

Christianity Today

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2013

Worshiping JESUS in the MOSQUE

INSIDE THE WORLD
OF A MUSLIM FOLLOWER
OF ISA.



 2013 BOOK AWARDS 44
WOMEN IN COMBAT? 70
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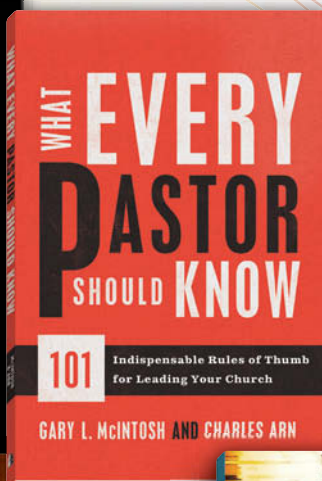
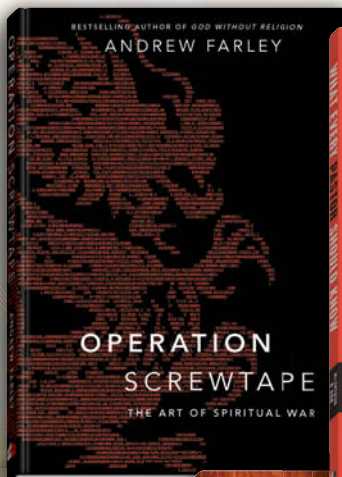
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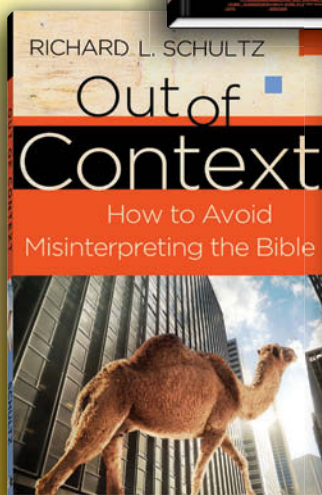


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McIntosh



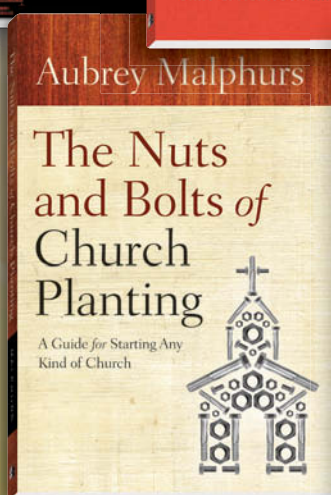
Charles
Arn

Offers pastors and leaders 101 valuable rules and "sacred" laws to help answer real-life ministry questions.



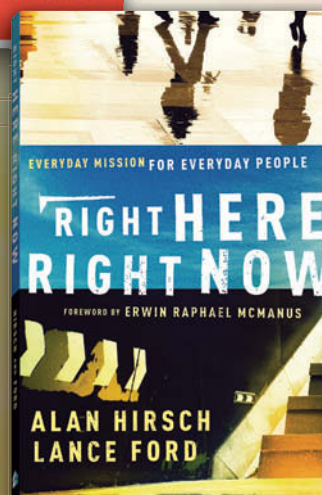
Richard L. Schultz

Richard Schultz believes the misinterpretation and misapplication of biblical texts amounts to a crisis of "interpretive malpractice." In *Out of Context* he seeks to explain how biblical interpretation goes wrong and how to get it right.



Aubrey Malphurs
www.malphursgroup.com

Most planting books offer a model to replicate—usually one that is tied to a particular style, generation, or even demographic. But what churches really need is a process that is flexible, not bound to a particular time or current fad.



Alan
Hirsch



Lance
Ford

No matter where you are, you are on a mission. You have concern for others. You want to be involved in solutions. You want to live your life for Jesus. But what does that really mean? How can you live out God's mission in the world, right here, right now?





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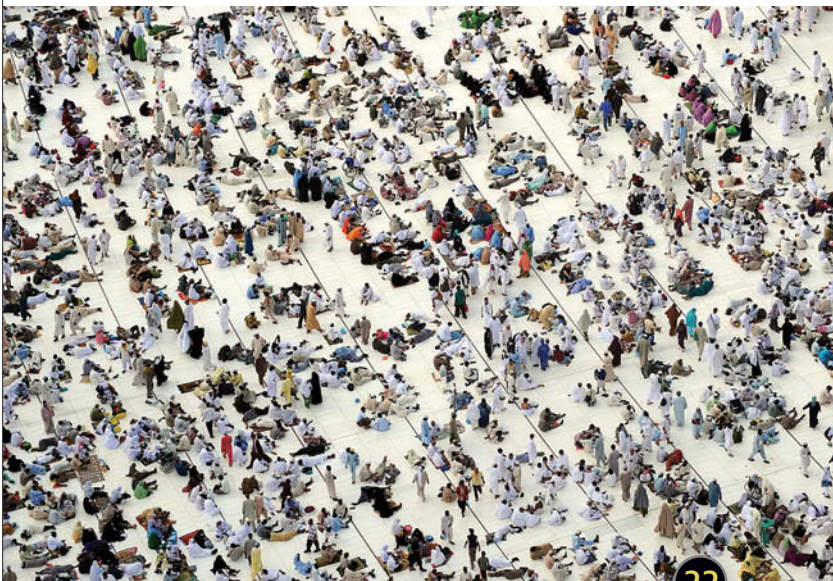
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Keep the Conversation Going

Christianity Today is eager to spark conversation between our readers and believers outside North America. Billy Graham, CT's founder, convened key events that brought people together from around the world. He initiated large international gatherings focused on evangelism in Berlin, Amsterdam, and Lausanne, Switzerland. At the 1974 Lausanne meeting, Graham worked closely with John R. W. Stott to spark a movement for holistic mission and a global network. In recent years, CT has partnered with both the Lausanne Movement and John Stott Ministries to foster world-class conversation and mutual learning.

The conversation continues in this issue. Our cover package on page 22 leads off with the voice of someone you wouldn't ordinarily hear from, an indigenous African Muslim convert to Jesus Christ who found evangelical ministries just too Western to reach his friends. Abu Jaz fosters a community of believers who worship within visibly Muslim cultural forms. He represents a small but significant ferment within the Muslim world.

Turn to page 56 to read about a different kind of international conversation: the one that goes on as Western missionaries in Ethiopia hand their responsibilities off to well-prepared indigenous workers.

Then turn back to page 15 and dip into the (sometimes-tense) conversation between Christian broadcasters serving the Middle East and North Africa.

Staying in touch with global developments is more expensive than monitoring events stateside. So while we're very grateful for your subscription dollars, we'd like to ask you to go beyond that and directly support this global conversation.

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Change to Believe In

Not all changes are good. But transformation is.



Christianity Today's editorial administrator, Becky Custer, keeps a list of the design and editorial staff who have left CT magazine during her 13 and a half years here. Her list has 37 names. Mine—if I had kept a list over my 27 and three-fourths years—would run to 68 names.

Last month in this space, Christianity Today CEO Harold Smith announced new leadership for CT magazine, including my own transition to editorial vice president of initiative development. In that role, I will focus much of my effort on launching our Spanish-language edition, *Cristianismo Hoy*. Over our nearly 30 years of involvement with CT magazine, Harold and I have seen a lot of change.

Change is good. At least that is the cheerful message that modernity thrusts at us. Change equals progress, and progress is, perforce, good. If you don't feel cheerful about change, well, just get out of the way.

But modernity is often wrong. Not all change is true progress. Technical innovation has increased long-distance communication (think Skype) and at the same time decreased people's interaction with those closest to them (think of the widely circulated cartoon showing everyone at the Thanksgiving table staring at their iPhones).

As I pass the baton of CT's editorial leadership, I have pondered the relationship between journalism and change. Journalism is, indeed, about change. Without change, there's no news. But evangelical journalists should be particularly concerned with one kind of change: transformation. Evangelicals love stories of personal transformation, tales of individuals placing their faith in Christ and living Spirit-renewed lives that give glory to God. We are also fascinated by the way faith transforms communities. This issue of CT abounds in tales of transformation.

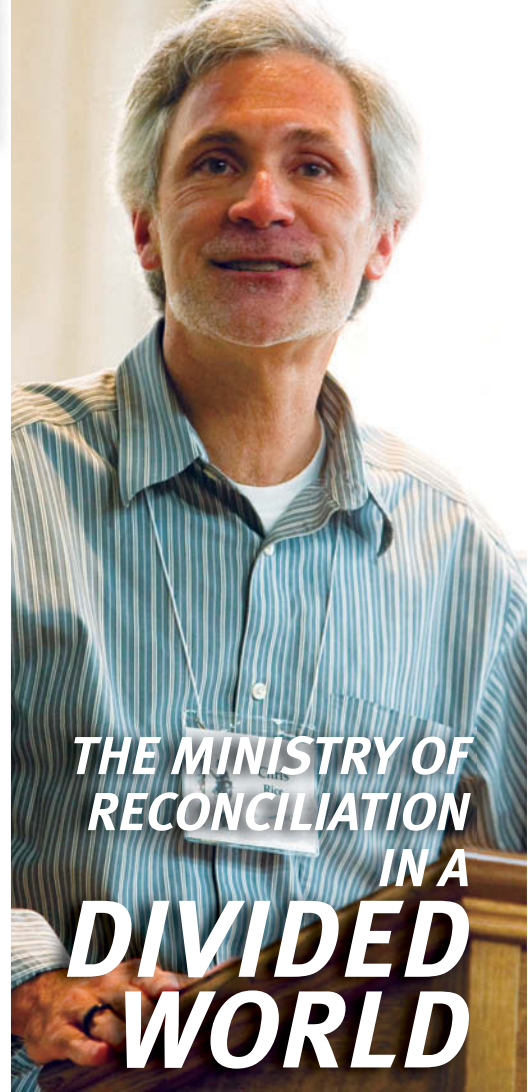
Start with our cover story and meet an East African follower of Jesus who has founded a worshipping community that retains its Muslim cultural forms (page 22). *Isa*, as Jesus is called in Islam, came to Abu Jaz's house and multiplied the macaroni so that he could practice the virtue of hospitality. Before long, Abu Jaz was following Jesus for much more than pasta.

Also check out our interview with *Poetry* editor Christian Wiman, whose essays on his conversion have been the talk of the literary world (page 48).

Finally, there's our back page. In recent years, it has been the venue for Who's Next, a feature on up-and-coming Christians influencers. Now, we initiate a new feature built on that fundamental evangelical genre, the testimony. Don't miss "My Train Wreck Conversion" (page 112).

Change is inevitable. Deal with it. Transformation is holy. Treasure it.

Next issue: Matthew Lee Anderson looks at why "radical" Christianity is all the rage, Megan Hill explores the spicy *50 Shades of Grey* phenomenon, and David Wilkinson upholds the doctrine of creation in a post-Darwin world.



THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION IN A DIVIDED WORLD

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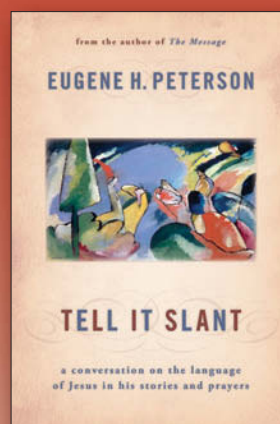
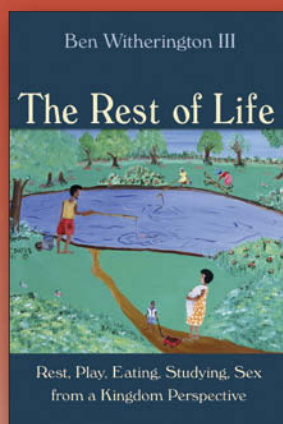
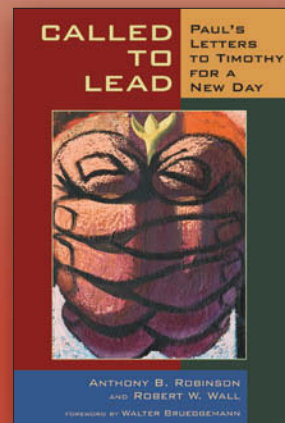
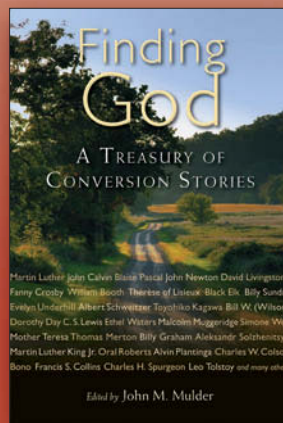
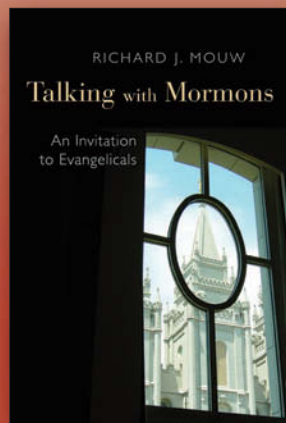
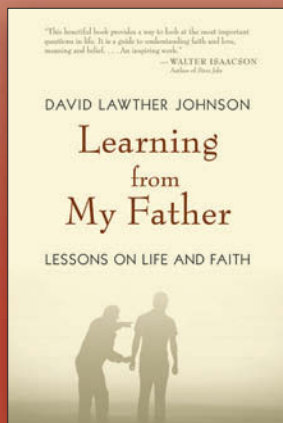
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When one global health expert said they were “too hopeful,” it lit a fire under (left to right) Skylar Piro, Sefanit Ghezahegn, and Rediet Mulugeta. For them, Seattle Pacific University’s mission to engage the culture and change the world is not just an abstract idea. As seniors at SPU, they put their education to work and created a business plan to help end devastating childbirth injuries in Ethiopia.

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REPORTING & DISPATCHES FROM THE CHURCH WORLDWIDE

Briefing

1

Christian colleges and for-profit businesses sue over the Obama administration's narrow **religious exemption** to its insurance requirements for birth control, including emergency contraceptives.

2

The Supreme Court sides with a Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod school against a former teacher, saying the government can't get involved in **ministerial employment**.

3

Continued **church bombings** and murders in Nigeria spur efforts to restrict religion. Islamist attacks on churches move into Kenya.

10

Justin Welby, an evangelical, becomes the new Archbishop of Canterbury and leader of 80 million Anglicans worldwide.

SPOTLIGHT:

TOP 10 NEWS STORIES OF 2012

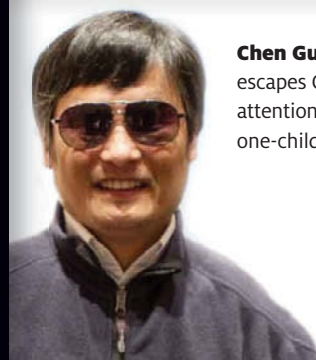
The events, people, and debates of the past year that have shaped, or will significantly shape, evangelical life, thought, or mission.

California bars **reparative therapy** as Exodus International continues to move away from it, causing internal division.

4

9

Christians in **Syria** debate whether (and how long) to support Assad.



Chen Guangcheng escapes China, reigniting attention to the country's one-child policy.

5

6

Vanderbilt University sticks by its "all comers" policy for student groups, leading most religious groups to leave campus.

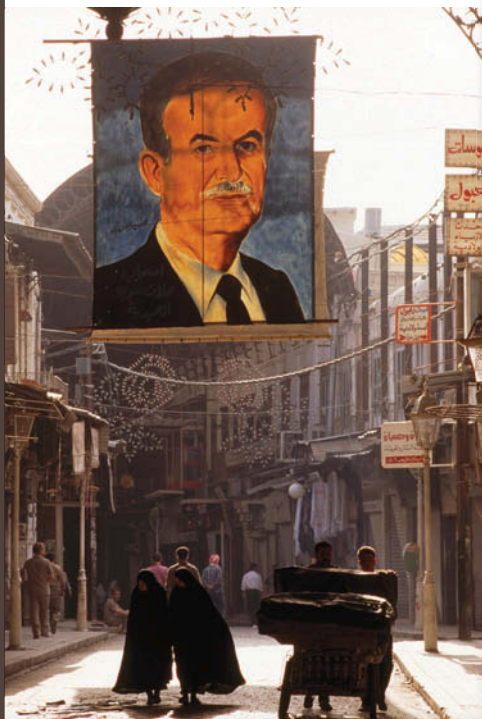


7

New York City says churches can no longer **meet in schools**. (A judge later grants a permanent injunction, letting some churches stay.)

Pakistan drops its blasphemy case against **Rimsha Masih** amid international pressure.

8





3



4



7

GLEANINGS

Important developments in the church and the world.

1 Hobby Lobby loses, Tyndale wins in court

In November, federal courts ruled both for and against evangelical groups challenging the Affordable Care Act's contraception mandate. A federal judge denied Hobby Lobby's request for an injunction, ruling that the arts-and-crafts giant must cover emergency contraceptives because "secular, for-profit corporations do not have free exercise rights." In contrast, a D.C. circuit court ruled in favor of Tyndale House Publishers, stating "[because] the beliefs of a closely-held corporation and its owners are inseparable, the corporation should be deemed the alter-ego of its owners for religious purposes." Meanwhile, the U.S. Supreme Court revived Liberty University's lawsuit, which an appeals court will hear this spring.

three Atlanta-based investors) pledged to donate 100 percent of profits to Christian ministries serving widows and orphans in the United States and abroad.

4 Churches told to quiet down or pay up

RWANDA, UGANDA Government officials in East Africa are cracking down on noise pollution, telling church leaders to reduce worship-related noise levels or face penalties—including being shut down. Rwanda's capital, Kigali, is enforcing penalties after receiving "overwhelming complaints" of "deafening noise from churches," where charismatic worship services often involve loud music. Meanwhile, Uganda's capital, Kampala, recently drafted legislation to reduce noise levels, prompting protest from many churches. Others are pursuing measures, such as soundproofing their worship centers, in order to comply.

5 Appeals court drops 'minister' test

In November, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals declined to determine whom a church can "consider a lay liturgical minister." It was the court's first case to address the ministerial exception doctrine in light of the U.S. Supreme Court's *Hosanna-Tabor v. EEOC* ruling. The court dropped its former threefold test and held that Philip Cannata, a fired music director who sued his Catholic church in Texas for age and disability discrimination, was a "minister" if the church says he was a minister.

6 Methodist publisher closes all bookstores

Nashville-based United Methodist Publishing House announced in November

that it would shut down all of its Cokesbury bookstores nationwide in order to focus on online and phone sales. All 57 stores, including 19 located in Methodist seminaries, will close by April 2013.

7 Excommunicated bishop must return churches

ZIMBABWE A high court ordered excommunicated bishop Nolbert Kunonga to return worship sites seized from Zimbabwe's Anglican Church. This ended a six-year standoff. The Supreme Court found that Kunonga—who founded his own diocese in Harare, the capital, in 2007—had no legal right to the properties. This decision overturned a previous court ruling in his favor. The bishop, a long-time ally of President Robert Mugabe, is appealing the eviction order.



8 Westmont tussles over graphic pro-life photos

Westmont College student Seth Gruber ignited debate when he began displaying graphic images of aborted fetuses on campus without permission. Gruber says the school has denied his request to post the signs (an initiative of the Center for Bio-Ethical Reform) for three years now. However, director of communications Nancy Phinney said Westmont offered him permission to display the images but in a less prominent location. The college does not take a position on abortion.

9 Methodist court preserves clergy tenure

The United Methodist Judicial Council overturned a church proposal that would have removed "employment guarantees" for clergy. Current policies for the world's largest mainline denomination (which includes 31,000 clergy) "give each ordained pastor a place to preach until mandatory retirement at age 72." Supporters argued the new policy would allow churches to remove ineffective bishops.

GO FIGURE Life Ethics

784,507
U.S. abortions reported to the CDC in 2009—the fewest since 1973. (California, Delaware, Maryland, and New Hampshire do not report statistics.)

-5%
Change from 2008. It's the largest drop in more than 10 years.

Centers for Disease Control

2 Teenager cleared of blasphemy—a first

PAKISTAN When an Islamabad court officially dropped the case against Rimsha Masih, the teenage girl accused of defiling the Qur'an became the first Christian exonerated from a blasphemy charge in the Muslim nation. Her arrest had prompted international condemnation. In response, President Asif Ali Zardari ordered an investigation and said the law must not be used to settle personal scores.



3 Family Christian Stores buys itself

In November, the nation's largest chain of Christian retail stores, Family Christian Stores, bought itself from its private equity owners, *Publishers Weekly* reported. The new owners (the management team plus



QUOTATION MARKS

“There is no presumption that religion . . . is for the public benefit, even in the case of Christianity or the Church of England.”

Britain’s Charity Commission, denying charitable status to the Preston Down Trust of the Plymouth Brethren Church.

The Telegraph

“It was like going to a movie that has two different endings.”

Stephen Neill, spokesman for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Richmond (Virginia), on the diocese’s requirement that Church of the Holy Apostles stop offering a combined Catholic-Episcopal liturgy for Communion.

The Virginian-Pilot

“I feel like church is important. . . . I think Jesus can help anybody.”

Judge Mike Norman, of Muskogee, Oklahoma, on claims that he violated the First Amendment by making church attendance a condition of a 17-year-old’s 10-year probation.

The New York Times

“I don’t even like the word *cult*. It sounds like Dungeons and Dragons or something.”

Franklin Graham, on the BGEA’s decision to stop calling Mormonism a cult. “I want to reach people for Christ,” he explained, “and how can I do that if I’m calling them a name?”

CNN

“Jesus”

The 21st most-common **password** used for websites. If you’re using it, you’re likely to get hacked.

SplashData.com

10 Pregnant woman’s death sparks protest

IRELAND In November, pro-choice activists from Dublin to Delhi demanded that Ireland amend its stringent anti-abortion laws after the death of an Indian woman who was denied an abortion. An estimated 6,000 Dubliners demonstrated to legalize abortion in heavily Catholic Ireland; similar marches occurred at the Irish embassy in India’s capital. However, prime minister Enda Kenny said any connection between the death, which was still being investigated by doctors, and Irish abortion law was a “tragic coincidence.”

11 Church staff fail to report child abuse

Five staff members from a Tulsa megachurch, Victory Christian Center (vcc), face charges for taking two weeks to report the rape of a child at the church. In November, John and Charica Daugherty, the son and daughter-in-law of vcc’s head pastor, tried to dismiss the “failure-to-report” charges against them. They argued that Oklahoma’s anti-child-abuse statutes legally did not require them to have reported the crime at all; the judge disagreed. vcc employee Chris Denman pleaded guilty in October to six felony sex crimes against children.

12 Island bans preaching on buses

JAMAICA Following complaints from some passengers, Jamaica’s government-run public transit system banned evangelism to bus passengers because they are a “captive audience.” Some preachers said the policy inhibits their freedom of religion guaranteed by the Jamaican constitution. But police superintendent Radcliffe Lewis told the *Jamaica Gleaner*, “It doesn’t matter who it is, even if you were the pope.”

13 Abuse alleged in Christian children’s homes

According to an investigation by the *Tampa Bay Times*, “nearly a dozen” of Florida’s more than 30 religious children’s homes subjected children to punishment and isolation verging on “torture.” The paper reported that “state authorities have responded to at least 165 allegations of abuse and neglect in the past decade,” and noted that some homes have lost their licenses but continued “to avoid state restrictions on corporal punishment.”

14 Census: Christians growing despite laws

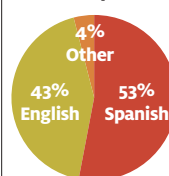
NEPAL The number of Christians in Nepal has tripled since the former Hindu kingdom secularized in 2007, according to its first-ever census. However, church leaders believe the census—which pegs Christians at 1.4 percent of the Himalayan nation’s 26 million people—undercounts their true numbers. Anti-conversion laws lead many Christians to still report as Hindus, though an agreement signed in May promised to protect the rights of Christians.

15 Disabled students win voucher victory

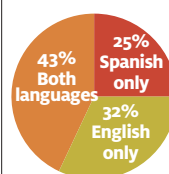
Less than a year after Oklahoma started offering scholarships for disabled students to attend private schools, two public school districts sued families that sent their children to religious schools. The districts claimed that using public dollars to pay tuition for religious schools violates the state’s constitution. A state court agreed. However, the Oklahoma Supreme Court rejected the lawsuit in November. It ruled that the school districts—not being taxpayers—did not have standing to sue, and that parents “are clearly not the proper parties against whom to assert these constitutional challenges.”

GO FIGURE Latinos

Hispanic Americans who say their church speaks:



Hispanic Americans who say they prefer services in:



Barna Group



PERSECUTION KENYA

Wolves in Sheep's Clothing

Jihadists recruit ex-Christians to attack churches.

By Tom Osanjo in Nairobi, Kenya

Hundreds of Kenyan youths who converted from Christianity to Islam—and then went to fight alongside jihadists in neighboring Somalia—are returning to their home churches. But these prodigal sons are not being welcomed back with fully open arms.

Instead, pastors are on high alert—with good reason. Al Shabab, an al-Qaeda affiliated militia, has begun using young men from predominantly Christian ethnic groups to attack churches.

In November, an assailant hurled a grenade into a church located inside a police station, killing the pastor. In September, assailants threw grenades into a children's Sunday school class, killing a 9-year-old boy. In July, similar grenade attacks at two churches killed 17 worshippers.

Last October, Kenyan military forces entered Somalia to engage Al Shabab. The militia responded with a recruitment drive of Kenyan

youth, offering cash incentives for the families of would-be martyrs.

“[Jihadists] have changed their recruitment tactics,” said Wellington Mutiso, head of Evangelical Alliance of Kenya. “Instead of enlisting from predominantly Muslim communities such as the Somali, Boran, and others, they are targeting those from tribes that are majority Christians, such as the Kikuyus, Luos, and Luhyas.”

Mutiso believes this is “an act of disguise,” given that security forces have been concentrating on suspects from Muslim communities. “With the new recruits, the security forces have been left in a spin.”

Jihadists have an easier time recruiting within Christian communities today because of Kenya's high unemployment rate (40 percent) and widespread poverty.

“A member of my church was given 50,000 Kenyan shillings (us\$570), and he immediately converted to Islam,” said David Gathanju, head of the Presbyterian

Prodigal Perps: Jihadists successfully recruited Kenyan youths from Christian tribes to fight for their cause in Somalia. Now those youths are returning home—and being linked to church attacks.

Church of East Africa. “There is also the issue of young men looking for quick money and not wanting to soil their hands in hard work.”

That's what worries Mutiso. Former church members who fought in Somalia can attribute their absence to going away to college or changing jobs to a different town, he said. “They are less likely to be under close scrutiny and, before you know it, they will have wreaked havoc.”

After a joint African military operation dealt Al Shabab a significant blow in October, capturing the jihadist coastal stronghold of Kismayu, the militia moved its fight onto Kenyan soil.

This has resulted in a disturbing increase in Nigeria-style attacks on churches, forcing leaders to increase security. Nowadays it is common for churchgoers to be frisked and have their cars checked for explosives. Armed policemen have become part and parcel of almost all Kenyan church services.

In October, Alex Shikinda (now known as Musharaf Abdalla) became the latest convert from Christianity to confess in court to handling explosives on behalf of Al Shabab. In late 2011, another Kenyan from a western Christian tribe, El-giva Bwire Oliacha (now known as Mohammed Seif), pleaded guilty to grenade attacks in Nairobi.

For Mutiso, the solution to this problem lies squarely with the government. “They know the mosques that were used as recruitment grounds,” he said. “They can get information from the sheikhs [regarding who was recruited], so we can circulate the information among churches.”

Another solution: Offer amnesty to those who renounce their conversion to radical Islam. Mutiso acknowledges it would be hard to distinguish between a genuine amnesty seeker and a fake one bent on attacking former brethren. “But desperate times call for desperate measures,” he said. “We need to try all possible solutions.”

GO FIGURE Church Life

64%

Church of England laity who voted to approve women bishops in November. The measure, which failed, needed a 2/3 majority.

45%

Of laity who voted against the measure, those who are women.

ChurchOfEngland.org, The Guardian

BIBLE

Fifty Shades of the Good Book

Erotica fans aren't the only beneficiaries of private digital consumption.

By Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra

The notorious erotica trilogy *Fifty Shades of Grey*, by E. L. James, has sold more than 60 million copies worldwide since March. Of note: Digital versions are outselling print more than 2 to 1.

The discretion offered by digital content has boosted the erotica industry. For example, adult eBooks accounted for 57 percent of Kensington Books' sales in 2011, compared with 2 percent in 2008, according to *The Telegraph*.

However, this discretion has also been a boon to those seeking access to the Bible.

"There is no question: A lot more people have access now," said Grant Lovejoy, director of orality strategies for the International Mission Board. "Especially in places where it's impossible to get Bibles in, or [where] there is a stigma attached to going into a Christian bookstore."

The fastest-growing areas for digital Bible reading are where access is restricted, said Troy Carl, national director of Faith Comes by Hearing. The ministry's second-most popular audio Bible (after English) has become Arabic. On average, those in traditional Muslim countries listen three to four hours at a time—far more than the average three to four minutes of those in developed countries.

"We've been distributing the Bible in other mediums for 37 years, and we reached 50 million people," said Carl. "In two and a half years, we reached 95 million people. That's exponential."

Lovejoy does offer a caution amid the good news. "It is the way of evangelicals to be blind to the fact

that different media impose various restrictions and have an impact on the message," he said. "We need to pay attention. Each medium has its own advantages or reason for being."

Still, Russ Hersman, chief operations officer for Wycliffe Bible Translators, agrees that access is one of digital's biggest advantages. One Wycliffe organization has launched Operation Timothy, which aims to raise \$100,000 to make digital Scriptures accessible worldwide.

And while some governments still restrict Internet access, such control is harder to maintain as technology evolves, he said. "Digital Scriptures are Scriptures without boundaries." ☩

EVANGELISM

Carrot or Stick?

Broadcasters debate best way to reach Muslims.

By Jayson Casper in Cairo

The stakes have been raised for Christian satellite broadcasting in the Arab world.

On November 28, a Cairo court sentenced to death Nakhoula Basilli Nakhoula and six other Coptic Christians—who all live outside Egypt—for their alleged roles in producing *The Innocence of Muslims*. The film, which mocks the Prophet Muhammad, prompted violent protests worldwide.

Nakhoula is relatively safe since he and the Way, the satellite channel that broadcasted the film, are based in the United States. But the sentence drew attention to how such channels have proliferated in recent years, seeking to present the gospel to Arab Muslims by—in part—directly criticizing Islam.

"Since satellite TV is widespread across the Middle East and is uncensorable, it is obviously a key way to make the good news of the gospel available," said Terence Ascott, CEO and founder of SAT-7.

The evangelical channel, which

has broadcast from Cairo and Beirut since 1996, has a policy to never attack other faiths. "Exposing the faults of another person's belief system is best done face to face in love," said Ascott. "To do it through a broadcast can often lead to a negative reaction by viewers, and . . . local Christians and churches then pay the price."

"Outside Egypt, channels have freedom and use it without limits," said senior producer Sherif Wahba. "But we [Egyptian Christians] are the ones who get blamed."

This claim is rejected by newer channels that challenge Islam directly. "It is ridiculous to say this, because there has been persecution in these areas long before we did our work," said Abu Ali, director of the Life, based outside the Middle East.

He counters that established broadcasters do not preach the gospel sufficiently. "If I want to be a politician and please everybody, I can do it. But will people be saved? Of course not," he said. "Is it an attack to disagree with unbiblical teachings?"

CTV, the official channel of Egypt's Coptic Orthodox Church, was quick to condemn *Innocence*. "We show people what the gospel says—that we are a people of love," said director of programming Akram Beshara. "But this is indirect, not direct. . . . I preach Christ by presenting the religion in all of its virtue."

By contrast, the Way broadcasts programs entitled "The Contents of the Qur'an" and "How to Become Christian from Muslim." Like *Innocence*, arguments are frequently drawn from Islamic sources that many Muslims find dubious.

"These programs pick one text, out of context, and explain it as they want to see it," said Imed Dabbour, a Tunisian producer who has worked with both SAT-7 and more aggressive channels. "It is neither objective nor academic. They make the traditional church afraid of their job by disturbing the social peace."

[continued on 16]

PASSAGES



Leaving
Doug Birdsall

As executive director of the global Lausanne Movement, in February, to become president of the American Bible Society.



Selected
Justin Welby

As Archbishop of Canterbury, in November. Welby, an evangelical, replaces Rowan Williams as leader of the world's 80 million Anglicans.



Died
K. H. Ting
Long-time leader of China's official Protestant churches, who helped Christianity navigate the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

Briefing [from 15]

To help erase such dichotomies, the Coptic diocese in Los Angeles recently launched its own channel, Logos TV.

"I will try to make the Bible known to those who have not accepted Jesus' salvation on the cross," said CEO Bishop Aziz. "But when you attack someone, they will defend their faith. If they realize Christianity is heavenly, they will be attracted to it. Otherwise, [a hostile approach] leads to enmity."

EDUCATION

Tussle Over Sex Standards

Why are fired teachers still suing Christian schools? By Ken Walker

The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Cincinnati expects to go to trial soon to defend the 2010 firing of an unmarried teacher who used artificial insemination to get pregnant.

Religious freedom advocates say the case could clarify the rules when faith-based employment decisions

collide with anti-discrimination laws.

In last year's landmark *Hosanna-Tabor v. EEOC* ruling, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously said a "ministerial exception" exempts religious employers from federal employment and disability laws.

But the ruling hasn't stopped lawsuits against churches and Christian schools for morals-related firings. Legal experts don't see a spate of recent suits in Texas, Florida, and Georgia as a trend—but they do consider them a harbinger of a coming wave.

"I would predict there will be more over time," said Eric Rassbach, deputy general counsel for the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty. "You'll get more people who think it's perfectly fine to cohabit and are genuinely surprised that a church employer feels otherwise."

Given this situation, Christian institutions must regularly update lifestyle covenants, said Tom Cathey, director of legal issues for the Association of Christian Schools International. Cathey counsels his 25,000 member schools to be forthright with staff about moral expectations and causes for dismissal.

"If their lifestyle agreements fit within the definition of church autonomy, then they'll absolutely

DISCUSSION STARTER Higher Education

Liberty University has spent millions building a football program intended to compete in top bowl games in order to raise the profile of evangelism. The success of the University of Notre Dame's football program—ranked No. 1 this year—is credited by many with having a similar benefit for Catholicism.

win," said University of Missouri law professor Carl Esbeck.

Those who get sued shouldn't panic either, since many cases fizzle or settle in pre-trial proceedings.

The latter is common, said Stanley Carlson-Thies, president of the Institutional Religious Freedom Alliance. He understands that schools often want to make such cases "just go away," but such secrecy robs other schools of a chance to apply lessons learned.

"It doesn't clarify if something is right or wrong," he said. "It doesn't allow schools to realize how vulnerable they might be."

Sometimes schools lose even when the employee is a leader. Several months after *Hosanna-Tabor*, a jury found Christian Academy of Wichita Falls, Texas, guilty of retaliation after firing its former headmaster (who filed a gender discrimination claim).

Despite the verdict, Jeff Matteer of the Liberty Institute thinks *Hosanna-Tabor* means most fired school employees who sue will lose.

"It's part of a larger issue," he said. "It's the First Amendment conflicting with employment law and other federal law. I'm confident the Constitution will win."

UNDER DISCUSSION Topics in the current debate.

compiled by Ruth Moon

Should Christian colleges build top-ranked football teams?

YES

"It would betray our mission (as explained to millions of donors) if we did not strive to build a topnotch football program. This investment will pay dividends for generations because it will shine a light on our mission—to train champions for Christ—like nothing else can."

JERRY FALWELL JR.
chancellor and president,
Liberty University

"The potential benefits of a winning football team are attractive to university administrators. Evangelicals have embraced sport in the name of spreading the gospel, using the formula 'winning = fame, fame = exposure, exposure = souls for Christ.' This is risky, but can be handled well."

BRIAN BOLT
professor, Calvin College

"Athletic programs can be glorious expressions of God-endowed human creativity and excellence, but they may become dangerous idols. Whether they are worth it depends upon whether they enhance or inhibit a school's particular God-ordained purposes."

PERRY L. GLANZER
resident scholar, Baylor
Institute for Studies of
Religion

"Athletics can be a tremendous way to extend the witness of an institution. But breaking into the upper tier of Division I athletics requires an investment of gargantuan proportions. Unless the entire community is behind the idea, it can be one of the riskiest decisions a college makes."

D. MICHAEL LINDSAY
president, Gordon College

"I understand why Liberty wants to move forward with football. However, if I were running a Christian university flush with cash, I would ask whether there are more distinctive ways to develop alumni passions. Can the money be used to fund teaching innovations or tuition subsidies?"

HUNTER BAKER
dean of instruction,
Union University

"A Division I program can produce substantial income. If indeed 'The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil,' we can expect that the pursuit of money and prestige through football will produce the same kinds of evils at Liberty that it has elsewhere."

MIKE HAMILTON
professor, Seattle Pacific
University

NO



Gathering Place: Students at Seattle Pacific University discuss same-sex attraction. More Christian schools are encouraging greater dialogue about homosexuality.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Hope for the Gay Undergrad

More and more groups connected with Christian colleges openly reach out to students with same-sex attractions. By Allison J. Althoff

W

hen Jordan enrolled in Wheaton College in Illinois, he wouldn't admit to himself that he was attracted to other men. Raised in a conservative Baptist church and a student at a conservative Christian college, Jordan (who asked that his real name not be used) hesitated to identify with the gay community, which he perceived as flamboyant and sex-obsessed. He attempted to ignore what was in opposition to his Christian beliefs.

"I would sit in Wheaton's prayer chapel, staring at the cross, and beg God to please just let me be attracted to girls," Jordan said. "I used to pray for it every day: 'Heal me!'"

Jordan waited for a chapel series at college, a sermon at the Anglican church he

attended, or a fateful meeting with that one person who would change his orientation. "I just thought I'd naturally be attracted to a girl and get married—everyone says that's what happens," he said.

When that didn't happen, Jordan was faced with the dilemma of addressing his same-sex attraction as a student at a school that prohibits any sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage. Jordan and others like him point to the recent experience of Wesley Hill, a Wheaton alum, professor at Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pennsylvania, and author of *Washed and Waiting*, as one example of a gay Christian's choice to live in celibacy to address same-sex attraction.

Leaders at Christian colleges and

universities around the country told *Christianity Today* their schools are rethinking the way they address the needs of these students on campus. Recently, Wheaton's administration provided forums for dialogue about human sexuality and encouraged students to be more open about their experience. "I'm very hopeful for the current climate at Wheaton," said dean of student care Melanie Humphreys. "There is always someone wrestling with this. But they need to feel a sense of community—this issue won't be resolved at arm's length."

Students from several Christian colleges who spoke with *CT* said behavioral codes, which often forbid homosexual behavior in addition to alcohol and tobacco consumption, sex outside of marriage, and erotic

dancing, inhibit their ability to be open about their sexual struggles or experiences. They fear disciplinary probation and being ostracized by peers.

"When I enrolled as a freshman, I would never have said I was gay," Jordan said. "I wanted to keep it quiet for fear of my guy friends being freaked out by me. You hear gay jokes around campus and you're afraid if you come out people will look at you differently."

Jordan often felt lonely during his four years at Wheaton, but insisted his experience was positive overall, especially after he made the decision to reveal his struggles with gay porn and same-sex attraction to his discipleship group and some professors, administrators, and close friends.

"When I first came out to my small group, they laid hands on me, prayed for me, thanked me for confessing deep, dark things, and said they'd be there to support me as I struggled through it," Jordan said.

Two months after graduation, he was faced with the challenge of coming out to his parents. "When those words came out of his mouth, I truly felt like I'd been gut punched," said Jordan's mom. But Jordan's family reassured him of their love, and turned to prayer to deal with their conflicted feelings.

Not all such stories end this way. Some students with same-sex attractions align with pro-gay student and alumni organizations. Others have left the faith altogether. In a few extreme cases, students have taken their own lives. All in all, dealing with same-sex attractions is a lonely road for many Christian students, and Christian colleges are trying to become places where these students don't have to struggle alone.

IDENTITY RECONSIDERED

The debate over homosexuality on campus is being recast by new research on sexual identity, which goes beyond a person's hetero- or homosexual behavior and orientation.

Understanding sexual identity is a continual process with many stops and starts regardless of a person's religious



'Celibacy is a hard choice, and if churches are not willing to hold it up as an honorable pursuit and support it with practices of friendship and hospitality, I'm not sure it will seem viable to many sexual minorities.'

~ Wesley Hill, author

convictions, according to William Struthers, author of *Wired for Intimacy* and a research psychologist and professor at Wheaton. He said that the traditional labels (such as gay or straight) concerning sexual orientation are outdated and inaccurate. "Human sexuality is a lot more complex than four or five letters."

He continued, "We're being forced to think more deeply about what role sexuality plays in life. All of these categories we thought were hard and fast really aren't. There's a nature to it. There's a nurture to it. It's how the brain develops." His research has focused on sexual arousal, addiction, and pornography. "Sexuality is about a lot more than just who you want to have your orgasms with," Struthers said.

He said churches would benefit from the experience of people like Jordan. They choose to forego their own sexual desires through celibacy because they see something beyond themselves. To Struthers, this is a sacrificial display of loyalty to Christ.

But as a student, Jordan found himself in the minority of his peers with same-sex attraction. According to Jordan, many individuals who took part in a same-sex attracted small group during his senior year expressed

desire to pursue same-sex relationships upon graduation. Many join liberal congregations that affirm gay orientation. Others may leave church altogether.

"If I could redo my life and like women that would be great, but I'm happy I'm gay," Jordan said. "God might change me, and I'm fine with that, but the experiences and conversations I've had have drawn me close to God and revealed him to me in awesome ways."

The prospects for change of sexual orientation remain extremely controversial. At the pastoral level, Mario Bergner, founder and director of Redeemed Lives Ministries, is a deep believer in the ability of gay individuals to change.

Bergner encourages students to identify themselves as individuals before God, apart from their sexual desires. Bergner said, "I see

them as a person first, and as a Christian, if that's how they self-identify." As a young adult, Bergner actively pursued a gay lifestyle before participating in pastoral care and therapy groups that enabled him in time to enter into heterosexual marriage. "The embracing of celibacy is a legitimate Christian option, but then again, so is embracing a dynamic process of sanctification," Bergner said.

Still, this is not the choice of some students, and when it isn't, colleges still try to reach out. Brent Persun, a 2011 Cedarville University graduate, is one example. Shortly after enrolling at Cedarville, Persun found himself in the dean's office during his freshman year to discuss his same-sex attractions.

Persun said, "Sex in general was not often talked about in my church or family, let alone homosexuality, so I hid it for as long as possible." After his parents discovered him accessing gay porn on his computer as a teen, he began attending sessions designed to change his orientation. He continued this treatment while at Cedarville.

"The dean knew that I struggled with same-sex attraction, but this was mostly contingent on the fact that I was struggling and trying to change," Persun said. "I still

appreciate my time at Cedarville for the education I received and the friends I made.”

When CedarvilleOut, a pro-gay alumni organization, hosted an off-campus meeting during his junior year, Persun met with founder and 1984 Cedarville grad David Olsen to discuss the integration of faith and homosexuality.

After the meeting, Persun decided to embrace a homosexual identity. Persun now lives an openly gay lifestyle and also is a member of Old South Church in Boston.

Olsen said, “Initially, I said if I could make one life better it would be worth it. Now, it’s done more than I ever thought it would.” CedarvilleOut has not collaborated directly with Cedarville University, but hosts off-campus events, such as the one Persun attended.

Cedarville’s vice president of student life Carl Ruby said the institution maintains a healthy dialogue with CedarvilleOut. “I was assigned to be Dave Olsen’s mentor back when we were students together at Cedarville in the early 1980s,” Ruby said. “We have major differences of opinion about what we believe the Bible says about this topic, but I consider him a friend. We have tried to model what civil conversation looks like.”

EXPANDING DIALOGUE

Christian college administrators have found that small group meetings and campus-wide forums about same-sex attraction are overcoming the reluctance of students to openly discuss sexuality and sexual behavior.

In 2006, Calvin College began hosting a sexuality series that includes events, speakers, and book clubs to help students better understand topics affecting homosexual and heterosexual students. According to Calvin’s 2008 Statement on Homosexuality and Community Life, homosexual orientation is not inherently sinful, but sexual behavior belongs within the bounds of heterosexual marriage.

Calvin communications director Tim Ellens said gay students are able to be honest about their sexuality while being accountable to the code of conduct. “Calvin teaches incoming freshmen to be loving, open, and kind about gay people,” junior Joel Betts said. “I’m friends with people

who are gay, and it’s not a big deal at all.”

Same-sex attracted students at several Christian institutions have attempted to start on-campus organizations with varying degrees of success. Seattle Pacific University’s Haven is an “unofficial club” organized by students. It hosts weekly meetings on campus to encourage honest conversations about sexuality while holding to the school’s “Lifestyle Expectations” regarding sex outside of heterosexual marriage.

“Haven is recognized by the university administration, but not as a recognized student club through the student government system,” vice president of student life Jeff Jordan said.

“Haven has applied a couple of times for official club status through student government, but they have not attained that status. So administration has said, if indeed what’s important is having a safe place on campus for conversation, and you’re willing to work with university administration, whether that be through me, which is how it was for many years, or through an umbrella organization, then we’ll work with you on this.”

According to faculty advisor Kevin Neuhouser, the meetings function as support for same-sex attracted students on campus as well as a forum that hosts speakers who address human sexuality. “There are gay

Biola’s dean of students, Danny Paschall, said there is a difference between students identifying as homosexual and those acting on their attraction. The community seeks to come alongside same-sex attracted students, not ostracize them.

Paschall said in a statement, “When a student approaches us and communicates that he or she is struggling with same-sex behavior or sexual identity, we aim to offer a safe environment that promotes openness, dialogue, and care. If students are engaging in same-sex behavior and are not taking into account their commitment to Biola’s community standards, then we will have a conversation about their status as a student.”

FREEDOM FROM FEAR

In the same vein, Wheaton’s Humphreys insists her institution is striving to become a safe space for students.

“Our policies are truly restorative,” Humphreys said. “If we have a student wrestling with sexuality, we’re not going to kick them out—we’re going to bring them closer to help them think through how they understand it.” This year, Wheaton’s student government has endorsed a student-led, confidential community group for those who experience same-sex attraction.

For celibate singles, affirmation from a

For celibate singles, affirmation from a church community is crucial to their well-being.

students on every Christian campus,” Neuhouser said. “What’s fundamental to respecting and caring for them is providing them a place they can feel safe. The main concern is the student, not the orientation.”

In California, some student organizations, like the Biola Queer Underground, advocate for acceptance of same-sex practice and provide anonymity for their members.

“As an LGBTQ student, you have to be constantly aware of how others perceive you, even off-campus,” an anonymous Biola Queer Underground representative said. “It’s a sad reality that students could very well turn in students to administration for discipline or expulsion.”

church community is crucial to their well-being.

Author Wesley Hill told CT, “Celibacy is a hard choice, and if churches are not willing to hold it up as an honorable pursuit and support it with practices of friendship and hospitality, I’m not sure it will seem viable to many sexual minorities.”

He added, “The congregations that give me hope are ones where I see married people and single people, older people and younger people, all sharing meals and ministries and small groups together.”

Allison J. Althoff is associate online editor at *Today’s Christian Woman*. Additional research by CT news intern Bryn Sandberg.



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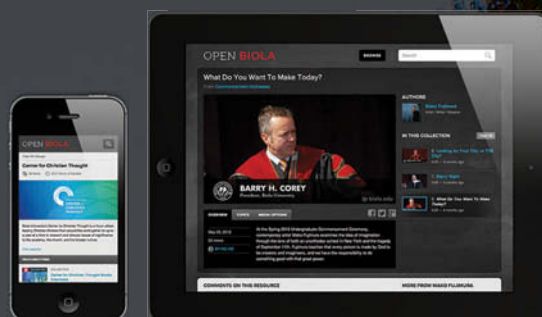
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WHAT IT'S LIKE TO FOLLOW CHRIST EMBEDDED IN MUSLIM CULTURE. AN INTERVIEW WITH A MUSLIM FOLLOWER OF ISA.

By Gene Daniels

CAN PEOPLE FROM OTHER RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS genuinely follow Jesus without becoming “Christians”? The question is a point of much dispute within today’s missions world. Those who follow Jesus yet don’t formally express Christian faith are said to belong to *insider movements*. And no insider movement has received more attention than Muslims who embrace Christ yet stay within their Islamic community. “Insiders” are hard to access due to cultural, geographic, and linguistic barriers. As a result, many Christians have taken positions on insider movements without ever having met or spoken with someone who belongs to one. In the following exclusive interview, we hear from just such an insider.

The following is the synthesis of two interviews conducted in 2011 with “Abu Jaz,” a key leader in a movement that describes itself as the People of the Gospel. This group represents several thousand Muslims in eastern Africa who have converted to faith in Christ during the past decade, but who have remained in their Muslim communities. Abu Jaz is married and has three children. He started following *Isa al Masih* (“Jesus the Messiah”) as the Savior 18 years ago.

The interview was conducted by “Gene Daniels,” a missionary in the Muslim community for over a decade, who has published many articles in missionary journals. *Christianity Today* has verified the authenticity of the interviewer and interviewee, whose real names are withheld so that the work of the People of the Gospel will be protected.

Describe your conversion to Christ.

One night the only food my wife and I had was a small portion of macaroni. My wife prepared it very nicely. Then one of her friends knocked on the door. I told myself, *The macaroni is not sufficient for even the two of us, so how will it be enough for three of us?* But because we have no other custom, we opened the door, and she came in to eat with us.

While we were eating, the macaroni started to multiply; it became full in the bowl. I suspected that something was wrong with my eyes, so I started rubbing them. I thought maybe my wife hid some macaroni under the small table, so I checked, but there was nothing. My wife and I looked at each other, but because the guest was there we said nothing.

Afterward I lay down on the bed, and as I slept, Isa came to me and asked me, "Do you know who multiplied the macaroni?" I said, "I don't know." He said, "I am Isa al Masih. If you follow me, not only the macaroni but your life will be multiplied."

He didn't tell me that he was God; he didn't tell me that he died on behalf of me; he didn't say, "I am the Son of God." He didn't talk to me about any complicated theological issues. He only told me that if I followed him, he would multiply my life. At that time, I was very happy if he only multiplied the macaroni like he did that day. I didn't understand what he meant

when he said that my life would be multiplied. Now I understand what that means. But at that time, I accepted him simply as the "lord of macaroni."

Much like the crowds in the Gospels who accepted him as "lord of bread."

Yes, I just accepted him as one who satisfied my needs. That day I understood that because Allah loved me, Isa came to my home.

When I think back now, the kingdom of God came to my home. Jesus said, "[I]f I cast out demons . . . the kingdom . . . has come upon you" (Luke 11:20, NASB). Any miracle that takes place by Isa al Masih speaks of the kingdom of God. It was not because I was poor that Isa came to my home; there are many poor. It is not because he wanted to multiply my macaroni. Maybe there might be other people who can multiply macaroni, like magic. So what is the purpose? Isa al Masih came to my home with the kingdom of God. He didn't completely explain theological issues, he only said, "If you will follow."

I went to an [evangelical] church after that, and I faced a cultural challenge as a Muslim. Everything was different—their way of worship, the way they sang songs, the way they danced. Nothing was familiar to me.

I have my own expression of worship. When it comes to greetings, I say, *As-salaam 'alaykum* ("Peace be upon you"), and I expect people to reply, *Wa 'alaykum Salaam wa rahmatu l-laahi wa barakaatuh* ("Peace to you and may God's mercy and blessings be upon you"). And we Muslims have a way of shaking hands. But in the church, it was totally different.

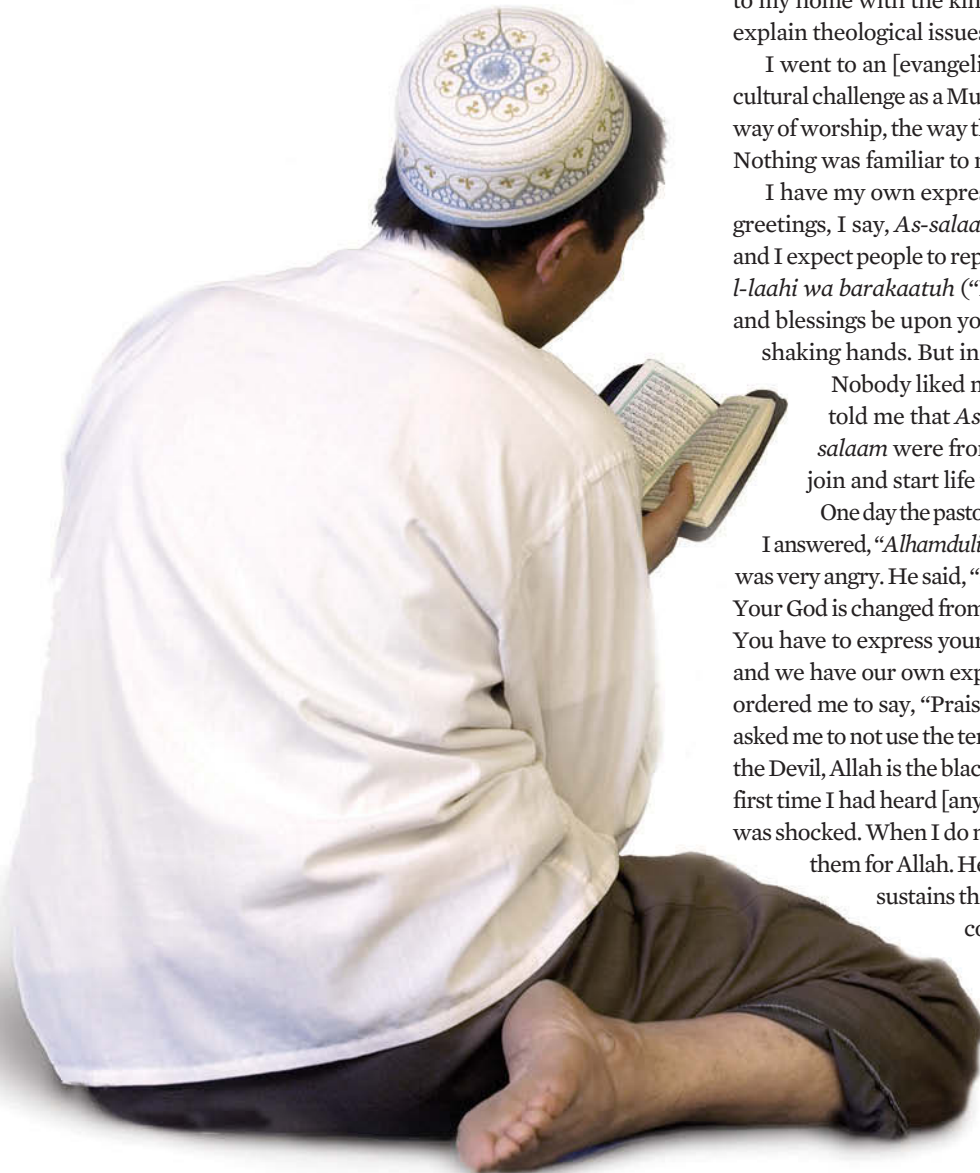
Nobody liked my expressions. Brothers and sisters told me that *As-salaam 'alaykum* and *Wa 'alaykum salaam* were from the Devil, so it was hard for me to join and start life with members of the church.

One day the pastor came to me and said, "How are you?"

I answered, "*Alhamdulillah!*" ("Praise be to God!"). The pastor was very angry. He said, "No, brother! No more *Alhamdulillah*. Your God is changed from *Allah* to *God* [using the tribal name]. You have to express your thanksgiving to God as a Christian, and we have our own expression of thanksgiving to God." He ordered me to say, "Praise the Lord" and "Praise to God." He asked me to not use the term *Allah* because Allah is evil, Allah is the Devil, Allah is the black stone, Allah is an idol. That was the first time I had heard [anyone say] that Allah is an idol or evil. I was shocked. When I do my spiritual duties, I think I am doing

them for Allah. He is the one who created the universe, sustains the universe, and judges the universe. I couldn't in my mind imagine that Allah is an idol or evil.

The next day the pastor asked, "How are you?" I wanted to replace his words with my own *Alhamdulillah*, but since the pastor warned me not to, I didn't. I tried to say, "Praise the Lord," or "Praise to God," but for



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33 years I had never used these words or the tribal name for God, and it was difficult to do so. So I stayed [in the church] without saying *Alhamdulillah* for more than three months. I simply said, "I am fine." I wanted to express my gratitude to Allah, but because of their understanding [of the term], I suppressed it.

Then I started questioning the justice of God. I asked him, "God, you are the one who put me in a Muslim culture; it was not my choice. They don't allow me to express [my praise] in the congregation. When they hear Islamic terminologies, they immediately rebuke me, so I prefer to keep silent. You like the Orthodox culture, you like the traditional African culture, you like Jewish culture, you like the European culture, you like cultures of other people groups, but you dislike the Muslims. So you are not just."

This stayed with me for two years. But finally, because I had no other alternative, I completely accepted the evangelical cultural context, and I dissolved all of my Islamic cultural identity. No more Islamic terms; [you could say] that in my context I became circumcised. Then people finally accepted me as a believer, but it isolated me from my own Muslim community.

Did the church accept you when you abandoned your Islamic identity?

When I changed my culture they thought I had finally become a believer; before that they did not consider me one. When I changed my culture to become like them, they even clapped their hands and said, "Now Abu Jaz has become a believer." But I had already believed for two years.

I went to an [evangelical] church, and I faced a cultural challenge as a Muslim. Everything was different—their way of worship, the way they sang songs, the way they danced. Nothing was familiar to me.

After some time, I had the chance to go to a Bible college. While I studied there, I learned the difference between the supracultural substance of the Word of God and the cultural form that expresses it. Then my question was answered, [and I understood] that God really does love everyone. God opened my eyes to understand that all cultures are equal in his eyes. It is not holy contexts, only holy texts.

From that time, 1998 by the European calendar, I started to prepare myself to speak with my own community. In the Bible college, I discovered myself, and I wanted to restore my cultural identity again, the identity of my culture, not for the sake of the people, but to express myself and my faith in God. I went back and restored my former Islamic cultural identity. Then I rejoiced that God is just.

Still, even if I had theological and cultural challenges in the Christian community, I experienced love there, a love that was alive. The believers showed me and my wife kindness and love. So I praise God for these people.

But I understand the pain of Muslims. I understand what they fear. When they hear the Good News, they want to have Isa al Masih, but because they have been told that it is only

Christians who think about him, they reject him. But now we are not repeating the same mistake.

Talk a little about the theology of your movement.

We do not use systematic theology, even though I studied [it] in Bible college and understand how and when Christians developed different Christologies, for example. I know church history, and I know the creeds and when they started. The early church fathers faced external and internal challenges; they wrote the creeds to solve their own challenges, in their own contexts. So if [the] church fathers solved their own problems by finding answers in the Word of God, then the people who are working among the Muslims have to identify their own problems and even call councils to discuss the challenges and apologetic [issues] in these contexts.

How do you go about sharing the gospel in your context?

It is important to start [by asking], *What is the purpose of preaching the gospel?* We find our thinking in Acts 14:15, where Paul says, "We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them." So bringing the Good News to people is turning them back to their Creator God. Of course, we must do this in Isa, in Jesus, but we have to start just as Paul did, with the Creator God.

This is general revelation. If we destroy general revelation, there is no more special revelation. As far as I know, Paul directly addressed non-Jewish religions twice, and both times,

he started with general revelation but ended up with Jesus, the ultimate revelation of God, as the one appointed by God the Creator to save people. The Book of Acts tells us that. But to believers, in the Epistles, he taught them that Jesus is divine. No one can say Jesus is Lord without the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3).

Muslims believe there is a Creator of heaven and earth, and his name is Allah. If you tell a Muslim about the Creator of heaven and earth, but say that the Creator is not Allah, the Muslim will be very confused. What you are telling him is not good news.

If you believe that even Muslims have received general revelation, then you have to start there. If you don't believe this, you don't believe your own [evangelical] theology. But if you come to them with good news, [to] restore their relationship with the Creator God, then you have to receive the name they have for him, *Allah*. If we say that the one they know as Allah is not God, we are not [speaking] against the religion of Islam, or Muhammad or Qur'an, but against the doctrine of general revelation. The missionary must first receive the name of the Creator God from the people, and then they have heavenly authority to give the people the name of the Savior, Isa al Masih.

How is this different from simply believing in the Muslim prophet Isa, as in the Qur'an?

Muslims believe that Isa is a prophet and messenger of Allah, but that he is superseded by Muhammad, the prophet of Islam. According to Islam, salvation is based on the teaching of Muhammad. But you still have something to start with in Islam. You start with their limited Christology and Christ's role in the kingdom of God, mainly his role in the Day of Judgment. Muslims start to think from Islamic Christology, but they end up with Isa [as the one] who overcame the power of death. They progressively understand him, from prophet and messenger to Savior and then to Lord. But this takes time and the Holy Spirit, as it also did for Peter.

But while they are slowly coming to understand who Jesus is, why don't you also slowly bring them into the Christian church?

It is possible for Muslim-background believers to join the existing church. But the evangelical church in my country represents a mixture of two religious forms, the Coptic Church and traditional religion.

If I say to Muslims, "Come to this church with me," I am inviting them to a very strange thing. Also, this is saying to them that they do not deserve a church that connects with their community. This is why we need a Muslim-focused church-planting strategy, because it will produce a church that uses the terms and forms from their Muslim community, not something from other religious communities.

Many Christians in the West would agree that Muslim-focused evangelistic strategy is needed. But many of them also feel that a Muslim-focused church is going too far.

Why is it too far? All people have a church-planting strategy that fits their religious context. Why is there a [problem] when we come to Islam? So we ask, "Do Muslims deserve a church that fits their cultural context?" We are not trying to bring them into the already [existing] evangelical church. They should have a church that reflects their culture. Then we can say that we have an indigenous church, one that grows from the soil of the Muslim community. To "hook" one person into the evangelical church is possible. But the question is how we can fish with a net.

When you are talking to one person you [are also] talking to his community. He represents the whole community. What we say to one will go back to all the rest. So we want to reach a whole community and bring community transformation. The content of church is from heaven, but the form of the church should be from the ground, the culture. The church should



reflect Muslim culture, not Muslim theology.

How do the people in your movement view Muhammad? Is there confusion?

First, we cannot rule out syncretism at the beginning of a new believer's life. The purpose of discipleship is to separate their old beliefs from their new beliefs. So when they put their faith in Jesus, they may have at the same time Muhammad in their heart. But when they start to pray in the name of Isa for their own need, they experience joy, assurance, and peace. And when they pray in the name of Jesus and find people healed and demons cast out, they completely stop thinking about Muhammad. It is a process of the Holy Spirit.

[We should] categorize people in how they relate to Jesus: Where are these people, and where is Jesus in their life? We should ask, "Does this person accept Isa as Lord of their life?"

But what about Muhammad?

Before [they believe in Isa], Muslims acknowledge Muhammad as the final prophet of God. Then we tell them about Isa al Masih. They already know that Isa al Masih was a prophet that raised people from the dead. They know that Isa al Masih did miracles and that he will come as the sign of the Day of Judgment.

Even though they know all this, they are not intentionally thinking about Isa; they are thinking about Muhammad. But when we tell them the gospel, they begin to think about Isa intentionally as the one who will save them from the Day of Judgment, from Satan, from antichrist, from death.

At that point, they mix Muhammad with Isa al Masih. Before, Isa was not the issue. Muhammad was the issue. But when they hear about Isa, they start to bring Isa up to the level of Muhammad. Before, Muhammad was the one who

If the Muslim community thinks the new believers “are not Christians and are not Muslims,” what do the new believers themselves think? What is their self-identity?

When they first come to believe in Isa, of course they still think [of themselves] as Muslims. What else could they think? We are not telling them they are now Christians.

But when they understand the gospel more clearly, they don't want to have an Islamic religious identity. Yet they also do not want to let go of their cultural identity as Muslims, which naturally includes forms from their previous way of life and worship.

Where is Jesus in the life of the people in your movement, the People of the Gospel?

When people want to know our faith articles, we can tell them. But when it comes to individual people, we cannot say so easily,

We need a Muslim-focused church-planting strategy, a church that uses the terms and forms from their Muslim community, not something from other religious communities.

controlled their life. But when they hear the Good News of the kingdom of God, they start to think about Isa. Now syncretism has started; before there was no syncretism. If missionaries don't ever want problems with syncretism, then just leave them with Muhammad [grins].

But syncretism did not start with us. It started even in Paul's time. That was the reason Paul wrote the Epistle to the Galatians. It is not [an] issue because we are Muslims; syncretism starts because people normally start with their own religious background. When people start to think about Isa intentionally, the Holy Spirit has room to lead them into all truth, even if they first mix Isa and Muhammad. The Holy Spirit through time will glorify Isa al Masih in their lives.

So after the new birth, the Holy Spirit begins to open their minds to understand more fully the Messiah.

Yes, of course. Before they believe in Jesus, the Holy Spirit will convict them about sin, righteousness, and judgment. As soon as they give their will to Jesus, they will receive the Holy Spirit and be born again and become a child of God. Then the Holy Spirit starts to live in them. Because the Holy Spirit lives in them, he will lead them to all [the] truth of Jesus. Then the Holy Spirit will give them revelation, and they will say that Jesus is Lord.

The [rest of the community] have started to think now, and they say, “*Lial lial rasul Isa*”—“These are the people of the messenger Isa.” They'll say, “Who are these people? These people are not Christians. These people are not Muslims. Who are they? Let's go and hear what they are thinking.” We explain as much as possible from the Bible. People ask us, “Who is Isa for you?” Our answer is, “He is the Word of Allah.” Then we quote from the Qur'an, but explain what the “Word of Allah” means from a biblical perspective.

because they are not all on the same level. We find some people who say Jesus is God, some who understand that Jesus is the Savior. Others say he is the Word of Allah, without explanation, as they are struggling to understand what that means. Sometimes they understand Isa, other times they don't. So we have to instruct them.

We have to teach them from the things that they already know. For example, some people may not [understand] if I tell them that Jesus died on their behalf. Islam has a different theology of sin; they don't accept that Jesus died on their behalf. It is *true* that he died on their behalf, but it is not the only benefit [of Christ's death].

When he died on the cross, he defeated death and the one who owned the power of death, Satan. And because God raised Jesus from the dead, he was appointed by God as a judge on the Day of Judgment, and the Savior from the Day of Judgment. The Cross is the answer for every [issue] in life. It is the solution regarding our relation to God, Satan, sin, death, and so on.

It is the evangelist's responsibility to choose which benefit of the Cross is the answer for the spiritual needs a Muslim feels. Then gradually the Holy Spirit will explain the benefit of the Cross as it relates to their sin.

Muslims are afraid of evil spirits; they are afraid of the Day of Judgment. They are afraid of the Devil. I have a message from the kingdom of God that addresses all of these spiritual needs. So we are using the Muslim way of thinking about Isa, even if it is incomplete. If Muslims understand even one of these, they will call to Isa, and the Holy Spirit can lead them to understand more benefits of the Cross.

There are lots of opportunities in Islam; there are also lots of challenges. But the opportunities are bigger than the challenges. We must remember that it is not we who are bringing God to the Muslim people. He was already here. ☩

THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF

For generations, Islam and Hinduism have had

THE DRAMATIC GROWTH of Christianity in Asia, Africa, and Latin America is summed up in one striking statistic: If current trends continue, by the year 2050, six countries in the world will each have 100 million Christians. And only one of the six—the United States—will be located in the industrialized West.

Christianity is growing in places where other religions once reigned. In these contexts, the very word *Christian* can carry strong connotations of Western culture, and with it imperialism and colonialism. Because of this, many new movements to Christ are rethinking the nature of church, giving rise to “insider movements” or “churchless Christianity.” Members of such movements trust in Christ as their Lord and Savior, but choose to remain within their Hindu or Muslim home cultures.

In his book *Churchless Christianity*, theologian Herbert E. Hoefler profiled such insider movements among people living in rural Tamil Nadu, India, and its capital, Chennai (formerly Madras). These are devoted followers of Christ who have not joined a visible Christian church and, indeed, remain identified with the Hindu community. They call themselves *Jesu bhakta*—devotees of Jesus. (Typically, Hindus accept people in their community who worship Jesus, even exclusively, within the larger framework of Hinduism.)

Jesu bhakta maintain their cultural identity as Hindus. Estimated to number 160,000 people, they do not belong to any visible, formal church, and do not call themselves Christians, because of the strong cultural association surrounding the term.

Similar and better-known movements have emerged among people in Islamic cultures. And it’s no small thing: It involves 200,000 or more Muslims who worship Jesus, known as *Isa*, in small fellowships in homes. There is no accurate assessment of how many of these fellowships exist across the world.

Followers of *Isa*, like the one interviewed on page 22,

note that the word *Muslim* simply means “one who submits” to God, and that Jesus Christ is the ultimate example of such submission.

ONGOING DEBATE

Insider movements raise important questions about the nature of faith in Christ. Can a Hindu or a Muslim accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior but not join some expression of the visible local church, yet still

be a “true” Christian? Is it important for followers of Christ to use or accept the label *Christian* in order to belong to him? What does baptism signify? Is it fundamentally a public profession of personal faith, or does it also require participating in a visible worshiping community?

In other words: Can someone say “yes” to Jesus and “no” to the existing local expressions of the church?

The debate has persisted for some 20 years. Missiologist John Travis helped give shape to the debate with his foundational report, “The C1 to C6 Spectrum: A Practical Tool for Defining Six Types of ‘Christ-centered Communities’ (‘C’) Found in the Muslim Context,” published in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* in 1998. In it, Travis correctly noted that Muslim-background believers, known as MBBS, are not all alike, but contextualize their new faith in Christ along a spectrum. The letter *C* reflects differences based on three main areas: the language of worship, the cultural and/or religious forms used in both public

life and worship, and self-identity as a Muslim or as a Christian. The spectrum runs like this:

C-1 refers to a “traditional church using outsider language.” Outsider language is a language originating outside Islamic culture. These believers call themselves Christians.

C-2 refers to a “traditional church using insider language.” This church is the same as a C-1 community but worships in the language of the Muslim population (such as Arabic or Turkish).

C-3 refers to “contextualized Christ-centered communities



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INSIDER MOVEMENTS



believers—on the inside. By Timothy C. Tennent

using insider language and religiously neutral cultural forms.” These churches adopt the language of the surrounding Islamic community and embrace nonreligious cultural forms, such as folk music, dress, and artwork. A C-3 church would filter out any religious forms specifically associated with Islam. The majority of members are MBBS.

C-4 refers to “contextualized Christ-centered communities using insider language and biblically permissible cultural and Islamic forms.” These churches adapt Islamic forms as long as Scripture does not explicitly forbid them. C-4 communities accept Islamic terms for God (*Allah*), Islamic prayer (*salat*), and the Gospels (*Injil*). Most C-4 churches follow the Islamic practices of avoiding pork and abstaining from alcohol. C-4 believers normally call themselves “followers of *Isa al Masih*” (Jesus the Messiah) or members of the *Isaya Umma* (“Community of Jesus”). The Islamic community would not view C-4 followers as Muslims.

C-5 refers to “Christ-centered communities of ‘Messianic Muslims’ who have accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior.” These followers of *Isa* remain legally and socially within Islam. The Muslim community views them as Muslims. They reject or, if possible, reinterpret features of Islamic theology that are clearly incompatible with biblical faith.

C-6 refers to “small Christ-centered communities of secret/underground believers.” These are believers living under the threat of persecution and retaliation from the government or their family or community if others knew they followed Jesus. They worship Christ secretly. If discovered, C-6 believers would almost certainly face prison or death.

Most mission workers today accept C-4 as the most appropriate form of contextualization. The current debate has largely centered on C-5 believers. They are not actually Muslim-background believers, but *Muslim believers*. They retain their Muslim identity. They

regard Muhammad as a prophet—not in the “final” sense that Muslims claim, of course, but as a man who led the peoples of Arabia out of polytheism and into monotheism.

The current debate about C-5 believers centers on five key issues. First is biblical precedence. Scholars seriously debate if the Acts 15 Jerusalem Council decision regarding Gentiles applies to insider movements and, if so, how does it apply to both the cultural and religious identity of Gentiles.

Second, scholars debate the relationship of personal salvation to identifying with the larger church and other Christians. And they wonder how much a true Christian movement needs to confess historical Christian doctrines in order to truly be Christian.

Third, there are many who ask if it is ethical to encourage followers of Jesus to retain their Muslim self-identity—the key difference between C-4 and C-5.

Fourth, scholars debate whether C-5 groups are a new phenomenon, or whether they are merely an extension of issues rooted in the Protestant Reformation.

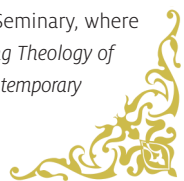
Finally, scholars debate whether C-5 represents a valid, permanent movement in the Islamic or Hindu world, or whether they are an acceptable transitional bridge that will eventually lead Muslims and Hindus into explicit Christian identity.

Amid the debates, one thing is clear: Christ-loving movements are

growing in countries where a traditional church has been absent or long gone. Both theologians and on-the-ground leaders will need to reflect with care on the C-1 to C-6 debate as the gospel takes root in new contexts.



Timothy C. Tennent is president of Asbury Theological Seminary, where he teaches world Christianity, and coauthor of *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues* (Baker Academic).



JESUS SAVES, RELIGION DOESN'T

Insider followers of Jesus may not have changed religions,
but their lives have been changed by Christ.

By John J. Travis

OVER THE PAST HALF CENTURY, many Hindus, Muslims, and other peoples of the major religions have put their faith in Jesus, often as a result of miraculous encounters with God through dreams, healings, or the reading of Scripture.

These new Jesus followers, coming from different countries and ethnicities, express their faith in a variety of ways. One such way is called a “Jesus movement” or “insider movement,” where families and groups follow Jesus as Savior and Lord while remaining within the socioreligious community of their birth.

What we are now seeing was predicted years ago by evangelical leaders such as Henry Riggs and Virginia Cobb. How should evangelical leaders today view such movements?

My family and I lived for more than 20 years in a Muslim-majority country. Most of those years were in a close-knit neighborhood where our children’s “aunties” and “uncles” were our Muslim neighbors and friends. We were privileged to see a Jesus movement firsthand in that society, which actually began while we were out of the country. Through this movement, several of our long-time Muslim friends came to faith in Jesus. In recent years, we have had the chance to provide training in prayer for healing in a variety of Muslim settings, sometimes at the invitation of groups of Muslims who follow Jesus. In this way, we have heard many of their testimonies of love and devotion for Jesus.

The particular movement that we witnessed began when God touched a woman called “Fatimah.” Before we met her, she had been reading a copy of the New Testament, given by trusted friends,

for nearly 10 years. During that time, her son was miraculously healed when he was prayed for in the name of *Isa al Masih* (Jesus the Messiah). Fatimah was drawn to the Jesus revealed in the New Testament.

She assumed that because she was a Muslim, she could not become his follower. Then one day, she spoke with a wise Asian pastor who understood her dilemma. He said, “Fatimah, you can receive Jesus now, right where you are. You are saved by Jesus, not religion.”

With joy, she received this good news. She felt the Spirit of God enter her heart, and the weight of sin lift from her life. Her mother, along with her son who had been healed, also embraced Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Fatimah became convinced that God had called her to bring the good news of Jesus to her Muslim family and friends. Soon, Jesus-centered groups began to form, gathering regularly for prayer, fellowship, and the study of the New Testament. Now, years later, these small groups continue to multiply. They have not “changed religions,” but their changed lives demonstrate the reality of Jesus, right inside the religious communities of their birth.

Several characteristics about these groups stand out, as well as others we have seen elsewhere, that should be of importance to evangelicals. First, they accept Jesus as the Savior through whom their sins are forgiven.

Second, there is clear evidence of the work of the Spirit as they obey the Bible and grow in the lordship of Jesus.

Third, though they are not called Christians, they are spiritually and biblically part of the church universal put there by Christ because they are one in him. (Many I have

met have deep friendships with Christians and often make statements such as, “Any person who truly follows Jesus is my brother or sister.”)

Fourth, they affirm most aspects of their Muslim heritage, simply seeing it as their natural identity. Yet they clearly reform certain teachings and practices that are not in line with the New Testament. This makes them different from others around them, and many have already endured more suffering for the name of Jesus than most Western evangelicals will ever face.

How should evangelicals best respond to such movements? We should be thankful. Many who might have never had the chance otherwise are now discovering the same wonderful Jesus we know.

Next, we should be prayerful. Though they remain part of their families and communities, these Jesus followers are still seen as “different” or even unacceptable by some, and many have suffered persecution for the name of Jesus. (This is not the time to widely publish details of these movements, thus exposing people on the ground to unnecessary risk.)

Additionally, we should be careful. We could find ourselves opposing what God is doing, when God moves in ways we do not expect. Those trying to pull up what they perceive as tares may in fact be destroying maturing wheat.

Finally, we should be biblical. They, just as we, are saved by grace through faith in Jesus alone, not by religious affiliation. 

John J. Travis is an affiliate faculty member at Fuller Seminary and has worked cross-culturally in the Muslim world for more than 25 years.

TOO MUCH CONTEXT MAY HARM

I learned the limits in contextualizing
the gospel for Muslims.

By Phil Parshall

FRUSTRATION. FATIGUE. FAILURE. These emotions overwhelmed me as I stumbled toward the finish line of completing my first ministry term in Bangladesh in 1967.

And exactly what did I have to report to our friends and churches—faithful supporters for five seemingly interminable years? I could talk about living without electricity and running water in a small village, or about learning a language for which my lungs produced a torrent of air when only a gentle puff was required.

But what about John 15? The assurance of “much fruit” had prompted this 24-year-old zealot to take his lovely bride of nine months to a remote village where not one convert from Islam had ever existed. Fruit? What fruit? Not one believer. Not even one inquirer to show for my marathon of perseverance.

After years of even more effort, our team of 21 missionaries embarked into the unknown in 1975. As far as we could research, no one was attempting to design and implement a contextualized way to evangelize Muslims.

We were living in a country of tens of millions of Muslims—but only 100 had come to Christ over the past 50 years. Most of these believers were extracted from their community and financially dependent on the small national church, heavily subsidized by foreigners.

The traditional Bangladeshi church was and is an amalgam of Western and Hindi influences. *Iswar*, a polytheistic word for “God,” was the word missionary William Carey chose in the early 1800s while translating the Bible into Bengali. To Hindus, who compose about 10 percent of the Bangladesh population, *Iswar* is a positive bridge word into the Christian faith. But to Muslims, who

compose the other 90 percent, it is abhorrent to think of God in terms of multiplicity and idol worship.

No faithful Muslim would ever enter a mosque wearing shoes. They cleanse their feet, hands, and face prior to worship. Sitting on the floor and prostrating themselves are acts of deep humility before the sovereign God of the universe. Singing and musical instruments are forbidden in mosques. They chant as the preferred mode of giving adoration to the “Great God.” The few Muslims who venture into the Bangladeshi church find the Hindu-influenced forms so repugnant that they are rarely able to process the message.

Our team commenced a two-year effort that centered on research, analysis, experimentation, and evaluation. Our goal was to be biblically orthodox and maximally attractive to our Muslim audience. We adopted some forms common to Muslim worship. But we were always cautious about accepting rituals whose form is inextricably linked to a heretical message. For instance, the prayer (*salat*) postures are filled with verses from the Qur’an. We didn’t adopt this. At the same time, we used biblical forms of prayer such as kneeling, raised hands, and prostration.

Perhaps the most significant assistance we received was a translation of the Bengali New Testament into Muslim-friendly terminology. Viggo Olsen of Association of Baptists for World Evangelism, along with his wife, Joan, birthed this masterful text, low-cost and packaged in a Muslim-friendly design. Bangladeshis affiliated with Operation Mobilization sold the New Testaments by the thousands throughout the country.

Years later, what about that John 15 fruit?

Today, tens of thousands of Muslims in Bangladesh have become followers of *Isa*. And in our fruitless village of the 1960s, more than 600 have been baptized.

But by the early 1980s, other committed evangelicals felt they should push further into a new evangelism effort: the insider movements. Actually, we have always considered our approach as insider, but we have strived to remain within biblical boundaries. I have significant concerns about these newer attempts in contextualization:

- There is a tendency to encourage converts to remain in mosques and perform the attendant prayers.
- New believers are still known as Muslims, and without further identification, such as “Muslim, follower of Jesus.”
- To some, it is still permissible to recite the creed, “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his Messenger.”

The latest controversy (one that *CT* covered extensively in 2011) relates to the Muslim’s misunderstanding of the term “Son of God.” A number of vernacular translations have translated this phrase to *Isa al Masih*, which is “Jesus the Messiah,” or an equivalent. Not all insiders use each of the above. Contexts vary as do the opinions of missionaries and mission boards. But how much contextualization is too much? Missionaries of good will have different opinions and strategies. Prayerful respect is essential to resolve these issues. ⊕

Phil Parshall is a missionary with SIM and author of *Muslim Evangelism: Contemporary Approaches to Contextualization* (IVP).

He spent 44 years in ministry to Muslims in Asia.



Rehabbing Hope: Lisa Johanon's community development group just bought this forsaken apartment complex in Detroit's Piety Hill neighborhood. The city wants to invest \$9 million here over the next three years.

Detroit's list
of maladies is long.
But some Christians' commitment
to its renewal is longer.

Faith *in a* Fallen Empire

By Katelyn Beaty



THERE IS A SECTION of Woodward Avenue—the spinal street of Detroit that runs 27 miles up to Pontiac, Michigan—that looks like a patch of quilt stitched in from Europe. Rows of neo-Gothic churches glisten in the dappled October sun, their limestone stairs and multicolored glass panes reflecting the prosperity of former times. There's Metropolitan United Methodist, built in 1926 in ochre granite imported from Massachusetts. There's the Cathedral of the Most Blessed Sacrament, finished in 1930 to seat the archdiocese of Detroit, its wrought-iron gates preserving the church's gleam over the past century. St. John's (formerly North Woodward Congregational) boasts an unusual Gothic red-and-white brick design, as well as the honor of being the first black church on Woodward Avenue. Together these and other churches earned this stretch of Woodward the name Piety Hill. It's a neighborhood that once pulsed with spiritual vibrancy and stability in a city rocked by economic and social upheaval.

"See that church?" says Piety Hill resident Lisa Johanon. She points to a Gothic beauty whose blood-red doors promise life inside. "For \$125,000, it's yours."

Like many churches on this street, Woodward Avenue Presbyterian (later Abyssinia) watched its upper-middle-class members, both black and white, leave the city of Detroit starting in the 1950s. After a series of mergers, expensive repairs, and a pastor's death in 2005, the church got locked in court battles. Its leaky roof ate away its wooden floors, and vandals scrapped its pipe organ in 2009. While it served as the set of a recent Tyler Perry movie, it is foreclosed and in ruins.

Johanon knows Abyssinia and the other churches well. Her nonprofit emerged from a partnership between seven of them 18 years ago. Central Detroit Christian (CDC) Community Development Group was launched to serve the poor in the Boston-Edison Historic District, the onetime neighborhood of Henry Ford. But all the founding pastors have left; two of the churches have closed. "We've just faced such random, massive abandonment that it's unreal," says Johanon.

Living in Piety Hill for 25 years, Johanon and her husband have faced massive personal loss as well. In 1989, they paid \$29,000 for a 100-year-old home charmed with all the original woodwork and a built-in fireplace. They watched its value climb (it reached \$122,000 by 2006) but, like countless other U.S. homeowners, watched it plummet as swiftly as it grew. Fellow Detroit development groups have dwindled from 36 in 2007 to 7 in 2012. About 103 vacant homes, many of them gutted and turned into drug or

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prostitution hubs, pock the eight blocks around the CDC's offices.

"We came here because it was one of the most devastated areas," says Johanon, who stayed even when her former employer, Youth for Christ, ended its Detroit ministry in the early 1990s. "We worked for 14 years only to have the economy fall out in 2008. Now we're in worse shape than we were 18 years ago. If that doesn't give you cause for pause, I don't know what does. . . . Yet you press on."

Many Christians whom *CT* interviewed for this story explained their commitment to Detroit using an analogy from church history. (This story focuses on Christians in central Detroit; our online reporting will cover the work of Christians in Detroit's suburbs.) When the plague ravaged Rome in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, inciting an exodus of citizens, many Christians rushed in to care for the sick and dying, joining the many who were already there, refusing to leave. As church father Dionysius wrote in A.D. 260, "Most of the Christians in our city showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves . . . drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pain." (Rodney Stark famously argues that such outlandish compassion helped spur Christianity's meteoric rise throughout the empire.)

This is the story of Christians like Johanon—Christians whose faithful presence in a ravaged city is sowing seeds of hope in the shell of a once-towering empire.

A CITY ON THE MOVE

To grasp just how radical it is to stay in Detroit, one first must understand how un-radical it is to leave.

Detroit (from *le detroit du Lac Erie*, "the strait of Lake Erie") was settled by the French nearly a century before America's founding. After the Erie Canal opened in 1825, Detroit became a major producer and exporter of goods such as stoves, railcars, and steam ships, and grew into a global industrial center just decades after the Civil War. When the automobile and, with it, Ford's assembly line debuted in 1898, both drew incredible wealth to the city as well as new residents who could secure a middle-class existence doing factory work. That included waves of black families from the South, looking to escape Jim Crow-era injustices.

"Detroit was one of the few U.S. cities where African Americans could become wealthy as blue-collar workers," says Harvey Carey,



Lasting Leadership: Pastor Stacey Foster has stayed in Detroit for 25 years despite opportunities elsewhere. 'Ministry in Detroit seems sexy, but unless you're called, you're not going to last.' Above, one of the 94,000 vacant homes in Detroit, recently bought by CDC.



senior pastor of Citadel of Faith and a Detroit resident for nine years. "When the auto industry began to boom, people flooded from the South and were able to build an unbelievable lifestyle here."

The lure of prosperity drew more than half a million new residents in the 1920s alone, making the Motor City the fourth-largest U.S. city in population, behind Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago. By 1929, Detroit had burgeoned to 1.6 million people, many of whom were immigrants or first-generation residents. In 1950, its population peaked at 1.8 million.

Not surprisingly, Detroit was also one of the first cities to take up federal plans for an interstate highway. New roadways allowed home and business developers to build outside the city limits, which "sow[ed] the seeds of the suburbanization and sprawl that eventually would empty the city core," notes journalist Scott Martelle in *Detroit: A Biography*. As the city's population grew and cars became commonplace, more residents and businesses relocated to surrounding suburbs.

But underlying prejudices played a major role in their departure. Deed restrictions in many Detroit suburbs barred selling or reselling property to blacks. Racial and ethnic tensions simmered in factories

'Detroit's gone through some tremendous transformation. We're hoping that better days are coming. If we don't all have hope, there is no point in being here.'

~ Lisa Johanon, founder, Central Detroit Christian Community Development Group

and mixed neighborhoods, bubbling up into a riot in 1943 that killed 34 over three days. Paradise Valley, Detroit's oldest, most dynamic black neighborhood, was demolished in the early 1960s to expand the Chrysler Freeway. By this time, auto-industry jobs had begun moving overseas. Then a police raid on a party the morning of Sunday, July 23, 1967, ignited a torrent of brutality and vandalism that lasted five days and took 43 lives. The "riot"—or "uprising"—was the nail that sealed many Detroiters' long-ago decision to leave for supposedly safer neighborhoods, better schools, and shorter commutes.

"Businesses left, the tax base left, and what was left was Detroiters to lead a city," says Carey. "[Today] you have about 700,000 people

GM and Chrysler Group, he was also in part bailing out Detroit.

The bailout seems to have helped, as much as one can. This year saw the strongest domestic auto market since 2007, and "General Motors is alive!" became a catchphrase in Obama's re-election campaign. But Detroit's unemployment rate hovers around 18 percent—about double Michigan's and over double the country's. And the numbers don't reflect the realities for many on-the-ground Christians.

'ONE BITE AT A TIME'

"Detroit is my *esperanza*—my hope and new beginning," says Stacey Foster, lead pastor of Life Changers International Ministry for 17 years. A onetime drug addict who came to Christ through Teen Challenge, Foster relocated to Detroit from Florida to pastor one of three then-new Assemblies of God churches. "Our church used to be 60 percent black and 40 percent white and Hispanic," says Foster, 49. "Now I can think of one Hispanic family and no whites. The job factor and fear factor since 2008 have driven people out."

Economic development—"from welfare to work"—is one of Life Changers' ministry pillars, and the church plans to buy up and develop vacant properties along Wyoming Street, where it still worships. But Foster is contributing to Detroit's common good far beyond the church walls.

Foster and his wife first lived in the city when they came to Detroit in 1987, but moved to a southern suburb six years later when their two children were young. Then Foster read John Perkins, the grandfather of the Christian community development movement.

Around the same time, Johanon's CDC had bought a gutted home from the city, and was busy rehabbing it. The Fosters decided to buy it from CDC and have lived there since 2003.

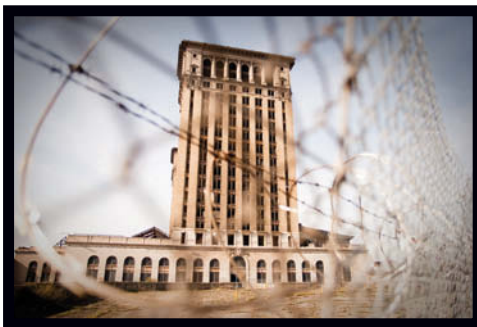
"God has called me to minister to a broken city," says Foster, who has received job offers from the Willow Creek Association and Compassion International. "God has not forsaken this place, and

neither will I." He ministers to those hurt by Detroit realities: the gang and homicide squads of the Detroit Police Department. Four hours a week since 1999, he counsels officers who face longer hours, pay cuts, torn marriages, and numbed spirits from the routine violence. Yet Foster thinks the city needs police and emergency crews living in the city now more than ever.

"The city of Detroit made a mistake a couple years ago when they let policemen and firefighters live outside the city limits," says Foster.



Slow Change: Ernest Cleaves, an officer on Detroit's special ops squad, moved back to the city in 2011. He says crime has gone down in recent months. Right, the Michigan Central Station, an icon of decay, is being restored; the lights came back on last October.



paying taxes for a city sized for 2 million." And the tax base may shrink further: An October 2012 *Detroit News* poll found that 40 percent of those 700,000 current residents plan to leave Detroit in the next five years. Lack of jobs, struggling public schools, crime, and dire reports from national media understandably have driven away would-be taxpayers.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Big Three—Ford, Chrysler, and General Motors—faced intense global competition and soaring fuel prices, and fewer working-class Detroiters looked to auto-industry wages for their livelihood. Detroit's security depended—some say too much—on the rise and fall of the U.S. auto industry. When President Obama made the contested decision in 2009 to lend \$80 billion to bail out

'We can't let businesses or the government be responsible for the soul of the city. That's what Detroit is known for—its soul.'

~Harvey Carey, pastor, Citadel of Faith

"It would be like having a mayor live outside the city."

One of Foster's neighbors, in fact, became the first police officer to return to the city under mayor Dave Bing's bid to lure officers back. Project 14, launched in 2011 and named after police code 14—"return to normal operations"—entices officers to move back by helping them with down payments. When Detroit native Ernest Cleaves heard about the program—especially that it meant a \$154,000 renovation by CDC to a lovely corner-lot home in Boston-Edison—he signed up.

"I signed the purchase agreement before even seeing the inside. Sometimes I look at it and still can't believe it's mine," says Cleaves, who joined the police squad's special operations unit in 2001. Since



he moved from a southern suburb in 2011, he says, neighbors tell him they feel safer and are more likely to stay. "I wanted to come back to help the city get better. The only way to do that is from the inside."

Perhaps no Detroit ministry knows this better than Johanon and CDC. The eight- by three-block area under its purview showcases the group's narrow but deep investment in central Detroit. Rehabbing homes is its cornerstone work. It uses federal funds to buy properties at public auctions, and recruits suburban Christians to install vinyl siding, replace stolen pipes, and complete other maintenance projects to restore the property. Then it locates families who need a home and can afford to maintain it. One Boston-Edison block alone features \$3 million in CDC investments. But CDC wisely does more than housing.

"So many [community development groups] put all their eggs in the one basket of housing," says Johanon. "When the housing market crashed . . . their construction loans and tax credits dried up, so their funding streams went away." CDC, on the other hand, boasts an array of local businesses: Peaches & Greens produce market, Higher Ground Landscaping, Restoration Warehouse home supply store, Solid Rock Property Management, and Cafe Sonshine, a "healthy

Planted: Like many young entrepreneurs, Margarita Barry sees new opportunity in Detroit—despite having one of her businesses robbed. 'Faith is what's keeping me here.'

soul food" restaurant. Together these add jobs and bring commercial value to Piety Hill. Their three neighborhood gardens named Faith, Hope, and Love will soon see another food venture, an aquaponics farm, in a veritable food desert. The CDC Farm and Fishery will raise tilapia in the basement of a onetime liquor store, and then use the fish excrement to fertilize a first-floor herb garden. (Johanon wanted to name it "Urban Herbs" but wondered if "herbs" carried the wrong connotation.)

Faith, Hope, and Love have all been put to rest for the winter, their beds harvested and ready to receive new life this spring.

"It's all about community transformation—how do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time," says Johanon. "That's how you create change. The little things add up to big things.

"Detroit's gone through some tremendous transformation. We're hoping that better days are coming. If we don't all have hope, there is no point in being here."

SOUL CITY

Glimmers of hope—economic hope, at least—have begun flickering throughout the Motor City. Start-ups pushing tech innovation and sustainability have flocked to Detroit, drawing young entrepreneurs from New York City and Silicon Valley. Stik.com moved its headquarters from San Francisco to the M@dison Building (purchased by billionaire Dan Gilbert) recently. A Whole Foods is slated to open in the hip Midtown area early this year.

Among these giants, young entrepreneurial Christians are joining Detroit's slow turnaround. Margarita Barry, a Detroit native, has at age 26 launched three start-ups: 71-Pop, a retail store that carries locally designed clothing and wares; Detroit Design Lab, a web development firm for local nonprofits; and I Am Young Detroit, a website that spotlights other entrepreneurial Detroiters and will this year begin offering them microgrants.

"I want to empower young people to pursue their passions within the city, so they're putting their dollars in the city and creating jobs," says Barry, who came back to Detroit in 2007 after earning her bachelor's degree in Ohio. "You don't have to be a Donald Trump to change Detroit."

Diallo Smith was "bent on making money" as a financial analyst in Houston when, he says, God intervened and redirected him to pastoral ministry. When he and his wife returned for a wedding in 2006, "we both felt God calling us back to Detroit," says the pastor of Awakenings, which meets at the Detroit School of Arts in Midtown. But Smith found that "newer churches in urban centers [face] sustainability issues, because economic realities are different than in the suburbs." To both bolster the downtown economy and offer a unique third space for locals, Smith is launching a table tennis social club, the first of its kind anywhere.

"Imagine Kanye West playing Ping-Pong with Tony Blair with dubstep playing in the background, surrounded by a café and wine boutique—that gives you a sense of what Drive is." Located in a downtown commercial hub, Drive will operate much like a bowling

COURTESY OF THEPEOPLEOFDETROIT.COM

alley, charging visitors per hour per table, or for unlimited membership. Smith says the model is strategic in more ways than one, allowing Christians to form relationships with Detroit entrepreneurs, which is what has happened at Awakenings' art gallery.

"We Christians need to be at the forefront of being imaginative, creative, and innovative in bringing economic viability for cities that are hurting," he says.

The key for Christians, though, will be doing so in a way that rightly remembers their city's history—and their neighbors.

"Newcomers come in without a sense of history and act as though Detroit is a blank canvas," notes Mark VanAndel, pastor of discipleship at Citadel of Faith. Pastor Carey remembers watching *Detropia*, a new documentary about postindustrial Detroit. "One interviewee said, 'I'm an artist and could never afford to live like this anywhere else; if this doesn't work out, we don't lose anything because we're at the bottom.'"

"When he said that, it was like a knife went through me," says Carey. "This is 'the bottom'? You can't imagine the grief a person feels when this is the place that is home."

"I didn't realize how deeply I'd be offended when other people, even Christians, would joke about Detroit," says Foster. "It's like they were making fun of my kid."

Carey and Foster say that as Detroit adjusts to a new set of migrants—those with hope, creativity, and incredible privilege—Christians in Detroit must keep a city with a battered soul spiritually intact.

"Who advocates for Grandma, who has worked here forever, who loves this city but is unable to fix her roof?" says Carey. "What about the young man who has gone through the public schools and still can't read and is now approaching 20 with no source of income? Who speaks for them?"

"We can't let businesses or the government be responsible for the soul of the city. That's what Detroit is known for—its soul."

A drive along Woodward Avenue might suggest that Detroit's soul has left the building. But stay awhile and drive through Boston-Edison, through Piety Hill, along Wyoming Street, in the places where Christians have chosen in faith to stay instead of leave. There, you'll find an empire fallen but far from forgotten.

Katelyn Beaty is managing editor of *Christianity Today* and editorial director of *This Is Our City*.



ORGANIC CITY

How Christian urban farmers are planting new life in Detroit's vacated landscape.

By Melissa Steffan

GROWING UP in the Netherlands, Riet Schumack dreamed of becoming a farmer. But when she married and moved to inner-city Detroit, she wondered if her dream was dead. "I hate big cities," Schumack says, "so when the Lord called us [here]—there was no way around it—we spent many years questioning God."

Detroit isn't exactly an agricultural paradise. Drive across the city, built for 2 million residents, and signs of decline are everywhere. Some 200,000 lots are vacant or foreclosed, and even city-owned land is overgrown and strewn with litter and refuse.

But all the empty and unused land makes Detroit an urban gardener's heaven. In the past decade alone, the number of gardens has grown from under 50 to over 1,400, as more residents—including Schumack—see opportunity in the citywide land crisis. Schumack says Detroiters involved in the urban farming movement—which has blossomed in other metro areas as well—are typically either New Agers or Christians. But the Christians pursue farming for different reasons, and through a variety of methods.

There is no shortage of blight where

Schumack lives, a four-square-mile neighborhood ironically named Brightmoor. She points out which homes are abandoned, vacant, and sliding into decay. But when she reaches one of her youth gardens, she beams. In the midst of poverty, Schumack is growing vegetables to teach her neighbors about the beauty of creation and labor.

"We are created to be co-creators and stewards," she says. "If you don't give [people] something to steward, they're missing out on why they were created."

After Schumack moved to Brightmoor in 2006, she wondered how she could minister to the neighborhood. She took an inventory of her passions—"children"

and "gardening" topped the list—and began building rapport with Brightmoor residents.

"If you want to work somewhere, you should move there," she says. "Jesus didn't stay in heaven, point his finger down, and say, 'Be healed.' He came to Earth and became one of us—and out of that, he ministered."

But community development is hard when 70 percent of the houses are empty. When they moved, former residents took with them social capital and resources, leaving those who remained with little incentive





to care for their space. So in 2009, Schumack helped establish Neighbors Building Brightmoor, an organization that runs “community-initiated, -driven, and -executed” cleanup projects within a 21-block radius. She said the organization now has 50 active households—and at least as many community gardens.

In the vacant lots on either side of her house, Schumack works primarily with neighborhood youth as young as 9 years old, whom she calls “garden kids.” On their first day with Schumack, garden kids learn to plant radishes, one seed every inch. Their first attempts are always “disastrous,” she says, but then they start to catch on—and they keep coming.

Spring is the kids’ favorite season: They sell their produce at local farmers’ markets, including Eastern Market, Detroit’s six-block public market, which attracts tens of thousands of people each Saturday. The first time Schumack’s garden kids went to Eastern Market, they sold out within an hour. They are especially pleased by this as they get to keep their profits.

That’s the same strategy Jerry Hebron, executive director of North-end Christian Community Development, uses on the other side of the city, but with a twist: To drive commercial activity in her neighborhood, Hebron started not only a garden but her own farmers’ market as well.

Hebron has been running the Oakland Avenue Community Garden since 2009. She started it with support from Greening of Detroit, a large nonprofit, and her church. St. John’s Evangelistic Temple members identified access to food as one pressing issue they could address, so they started the Oakland Avenue garden on three church-owned lots. With a little outside capital, the garden overflowed into seven surrounding lots.

Top 10 Rating: Jerry Smith oversees operations at Capuchin Soup Kitchen, which runs Earthworks Urban Farm as one of its ministries. Earthworks was named one of *Natural Home* magazine’s top 10 urban farms in the United States.

The ministry expanded when U.S. Department of Agriculture funds helped purchase a hoop house that creates a year-round greenhouse environment; they then launched a summer farmers’ market. Hebron says they sell almost 4,000 pounds of produce to locals.

“They get to have a relationship with us,” she says. “They get to see how the produce they’re putting in their body comes out of the ground.”

But Brightmoor and Oakland Avenue face different challenges. Whereas Brightmoor is primarily residential, Oakland Avenue used to be its neighborhood’s commercial center, which businesses abandoned after the riots of the 1960s and the economic downturn.

Hebron says she hopes her farm’s presence will help increase commercial demand and revitalize Oakland Avenue.

“We don’t have a Laundromat, a cleaners, a bakery,” she says. “[But] we’re here. By us being here, we are reaching out to businesses, saying they need to take advantage of the vacancy.”

TAKING FARMS TO SCALE

Detroit’s smaller urban farmers are being joined by agribusiness. Agribusiness isn’t welcomed by all, but Mike Score, president of Hantz Farms, has changed many a mind in the last four years.

Unlike community gardens and small-scale farms, Hantz Farms is a for-profit business started in 2008 by John Hantz, founder of Hantz Group. Score, a Detroit native and agricultural scientist, manages day-to-day operations for the forestry-based farm venture. Currently that includes overseeing the growth of 900 saplings in the Indian Village neighborhood, where the city has let Hantz buy land and test the “Hantz

'We are created to be co-creators and stewards. If you don't give people something to steward, they're missing out on why they were created.'

~ Riet Schumack, Neighbors Building Brightmoor

Woodlands" model.

"Gardening is good, but it's not enough to fill the gap in this city," Score says. "We need some large-scale farms in the city that would make better use of the natural resources."

Both Hantz and Score believe the abundance of city-owned land is "killing the city." Many of the lots go unmanaged, thus hurting the investment value of neighboring homes and businesses. "If there's a vacant parcel today, nobody will buy it because it will be cheaper tomorrow," Score says. "There's no incentive to build anything in Detroit."

But there is incentive to grow, which is why Hantz plans to purchase swaths of publically owned land, up to 40 acres at a time, and plant saplings. Then Hantz Farms will maintain the land and wait—for 60 years, when the trees are ready to be harvested and will yield a 5 percent annual return on equity, Score says.

"It's a long-term crop, but we're in a position where we can [be patient]," he says. "We're paying cash for the land, taking over the maintenance costs, and then removing the blight, which increases the value of surrounding properties."

Hantz Farms is not focused on creating jobs or food sources, like many nonprofit gardens are. But it is committed to making Detroit more livable and beautiful. That fits with the mission of many small-scale gardeners who initially criticized the Hantz venture, says Score, calling Hantz's business success "evil."

Even friends who knew of his faith told Score he had "sold out." He said they assumed there was "an inherent conflict to say you care about Detroit, are interested in urban agriculture, and work on a large-scale, for-profit business venture."

But Score has been forbearing, letting his results speak for themselves. Now when Score talks to Christians about Hantz Farms, they agree that its forestry and farming efforts have helped better Detroit. Some even talk about it as a sign of God's kingdom.

"They say, 'See, this is how God works,'" Score says. He wants to make sure that people outside the church hear that God cares and God is working in their midst. "That," he says, "is the gap that needs to be bridged."

FINDING MIDDLE—COMMON—GROUND

Still, some Christians remain skeptical. Schumack, for example, calls the Hantz venture a "land grab," and Hebron doubts that a business would be able to stay true to its mission over 60 years. Critics also say that such ventures ignore Detroit's immediate needs, like access to food.

Mount Elliott residents are finding a middle way and addressing a different gap: the differences in method between community gardens and large-scale tree farms. Earthworks Urban Farm is a midsize farm run by the Franciscan Capuchin Soup Kitchen (CSK). It uses large areas of land for food production to both feed the hungry and make more

food available in the long-term, says CSK executive director Jerry Smith.

"Earthworks fits in [naturally] with Franciscan spirituality," he adds. "Earthworks is about right relationship with [the] earth and environment and with each other. They're spiritual values."

Earthworks invites people from its soup kitchen to volunteer in the garden, where they participate in the complete farm-to-table cycle. That's how Earthworks evangelizes, Smith says—not through words, but by the way they operate.

But it doesn't hurt that Earthworks helps meet residents' physical needs as well. Earthworks contributes fresh produce to more than 2,000 meals served at CSK's two locations every day. Smith says he doesn't want Earthworks to expand and farm 50 acres. Already Earthworks employees and volunteers farm land that spans two city blocks, some of which the farm owns and some it does not. Smith says that's the right size to meet current demand.

Earthworks thrives partly because of its partnership with CSK, which has the resources to fund many of its projects. In contrast

to relatively new start-ups, like Neighbors Building Brightmoor, Earthworks' funders "have seen our track record and that we have credibility, so we have that advantage," Smith says.

But Score avoids talking about "advantages" and "disadvantages" of different urban farming methods. Rather, Score says, Detroit needs to embrace mixed approaches, because single-lot sales will not solve Detroit's larger property-value problem. If the city wanted to sell all of its city-owned lots to individuals, Detroit would need 100,000 buyers. Interest in urban farming has grown in recent years,

but not to that extent, he says.

But it is a start. Regardless of whether it reaches 5 or 500 people, a single patch of land allows Christians to minister in a nonthreatening way, Hebron says. Her church recently baptized neighbors who became involved in the Oakland Avenue garden. "The church and this initiative are impacting people's lives in a way that is saying we accept them and love them and they make a difference to us," Hebron says.

Similarly, Schumack says gardening helps restore broken relationships—with the earth and with each other—a view that is not so far removed from Score's perspective. In spite of their differences, both agree: If Detroit were to receive a check for billions from Washington, D.C., to fix everything, it would not be able to repair broken relationships within the city. Only God can do that.

"Christians will have a role and God will work more broadly to make Detroit a better place," Score says. "People will look at Detroit and say, 'Wow, what a comeback.'" 

Melissa Steffan is Christianity Today's editorial resident.



Career Switch: Jerry Hebron left work in real estate to serve full-time at the Oakland Avenue Community Garden she helped found in Detroit's Northend.

Election Is for Everyone

However we interpret the controversial doctrine, it's clear that salvation is never a human achievement.

By Roger Olson

WHEN I WAS A KID my brother and I would sometimes spend part of Saturday handing out gospel tracts in our neighborhood. We were pastor's sons and probably felt some obligation to do it (as it was something promoted in Sunday school and youth group), but I can honestly say we also felt it was our contribution to the kingdom of God.

One of our favorite tracts pictured a voting ballot. The great preacher Herschel Hobbs, known among Southern Baptists as "Mr. Baptist," preached a famous sermon based on that tract on *The Baptist Hour* in October 1967. His sermon was "God's Election Day," and its main point was: "The devil and God held an election to determine whether or not you would be saved or lost. The devil voted against you and God voted for you. So the vote was a tie. It is up to you to cast the deciding vote."

Without doubt that concept of the doctrine of election has become popular among Christians. After all, we Americans prize our right and freedom to vote. But is that what Scripture means by *election*? Is the gospel that God votes for our salvation, Satan votes against it, and we—individually, freely—cast the vote that decides our eternal destiny?

Probably not. Some biblical scholars and theologians would say, "Definitely not!" It does seem to trivialize the concept of election and especially God's sovereignty in our salvation. On the other hand, there may be some truth in this way of conceiving the issue, even if it does not do justice to the profundity of the biblical doctrine of election.

MICHAEL MULLAN



Unfortunately, the “doctrine of election” has come to be associated especially, even uniquely, with one particular branch of Christian theology—the one people know as “Reformed.” It descends from the Swiss Reformation of the 16th century and most notably from the French reformer John Calvin, who lived in and spiritually led the Swiss city Geneva. Too often, “election” is identified as the distinctive doctrine of Calvinism—as if no other branch of Christianity believes in it.

In fact, it would be impossible to be a Bible-believing Christian without affirming God’s electing grace and having a doctrine of election. The same could be said about *predestination*, often thought of as a synonym for election. The Bible is filled with references to God’s choice of people, both individuals and groups. Abraham was not just “called” by God but also “chosen” or “elected” to be the father of God’s “chosen people,” God’s elect nation of Israel (Gen. 12:1–3; Isa. 45:4). The church is the elect of God, chosen for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:5). Paul was clearly chosen by God for apostleship (Acts 9).

It would be no stretch of truth to say that God’s election of people is central to the biblical message, to the gospel. And it can safely be said that people’s election is God’s grace, not human achievement. Nowhere does the Bible even hint that people elect themselves.

‘TOUCHED BY AN ANGEL’ THEOLOGY

That brings us back to the gospel tract and Hobbs’s sermon. All Christians, not only Calvinists, ought to reject the underlying message that election is a human act or achievement. Theologians have a term for that belief: *semi-Pelagianism*. It is arguably the default view of both salvation and service among American Christians, especially younger Christians. But all branches of Christianity have condemned it as heresy, because it completely contradicts Scripture.

Semi-Pelagianism is the idea that human beings take the initiative in their salvation and service to God. We decide whether to be saved or enter into God’s service completely by ourselves, without *prevenient* (or necessary) grace. (Prevenient grace is grace that convicts, calls, illumines, and enables. Christian theologians disagree about whether it is resistible or irresistible, but all evangelical theologians agree it is necessary for the first exercise of a good will toward God.) Some years ago, a popular television series featured angels in human disguise helping people in distress turn to God. In one episode, a beautiful young angel with a Scottish accent counseled a man to “reach up to God as far as you can, and then he’ll reach down and take you the rest of the way.” I call that “*Touched by an Angel* theology.” By itself, without careful biblical and theological clarification, it expresses semi-Pelagianism.

Contrary to what many think, both Calvinist and Arminian traditions of Protestant Christianity have always emphasized God’s initiative in salvation and service. (Arminianism is the theological tradition named after Jacob Arminius, a 17th-century Dutch theologian who affirmed human free will.) That is, if any person or group finds reconciliation with God and/or a role in God’s mission, it is due to God’s electing grace and not to human decision or achievement alone.

Unfortunately, the doctrine of election has become a battleground among evangelical Protestants. Three main viewpoints vie for attention and belief. All three appeal to Scripture. All three claim the other two fall short of biblical and theological correctness. Occasionally

advocates of the three views fall into nasty verbal combat with each other. Advocates of all three need to realize they share much in common, specifically belief in the divine initiative—that God is the electing one, the one whose grace is necessary to every good thing a person does, including the first movement of the will toward God.

The first view is classical, traditional Calvinism. It was not invented by Calvin but came to be associated with his name in English lands through the Puritans. Earlier reformers Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli held much the same belief about election.

According to Calvin, election, which is the same as predestination and foreordination, refers to “God’s eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man. . . . [E]ternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others” (*Institutes of the Christian Religion* III.XXI.5). Many people refer to this as “double predestination.” Calvin based it on Romans 9 and other passages that emphasize God’s sovereignty in everything, including each individual’s eternal destiny.

The second view is classical, traditional Arminianism. It is named after theologian Arminius, but the basic outlines of the view predate him. Perhaps the most influential Arminian was John Wesley, founder of the Methodist tradition, who is also revered by Christians in the holiness and Pentecostal traditions.

According to Wesley’s essay “On Predestination,” faithfully following Arminius, election (predestination) means that “God *foreknew* those in every nation, who would believe, from the beginning of the world to the consummation of all things.” He based this on Romans 8, especially verses 29 and 30. Like all Arminians (and many who do not use that label but agree with its essential doctrine of election), Wesley affirmed free will, enabled by grace, because otherwise, “[I]f man were not free, he could not be accountable either for his thoughts, words, or actions.”

MOUNTAINS OF VERSES

Most contemporary evangelical Christians lean one way or the other—toward either Calvin’s or Wesley’s view of election. All agree that God elects people to service; all agree that God chooses (through corporate election) to have a people. The flashpoint of controversy is election to salvation. Is it unconditional and irresistible, or does it depend on one’s willingness to accept it?

The divide is over individual salvation and especially whether God predestines some people to hell. Arminians find that abhorrent and damaging to God’s reputation, based on passages such as John 3:16, 2 Peter 3:9, and 1 Timothy 2:4. Calvinists argue that allowing humans to resist and thwart God’s will limits God’s sovereignty and, however unintentionally, diminishes his deity. If sinners can freely contribute to their own salvation, then grace is not the only factor.

Both sides in this debate can pile up mountains of verses and arguments to support their view. It seems doubtful that equally God-fearing, Bible-believing, Jesus-loving Christians will ever reach consensus about the matter. But consensus already exists in this: whatever role humans play in their salvation, salvation is God’s work. Even Arminians, at their best and truest, believe sinners receive saving grace only because God enables them to receive it with the free response of faith.

A third view appears among contemporary evangelical Christians. Whether it leans closer to the classical Calvinist or Arminian doctrine of election is much debated. So-called “evangelical Calvinism” is

championed by followers of Scottish theologians Thomas and James Torrance. They, in turn, were influenced by Swiss theologian Karl Barth and, before Barth, by Scottish theologians John McLeod Campbell and P. T. Forsyth. This view has recently been spelled out and defended by 12 leading evangelical theologians in *Evangelical Calvinism: Essays Resourcing the Continuing Reformation of the Church*.

According to evangelical Calvinism (something of a misnomer, as all Calvinists consider themselves evangelical in some sense), Christ must be central to election as both its object and its subject.

God elects Jesus Christ to be the Savior, and then elects people only “in him.” In Jesus and his cross, God has said, “Yes!” to all people; there is no corresponding divine “No!” If anyone has been

elected to salvation, it is because God first elected Jesus Christ and then, by grace, included sinners in that election. If anyone rejects their inclusion in Christ’s election, it is solely because of their inexplicable rejection of the grace God extended to them in Jesus Christ.

The editors of *Evangelical Calvinism* affirm that “[A]ll are included in Christ’s salvific work, and . . . salvation is by grace alone and Christ alone.” Election to salvation is good news, because it is not dependent on the frail and faltering free will of sinners, and no one is excluded except those who willfully exclude themselves.

Classical Calvinists and Arminians agree with much in evangelical Calvinism, but both find it inconsistent at certain crucial points. Their main common complaint is that it falls into contradiction. How, they ask, can one affirm the universality of electing grace and deny free will with regard to being elected, while also affirming free will to reject the truth of one’s election? Evangelical Calvinists, on the other hand, find both alternative views of election problematic in that each, in its own way, seems to impugn the goodness of God’s character.

Evangelical books about the doctrine of election abound. Unfortunately, most of them are polemical—spending more time arguing *against* another view than underscoring and explaining common ground. Especially in the past two to three decades, the doctrine of election has become a cause of division more than of unity among evangelicals. More attention needs to be given to areas of broad and profound agreement, and less to areas of diversity. Evangelical Christians, at their best, share a common doctrine of election. The devil is in the details, especially when they become points of polemical accusation and opportunities for charges of heresy or biblical infidelity.

All evangelicals agree that salvation is God’s work and not ours. Our good works, even our free decisions or signs of grace, amount to nothing when compared with God’s electing grace and power.



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They’re like the deceptive pillars English architect Christopher Wren installed to reassure the city fathers who doubted his scheme for supporting the second floor of Windsor’s town hall. Wren had in fact left space between the pillars’ tops and the ceiling of the first story. But the space was so miniscule as to be invisible, and it wasn’t until years later, when workmen built scaffolds to clean the ceiling, that the ruse was discovered. The pillars, which had seemed so important to the architectural design, were revealed (like our outwardly impressive good works) as meaningless.

‘GOD WILL FIND A WAY’

If a sinner comes to Christ and receives salvation, all evangelicals agree, it is due to God’s electing grace and not at all due to any meritorious work.

They also agree that God is sovereign in salvation; election is one biblical way of expressing that sovereignty. The whole of Ephesians 1 extols God’s sovereign election of his people. There as elsewhere, however, it is possible to interpret election corporately. All evangelicals agree that God’s election of a people, Israel and the church, is unconditional. God chooses to have a people for his name and for his glory. He chooses to have a people on whom to lavish his love. He chooses to have a people to be a light to the nations and a testimony of God’s greatness and goodness to the spiritual beings that populate the invisible world.

Evangelicals can and do disagree about whether individuals’ inclusion in God’s elect people involves any level of free will, but all agree that the existence of the people of God is not dependent on human choice. As a famous line from *Jurassic Park* says, “Life finds a way.” Evangelical faith of all types and tribes agrees that “God will find a way” to have a people for his name.

Calvinists, Arminians, and evangelical Calvinists tend to find each other’s positions inconsistent. But inconsistency is not heresy. Perhaps evangelicals divided over the details of the doctrine of election could rally around a prayer. The great English Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon, saved in a Methodist church but a passionate Calvinist, frequently prayed a seemingly inconsistent prayer at his church’s evening prayer meetings: “God, call out your elect. And then elect some more.” Evangelicals of varying opinions may cringe at the apparent contradiction, but all can rejoice at the spirit of generosity and hope that pervaded Spurgeon’s appeal. ✚

Roger Olson is professor of theology at Baylor University’s George W. Truett Theological Seminary, and the author, most recently, of *Against Calvinism* (Zondervan).

The 2013 Book Awards

The late Christian philosopher Arthur Holmes proclaimed confidently that “all truth is God’s truth.” Holmes’s epigram came to mind as I was tallying up our judges’ rankings, encountering one surprise after another. Would *Christianity Today* really bestow top honors on a Roman Catholic *New York Times* columnist? On a Roman Catholic Ivy League professor? Or on a satirical novel lampooning contemporary evangelical culture?

Well, why not? If God is indeed the Author of all truth, we needn’t be too choosy about those earthly authors whose truth-telling we recognize. Yes, most of this year’s honorees (take a bow, Tim Keller!) fit more or less comfortably in an evangelical milieu. (Fearless prediction: Richard Dawkins will never win a CT book award.) Still, it’s nice to remember that, whatever the source, truth (to say nothing of goodness and beauty) is always a cause for rejoicing.

Now the envelopes, please. From an initial crop of 455 titles submitted by 68 publishers, we’ve selected 10 winners, and 9 notables, that offer insights into the people, events, and ideas that shape evangelical life, thought, and mission. Here they are, along with comments from the judges. —Matt Reynolds, CT associate editor

APOLOGETICS / EVANGELISM

WHERE THE CONFLICT REALLY LIES

Science, Religion, and Naturalism

ALVIN PLANTINGA (OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS)

“This book offers topnotch scholarship to pit against the very best arguments of contemporary atheism, as well as to clarify what truly is at stake in the battles orthodoxy faces in science, biblical studies, philosophy, and more. A *tour de force* by one of our era’s great philosophers—and we can be glad, again, that he is on our side!”

AWARD OF MERIT

MIRACLES

The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts

CRAIG S. KEENER (BAKER ACADEMIC)

BIBLICAL STUDIES

A NEW TESTAMENT BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New

G. K. BEALE (BAKER ACADEMIC)

“This is Beale’s ‘great work,’ and will mark his career for many decades to come. He’s been working on it for 25 years, and it shows. It is dense, exhaustive, and provides a compelling theological framework for understanding Scripture (Creation, Judgment, New Creation), helping us see what the New Testament is doing with the major Old Testament themes. . . . I can see many of us referring to it for decades.”

AWARD OF MERIT

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

A Commentary

FREDERICK DALE BRUNER (EERDMANS)

CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE

BAD RELIGION

How We Became a Nation of Heretics

ROSS DOUTHAT (FREE PRESS)

“A searching and illuminating reading of our times that is probing in judgment while sympathetic in mood. It makes sense of the history we have lived in a way that inspires renewed—and improved—movement forward.”

CHRISTIAN LIVING

KINGDOM CALLING

Vocational Stewardship for the Common Good

AMY L. SHERMAN (INTERVARSITY)

“This practical, lively, theologically grounded book provides guidance for congregations trying to bring their faith to bear upon a needy world. It’s also a compelling invitation to look beyond individual moral and spiritual concerns to the ways faith is always and necessarily about the community. Sherman’s many well-told examples of Christians who have taken inventive initiatives to bring their vocational skills together with others’ needs are helpful in their specificity.”

AWARD OF MERIT

A GRACE REVEALED

How God Redeems the Story of Your Life

JERRY SITTSER (ZONDERVAN)

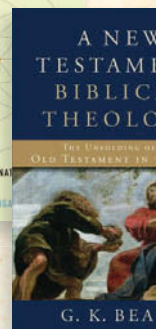
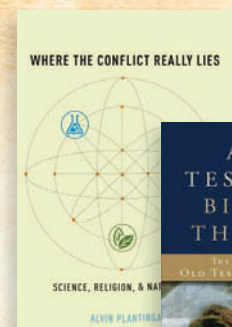
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a case study for the growth and development of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, but also a theological blueprint for doing ministry in the 21st century. Words like *thorough*, *comprehensive*, and even *magisterial* come to mind to describe it."

AWARD OF MERIT

THE JUVENILIZATION OF AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY

THOMAS E. BERGLER (EERDMANS)

FICTION

EVANGELLYFISH

A Novel

DOUGLAS WILSON (CANON PRESS)

"An insightful satire on contemporary Christian culture that moves seamlessly from laugh-out-loud funny to startlingly poignant. Wilson's critique of the church is sharp, humorous, and uncomfortably accurate, but he doesn't leave it at that. With honesty and heart, he portrays the difficulty of forgiveness and what it means to live in community. I loved this book!"

AWARD OF MERIT

MAN IN THE BLUE MOON

MICHAEL MORRIS (TYNDALE)

HISTORY / BIOGRAPHY

SUMMONED FROM THE MARGIN

Homecoming of an African

LAMIN SANNEH (EERDMANS)

"Sanneh, one of the most original Christian thinkers of our time, recounts how he made his way as a poor boy from a remote, colonial West African town to become a distinguished professor in one of the world's greatest universities. At once a personal memoir, a conversion and pilgrimage story, and an intellectual excursion, the book shows how Sanneh's lineage and life encounters have shaped his remarkable body of scholarship. With sharp insight, Sanneh . . . reveals some of the trials he has endured at the hands of prejudiced and unwelcoming colleagues and congregants. But even when doing so, he stays gentle, speaking the truth in love."

AWARD OF MERIT

GODLY AMBITION

John Stott and the Evangelical Movement

ALISTER CHAPMAN (OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS)

MISSIONS / GLOBAL AFFAIRS

JUST AND UNJUST PEACE

An Ethic of Political Reconciliation

DANIEL PHILPOTT (OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS)

"Philpott's authoritative study of the ethics of political reconciliation offers new hope for solving one of humanity's most intractable problems: bringing justice in the aftermath of human conflicts. Philpott focuses on restoring right relationships—going well beyond conceptions of human rights that do not redress wounds of injustice. He appeals to Jewish, Muslim, and Christian traditions for resources on restorative justice."

AWARD OF MERIT

SOUL, SELF, AND SOCIETY

A Postmodern Anthropology for Mission in a Postcolonial World

MICHAEL RYNKIEWICH (CASCADE BOOKS)

SPIRITUALITY

STILL

Notes on a Mid-Faith Crisis

LAUREN F. WINNER (HARPERONE)

"Despite deep pain and doubt, Winner relentlessly searches God's mysteries, seeking peace and authenticity in her faith. Her spiritual memoir is unblinking, credible, and compelling."

AWARD OF MERIT

THE HOLE IN OUR HOLINESS

Filling the Gap between Gospel Passion and the Pursuit of Godliness

KEVIN DEYOUNG (CROSSWAY)

THEOLOGY / ETHICS

THE THEOLOGY OF JONATHAN EDWARDS

MICHAEL J. MCCLYMOND AND GERALD R. MCDERMOTT (OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS)

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AWARD OF MERIT

GOD IS LOVE

A Biblical and Systematic Theology

GERALD BRAY (CROSSWAY)



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GOD BETWEEN THE LINES

Poet
Christian Wiman
never lost the faith
of his Baptist
upbringing.
It just lay dormant
until love and cancer
unearthed it.

Interview
by Josh Jeter

IN THE AFTERNOON of his 39th birthday, less than a year after his wedding day, poet Christian Wiman was diagnosed with an incurable cancer of the blood. Wiman, the editor of *Poetry* magazine, the oldest and most esteemed poetry monthly in the world, had long ago drifted away from the Southern Baptist beliefs of his upbringing. But the shock of staring death in the face gradually revived a faith that had gone dormant (a story he first told publicly in a 2007 article for *The American Scholar*).

Wiman's new book of essays, *My Bright Abyss: Meditation of a Modern Believer* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux), took shape in the wake of his diagnosis, when he believed death could be fast approaching. These writings come from someone who is less a cautious theologian than a pilgrim crying out from the depths. They divulge the God-ward hopes (and doubts) of an artist still piecing together a spiritual puzzle. San Francisco-based lawyer and author Josh Jeter

JIM NEWBERRY

corresponded with Wiman about his new book, his precarious health, and the ongoing challenge of belief in God.

How did you arrive at your Christian faith?

I was raised in West Texas as a Southern Baptist, in a culture and family so saturated with religion that it never occurred to me there was any alternative until I left. Then it all just evaporated in the blast of modernism and secularism to which I was exposed in college. Or, it didn't evaporate, exactly, because I never would have called myself an atheist. But religious feeling went underground in me for a couple of decades, to be released occasionally in ways I never really understood or completely credited—in poems, mostly.

Then about 10 years ago I fell into despair. There is no other way to say it, really, nor do those words do anything but hint at the abyss. Whether it was cause or effect, I went through a writing drought unlike anything I had ever known—three years of it. In the midst of this—miraculously, it now seems to me—I fell suddenly and utterly in love with the woman who is now my wife. I still couldn't write, but the despair was blasted like a husk away from my spirit.

We found ourselves saying little prayers together before dinner. They were almost jokes at first, and then, increasingly, not. We'd been married about eight months when I got a surprise diagnosis of an incurable cancer, and the encroaching darkness demanded that the light I felt burning in me acquire a more definite and durable form. One Sunday morning we wandered into a church. A couple of days later I started to write. I don't think it's quite accurate to say that I had a conversion or even a "return" to Christianity. I was just finally able to assent to the faith that had long been latent within me.

You have three vocations: poet, editor of *Poetry* magazine, and, most recently, spiritual essayist. How did you decide to begin writing spiritual essays?

I've always written prose, and I can now see how God's absence—or, more accurately, my refusal to admit his presence—underlies all of my earlier work (poems as well).

But you're certainly right to point out a change. My work—prose and poetry—is still full of anguish and even unbelief, but I hope it's also much more open to simple joy. The theologian Jürgen Moltmann once wrote that all theology, especially a theology of hope, had to be conducted "in earshot of the dying Christ." Abundance and destitution are both aspects of God—or, more accurately, aspects of our experience of God.

Soon you will release a set of essays. How has your turn to faith shaped or influenced these essays?

After my diagnosis, I wrote a short piece trying to make sense of all that had happened to me. It was published in a relatively small magazine, *The American Scholar*, but the response to it was pretty overwhelming. I began to realize there was an

enormous contingent of people out there who were starved for new ways of feeling and articulating their experiences of God. I wanted to have a conversation with these people.

I also wanted to figure out my own mind. I knew *that* I believed, but I was not at all clear on *what* I believed. So I set out to answer that question, though I have come to realize that the real question is *how*, not *what*. How do you answer that burn of being that drives you both deeper into, and utterly out of, yourself? What might it mean for your life—and for your death—to acknowledge the insistent, persistent call of God?

You have had some very difficult health issues the past few years, and according to one essay, have recently been "close to death." How is your health now? And what have your health struggles meant for your work?

I've been through a multitude of treatments, culminating in a bone-marrow transplant last fall. There's no question that illness has brought a great urgency to my work: One speaks differently when standing on a

cliff. Then again, I have always had little patience for art that is not elemental, art that doesn't take on the major questions of our existence. Perhaps my own inclinations have simply been intensified by my illness.

As for that illness, it's gone. For now. I haven't felt this healthy in eight years. I hope I am now faced with the difficult task of learning to live without my familiar miseries. "Our torments also may, in length of time, Become our elements," says John Milton. "[T]hese piercing fires [a]s soft as now severe." There is always some devil in us—that's a demon speaking the lines above—who makes us think we love or need our pain.

Sometimes your essays feel like you are arguing with yourself. Do you write them for yourself or others?

I've never thought of my essays like this, but I see immediately that you're right. W. B. Yeats defined rhetoric as the quarrel we have with others. Poetry, he said, comes out of the quarrel we have with ourselves. Prose isn't poetry, obviously, but I've always felt the two arts to be raveled up with one another for me.

I read a lot of theology, even though I am almost always frustrated by it. Thomas Merton once said that trying "to solve the problem of God" is like trying to see your own eyes. No doubt that's part of it. There is something absurd about formulating faith, systematizing God. I am usually more moved—and more moved toward God—by what one might call accidental theology, the best of which is often art, sometimes even determinedly secular art.

I am moved by works of art that don't so much strive to make meaning as allow meaning to stream through them: Bach, certain poems by T. S. Eliot, the novelist Marilynne Robinson, the late work of the American sculptor Lee Bontecou, even less conventional religious writers like Simone Weil or Sara Grant. People can occasionally embody and enact this kind of meaning as well—we are, after all, works of the very greatest Creator's hands.

'There's no question that illness has brought a great urgency to my work: One speaks differently when standing on a cliff.'

~ Christian Wiman

How much is spiritual experience—prayer, solitude, and the like—a part of your artistic process?

I think poetry is how religious feeling survived in me during all those years of unbelief, and it remains the most intense experience I have of another order of being entering my own. But poems are not contemplative or peaceful times for me; they're chaotic and can wreck my life for a while. They're also few and far between, and you can't (or I can't) build a spiritual life on that kind of intermittent intensity.

So I try to pray every day, usually in a little chapel near where I work, sometimes in a cathedral because I like the huge estrangement of it, the volatile silence. I feel no connection between prayer and poetry, except for the poems that I have written as prayers. Poetry is a much more powerful experience for me than prayer, but I feel this to be a weakness in me. I'm still just learning how to pray.

In your essays, you often appeal to the work of Christian mystics (like Meister Eckhart, Thomas Traherne, George Herbert, Marguerite Porete, Weil). What draws you to the mystics?

Partly I feel envy. I want to be taken over by God. I want to have the kind of disciplined inwardness that allows the ego to be annihilated. I want the kind of revelation that precedes all doctrine and dogma, is the *reason* for all doctrine and dogma. Christ's life is one long revelation; everything after that merely grows up from it.

But then, too, all of these writers have an artistic consciousness. I understand the language they speak, though I don't quite speak it myself, or maybe speak a different dialect. The energy of art may be prior to religion, but religion, paradoxically, is a way of sustaining and surviving the psychic storm of that original energy (just as ritual and doctrine are ways of stabilizing and preserving the awful power of mystical revelation). Art for its own sake, art that has no answering "other," will eventually eat you alive.

You have written that one measure of a genuine spiritual experience is the extent to which it "demands uncomfortable change." What kinds of "uncomfortable changes" have you experienced in your life?

That's what my wife always asks me!

I would like to think of this new book as a viable answer to your question, but solitary writing is quite natural to me, and we should be suspicious when God's call conforms so neatly to our own inclinations.

More relevant, maybe, are the many

speaking engagements, including sermons, I have taken on at religious schools and organizations in the past few years. This is new to me and, while very gratifying, has at times been quite discomfiting. I have also become deliberate about being open and honest about my thoughts of God. Maybe not so honest in secular settings. That, too, has provoked some useful but uncomfortable exchanges.

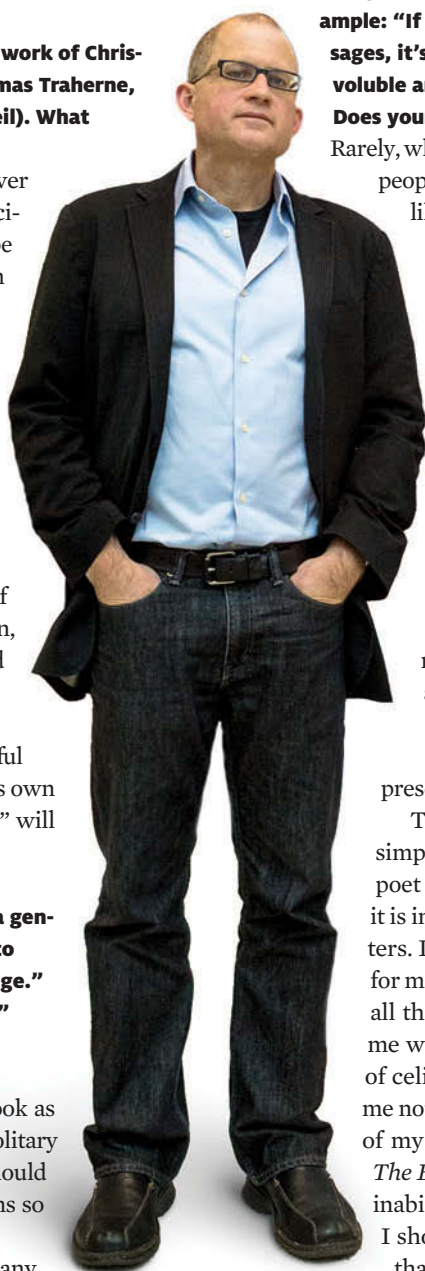
Still, the question is a thorn in my brain. I feel that I spend too much time agonizing over what faith might mean, rather than simply acting in accordance with my instincts. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote that only the person who obeys believes. It is a hard road, but the right one. I will probably end up as a preacher after all.

Your faith does not come across as breezy in your essays, which you occasionally grace with levity. For example: "If I ever sound like a preacher in these passages, it's only because I have a hornet's nest of voluble and conflicting parishioners inside of me." Does your faith ever express itself as peace?

Rarely, which I see as a weakness. I do feel that some people may be called to unbelief—or what looks like unbelief—in order that faith may take new forms. Emily Dickinson is a good example of this, or Albert Camus. But I also believe that God requires every last cell of yourself to bow down. Or perhaps that verb, *requires*, is wrong, or that it's God doing the requiring: It's more like *your nature* requires, in order to *be your nature*, that every last cell of yourself bow down. There is still some satanic pride in me, for which I pay a high price.

And yet, I have certainly experienced peace in poems that in their sheer givenness seemed to reveal something of God to me. I have written poems that begin in great anguish and explode into joy. As psychically difficult as the poems may have been to write, certainly I have felt peace and presence in their wake.

There are other moments, too, which are simply moments of life. *Simply!* I think of the poet Paul Eluard: "There is another world, but it is in this one." I have 3-year-old twin daughters. It would be disingenuous in the extreme for me to pretend that they don't at times drive all thought of God out of my head and make me want to write a series of sonnets in praise of celibacy, but it would be equally insane for me not to acknowledge that they are the source of my greatest happiness. Father Zossima, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, defines hell as "the inability to love." I have known that hell, and I should probably spend my remaining days thanking God that I am free of it. ☩



The false god of endless options, like those at a coffeehouse, is enslaving modern Americans. How to resist him.

Imprisoned By

By Barry Cooper



AS AN ENGLISHMAN, one of the biggest challenges I've faced in America is automated call centers. You miss a package delivery from FedEx, and you have to call them to arrange a new delivery time. The problem is that when you call, you aren't connected to a human being. You are connected to a talking robot programmed to recognize what you are saying in English.

Or should I say, it is programmed to recognize what you are saying in *American* English.

Every time I call FedEx, I end up conducting the entire conversation in an accent that can only be described as the unholy offspring of John Wayne and Judi Dench. The talking robot, who is trying extremely hard not to laugh, keeps asking me to repeat myself. For a Brit, it is absolutely humiliating. It's as if someone has implemented the whole system as payback for nearly two centuries of colonial rule.

The last time it happened, it occurred to me that this nightmarish limbo is a familiar place for many of us. Making choices and moving on with our lives seems increasingly difficult. We find ourselves paralyzed: unable to make choices about relationships, dating, marriage, money, family, and career. I want to suggest that if we feel unable to make these choices, it's not because we have the wrong accent. It may be because we're worshipping a false god.



THE GOD OF OPEN OPTIONS

1 Kings 18:21 describes a crucial moment of decision. It's the final showdown between the God of Israel and a false god called Baal. Elijah calls God's people to choose once and for all between the living God who delivered them, and this false god who has captured their affections: "'How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.' But the people said nothing."

They seem unable, or unwilling, to make a choice. They want to hedge their bets, sit on the fence, and keep their options open. How different are we Christians in the 21st century? Would you prefer to make an ironclad, no-turning-back choice, or one you could back out of if need be? Do you ever find that you're afraid to commit? Do you reply to party invitations with a "maybe" rather than a "yes" or

"no"? Do you like to keep your smartphone switched on at all times, even in meetings, so that you are never fully present at any given moment? Will you focus on the person you're talking to after a church service, or will you look

doesn't actually make us happy. The number of choices available to us becomes overwhelming, and actually makes it difficult for us to ever have the joy of fully committing to anything or anyone. Even if we do commit, our culture then makes us feel dissatisfied with the choice we've made.

During a recent Starbucks visit, I stood behind a customer who ordered a decaf grande sugar-free vanilla nonfat latte with extra foam and the milk heated to 140 degrees. As I stood in line, I actually started to think, *Maybe I want 140-degree coffee too. Maybe, I thought to myself, my choice of milk temperature up to this point has been catastrophically naive.* Suddenly, his choices made me unhappier about my own. I began to covet. I wasn't sure what I wanted anymore. I became anxious and indecisive. I wasn't sure I was ready to commit—either to my kind of coffee or to his. Was this really freedom of choice, or slavery to it?

What if we take the same multiplicity of trivial options we have at Starbucks, and apply them to bigger questions: where we should work, where we should study, where we should live, whom we should marry, or whom we should worship? It seems that the more options we have, the more afraid we are of choosing. We become enslaved to being noncommittal. We don't want to make a mistake or cut down our options. In fact, we may become so fearful of making a choice, we simply refuse to choose.

As we do that, we are worshiping an idol. A false god. One of the Baals of our culture, in fact. His name is "open options."

Over the years, the Israelites had seen themselves delivered from slavery—repeatedly, spectacularly and miraculously—by the living

The customer ordered a decaf grande sugar-free vanilla nonfat latte with extra foam and the milk heated to 140 degrees. Suddenly, his choices made me unsure of my own. Was this freedom of choice, or slavery to it?

over her shoulder for a better conversation partner?

If so, you may be worshiping the god of open options.

People wait years before declaring a college major, they only go to stores with a guaranteed return policy,

and it's not unusual for a person to date someone for years before getting married—if they ever do get married. We reserve the right to keep our options open in every department of our lives, from sex to spirituality.

In his book *The Paradox of Choice*, psychologist Barry Schwartz explains why we have trouble committing, why we love to keep our options open. He says that as a culture we demand choice. We demand options. We imagine that more options mean more freedom. And most people think that limitless freedom must be a good option.

The irony, Schwartz writes, is that this apparently limitless choice

God. The Egyptian gods were powerless against him, as were the gods of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Yet here they are in 1 Kings 18, their faces licking the dust before Baal, worshiping another soon-to-be-defeated god.

It should disgust us. But as God's people today, how different are we? We have been delivered from slavery to sin by Christ's death and resurrection, spectacularly and miraculously.

Yet here we are, many of us, worshiping the very gods that Christ has triumphed over, when we know they are defeated gods, and will only drag us to our deaths if we cling to them.

We worship the god of open options. And he is killing us. He kills our relationships, because he tells us it's better not to become too involved. He kills our service to others because he tells us it might be better to keep our weekends to ourselves. He kills our giving because he tells us these are uncertain financial times and you never know when you might need that money. He kills our joy in Christ because he tells us it's better not to be thought of as too spiritual.

What is most frightening of all about the god of open options is that you may not even know that you are worshiping him. Because



he pretends not to be a god at all.

In fact, he promises you freedom from *all* gods, *all* responsibilities. “Keep your options open,” he says. “Worship me, and you don’t have to serve anything or anyone. No commitment necessary. Total freedom.”

Similarly, the Israelites thought that by saying nothing (1 Kings 18:21) they were not committing idolatry. But when they chose not to decide, they made a choice. By refusing to act, they were actually turning away from the living God who rescued them, and committing an obscene act of spiritual adultery by worshipping the god of open options. Some modern translations describe God’s people as “wavering” between two different opinions, but the Hebrew is closer to our word “limping.” Their indecision was crippling them.

THE LOVING GOD WHO REDEEMS CHOICES

The living God, the loving, triune God, did not create us to keep our options open. He didn’t create us to live in fear of making a choice. He didn’t create us to be like Al Pacino’s character in the 1995 movie *Heat*, a man who vows never to get involved in a relationship he can’t walk away from in 30 seconds. God created us to commit. To him, and to others. He created us to choose.

It’s right to be careful in our decision making, of course: to pray, to seek counsel from Scripture and from wise Christians. The bigger the decision, the more careful we should be.

But there comes a point when pausing becomes procrastination, when waiting is no longer wise. There comes a point when not to choose becomes idolatry. It becomes a lack of trust in the God who ordains the decisions we will make, gathers up the frayed ends, and works all things for our good and his glory.

Be wise, but then rest in God’s total sovereignty and goodness, and choose. Commit. Make a decision. Be wholehearted and single-minded.

James 1:6–8 puts it like this: “[B]elieve and [do] not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. . . . Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.”

Trust that God is good and sovereign, and redeems every choice we make. If even the choices of those who murdered his own Son were ordained for our own infinite good (Acts 4:27–28), then how can we doubt that he intends good to come from our choices, however ill-advised they may be?

Another reason for rejecting the god of open options is because the living God himself is a God who chooses. And he made us in his image.

Ephesians 1:4 says, “[H]e chose us in him before the creation of the world.” 1 Corinthians 1:27 says, “God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise.” 2 Thessalonians 2:13 says, “God chose you . . . to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit” (emphases mine).

If the living God were as fond of keeping his options open as we are, we would have nothing to look forward to except eternal torment.

So let me ask you, in what area of your life are you still flirting with the god of open options? Where are you refusing to choose?

Maybe you’re refusing to commit to a particular relationship—

Not choosing becomes a lack of trust in the God who ordains the decisions we will make and works all things for our good and his glory.

perhaps even your marriage? Maybe you’re not truly committed at work—you have Facebook open in one of your browser tabs, half hoping to be interrupted. Maybe your restless eyes are on constant alert for something or someone better.

Maybe you’re keeping your options open with God himself, not allowing yourself to become too committed. Elijah is speaking to you in 1 Kings, and he is saying, “Make a choice.” You have all the information about God you need. Enough

of this noncommittal, risk-averse, weak-willed, God-forgetting immaturity. Or, as it probably says in some of the more modern translations, “Grow up.”

I write this with tears. As I look back over the past 20 years of my Christian life, I have repeatedly worshiped and served the god of open options, and I’ve seen many do the same. How many, for example, have been afraid to commit to marriage because the god of open options hates the marriage service? He knows that during it, we must promise to “forsake all others,” and that means forsaking all other options.

The god of open options is a cruel and vindictive god. He will break your heart. He will not let anyone get too close. But at the same time, because he is so spiteful, he will not let anyone get too far away because that would mean they are no longer an option. On and on it continues, exhausting and frustrating and confusing and endless, pulling towards and then pushing away, like the tide on a beach, never finally committing one way or the other. We have been like the starving man sitting in front of an all-you-can-eat buffet, dying simply because he would not choose between the chicken and the shrimp.

The god of open options is also a liar. He promises you that by keeping your options open, you can have everything and everyone. But in the end, you get nothing and no one.

Jesus said, “You cannot serve two masters.” At any given moment, you must choose whom you will follow. And if you choose the god of open options, you cannot at that moment choose the triune God, the one who deliberately closed off his options in order to save your life. Nothing narrows your options more than allowing your hands and feet to be nailed to a wooden cross.

“This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life” (Deut. 30:19–20).

Choose the God of infinite possibility who chose to limit himself to a particular time, a particular place, and a particular people. Choose the God who closed off all other alternatives so that he could pursue for himself one bride. Choose the God who chose not to come down from the cross until she was won. Choose the narrow way. Stop worshipping the god of open options. ☩

Barry Cooper is an author and speaker. He is director of product development at Christianity Explored Ministries, blogs at Future Perfect, Present Tense, and is planting Trinity West Church in Shepherd’s Bush, London.

The Gospel Hand-off

After a setback due to illness,
one missionary couple had
to give their ministry away.
Why they're happy about it.

By Adam and Christine Jeske in Ethiopia

Photos by Adam Jeske

WE NEED TO CUT DOWN another tree!" Simon and Lynn Caudwell were on the last day of a dusty trek toward Basketo, Ethiopia, in 1994. The road was blocked by yet another thick tree. Their path had taken them through bogs that stymied their four-wheel drive and sections that narrowed to about the width of their vehicle, with a 3,000-foot drop on one side.

The Caudwells got out of their car, found a way around the tree, and pressed on toward the village. But when they arrived, rain threatened overhead, and they had to leave quickly before the storm made the mountain road impassable. It would not be the last time that circumstances beyond their control would halt their time in Basketo, a remote village southwest of Addis Ababa.

On this visit, their first, Simon was sizing up land for their house

and ministry center. Lynn, meanwhile, was convinced she could never live in Basketo.

Lynn cried as they drove away, not because the visit ended abruptly but because she felt God had asked too much of them. "God, I did not know what you were asking of me," she prayed. "I don't think I can bring my children to such an isolated place."

The couple had been preparing for the challenge for years. After college they spent a year in field linguistics before moving with their two young children to Addis Ababa to study Amharic, the official language of Ethiopia.

The couple eventually moved to Soddo-Wolaitta, the closest city to Basketo. In this season of waiting to move to Basketo, Lynn was running an errand one day when she felt the Lord speak: "Lynn, I have come to give you fullness of life." Little did she know what that fullness would mean in the years ahead.

While in Soddo-Wolaitta, the Caudwells visited Basketo 20 times. They started building a house and ministry office. Finally they moved to the village in 1999. The uncertainty was over—so they thought.



Captive Audience: Pastor Eshetu Worku (far left) reads Scriptures in Basketo, a language spoken by about 94,000 people.



TURNING POINT

Working with people in Basketo, the Caudwells finished the initial analysis of the Basketo language. With the linguistic groundwork laid, after six months the couple left on furlough, planning to return soon to begin actually translating Scripture.

Suddenly, their careful planning came apart. One of their children became extremely sick. The family rushed back to their home in Britain. After treating the young child, doctors urged the Caudwells not to return the family to Basketo due to its remoteness.

Simon was shocked and bewildered. Why would God lead them this far and no farther? The Basketo would welcome having the Bible in their mother tongue. Relatively few of them could read existing Bibles, available in key Ethiopian languages for more than 1,000 years.

Biblical texts were available in Ethiopia as early as the 5th century, specifically in the Semitic language of Ge'ez. As Islam spread across North Africa, many Ethiopian Christians resisted the new faith. Some scholars today believe they did so because they had the Bible in their own language.

According to the national census, about 63 percent of Ethiopians are Christians—44 percent Orthodox, 19 percent other denominations. Since the original Ge'ez Bible translation, Ge'ez has been replaced in prominence by Amharic. More than 80 languages exist in Ethiopia. But of those languages, only 19 have New Testament translations, and 8 have the complete Bible.

The Caudwells were not the first missionaries to leave behind unfinished work in Ethiopia. Missionaries of Sudan Interior Mission (now SIM) entered Ethiopia in the 1920s. According to local accounts, when war broke out in 1937, missionaries had to flee the country, leaving behind 150 newly baptized believers. Years later, when the Italian army had left, SIM missionaries returned. To their surprise, they found not a straggling few but 10,000 new believers.

Evangelical churches in Ethiopia grew rapidly after World War II. The congregations related to SIM grew steadily, forming one of Ethiopia's largest denominations. The Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church now has more than 7 million believers, and they invited the Caudwells to minister in Basketo. Across Ethiopia, Kale Heywet churches are



New Focus: Getachew Yohannes continues translating the Bible after finishing the Gospel of Mark.

eager to advance the gospel. Tesfaye Yacob, former general secretary of the Kale Heywet Church, said, “Wherever it is, the church can only be alive when it is engaged in the Great Commission.”

Many indigenous missionaries live by subsistence agriculture as they have their whole lives. They raise from their local churches only a tiny fraction of what it costs for Western foreigners to serve in places like Ethiopia.

The Caudwells understood the value of local leadership. They had come to Ethiopia eager to nurture disciples as they worked with the Basketo community to translate the Bible. They hoped local Christians could reach other Basketo people and neighboring regions that have few if any Christians. But now, the Caudwells found themselves pushed to make a leap in that direction far sooner than they had imagined.

THE RIGHT PERSON

Three years before the Caudwells arrived in Ethiopia, a Basketo man named Getachew (Geh-tá-cho) Yohannes had given his life to

Christ. After finishing high school, Getachew worked as a government agriculturalist for three years, then returned to school for pastoral training.

If Simon and Lynn were to leave their home and ministry in Basketo, they needed a special person to take over the Basketo translation—someone who knew Basketo, Amharic, English, and theology. But waiting for a Western missionary to get trained in Basketo alone could stall the translation project for years.

When the Caudwells heard about Getachew, they thought he could be a clear choice for the job.

When Simon asked Getachew to take over the Basketo translation, Getachew immediately refused. In fact, he repeatedly told Simon that he would not do translation work at all. “I had no idea about Bible translation. I thought God had called me to work with the youth in my local church,” he says. “I had no intention to switch to another job, even in the church.”

Then Simon made an offer to Getachew—would Getachew undertake the Basketo translation of the Bible if his church approved? This proved to be more effective.

The church agreed, and so did Getachew. In 2003, he took over the Caudwell’s research and started the slow work of translation, working alongside another local Christian, Geresu Kassa.

Getachew had known the Caudwells since early in their ministry in the village. He had already grasped God’s call on the church—the whole church—to reach people with the Good News of Jesus and thus to provide that Good News in people’s most accessible language. For him, that meant Basketo.

Getachew says, “One day we took the Gospel of Mark to a church conference [where] I was the speaker. I read one chapter in Amharic, and I read the same chapter from the Basketo translation. I saw the response of the people. For the first time my heart was greatly touched.

“Then I said to myself, ‘These people really need the Bible in their own language. For this has God called me to the work of Bible translation.’ I became so convinced and so happy translating the Bible. I was willing to sacrifice everything I had: my time, my energy, and so on, joyfully.”

Yet Getachew was not alone. The Caudwells and a support team of Bible translation consultants and trainers helped out. He received what anyone handed a ministry hopes for: a healthy, well-tended ministry already thriving and poised for more growth.

DURABLE RELATIONSHIPS

As the translation proceeded, the Caudwells built stronger relationships with the translation team. Getachew and Geresu stayed with the Caudwells many times in Addis Ababa, where Simon had undertaken a different ministry role.

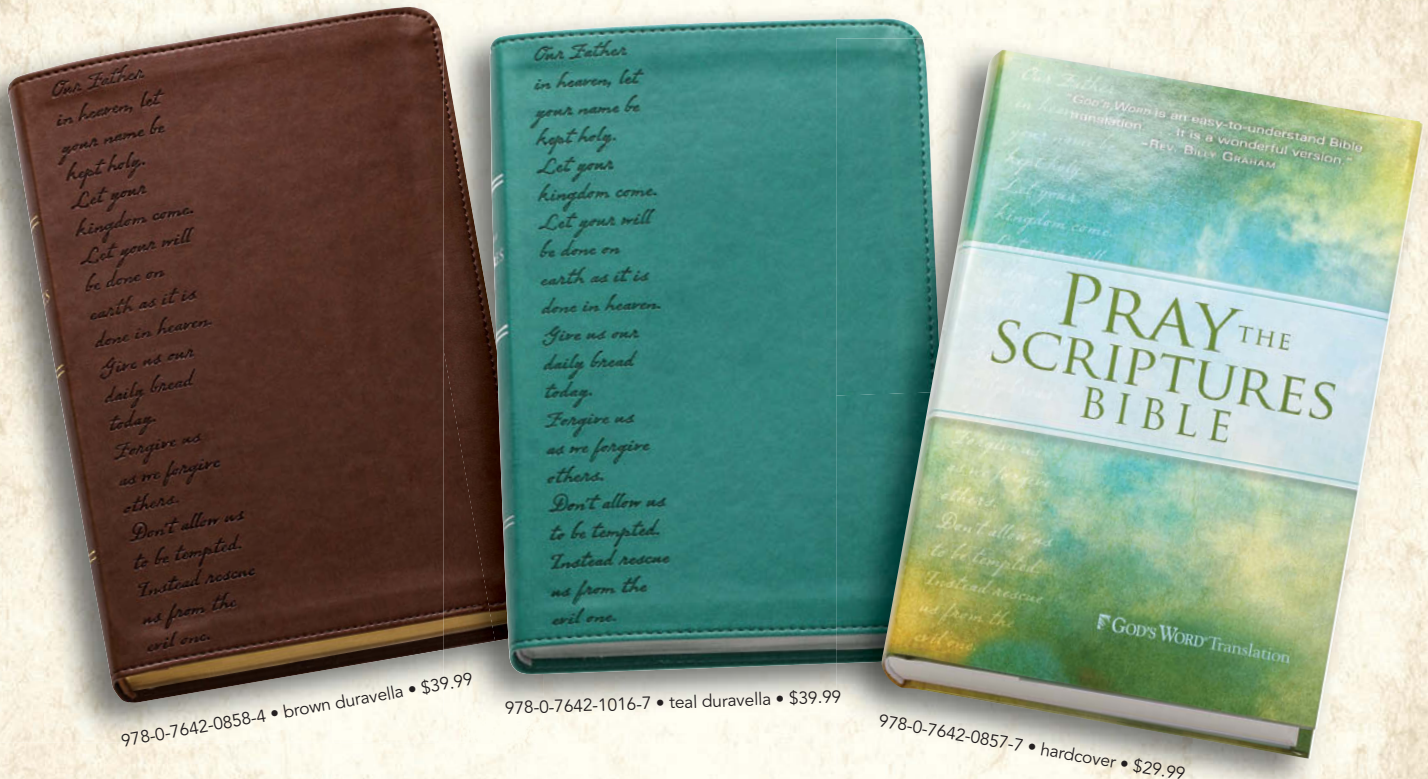
“We were sad not to be able to live in Basketo and not to be actively involved in the project from 2000 onward,” Simon says. “Encouragement and moral support were at least as important as technical project support.

“Through the time spent building our house, by depending on

[continued on 60]

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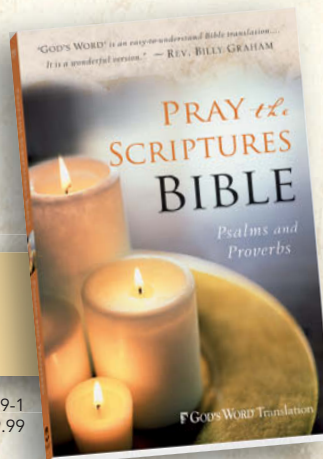
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In Ethiopia, only 43 percent of people over age 15 can read, so Scripture is commonly read aloud in churches.

The Gospel Hand-off [from 58]

their hospitality and protection, in walking the footpaths in Basketo, we built loving relationships with the Basketo church and community.”

Handing off a ministry is rarely simple; a calling is rarely easy to release. Even now, a decade later, as the Caudwells live and work in the United Kingdom, they and their two children miss Getachew, Geresu, and the Basketo church and community.

Whenever a baton of leadership passes to new hands, challenges arise from either holding the baton too tightly or from dropping it altogether. For the hand-off of the Basketo project, finances proved to be a test.

When Getachew accepted the call to serve in translation, a long fundraising season for him did not seem wise. Funds for his project were provided through the member organizations of the Wycliffe Global Alliance. He became a fully funded employee.

This choice demonstrated how the Western church can facilitate key work in the developing world by investing its resources in local leaders who are ready for more responsibilities.

Such arrangements of sharing finances require trust and accountability that come through on-the-ground partners like Getachew and the Caudwells. Getachew will soon become a Wycliffe Africa member, and he will have to raise local financial support. This will bring fresh challenges for his local Christian support network.

Indigenous missionaries face strong social pressure to favor their own community and ethnic heritage, escape poverty, protect their

status, and provide for extended family. Serving in remote areas as missionaries may mean their families are disappointed. And of course, finding funding and the time to finish training is a constant struggle. Even today, Getachew still works to complete additional translation training.

POSTURE OF SERVICE

As the Caudwells and Getachew have seen, God may use situations beyond human control to bring missionaries and their agencies to hand off work into indigenous hands.

In a victory the Caudwells could scarcely have imagined 12 years ago, the churches of Basketo now have the Gospels of Mark and Luke in their mother tongue, and the entire Basketo New Testament is currently being reviewed. Throughout the

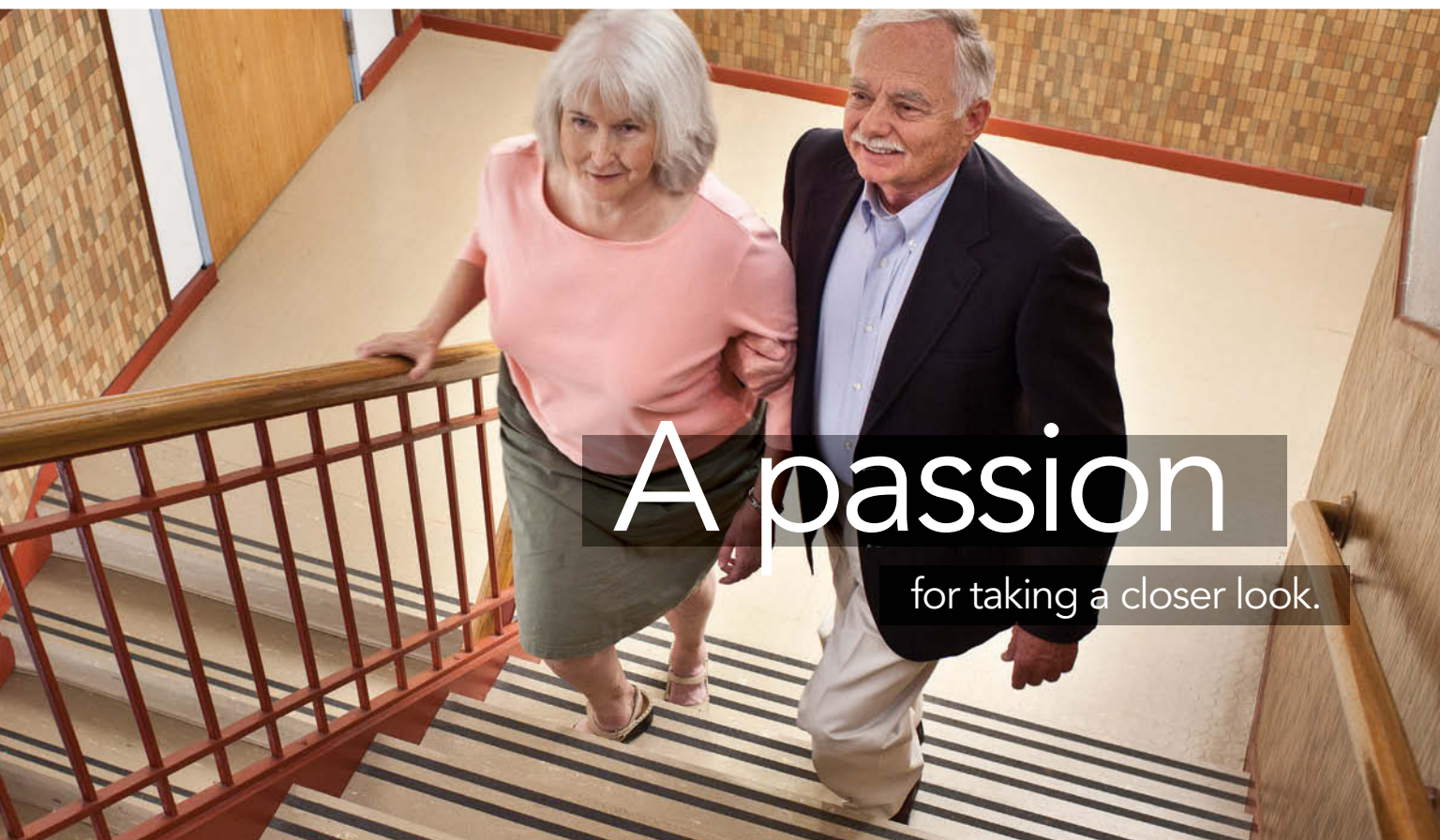
process, the credit for the work was due not to one or two missionaries, but to a wide team of translators, consultants, and supporters both in Ethiopia and worldwide. Today, the Basketo people are more than 90 percent Christian.

Indigenous missionaries like Getachew are increasingly sent out to neighboring people groups. Foreign and local ministries are ministering in greater ways than either could alone. “Foreigners increasingly need to adopt a posture of service to the local and national leaders,” says Simon.

The Caudwells consider it among their greatest joys in Ethiopia that “God was overriding our plans—for better ones.”

Handing off a ministry is rarely simple; a calling is rarely easy to release.

Adam and Christine Jeske, based in Madison, Wisconsin, are coauthors of *This Ordinary Adventure: Settling Down Without Settling* (InterVarsity Press).



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[MISSIONS]

The Great Tiny

MY JOURNEY TO A GUATEMALAN VILLAGE
WHERE STARVING CHILDREN ARE RESCUED IN A RACE
AGAINST DEATH.



Baby Rescue

BY KAREN SWALLOW PRIOR

THE BABIES COME in all sizes. They arrive at the rescue center weighing anywhere from 1.5 to 36 pounds. Some are newborns, some are 19 years old. Technically, then, they aren't all babies. But technicalities weigh little in matters of life and death. All the children brought here are helpless and need critical care—or they will die. Of the 1,200 children treated at the center last year, 85 did die.

I have traveled here with World Help, a faith-based humanitarian group located near my home in Virginia. World Help partners with ministries worldwide, bringing to impoverished communities a bit of America's bounty. One of World Help's more than 100 partners is Hope of Life here in Zacapa, a flat, fertile valley nestled next to the Rio Grande de Zacapa in eastern Guatemala.

Rescuing babies has brought me here.

The fragile, dying babies that surround me remind me of other babies I tried to rescue, years ago, in America, at the crisis pregnancy center. And at the abortion clinics. And even the ones I could not bear. I could not see or hear or hold those babies. But these I can. And I do.

CROSSING TO HOPE

The ministry began in 1987, when Carlos Vargas made a sickbed bargain with God.

Born and raised in the Guatemalan village of Llano Verde, as a teenager Vargas left for the United States, where he became a successful businessman. But he was forced to return to Llano Verde when an unknown illness crippled him, threatening to keep him in the village the rest of his life. Moved one day by an elderly beggar, Vargas gave the man money and promised God that if he could get out of bed, he would spend his life serving the poor.

Both God and Vargas kept their word. Vargas recovered, and he soon built a home for the elderly. It became one of the first buildings of a ministry that has burgeoned into a 3,000-acre campus—almost 5 square miles—that serves Guatemala's most vulnerable citizens from crib to wheelchair. Beyond home base, Hope of Life serves outlying communities by sponsoring children, building wells and new homes, running feeding centers, leading schools, and more. Partnering with World Help, American companies provide surplus goods in a makeshift store where villagers shop using tickets given by Hope of Life based on family size. Missions teams—which descend upon the campus every week—distribute new shoes to surrounding villages. The ambulance used to transport rescued children was donated by a church in Virginia.

Operation Baby Rescue, a partner program with World Help, is only the beginning of Hope of Life's ministry. "While rescuing babies is a priority, we are investing in the rest of their lives and in their communities," explains Noel Yeatts, vice president of World Help. "It doesn't end with

Clinging to Life: Noel Yeatts came with other World Help staff to take babies like Kender to food and shelter. An estimated 80 percent of children in rural Guatemala are malnourished.

SALLY HAHN / WORLD HELP

baby rescue. We are doing multiple things to break the cycle of death and despair.”

Today, one of the rescued “babies” who just arrived is 13-year-old Noë, who rests in his father’s arms. They are accompanied by six more sick children and five family members—each toting a few possessions in small plastic bags. They have walked for hours from a remote mountain village, arriving at the bank of El Motagua River. They are met by World Help and Hope of Life staff. Rugged oarsmen ferry them to the other side, where an ambulance awaits.

Noë’s father bears his son up the steep grassy bank toward the ambulance. His dark face is set grimly, his eyes lit with fear. Many indigenous Maya mountain dwellers suspect Western Christians of wanting to trade the children in the country’s thriving human trafficking scene—or worse. Some families, believing shamans’ promises to heal their sick children, have only seen their loved ones deteriorate. Between fear and empty promises, Noë suffers— from cerebral palsy, pneumonia, and severe malnutrition. His father finally lifts his son’s limp-limbed body into the ambulance. Medical personnel lay Noë gently on a bench next to me, as I take into my own arms Rosalia, another child who has crossed the river today.

I loosen Rosalia’s swaddling blankets in the sweltering heat of the ambulance. Rosalia’s limbs, like sticks, betray her malnourishment. It is immediately clear that she has Down syndrome. She is wearing only pink eyelet underpants; white scabies adorn the rest of her thin body. She seems not to notice the siren scream or the jolts as we drive along the rocky road carved into a wooded thicket leading away from the deadly river toward life.

Yet if I speak softly to her, she turns her unfocused eyes toward my face. When I learn through a translator that tiny Rosalia is 4 years old, the lightness of her being becomes unbearable in my arms.

At the rescue center, I learn that Rosalia weighs 14.8 pounds. Noë, a teenager, weighs 46.

During my stay at Hope of Life, the center receives 17 sick and dying children. Their ailments range from brittle bones to hydrocephalus. Most are malnourished. Before I leave, one of them will be borne by his lightness to the grave.



When I learn through a translator that tiny Rosalia (above) is 4 years old and 14.8 pounds, the lightness of her being becomes unbearable in my arms.

LOVE IN ACTION

Rosalia, Noë, and the five other children brought across the river this afternoon are joining 30-some children in the rescue center. Among these are Diego, a few months old. He is now a chubby, happy baby, a new development in his short life: When he was a few days old, Diego was discovered in a heap at the trash dump while dogs fought over his umbilical cord.

Jenri, age 2, was brought into the center some weeks ago. He weighs 10 pounds, two more than when he arrived. At 49 pounds, Yolanda, 13, is a wisp of a girl. Deaf and mute, she is slow to smile but has started to shyly practice her newly learned sign language with visitors.

Fortunately for Yolanda, Hope of Life opened a center for special-needs children right next to the Baby Rescue Center this summer. A World Help board member whose daughter recently died of cancer donated the money to build the center. When Yolanda’s condition stabilizes, the center will become her permanent home. Other children brought to the center will, when they are well, return to their families. Many family members stay in temporary



From Gaunt to Great: Sisters Lady and Alicia, before and after Hope of Life’s rescue.



homes near the rescue center while their children are treated. Children who are here due to abandonment, neglect, or abuse will live at the ministry's orphanage. A 500-student K-12 school on the campus serves all of the orphans for free. About half of the students come from wealthy families able to pay tuition.

This has two benefits: The school supports itself, and the daily socialization of rich and poor children helps close the social gap that's a defining characteristic of Guatemala, a country rated as one of the worst for income inequality.

Hope of Life sustains its home site with income from its greenhouses and a tilapia farm, which produces over one million pounds of fish annually that's sold in local markets. The bustling campus employs about 400 people, a significant contribution in a country with staggering poverty (see "Hungry Guatemala"). But this is a fraction of the efforts of Hope of Life. In fact, Vargas says, 90 percent of its labor and budget are expended outside the home base through projects like Total Village Transformation, which gives communities a well, a church, and a school.

"When we say 'God loves you,'" says Sal Vargas, who helps his brother run Hope of Life, "it's not just words—it's love in action."

One of the children carried across the river has died. Nelson was 19 months old, the child of a young mother who traveled down from the mountain and crossed the river with him. She had come wearing a lilac shawl over a colorful cotton dress—Sunday best for a somber day. After Nelson arrived, the effects of his malnutrition worsened, and staff decided to send him to the hospital an hour away. He died on the way.

Today we are holding a small service for him outside the center. A miniature casket covered in silky white cloth sits open atop a table surrounded by vases of plastic flowers. Yeatts offers a short message of comfort to the gently weeping mother and the handful assembled. Vargas translates for Yeatts into Spanish, and a center volunteer translates it to the mother's Mayan dialect. Nelson was her only child. His father, like many villagers, did not want his son taken to the rescue center. His son's death will reinforce his fears, perhaps making it likely that others will delay getting help for their sick children until it is too late. In communities where word circulates with surprising reach and speed, Vargas must now try even harder to build trust.

The first children I meet at Hope of

Life are Lady and Alicia. They are playing outside the orphanage with other children in the morning sunlight before school. Sisters ages 9 and 10, they have thick, shiny black hair and warm brown skin. But when they were brought to the rescue center five years ago from a remote village, their skin hung on their visible bones like sackcloth.

They had been abandoned by their mother and father in their grandmother's care. She tied them to a bed with ropes when she left them to earn money by washing clothes. Today, they glow with life and joy as they play with the other orphans. They attend school at Hope of Life, which will also cover the girls' college tuition should they choose to go.

Nelson may have had these opportunities, too, had he been rescued in time. Or perhaps if the hospital had been closer, as soon it will be. Built in partnership with World Help, Hope of Life is completing St. Luke's Hospital, rising six stories, topped by a helicopter pad, equipped to meet the needs of the children who come to the Baby Rescue Center, and others as well. Much of the medical equipment has been provided, in large part through a U.S. program that allows organizations like World Help to claim unused and unneeded military surplus. Once the hospital is open, children like Nelson will have an even greater hope for life.

These babies, those babies, all unbearably light. They are there, they are here. They exist, whether we see them or not, slender shafts of life eclipsed by the dark weight of the world.

I have never borne a baby of my own. Two-thirds of fertilized eggs—babies too light to bear—fail to implant, scientists surmise. My womb is a grave. My friend the biology professor once said to me, "When you get to heaven, you might find it filled with your babies." Perhaps. But I believe that Nelson will be there, along with many other children. Yet I know, too, that I don't have to wait to get to heaven to see all of my babies: They fill the earth. And they come in all sizes.

Editor's Note: At press time, World Help revised its 2011 reported revenue after discovering a major over-valuation of non-cash donations (medicines), likely due to misrepresentations from a former consultant. Its 2010 and 2009 reports will also be revised. For more information, see worldhelp.net/nov2012_statement_revised_financials/.

Karen Swallow Prior is chair of the English and modern languages department at Liberty University. A writer for *Hermeneutics* and *The Atlantic*, she is the author most recently of *Booked: Literature in the Soul of Me* (T. S. Poetry Press).

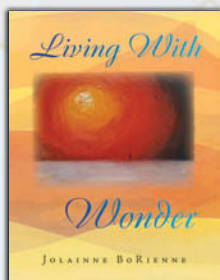


Under decades of colonization, dictators, ethnic and racial strife, civil war, and government corruption—all punctuated by natural disasters—the lush, gorgeous land

of Guatemala has become a death trap for the poorest of its citizens. According to a November report from the United Nations' Human Rights Council, about 40 percent of Guatemala's indigenous population lives in "extreme poverty." Half of all Guatemalan children under age 5 suffer from chronic malnutrition, and the rate increases among those living in the mountains and in rural villages to over 70 percent. According to UNICEF, Guatemala's rate of malnutrition is the worst in the Western Hemisphere. It is commonly ranked as the third worst in the world for child malnutrition. In 2009, the country's food shortage resulted in the government declaring a national emergency. The UN calls the current food situation "extremely serious."

Parents are so accustomed to small and skinny children that obvious signs of malnutrition can go unrecognized for too long. Experts cite malnutrition as the cause of significantly stunted growth among many children. Half of Guatemala's population is stunted, and in rural villages, the figure is as high as 80 percent. Beyond mere survival, malnutrition has effects both long-term and long-reaching. Without nutrients during early developmental stages, both the body and the brain can't grow. Experts forecast generations of Guatemalan adults less likely to attain higher levels of education or entrepreneurship, even when such opportunities are available.

Books You'll Love to Share



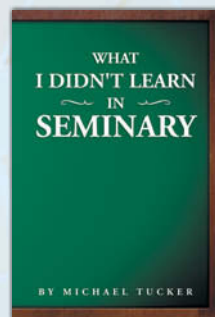
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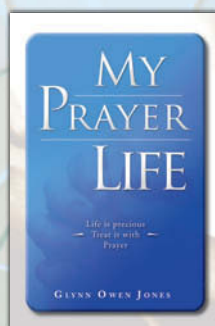
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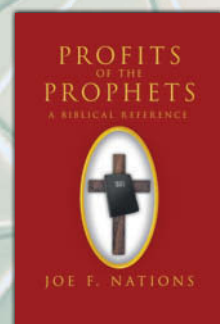
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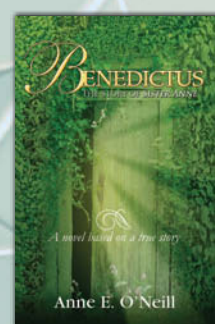
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OPINIONS AND PERSPECTIVES ON ISSUES FACING THE CHURCH

Viewpoints



What does this say about what I think, what we all think, what freedom of religion in America really is, how it is really practiced, and who it is really for?

Jim Gustafson
E-mail

Freedom for All?

I read "Honoring Faith in the Public Square" [November] with interest, and found myself nodding in agreement often. Then I read it again but this time, wherever I saw *church*, I substituted *mosque*; wherever *faith*, I substituted *Islam*; wherever *minister/pastor/clergy*, I substituted *imam/mullah*; and so on. I did not nod in agreement. What does this say about what I think, what we all think, what freedom of religion in America really is, how it is really practiced, and who it is really for?

JIM GUSTAFSON
E-mail

Separating Christ

"Shari'ah's Uphill Climb" [November] is well argued, though I find the final point about slow assimilation unsatisfying. I'm sympathetic to the logic, but the author seems to be saying, "No, Shari'ah is not permissible, except that it is after a long period of semi-injustice."

It may be more consistent to argue that Jewish and Muslim law make claims on the entire community, from personal to legal to social relations, but that Christianity more clearly separates Christ from Caesar. As the West developed a secular

public sphere, Christian (especially Protestant) practice developed with and facilitated this move. By contrast, Jews had to fight to carve out a legal space. Notably, they also had to jettison Jewish law as an all-encompassing standard for social/political life. In a similar fashion, if American Muslims want to set up an overlapping jurisdiction with the state, they need to revise the traditional understanding of Shari'ah.

RED WELL
E-mail

United by Trust

"The Key to a Purposeful Life" [November] was superb. We 21st-century believers have largely lost touch with the experience and teaching regarding union with Christ. This is partly due to the current translation of the New Testament Greek words *pistis/pisteuo* ("believe" or "have faith"). The English word *faith* no longer has the same depth of meaning that it did a few hundred years ago, but we have kept the word and thereby short-circuited the meaning. Much better to replace every *believe* and every *faith* with the word *trust*. Trust is that which unites us to other persons.

TOP 3

What got the most comments in November's CT

46%

God Did It

Carolyn Arends

18%

Shari'ah's Uphill Climb

John Witte Jr.

10%

The Mystic Baptist

Interview by Mark Galli

READERS' PICK

The most praised piece in November's CT



The Key to a Purposeful Life
Sarah Lebar Hall

Trusting Jesus is the experience that confirms the spiritual union that we all enjoy in Christ. Every believer, even one who is only five minutes newly born, can experience and exhibit this gift of trust.

DAVE STRAVERS
Hudsonville, Michigan

On Common Ground

"What's So Great About 'The Common Good?'" [November] was important and much appreciated by me as a Christian law professor. This notion of the common good is critical in today's corporate law in order to reclaim the way in which capital workers and others pursue a common mission that transcends individual interest. It also calls conservatives to see the importance of advancing the well-being of groups without also invoking statist

solutions, thereby blunting liberal criticisms that conservatives are too individualistic in cultural orientation.

May I suggest that those in the common-ground movement attend to our important business-

related world? This would itself create common ground in which evangelicals and Catholics can labor together.

LYMAN JOHNSON
Lexington, Virginia

'Quiet Intimacy'

Thanks for the insightful interview "The

COMMENTS? QUESTIONS?

CT'S EDITORS WOULD LOVE TO HEAR THEM.

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Mystic Baptist" [November], which did not give us another 5-point plan on how to grow a church. If Charles Stanley fits the definition of "mystic," then may God give us thousands more. His reliance on unceasing prayer and guidance by the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit was very refreshing to this minister's heart. I sense "Stanley's Plan" was summarized with these words: "I think that quiet intimacy with him, for me, is the key to the whole Christian life."

JAMES H. DIEHL
Lakewood, Colorado

Discrediting Our Truth

Bravo to Carolyn Arends for her much-needed viewpoint on evolution and Christianity ["God Did It," November]. Somehow much of the evangelical world has tied the question of the truth of the Christian faith to the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture. It only discredits our truth claims for the Christian faith when we insist on treating Scripture literally.

There are indeed good reasons to critique the doctrine of unassisted evolution, and we should not fail to point these out. But we should also stop shooting ourselves in the foot by insisting on taking the Genesis creation account literally.

DAN HOCHBERG
Seattle, Washington

Unleashed Chaplains

I am truly touched by "True Shepherds" [November]. I served as a Navy and

Marine Corps chaplain for 29 years, and I also spoke to the heroes of the chaplain corps. I was so inspired by their faith, courage, and patriotism. While in Iraq, I tried to minimize casualties by restricting the travel of chaplains. But my chaplains wanted to be with the troops and did not want to be on a leash. God bless them.

WILLIAM PAYNE
E-mail

Questions of Faith

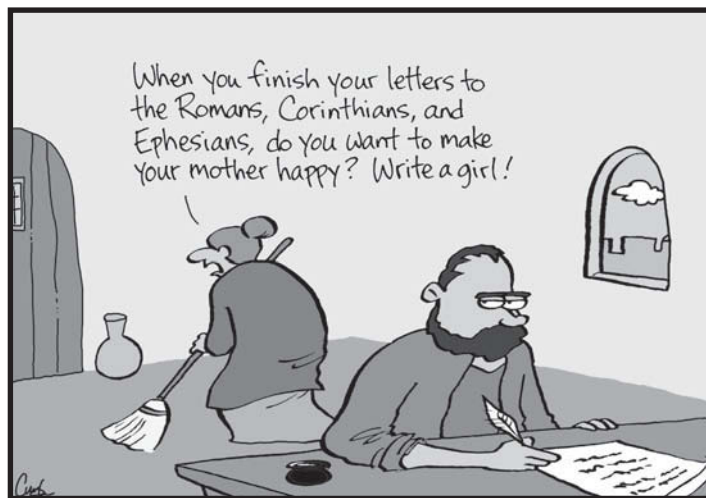
Fringe is my favorite show, and I've often wondered why I saw so little written about it here, when it had so much to do with questions of faith and love ["Mad Scientist Meets God," November]. It is a well-written, thoughtful, intelligent show, and the acting is wonderful. I will dearly miss it when it goes off the air.

DORIS RILEY
E-mail

CLARIFICATION

I am grateful for the generous profile of me ["The Choice," October]. But one paragraph may give the wrong impression about my dear friend Kumar Abraham, who left the country after his house had been burned for the second time. He did leave to minister in the Philippines and Australia, but has now returned to Sri Lanka and is doing a very significant ministry among our people.

—Ajith Fernando



compiled by Elissa Cooper

WORTH REPEATING

Things overheard at CT online.

"If you expect women to follow someone other than God, then you should also expect them to have extremely high expectations for who they're going to choose as their 'leader.'"

Janni, discussing how the belief that the husband must be the spiritual head of the family can be harmful to both men and women.

Her.meneutics: "He's Just Not a Spiritual Leader," and Other Christian Dating Myths," by Marlena Graves

"This may be God saying, 'Enough already! This does not represent who I am. No party represents who I am. Stop worshipping the American gods.'"

John Hubers, commenting on evangelicalism in the United States amid readers' discussion about the "true" faith of the presidential candidates based on political views.

"In Defeats, Evangelicals' Political Unity at All-Time High," by Tobin Grant and Ted Olsen

"I feel a terrible loss regarding what both evangelicalism and the pro-life movement might have been."

Jon Trott, addressing a fellow reader's criticism of the Christian Right in the abortion debates.

"Does It Matter that Evangelicals Became Pro-life Recently?" by Mark Galli

"Does she remember God? I do not know. I find comfort in the fact that God remembers her."

BJ, sharing his own experiences of a Christian mother-in-law suffering from Alzheimer's.

Speaking Out: "Seeing the Hidden Grace of Alzheimer's," by Colleen Carroll Campbell

CUYLER BLACK

Discipleship Is Messy

Insider movements can lead to syncretism, yes. But less so if we all stay connected.

The most telling comment in the interview with Abu Jaz, a Muslim follower of Christ (page 22), is this: “We cannot rule out syncretism at the beginning of a new believer’s life. . . . When they put their faith in Jesus, they may have at the same time Muhammad in their heart.”

It harkens to another quote from a recent CT interview, this one with author-pastor Max Lucado, given in response to someone who asks if preaching grace might encourage sin: “My experience has been, yes, for a time. There will be people who will say, ‘You know what? God is going to forgive me. I’m going to go get drunk again.’”

Whether the context is Christian America or the Muslim world, discipleship is a messy business. Growth in Christ is usually slow, sometimes agonizingly slow, subject to repeated misunderstanding, backsliding, and even heterodoxy.

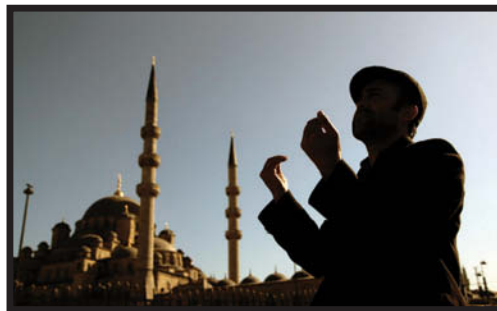
That’s why many new converts and missiologists say that new converts from Islam or Hinduism, for example, should repudiate their religion, and even their culture, especially if that religion has permeated culture to prevent people from hearing the gospel. There is something right and true about this approach for many believers.

Other converts and missiologists encourage new believers to remain in their culture as long as possible, as long as Scripture doesn’t explicitly forbid the practices in question. This approach has been very effective at introducing Muslims to Christ, exponentially even, as the article by missiologist Phil Parshall shows (page 31). There is also something right and true about this approach.

Recently, some missionaries have advocated a more radical approach. New believers are encouraged to retain their religious identity and to worship and follow Jesus as Lord and Savior within their community. They reject or reinterpret features of their

religion when necessary (e.g., Muhammad can no longer be *the* prophet, though he can still be viewed as a prophet of God and honored as such), but they otherwise follow Jesus in the midst of their religion. As the interview with Abu Jaz shows, there is something right and true about this approach as well.

Like many, we are cautiously optimistic about this deep insider strategy. Optimistic because we believe this is an effective way to introduce large numbers of Muslims or Hindus, for example, to Christ—especially when their cultural and religious setting



makes it nearly impossible to hear the gospel as good news, rather than a foreign religion or an American import.

We’re cautious because the hazards—such as syncretism—are obvious, as Abu Jaz notes.

Still, church history shows that the threat of syncretism or even heresy, while a cause for concern, is not necessarily an end point. In the 3rd and 4th centuries, the “gospel” in much of southeastern and central Europe was more Arian until orthodoxy finally triumphed in the 6th and 7th centuries.

Another example: Christianity in Japan was forced to become a deeply insider movement in the early 1600s. These *Kakure Kirishitans*, or “hidden Christians,” continued

to practice Christianity in secret. Figures of the saints and the Virgin Mary were transformed into traditional statues of the Buddha and bodhisattvas. The prayers began to sound like Buddhist chants, and the Bible and other parts of the liturgy were passed down orally.

Having lost a connection to the wider church, many doctrines morphed. As the scholar Hayao Kawai noted, for the hidden Christians, “Mary ascended to heaven and became the intermediary, and Jesus, the savior,” so that “the Trinity consisted of Father, Son, and Mother (Holy Spirit).”

So, yes, insider movements can go awry. But not if they stay connected to the global church. When Japanese Christianity came out of hiding in the mid-1800s, 30,000 secret Christians came out and the majority rejoined the church, renouncing unorthodox beliefs and practices.

How do we connect with, say, Muslim followers of *Isa* deep inside a Muslim culture? There are no easy answers—to reach out publicly would invite serious problems for the local believers. Here’s where the missions community might give us wise guidance. One idea: Can some ministry organize mediators to connect by e-mail insider leaders with churches elsewhere to offer mutual encouragement? Surely in a digital age, there are ways to facilitate this type of fellowship.

God does indeed watch over his church, in its manifold expressions and during periods when believers are confused and immature. And he uses the global church, when we all stay connected, to help us “all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13, ESV).

History shows that the threat of syncretism or even heresy, while a cause for concern, is not an end point.

*Theology
at the
Frontline*

Given Deborah, Jael, and Judith, why shouldn't women serve in combat?

MEN ARE FITTER

Owen Strachan is a contributing writer for the Gospel Coalition and executive director of the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood.

Recently, the *Marine Corps Gazette* published a bold op-ed on a hot topic: women in combat. This essay was not written by a patriarchal jarhead, however. It was authored by Katie Petronio, Marine captain.

Petronio, a former college hockey player, shared that after five months on the frontlines in Afghanistan, "I had muscle atrophy in my thighs that was causing me to constantly trip and my legs to buckle with the slightest grade change." Eventually, Petronio lost 17 pounds and was diagnosed with polycystic ovarian syndrome. She concluded, "There is no way I could endure the physical demands of the infantrymen whom I worked beside."

This experience confirms the fears of evangelicals who have concerns about women in combat. Scripture teaches that woman was made from man, a truth that grounds her dependence on him (Gen. 2:21–22). It details how Adam failed to own this responsibility and protect his wife. For this reason, God addressed him first after the forbidden fruit was eaten: "Where are you?" (Gen. 3:9). Adam was a self-crippled man.

This tragic pattern continues in different places in biblical history, leaving courageous godly women like Deborah and Jael to lead in place of men. When Barak quails at the thought of battle against the Canaanites, Deborah promises that this abdication "will not lead to your glory, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman" (Judges 4:9, ESV). We hear her scorn loud and clear, even as we hear the pounding of Jael's tent peg into Sisera's skull (4:21).

David, whose kingship begins with his stunning defeat of Goliath, is supported during his reign by his "mighty men," something of an Israelite SEAL Team Six (1 Chron. 11:10–47). David's sacrificial valor anticipates the warrior-savior, Jesus Christ, whose death on behalf of his people was an act of war against Satan (Isa. 53; Eph. 4:8). Jesus was a self-sacrificial man.

Men receive their marching orders from this Christlike example. Paul teaches that husbands "ought to love their wives as their own bodies." In these and other texts, we see that the Bible consistently shows men protecting women, whether in home, church, or broader society.

The Bible teaches textually what common sense tells us naturally—and physiological study confirms scientifically. According to scientists Anne and Bill Moir, authors of *Why Men Don't Iron,*

men are generally larger, stronger, and faster, and have greater lung capacity, a faster metabolism, and roughly 11 times the testosterone of women. God's design for men and women is good. We ignore it at our own peril.

If men will not own this responsibility, then women will be forced to take it on as did biblical women such as Deborah and Jael (and the extrabiblical figure Judith). Many modern men fail to mirror Christ in leading, providing, and protecting. In the cries of fatherless children, the strained voice of working mothers desperately seeking "work-life balance," and the *Marine Corps Gazette*, we hear echoes of the Bible's first question, addressed to a self-crippled man: "Where are you?"

GENDER DOESN'T MATTER

Jan McCormack, USAF Chaplain, Lieutenant Colonel (retired), is director of the chaplaincy and pastoral counseling programs at Denver Seminary.

Yes, women should be allowed to serve in combat roles. Sacrificial love is a core principle of Christianity—as is compassionate protection for those who are not able to protect themselves.

These are principles that apply to all of us, regardless of gender or the times in which we live. They demand courage and often break with the mores of the culture for a

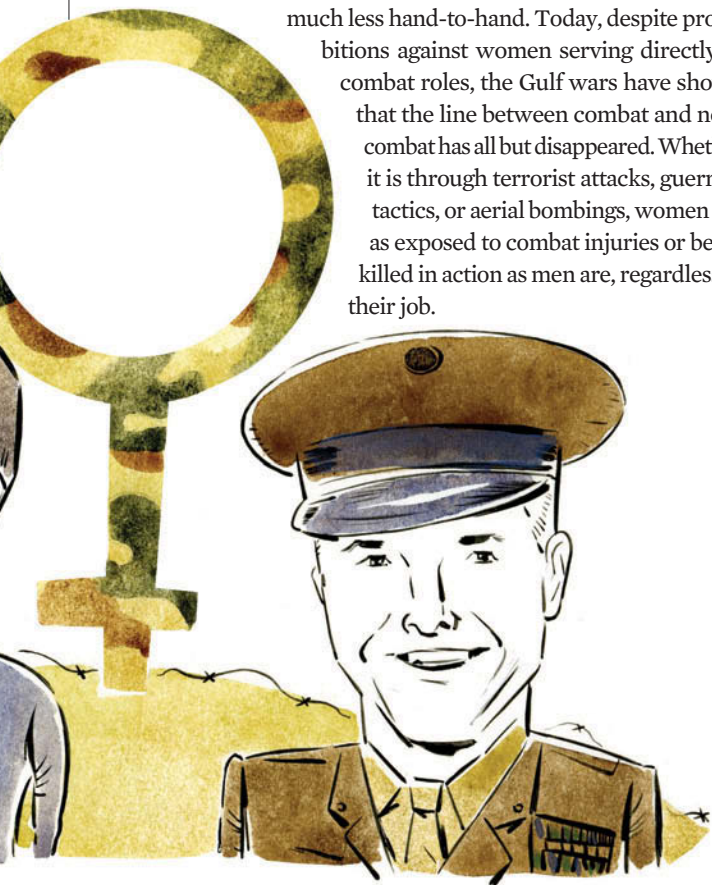


greater good. Esther was willing to sacrifice herself by braving the wrath of the king even unto death, in order to save her people. Mary knew that becoming pregnant by the Holy Spirit, not by her fiancé Joseph, could get her killed, yet she obeyed God's will for her.

In the Bible's patriarchal society, we read of heroines who engaged in combat in desperate times. Judith was not a warrior, yet she beheaded the Assyrian king's general. Deborah, a prophetess and a judge of Israel, guided her people during peace and war. When war and oppression came, she battled against the superior Canaanite army herself and led her male troops to victory. Sisera, the enemy general, then fled the battlefield towards Kedesh, where he was received by his ally Heber's wife, Jael. After he fell asleep, Jael killed him with a tent peg. She was hailed a heroine by the pursuing Israelite forces.

Before the modern state of Israel existed, Jewish women served in combat roles in what would become the Israel Defense Forces, because "every Jewish male or female" needed to be "prepared and trained to fulfill the obligation of national defense." In 2000 women were readmitted to combat roles; those trained as combat soldiers serve a longer mandatory term and stay in the reserves longer than their noncombat sisters (though most are exempted from reserve duty after marriage or having children). Both men and women can be exempted from military service for religious reasons.

In America, during World War II military women did not serve in combat roles. Like men, they returned to their civilian lives at war's end. With the draft's repeal, women entered noncombat service as a voluntary career. Increasingly, combat has become much less hand-to-hand. Today, despite prohibitions against women serving directly in combat roles, the Gulf wars have shown that the line between combat and non-combat has all but disappeared. Whether it is through terrorist attacks, guerrilla tactics, or aerial bombings, women are as exposed to combat injuries or being killed in action as men are, regardless of their job.



"Greater love has no one than this, that he [or she] lay down his life . . ." (John 15:13, NIV 1984). In all things, we are to respond to the Lord's call on our lives. No one should automatically be excluded on the basis of gender alone.

GIFTS ARE WHAT COUNTS

Alan "Blues" Baker, Rear Admiral and Chaplain of the Marine Corps (retired), served on staff at Menlo Park Presbyterian Church and is currently principal consultant at Strategic Foundations.

Christmas week of 2006, as I climbed into a helicopter on my way to a combat zone deep inside Iraq, I noticed two machine gun barrels protruding from the helo in anticipation of hostile fire.

One of the gunners with dark goggles took a finger off the trigger, turned to face me, and gave me a thumbs-up while handing me a note: "Chaplain Baker, my name is Sgt. Elizabeth Walker. I was stationed on the *USS Harry S. Truman* with you from 2001–2003. Glad to see you again." Knowing my fellow shipmate was defending our group gave me confidence to focus on my mission of encouraging the Marines whom we visited on the ground.

Earlier in my career, I was responsible for the safety of 30 crewmembers as the officer-in-charge aboard an 80-ton training vessel. When caught in an offshore squall, the entire crew became seasick and I felt as if I were the only one left to steer the boat.

I was relieved to see five crewmembers gain the resolve and iron will to maintain their posts in spite of their illness. As a small team, we brought the vessel safely into port. All five of these tough sailors were women. Once the males saw their female colleagues in action, not only did any doubts about the women's abilities disappear, the whole crew grew stronger as well.

Aboard this boat, I noticed that the women tended to work twice as hard, perhaps because of lingering stigma. The men seemed to need to compete with each other and with the women, so they also brought their best to the same mission. It became symbiotic. These experiences demonstrated to me that a woman can be as successful as a man whether she is leading a helicopter squadron through the Euphrates River Valley or a software company in Silicon Valley. In my experience, I have seen women not only being *as* successful as men, but often *more* successful.

As Christians, we should seek to serve where we are gifted. We should support those who are best qualified for combat, whether male or female. I find this similar to Paul's proclamation in Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Whether it is a playing field or a battlefield, all who are called should have the opportunity to serve without reservation.

I saw a verse painted on the side of a building in Kandahar province, Afghanistan: "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'" This verse from Isaiah reminds me that God calls us to places of significance by his design and for his purpose, regardless of whether we are male or female.



So, Who Hallows God's Name?

We usually think it's our job. Think twice.

On a recent trip, I had a conversation with a man who learned I was from Vancouver. He had lived there years earlier, and after asking if a particular music shop was still in the city, he told me a story.

His wife was a piano major at the University of British Columbia. When they went piano shopping as newlyweds, the saleswoman led them straight to the entry-level models. "She had us pegged exactly right," the man told me. "We didn't have two nickels to rub together. We were going to have to borrow the money to get the cheapest instrument there."

Everything changed, however, when the name of the prospective buyer's mentor—a world-renowned master teaching at the university—came up in conversation. The saleswoman was panic-stricken. "Not these pianos!" she exclaimed, herding the couple away from the economy section and into a private showroom of gleaming Steinways. "I'm so sorry," she kept repeating, horrified at the thought of the teacher finding out she'd shown one of his students an inferior instrument. Try as they might, they couldn't persuade her to take them back to the pianos they could afford. Once the master's name came up, only the best would do.

"Hallowed be thy name," I said this morning, mumbling my way through the Lord's Prayer. I've prayed that phrase countless times. But today, I find myself thinking about the reverence a flustered piano saleswoman had for a teacher's name, and the prayer begins to change shape.

What does it mean to "hallow" God's name? I was raised to flinch whenever someone uses it as a mindless exclamation or, worse, a curse. I've heard about the extreme care taken in branches of Judaism: Pages containing the name of YHWH are never thoughtlessly discarded but rather buried or ritually burned. When I've prayed the Lord's Prayer, I've tried to cultivate that kind of

personal reverence for his name—even while living in a world prone to profane it, and a church apt to make puns with it on T-shirts.

I'm glad I was taught to avoid blasphemy. But I'm beginning to suspect that my understanding of what it means to hallow God's name has barely scratched the surface.

Names are a big deal in the Bible. From Abraham ("Father of Many") to Jacob ("Heel-grasper") to Peter ("Rock"), monikers don't merely identify, they reveal. Moses understood this. So he asked God (whom he knew by the generic deity designation *Elohim*) for his personal name. "Yahweh," God told him, offering Moses the kind of intimacy that only comes on a first-name basis—and revealing his covenant with his people in the process.

Every name we have for God is a revelation of his character. So making his name holy must have something to do with revealing him here on earth. But a review of the human track record tells us this isn't our specialty.

There is a scene in the 1999 CBS miniseries *Jesus* that haunts me. Jesus is in agony in Gethsemane, and Satan comes to tempt him one last time. In a devastating move, he shows the Lord a preview of the evils that will be done *in his name*, and asks if his sacrifice will be worth it.

The scene is not from Scripture, but the scenario it proposes is powerful. In the shadow of the Cross, did Jesus observe all the wrongs—catastrophic and petty—we'd credit to him? Did he see inquisitions and gas chambers, defenses of slavery and "God

hates fags" placards? Did he anticipate the way we'd use his name as a political trump card, or speak for him and pronounce his judgments in the wake of tragedies? Did he hear us mutter, when confronted with need, "God helps those who help themselves"? Did he want to shout that he'd said no such thing?

We can only guess at all he endured in the garden, but we know for certain that when one of his friends sliced off a soldier's ear, Jesus put it back on. "You can't hallow my name," the gesture seems to say, "if you're associating it with something I would never do." Thanks be to God, many of his disciples have altered the course of human

history with the good done in his name. And yet, 2,000 years later, we still have a propensity to wield our swords—rhetorical and otherwise—on his behalf.

In light of all this, the Lord's Prayer takes on new urgency. None of the six petitions Jesus taught—for God's name, kingdom, will, bread, forgiveness, and deliverance—are things we can obtain on our own. In fact, all the verbs are passive. This means that the first request is not really, "Let us hallow your name." It's more, "Father, do what we can't—make your name holy in all the earth."

Only God can reveal himself to the world. But if we pray as he taught us, our reverence and care for his name will grow. That's when we'll begin to exchange our cheap instruments of self-interest and power for the costly cross of Christ—the only instrument worthy of our Master's name.



Every name we have for God is a revelation of his character. So making his name holy must have something to do with revealing him here on earth.



Catholics and Baptists Together

The recent synod of bishops sounded notes Protestants can sing.

Always the same. That's the translation of the Latin *semper eadem*, often used to describe the unchanging character of the Catholic Church. Despite certain critics, who say no real change can take place in the Catholic Church, change does take place, though it usually happens by indirection, reassessment, and development. The result is what Pope Benedict XVI has called a "hermeneutic of continuity and reform." This was evident in the 2012 Synod of Bishops, convened to consider "The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith."

I participated in this recent synod as a fraternal delegate representing the Baptist World Alliance. The conveners asked the fraternal delegates to make a brief presentation to the synod, offer written comments on the proceedings, and participate in small groups to help draft the final documents. Given the distant and even hostile relations between Catholics and evangelicals in the past, this represents a remarkable degree of openness on the part of the Catholic Church. Though Vatican II documents call non-Catholic Christians "separated brothers," the synod decidedly emphasized fraternity. This was evident in three major themes of the synod.

1. The centrality of the Bible. The synod recognized the importance of reading, studying, translating, and obeying the written Word of God as essential for evangelization. Lamar Vest of the American Bible Society made a special presentation to the pope and spoke of the collaborative work of spreading the Scriptures throughout the world. We should never minimize the transforming power of God's Word: The Reformation began with a Catholic monk, Martin Luther, poring over the text of the Bible.

2. Jesus Christ and his saving grace. The synod described the Christian faith as "a true encounter and relationship with Jesus Christ," "not simply teachings, wise sayings, a code of morality, or a tradition."

We need a "new" evangelization because difficult challenges confront Christian witness today. These include secularism, relativism, radical pluralism, the denial of God, and the loss of basic values of decency and respect for life. Though globalization has spread these spiritual viruses throughout the world, the synod noted the new opportunities technology brings for sharing the message of Christ across the world.

But none of these are distinctively Catholic issues. They concern Christian evangelists everywhere. As pluralism threatens both Catholic and evangelical thought, the synod boldly affirmed Jesus Christ as the one and only Savior of the world. Several speakers noted the 1999 joint statement by Catholics and Protestants, which said in part, "By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works." Such statements do not dissolve all differences, but they surely point toward a hopeful convergence.

3. The importance of religious freedom. In my remarks to the synod, I stressed this not only for Christians but for all people. Today many nations and groups assault religious freedom, sometimes blatantly, sometimes subtly. All Christians who take seriously Jesus' call to evangelize must stand

and work together for the protection and flourishing of universal religious freedom, both for individuals and for institutions of faith. In his encyclical "Ut Unum Sint" (1995), Pope John Paul II emphasized the memory of the martyrs as a living part of our Christian witness today.

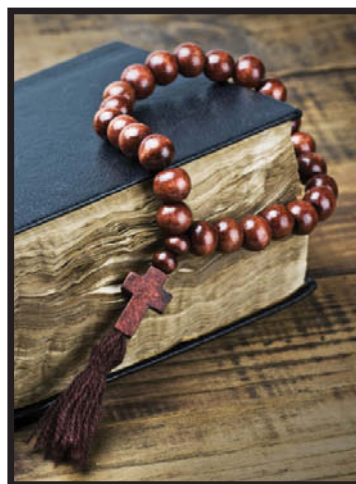
While in Rome, I visited the Basilica of St. Bartholomew and saw a beautiful icon of 20th- and 21st-century Christian martyrs, from East and West, North and South, Catholic and Protestant alike—including two

Baptists: Martin Luther King Jr. and a Romanian pastor killed by the Communists for his faith. Just as the blood of the ancient martyrs was the seed of the early church, so the blood of today's martyrs is the seed of today's church unity.

In response to Mark A. Noll and Carolyn Nystrom's book *Is the Reformation Over?* I've said that the Reformation is over only to the extent that it has succeeded. In

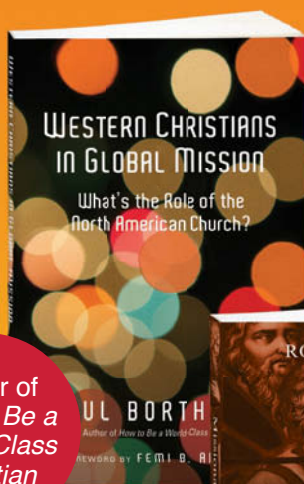
fact, in some measure, the Reformation has succeeded—and more so within the Catholic Church than in certain sectors of the Protestant world. Still, important theological differences remain. The way forward is to seek unity in truth based on God's written Word, the Holy Scriptures.

[For the full text of Timothy George's remarks at the Synod of Bishops, see beesondivinity.com/fromthedean/posts/vatican/.]

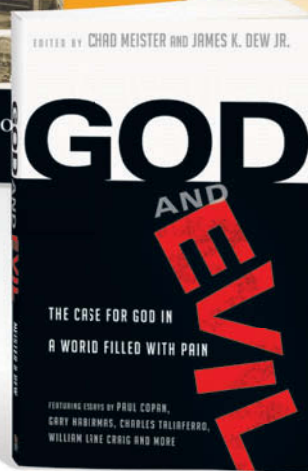
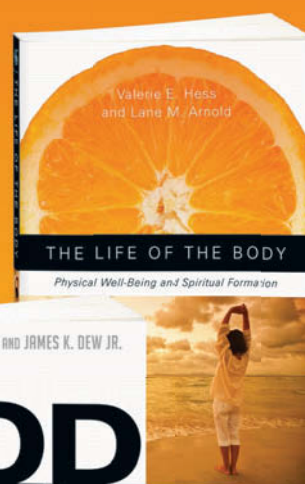
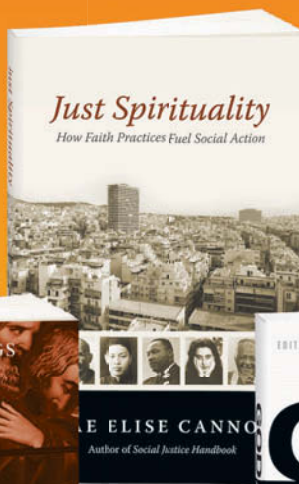
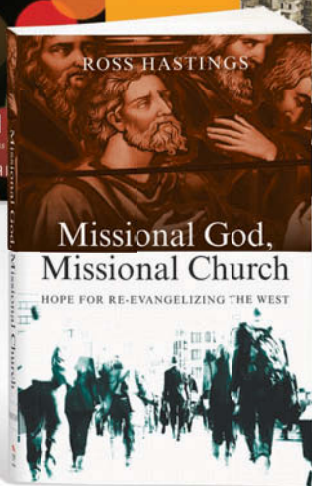


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Keynotes in Contemporary Christian Thought



Author of
*How to Be a
World-Class
Christian*



Western Christians in Global Mission

Paul Borthwick

978-0-8308-3780-9, \$15.00

"This book is exceptional! Paul truly gets at the issues that are most critical for people in North America to understand if they hope to fruitfully engage in global mission."

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Includes biographies of Mother Teresa, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Watchman Nee, Martin Luther King Jr., Fairuz, Desmond Tutu and Oscar Romero.

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Missional God, Missional Church

Ross Hastings

978-0-8308-3955-1, \$24.00

"With his characteristic commitment to the church as well as his facility with and passion for trinitarian theology, Ross Hastings offers a perspective on ecclesiology and mission that cuts through the extremes that are so prevalent in the contemporary ecclesiastical culture."

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God and Evil

Edited by Chad Meister and James K. Dew Jr.

978-0-8308-3784-7, \$20.00

Leading thinkers in Christian philosophy and apologetics take on the problem of evil and suffering. Essays from Paul Copan, Gary Habermas, Charles Taliaferro, William Lane Craig, Jill Graper Hernandez and others provide critical engagement with the New Atheists and offer grounds for renewed confidence in the God who is "acquainted with grief."

The Life of the Body

Valerie E. Hess and Lane M. Arnold

978-0-8308-3571-3, \$15.00

"Here is an engaging contribution to vital spirituality and physical wellness, or total-person shalom."

—Bruce Demarest, senior professor of Christian formation, Denver Seminary, and author of *Seasons of the Soul*

BOOKS, MOVIES, AND THE ARTS

CT Review



The Sin of a Preacher Man

Why churches can't afford to overlook the spiritual lives of their pastors. By David Swanson

There is a disheartening rite of passage every young pastor faces. And though it was almost 10 years ago, I remember my own moment clearly. "Have you heard?" asked my senior pastor when I arrived at the church office that morning. I hadn't. So he proceeded to tell me about the well-known pastor whose moral failure had made the morning headlines. I remember two things about that moment: my pastor's grief and my inability to focus the remainder of the day. Though neither of us had met the man or been greatly

influenced by his ministry, this pastor's public shame still felt deeply personal.

"Have you heard?" As the years have passed I've come to dread that question, yet it—and the sad stories behind it—is frustratingly common. The hushed conversations between pastors at these moments reflect an unsettling worry: that in our discredited colleagues, we see possible reflections of ourselves. We too have known temptation. We too inhabit a church culture that can seem to hinder our own

discipleship by elevating ministry production over spiritual fruit.

In ***Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry*** (Crossway) ★★★★★, Paul David Tripp wades into these murky and hazardous waters. An author and director of the Center for Pastoral Life and Care, Tripp knows the pastoral vocation well. His years in church ministry provide the intimate knowledge necessary to write boldly and mercifully to ministers who so often feel misunderstood by anyone but a fellow pastor. Tripp has spoken to and with enough pastors to see disturbing themes emerge.

"From Belfast to Los Angeles," he writes, "from Johannesburg to New York, from Minneapolis to Singapore, from Cleveland to Berlin, I've heard their stories and felt their discouragement, bitterness, aloneness, fear, and longing. As I've told my story, pastors have felt safe in telling their stories. And it has hit me again and again that there are too many pastors with sad stories to tell, and I've wondered again and again to myself, *What's gone wrong with pastoral culture?*"

NEGLECTING THE HEART

Is a dysfunctional pastoral culture a new development? The Puritan pastor and writer Richard Baxter penned his classic *The Reformed Pastor* in 1656, and he too lamented the state of the pastorate. "Alas!" he wrote to his fellow pastors, "it is the common danger and calamity of the Church, to have unregenerate and inexperienced pastors, and to have so many men become preachers, before they

are Christians. . . . O that all our students in our universities would well consider this!" The circumstances in 17th-century England were certainly different than our own, but it seems the pastorate was prone to defect all the same.

Interestingly, though separated by centuries, both Baxter and Tripp are interested in the schools



that train pastors for ministry. Tripp, who has taught for years at Westminster Theological Seminary, thinks seminaries are failing to prepare ministers for the realities of ministry. They focus too narrowly on theological education for future pastors' heads, he argues, while almost entirely neglecting their hearts.

Tripp rightly holds the entire seminary system accountable for giving pastors and churches a false sense of security. Under the seminary model, future pastors leave the home church where they first discerned a call to ministry. Removed from long-standing relationships of mutual accountability and encouragement, the seminarian enters a world that values knowledge above all else. After graduation, the (usually) young pastor is called to a church, requiring another move. The leadership and members of this church rely mostly on their new pastor's seminary degree as evidence of calling and preparedness for ministry. Often they are unprepared or unwilling to look beyond the degree to see the actual person they are calling their pastor.

Selecting pastors simply by theological education is related to a second problem Tripp sees. Rather than paying attention to warning signs that their pastor may be

Like Charles Spurgeon, who once wrote that 'the black fingers of sin leave smuts upon our fairest robes,' Tripp is relentless in pointing out that pastors and churches must acknowledge the ongoing war with sin.

struggling, churches instead look the other way as long as the supposed essentials of ministry are being covered. Within this toxic culture a pastor may be lonely and spiritually stunted, a short-tempered spouse and emotionally absent parent, as long as the sermon is decent and ministry is moving forward. Tripp offers practical suggestions to counter this dangerous tendency, such as requiring the pastor to participate in a small group, inviting the pastor's family into church members' homes, intentionally supporting the pastor's spouse, and making counseling available to the pastor.

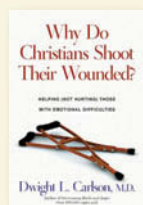
Dangerous Calling, then, is not just a book for pastors. It's just as important to the church members who care for them. Tripp's keen observations and diagnoses target those with the influence to change the pastoral

culture within a local congregation. With its realistic portrayal of ministry, the book will occasionally upset readers with no pastoral experience. Thankfully Tripp provides enough useful counsel to compensate for any discomfort. A church leadership team reading this book would gain significant insight into the minefield of pastoral ministry, discovering helpful ways to care for their pastor.

Most readers will have some qualms about Tripp's vision of pastoral culture. Advocates of house churches may dismiss the entire system as beyond reform. Those, like myself, who believe both men and women are called to pastoral ministry will be disappointed by Tripp's limitation of that calling to men. Others who see a necessary dividing line between clergy and laity will be uncomfortable with Tripp's call for pastors

MY TOP 5 BOOKS ON MENTAL ILLNESS

By Amy Simpson, editor of *GiftedForLeadership.com* and author of *Troubled Minds* (IVP, 2013)

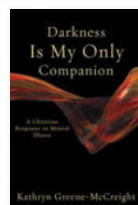


WHY DO CHRISTIANS SHOOT THEIR WOUNDED?

Helping (Not Hurting) Those with Emotional Difficulties

DWIGHT L. CARLSON, M.D. (IVP)

This clear and practical book rejects the idea that hurting people should be condemned for their pain, and it succeeds in equipping churches to provide more effective care for these people.

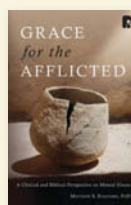


DARKNESS IS MY ONLY COMPANION

A Christian Response to Mental Illness

KATHRYN GREENE-MCCREIGHT (BRAZOS PRESS)

In this book, an Episcopal priest and college professor afflicted by bipolar disorder shares her experiences and wrestles through theological questions pertaining to mental illness.



GRACE FOR THE AFFLICTED

A Clinical and Biblical Perspective on Mental Illness

MATTHEW S. STANFORD, PH.D. (PATERNOSTER PUBLISHING)

This book contains detailed information and biblical perspective about various types of disorders. It is an excellent reference to better understand the problem as well as help people with mental illness.



WHEN YOUR FAMILY IS LIVING WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS

MARCIA LUND (AUGSBURG FORTRESS)

Part of the Difficult Times series, this is a small booklet that church leaders can give to families affected by mental illness. It refers readers to other resources, and assures families that they are not alone in the challenges they face.



MINISTRY WITH PERSONS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS AND THEIR FAMILIES

EDITED BY ROBERT H. ALBERS, WILLIAM H. MELLER, AND STEVEN D. THURBER (FORTRESS PRESS)

These essays from psychiatrists and theologians discuss mental illness from medical, theological, and ministry perspectives. They provide detailed information for church leaders about various types of disorders.

to participate more fully in the community life of their churches. But these are qualms evangelically-minded readers should already expect, and none should detract from the author's timely insights.

THE ONGOING WAR

One of these insights, one that ties together much of *Dangerous Calling*, is Tripp's insistence on the reality of "remaining sin" in the lives of believers, including pastors. Like Charles Spurgeon, who once wrote that "the black fingers of sin leave smuts upon our fairest robes," Tripp is relentless in pointing out that pastors and churches must acknowledge the ongoing war with sin. Ignoring it not only sets up the pastor for devastating failure, but also diminishes the power of the gospel, as we lose sight of our ongoing need for a Savior. For the gospel to remain deeply personal and transformational, rather than merely theoretical sermon fodder, we pastors need to continually acknowledge our sinfulness in confession and repentance.

A couple of years ago, I shared a rejuvenating dinner with a diverse group of pastors from around the country. After the meal, I reflected on what made the conversation so good. It wasn't superficial similarities: Most of the other pastors were significantly older than me and ministering in contexts different from my own. No, the refreshment came from a deeper camaraderie. These were pastors who had known the pain of ministry and who were not afraid or ashamed to recognize it. Their witness to the gospel's power was not from the success of their ministry or the size of their churches but from Christ's power experienced through their weakness.

Pastoral ministry, as Tripp points out again and again, is regularly a painful experience. The question is not how to avoid this pain. No, the only question is whether it will isolate the pastor and damage the church, or drive us again and again to the source of our life and ministry. *Dangerous Calling* is an unambiguous call for pastors and churches to make our Savior known, not simply in sermons and ministries but in the very substance and shape of our lives and communities. ➤

David Swanson is the pastor of New Community Covenant Church in Chicago and a contributing editor for *Leadership Journal*. He blogs at davidswanson.wordpress.com.

God Repairs the Shattered Glass

Even the most tragic stories find redemption in the story of the Bible. By Christopher Hall

In 1996 Jerry Sittser, professor of religion at Whitworth College, published *A Grace Disguised*, the story of his family's tragic car accident (it claimed his wife, mother, and young daughter) and the faithful manifestation of God's grace in the midst of searing pain and loss. Though writing the book was "an unpleasant task" and "did nothing to explain or justify the accident," it has helped thousands of people navigate their own grief.

Now, more than 15 years later, in ***A Grace Revealed: How God Redeems the Story of Your Life*** (Zondervan) ★★★★★, Sittser shifts focus, inviting us to read with our own stories in mind. How, he asks, do our stories—guided and directed by the Spirit of God—intersect with the much grander, deeper story that ripples through the pages of the Bible, the story that reaches its fulfillment in Jesus Christ?

Sittser's period of grief has afforded him ample opportunity to ponder this question. How could it not? He—as do each of us—has a life story in which God's larger story of redemption has manifested itself. The car accident and its aftermath, good and bad, are but one pane in the multicolored window of Sittser's life, the stained glass that God has blown and shaped, through which the light of a much greater story shines.

Even this tragic event, he writes, "does not stand on its own or exist unto itself. It is part of a larger story. In that moment, I have no idea how; that is for me to discover in the future. For now, in the painful silence, it is enough to know there is a story out there that can make sense of my own. But it is not merely a story; it is the story."

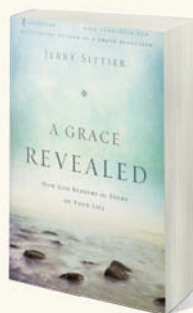
As we surrender to Christ, God's story, *the story*, can envelop and transform all other stories, "however sensational or mundane, tragic or happy." Sittser sees himself "as a witness to

this truth: God redeems our stories through him. If you dare to surrender yourself to God, he will take up the story of your life and integrate it into the great story of salvation, turning it into something so extraordinary that you will be tempted to think it was all a beautiful dream."

Yet understanding the relationship between our story and God's story is not an easy task. It requires a number of skills, practices, and dispositions: knowledge of the biblical story, spiritual discipline, time, prayer, discernment, wisdom, perspective, and the counsel of others. Making this task harder still is the palpable gap between the hellish chapters of our stories and the heavenly trajectory of God's. Though we know how God's story ends—resurrection, redemption, regeneration, re-creation—we find ourselves living in a strange, unexpected in-between time. Christ has yet to return, and this present evil age is still with us: We struggle with sin, we experience accidents, we grow old, we get sick, we lose loved ones, and finally we die.

But even in the midst of this evil age, we have risen to new life in Christ through the grace of God and the power of the Spirit. As Sittser puts it, we are "new in Christ," though we still grow old in a manner we were never meant to experience. It is this combination of old and new that Sittser skillfully helps us discern in our own life stories. God wants us to live a life of faith right now, even where adverse circumstances could easily produce despair. Today's wreckage may look like nothing but shattered glass. But there's a beautiful window, a conduit of God's light, well under construction. ➤

Christopher Hall is chancellor of Eastern University and dean of Palmer Theological Seminary.



Go to the Source of Sin

from **GODS AT WAR:
DEFEATING THE IDOLS THAT BATTLE FOR YOUR HEART**

KYLE IDLEMAN (ZONDERVAN, 224 PAGES)

Let's think about your heart, and we'll do it by imagining a scenario. You're out for a hike on a beautiful spring day. You're delighted to hear running water, and sure enough, you come to a creek. But there's something wrong with this picture. You notice that someone has dumped trash into the stream—an ugly sight. There is refuse floating on the water. Judging by some of the empty soda cans, the trash has been there awhile. And there is an ugly film on top of the water.

You can't just leave the scene as you found it, because it would bother your conscience. So you stoop down and begin gathering the trash.

It actually takes several hours before you can begin to see a difference; it's amazing how much junk is there. You sit back, rest for a moment, and realize you'll have to keep returning each day until the site is truly clean. Well, that's okay; it's a project you'll be proud of.

Except that when you come back the next day, it's as if your work has been undone.

In fact there's more trash than before. Somehow the garbage bred overnight. You think about the unlikelihood of someone coming to this very spot to dump their garbage in the few hours while you were away, and you realize that something smells fishy—so to speak. So you begin to follow the creek upstream.

Sure enough, you come to a garbage dump that has been there for years. It's emptying into the passing creek. Your cleaning job only opened up a gap for more stuff to settle. You could go and clean every day, but it would just be like pushing a boulder up the hill and watching it roll back down again. . . .

If you want your creek to be clean, that means going directly to the source and dealing with what's there.

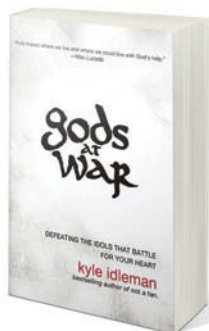
Think of your heart, as the Hebrews did, as the source from which your life flows—thoughts, emotions, actions.

How much of your life do you spend dealing with the visible garbage rather than what produces it? We all spend great amounts of time, money, energy, and frustration doing trash removal when something upstream is still dumping into the flow. Even the church

focuses downstream too much. It's so much easier to pick up a little bit of trash. Dealing with what's upstream is a staggering commitment. But the [idols that vie for our affection] know the heart is the battlefield. It's where the war is won.



Taken from *Gods at War* by Kyle Idleman. Copyright © 2013 by Kyle Idleman. Used by permission of Zondervan. zondervan.com.



ILLUMINATIONS

A Novel of Hildegard von Bingen

MARY SHARRATT (HOUGHTON MIFFLIN HARCOURT)



Hildegard von Bingen, the 12th-century abbess and mystic whose writings and musical compositions are a living witness to a vibrant faith, has been named a doctor of the Church, sponsored by Pope Benedict

XVI himself. This novel opens an imaginative window on Hildegard's life and times—and may (we hope) lead many readers to explore further. (For listening, try the Anonymous 4 recording *The Origin of Fire* and Sequentia's *Canticles of Ecstasy*.)

STANDING IN ANOTHER MAN'S GRAVE

IAN RANKIN (REAGAN ARTHUR BOOKS)



After a hiatus of roughly five years—the last book in the series, *Exit Music*, concluded with his retirement—John Rebus is back. He's been working cold cases as a civilian, we learn, but he's thinking about re-applying

to the police force in Edinburgh (the age of superannuation has been raised). In a strange twist, his antagonist here is Malcolm Fox, the protagonist of Rankin's two previous books, a cop who investigates other cops. Fans won't be able to get this new installment soon enough; newcomers will soon be going back to the start of the saga. Pure gold—but I still miss the early Rebus, who reread Dostoevsky and hadn't altogether forgotten God.

MY BOOKSTORE

Writers Celebrate Their Favorite Places to Browse, Read, and Shop

EDITED BY RONALD RICE AND BOOKSELLERS ACROSS AMERICA (BLACK DOG & LEVENTHAL)



If you are booklover, and if you didn't find this handsome volume under the Christmas tree or in your stocking, you should hasten to pick up a copy—preferably at your local bookstore. One bonus: Next

time you are on the road, you can check to see if you'll be in the vicinity of one of the 84 shops highlighted therein. (I already have a list of book-haunts I particularly want to visit.) Each entry comes with an inviting drawing by Leif Parsons.

Better Partners

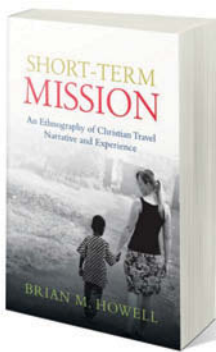
How can short-term missions best advance God's mission? Interview by Jeff Haanen

It's a relatively common sight at the airport: the conclusion of a short-term mission trip. A dozen suburban teenagers wearing matching yellow T-shirts talk about two weeks of manual labor at an orphanage and share iPhone photos of their trip to the jungle. Wheaton College anthropologist Brian M. Howell has puzzled over this phenomenon. Is it about service, tourism, personal pilgrimage, or something else completely? Are short-term missions even *missions* at all? Freelance writer Jeff Haanen spoke with Howell, author of **Short-term Mission: An Ethnography of Christian Travel Narrative and Experience** (IVP Academic), about how Christians justify short-term mission trips, the problem with these stories, and how churches can do short-term missions better.

As an anthropologist, why write a book on short-term missions?

When I started teaching in the 1990s, I asked students about their cross-cultural experiences. Some hadn't done anything, or some maybe had taken a cruise. But when I came to Wheaton College and asked the same questions, I would get stories about northern Ghana, Mongolia, the Czech Republic—places people don't normally go on vacation. Short-term missions had exploded, and all these students had gone on short-term mission trips.

I was curious not just about the experiences, but the fact that they talked about them so similarly. They seemed to have this really well-developed narrative and vocabulary about what these trips were for and what they were like. It didn't matter whether they went to Mexico or to South Africa, it was all similar. I was interested in how these trips affected them culturally and made them think about their faith.



What was the common story you uncovered?

The common narrative goes something like this: "There's poverty out there, and we should do something about it because we're Christians. We've traditionally thought of missions as evangelism, but now we're thinking about missions more as serving, caring, and giving. We're going to *do* something. But what we find when we take these trips is that you actually receive more than you give; you will be changed more than you will change anyone else."

So, it's a narrative of self-transformation, a narrative of personal growth, a narrative of Christian service that becomes a kind of pilgrimage. We went out as one kind of person, and we came back another kind of person.

On the whole, are you for or against short-term mission trips?

As an anthropologist, I'm absolutely for people traveling and encountering what God is doing in other parts of the world. I am for people understanding more about their own culture and the cultures of others. To the extent that these trips are a significant vehicle for people to do that, I am for them.

I am not for the narrative that has typically driven these trips: "We are going because there's this tremendous need out there that we have to meet. And there's this burden that we have as the wealthy country to go and do something in another place." I support transforming this narrative so that it becomes, "How can we connect with what God is doing in other parts of the world? How can we learn to be good partners with Christians already in these places? How can we participate in what the church is already doing in these countries in effective ways?"

Do short-term groups inadvertently force their agendas on the host country or church?

Too often, we simply don't realize how our wealth and power crush the ability of local people to set the agenda. We can go with good intentions, teaching flexibility and listening to our team members. But the structures of our organizations and our control of resources make it extremely difficult for local believers to shape these trips or imagine how they'd like to interact with us. They turn to patterns already set by previous teams or laid out by long-term North American missionaries. They may be glad for the connection, but in many cases their ability to refashion these encounters is profoundly shaped by an aversion to offending a powerful and wealthy guest.

How would you reform the guiding narrative of short-term missions?

The place to start is a robust theology of mission. It's not about just evangelism or just humanitarian aid, but the *missio dei*—God reconciling humanity to himself and reconciling humans to one another. Everything we do on a short-term mission trip should be seen through that lens. So, the time that we spend in work, building a home or spending time with orphans—that's mission. But so is going to a museum, talking with the mayor of a local town, or even going to a beautiful beach.

Doesn't this make short-term mission trips sound like Christian tourism? What makes it specifically a *missions* trip?

We think of tourism—things like visiting a beach or museum—as being "self-centered," "shallow," and "secular." By contrast, we equate "mission" with being "spiritual," "generous," and "sacrificial." So we might plan a "tourist day" into our trip, but we might feel bad about that, or think that the "mission" portion is over. But I'd actually like to see this distinction broken down. When we travel—whether we're building a house, visiting a beach, or even just moving through the airport—we're on God's mission. We shouldn't differentiate between "mission" and "not mission." The whole trip should be an experience of learning, growing, and serving God. Listening and learning from people, about people, about places, about what God is doing—this is God's mission, and it should be ours as well.

The Zombie Apocalypse

Why are we fascinated with the walking dead who want to eat us? By Paul Pastor

The dead know where you are, and they are hungry.

The runaway success of AMC's *The Walking Dead* highlights the recent potency of zombie stories. Once wholly a genre for horror/grind house cinema, zombie media has made the tough crossover from "pulp" to "pulpular." "Zombie walks," including thousands of participants shuffling in gore makeup, are a global trend, bringing flash mob energy to raise money for charities—usually to combat brain disease. Zombie games are routinely on top lists in app stores, and longer video games, including *Dead Space*, bring the apocalypse into our living rooms. The list goes on.

For a theme with such diverse expression, the zombie genre's conventions are surprisingly rigid. Most stories follow a strict formula: The dead rise and eat, the living flee and fight, and the credits roll. Some tales end well for the living, more end poorly, but these essentials are present in all, marking the limits of a traditional zombie tale as inflexibly as any folk story.

For all the screams and splatter, these common story elements provide a backdrop for filmmakers to talk candidly about the human condition. The first three entries in seminal zombie director George A. Romero's *Dead* series are fine examples of this, using the cannibal corpses to skewer major cultural issues such as racism, consumerism, and abuse of human power.

Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* is a classic example, featuring a small band of well-armed survivors safely hiding in an abandoned shopping mall. With abundant food, ammunition, and consumer goods, they are living the American dream as the outside world crumbles. But the dream turns into a nightmare as the hollow nature of consumerism saps their will to live, pits them against each other, and eventually leads to a tragic end. Such films can be poignant, and the ideas leave a deep impression long after the flesh-hungry revenants have faded from the screen.

The true villains in such stories are not the dead, but the broken living. Zombies serve as an elemental force in the plot, like a flood or a hurricane in disaster movies. The dead force the true conflict—humanity's inability to be truly human. One key scene in Romero's *Day of the Dead* flips the role of man and monster, showing Bub, an unusually intelligent zombie, weeping over the body of the sci-

whatever fortress we've found to hide in.

In zombie films, we also see our cultural hopes. We sense that even in the total collapse of human society, we can hope for not only survival, but for community, for beauty, for something more than the Western dreams of brainless consumption and the cannibal exploitation of our neighbors. We long to find a sense of belonging, of basic human dignity.

In *Night of the Living Dead*, Ben, the central character, is committed to cooperation and trust, even among total strangers. As those around him succumb to denial, cowardice, stupidity, and guilt, he works to rally and inspire, to protect his companions and try to get to safety. In a dark film, Ben represents active hope. As we watch, we long for a satisfying level of self-sufficiency, for friends that we could trust our life with, for a sense of clear purpose, however bleak that might be. At its best moments, the zombie apocalypse offers that to us.

Christians, of course, can find many familiar images here. With a little allegorical stretching, we can talk about the church as a community of the risen dead, of zombie cannibalism as a perverted Eucharist, of the church's perilous existence as a community out of place in the world as analogous to the band of survivors in a good zombie flick. But we don't need to dig very far at all to find deep meaning in the zombie myths of our culture. Really, the films are about us, about all of us, in this time and place in history, and about our hopes and fears. And those truths, while hard to swallow, give us a whole lot to chew on.✚

Paul Pastor is assistant editor for Church Law & Tax Group and Global Publishing at Christianity Today.



Global Hit: The 1968 classic *Night of the Living Dead* cost \$114,000 to make but grossed \$18 million worldwide.

entist who had been studying him. His grief expressed in his sluggish manner, Bub then picks up a pistol and tracks down his friend's treacherous murderer. We're impressed with Romero's point as clearly as if he'd written it out for us in blood: A heartbeat alone isn't what makes us human.

The concern with gnawing, existential questions is common in a zombie film. We're invited to ask how we'd respond if we were forced to choose between our safety and the good of our neighbor. Would we risk our own necks to save a friend? What about a stranger? What about a traitor? We're afraid of ourselves here, afraid of our friends, afraid of so many things, least of which are the sea of decaying corpses lapping at the walls of

For all the screams and splatter, these common story elements provide a backdrop for filmmakers to talk candidly about the human condition.

QUICK TAKES

More media of note.

BOOKS

► GOSPEL DEEPS

Reveling in the Excellencies of Jesus

JARED C. WILSON (CROSSWAY)

★★★★★ The gospel is about saving individual sinners. You hear the message of Christ's atoning death and resurrection, you believe it, and you get to spend eternity in heaven. Sounds great! But is there anything else to the story? More, says pastor Jared Wilson, than we could ever imagine. "[T]he gospel of Jesus Christ," he writes, "is big. Like, *really* big. Ginormous, if you will. And deep. Deep and rich." In this follow-up to 2011's *Gospel Wakefulness*, Wilson plumbs the depths of our gospel's ginormousness, revealing something far grander than a one-time transaction between sinner and Savior. Not only does he address our tendency to diminish, through individualistic notions of salvation, the cosmic dimensions of God's redemptive plan; perhaps more importantly, Wilson reminds us of the gospel's continuing relevance in the lives of believers. It's not something we move beyond or "graduate from" once we've heard it and believed it. Like the author's MacBook Pro computer, there are "functions" of which we are entirely unaware, and layers upon layers of mystery to explore. —Matt Reynolds

► THE LIFE OF THE BODY

Physical Well-Being and Spiritual Formation

VALERIE E. HESS AND LANE M. ARNOLD (IVP)

★★★★★ I love to exercise. I also love eating foods (in immoderate quantities, alas) that negate the benefits of that exercise! Clearly, this split-personality disorder has implications for my health and outward appearance. And anecdotally, at least, I've often sensed a connection between my physical condition and intellectual sharpness. Until encountering *The Life of the Body*, however, I hadn't really pondered the *spiritual* impact of oscillating between workout warrior one moment and glutton the next. Rejecting the body-soul dualism to which Christians have often succumbed, authors Valerie Hess and Lane Arnold reflect on the many ways fitness, nutrition, and other aspects of bodily care can aid or impede a relationship with God. —Matt Reynolds

► PURSUED

God's Divine Obsession with You

JUD WILHITE (FAITHWORDS)

★★★★★ One reason people resist Christianity is that they suspect God, having kept a meticulous record of their wrongs, just wants to punish them. Even committed Christians can find themselves fleeing God's gracious embrace, fearing they need to continually earn his love through good deeds and the avoidance of sin. Fortunately, says Las Vegas pastor Jud Wilhite, God keeps lovingly pursuing us—even when we reject his advances. God, Wilhite now realizes, "wasn't pursuing me to give me a ticket and send me to jail. He was pursuing me to give me the life I was meant to live." Wilhite takes readers through the Book of Hosea to illustrate how God's steadfast love overcomes even our bitterest betrayals. —Matt Reynolds

► APOCALYPTIC FEVER

End-time Prophecies in Modern America

RICHARD G. KYLE (CASCADE BOOKS)

★★★★★ If you're like me, you don't get all hyped up on doomsday stuff. You like to congratulate yourself for keeping your senses

when some kook starts sounding off about the looming end of the world. You scoffed with everyone else in 2011 when Harold Camping made his ill-fated forecasts of apocalypse. You made facetious quips about slacking off at work last year, on account of the Mayan calendar's speculations. But for all this self-styled sobriety, contemporary America retains its stubborn fascination with end-times scenarios. In *Apocalyptic Fever*, Richard Kyle shows how surprisingly widespread this mindset has become. "Americans," he writes, "have a tremendous appetite for prophecy, more than nearly any other people in the modern world." It's not just Protestant fundamentalism scratching the eschatological itch, says Kyle, but a veritable "hodgepodge" of denominations and movements. And don't forget secular strains of the apocalyptic virus, typically focusing on such fears as overpopulation and global warming. Of course, it's worth remembering that, like many wrongheaded passions, end-times zealotry isn't so much wrong as misplaced. After all, there really will come a Judgment Day, even if we'll never learn the exact date from the UN climate change panel or Camping. —Matt Reynolds



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“I Wish

I'd Known

Then . . .”

How to make a smooth transition to seminary.

Know what to expect
before you enroll. page 84

Real-life experiences of
three seminarians. page 104

GREEK-ENGLISH
NEW TESTAMENT

Do Your Homework

Know what to expect before you enroll in seminary.

Keane Collins earned his M.B.A. from UC Berkeley and worked in large cities like New York and San Francisco. During his business career he came to faith in Christ and began speaking about his faith. Eventually Collins decided to attend seminary. “I wanted to be able to preach effectively. Yet I was frustrated because I didn’t have the skills,” Collins said.

The accomplished professional found the transition to seminary to be a challenge, both personally and academically. “I wish I had prepared myself ahead of time to be satisfied with a very scheduled life,” Collins said. “Going to seminary while being married, raising children, and working means there is not much room for spontaneity.”

Experts say that like Collins, many students who enter the 200-plus seminary and graduate ministry programs in the United States underestimate the academic, spiritual, and life challenges they may face. Seminary students agree the end result is worth the difficulties, but many say they wished they’d prepared for the adjustment and the workload ahead of time. So I asked seminary experts, students, and alumni from across the country to share their thoughts and suggestions for people considering a seminary degree. More specifically, what can they expect from the experience and what should they do to make a

successful transition once they decide to attend seminary?

The transition for Collins began online in a seminary certificate program of just four courses. Finding success there, he and his wife packed up their two kids and moved from California to Oregon. Collins enrolled full time at Western Seminary and expected more success. But the transition was a big shock. “We missed our church, we missed our friends and neighbors, and we had no relationships to help us in securing work,” Collins said. He also had to relearn how to study. “I learned that cramming doesn’t work in seminary. Instead, I had to make daily progress in reading my assignments, memorizing biblical languages, and writing papers,” Collins said.

Experts say adjusting to academic demands tops the list of areas in which new seminary students may struggle. “Over the course of a full M.Div. program, students will read somewhere in the vicinity of 34,000 pages,” said Leroy Goertzen, director of the Doctor of Ministry program at Corban University. “[Students] are surprised by the feeling of being quickly overwhelmed three weeks into the first semester.”

Collins said having a family while attending seminary only added to the challenge of managing the reading and coursework. “I wish I’d realized that I could not study at home when my kids

were awake. All they heard from me was, ‘No. Dad is studying right now,’ when it made total sense to them that I should be available to them whenever I was home,” he said.

Goertzen said students may find more success at seminary if they develop academic reading skills during their undergraduate years. “Ask professors for extra reading that goes deeper into the subjects of your major,” he suggested. He also said that all potential seminary students—at whatever life stage—would benefit from completing either a rapid reading course or a writing course ahead of time.

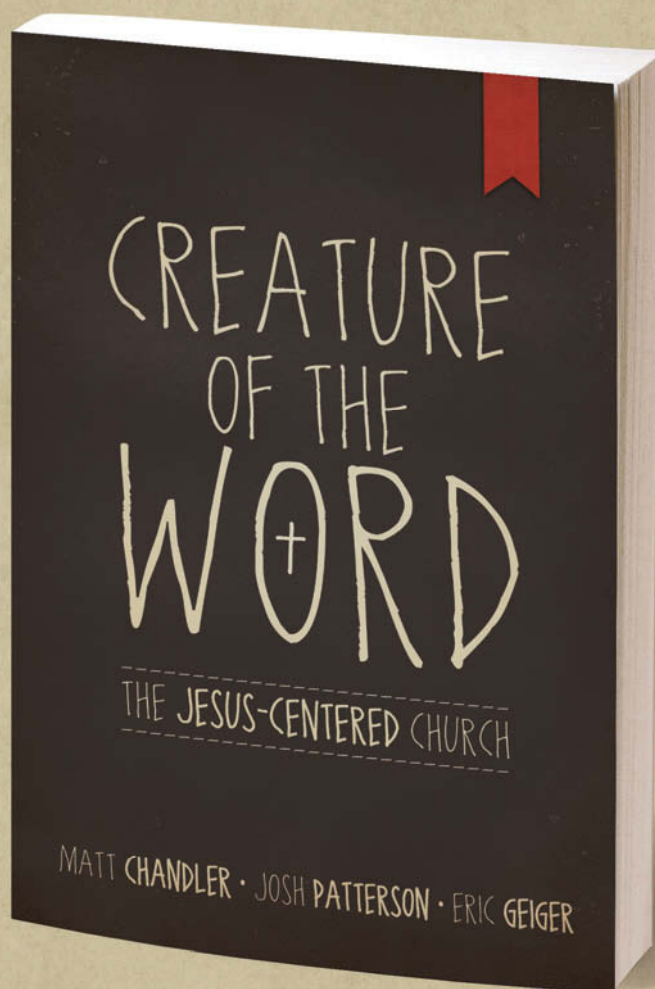
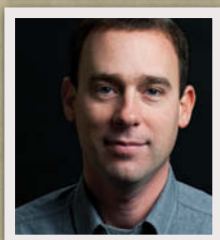
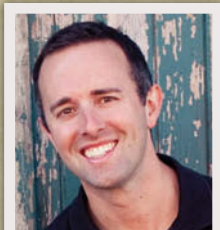
People considering seminary should realize it’s a graduate-level education, not just college plus theology. “Some students are under the impression that seminary will be a religious rehash of their college experience, and thus find it surprising when they are expected to produce work at the master’s level,” said Matt Minier of Southern Seminary.

Sam Emadi, who has an M.Div. from Southern Seminary, agreed. He thought he was fairly well-read and had a good background in theology and biblical studies. But it took only one semester for him to grasp that there is a difference between lay literature about the Bible and the academic texts one tackles in seminary. “I realized [that with] a lot of the self-study I had done, I was reading decent theological literature;

continued on page 88

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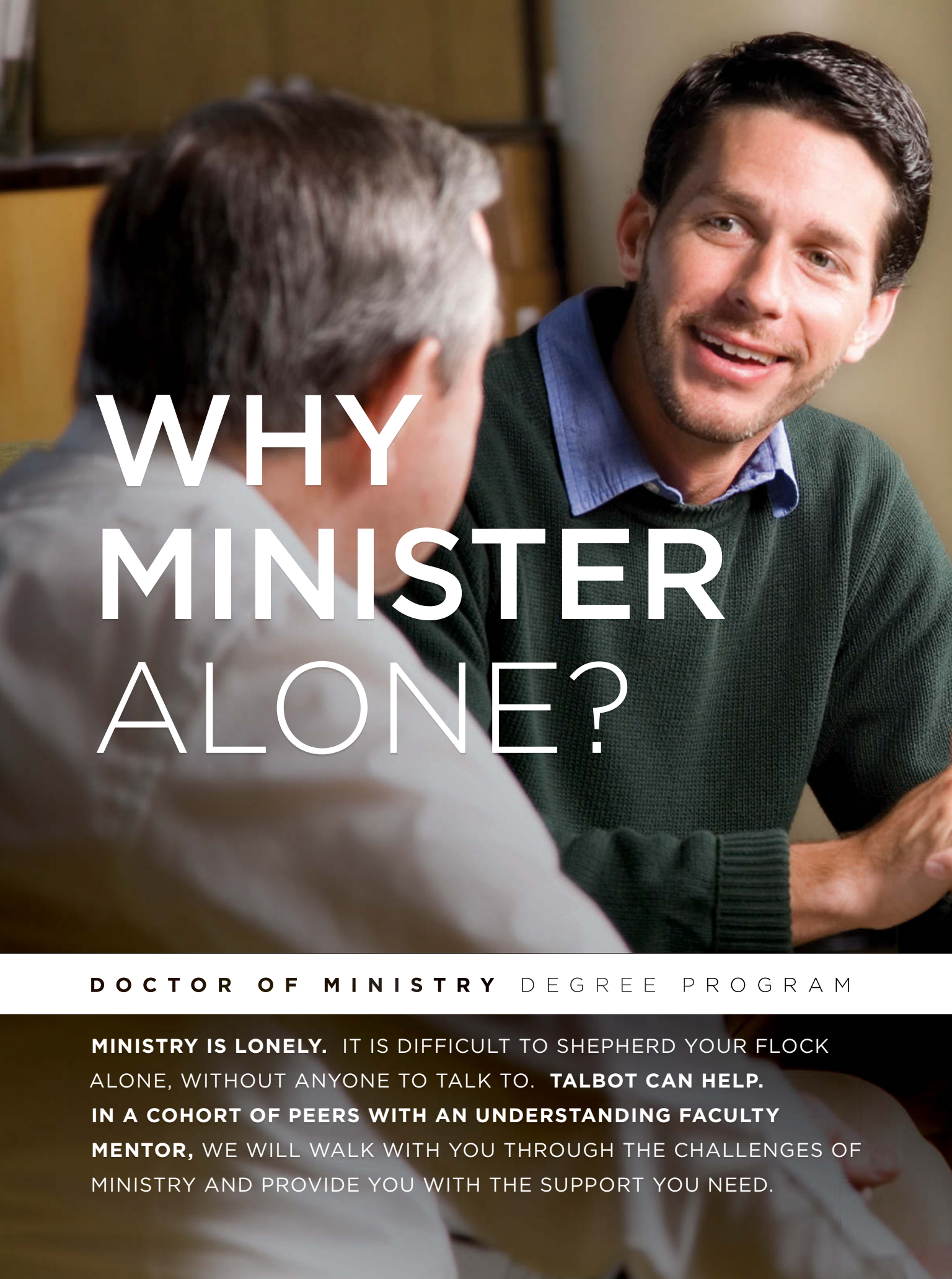


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B&H
BOOKS

A photograph of a man with dark hair and a beard, wearing a green sweater over a blue collared shirt, smiling warmly at an older man with grey hair. The older man is seen from the back, wearing a light-colored shirt. The background is softly blurred, showing what appears to be a bookshelf.

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Sam Emadi and Matt Minier

but a lot of it was still advanced lay-level literature. . . . When I came to seminary, there was a season of learning that there is a world of biblical scholarship that I didn't know," he said.

Southern Seminary, the flagship school of the Southern Baptist Convention, has a department called the Center for Student Success. Minier serves as the director, and Emadi is an academic advisor

to seminary students while pursuing his own doctorate in Old Testament. The center recently expanded the number of staff and programs available to seminary students, including a writing center to help seminarians improve at each step of the writing process.

Emadi said the seminars are popular, including one on typing biblical languages. "Let's say I want to quote Genesis 1:1 in Hebrew in a paper. Is there a Hebrew font in Microsoft Word? How do I know what buttons on my keyboard correspond to the Greek and Hebrew letters?" Emadi said. He remembers spending "about a hundred" hours trying to get it to look right in his early seminary papers. "In two hours we hopefully equip students to go out and type in Greek and Hebrew so it's not a huge burden and so they don't have to spend dozens of hours formatting their papers. . . . For students who are busy with families and working, that may be

continued on page 94



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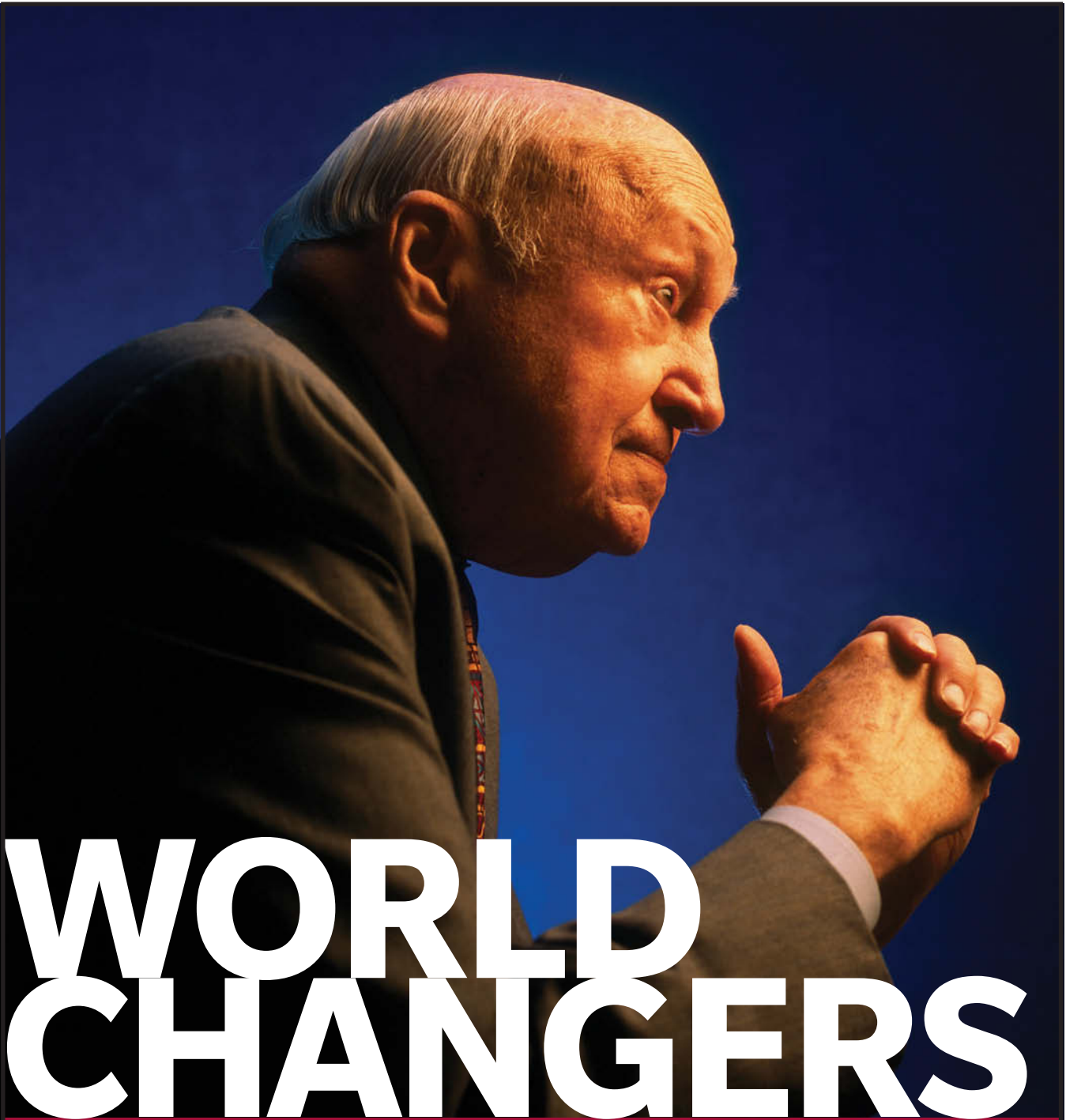
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Check out the video viewbook to hear more from Brendan, other students and faculty at [WHEATON.EDU/GRADSCHOOL](https://wheaton.edu/gradschool).



the difference between their dropping out and pursuing a degree,” he said.

Many seminaries offer similar resources to help students foster the necessary skills for degree programs. For instance, the M.Div. program at Corban requires students to take a research class early on, giving students a methodology for the comprehensive biblical and theological research ahead of them. The good news is that many of the academic skills that are necessary in seminary can be learned with advance preparation and classes like the one at Corban. “A student in the sixth week of the research class commented that if he had taken it in the first semester, as he had been encouraged to do, then he wouldn’t have turned in so many poor papers during the first two semesters,” Goertzen said. Experts suggested that students returning to school after spending years in the workplace could benefit from learning about updated technologies

such as social media, eBooks, and online research programs prior to entering seminary.

Reverend Lillian Hinds already had a master’s degree in psychology when she enrolled in seminary. She is part of a growing number of students entering theological programs even though they already hold advanced degrees. A survey conducted by the Association of Theological Schools in the U.S. and Canada (ATS), found that 28 percent of entering seminary students in the 2011–2012 school year had a master’s degree or higher.

Hinds’ path to seminary began in 2001 when she felt God calling her to preach. In 2005, she began commuting a few hours back and forth to Truett Seminary at Baylor University. Eventually she and her husband packed up and moved to Waco so she could enroll full time. “I was a ‘nontraditional’ student. I was 52 years of age and a woman

feeling the call to preach in Texas Baptist life. The decision to attend seminary was extremely difficult and very emotional. But I loved every minute of it,” Hinds said.

“Since I had already attended graduate school, I was not surprised that seminary was difficult,” Hinds said. But she wished she’d known more about the actual classroom experience. “I was not prepared for a seminar style classroom. . . . All of my college work had been lecture style. It would have been helpful to have that explained more fully or to have observed this format.” Hinds described how student groups and smaller accountability groups helped her adjust and thrive in seminary, but the professors were particularly helpful to her—then and now. “The professors at Truett talked with me, prayed with me, loved me,” Hinds said. “To this day . . . I frequently contact [my former professors] to ask for recommendations for commentaries and other resources. Several have been to my church to provide Bible studies or to fill the pulpit in my absence,” she said.

Sherri Brown, director of admissions for Beeson Divinity School, located on the campus of Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama, said professors often have an open-door policy. “Those who take advantage of faculty assistance typically thrive. . . . Students who talk through a poor paper or go over test material before exams seem to get through the transition quickly.” Mid-career seminary students may find the financial transition to be a larger issue. “Their biggest challenges are usually transitioning financially and not having the resources they had when they worked full time—especially if they have families,” Brown said.

“Seminary is very expensive,” Hinds said. “[If I were to do it again,] I would do more to try and find help outside of the university for financial assistance.”

Many students continue working while pursuing a seminary degree. The ATS survey found that 25 percent of full-time M.Div. students work more than 20 hours a week, as do 78 percent of part-time M.Div. students.

Western Seminary student John

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Richert is one of them. He is in the sixth year of his M.Div. program, while also working as the lead pastor of a church in California. Richert recommends that people who are thinking about seminary consider schools that offer flexible options, such as online courses or multisite campuses. "You never know how God may adjust your plans, or what life will throw at you," he said. Richert has studied online, sat in on classes located at Western's Sacramento campus, and even took a hybrid course one semester that involved spending three days at Western's Portland campus.

"I have four young kids—three of them were born while I was in seminary. . . . I also have a growing church. Without flexibility in my seminary program, I would feel pressured to put my education over my family or my ministry," he said.

P. J. Oswald, a spokesperson for

Western Seminary, said some seminaries specialize in serving nonresidential students who don't want to relocate. For some students, a part-time program is the best path to getting their theological degree. "Studying at a part-time pace can help students maintain their own lives in family, ministry, and work, which helps them see that seminary studies are meant to fuel a life of ministry, rather than be a purpose unto itself," he said.

Oswald encouraged seminary students, whether part time or full time, to be involved in ministry outside of their education. "Successful seminary students find a ministry sandbox to serve in while they're going to seminary—even if it's only for a few hours a week," Oswald said. "Monday's seminary training will have less relevance if a student doesn't also have an outlet in which to put their skills and knowledge to work on Tuesday."

Several experts also suggested participating in church or parachurch ministry prior to enrolling in classes. "It will help you discover your motivation for needing training, and it will establish the scope of training you need," Oswald said.

It may also help clarify your "calling." Dr. Paul Wilson from Moody Theological Seminary described it this way: "Seminary is for students who are called to ministry. Having a calling is important to being a seminarian and for becoming a successful minister of God. Ministry is not a job to choose but a calling for one to discover and follow." Wilson works closely with hundreds of students in his role as chaplain on Moody's Plymouth, Michigan, campus. "Make sure you involve your church community in discerning your calling to be a seminary student. They will help you discern your gifts and will support you in prayer if you ask and share about your journey," he said.

Daniel Holloway said it took 10 years to confirm his calling for seminary. "Over the course of those years, a couple times I seriously considered going to seminary. But I always had some hesitation until . . . [my wife and I] felt a clear sense that God was telling us it was time," he said. "I am very grateful for the time I had between college and seminary. I think God used all of that time to mature me spiritually and emotionally," he said.

Holloway is now a master of divinity student at Beeson. "One thing that . . . is important to know when considering seminary is that it is highly academic. I think I may have had a view coming in that it would be a more holistic spiritual experience or discipleship experience. In contrast, I have found it has been weighted very strongly toward the academic side of the Christian life," Holloway said. "I am recognizing seminary to be a great benefit to enhance my effectiveness as a minister and to clarify my understanding of my personal call to ministry. But it is only a piece of how God prepares us. . . . No matter what circumstances I am in, a regular job or

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seminary class, [God] uses those circumstances to teach me, transform me, and prepare me for ministry. . . . And the main ingredients are the same—relationships and community, time in the Bible, and prayer,” he said.

Moody’s Wilson said successful seminary students remain well-connected within a church community, or else they risk becoming spiritually diminished. “While [students] have obtained a seminary degree in Bible and theology, they may have actually grown cold and critical in their hearts,” Wilson said. “Seminary teaches students to evaluate, to be critical, and to be reflective. If these skills are not balanced with patience, love, and compassion, then the student may learn how to evaluate well but be socially ineffective,” he said.

Diana Burns, a student at Calvin Theological Seminary, enrolled only after experiencing a strong sense of calling and receiving affirmation from

others. “For much of my life, I have cultivated an interest in theology and discipleship. . . . However, I pushed aside studying at a seminary for many years because it did not seem practical if I had no career plans for ordained ministry,” Burns said. “I was affirmed that my gifts and delights could be even better cultivated through a seminary education,” she said.

Burns also shared a caution for potential seminary students about the sense of call. “One of the primary challenges in seminary is that of pride. . . . [The] thirst to belong is compounded by the unspoken, and perhaps self-inflicted, pressure to *prove* you belong, both spiritually and academically, because of your calling. This may lead to resentment of others’ gifts, to suspicion of things that do not come easily to you, or to a general paucity of community during your studies. The truth is that no one person belongs more or

less. . . . God has led each of us here through unique means,” she said.

Finally, experts said that potential seminarians should pray. Pray a lot ahead of time, pray during the transition, and pray during spiritually dry times that may occur during an academic study of the Bible. “Allow your theological and biblical studies to be your devotional time, and invite the Lord to speak to you through what you are reading,” Brown said. “Enjoy this season where you can immerse yourself in the Word and in spiritual growth. There will most likely never be another time in life when you will engage in learning and Christian community quite so intensely—so don’t wish the time away . . . enjoy it!”

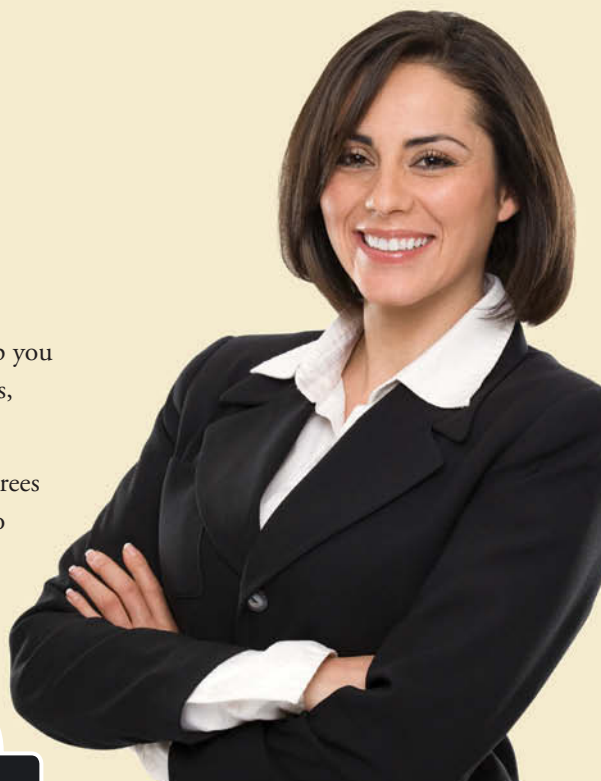
Kara Miller is a writer and communications professional with an extensive background in journalism. She lives with her husband, two young children, and a dog in the Chicago area.

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Is Seminary Right for You?

Real-life experiences of three seminarians.

For Calvin Theological Seminary student Brandon Haan, matters of faith—not academics—are the more challenging aspect of his seminary experience. “I feel that my undergraduate education at Calvin College prepared me fairly well for the rigors of a graduate school curriculum. Plus, I didn’t take time off between college and seminary,

so you could say I had momentum,” Haan said. Instead, the spiritual intensity of the program caught him by surprise. “I’ll admit I came into

seminary without the most regular of devotional lives. I read Scripture somewhat haphazardly. I prayed when I remembered to,” Haan explained. “Seminary hasn’t left those habits untouched. It’s broken them down. . . . It’s given me a formula for dying and rising in Christ each and every day.”

Haan said people considering a graduate theological education should

expect similar spiritual challenges. “I think one of the pitfalls would be expecting seminary to be ‘just graduate school.’ Seminary done well is preparation for Christian ministry. . . . It’s first and foremost about Christ. . . . But seminary is about Christ in an especially focused way, and you can’t expect to get through it unscathed. Be ready to grow in your faith in ways you don’t find comfortable. Actually expect [Christ] to show up.”

The future pastor said mentor programs and the Calvin environment, which he said promotes authentic Christian community, helped him handle the challenges. “The seminary has given us resources and avenues as friends to grow deeper with one another as we progress toward ministry in the same denominations and churches,” Haan said.

Thousands of other students enter seminary with years of life experience, often juggling their careers and families while pursuing a ministry degree. Texas attorney Jon Ker expects to graduate from Truett Seminary in the spring of 2016. “Since I am maintaining my law practice while attending seminary, the

difficulties associated with attending seminary are more time-management issues than subject-matter difficulty,” Ker said. “The classes have been challenging but at the same time rewarding. Anything worth pursuing requires commitment, dedication, and discipline; and that should result in one’s best efforts being applied,” he said.

The grandfather of four

came into seminary not only as a lawyer, but also a retired colonel with nearly 40 years of service in the U.S. Army. “I am a combat veteran of both Vietnam (1969) and Iraq (2003–2004), serving in both combat zones with the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), commonly known as the Green Berets,” Ker said. He earned a second opportunity at GI Bill benefits with his service in Iraq. “As for my faith being challenged, at age 65 I am fairly settled in my ways, but I’m open to modifying them in order to follow after the Truth,” Ker said. “The point is that even in seminary we will be exposed to ideas with which we may not agree. What I suggest to potential seminary students is—be like the Bereans





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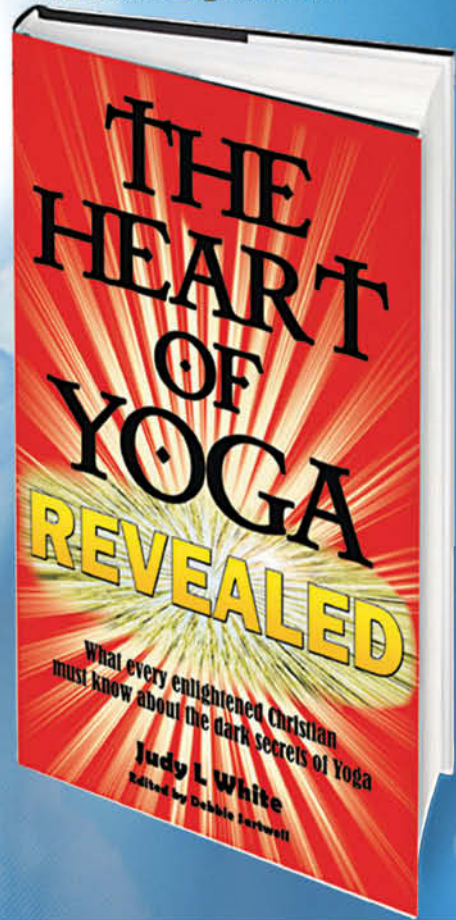
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Nina Anderson expects to graduate next year from Regent University's School of Divinity with two degrees: a master of divinity in practical theology and a master's degree in counseling. "I've learned some valuable truths about attending seminary. The most important is how you spend your time," Anderson said. "God has opportunities waiting beyond the classroom. . . . I realized that now is the time to serve and learn! It is one thing to come to seminary and stay locked up in your own world, but I found growth and gained experience as I served within my Regent University community," she said.

Anderson is a wife, mother, and grandmother who came to faith in her early 20s. "I always make time for my family no matter what! Being a successful seminary student and private failure at home is not good for ministry," Anderson said. "I believe if more seminarians put their families on their planning schedule, they can experience success in both areas."



Anderson also advised potential students to carefully schedule their classes. "I never register for three difficult classes in the same semester. If I know that a professor is very demanding with a tight course load, I will couple that class with one that's less demanding. "Potential seminarians should remember they're entering an academic environment with professors who also have a heart for ministry. "It shows when you go to them for help," Anderson said. "I can remember my time of transition and being very lonely. My husband was back in our hometown tying up loose ends, and I was in Virginia alone. I went to my professor's office to discuss his syllabus. . . . He took one look at me and said, 'How are you doing?' I cried. . . . He encouraged me, prayed, and then answered my scholarly questions. . . . So my experience has been successful not solely because of some wonderful plan that I created, but because of the love and care of a wonderful group of people who aren't afraid to show the love of God in an academic setting," Anderson said.

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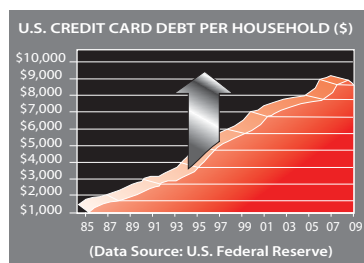
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Republican politics, and patriarchy, in the form of an article in the local newspaper about Promise Keepers. It was 1997.

The article generated many rejoinders, so many that I kept a Xerox box on each side of my desk: one for hate mail, one for fan mail. But one letter I received defied my filing system. It was from the pastor of the Syracuse Reformed Presbyterian Church. It was a kind and inquiring letter. Ken Smith encouraged me to explore the kind of questions I admire: How did you arrive at your interpretations? How do you know you are right? Do you believe in God? Ken didn't argue with my article; rather, he asked me to defend the presuppositions that undergirded it. I didn't know how to respond to it, so I threw it away.

Later that night, I fished it out of the recycling bin and put it back on my desk, where it stared at me for a week, confronting me with the worldview divide that demanded a response. As a postmodern intellectual, I operated from a historical materialist worldview, but Christianity is a supernatural worldview. Ken's letter punctured the integrity of my research project without him knowing it.

FRIENDS WITH THE ENEMY

With the letter, Ken initiated two years of bringing the church to me, a heathen. Oh, I had seen my share of Bible verses on placards at Gay Pride marches. That Christians who mocked me on Gay Pride Day were happy that I and everyone I loved were going to hell was clear as blue sky. That is not what Ken did. He did not mock. He engaged. So when his letter invited me to get together for dinner, I accepted. My motives at the time were straightforward: Surely this will be good for my research.

Something else happened. Ken and his wife, Floy, and I became friends. They entered my world. They met my friends. We did book exchanges. We talked openly about sexuality and politics. They did not act as if such conversations were polluting them. They did not treat me like a blank slate. When we ate together, Ken prayed in a way I had never heard before. His prayers were intimate. Vulnerable. He repented of his sin in front of me. He thanked God for

all things. Ken's God was holy and firm, yet full of mercy. And because Ken and Floy did not invite me to church, I knew it was safe to be friends.

I started reading the Bible. I read the way a glutton devours. I read it many times that first year in multiple translations. At a dinner gathering my partner and I were hosting, my transgendered friend J cornered me in the kitchen. She put her large hand over mine. "This Bible reading is changing you, Rosaria," she warned.

With tremors, I whispered, "J, what if it is true? What if Jesus is a real and risen Lord? What if we are all in trouble?"

I was a broken mess. I did not want to lose everything that I loved. But the voice of God sang a sanguine love song in the rubble of my world.

J exhaled deeply. "Rosaria," she said, "I was a Presbyterian minister for 15 years. I prayed that God would heal me, but he didn't. If you want, I will pray for you."

I continued reading the Bible, all the while fighting the idea that it was inspired. But the Bible got to be bigger inside me than I. It overflowed into my world. I fought against it with all my might. Then, one Sunday morning, I rose from the bed of my lesbian lover, and an hour later sat in a pew at the Syracuse Reformed Presbyterian Church. Conspicuous with my butch haircut, I reminded myself that I came to meet God, not fit in. The image that came in like waves, of me and everyone I loved suffering in hell, vomited into my consciousness and gripped me in its teeth.

I fought with everything I had.

I did not want this.

I did not ask for this.

I counted the costs. And I did not like the math on the other side of the equal sign.

But God's promises rolled in like sets of waves into my world. One Lord's Day, Ken preached on John 7:17: "If anyone wills to do [God's] will, he shall know concerning the doctrine" (NKJV). This verse exposed the quicksand in which my feet were stuck. I was a thinker. I was paid to read books and write about them. I expected that in all areas of life,

understanding came *before* obedience. And I wanted God to show me, on my terms, why homosexuality was a sin. I wanted to be the judge, not one being judged.

But the verse promised understanding after obedience. I wrestled with the question: Did I really want to understand homosexuality from God's point of view, or did I just want to argue with him? I prayed that night that God would give me the willingness to obey before I understood. I prayed long into the unfolding of day. When I looked in the mirror, I looked the same. But when I looked into my heart through the lens of the Bible, I wondered, *Am I a lesbian, or has this all been*

a case of mistaken identity? If Jesus could split the world asunder, divide marrow from soul, could he make my true identity prevail? Who am I? Who will God have me to be?

Then, one ordinary day, I came to Jesus, openhanded and naked. In this war of worldviews, Ken was there. Floy was there. The church that had been praying for me for years was there. Jesus triumphed. And I was a broken mess. Conversion was a train wreck. I did not want to lose everything that I loved. But the voice of God sang a sanguine love song in the rubble of my world. I weakly believed that if Jesus could conquer death, he could make right my world. I drank, tentatively at first, then passionately, of the solace of the Holy Spirit. I rested in private peace, then community, and today in the shelter of a covenant family, where one calls me "wife" and many call me "mother."

I have not forgotten the blood Jesus surrendered for this life.

And my former life lurks in the edges of my heart, shiny and still like a knife. ☩

Rosaria Champagne Butterfield is the author of *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert* (Crown & Covenant). She lives with her family in Durham, North Carolina, where her husband pastors the First Reformed Presbyterian Church of Durham.



My Train Wreck Conversion

As a leftist lesbian professor, I despised Christians. Then somehow I became one.

By Rosaria Champagne Butterfield

The word *Jesus* stuck in my throat like an elephant tusk; no matter how hard I choked, I couldn't hack it out. Those who professed the name commanded my pity and wrath. As a university professor, I tired of students who seemed to believe that "knowing Jesus" meant knowing little else. Christians in particular were bad readers, always seizing opportunities to insert a Bible verse into a conversation with the same point as a punctuation mark: to end it rather than deepen it.

Stupid. Pointless. Menacing. That's what I thought of Christians and their god Jesus, who in paintings looked as powerful as a Breck Shampoo commercial model.

As a professor of English and women's studies, on the track to becoming a tenured radical, I cared about morality, justice, and compassion. Fervent for the worldviews of Freud, Hegel, Marx, and Darwin, I strove to stand with the disempowered. I valued morality. And I probably could have stomachached Jesus and his band of warriors if it weren't for how other cultural forces buttressed the Christian Right. Pat Robertson's quip from the 1992 Republican National Convention pushed me over the edge: "Feminism," he sneered, "encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism, and become lesbians." Indeed. The surround sound of Christian dogma comingling with Republican politics demanded my attention.

After my tenure book was published, I used my post to advance the understandable allegiances of a leftist lesbian professor. My life was happy, meaningful, and full. My partner and I shared many vital interests: AIDS activism, children's health and literacy, Golden Retriever rescue, our Unitarian Universalist church, to name a few. Even if you believed the ghost stories promulgated by Robertson and his ilk, it was hard to argue that my partner and I were anything but good citizens and caregivers. The GLBT community values hospitality and applies it with skill, sacrifice, and integrity.

I began researching the Religious Right and their politics of hatred against queers like me. To do this, I would need to read the one book that had, in my estimation, gotten so many people off track: the Bible. While on the lookout for some Bible scholar to aid me in my research, I launched my first attack on the unholy trinity of Jesus,

[continue reading on preceding page]

A portrait of Dr. Eckhard J. Schnabel, a middle-aged man with grey hair and glasses, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and a patterned tie. He is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a warm, out-of-focus interior with wooden paneling.

Dr. Schnabel's *Commentary on Acts* was recently published in the Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament series.

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