

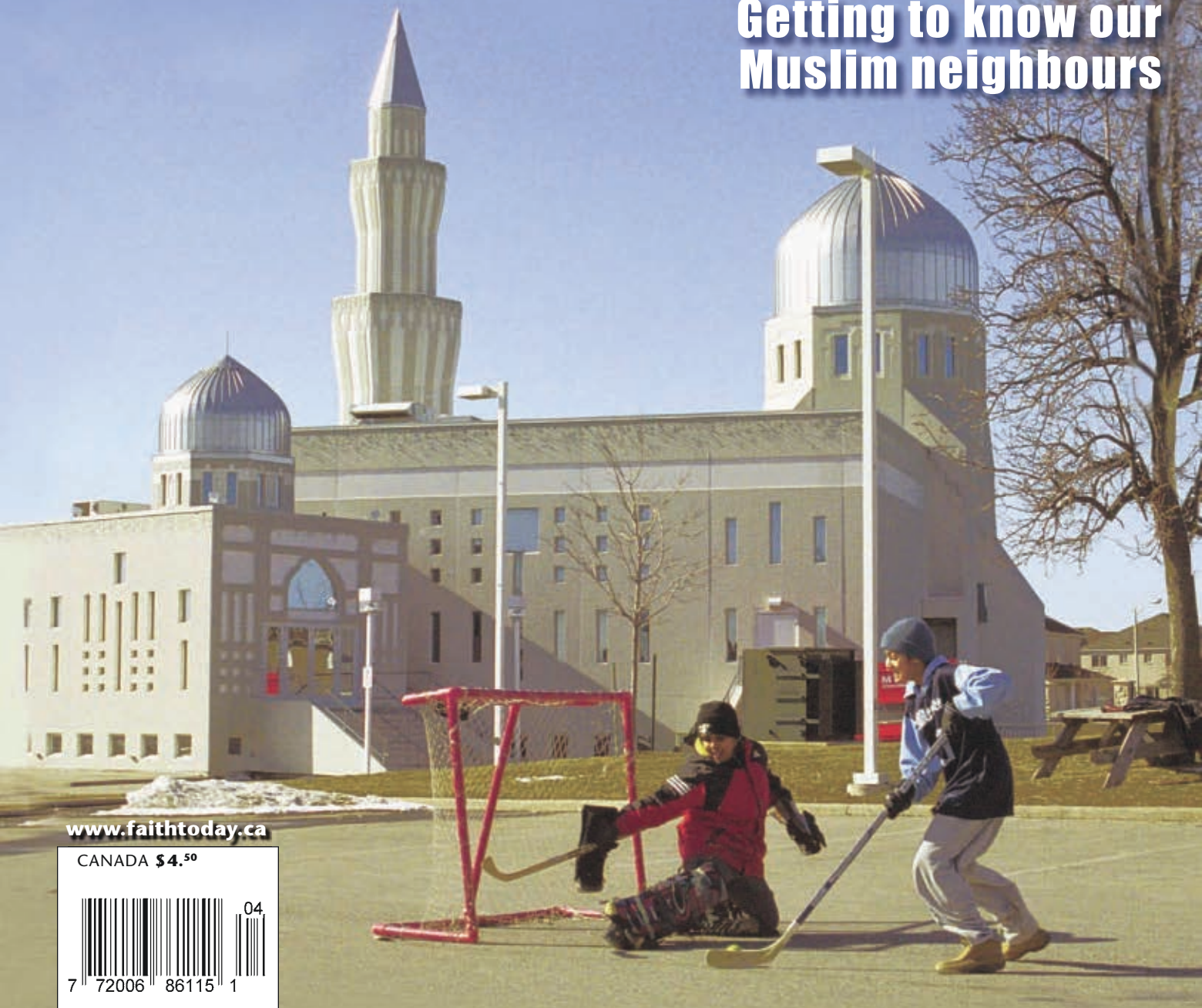
Faith Today



To Connect, Equip and Inform Evangelical Christians in Canada

Islam in Canada

Getting to know our Muslim neighbours



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Toronto—Canada Christian College, 7-9 p.m.

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Winnipeg—Holiday Inn Airport West, 7-9 p.m.

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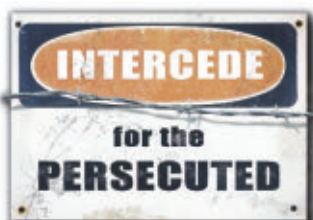
Friday, May 16, 2008

Edmonton—Ramada Hotel and Conference Centre, 7-9 p.m.

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Faith Today

To Connect, Equip and Inform Evangelical Christians in Canada

March / April 2008

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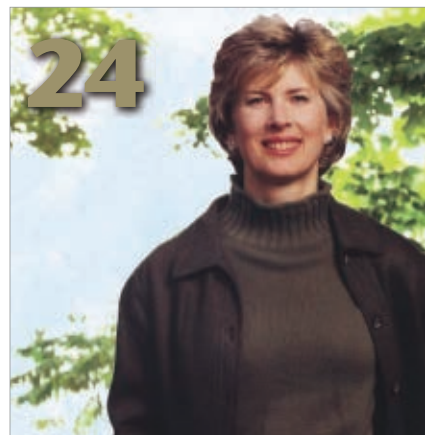
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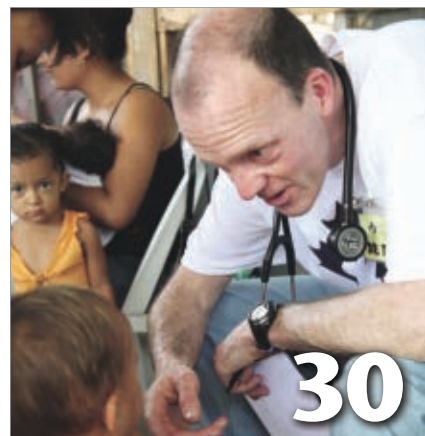


PHOTO: PAUL BETTINGS



PHOTO: SUSIE NIEMEYER

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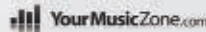
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Seeking Discussion

By Gail Reid



Listening speaks volumes

There's a mosque on our street – I believe it was the first in Toronto. Ironically, the building was built by a Protestant congregation that refused to sell it to Roman Catholics. Ironic because, at that time, it was Roman Catholics we were nervous about. So what has changed? Well, Protestants and Roman Catholics now know more about each other and knowing more has enabled us to work together when there is common cause. Knowledge can dispel fear and misunderstandings; it can create bridges for communication.

Our cover story, "Getting to Know Our Muslim Neighbours" by Alan Guenther, is intended to help us make sense of what appears to be a confusing faith, most often linked to violence internationally. Guenther lays out the diversity among Muslims and highlights the roots of their differences. And he guides us into the touchy question that Evangelicals often ask, "How can we share our Christian faith with Muslims?"

We can expect more help with these issues now that the Canadian Network of Ministries to Muslims was launched in November, facilitated by The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC). This network intends to be an ongoing resource to the Christian community with advice on how to relate and respond to Muslims. It will also offer guidance and resources for those who have a Muslim background but have become Christians.

With the growing Muslim population in Canada we can expect cultural challenges to how we have done things

in the past. However, as EFC president Bruce J. Clemenger relates in his column, "Muslims and Public Policy," the deep faith commitment of Muslims often brings with it a unity of common concern with Evangelicals. Clemenger raises the need for us to think carefully about what principles shape our common life together and how we can respectfully express our differences.

As the EFC publication for the evangelical community in Canada, *Faith Today* provides common space for these discussions. They are also posted on the EFC website (www.faithtoday.ca). In this issue, Stan Fowler, professor of theology at Heritage

Theological Seminary, skilfully handles the question "Is salvation tied to baptism?" For another interesting look at a challenging topic, Clair MacMillan, director of the Church of the Nazarene Canada, questions whether we are allowing religious culture to interpose itself between us and God. In "Tribes or Denominations?" MacMillan points us instead to the gospel of Jesus Christ that will always transcend culture.

Finally, a willingness to discuss differences on strong beliefs does not have to be avoided or end up dividing. *Faith Today* asked two Christian ministries, Exodus Global Alliance and New Direction Ministries, to give our readers guidance in how to be a friend to others regardless of their sexual orientation. Their suggestions will encourage you. ☒

Gail Reid is managing editor of Faith Today and director of communications for The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada.

Climate Change

Re: *A Primer on Climate Change* (Jan/Feb 2008)

Thanks for publishing this. It touches on crucial issues that require deeper exploration. How now shall we live, knowing our lifestyle is destroying others? What should we do and say about the biofuels perversion that turns foods and croplands into fuel production? How can we work together to help Christian aid agencies forestall famine, erosion and deforestation now that we are forewarned of famines (like Joseph or Agabus) – or do we just wait for disasters? How are agencies now dealing with mitigation and adaptation strategies and how can we help them? And can we Canadians escape the sticky money pits of the destructive and dirty tarsands to oppose and hinder their expansion?

There will be no salvation here without repentance from our worship of mammon and our addiction to the convenience brought by cheap fossil energy. Technology won't let us "have it all," as politicians may promise. Though it's unlikely that our oil-rich nation will repent when it is poor millions elsewhere who will perish, for Christians this is the ultimate test of our heart loyalties: will we serve (and trust) God or mammon? Please explore some of these issues in future articles.

BILL TAYLOR
Dawson Creek, B.C.



Evangelicals would be better served if *Faith Today* did not present the global warming issue in such a one-sided way. Cyclical patterns of global warming and cooling were God's idea – that is how He created it to work. I'm thankful that evangelical acceptance of Al Gore-like environmental activism is

behind the curve, although unfortunately it appears The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada has recently become more willing than most to fall for the fraud.

Where will Al Gore-like activism take us? Consider this train of thought: If global warming is a moral crisis then drastic measures must be taken. Centralized government must have the power to act aggressively to prevent the crisis, which will inevitably lead to less freedom for the people. We need fewer human beings because human beings are ultimately fuelling global warming. Abortion and homosexuality are moral virtues because they do not cause more human beings to be brought into the world.

Al Gore would be pleased with the recent *Faith Today*. I am not.

KEVIN WOOD
Ottawa, Ont.

Heaven and Hell

Re: *Ask a Theologian* (Jan/Feb 2008)

Randal Rauser wonders how we can be happy with a loved one in hell. This is a very emotional question but the answer does not rest on our feelings.

How did we end up saved and our loved ones lost? Ephesians 2 teaches everyone is born spiritually dead and unable to respond to God. This means everyone is the object of God's wrath and deserves eternal punishment in hell.

It is only by God's grace my spiritual eyes are open to accept what Jesus accomplished. Thus many Scriptures exhort believers to rejoice in God's salvation.

God's attitude toward the wicked is described in Ezekiel 18:20-32: "The one

who sins is the one who will die.... I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!"

Surely this means believers are not going to be jumping for joy about anyone being in hell. Proverbs 24:17-18 instructs us not to gloat when our enemy falls.

We will know who is in hell according to Luke 16:19-31. We will also know we deserve to be there as much as our loved one. We will rejoice that Jesus conquered sin and death. Some day those who are suffering for Jesus' sake will rejoice when evil is judged (Revelation 18:20). We will acknowledge that God is just in punishing sin.

HEATHER KENDALL
Innisfil, Ont.

A bigger question is: How can we be happy in heaven knowing there are any people in hell? If all my loved ones were saved and in heaven with me, would that make me happy? I always believed heaven focuses on Jesus.

People are in hell because they make a conscious decision not to follow Christ. Those people come from all walks of life, including our loved ones. We need to lament over the fact that people are going to hell who are still alive in our presence today.

ROB GLEESON
Kincardine, Ont.

The answer for me is simple: I don't believe in hell! I am a Christian but I believe in a loving God. I may not always agree with my children but I would never permit anyone to torture them. Does that mean I have more love than God? If someone injures me and does not ask for forgiveness, I still have the ability to forgive him. Does that mean I have more forgiveness than God?

I don't believe some sentence I do or do not say before I die will control God. What about the people before Christ's incarnation or the ones who do not have the mental capacity to utter those words? I worship an all-powerful and all-loving God.

GLEN EAGLE
Churchill, Ont.

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Palestine

Re: The Gathering Place (Jan/Feb 2008)

Thank you for that very timely reminder that we cannot let our spontaneous attachment to the State of Israel be our sole guide in matters pertaining to the Middle East.

ERIC WINGENDER
Montreal, Que.

Omnipotence

Re: Ask a Theologian (Nov/Dec 2007)

I agree with Victor Shepherd when he says, "God acts only in accord with His true nature." Certainly as a God of truth He cannot lie. However, when Shepherd states that "wicked people" were in control at Auschwitz, I believe Scripture disagrees with him. Certainly God was in control.

Consider Jesus' death on the cross: both "Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel ... [and] did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen." (Acts 4: 27-28). God "who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (Ephesians 1:11), including the death of Christ.

The Cross, because of Christ's innocence, was more heinous and unjust than Auschwitz when sinners killed sinners. But that Auschwitz was awful and terrible and criminal cannot be denied. Yet, the Scriptures are clear: God works all things according to His will.

The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith is helpful at this point: "Nothing happens by chance or outside the sphere of God's providence. As God is the First cause of all events, they happen immutably and infallibly according to His foreknowledge and decree, to which they stand related. Yet by His providence God so controls them, that second causes, operating either as fixed laws, or freely, or in dependence upon other causes, play their part in bringing them about" (chapter 5, paragraph 2).

Wicked people were not in control at Auschwitz or Calvary. They played their part; they did whatever God's hand and plan had "predestined to take place." God is the One from whom and through whom

and to whom are ALL things (Romans 11:36). To hold any other position is to deny the Author of the Scriptures at this point.

TODD BRAYE
Blackie, Alta.

More on Forgiveness

Re: Ask a Theologian (Sep/Oct 2007)

Guretzki says the Bible does not teach "unilateral" or "one-way" forgiveness. The conclusion is erroneous because of the erroneous use of terms. Beyond "unilateral" forgiveness and "bilateral" (that is, forgive only where there is repentance), there is a third choice: "Christocentric" forgiveness. Our forgiveness of others is contingent on Christ's forgiveness of us (Ephesians 4:32).

Consider Matthew 18:21-35. King forgives Servant #1 who then should forgive Servant #2. But it turns out King does not forgive because Servant #1 does not forgive Servant #2. Where is the requirement for repentance to forgive? Clearly this is not bilateral forgiveness; it is Christocentric forgiveness.

Guretzki's interpretation of Luke 17:4 ("Even if they sin against you seven times in a day...") is misguided because of lack of context. Verses 1-2 of Luke 17 are a warning that our action or inaction should not cause "little ones" to stumble. The counsel Jesus offers is to pay cautious attention to yourself (v. 3) rather than to the degree or success of the other person's repentance.

Now to Luke 23:34. What part of "Father, forgive them" is so difficult to understand if Christ is the prime Forgiver and thus the unilateral Forgiver? In fact He unilaterally forgives us of our sins because of His death on the cross. The problem with humanity is not with the efficacy of His forgiveness but with the impossibility of reconciliation because of sin.

Unfortunately, Guretzki attempts to distinguish forgiveness and reconciliation by providing a biblically inaccurate definition of reconciliation. After considering Matthew 5:23-24, Romans 5:10, 2 Corinthians 2:10-11 and especially 2

Renamed: Eston College is the new name for Full Gospel Bible College in Eston, Sask. It is the training institute of the Apostolic Church of Pentecost of Canada, Inc., and has about 125 students. The president is Lauren Miller. www.estoncollege.ca

Appointed: Perry Zelman as director of Red Sea Team (RST) Canada, based in Surrey, B.C. RST International has offices in North America, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, Germany and Switzerland. It offers medical programs, schools that teach English as a second language, and other "tent-making" initiatives in the Middle East and in Northern and Eastern Africa that aim to "Help Muslims Follow Jesus." www.rst.ca

Corinthians 5:18-19, it seems more biblical to say reconciliation speaks to the process of regaining trust, harmony and peace between two parties in which one party continues to forgive in the light of the other's continued repentance. Repentance is essential in the process of reconciliation; Christocentricity is essential in the process called forgiveness.

Finally, Guretzki poses the question, "So how should Christians respond to unrepentant offenders?" but then proceeds to tell Christians how they should not respond without telling them how they should. Very confusing. The answer is found plainly in Scripture: Forgive just as Christ forgave. Keep doing so as a process of grieving over a hurt. Do business with Christ and Him alone.

The moment we set ourselves as judge and jury over another's repentance we fancy ourselves also executioner with the blade called anger. If there's then cause for reconciliation, look for verbalization of repentance. And if the person repents, even with continued offence, forgive. But walk the process of reconciliation with care because it is the process in which trust is gradually built.

TIMOTHY QUEK
Scarborough, Ont.

Correction: The address for Missionary Health Institute is www.ihm.ca. A wrong address was printed in the Jan/Feb 2008 issue.

Compilations Highlight Canadian Writers and Musicians

The Christian music industry and Christian writing industry in Canada are each releasing significant compilations this spring.

A set of 45 songs on three CDs, *History of Canadian Christian Music*, offers a definitive retrospective look at Canadian Christian music. It features Brian Doerksen, Starfield, Daniel Band, Hokus Pick, Connie Scott, Rhythm & News, Thousand Foot Krutch, Hawk Nelson, Relient K, The Toronto Mass Choir, The Torchmen Quartet, Jake, downhere, The Suspenders, George Beverly Shea, Steve Bell, Carolyn Arends and many more.



The Gospel Music Association of Canada planned to release the set in early 2008 to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Covenant Awards, to be held in October in Calgary.

An inspirational book, *Hot Apple Cider: Words to Stir the Heart and Warm the Soul*, which features contributions by 30 professional Canadian Christian writers, is also slated for release in early 2008. The book includes stories of ordinary people who discover that God has a plan for their lives.

It was put together by The Word Guild, a Canada-wide association of more than 300 writers and editors, in co-operation with World Vision Canada, which plans to distribute 30,000 copies at several Girls Night Out events this year.

The Word Guild recently amalgamated with the charity Christian Info Canada, giving the organization a permanent charitable home after six years of operating as a project of Imago, a charity that offers a temporary home to Christian arts projects.

Both compilations should be available at Christian bookstores. Find out more at www.gmacanada.org and www.thewordguild.com. ■

—BILL FLEDDERUS

Musician Sells Farm-



PHOTO: SUSIE NIEMEYER

Bryan Moyer Suderman's latest songs discuss Christian stewardship.

Bryan Moyer Suderman, an Ontario musician from a Mennonite background, writes songs to encourage faith, but he distributes his “product” like an organic farmer who operates on a “community supported agriculture” model.

Suderman sells annual memberships to his company SmallTall Music and members “receive regular deliver-

ies of fresh, homegrown, organic music – new songs of faith for small and tall – straight from the producer,” he explains.

His latest album, *My Money Talks: Songs for Worship*, was produced in partnership with the Mennonite Foundation of Canada. The 12 original songs on economic stewardship themes, intended for congregational worship,

Fresh Songs

challenge listeners to live with less. Some Ontario churches are already using the songs in worship.

“We need to learn to pray, to learn a sense of contentment and ‘enough,’ to learn to see the activity in our bank accounts as a key facet of our relationship with God,” says Suderman, a member of Stouffville’s Community Mennonite Church.

Although he has lived in six countries and three provinces (he was born in Winnipeg), Suderman prefers a simple life. He lives in a rented 150-year-old farmhouse in Willowgrove, Ont. Every morning he feeds sheep, cows, chickens, goats, pigs and a donkey before eating breakfast with his wife and son. Then he settles down to make music.

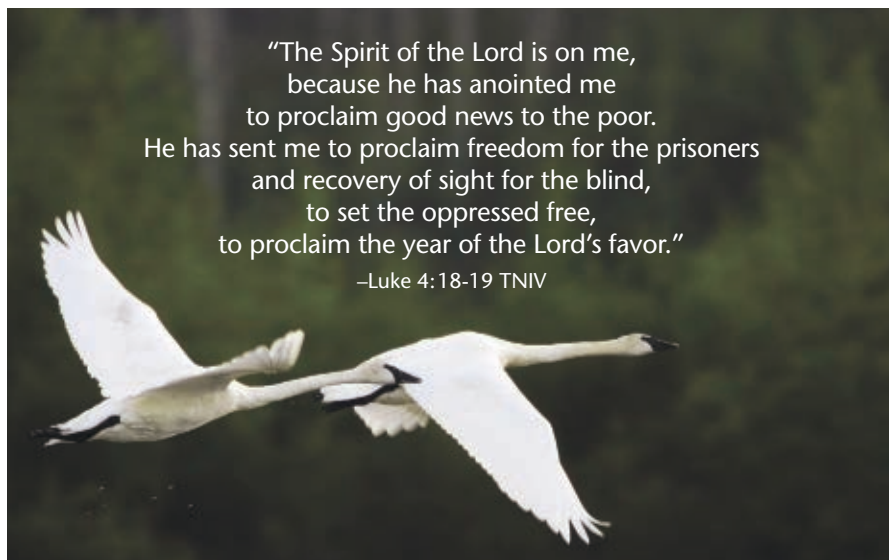
Suderman aims to create a musical community in which members not only offer feedback on his songs but also share their own via the annual Members Jamboree – a special “bonus delivery” of songs written and submitted by the members of SmallTall Music.

Fans are already referring to Suderman’s idea as CSM, Community Supported Music (since community supported agriculture is known as CSA). Recently he added the option of bartering or exchanging goods or services as another form of payment.

“There are currently different households exchanging pork, pies, photography services, website assistance and some painting around the house as payment for their membership in SmallTall Music,” says the former youth pastor, teacher and overseas mission worker. Today the farmer-musician calls himself a “farmician.”

“I am deeply grateful that I can live out this vocation and I look forward to seeing where it will all lead,” says Suderman. More details at www.smalltallmusic.com. ■

–EMILY WIERENGA



“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

–Luke 4: 18-19 TNIV

WWW.DESIGNPICS.COM

Widow Rescues Cambodian Orphans

Many of us dream of retirement as a time when we’ll no longer need to lift a finger. Not Saskatchewan native Marie Ens. When asked to retire from The Christian and Missionary Alliance in 2000, the widow decided to start an organization in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, called Rescue, which would allow her to keep on working.

“I didn’t want my life to consist of just sitting there, waiting to die,” says the 73-year-old author who is scheduled to speak at this year’s MissionFest Toronto (www.missionfest.org), March 6-8. “I still wanted my life to count. Even after my husband passed away in ‘91, I felt God say my missionary career wasn’t over.”

The former pastor’s wife and mother of four joined the Alliance in 1961. Along with her husband and children, she worked in Cambodia on and off until the country’s collapse in 1975, when they returned to Canada for a short while to plant a church, then headed to France where they worked with Cambodian refugees.

Whereas before she trained pastors and started churches, Rescue allows Ens to work with hundreds of orphans and AIDS victims at an orphanage called Place of Rescue.

“The work I’m doing now is more natural,” she says. “Now that I’m an older woman I want to be a grandmother.” With 12 grandbabies of her own and 140 at Place of Rescue, her desire has been more than realized.

When asked about her vision for the children, Ens replies: “That they soar like a kite. We [she works with a Cambodian director and houseparents] want them to reach their full potential. Whatever God has in mind for them we want to see fulfilled.”

Only four years old, the organization (www.placeofrescue.com) already consists of an orphanage, two large homes called “granny houses” for elderly women, another building for young pregnant factory workers and a transition house that assists the orphans with obtaining life skills and a job.

Following MissionFest Toronto, where Ens will be teaching seminars on Third World countries and AIDS, she will be returning to the land and people she has fallen in love with. “I hope to keep doing this for the rest of my life,” she says. ■

–EMILY WIERENGA



Helping orphans and AIDS victims at age 73: Marie Ens.



Church Musicians Meet in Ontario

Christopher Dawes, director of the Summer Institute of Church Music, with church musician Anne Mizen-Baker at Trafalgar Castle School in Whitby, Ont.

Church musicians of all denominations and abilities are finding a welcome respite and refreshment each July at the Summer Institute of Church Music. Founded 38 years ago by Dr. Stanley Osborne, this week of music education, association with other musicians and spiritual development happens each July in Whitby, Ont., about 60 kilometres east of Toronto.

The week is “a chance to talk about and work out frustrations and

to re-equip both mentally and spiritually,” says director Christopher Dawes. There’s also time to study with excellent teachers and connect with other church musicians.

The week consists of daily chapel services, anthem reading sessions, organ master classes, choir rehearsals, concerts by faculty and students as well as sessions in piano improvisation and arranging (details at www.orgalt.com/sicm). Sixty people attended last year.

Bev Foster, who works in the evangelical Anglican tradition, was on faculty last summer. Her goals include facilitating “thoughtful music-making” and bridging between mainstream church music and contemporary Christian music.

The institute’s focus is on choral music and organ but there are always sessions that include praise music using guitars and piano.

The institute also includes the biennial Osborne Organ Competition, now in its 20th year. It often enables young winners to pursue advanced study in church music. ☒

—ANNE MIZEN-BAKER

Couple Ministers at Ontario Native Reserves

When Hugh and Carol Hamp moved north to Shelburne, Ont., and took early retirement, they channelled their years of volunteering in youth ministry towards the people who live on Ontario’s aboriginal reserves.

The Hamps are best known for leading Smoky Trail Native Bible Camps. These youth camps operate six weeks every summer in rented quarters, usually near Parry Sound, Ont., about 225 kilometres north of Toronto. For one week they offer a camp near Hanover, Ont., about 190 km northwest of Toronto.

Sponsors pay the costs of camping, not the parents. The camps set aside time for volunteers to help the campers improve their reading skills because of the difficulties many of the youth have with education.

Each child receives his or her own Bible to keep. After camp the Hamps send a letter and a Bible study to each child every three months.

The Hamps registered their ministry as a charity in 1998 as Georgian Native & Outreach Ministries. Before that they worked with a Shantyman camp ministry.

Besides the summer youth camps, the couple also ministers in other ways.

Hugh Hamp is ordained with Worldwide Ministries Canada, a Full Gospel organization based in Manitoba, and preaches where invited. They travel farther north at least three times a year to visit 30 reserves to the east and west of Sudbury, Ont. They also visit 15 in southwestern Ontario. Part of the time they minister to seniors on the reserves.

The Hamps find catching the interest of two or three adults on a reserve can often lead to children from that re-



Carol and Hugh Hamp help lead Smoky Trail Native Bible Camps.

serve attending the summer camps. Of the children who attend, half return for another season. While at camp some make a profession of faith. More details at www.smokytrail.org. ■

—HEATHER KENDALL

Baptists Blitz-Bless Hamilton

Delegates from a recent Baptist convention meeting held a coat giveaway, dispensed free hot chocolate and picked up garbage in support of a church plant in the east end of Hamilton, Ont.

Four busloads of volunteers donned black hats labelled "Bless Hamilton" and took time from the annual convention of the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Canada (FEBC) held in November for the outreach.

John Kaiser, president of the FEBC, says the event fits with the vision that God can use the FEBC to bless Canada.

Volunteers also cleaned laundry rooms, stairwells and other public areas at three apartment buildings and a nearby community centre. During the afternoon a prayer team asked God to bless these outreach efforts.

The efforts were an attempt to gain trust and to show God's love in a practical way in the neighbourhood around Lightway Church, which had begun holding services only two months earlier at Lake Avenue Public School.

Lightway is a daughter church of Hughson Street Baptist. The neigh-



Outreach targeted three apartment buildings.

bourhood around Lightway is inhabited mainly by poor immigrant families. Its pastors are Mark Vincent and Ian Havercroft.

Organizers say the outreach helped many. After volunteers arranged the coats and clothing in order of size, neighbourhood women found and took away many items. At the community centre, a prenatal class of Muslim women accepted baby clothes. School children appreciated the hot chocolate and other clothes. They were delighted even when the coats obviously did not fit.

Literature about the new church was available at the hot chocolate station. Two new couples are now attending Lightway and hearing the good news of Jesus for the first time. ■

—HEATHER KENDALL

Victoria Church Feeds Body and Spirit

For college and university students in Victoria, B.C., Tuesday night guarantees a home-cooked meal thanks to Emmanuel Baptist Church (EBC).

For the past few years volunteers from EBC have been serving food in the church gym for more than 400 young men and women every week, many from the University of Victoria or Camosun College.

Dr. Rob Fitterrer, senior pastor at EBC, is the founding director of the Christian Community College (CCC) project. These dinners fall under the CCC's vision to help students integrate faith with everyday life.

Despite being a church-hosted meal, the invite comes with "no strings attached," according to www.studentdinner.ca.

Some students strongly appreciate that. "I like the fact that no one is pushing religion down our throats – only

food," says a student who prefers to remain anonymous.

Other come because, quite frankly, "The food here is really good."

In addition to dinner, EBC has a "Grab and go" breakfast on the corner of Henderson and Cedar Hill Road where students can snag a bagel, orange juice, muffin and even sometimes a hot breakfast on Wednesday mornings.

Hosts Rebecca and Craig Hiebert also draw students with their warm demeanour and inviting entries at www.studentdinner.ca. They also offer costume contests and "open mic nights" as well as a coffee bar boasting wireless Internet.

"I told all my friends about this dinner," says one student, "and most of them come here now for a great meal once a week." ■

—EMILY WIERENGA

Muslims and Public Policy

By Bruce J. Clemenger



Blaming social changes on Muslim immigrants is simplistic and unhelpful

Canada is undergoing a shift in societal norms, with polygamy and other former taboos being openly challenged. Recently Canadians learned that the Family Law Act of Ontario allows polygamist marriages performed overseas to be recognized for the purposes of welfare. For some, such reports promote new expressions of anxiety about the impact of Muslim immigration on Canadian practices and values.

Polygamy is a complicated issue in Canada due in part to the conflict between provincial laws and federal law, which recognizes only one spouse.

The challenge of polygamy comes from other quarters as well. We are still waiting to learn if the government of British Columbia will lay charges in Bountiful where polygamy, influenced by the history of Mormonism, is known to be practised.

The ground for the defence of the two-ness of marriage has also shifted. The redefinition of marriage has undermined the idea that the natural limit of marriage is rooted in biology, and so we hear the Supreme Court musing that the natural limit might be merely cultural.

Such challenges will require each of us to articulate reasons for what has become over time custom and habit.

It should not surprise us that immigration and the alternative practices and observances of people arriving from a range of cultures will challenge the status quo. This is not a unique challenge of Muslim immigration. We will find both agreement and alternative voices among immigrants, adding to the existing plurality of voices.

For an example of agreement, let me sketch my first experience working with Muslim leaders. It occurred in the Ontario Multi-Faith Coalition for Freedom in Education, a group of Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus and Christians (including The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada).

The coalition was seeking funding for alternative reli-

gious schools in a province where Roman Catholic schools receive full funding but no others.

All coalition participants agreed parents are primarily responsible for the education of their children and that, while this might be delegated to teachers, parents are not thereby absolved.

We also agreed that education is faith-based, which was also the conclusion of Canada's Fathers of Confederation who provided funding for majority and minority religious education – at that time Roman Catholic and Protestant.

It was the arguments of the secularists, those who believed education could be non-religious, that our coalition contended with. These were often the same voices that challenged religious symbols or displays in public settings or the recognition of Christmas in the public schools. Such public Christian expressions did not bother the Muslims we encountered.

They too were concerned with the bifurcation of life that presumed faith could be compartmentalized or privatized. They did not object to the public calendar being framed around Christian celebrations, although they also felt the holidays of other faith groups should not be ignored.

This example helps to illustrate that the challenges we face to societal norms do not come from only immigration and non-Christian religions. The challenges also come – and in many ways more acutely – from the unfolding of liberalism and its secularist expression, very much a western ideology birthed out of Christendom.

These challenges will require the hard work of thinking again about what principles ought to shape our common life together, what needs to be enforced through law, what should be accommodated and how civility is expressed. Immigrants of all kinds share in this work.

We may also remind ourselves that our ultimate task *as Christians* is to engage our neighbours in a way that opens up conversation rather than closes it down, to listen carefully, to find common ground where we can and to offer up and live out a way of life that is an authentic expression of the gospel that will be both attractive and challenging to our neighbours. ■

Bruce J. Clemenger is the president of The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. Read more columns at www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/clemenger



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The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada is the national association of Evangelicals, gathered together for influence, impact and identity in ministry and public witness. Since 1964 the EFC has provided a national forum for Evangelicals and a constructive voice for biblical principles in life and society. Visit us at www.evangelicalfellowship.ca

Engaging Our Neighbours: Free DVD

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC) has produced a new video brimming with ideas and inspirational teaching to help congregations engage more closely with their surrounding communities.

The free DVD also explains the vision for this summer's Celebration 2008 initiative and invites congregations to plan a local outreach or celebration event in the three weeks after Pentecost (May 17).

Excerpts of the DVD are available online, including segments from EFC president Bruce J. Clemenger, EFC director of national initiatives David A. Macfarlane and Dave Toycon, head of World Vision Canada. www.celebration2008.ca.

New Partnerships: Workplace, Muslims

The EFC is facilitating two new ministry partnerships.

The Workplace Transformation Group oversees the annual Canadian Workplace Conference (www.workplace.transformation.ca). Held this year April 2-4 in Toronto, it aims at men and women who desire a better understanding and fulfilment of God's purpose for them in the workplace.

The group, which shares a common vision of spiritual transformation in our cities through the marketplace, has chosen to operate on the EFC's "partnership platform" to achieve a broader national impact and increased accountability.

The second new partnership, the Canadian Network of Ministries to Muslims, is described on page 20.

New Church & Faith Trends

The 2001 Canadian census stated evangelical churches were shrinking but the churches themselves said they were growing. Find out why the churches were right in "Evangelicals and the Canadian Census," an article in the new issue of *Church & Faith Trends* published by the EFC's Centre for Research on Canadian Evangelicalism.

The new issue, released in February at www.churchandfaithtrends.ca, includes an interview with Reginald Bibby, one of Canada's top sociologists, on why believing in God may make people more civil.

Public Policy Items

The EFC addressed a Senate committee in February to support the proposal in Bill C-2 to raise the age of consent to sexual activity with an adult to 16 from 14.

The EFC's Don Hutchinson has a column at www.christianity.ca reflecting on the 20th anniversary of the Supreme Court decision on abortion.

New Radio Episodes

The EFC's radio show *Canada Watch* has released at least six new episodes already in 2008. Each episode is four minutes and is hosted by EFC president Bruce J. Clemenger. Listen for

free online at www.evangelicalfellowship.ca. Recent topics have included euthanasia, the environment, parental rights in education and protection of the unborn.

Call for Proposals

The EFC Centre for Research on Canadian Evangelicalism is calling for research proposals on healthy evangelical churches in Canada. The Centre is seeking proposals that look at five areas: the role and care of clergy, children's ministry, youth and young adult ministry, evangelism, and associative structures. Visit www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/evangelicalism.

Intercultural Ministry

To discuss how churches can best minister in Canada's increasing cultural diversity, the EFC hosted its first "webinar" in November – a conference phone call with a computer slide show – and is planning another for April 22. The November webinar, organized by the EFC's David Macfarlane and B.C. pastor Sam Owusu, discussed immigration trends and the theology of interculturalism among other topics.

Macfarlane and Owusu are also planning a "travelling intercultural symposium" to visit six cities in Sept. 2008. Details at www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/intercultural. ☒

COMING EVENTS

Details at www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/EFCEvents or call 905-479-5885.

- **Dinner for EFC Supporters & Friends** – Enjoy an evening of food and music with EFC staff including President Bruce J. Clemenger. Abbotsford and Burnaby, B.C., March 10 and 11. Markham and Cambridge, Ont., April 8 and 9. RSVP at 1-866-302-3362 ext. 235 or sayersk@efc-canada.com.
- **Purpose@Work Conference** – Ed Silvano, Linda Rios Brook, David Rae, Jim Brown and many more excellent Christian business communicators will be at this April 2-4 event in Toronto, cosponsored by the EFC. The Workplace Transformation Group operates on the EFC's "ministry partnerships platform."
- **Christian Leaders Connection (Ontario)** – This year's travelling EFC seminar for ministry leaders is called Shifts: Changing Gears to Handle Issues Facing the Church in Canada Today. EFC staff including President Bruce J. Clemenger will discuss law, religious freedom, public witness and spiritual trends. St. Catharines, April 9, and Burlington, April 10.
- **Cross the Street** – A practical EFC conference on community engagement and church growth. Plenary speakers include Tony Campolo, Claude Houde, David Macfarlane and Mark Hughes. Winnipeg, April 11-12.
- **Forty-Day Prayer Ramp: Evangelism** – More than 65 Canadian prayer networks plus hundreds of individual believers have already committed themselves to pray for 40 days for the success of evangelistic efforts in Canada. April 23-June 1.
- **Celebration 2008** – The EFC is encouraging churches to hold local outreach and public celebrations of Jesus during the three weeks after Pentecost (May 17). This initiative, held annually since 2005, is a catalyst to draw people together in new ways to demonstrate God's love in local communities. ☒

Strong Loonie Affects Ministries

In September the Canadian dollar broke the US\$1 barrier for the first time since 1976. It subsequently rose even higher and at press time was trading at just over par. The loonie also rose against other currencies such as the British pound and Japanese yen.

Though it is good news for Can-

adian Christian relief agencies – due to the increased purchasing power of the Canadian dollar – there is a negative side. Canadian charities that depend for support on head offices in the United States or derive most of their funds from there are feeling the pinch.

Jim Uttley from Indian Life Ministries in Winnipeg says their revenue

has dropped by between 30 and 40 per cent primarily due to the exchange rate appreciation. American funds account for 60 per cent of their income.

Some of this loss is the result of a decrease in the subscriber base of a bimonthly newspaper published by the ministry and distributed in North America. Uttley is not sure whether this is partly attributable to the worsening economic situation in the United States. He says the ministry donor base and product sales have not declined although they have had to raise prices to American customers.

The Canadian Convention of Southern Baptists are similarly disadvantaged by the increase in the Canadian dollar value. A significant portion of their funding comes from American sources.

Gerry Taillon, national ministry leader for the Convention, reports in the *Baptist Horizon* newsletter that the Convention reduced its budget by 15 per cent in 2008 on top of a 30 per cent reduction three years ago to accommodate the rising value of the loonie, a trend that started in 2002.

Though these ministries are hard hit behind the scenes, others have been forced to take their struggles public.

Blessings Christian Marketplace, a national Christian retailer, has been forced to restructure drastically as a result of the rise in the dollar. Only four stores of the original 23 will remain open under the Blessings banner.

Mark Hutchinson, owner of Blessings, explains that customers demanded immediate price adjustments when parity was reached. The stock on hand for the Christmas season had, however, been bought three to four months prior when the dollar traded lower. As a national chain with relatively high overheads, it could not react fast enough when customers voted with their feet and transaction volumes declined commensurate with the increase in Canadian dollar value.

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Some people do see light on the horizon. A recent TD Economics special report says the loonie is overvalued and a more realistic exchange rate would be around US\$0.93. This would bring some relief to ministries dependent on American funds. ■

—ALOMA JONKER

Parishes Leave Anglican Church

Even theologically conservative Anglican parish churches voted in February to place themselves under the authority of a South Ameri-

leadership's liberal stance on Christian fundamentals, especially since a vote in 2002 on same-sex unions.

Archbishop Gregory Venables and the Anglican Province of the Southern Cone, which covers the southern half of South America, offered to accept alienated Canadian churches last November.

Since then several small congregations that had roots in the Anglican Church but were not members had already joined the Southern Cone, along with two retired Canadian bishops and several retired clergy.

The alienated Canadian churches will be spiritually overseen by one of those bishops. Donald Harvey is known as moderator of the Anglican Network in Canada and now serves outside The Anglican Church of Canada as a bishop under Venables.

Canadian Anglican leaders have suspended some of the alienated clergy and plan to appoint replacements. Legal precedents suggest that alienated congregations cannot take Anglican church buildings away from the denomination, but participants on both sides predict at least some lawsuits.

Lesley Bentley, spokesperson for St. John's Shaughnessy,

told the *Anglican Journal* the parish has disagreed with diocesan bishop Michael Ingham over a number of faith issues for 15 years and has been unable to find resolution.

Ingham's support for blessing same-sex unions is "contrary to Scripture," she told the *Journal*. "He preached against the bodily resurrection of Christ.

His book *Mansions of the Spirit* doesn't support the uniqueness of Christ, which is a core element of our faith. He reads Scripture in a way we don't read Scripture. At this point, it's two different religions."

Similar issues have divided the 77 million-member Anglican family worldwide, with orthodox Anglicans – a minority in North America but a majority in much of the rest of the world – joining together in a "re-alignment." In December the entire Diocese of San Joaquin in California, 47 churches and 8,300 people, also put themselves under Venables. ■

—BILL FLEDDERUS /
Anglican Journal

TWU Launches Religion Institute

A group of scholars from Trinity Western University in Langley, B.C., recently launched the Religion in Canada Institute to serve as a nucleus for religious research and scholarly networking in Canada.

The institute aims to further our understanding of the diverse role religion plays in Canadian lives, culture and social institutions. It will also engage in research projects that will assist religious organizations to conduct their activities knowledgeably and thoughtfully.

Topics to be addressed at the interdisciplinary institute include evangelicalism, faith-based social services, Pentecostalism, and connections between religion and ethnicity, conflict, globalization, law, public life, health and women.

The institute is "a unique think tank" that will conduct "research that has never been done before in this type of collaboration," according to Michael Wilkinson director of the institute (www.twu.ca/rci).

Wilkinson also serves as associate professor of sociology at Trinity Western, an independent Christian liberal arts and sciences university with 4,000 students. ■

—BILL FLEDDERUS / TWU



PHOTO: SUE CARELESS

Alienated Canadian churches will be overseen by Bishop Donald Harvey, moderator of the Anglican Network in Canada.

can bishop rather than remain in The Anglican Church of Canada.

The four Ontario parishes and three in British Columbia include St. John's Shaughnessy in Vancouver, Canada's largest Anglican parish church.

Some of the parishes have been in dispute with their Canadian and diocesan leaders for 15 years. At issue is the

Getting to Know Our

Faced with the great variety among Muslims in Canada, Christians would be wise to know a bit of history and to invite their neighbours to talk about what they believe

By Alan Guenther

With more and more Muslims making Canada their home – now up to 800,000 according to one estimate by Statistics Canada – how do evangelical Christians relate to our Muslim neighbours? Newspapers and TV give us confusing impressions. Are Muslims in Canada really like the characters on the popular show *Little Mosque on the Prairie*? Some newspaper columnists would convince us Islam is fundamentally violent while others suggest the message of Islam is “peace.”

A helpful approach for Christians is to focus less on “Islam” and more on “Muslims.” This approach helps do justice to the diversity among Muslims and avoid simplistic generalizations. We non-Muslims don’t have the right to decide what normative or “true” Islam is anyway – we are limited to describing what we observe as outsiders.

Two biblical commands can guide us: (1) Love your neighbour as yourself and (2) Do not bear false witness.

The first means we should be careful to think and talk about Islam in ways that we would want Muslims to use in describing Christianity. This doesn’t mean we can’t speak critically, but it does mean we must follow Jesus’ example of self-giving love.

Second, any statements we make about Islam and Muslims should be those a Muslim would recognize to be accurate. If no Muslim can accept our definition of Islam as true of himself or herself, then we risk bearing false witness. (We also need to beware of responses based primarily in fear, which by definition take a worldly, un-Christlike attitude.)

SOURCES OF AUTHORITY

Christians respect the Bible as a key source of authority. Similarly, Muslims have the Qur’an. But a close look at different kinds of Christians – Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant – shows that we express our faith differently based on the differing weight given to the Bible, gifts of the Holy Spirit,

traditions from the Church Fathers, creeds and decisions reached by ecumenical councils, apostolic succession, systems of church government and even human reasoning.

Muslim diversity can be explained similarly.

The two most important sources of authority for a Muslim are the Qur’an and the *Sunna*, or pattern of Muhammad’s life. Muslims believe God sent revelations to Muhammad which were collected into a book to provide guidance for the new Muslim community. To help decide what the verses

in the Qur’an mean, Muslims today consult commentaries written hundreds of years ago, similar to what many Christians do with classic Bible commentaries. So we can’t just pick up a Qur’an and assume we can interpret it correctly if we have no knowledge of the history of Qur’anic interpretation.

In situations where the Qur’an did not provide specific guidance, Muslims looked to the actions and words of Muhammad. Many such stories are preserved in the collections of traditions known as the Hadith. Unlike the Qur’an,

there is no single book of Hadith accepted as authoritative by all Muslims, though some traditions and some collections are seen as more reliable than others.

A helpful approach for Christians is to focus less on “Islam” and more on “Muslims”



BEYOND THE QUR’AN AND THE SUNNA

Based on the Qur’an and Muhammad’s life (he died in AD 632), early Muslims developed Sharia (Muslim law), theology and philosophy. The Sharia also drew on reasoning by qualified scholars and the consensus of the Muslim community. As a body of legal decisions accumulated, four distinct schools of law emerged – and these help characterize different groups of Muslims today.

The majority of Muslims in Canada and worldwide identify with the Sunni tradition. Sunni Muslims in Canada today may have roots in Pakistan, Indonesia, the Arab world or a North African country, for example. In many of these

Muslim Neighbours



PHOTO © CANADIAN PRESS IMAGES / BORIS SPREMO

Two boys play hockey in the parking lot of Ahmadiyya Muslim Mosque in Vaughan, Ont., during March break.

places, Sunnis form the majority of the national population. Sunnis share a preference for one of the four schools of law for guidance.

Another group of Muslims, with roots in Iran and Iraq, are Shi'ite Muslims. The earliest Shi'ites after the death of Muhammad chose to follow his cousin and son-in-law Ali,

and developed their own schools of law based on the traditional sources but continue to accept the opinions of certain living scholars.

“The main Shi'ite legal school today follows scholars known as ‘living sources of emulation’ who are believed to have inherited the mantle of prophetic authority from

12 direct descendants of Muhammad through his daughter, Fatima. Their legal decisions are said to represent the opinions of the ever-living but absent Mahdi, the last of the 12, who will return some day to establish a just world,” explains Linda Darwish, who teaches religious studies in New Brunswick at Mount Allison University.

Other historical episodes have shaped the faces of Islam seen in Canada today. Wahhabism, a movement that influences many revivalist groups such as Al-Qa’ida, is inspired by a back-to-basics, 18th-century reformer. Abd al-Wahhab rejected mystical practices and an unquestioning obedience to the established Sharia in favour of a more direct reliance on the Qur’an and the Hadith.

In contrast, movements such as the Taliban in Afghanistan are committed to a strict following of one of the four

traditional schools of law.

There are also modernist Muslims who emphasize that Islam has enough flexibility within itself to adapt to the modern world and who have insisted on the right of Muslims to reinterpret their sources to meet the ever-changing needs of Muslim communities.

Yet another group, often denounced as heterodox by other Muslims, is the Ahmadiyya movement. Its 19th century founder claimed to be the reformer of Islam, as well as the Mahdi awaited by the Shi’ites and the Messiah awaited by the Christians. His followers accept his teachings as the authoritative interpretation of Islam.

ISSUES FACING CANADIAN MUSLIMS

More than half of Muslims in Canada are first-, second- or third-generation immigrants according to Statistics Canada. (Toronto, Montreal, Calgary and Vancouver continue to draw most.) Like immigrant Muslims in many other western countries, they now find themselves a religious minority and are arriving at diverse conclusions about what it means to be a Muslim in such a situation.

“When young Muslims today look for help in understanding the Qur’an, where do they turn?” asks Gordon Nickel, who teaches intercultural studies at ACTS Seminaries in British Columbia. “Would committed young Muslims in Canada be more attracted to a relativist, postmodern or secularist spin on the Qur’an and Islam or to a revivalist interpretation?”

The best way to understand how our Muslim neighbours answer such important questions is to get to know them and hear what they have to say themselves about what they believe.

We may find, for example, that our neighbours advocate Sharia to arbitrate matters such as family law disputes. Or they may strongly oppose such efforts, arguing that Muslim law would be too open to political control and manipulation by certain groups within the Muslim community. (Some Muslims even disagree as to what constitutes the Sharia, with some seeing it as a rigid code passed down from medieval times and others seeing it as a more flexible legal system sensitive to changing contexts.)

Shi’ites appeal to living authorities to apply the Sharia. Linda Darwish explains: “As new issues arise – and they frequently do for Muslims living in the West – Shi’ites have a ready store of up-to-date guidance that provides security in knowing they are following the wisdom of the Prophet.”

For example, Muslims living in the West might question what responsibilities they have towards their adopted government. “One popular source of emulation for Shi’ites in the West, Ayatollah Fadlallah, commands a code of honourable conduct based on the idea of the contract: the Muslim who enters foreign territory is obligated to fulfil the con-

Ministries Working With Muslims Launch Network



A new group called the Canadian Network of Ministries to Muslims launched in November to assist and serve Canadian churches in outreach to our Muslim neighbours.

The network, facilitated by The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, includes a number of Christian ministries and is seeking more members that have expertise in this area.

“As the Muslim population grows in Canada and the world, more Christians are looking for advice on how to relate and respond,” says Randy Hoffmann of Vancouver, one of the founding members.

The network intends to promote prayer for Muslims, to host consultations to address common questions, and to produce materials that equip individuals and churches.

Common questions that network members hear from Christians include: What’s the difference between Christian and Muslim beliefs? What should we do to try to befriend them or share the gospel with them? What’s the truth about jihad, Salman Rushdie, the Darfur region of Sudan, Iran and Algeria, for example – we hear so many conflicting voices.

The need for high quality materials that evangelical Christians can trust is great, say network members. Furthermore, there is a need for better discipling materials and support communities to help in cases where someone with a Muslim background becomes a Christian.

“Let’s face it,” says Hoffmann, “the terrorism done purportedly in the name of Allah in recent decades has made this an era when both Christians and Muslims are wondering what real Islam actually teaches. Now is the time for Christians to extend a hand of friendship and a listening ear to our Muslim neighbours.”

For more information: info@cnmm.ca. ■

—Bill Fledderus



PHOTO: CBC

Baber (Manoj Sood), Rayyan (Sitara Hewitt) and Fatima (Arlene Duncan) on the set of *Little Mosque on the Prairie*. The comedic show portrays immigrants from diverse Muslim regions along with converts from Christian backgrounds striving for unity in their fictional small-town community.

tractual obligations implicit in the visa he or she received upon entry to the new country,” explains Darwish.

“Wearing the hijab [or headscarf] is likewise considered a religious duty (comparable to the daily prayers at the set times) and does not change because of where a Muslim woman lives. Statements such as these are called *fatwas*, and there are many such declarations covering a wide range of questions that Muslims ask themselves in the process of adapting to life in the West,” says Darwish.

Responses by Muslims in Canada to various *fatwas* range from strict compliance to more liberal attitudes, such as following the ideas of western Muslim academics or even one’s own interpretations.

While many Muslim immigrants have tried to duplicate in Canada the way of life they may have lived elsewhere, others – especially the second and third generations – are increasingly frustrated by traditions and practices that

alienate them from other Canadians.

They are exploring new ways of being Muslim *and* Canadian. The tension they face between wanting to preserve their cultural practices and needing to translate their values and beliefs into a new culture is not new in Canada. German Mennonites, Ukrainian Catholics and Korean Presbyterians and many others have worked through the same tension.

Language is a key issue in immigrant communities. Many Canadian mosques are bilingual, using English to accommodate Muslims who don’t come from the majority ethnic group in a particular mosque. Arabic, though, continues to be used for the prayers and reading or recitation of the Qur’an.

Identity and integration are also prominent concerns among Muslim intellectuals. “Questions of nationalism, gender, sexual orientation and relationships between different parts of the global Muslim community are changing notions of what it is

to be Muslim,” says Chad Hillier, who teaches in Ontario at Wilfrid Laurier University and Redeemer University College.

Cultural assimilation also continues to be discussed. For example, Hillier points to Tariq Ramadan, a leading European Muslim intellectual who has often “criticized Muslims for establishing independent schools, arguing that they hurt integration.”

LITTLE MOSQUE ON THE PRAIRIE

Translating cultural values other than language has proven difficult, as viewers of the new CBC television series *Little Mosque on the Prairie* have seen. The comedic show portrays emigrants from diverse Muslim regions along with converts from Christian backgrounds striving for unity in their fictional small-town community.

We see Baber, one of the main characters, desperately trying to pass on his values to his daughter who is equally desperately trying to fit in with her friends at school.

Baber’s efforts are not limited to his home. Often his conflicts with other Muslims at the mosque come as a result of his desire to replicate his experience as a Muslim from South Asia, something the others strenuously resist – with all participants frequently claiming Islam as the ground for their various positions.

The show also illustrates how second-generation Mus-

lims who have grown up in Canada are now expressing their Muslim identity in new ways. For example, consider the character of Rayyan, whose parents are Yasir and Sarah. Rayyan chooses to practise her faith more strictly than either of her parents. As an expression of that choice she wears a headscarf that is not adopted from either of her parents’ cultures. Like her, some Canadian Muslims have chosen to reinterpret and translate their faith to live harmoniously with their neighbours and as contributing citizens. Some others have adopted instead a radicalized faith in which Islam becomes a comprehensive ideology that is opposed to everything “western.”

Tensions among Muslims living in the West are often exacerbated by demands for assimilation made by the host culture. Such demands are frequently strident – an ironic stance in Canada when made by people whose own immigrant grandparents suffered the same treatment. Cultural practices, particularly the veiling of women, are often attacked as un-Canadian (yet my grandmother, a third-generation Canadian Mennonite, wore a head-covering all her adult life whenever she was in public).

Conversations within Canadian Muslim communities are regularly interrupted by those outside who wish to impose their perspective or seek to influence the outcome. For example, secularists might encourage all Muslims to follow the lead of a secular Muslim such as Irshad Manji (a

Tensions among Muslims living in the West are often exacerbated by demands for assimilation made by the host culture.



Philosophy, Theology and Sufism

By Chad Hillier



As the Islamic Empire expanded into Christian lands in the seventh and eighth centuries, it engaged Jewish and Christian theology and assimilated Greek philosophy. Theology was especially helpful when particular religious questions (for example, whether the Quran was eternal) and political questions (for example, whether it was sinful to assassinate a wicked ruler) caused divisions within the Muslim community. From their various answers, different denominational sects and schools of theology arose, the prevailing one being the Sunni school of Asharite theology.

Philosophy likewise became important with the quick rise to political power the Muslim world experienced, as new rulers only a generation or two removed from the desert were now charged with governing massive city-states. The new elite wisely realized the resources they had in the libraries of the Byzantine and Sassanid empires, and they came to fund Arabic translations of the mathematical, astronomical, medical and political writings of the great Greek philosophers (using Christian scribes). This new knowledge helped them in building new mosques, determining holy days

across the Empire, managing civil affairs, keeping the rulers healthy and developing educational institutions. Other Greek philosophical works were later translated out of pure interest, and it is from these early pursuits we today possess many of the writings of the ancient Greek philosophers.

One response to all this rationalism and legalism was the mystical tradition of Sufism which arose in Persia (later also influenced by Indian elements). Early Sufis sought to achieve a unitary experience with the Divine, basically an intense, intoxicating experience of spiritual rapture. Such experiences inspired some of the greatest poetic and philosophical reflections in Islam, including the poetry of the 13th-century Persian teacher Jalal al-Din Rumi. As Sufism became a more common expression of faith it also became more orthodox. This acceptance is seen in how the 12th-century Persian teacher al-Ghazali, an openly practising Sufi, is also considered to have been the greatest theologian in Islamic history. ■

Chad Hillier has taught at Redeemer University College and at Wilfrid Laurier University, both in Ontario.

Canadian feminist broadcaster, author of *The Trouble With Islam Today: A Muslim's Call for Reform in Her Faith*). Certainly we can all be involved in the discussion of what it means to be Canadian but only Muslims can decide what it means to be Muslim.

A more pernicious intrusion into these conversations is created by non-Muslims who choose a radical element within the conversation and declare it to be the definitive expression of Islam, and on that basis declare that Islam is to be feared and opposed.

EVANGELICAL RESPONSE

In conversations between Muslims and Christians, the principle of respect for people of other faiths means taking seriously what both sides believe and confess. Since the beginnings of Islam, Muslims have denied the central gospel affirmations about Jesus confessed by Christians: the divinity and the redemptive death of Jesus. How, then, should we respond to these denials in a Christlike way?

Gordon Nickel addresses that issue in *Peace, Order, and Extremism: A Canadian Perspective on Moderate and Militant Islam* (Wiley, 2008, co-edited by James Beverley of Tyndale Seminary in Toronto).

Christians should not be alarmed by Muslim polemicists in Canada who debate Christian leaders, attack central tenets of Christian faith, and preach weekly on Canadian television.

"It is simply a reality that asks for an appropriate response," writes Nickel. "Christians understand the seriousness with which Muslim polemicists take their faith, even if they do not appreciate the attacks on their own faith."

Nickel says expressions of anger have no place in disagreements about faith: "Points of deep faith are not settled by force or threat of force, by raising one's voice, by polemical skill or deception or manipulation. (Neither, of course, is anything settled by avoiding crucial issues or trying to smooth them over without open discussion.)"

Nickel concludes that Christians, following the example of Jesus, should relate to others by invitation, not compulsion: "Listen carefully and sympathetically in turn to the confession Muslims make, and take the opportunity to challenge truth claims which seem to them false."

If we accept Muslims as they are, we have a right to expect them to accept us as we are – and sharing our faith is part of our identity as evangelical Christians. Muslims should understand the explanation that we have a responsibility to obey the commands Jesus the Messiah has given us, especially the final command to be His witnesses.

We need to be aware, however, that Muslims also bear witness to one God and to Muhammad as His Prophet as essential parts of their faith.

The Kite Runner

By Arley Loewen



Reading English novels written by Muslims helps us to gain a broader and more realistic perspective of life in a Muslim context. Khaled Hosseini is a popular Afghani author now living in North America. His best-selling novels, *The Kite Runner* (2003) and his more recent *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), give insight into aspects of Muslim culture we normally do not learn about. These stories are not so much about religion but about struggles of maintaining open relationships among urban Muslims. They are stories about friendships, love, betrayal and heroism. In *The Kite Runner*, when Amir betrays his best friend, he can never forget what he has done and feels he needs to "atone for his past sins." This story reflects the intense personal struggle to cover one's shame and gain forgiveness.

A Thousand Splendid Suns, a harsh story of male-female relationships, opens the door into Afghan family life. But not all is stereotypically cruel. Rays of hope shine through as the two rival wives of one husband develop a deep friendship. Three different family relationships portray three different kinds of family experiences – cruelty, pretence and intimacy. Interestingly, the theme of longing for forgiveness comes through again, though much quieter.

As with all novels, these clearly reflect the writer's perspective rather than serving up objective history. Unfortunately, these novels (as well as the movie) reinforce our caricatured view of the Taliban and the conservative Pashtun culture. Yet I also know of one Afghan who says he felt as if he was reliving his childhood when reading *The Kite Runner*.

Thoughtful readers will find such stories can begin to open our eyes to the beauty and tragedy of human relationships among peoples from Islamic cultures. ■

Arley Loewen of Manitoba is a Persian culture specialist with the Central Asian Development Agency.

Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman (John 4:3-45) is a helpful example. We must be as humble and affirming as He was when pointing out that true worship of God has less to do with whose religious rituals are correct and more to do with worship "in spirit and in truth."

Our belief that Jesus Christ is "the way, the truth and the life" frees us to be the warmest community Muslim Canadians will encounter. That is the truth that sets us free to approach Muslims with an attitude free of fear, prejudice and preconceived notions. Then, we can be good neighbours. ■

Alan Guenther is assistant professor of history at Briercrest College and Seminary in Carleton Place, Sask.

A New Kind of Power

Faith Today interviews Eleanor Clitheroe

Eleanor Clitheroe is executive director of Prison Fellowship Canada and serves as a curate at an Anglican church in Oakville, Ont. She is the editor of a recently released book about women in the Canadian penal system called *Women Rising*. In 2002 Clitheroe was dismissed from her position as CEO of Ontario's Hydro One. Fending off very public accusations of wrongdoing, Clitheroe found comfort in her faith – and then she found a calling. Clitheroe (EC) spoke to *Faith Today's* Karen Stiller (KS) about redemption, restoration and beginning again.

KS: Eleanor, most of the people who read *Faith Today* call themselves Evangelicals. Do you fit into that category?

EC: I come to my faith with an evangelical understanding but I don't really put myself into any category. I have a foot in the Baptist Church and one in the Anglican. My dad was Anglican and I grew up in the Baptist Church as a child. I love the outreach of the Baptist Church; it connects with my sense of responsibility and call on my life. I love the liturgical side of the Anglican Church. I love the harmony of the sacramental side. But my focus is primarily on involvement as a Christian in the walk of life.

KS: Your involvement these days is concentrated on Prison Fellowship Canada. What are some of your personal challenges around that work?

EC: There are days when it can feel overwhelming and as if it's all up to us. What we do may seem insignificant and what needs to be done seems so significant. We forget that God is in charge. I have learned that we may have things on our to-do list but, in the end, it's really in God's timing and in His place.

KS: What you are really doing is caring for prisoners and their families and those hurt by crime. It must be amazing to see the impact of the work of Prison Fellowship.

EC: The changes and transformations are mighty and often

in the places we don't expect to see them. As long as we work along and do what we are supposed to do, those are our best days. It's when we get ahead of ourselves that we get down. There are a number of people around the world who work in this ministry. It's a wonderful community of very diverse people coming together around this particular need.

KS: How can people get more involved with Prison Fellowship? Surely not everyone can be cut out for visiting prisoners?

EC: Not everybody is called to be inside a prison. It's like any other task that one undertakes. If you don't know what you are doing you may flounder. We train people. If you understand the rules, the dos and don'ts, you will do better. But there are different ways of being involved in prison ministry. You can work with families, mentor a young person, one can help with the homework in a family with a single mom. There are lots of ways of helping those families impacted by crime. And of course there are the victims of crimes who often are as neglected or feel as marginalized or are afraid. Often our biggest fear is of getting involved.

KS: It is a bit intimidating, the thought of being involved in ministry with criminals.

EC: Well, it is astonishing how often a family has been impacted by crime that would not be readily apparent. Our workers speak to a wide range of churches. Afterwards some-



in on the part of the victim to prosecute the criminal. The community doesn't actually get to feel any safer. The victims never really feel restored in any way.

KS: I would think that is one important thing our faith could offer to the system – the radical idea of restoration.

EC: There are Communities of Restoration in various forms in prison ministries around the world. They are faith-based communities for people who have been through their sentencing but want to rehabilitate. There is a huge parallel here in Canada with the aboriginal healing lodges. We've been anxious to see if a model could be used here in Canada for people who want a spiritual component in their restoration. It looks as if we may be able to do at least a halfway house or a transition house. To have that kind of restoration in a community that is based on a set of principles we agree on is really great.

KS: In your work, you are with what I assume is a fairly wealthy reality in Oakville, Ont., and also with prisoners. Is there anything in common between those two extremes?

EC: Everyone has the longing to know God. That doesn't really change with economic background. It's a God-created search for God. I think success can mask unhappiness. We can almost inoculate ourselves from the needs of the world, the tragedies of the world and the deep joys of the world. Success allows us to put our confidence in the fact that our money can buy our way out of

PRISON FELLOWSHIP CANADA

one often comes up and says "That could have been me," or someone has been a victim or hurt. We're not that far away as a community from the criminal justice system and those in it as we may think. But everyone has a bit of this sense of fear of the lack of security in the community. Adding to that is a bit of a disconnect we feel as the government steps

situations. I don't even mean wealthy. Just "I'm OK." It allows us to say "I'm the one who is in charge here." It's a very fragile state, which of course I found out.

KS: Yes, in 2002 people in Ontario anyway were hearing about your very public dismissal from Hydro One. The

next time most of us heard about you, you had an M.Div. in hand and were wearing a clerical collar. Tell us a bit about that?

EC: I had thought for several years about going into full-time ministry. I kept putting it off. I wonder if that hadn't happened if I would have taken the plunge. You can go along and think "I'm saying my prayers in the morning, I'm going to church and I'm on the right track." You can be blinded to the fact you are taking on so much, skimming the surface and drawing on that well of spiritual resources. When I lost my job I was depleted. I was tired. I was reaching really deep into that well of spiritual support, and God was there for me.

KS: Some of your friends must have been a bit surprised when you and your family moved into seminary

housing and you started your studies?

EC: I think sometimes people shake their heads in wonder and sometimes they nod in recognition and wonder what it would take for them to make that kind of commitment. I do feel privileged, although surprised, I'm in a position that I can speak about my faith. If there's something in my experience that can speak to other people to explore their relationship with God, I'm happy to do it. It's the most important part of my life. If I can help someone in that exploration I am happy to share my personal journey.

KS: Public opinion as I understand it now acknowledges that you suffered a virtual character assassination when you were fired from Hydro One. But

I'm assuming not everyone in the Christian community is on board with your decision to sue Hydro One and the individual who fired you for millions of dollars?

EC: I did some soul-searching, but I was strongly encouraged to put my case forward. I've had moments of doubt as time has gone by when I hear the conflicting arguments that I should simply forgive, and that to forgive means dropping the case. I have concluded in response that I do forgive but I'm not sure forgiveness means dropping accountability. There are people on both sides of the spectrum. Some would think it inappropriate for me not to stand up for my rights under the code of human rights. Others would say it doesn't matter what happens to us, right or wrong, Christians should never solve their problems inside the secular system or use the courts. Whatever happens, I think what was really an important aspect of those months of trauma, doubt, embarrassment and humiliation was that it wasn't me who had to uphold me. It wasn't my strength. It was God.

KS: What is the most rewarding part of your work now?

EC: Prison Fellowship volunteers dropped off gifts to the wife and children of a man in prison. And they invited her to church. The husband later told me that changed his wife's life. I'm sure the volunteers had no idea. From their point of view all they did was wrap a gift, drop it off and invite the family to church. And now here is this gentleman speaking to me and saying what an impact it had on a life and a family. We hand what we do over to God and say "Help me do the right thing." With God's help, that's what really results in a significant life. **▣**

Karen Stiller is associate editor at Faith Today.

I do feel privileged I'm in a position that I can speak about my faith




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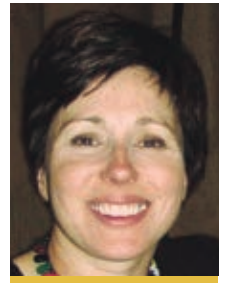
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The Day We Met Our Sponsored Children

By Karen Stiller



It is 11,734 kilometres from Toronto to Kampala, Uganda. And it feels like it. Throw in a few hours in a hot van down some roads that give new meaning to the word “bumpy,” and my family and I found ourselves standing in the headmaster’s office at Kiyindi and Brikwe primary schools. The schools, which serve close to 1,000 children combined, are projects of International Needs (I.N.) Network Canada, a small but mighty relief and development agency.

We were travelling through Africa as tourists on a long-dreamed of journey that took us from the bush of Burkina Faso to the plains of Kenya, with a week in Uganda between. It was our Uganda days that we talked about the most leading up to our adventure.

We had met Justus Miwanda, I.N. Network’s Uganda director, when he visited our church in Port Perry, Ont.

Moved by his message, we had accepted the invitation to sponsor two children through I.N. Network.

(Our experience sponsoring one child up to that time through World Vision Canada had been a rich one and had convinced us that, done well, the child sponsorship model works. Both World Vision and I.N. Network Canada are affiliates of The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada.)

Now we were about to meet our two newest friends.

Mariam and Fred attend the I.N. Network schools. Each school is made up of simple classrooms built around a common yard. Lunch for the students is cooked over a fire every day in a pot taller than my youngest son. The classrooms are packed with pupils – some rooms have up to



The Stiller family meets with Mariam and her mother outside Mariam’s home in Uganda. Below: Erik Stiller with Mariam and Fred with Thomas Stiller.

PHOTOS: KAREN STILLER

90 kids to one teacher. Four or five students squeeze onto one bench and, when the headmaster walks in with unexpected guests from Canada, everyone pays close attention.

At one of the schools we had the opportunity to speak to each class. At every stop the headmaster asked the children sponsored by Canadians to raise their hands. It was a beautiful sight to see so many hands in the air of children who were able to be there because of the generosity of someone back home.

I boldly offered greetings from “every Canadian sponsor” and told the children how much they were valued, prayed for and thought of back home in Canada. Some of the children seemed to delight especially in our seven-year-old son. The headmaster explained that Caucasian children were a rare sight, especially ones that small.

It was our turn to be delighted when our sponsored children were led quietly to us to say hello.

They were both very shy and much smaller than we had imagined. Mariam and Fred knew who we were from the photos and letters we had sent. We offered them the simple gifts we had carried with us. Our hosts at the schools were careful to have the children set them aside for later, so other kids would not feel left out.

We could see Mariam and Fred were flabbergasted that we were there in the flesh. Our own three children were thrilled to meet the children we talk about, pray for and write to. They were gentle and loving with Mariam and Fred. And it was a proud moment for us.

We had the privilege of driving Mariam home from school that day. We parked our van where the rough road

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narrowed to a path. As we hiked towards Mariam's house, the heady smell of vanilla that grows there like apples filled the air. We looked up to see a woman running towards us. Her hands were in the air in an exuberant wave. She was Mariam's mother. And she was crying.

She gripped my arm and embraced my husband and me. The mother of our sponsored child touched the heads of each of our own children and invited us into her tiny mud home. We sat on a rough wooden bench, the only seats there were. A fire smoldered in the cooking pit just outside the entrance.

Then Mariam's mother dropped to her knees, closed her eyes and raised her hands in the air. She prayed a blessing over us in a language I could not understand. But it was a benediction I will never forget. ■

Karen Stiller is associate editor of Faith Today.

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Is Salvation Tied to Baptism?

By Stan Fowler



In the early church, baptism was an experience that unified Christians (Ephesians 4:5), but that is no longer true in the same way. Among the various disagreements about baptism, the most significant may revolve around the efficacy of baptism. Are we saved by baptism?

Peter's statement in 1 Peter 3:21 that "baptism now saves you" seems to offer a quick answer, but that would be an example of proof-texting at its worst. Christians in my own (Baptist) tradition and many other evangelical traditions would be quick to say that this text is unusual and has to be read in light of clearer texts that deny this kind of efficacy.

But there are also many other baptismal texts of the New Testament. Looking at them is very interesting for we see that the effects attributed to baptism are, in fact, the various aspects of salvation.

Although John's baptism was not completely equivalent to Christian baptism, it was the precursor. That baptism was done as an act of repentance "for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 3:3) in order to escape "the wrath to come" (Luke 3:8). The (disputed) long ending of Mark indicates Jesus viewed faith and baptism as instrumental in the experience of salvation (Mark 16:16).

In the Book of Acts, baptism is a crucial part of conversion resulting in the benefits of salvation. At Pentecost, Peter instructed questioning Jews to repent and be baptized in order to be forgiven for rejecting their Messiah and to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). When Paul encountered 12 "disciples" at Ephesus who lacked the gift of the Spirit, he asked about their baptism. Having discovered they knew nothing beyond the basics of John's baptism, he gave them Christian baptism, through which they received the Spirit (Acts 19:1-6). When Paul recounted his own conversion, he recalled that Ananias told him to call upon the Lord in the act of baptism and thus have his sins washed away (Acts 22:16).

In Acts it is clear baptism can occur without the bestowal of the Spirit (Acts 8, the Samaritans) and the Spirit can be bestowed prior to baptism (Acts 10, Cornelius and his household), but the normative link between baptism and the Spirit is still evident. Luke shows that the delay of the Spirit at Samaria was an unexpected thing and, after the gift of the Spirit to Cornelius and the others with him, Peter was

insistent that baptism must follow immediately.

But doesn't Paul contradict all this with his insistence that we are justified by grace alone through faith alone? Not really. Paul says we become children of God through faith in Christ (Galatians 3:26) and then immediately speaks of our being "baptized into Christ" (verse 27). The same thought of union with Christ through baptism is also found in Romans 6:3-4 and Colossians 2:11-12. Paul sets faith over against works of the Mosaic Law but he never opposes faith and baptism in the same way.

So 1 Peter 3:21 is more typical than unusual in the New Testament language concerning baptism. Now of course Peter emphasizes that the crucial matter is not the ritual itself ("the washing of dirt from the body") but the attitude toward Christ expressed in the act ("the appeal for a good conscience before God"). And even then the power is not in the human choice to believe but in "the resurrection of Jesus Christ," to

whom faith and baptism connect us.

The biblical evidence, then, leads to the conclusion that baptism is the act of a penitent sinner turning to Jesus Christ for salvation, not the act of a confirmed disciple bearing witness to conversion as a past event. Therefore, baptism is designed to mediate union with Christ at the level of conscious experience, even though the Cornelius story and contemporary experience both show that many people receive powerful assurance of grace prior to baptism.

So can we be saved without baptism? Of course, but that is not the right question. It would be better to ask how God intends baptism to function. In practice we all recognize that the experience of conversion demands the attitude of faith be translated into action (e.g., prayer, raising a hand, signing a card, etc.). Other actions may have benefit but, in Scripture, that action is baptism. ■

Jesus viewed
faith and baptism
as instrumental
in the experience
of salvation

Stan Fowler is a professor of theology at Heritage Theological Seminary in Cambridge, Ont., and the author of More Than a Symbol: The British Baptist Recovery of Baptismal Sacramentalism (Paternoster Press). Representatives of 10 seminaries affiliated with The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada take turns writing for this column. Please send your questions to: FTeditor@efc-canada.com or Faith Today, Ask a Theologian, M.I.P. Box 3745, Markham, ON L3R 0Y4.

White Elephants in Africa

How to send what the developing world really needs

By Sandra Reimer

A “white elephant” is a thing of value whose maintenance cost outstrips its usefulness. Our writer explores how the things we sometimes send to the developing world may not actually be that helpful. Here’s how to do better

One day at the processing centre for Operation Christmas Child in Eastern Canada, a worker opened up a shoebox that was supposed to be filled with gifts for a child overseas. Mae Joudry, co-ordinator for the processing centre in Moncton, N.B. says the shoebox held a package of hotdogs among some appropriate gifts. Another box held the hotdog buns.

“I guess they wanted the kids to experience something about Canadian culture,” says Joudry. By the time the boxes are centrally processed, shipped, and clear customs in the recipient country, those hotdogs wouldn’t be so good anymore. The hotdogs and buns were removed.

As Canadian Christians, most of

us are blessed with an abundance of material goods and many of us want to share them with the world. Our churches often engage in outreach activities that involve sending material goods to the developing world in an attempt to bless our brothers and sisters there.

Our hearts are in the right place – but sometimes our gifts aren’t. *Faith Today* spoke to people on the front lines of distributing – and receiving – goods in developing countries to help ensure that what we send is truly helpful.

SEND THE BEST

Trevor Adams, material resources coordinator for Mennonite Central Committee Ontario (MCC), heard about a developing nation that received a gift of one-claw hammers. You could pound nails in

with those hammers but you couldn’t use those hammers to remove the nails. Fortunately the locals were creative, melting down the tools and making hoes out of them.

Other donations can be burdensome and sometimes are met with a “No, thanks” by recipient nations. Problem items include used clothing and outdated medications. Some countries won’t accept used clothing because they want to protect their own textile industries. Justus Miwanda is executive director of International Needs (I.N.) Network in Uganda. I.N. Network projects are managed and staffed by nationals (people born and raised in those countries) around the globe. Miwanda explains that the Ugandan government will not accept outdated medicines and makes the donor pay for their destruction.

Many agencies, like World Vision, have a policy against sending outdated medications. “There is always the potential that the medicine could be harmful to the person taking it if it is expired,” says World Vision Canada president Dave Toycen.

Feed The Children Canada (FTC) also doesn’t send medications. According to Dr. Tony Brown, a medical

If you are a church or business that wants to donate goods

- Before gathering anything, do your homework.
- Call an agency that already has distribution channels and send goods through them or find out how they do it.
- Factor in the cost and practicalities of shipping the items.
- Consider sending an advance team to assess the needs in the recipient country or at least connect with nationals to make sure what you send will be helpful.
- Consider the environmental and cultural impact of your donation.
- See FTC Canada’s website at www.ftccanada.org for ways your company can donate useful items.



Dr. Tony Brown, medical adviser with Feed the Children Canada, provides care to children in Honduras.

adviser with FTC, it is more cost effective and culturally appropriate to buy medicine in the countries where FTC provides primary and preventative health care. Medications purchased in the host countries are usually cheaper

and shipping charges are avoided. This practice also supports the local economy – it’s like giving twice.

Sending outdated medications, stained and worn clothing, or other poor quality items gives a negative

message to our brothers and sisters in developing nations. “Just because people are poor doesn’t mean they should get second-rate medicines,” says Toycen.

“If you are going to bother shipping something, send the best things possible with lots of life left in them,” adds MCC’s Adams.

WHAT DO YOU NEED?
Dr. Brown has led many cross-cultural mission trips. In his experience, if you ask nationals “Could you use this?” they will always say yes even if they can’t – both to be polite and to keep the donations coming. A better question to ask is “What do you need?” That’s where MCC and World Vision start as they work with national partners.

When Miwanda coordinates an I.N. Network project with partners from “supply nations” (including Canada), he invites

representatives to visit Uganda to assess needs before bringing a team. Groups doing building projects receive a list of construction supplies and then donate money so Miwanda and his colleagues can purchase the

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items in Uganda. Teams work alongside Ugandan tradespeople who have been hired to help with the construction. Miwanda has noticed that when hospitals or other buildings are constructed solely by foreigners, the locals are not as committed to the upkeep of the building or the ongoing success of a project. They refer to it as “the Canadian hospital.” But if nationals define the need, supplies are purchased domestically and local labourers are hired, there is a sense of ownership that empowers the community to solve its own problems.

WHEN DISASTER STRIKES

When Canadian Evangelicals hear about a disaster, they want to alleviate the suffering. “After major disasters

you will often find warehouses full of used clothing and food, but no one has thought of the cost to send these items,” says Toycen.

When MCC responds to a disaster, it visits the country first to assess the situation and sees how the people affected define their needs.

Financial donations are always best because they allow organizations like MCC and World Vision to respond quickly and flexibly in an emergency. Whenever possible MCC purchases relief items in the host country but is not always able to do so. “If it’s a natural disaster that has destroyed the infrastructure of a country then it is easier to ship things from North America,” says Adams. Groups wanting to send goods in times of disaster should also remember the local church already in place in the country in need. In

If you are an individual who wants to donate goods

- Check out MCC’s guidelines for creating health kits, sewing kits, relief kits, AIDS care kits, newborn kits and school kits (the most popular with Canadians). Relief kits are most needed at this time. Find kit lists at www.mcc.org.
- Bless a child with a shoebox full of toys and practical items (but not hotdogs!) through Operation Christmas Child. Be sure to follow the list provided – inappropriate items will be removed. See www.samaritanspurse.org.
- “Shop” in charity gift catalogues to provide a family with a goat, educate a girl in rural China or dig a well. See World Vision’s catalogue at www.worldvision.ca. Partners International Canada, another EFC affiliate, also offers a catalogue popular with Canadians at www.partnersinternational.ca.

If you sponsor a child

Many people sponsor a child through World Vision Canada, FTC Canada, I.N. Network Canada, Compassion Canada or one of the other great organizations that offers sponsorship opportunities (check out EFC’s list of affiliate organizations for links to many of them). Here are some tips from World Vision president Dave Toycen for sending gifts to your sponsored child:

- Be careful not to underscore the affluence in Canada. If you send a photo of your family, don’t take it in front of a huge house or an expensive car.
- Be modestly dressed in any photos you send. In many countries our clothing could cause offence.
- Send something that would be helpful, meaningful, culturally appropriate and right for the age of the child. Postcards, stickers, puzzles and writing tablets are well received and they fit in an envelope.
- Bulky or expensive things could be stolen in the mail. Keep it simple. Expensive items could also set your child and his family apart from others in their village, which could cause tension.
- Don’t send toy guns or other war-related items. War is all too real in many developing nations.



PHOTO: SANDRA REIMER



PHOTO: SANDRA REIMER



PHOTO: KAREN STILLER

Clockwise from left: An MCC volunteer packs newborn kits for shipment to developing nations; an MCC volunteers knots a handmade comforter for people in need; Justus Miwanda encourages mission agencies to work closely with nationals when defining and meeting needs in other countries.

2004, when a tsunami hit coastal communities in 11 countries bordering the Indian Ocean, the Indonesian churches wanted to help their own people. They purchased some supplies locally and assembled relief kits along with MCC's efforts in the area. The Indonesian Church's reach was extended as North Americans shipped additional kits for a total of 25,000. Nationals distributed them and were able to demonstrate God's love in their own communities.

EXTENDING THE HANDS OF CHRIST

Though cash donations are always helpful, Canadian Christians will con-

tinue to give gifts-in-kind. And that is a good thing, as long as the recipients have been consulted and *their* priorities made the priority of the giving project. "There is something tangible about sending materials goods," says Adams. "It makes people feel as if they are the hands of Jesus." Armed with knowledge and an others-centred attitude, we can come closer to being truly that as we send what is really needed and desired by our brothers and sisters in need. **FB**

Sandra Reimer is a freelance writer from Kitchener, Ont.

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Friendship Regardless of Sexual Orientation

A youth worker shares what he learned befriending gay, lesbian and bisexual young adults who were rejecting Christianity

By Brian Pengelly

Tracey was shaking with anger, a gospel tract crumpled in her fist. “I HATE Christians so much!” she announced to our little group as we walked up the street, leaving the sidewalk evangelist behind.

The force of her announcement took me by surprise. I had been part of the storytelling group at the university for only a couple weeks but Tracey had always seemed so soft-spoken and easygoing.

We reached the diner and the group settled into a booth. It was a few hours after midnight and we were there for milkshakes and the traditional all-day breakfast.

The majority of the group that night, including Tracey, identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual. As they went around the table sharing stories, I became increasingly sad and frustrated. Almost everyone had experienced Christians as judgmental, hurtful, mean-spirited, and in some cases even violent.

I had joined this group to build relationships with unbelievers in my community, hoping to have a chance to share my faith. But now I wondered what I could say.

Over the next year and a half I learned a lot. It turned out that most of my gay friends were not hostile to Jesus or the gospel. In fact they were eager to discuss matters of

faith – under certain conditions.

Here are a few key things I learned.

“**Please get to know me!**” The most common complaint from my gay friends was that Christians didn’t bother to get to know them before telling them what to do. Many Christians had built assumptions without bothering to see if they were true. One told me how frustrating it was to hear Christians railing against homosexuality because of “promiscuous lifestyles” when, ironically, the individual was still a virgin. Others told of loved ones who assumed same-gender attraction must come from sexual abuse or “just not having met the right guy” or girl. These responses leave individuals feeling unimportant and unloved.

Coercion is not OK. Many friends had been given ultimatums by their loved ones. Some had been thrown out of their homes. Others had been told that if they didn’t change they would receive no more assistance with university tuition. In every case these threats hardened the person’s heart against Christianity and made telling lies seem like the only solution.

“**Tell me about Jesus!**” Telling people who are unfamiliar with the Bible what it says about sexuality is no more persuasive than quoting the Qur’an or the Code of Hammurabi at them. Among my friends, it was only as they got to know Jesus and saw Him reflected in my life that they began to care what Scripture said about sexuality.

“**If you really love me, then care for me!**” Most of my friends had heard the phrase “Love the sinner, hate the sin” a thousand times but were hard-pressed to come up with concrete examples of how Christians had ever loved them.



Sexuality, Truth and Grace

Both Brian Pengelly and DJ Thompson will be speaking at an upcoming international conference in Toronto, May 10, sponsored by Exodus Global Alliance.

The full conference “Sexuality, Truth and Grace” offers 50 different workshops between May 8-10 for ministry leaders, pastors, counsellors, family members, friends and strugglers. Among the international speakers will be Canadians Patricia Lawrence, head of Exodus Global Alliance, and Bruxy Cavey, teaching pastor of The Meeting House.

The Saturday Youth Conference will offer “a variety of workshops, testimonies and presentations to inspire and help youth make healthy and godly choices about themselves and equip them to reach out to friends who may be struggling with their relationships and sexuality.”

Visit www.exodusglobalalliance.org. ■ –Bill Fledderus

Continued on page 36

I Have a Gay Friend. What Do I Say?

The story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well is a helpful example

By DJ Thompson



does not avoid or ignore the Samaritan woman. Instead he flouts the social rules that separate them by allowing her to come near and then initiating a conversation with her.

Be transparent. Jesus opens with a question: “Will you give me a drink?” In saying this, Jesus makes Himself vulnerable. In fact throughout His ministry Jesus never seems reluctant to share that He thirsts too.

Somewhere along the way Christians have mistakenly concluded that we aren’t supposed to identify with the human frailty of unbelievers – as if being a Christian means we are only spiritual and no part human! However, Jesus demonstrates that being fully human is not a hindrance but a way to connect.

Focus on needs, not sin. Starting with his own thirst, Jesus encourages the woman to consider her thirst, her search, and how none of us can fill the emptiness behind it: “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again.”

Can you relate to being stuck in a self-defeating cycle? I can. As a teenager, walking the streets of a gay community in southern California, I was desperate for male attention, affection and affirmation. It

was enlightening to learn that my same-sex attractions were symptoms of an even greater problem. By learning to address my unmet spiritual and relational needs, my compulsion to participate in homosexuality waned.

Likewise, when dialoguing with gay loved ones, we can prayerfully help them to discern factors that may be contributing to them feeling “different” or attracted. There’s no need to be reluctant to explore feelings of human need, especially as we invite the Holy Spirit to make them clear.

Testify to God’s provision. Jesus does not stop at identifying with the woman’s predicament. He goes on to direct her to what can satisfy her thirst. What she needs is living water, represented by the Holy Spirit (John 3:38-39). Simi-

When someone we care about says “I’m gay” or “I’m a lesbian,” many of us feel paralyzed. We may feel unsure how to continue showing we care in light of God’s disapproval of homosexual behaviour revealed to us in the Bible.

Unfortunately, we don’t have any record of Jesus speaking to homosexuals. But thank God we do have relevant examples of how Christ reached women known for their sexual reputations. John 4 is the longest account of Jesus interacting with one of these women in Samaria.

What can we learn from the way Jesus acts in this situation?

Communicate acceptance. Before saying anything we need to become approachable first. Acceptance grants greater influence than immediate judgment ever can. Jesus

Continued on page 37

Friendship

Continued from page 34

Most had found that Christians were afraid to help them or treat them kindly for fear of being perceived as “condoning” their lifestyle.”

What finally broke down some barriers was my willingness to serve them where they were at. I gave out a lot of rides when needed, whether moving

someone out of an abusive partner’s apartment, getting them home safe after a night of drinking, or driving them home after an event.

I had a year and a half with that group. But my next step in life was going to take me to another city, away from my church and my friends in the storytelling club. At my church I had done some work as a youth pastor. Among my friends I had some great conversations about faith and

had led a few of them to the Lord.

On one of my last Sundays I was asked to speak in the worship service. I looked out in surprise at an entire pew filled with my friends from the storytelling club. Afterwards Tracey came up to me and shook my hand.

“I never thought I would set foot in a church again!” she said. “I don’t think I’ll be becoming a Christian any time soon ... but you have given me a lot to think about. You have been really awesome to me. I think that if God is like you, maybe He is OK.”

I smiled and hugged her and tried to explain that it wasn’t that God was like me; it was that I was trying to be like Him. But I think it was the greatest compliment anyone has ever given me. ■

Brian Pengelly of New Direction Ministries works to equip youth and youth leaders to show God’s love effectively to their gay friends. He also counsels teens struggling with sexual identity issues. He lives in Toronto.

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Gay Friend

Continued from page 35

larly, when conversing with those who are thirsty we can confidently testify to God's sufficiency in sustaining and transforming us.

Be tactful. Jesus didn't lower the bar when it came to purity. In fact He raised the standard (Matthew 5:27-30). Knowing the raw fact that this woman has been sleeping around, Jesus could easily use that piece of information against her. When he asks her to "Go, call your husband," it wasn't to shame

her, but to get *her* to see that she is living with someone other than her husband.

Diffuse arguments.

The Samaritan woman eventually brings up the glaring differences between Samaritan and Jewish beliefs. In the same way, your loved one will inevitably draw

Don't make sexuality, or changing it, the focal point of the discussion. Jesus didn't.

attention to the fact that most Christians believe homosexual behaviour is wrong. Your loved one may be worried that this Christian belief will force you to reject him or her.

Jesus is excellent at circumventing red herrings and diversionary arguments – and communicating what needs to be said. His answer to the woman's question about different beliefs is remarkable. He avoids her call to choose between Samaritan or Jewish practices and redirects the conversation to what God ultimately desires: worship in spirit and in truth.

Likewise, we cannot let our dialogue with our gay friend or relative digress to a debate. Perhaps we can respond like this: "I want to continue to be friends even though we don't agree on everything. My commitment to you is to be a good friend [relative] even when we have different opinions."

This answer both preserves the relationship and protects our beliefs. Our loved one will more likely accept our

answer when we convey acceptance as Jesus did and not condemnation.


Reveal Christ. Don't make sexuality, or changing it, the focal point of the discussion. Jesus didn't. What is more important is revealing who Christ is. Eternal direction holds a higher priority than sexual preference.

God-intended sexual expression is the byproduct of holiness not its prerequisite. Only when we are in relation-

ship with our Redeemer can the blood of Jesus cleanse us and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit begin.

The bottom line is, when we encounter someone who is thirsty, we should offer the very best drink we know. ■

DJ Thompson is the youth co-ordinator for Exodus Global Alliance based in Ajax, Ont.



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Tribes or Denominations?

By Clair MacMillan



The gospel of Jesus Christ is bigger than the religious culture of any one denomination

At separate and very different church conferences last year, two leaders referred to denominations as tribes. In both instances I found myself responding in similar ways.

First, I was slightly amused. Using unexpected terminology such as this always causes people to pay special attention for a few moments. It was a little funny, both to watch others perk up and feel my own reactions.

Second, I was a little annoyed. Thinking about Christian groups as tribes dismisses theology as a relevant factor in the differences between denominations. It is not helpful to us as we pursue the mission God has given to each denomination.

To understand what I mean, let's consider that tribalism is defined as a form of social organization, a "social construct." A tribe is a society that organizes its culture around the memory of a common ancestor. Today, people sometimes also use tribe in a somewhat derogatory sense to refer to people who share characteristics that seem somewhat odd or quaint.

So when we call Christian groups tribes we imply that our differences are mostly a matter of different historical and cultural development. We blur or ignore denominational theological distinctions.

Perhaps I am biased as a professional theologian who has worked for three decades to keep theology relevant and functional in the pulpit, in the church and in society. In blurring theological distinctions do we not risk allowing belief systems to be built upon untested theological underpinnings?

Are we not in danger of offering the modern equivalent of what Dietrich Bonhoeffer decried as cheap grace? Bonhoeffer was talking about the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. "Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate" (*The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R.H. Fuller, rev. ed., 1960, p. 30).

Besides being amused and slightly irritated, I was also intrigued. Had these speakers hit upon an important point? Are the differences between denominations merely cultural, nothing more than social constructs that are expendable in advancing the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ?

There are several aspects of religious culture that frame my response to that question. First, let me assert the vital

importance of culture to Christian religion.

Religious culture is very important. Among other things it sets the "mood" of our religious experience. It articulates motivations for our actions. It provides us with a vocabulary for faith, with stories that make faith real. It provides a community of believers who share the language and stories. There is no religion without these things.

The problem with religious culture is that it is voracious. It has the capacity to add things but no capacity to eliminate things that are no longer useful. Hence it inflates – it keeps getting more encompassing. There is no inherent mechanism in culture to moderate this inflation.

Additionally, religious culture tends to lack discernment. Within religious culture everything looks equally important.

What starts out as expressive of an idea soon becomes viewed as definitive and eventually becomes viewed as exclusive. Over time religious culture tends to interpose itself between people and God, demanding acquiescence to cultural demands even at the expense of radical obedience to God.

These observations can help us to refresh our perspective. Let's remind ourselves that, although Christendom has been a vastly successful cultural expression of the gospel of Jesus, it does not encompass the gospel.

The gospel of Jesus Christ always transcends culture – even good religious culture. It usually frees people from some aspects of their previous Christian culture and occasionally calls for a radical renouncement of that previous culture in favour of a personal, accountable relationship to God.

We dare not forget Ignatius Loyola, Martin Luther, John Wesley and countless others of the same ilk!

So is "denomination" merely a code word for "tribe"? My answer: It is always in danger of being so! Yet it is in the rigorous pursuit of our theological assumptions, processes and conclusions that we have the possibility of being preserved from the tragedy of that error. Through the gospel of Jesus Christ, God saves us from the ravages of sin and from the tyranny of unexamined religious culture. ■

Are the differences between denominations merely cultural?

Clair MacMillan is the director of the Church of the Nazarene Canada. This column continues a series by leaders of affiliates of The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada listed at www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/affiliates.

Rethinking Willow Creek

By James Beverley



One of North America's major churches now admits flaws in its seeker-sensitive model. What can Evangelicals learn from this?

Last summer Bill Hybels, the famous founding pastor of the Willow Creek Church, admitted he blew it. He told participants at his Leadership Summit that he was facing the “wake-up call” of his entire ministry. With the assistance of Greg Hawkins, Willow’s executive pastor, Hybels discovered that key practices of the seeker-sensitive paradigm had not worked.

Hybels states: “Some of the stuff that we have put millions of dollars into, thinking it would really help our people grow and develop spiritually – when the data actually came back it wasn’t helping people that much. Other things that we didn’t put that much money into and didn’t put much staff against is stuff our people are crying out for.”

Hawkins says Willow Creek is recognizing the need to make big changes. “Our dream is that we fundamentally change the way we do church – take out a clean sheet of paper and rethink all of our old assumptions. Replace them with new insights. Insights that are informed by research and rooted in Scripture. Our dream is really to discover what God is doing and how He’s asking us to transform this planet.”

This is very, very sobering reality. Willow Creek’s impact does not stop at the mother church in South Barrington, Illinois. Hybels’ influence stretches across more than 35 countries and to thousands of churches. The fault lines discovered last summer run deep and long. It is no wonder Hybels said the new research from Hawkins “rocked” his world.

So, beyond facing the heavy truth of past mistakes, how should this Willow Creek bombshell be handled?

First, the crucial findings about Willow Creek also apply to churches outside of the seeker-sensitive model. In other words, churches of all stripes have failed in ways parallel to those discovered by Hawkins. He and Cally Parkinson, another Willow Creek staffer, document this in their new book *Reveal* (Willow Creek Assoc., 2007). Parkinson told me: “*Reveal*’s findings go well beyond Willow Creek. We’ve just finished doing research with over 500 churches, and almost half of them are not seeker-targeted or seeker-sensitive. Based on those churches, the ‘flaws’ discovered by *Reveal* are not unique to Willow Creek, or the seeker movement. Our findings suggest that all churches could be

doing a better job helping people grow spiritually.”

Second, Hybels deserves credit for admitting the mistakes in planning and implementing the Willow Creek dream. He said he lost nights of sleep in the realization that he had been wrong on some church growth stuff for 30 years.

Thankfully, even many of his critics have applauded him for his honesty and humility in facing some gigantic errors.

Hybels’ admission of error must not be misconstrued, as his harshest critics have already done

Third, Hybels’ admission of error must not be misconstrued, as his harsher critics have already done. Willow Creek errors do not prove Hybels does not know the gospel, as some allege. These critics also say the same thing about Rick Warren. This accusation about both Christian leaders is false and unloving. Both Willow Creek Church and Saddleback Church have thoroughly orthodox statements of faith on all essential Christian doctrines. The errors have been about proper strategy, not proper truths.

Fourth, the errors at Willow Creek must be set in the larger context of all that has been right at Willow Creek from the beginning. (Early press focused solely on Willow Creek, accented the negative, and Willow’s successes got lost in the bad news.)

The gospel has always been preached and taught at Willow Creek. Many of the strategies for church growth have worked in all of the best ways any Christian would want. The research shows, for example, that Willow Creek has done superbly in reaching non-Christians and young Christians but not so well in helping mature Christians grow deeper in the Lord.

Last, evangelical churches of all styles would do well to engage in self-criticism as Willow Creek has done. One pastor I read about took his own denomination to task for being hypercritical of Hybels while being closed to internal change and critique. A proper response to Willow Creek is for all other evangelical churches to imitate that famous church in its desire to get better at reaching the lost and growing the saved. ■

James A. Beverley is professor of Christian thought and ethics at Tyndale Seminary in Toronto.

MOVING FROM FEAR TO FREEDOM: A WOMAN'S GUIDE TO PEACE IN EVERY SITUATION

Author: Grace Fox

Grace Fox begins her book about fear by discussing her childhood terror over imaginary dinosaurs in her bedroom. Although this sounds like a trite beginning, that's exactly her intended point.

A popular speaker from British Columbia, Fox has interacted with hundreds of women and heard their life stories.

She draws on these anecdotes to show how everyday fears can present us with opportunities for a deeper relationship with God.

While personal fears may seem eccentric, Fox moves on to more common worries such as anxiety concerning children, financial security and body image. She also deals with the existential dread that strikes us to the heart in extreme circumstances.

Given these topics, it would be easy for this book to slide into candied clichés. How-

ever, several characteristics save it from such a fate.

Fox's voice is both gentle and candid. When she addresses her audience directly as "dear reader," she sounds like a caring counsellor and confidante. At the same time, some of the stories she shares, including those from her own experience, are shockingly vivid and startle us into a new appreciation of God's grace.

But Fox isn't content merely to relate these narratives. Each chapter ends with a list of searching questions suitable for individual or group study. These are followed by fear-fighting Bible passages and prayers that turn those passages into personal affirmations.

It struck me that Fox's challenging, uplifting book would benefit from a discussion of mental illness. Fox bypasses the topic, admitting she's no psychologist. However, experts suggest that 20 per cent of women wrestle with mental illness at some point in their lives. When fear can't be attributed to spiritual causes alone, what particular opportunities are there to experience God's love in a liberating way? It would no doubt be inspiring to see such a sensitive, encouraging writer take on this difficult topic that the Church as a whole has neglected for far too long. —DAWN HENWOOD

ONE SMOOTH STONE

Author: Marcia Lee Laycock

The tagline for *One Smooth Stone* challenges: "No matter how far you run, God will find you. No matter what you've done, God will forgive you." One endorsement labels it a thriller but I disagree – it's not Clancy-esque or high action. It's a compelling

read about hurting people fumbling toward healing and about a God who won't let go.

Marcia Lee Laycock's writing style is vivid and rich with sensory detail. She draws on her time in the North to evoke a strong sense of place. *One Smooth Stone* would be worth reading just to experience the Yukon setting from our warm living rooms, but she also gives us lifelike characters to root for, suspense and a puzzle to unravel.

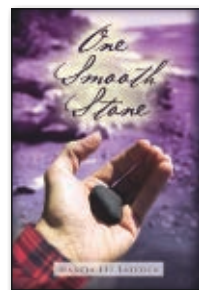
Protagonist Alex Donnelly is a man with secrets and Laycock brings them to light slowly, compassionately and with a defter touch than a debut novelist should have. The pain Alex and the other characters experience is neither minimized nor exploited, and it's brought to light in a way that didn't traumatize this chicken reader.

Hard questions and spiritual issues are treated naturally, with none of the heavy-handed preaching or pat answers found in some Christian novels. The story feels real and it offers hope. *One Smooth Stone* is the best Christian fiction I read in 2007 and its characters have a place in my heart.

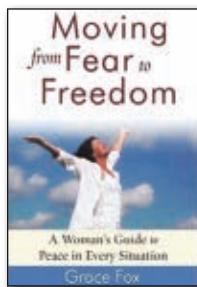
The manuscript won the 2006 Best New Canadian Christian Author Award. This is a story for adults, male or female, wounded or whole. Check out the opening chapter at www.vinemarc.com.

Marcia Lee Laycock is a writer, speaker and pastor's wife from Alberta. She's also the author of two devotional books and sends a weekly devotional via e-mail to more than 4,000 subscribers.

—JANET SKETCHLEY



Castle Quay Books, 2007. 252 pages. \$19.95 (paper)



Harvest House, 2007. 256 pages. \$14.99 (paper)

AFRICA BIBLE COMMENTARY

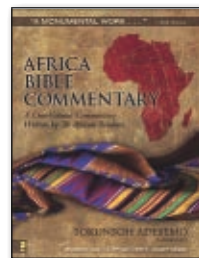
Editor: Tokunboh Adeyemo. Includes 70 African authors

This long-awaited biblical commentary is indeed a "monumental work," as the cover blurb says. At almost 1,600 pages of text it provides a commentary on every book in the Bible.

It also offers articles on topics from standard Bible encyclopedia fare such as "History of Israel," "Intertestamental Period" and "The Ancient Near East" to topics not found in traditional commentaries such as "Weddings and Lobola" ("lobola" means "bride wealth").

Many of the articles focus on the toughest issues facing Africa today, such as "Refugees," "HIV and AIDS" and "Wealth and Poverty." In these instances the African content is evident but the problems addressed are current and practically universal, benefiting people everywhere.

Creating a Bible commentary for the African context required scholars with firsthand knowledge of African customs and current African realities as well as knowledge of the biblical languages and customs. And it is in these fields



WordAlive Publishers / Zondervan, 2006. 1616 pages. \$42.99 (hardcover)



MUSIC REVIEW

BEAUTIFUL

Artist: Amanda Falk

Avante Records.
\$15 at www.avanterecords.com

Amanda Falk's self-titled debut CD won a Juno Award, made her thousands of fans and has become one of my all-time favourite albums. Waiting for a second CD from the young Manitoba artist, I feared disappointment would be inevitable. Now that Falk has released *Beautiful*, I've had to humbly sideline my opinions because the album was made not for me but for the likes of my 14-year-old daughter.

While Falk's debut album was adult contemporary, introspective and ballad-heavy, *Beautiful* is an edgy, energetic, fresh and youthful collection of crisp, shimmering radio-ready pop songs.

The writing, musicianship and production are all stellar, Nashville-slick yet entirely Canadian, proving again that producer-musician Marshall Zacharias (Falk's mentor) and his Avante Records team in Winnipeg are a driving force behind the steady growth of outstanding contemporary Christian music in Canada.

From beginning to end this CD focuses on bringing hope to young girls and gently imploring them to see their value and worth in their Creator's eyes. The upbeat title track sums it up: "You're beautiful the way you are / and you don't have to look too far / to find your worth it's a simple truth/ your real beauty starts inside of you."

It's a powerful ministry tool for the BUGirl (Beautiful Unique Girl www.bugirl.com) movement Falk is currently touring with across Canada.

The disc's highlight is Falk's crystal pure voice set to a backdrop of plush arrangements from the heavier, worshipful "Faithful" and "Love Like You" to the more delicate, string-laden "We All Cry" and "Fragile."

Most of the songs are guitar-driven but a few still showcase Falk's wonderful piano work. Lyrically they balance confidence and vulnerability, addressing issues of pain, loneliness and failure – and always coming back to the power of God's unconditional love and acceptance.

In a Christian music world deluged by formulaic contrivances, this project is a blessed offering delivered with passion, authenticity and hope. As a music lover, I am impressed. As a mother, I am overjoyed.

–Ali Matthews

that African scholars can be of greatest value to the larger world Church.

African traditional world views have remarkable similarities to those of the Ancient Near East and can sometimes shed light on the meaning of otherwise incomprehensible Bible passages. In many other cases they give us a new richness and vitality of meaning.

Kwame Bediako, a theological adviser to the project, is the best known leader in the field of African theology today and his other widely respected works have proved especially fruitful and creative in shedding new light on the Bible.

Other theological advisers, Isabel Phiri and Yusufu Turaki, are also well known for their creative work, as is Tokunboh Adeyemo, the general editor. The other 66 scholars are less well known but the depth of their scholarship is not lacking.

Several Canadians served as editors on this international project.

Every African Bible student should definitely own a copy of this work. As an affordable single-volume commentary it can be highly recommended to Bible students anywhere.

–IAN RITCHIE

SO THE MOON WOULD NOT BE SWALLOWED

Author: D. S. Martin

They arrived in Shanghai in 1923 with the China Inland Mission, both of them 25 years old. Ernest and Marian Davis stayed through 28 tumultuous years, serving God by serving the Chinese people.

"Wind & dust & dust & wind / The young wife prays in Yencheng / The young husband watches from some outstation / The wind blows where it will"

While visiting an elderly aunt a few years ago, Don Martin, grandson of that dedicated couple, was shown a suitcase full of their letters home – a fascinating find both as family history and an account of China in those years. Martin saw the possibilities in telling their story anew, this time as poetry.

"The station's a wreck dead & wounded scattered about / beggars stealing grain fifteen boxcars burning / A black banner rises like a murder of crows / A pillar of cloud"

This is what poetry can do: take volumes of letters and locate the kernels, distil years of details with subtlety and a tolerance for ambiguity, stay faithful to the historical record and retell a compelling story.

How much of the wording is taken verbatim from the letters is not clear but it's obvious Don Martin has used his skills as a poet to edit and reorder the text, drawing out both the most tender and the most fearful episodes.

With tongue in cheek he recounts his grandmother's joy at receiving mail from home, which includes the latest *Good Housekeeping*. The magazine advises her to take her child for walks. Walking?

"The beach is horrible / with blood & memory of war / The beheaded & shot were buried in sand / But dogs will be dogs / In China as elsewhere"

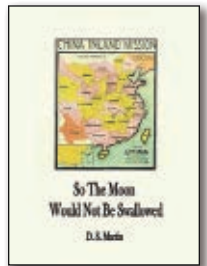
Letters home – one wonders how many suitcase treasures languish in attics. Hopefully this slim chapbook promises more of these poems by Don Martin.

Do we feel slightly awkward about some missionary activity of the past? Western values and thought processes were sometimes spread as if they were synonymous with the gospel. These touching poems bring a new perspective.

Marian and Ernest frequently risked their lives – the hardships are almost unimaginable today, their longings as human as anyone's. They honoured God and respected the people whom they felt called to serve.

Don Martin, who one could argue coauthored the poems with the letter writers, has honoured them.

–HANNAH MAIN-VAN DER KAMP



Rubicon Press, 2007. 24 pages. \$10 at www.dsmartin.ca (paper)

The Classified Network

Classified ad deadline for May/June 2008 issue: Mar. 28

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Network continued on page 44

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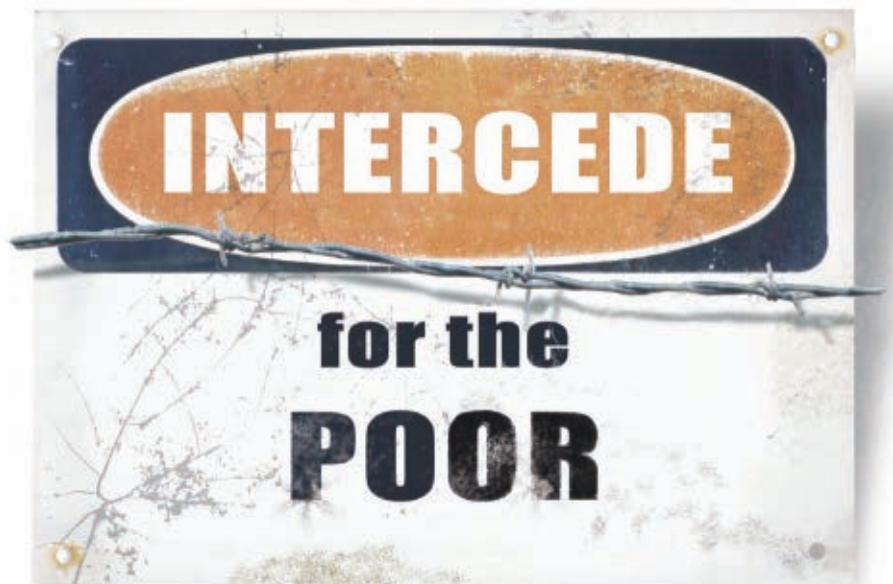
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