiar point of contact is probably Graham Greene's celebrated novel *The Power and the Glory*, set during the continued anticlerical persecutions of the 1930s after the end of the Cristero conflict.

For Greater Glory (ARC Entertainment) ★★★★★, in limited theaters on June 1, is set a decade earlier. The story takes place during the presidency of Plutarco Elias Calles (Rubén Blades), who held office from 1924 to 1928 and continued for a half-dozen years afterward to govern the nation through puppets. Calles was a fanatical opponent of Mexico's Catholic Church, which had opposed the revolutionary generals in the turmoil following the Mexican Revolution. He promoted ruthless enforcement of restrictions on the church under the 1917 Constitution, compounding them with draconian punitive measures.

Calles's oppression was met first by peaceful resistance and then by violence, with a decentralized movement of peasant forces—derisively dubbed *Cristeros* or “Christers” by their opponents—enjoying some startling successes against the *federales*, particularly under the command of



Andy Garcia plays a freedom fighter.

General Enrique Gorostieta Velarde (Andy Garcia), an accomplished military leader who served in the Federal Army before becoming an unlikely leader of the Cristero forces.

Spearheaded by Mexican producer Pablo José Barroso, *For Greater Glory* is one of the most expensive and ambitious films in Mexican filmmaking history.

The film enjoys a solid cast led by Garcia, Oscar Isaac (*The Nativity Story*), and Santiago Cabrera (*Heroes*), with Peter O'Toole, Eva Longoria (*Desperate Housewives*), and Bruce Greenwood effective in smaller roles. Eduardo Verástegui (*Bella*) has a cameo as a pacifist lawyer named Anacleto Gonzalez Flores, and 15-year-old Mauricio Kuri, a Mexico City native, makes a likable debut as José Luis Sanchez del Rio, a young Cristero tortured and killed by federales. Both Flores and Sanchez were declared martyrs and beatified by Pope Benedict XVI in 2005.

Garcia stars as Gorostieta, depicted as benignly agnostic, supportive of religious

freedom, and indulgent of the pious faith of his wife, Tulita (Longoria), who raises their children in the faith with his consent. The real Gorostieta was apparently more complicated: A committed anticlerical who was contemptuous of religion, he nevertheless supported limited government toleration of religion.

Though he openly sneered at the faith of his subordinates, Gorostieta wore a large crucifix around his neck—and if the depiction of Gorostieta shouting the famous Cristero slogan “¡Viva Cristo Rey!” (“Long live Christ the King!”) seems paradoxical, it's probably accurate. Less accurate, probably, is Gorostieta's edifying character arc toward faith.

That's typical of the movie's sanitized, faith-friendly approach to its subject matter. The real Father Vega was a vigorously irreligious man whose carnal and murderous ways would make Greene's frail “whisky priest” look like Francis of Assisi. The film's Vega is more like the historical Father Pedroza, an earnest priest despite his military involvement. An infamous atrocity from Vega's career involving a massacre of civilians is depicted in the film as an accident.

Despite its schematic simplicity, *For Greater Glory* effectively taps into timely themes of religious freedom and intrusive government policy, as well as the mixed outcomes of U.S. vested interests in complex foreign affairs. The film shows U.S. ambassador Dwight Morrow (Greenwood) working to negotiate a peace deal with the Calles government partly to ease the flow of oil to the United States—a flawed deal that ultimately goes through, essentially selling out the Cristero cause. *For Greater Glory* bears witness to continuing religious persecution after the Cristiada ended. Even today, after a recent narrow vote in the Mexican Senate to expand religious freedom, freedom of religion in Mexico remains incomplete. Almost a century later, the promise of the Cristero cause remains unfulfilled. ✚

Steven D. Greydanus, who regularly reviews movies for CT, is film critic for the *National Catholic Register*.

Preacher Spins Riveting Yarn

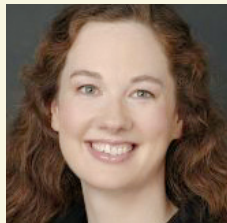
Machine Gun Preacher (Relativity Media) ★★★★★ is based on the complex story of Sam Childers, a violent, drug-dealing convict who finds Jesus and moves to Africa, ostensibly to become a “freedom fighter” for orphans of Sudan's civil war—particularly those left parentless by Joseph Kony and the brutal Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). This dark, R-rated film, which releases to DVD on June 5, shows Childers's transformation from a thug to a God-fearing “preacher” who builds an orphanage for the children he has allegedly rescued.

The movie certainly affirms the power of faith, but what about the *truth*? As CT reported last fall, when the film released to theaters, many eyewitnesses—including officials from the military and government, and the local community—have questioned Childers's claims, from his alleged fighting against the LRA to the way he says he takes care of the kids at the orphanage.

The movie tells a compelling story that makes for a pretty good drama and action flick. Nevertheless, viewers should remember that key elements of the story are apparently fictionalized. —Mark Moring, CT senior associate editor

TWO MINUTES WITH...

Cornelia D. Moore



When Cornelia D. Moore was in seminary, she received a remarkable gift from her godmother, novelist Madeleine L'Engle: the rights to adapt

12 of her early stories into plays and movies. Moore promptly quit seminary and enrolled in film school, and now she has adapted *Camilla*, a coming-of-age story L'Engle wrote in her 20s, into a film called *Camilla Dickinson*. Moore is now seeking a distributor and a release date. Film critic Jeffrey Overstreet, who has seen the film and sings its praises, interviewed Moore for CT.

What attracted you to this story?

There are large parts of Madeleine's story in it. It's tragic and beautiful and painfully awkward, the way adolescence is. It's about flailing around and . . . trying to find out who you are. All of Madeleine's work is so full of light. We need more films that are full of light. I wanted to get this film made in a way that Madeleine would really love, to honor her.

The cast includes some fine talent.

Yes. Cary Elwes (*The Princess Bride*). Samantha Mathis (*Grey's Anatomy*). Robert Picardo (*Star Trek: Voyager*). And *Camilla* is played by Adelaide Clemens (*Lie to Me*). We are humbled, overwhelmed by this cast. Making this movie with this cast was like getting to make a painting with Picasso's brush.

What kind of movies do you want to make?

My company, Kairos Productions, is dedicated to making movies with heart, soul, and spirit. But *Camilla Dickinson* wouldn't have been made without a lot of people behind the scenes, including two women who, through the Hollywood Prayer Network, have been praying for me for 10 years. And I have a team of prayer partners. I am deeply in their debt.

More: CamillaDickinson.com



Hungry for Home

Karr, Crowell find beauty and grace. By Josh Hurst



Mary Karr's memoir *The Liars' Club* is a harrowing tangle of substance abuse and mental illness, of broken hearts and human depravity. It lends new weight to the term "broken home." Even the way the story is told, in nonlinear fashion, seems to underscore how fractured her growing-up days really were.

The same kind of brokenness haunts **Kin: Songs by Mary Karr & Rodney Crowell** (Vanguard) ★★★★★, co-written by Karr and country singer (and fellow memoirist) Rodney Crowell. Because Karr herself isn't a singer, Crowell performs the songs with a series of guests, each of them so good it would be a sin to call them stand-ins. Norah Jones, Lucinda Williams, and Emmylou Harris are all here to fill Karr's shoes. Crowell even shares space with Kris Kristofferson and Vince Gill.

Kin, produced by Joe Henry, is a bright testament to the power of song and story to find meaning in brokenness. The album is fraught with heartache and regret, to be sure—but it is also filled with beauty and grace.

Henry is known for drawing soulful performances from stellar singers, and there are plenty of knockout performances here,

especially from Jones, Williams, and Harris, while Crowell is stalwart as the album's anchor. The songs lean toward country, with plenty of pedal steel, jaunty piano, brushed drums, and fiddle; if the studio musicians are a shade too genteel, the singers more than compensate, bringing warmth and tenderness even to the saddest songs.

And there is much sadness, indeed, but not the kind born of self-pity so much as self-awareness: these characters desperately need hope and healing, and they know it.

When Williams sighs, "God, I'm missing you," in a song of the same name, it speaks to a loneliness that penetrates the soul.

On "I'm a Mess," sung by Crowell, the narrator realizes the mess he's in is entirely of his own

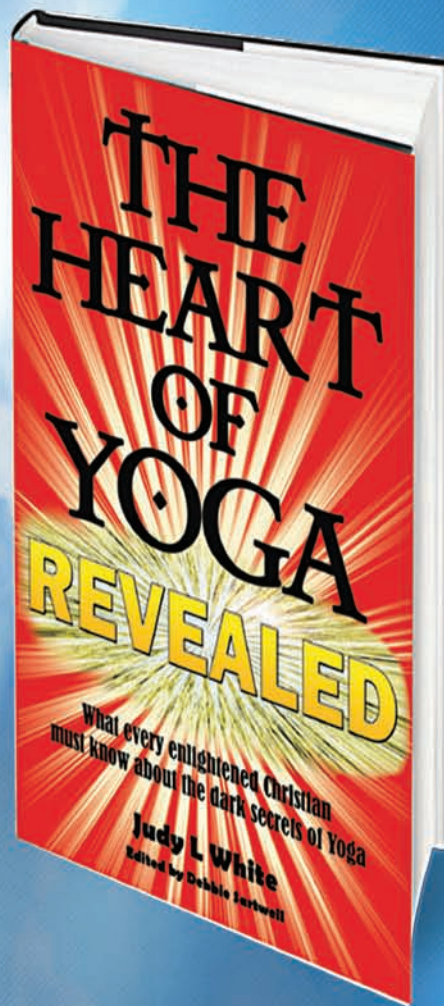
making. Temptation looms—"God gave me wisdom, but the Devil's got style"—but the consequences are undeniable: "All the change in my pockets won't pay for my sins." But the album ends on a note of hope: "Hungry for Home" is a paean to redemption and belonging, as though these dark tales can still end somewhere in the light. ✦



Josh Hurst, a CT music and film critic, blogs at thehurstreview.wordpress.com.

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► FORSAKEN

The Trinity and the Cross, and Why It Matters

THOMAS H. MCCALL (IVP ACADEMIC)

★★★★★ Jesus' lonely cry on the cross—"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"—has bewildered Christians for centuries. Does this mean the Trinity was broken at Calvary? Or worse, did God kill his own Son? Tackling tough topics ranging from determinism to divine wrath, Thomas McCall denounces contemporary theologies that pit God against God in favor of solidly biblical and Trinitarian views of the Atonement. As a collection of systematic theology essays, the book doesn't dazzle, but its brevity, clarity, and balanced perspective make *Forsaken* worth reading. —Jeff Haanen

► GOD ON THE STREETS OF GOTHAM

What the Big Screen Batman Can Teach Us about God and Ourselves

PAUL ASAY (TYNDALE)

★★★★★ Coinciding with the finale of Christopher Nolan's Batman trilogy, *God in the Streets of Gotham*, by PluggedIn.com associate editor Paul Asay, offers a breezy, faith-inflected reading of the Dark Knight that neither overstates its case nor idealizes its flawed, ambiguous subject. Asay depicts Batman less as an implausible Christ figure than a flawed human being touched by a sense of calling; compromised by trauma, but living by a code; tortured by personal demons, but living sacrificially for others. Asay keeps the focus practical and devotional, emphasizing the spiritual lessons to be drawn from comic-book heroism and villainy. —Steven Greydanus

► DEBATING SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

JOHN CORVINO AND MAGGIE GALLAGHER
(OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS)

★★★★★ Talk radio host Dennis Prager likes to say that he prefers clarity to agreement. This appears to be the guiding philosophy of *Debating Same-Sex Marriage*, the latest in Oxford University Press's Point/Counterpoint series. Philosopher John Corvino and National Organization for Marriage co-founder Maggie Gallagher spar spiritedly but respectfully on such topics as the purpose of marriage, the rationale for state recognition, the interests of children, and the consequences for religious freedom. —Matt Reynolds

MUSIC

NEWWORLDSON

► REBEL TRANSMISSION

(PLATINUM POP)

★★★★★ After 2010's surprise No.1 hit "There Is a Way," the industry-acclaimed Canadian quartet self-proclaims *Rebel Transmission* as a gift to radio, issuing accessible pop melodies within the context of the band's trademark funk, soul, gospel, and blues accompaniment. Whether recording vintage alt-country on the electric shuffle of "Sweet Grace," a Motown two-beat on "Selah," or the college-pop sweetness of "Today," the band explores diverse genres seamlessly thanks to their uber-tight musicianship. And on a record fans and critics could have deemed as a sellout to radio, Newworldson has enough musical gumption to incorporate ear candy for both the casual listener and the rabid fan. —Andrew Greer

WATERDEEP

► NO DOUBT OF SUNSHINE

(HEY RUTH)

★★★★★ Listening to the new album by Waterdeep, there's a sense that Lori and Don Chaffer have spent the year or so since their last release absorbing the sounds coming from modern indie pop artists. *Sunshine* has an autumnal glow touched with the warm pulse of acoustic guitars that helps buoy the gentle motion of the married couple's lovely vocals. That said, the album feels more focused on personal triumphs and human relationships than a connection with God. But the Chaffers know that it's in those small beautiful moments that you often find yourself closer to the Almighty, and that essence shines out even if they don't call your attention to it. —Robert Ham

SOULBREATHER

► SEVEN POINT EIGHT . . .

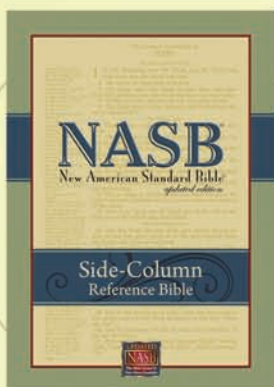
(INDEPENDENT)

★★★★★ Combine one of Whiteheart's co-founding singer-songwriters with Rachel Rachel's keyboardist-songwriter-vocalist, and the result is the delightful Soulbreather. Mark "Gersh" Gersmehl and wife Brynn blend their soothing vocals, calming acoustics, gorgeous piano arrangements, and vertical songwriting for a prayerful atmosphere. Their pop sensibilities remain, but with a more mature mindset. Longtime fans and first-time listeners are in for an intimate and inspirational journey into the couple's life together. —Andy Argyrakis

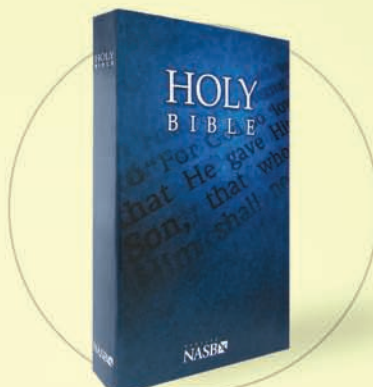
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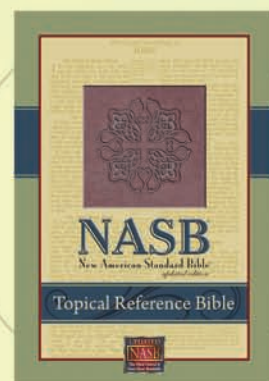
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BY MATT BRANAUGH



Love Thy Neighbors

Dave Runyon puts the Great Commandment in action.

In 2006, as teaching pastor of a large church in the Denver area, Dave Runyon found himself stalled. “I would spend most of my time on the weekend services,” he says, “then go out and wonder, *If this is success in ministry, I have to do something else, because it feels pretty empty.*”

Runyon sought counsel, read Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson’s *The Externally Focused Church*, and was encouraged to “learn his city.” He and other local pastors began attending council meetings and visiting civic leaders, all with an eye toward galvanizing churches to tackle a specific problem for the city.

Soon a church network focused on service was launched. That led to a meeting with the mayor of Arvada, Colorado, who suggested that the pastors help teach residents to be better neighbors. “I drove home that day thinking Jesus is a genius,” says Runyon, co-author of *The Art of Neighboring: Jesus’ Call to Love Starts Right Outside Your Door* (Baker), coming in August. The notion of loving God wholeheartedly and loving your neighbor as yourself was a strategic plan that could change the world. And thus was born Building Blocks, a multichurch effort to help Denver area church members and attendees engage with the eight neighbors most immediately surrounding them. More than 55 churches and 4,000 households have committed to the cause, and other cities are launching similar efforts.

- **Hometown** Denver
- **Church** Mile High Vineyard Church
- **Age** 38
- **Family** Lauren (wife); Ethan, 8; Kate, 7; Kendra, 5; Emery, 3 (children)
- **On your iPod** The Fray, Mumford & Sons, Dispatch, Kool Moe Dee
- **Favorite movie** *The Natural*
- **Your heroes** My mom, Dallas Willard, John Wesley
- **Favorite Bible verse** John 17:21
- **Hobbies** An unhealthy relationship with golf

question & answer

Please describe Building Blocks.

We focus on building relationships as opposed to evangelism. If people neighbor well, if people love other people because that’s what God told us to do, we believe people will come to know Jesus. People sniff out when strings are attached. That limits effectiveness. Posture is everything. Our motives really do matter.

What makes it work?

We are simply taking Jesus at his word and challenging others to do the same. Congregations doing this *together* is a really big deal. When there is unity, people who don’t know God will be drawn to him.

City leaders often hesitate to partner with churches for fear of proselytizing. How have you navigated that?

We had three and a half years of trust from working with city officials, showing them that we want to serve the city with them. We built up trust over time. We didn’t come at them cold, and that was the key to making this work.

What challenges have you encountered?

The barrier of time. Most people live at a really unhealthy pace. When they begin to wrestle with Building Blocks, they realize doing it means saying no to other things in order to build relationships with their neighbors. Most people love the *idea* of this, but aren’t willing to make the hard decisions that allow them to act on it.

How has Building Blocks responded to that challenge?

We keep putting the message in front of people to let them wrestle through it. As people mull on it, and realize they don’t know half or more of their neighbors, that helps them make some of these hard decisions. There’s a big difference between shame and conviction. We’ve tried to err on the side of conviction.

More: ArtofNeighboring.com



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